

Student Acquisition of Social Skills through Teacher Modelling

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This thesis is submitted in total fulfilment
of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Submitted May 2014

Abstract

Using the perspective of school leaders, teachers and students, this research questions whether Victorian Government schools provide opportunities, in the form of explicit teacher modelling, for the development of student social skills and social competence. The essence of this study was to determine whether students feel they can thrive at school and whether they believe there are opportunities for them to succeed. Two Victorian Government secondary schools were involved in the study and eight male and ten female students aged 12–14 years volunteered to be interviewed over the course of their first year in secondary school. Teachers and principals at the schools were also interviewed.

The research found that students do not identify teachers as role models for social skills. However, school leaders believe that teachers are behaviour role models for students. Students and teachers were found to place value on positive teacher–student relationships. The variance of social-skills instruction in secondary schools and classrooms points to significant differences between intent and practice of such instruction within schools. It seems there are considerable differences in the perception of the Australian Curriculum’s Personal and social capability domain within schools and between individual teachers’ classrooms. This limits opportunity for students to develop social skills, as there appears to be no strategic whole-school social–emotional curriculum plan, few resources to implement such plans and no professional development for teachers in this area.

This research describes the opportunities that are available for secondary students at Victorian Government schools to develop social skills and social competence. The research contributes to, and informs teacher pedagogy and contributes to knowledge on the value placed on social competence by students, teachers and school leaders. It also provides insight into the importance that students place on teacher interpersonal skills, the subsequent engagement of students with teachers and their sense of connectedness and belonging to their school.

Statement of Authorship

Except where explicit reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for, or been awarded, another degree or diploma. No other person's work has been relied on or used without due acknowledgement in the main text and bibliography of the thesis.

Signed: _____



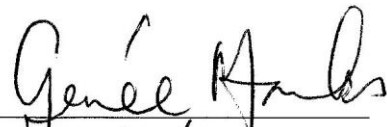
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Ethics Approval

Approval

Human Research Ethics Committee

University of Ballarat
Learn to succeed



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Project Number:	A11-115
Project Title:	Student acquisition of social skills through teacher modelling
For the period:	5/3/2012 to 31/12/2013

Please quote the Project No. in all correspondence regarding this application.

REPORTS TO HREC:

An annual report for this project must be submitted to the Ethics Officer on:

5 March 2013

http://guerin.ballarat.edu.au/ard/ubresearch/hdrs/ethics/humanethics/docs/annual_report.doc

A final report for this project must be submitted to the Ethics Officer on:

31 January 2014

http://guerin.ballarat.edu.au/ard/ubresearch/hdrs/ethics/humanethics/docs/final_report.doc

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Louise Dular'.

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5 March 2012

Please see attached 'Conditions of Approval'.



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Ms Carol Tocknell
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Dear Ms Tocknell

Thank you for your application of 10 February 2012 in which you request permission to conduct research in Victorian government schools and/or early childhood settings titled *Student acquisition of social skills through teacher modelling*.

I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the information you have provided your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the conditions detailed below.

1. The research is conducted in accordance with the final documentation you provided to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.
2. Separate approval for the research needs to be sought from school principals and/or centre directors. This is to be supported by the DEECD approved documentation and, if applicable, the letter of approval from a relevant and formally constituted Human Research Ethics Committee.
3. The project is commenced within 12 months of this approval letter and any extensions or variations to your study, including those requested by an ethics committee must be submitted to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for its consideration before you proceed.
4. As a matter of courtesy, you advise the relevant Regional Director of the schools or governing body of the early childhood settings that you intend to approach. An outline of your research and a copy of this letter should be provided to the Regional Director or governing body.
5. You acknowledge the support of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in any publications arising from the research.
6. The Research Agreement conditions, which include the reporting requirements at the conclusion of your study, are upheld. A reminder will be sent for reports not submitted by the study's indicative completion date.
7. If DEECD has commissioned you to undertake this research, the responsible Branch/Division will need to approve any material you provide for publication on the Department's Research Register.

I wish you well with your research study. Should you have further enquiries on this matter, please contact Kathleen Nolan, Research Officer, Education Policy and Research, by telephone on (03) 9637 3244 or by email at nolan.kathleen.j@edumail.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Dr Elizabeth Hartnell-Young
Group Manager
Education Policy and Research

01/03/2012

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Acknowledgements

My doctoral study has been a journey of the mind and spirit but also a geographical one. The dream that I could try to complete a PhD was born out of a conversation in Ballarat where I was celebrating the completion of my master's study, feeling confident (and relieved) after having taken some time away from formal higher education. The literature review took shape in Tennant Creek and Alice Springs, while one university progress report was written in an internet café in Far North Queensland. I carried ethics documents around Spain and the United Kingdom, and spent many hours reading journals and transcripts and writing drafts in Bonnie Doon and Nar Nar Goon, in rural Victoria, Australia. For the past five years, I have taught, travelled, laughed, cried, and lived life, always with the dream of completing my PhD. Looking back, all of these are fond memories, but the reality is that it would have all been an impossible dream without the love and support of family and good friends, and the encouragement and support of my supervisors.

I am especially grateful to my supervisors who have given me their unwavering encouragement and guidance throughout this endeavour. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to my principal supervisor, Dr Genee Marks, for the time and support that she has given me throughout this project, and I would also like to give my sincere thanks to Dr Jacqueline Wilson who has given me tremendous support and advice throughout this study.

I would also like to thank my colleagues at all the schools in which I have taught in the past five years who have shown interest in my project and allowed me to 'bounce ideas around' with them. I sincerely thank all the participants in this study, and especially the students who volunteered their time and allowed me to share in their school lives over the year. Truly, only through their generosity was this research possible. I would also like to acknowledge the Victorian state Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) for granting me approval to conduct research in Victorian Government secondary schools.

Professional copyediting and proofreading services were provided in compliance with the guidelines laid out in the university-endorsed national guidelines, *The editing of research theses by professional editors*.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my family—John and my children, Ryon, Kali and Adyn—for always being there for me during the past five years and for believing in me and my dream.

I am truly lucky to have such wonderful people in my life.

Dedication

To John, Ryon, Kali and Adyn—with love.

Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Statement of Authorship	iii
Ethics Approval.....	iv
Acknowledgements	vii
Dedication	ix
Contents	x
List of Tables	xiii
List of Abbreviations	xiv
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Rationale	3
Research Focus and Research Questions	5
Teacher as Researcher.....	7
Chapter Two: What Has Been Reported Before	9
Definition of Social Skills.....	9
Need for Social Skills in Society	13
‘Whole-child’ Education.....	15
Connection to School	17
Curriculum, Pedagogy and the Teacher	18
Social Competence in the VELs (Prior to 2013)	20
The Australian Curriculum (Implemented 2013).....	21
Assessment of Student Social Competence	22
Teachers and Pedagogy.....	24
Teacher-student Relationships.....	26
Chapter Three: I Have My Methods.....	27
Epistemology	27
Research Methods	29
Interviewing approaches	29
Focus groups	31
Observation and interviewing: framing the questions	33
Composition of interview groups.....	35
Methodology	36
Phenomenological research	39
Ethnography	42
Theoretical Perspective	45
The Research Study	47
Design	47
Participants.....	48
Methods.....	49
Transcript analysis	51
Chapter Four: Working with Children	53
Student Voice	55
Language and Communication	60

Children's Consent and Adult Gatekeepers	62
Focus Groups and Power Balance	65
Validity.....	67
Purpose of the Research	69
Chapter Five: Inside Out.....	72
Practitioner Research	73
Researcher Identity	73
Reflexivity.....	74
Insider-Outsider Status.....	78
Conflict.....	82
Conclusion	84
Chapter Six: I'm with You.....	86
Team Teaching.....	86
Team Teaching at Waratah High	88
Teacher Emotions on Display	96
Conclusion	100
Chapter Seven: Should or Should Not—That Is The Question.....	102
Previous Assessment in the Social Domain	103
The New Australian Curriculum.....	105
Teacher Understanding of Social Curriculum and Assessment.....	106
Social-Emotional Curriculum Delivery	111
Conclusion	114
Chapter Eight: It's All about the Culture	116
School Culture.....	116
School Traditions	117
School Engagement.....	121
School Discipline Approaches	122
Inclusiveness	125
School Leaders	128
Conclusion	130
Chapter Nine: Is School for You?	132
The Social and Emotional Health of Australian Young People.....	132
School Factors.....	136
Connections to School	137
Teacher Pedagogy	137
Conclusion	150
Chapter Ten: Could Students Be Taught by Robots?	151
'Whole-child' Education	151
Teacher-student Relationships	153
Teacher Qualities	157
Conclusion	162
Chapter Eleven: I Like Her—She's Nice!	163
Introduction: Teacher-student Relationships in Primary School and Secondary	
School.....	163
Explicitly Teaching Social Skills.....	165
Student Observations on the Differences between Primary-school and Secondary-	
school Teachers.....	169

Recognition and Reward	176
Conclusion	179
Chapter Twelve: Could You Please	181
Introduction: Student Compliance and Teacher Pedagogy	181
Consequences of Poor Social Skills in Young People	182
Compliance and Motivation	183
The Learning Environment	187
Classroom Observations	191
Dimensions of Teacher-student Relationships	193
Conclusion	196
Chapter Thirteen: Conclusion	197
Introduction: The Need for Social Competence	197
Aims and Research Questions	198
Outcomes for the Researcher and Participants	199
Methodology	199
Discussion	199
Do Victorian Government secondary-school teachers explicitly model social skills so that students have the opportunity to develop social skills and social competence?	200
Team teaching—Chapter Six	200
Student social competence and its assessment—Chapter Seven	204
What value do students, teachers and school leaders place on social competence as an educational outcome?	209
School culture—Chapter Eight	209
Student connectedness through teacher classroom pedagogy—Chapter Nine	212
Do students identify teachers as exemplars/role models of social skills?	215
Teacher–student relationships—Chapter Ten	215
Comparing teacher pedagogy in secondary and primary classrooms—Chapter Eleven	217
Student compliance—Chapter Twelve	219
Conclusions	222
Limitations	228
Implications for Further Research	231
Appendix 1: Teacher Observation Checklist—Social Skills	233
Appendix 2: Interview Questions	235
Appendix 3: DEECD Sample Secondary Template	247
Appendix 4: DEECD Student Attitudes to School Survey	249
Glossary	252
References	255

List of Tables

Table 1: The five social-skills dimensions with opposing problem-behaviour dimensions	12
Table 2: Social-skills accumulation through the stages of development.....	21
Table 3: MSE Testing Schedule	23
Table 4: Social-skills accumulation through the stages of development.....	104
Table 5: MSE Testing Schedule	105
Table 6: Teacher classroom behaviours.....	138
Table 7: Teacher classroom behaviours.....	192

List of Abbreviations

AARE	Australian Association of Research in Education
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
ANZAC	Australia New Zealand Army Corp
ASCD	Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
ASG	Australian Scholarship Group
ATP	Australian Temperament Project
CASEL	Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DETWA	Department of Education and Training, Western Australia
EAL	English as an Additional Language
FGP	Fair Go Project
LOTE	Languages Other Than English
LSAY	Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth
MCEECDYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
MCTEE	Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment

MCVTE	Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education
MSE	Monitoring Standards in Education
MYI	Middle Years Initiative
MYSA	Middle Years of Schooling Association
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NSW	New South Wales
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PD	professional development (used in interviews)
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
SDQ	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
SES	socio-economic status
SRC	Student Representative Council
SEWB	social-emotional well-being
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
VCAA	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VELS	Victorian Essential Learning Standard

Chapter One: Introduction

No printed word, nor spoken plea can teach young minds what they should be. Not all the books on the shelves—but what the teachers are themselves.

Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936)

Social skills are the highly rule-governed behaviours, involving non-verbal skills, verbal skills and cognitive skills that humans employ to achieve social tasks such as forming friendships, working together and generally interacting with others. Social skills are important tools that we use to initiate and maintain vital interpersonal relationships, and people wanting to achieve success in their lives rely on social-skills competence to interact with others. A lack of social skills and social competence can limit all learning opportunities, including success at school (Elias et al., 1997; Zins, Weissberg, Wang & Walberg, 2004).

This research project had its genesis when I was teaching in an alternative educational setting for students with challenging behaviours. Students were referred to the alternative setting, as they were not achieving success at school and the behaviours that they were displaying were regarded as symptoms of poor relationship skills, poor self-esteem, lack of responsibility and poor anger management. I was struck by the fact that because of their poor social skills, these students were often not liked by their peers. The intention of the programme in the alternative setting was to reinforce the positive aspects of each student and to develop social–emotional learning. A social-skills programme was an integral part of the intervention programme. As Zins and Elias (2006) state:

genuinely effective schools—those that prepare students not only to pass tests at school, but also to pass the tests of life—are finding that social–emotional competence and academic achievement are interwoven and that integrated, coordinated instruction in both areas maximizes students’ potential to succeed in school and throughout their lives. (p. 233)

The purpose of the twelve-week intervention programme in the alternative setting is to motivate and encourage students to reengage with education or training. During their participation in the programme, students are exposed to a number of experiences and personal challenges and the programme has a strong emphasis on building the self-esteem of students. The programme’s vision is to develop in its students a desire to improve their behaviours through participation and connection with staff.

As part of my Master of Education study, I conducted an evaluation of the progress of a group of students participating in the programme in the alternative setting. Using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) pre-intervention and post-intervention, students' self-reporting indicated that participants experienced enhanced confidence, improved self-esteem and feelings of wellbeing, together with better connections with their peer group and school (Tocknell, 2008). This led me to consider the curriculum opportunities that 'mainstream' schools provide for promoting the development of social skills and social competence for students. Given the strong relationships formed between participants in the alternative programme and the staff, I was motivated to research whether students identified teachers as exemplars of social skills. Additionally, I was interested in investigating the value that students, teachers and school leaders place on social competence.

My initial thoughts about conducting research in this domain were to consider the curriculum being taught at schools and determine its effectiveness in encouraging the development of social skills and social competence in students. As the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) (2004b) concedes:

The formal curriculum cannot guarantee good teaching or effective school organisation. It cannot, by itself, overcome disadvantages of background, disability or geography, improve student welfare or guarantee appropriate behaviour in the classroom. These are matters for individual schools and teachers within the framework provided by legislation, regulation and the policies of government. (p. 13)

I became interested in researching the manner in which school leaders and teachers work within the prescribed curriculum to deliver classroom lessons that facilitate student social-emotional learning, specifically of social skills. More importantly, I was motivated to investigate what students themselves perceive to occur in their classrooms and their thoughts about successful social interaction and social skills. As a classroom teacher, I had always tried to incorporate social-emotional learning with academic instruction in my own practice. Therefore, I believed that as a practitioner-researcher, I could contribute insights about schools and teacher pedagogy to a study and that I had much to learn that could contribute to my own practice from reflecting on the research findings. I had experience of social-skills instruction within my own classroom and one alternative educational setting, but became interested in whole-school approaches, especially towards student acquisition of social skills. In the past 20 years there has been a great increase in practitioner research in education (Mercer, 2007). As Mercer (2007) highlights, the irony

is that ‘given that so many people are now engaged in this kind of research, one might expect a corresponding growth in the literature on the methodology of insider research in educational contexts. This does not appear to be the case’ (p. 2).

Rationale

It was not until approximately 1920 that the concept of ‘social intelligence’ was coined by Edward Thorndike. Speaking to teachers at the time, he was attempting to help them understand the many varieties of thinking skills of students and was not satisfied by the notion that all of the skills fell into the two categories of ‘concrete intelligence’ and ‘abstract intelligence’. According to Thorndike (1920), the notion of social intelligence was the ‘ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls, to act wisely in human relations’ (p. 228).

Nowadays, international, national, state and school-mission statements set out holistic goals for students, including objectives on personal and social development. An example is the recent Council of Australian Governments’ (2009) strategy document *Investing in the early years*, which sets out as a principle ‘a focus on the whole child, across cognitive, learning, physical, social, emotional and cultural dimensions and learning throughout life’ (p. 4). The National Curriculum Board’s (2009) definition of social competence is enabling students ‘to interact effectively with others by assessing and successfully operating within a range of changing, often ambiguous human situations’ (p. 14). Specific skills are then listed as follows: maintaining personal relationships, including initiating relationships (assertiveness); being self-aware (responsible); recognising emotions in others and being mindful of others’ perspectives (empathy); conflict resolution (problem solving); being inclusive of others (accepting); and participating successfully in a range of social and communal activities (belonging).

The society in which we are living is changing, and changes such as global economic instability and advances in technology, for example, have a major effect on Australian youth today. Over ten years ago, Sawyer et al. (2001) reported that mental health and specifically depression was of great concern to adolescents.¹ Findings from the *ASG student social and emotional health report* (Bernard, Stephanou & Urbach, 2007, p. 107)

¹ For the purposes of this study, the terms ‘adolescents’, ‘children’ and ‘young people’ are used interchangeably in the text and refer to the students who were participants in this study. All students were under fifteen years of age.

suggest that Australian young people still have concerns regarding their mental health and wellbeing. Almost 50 per cent of students reported that they are not learning about their feelings and how to manage stress, while 40 per cent say they are not learning about how to make friends or how to solve interpersonal problems.

A number of studies have indicated that a lack of social skills has both long-term and short-term effects, and may cause more severe problems later in life (Elias et al., 1997; Zins et al., 2004; Zins & Elias, 2006). The link between poor social skills and low academic achievement has created interest in social–emotional curriculum initiatives in Australia and internationally. According to the latest findings of the Australian Temperament Project (ATP) (Prior, Smart, Sanson & Oberklaid, 2000), school bonding is the most important predictor in becoming a successful young adult. Teenagers’ perceptions of the value of school, hard work and their opinions of teachers contribute to their sense of ‘school connectedness’.

For many students, school provides the only social institution in their lives. It can be the only social setting in which they can develop, refine and practice social competencies. The implications of a changing Australian society and the subsequent stresses placed on youth need to be examined by educational providers, and a curriculum needs to be provided that adequately prepares Australian students for the future and more importantly, promotes student wellbeing.

Outcomes based on curriculum and standardised testing in Australia, together with the publication of statistics of ‘school rank’ based on academic results, places pressure on schools to be in competition both nationally and internationally. Many people are involved in the ‘business’ of education. Policy makers, administrators and classroom practitioners should all work towards the goal of students reaching their full potential, rather than simply having students produce good outcomes in standardised tests. While the new Australian Curriculum may set out what is taught, it does not prescribe ‘how’ it is taught in classrooms. The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) (2008) provides the policy framework for the Australian Curriculum. While this is founded on the importance of the three dimensions of knowledge, understanding and skills, the Australian Curriculum provides flexibility for schools and teachers ‘to promote personalised learning that aims to fulfil the diverse

capabilities of each young Australian' (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 7). Thus curriculum and pedagogy, which may be distinct in theory, merge within the professional expertise and practice of the teacher in the classroom. Good teacher pedagogy and modelling is imperative to the understanding by students of the personal and social aspects of curriculum. What is being taught in schools is extremely important, and discovering whether the 'implemented' curriculum adequately provides opportunities for the development of social skills and, therefore, the ultimate success of Victorian secondary students, is the rationale for this study.

Research Focus and Research Questions

The focus of this research was to determine whether the opportunity to develop social skills and social competence through explicit teacher modelling is available to secondary students in Victorian Government schools. It was important that I observe teachers' classroom practice so that discussion questions with the young people who participated in this study could be framed by the students' and my classroom experiences. Van Manen (1999) states that teachers 'can only be pedagogically perceptive if we develop our understandings of how the young people we teach experience things, including our influence. Strangely, this question of how students experience their relationships with teachers is seldom asked' (p. 19).

Several research questions were developed to understand both the culture of the two schools involved in this study and the experiences of the students in these schools. The first research question is the following:

Do Victorian Government secondary-school teachers explicitly model social skills so that students have the opportunity to develop social skills and social competence?

The practice in schools of team teaching, where two or more teachers instruct a class together, potentially offers the opportunity to students of having their teachers model respectful collaborative behaviour and social skills. Interviewed school leaders emphasised their belief that educators teaching classes in teams were in a position to model social skills for students. Student and teacher experiences and perspectives about team teaching have been described in the sixth chapter of this dissertation entitled 'I'm with you'. The seventh chapter of this study 'Should or should not—that is the question', explores teachers' views of assessing social competence. This chapter provides insight

into the importance that teachers place on student social competence and the role of classroom teachers as both observers and reporters of student behaviours. The perception of teachers of their role in student acquisition of social skills is explored, together with their views of formally reporting on social competence to parents.

The second research question is the following:

What value do students, teachers and school leaders place on social competence as an educational outcome?

Australian Curriculum documents promote social competence as an educational goal. The extent to which school leaders support the development of a school culture where the social competence of students is a priority is explored in Chapter Eight, which is entitled ‘It’s all about the culture’. Traditions and events that might contribute to a school’s culture are described by study participants in an attempt to conceptualise school culture from the perspectives of teachers and students. In this chapter, students’ views of the classroom culture created by their teachers’ pedagogical practices are discussed. The theme of teacher classroom pedagogy is further explored in Chapter Nine—‘Is school for you?’ Student feelings about school are explored from the perspective of the classroom environment and the school culture that contribute to students’ sense of connectedness to school. Student descriptions of classrooms and perceptions of teacher pedagogy, including modelling of social skills are investigated and related to school culture.

The final strand of investigation in this study was explored by the third research question:

Do students identify teachers as exemplars/role models of social skills?

This question is examined in Chapters Ten to Twelve, with the discussion assisting to conceptualise the students’ value of teachers as role models of social skills. These three chapters connect the themes of the phenomenon, that is the potential of teachers to be social skills role models for students, that arose in the interviews with participants in this study. In Chapter Ten ‘Could students be taught by robots?’, student perceptions of their classroom interactions with teachers are described, together with student opinions of the characteristics of ‘good teachers’.

Of particular interest to the research question on whether students identify teachers as social-skills role models were the perceived differences that students were able to

describe between the pedagogy of their secondary-school teachers and that of their primary-school teachers. Year-seven students were specifically chosen for this study because their recent transition from primary school to high (secondary) school meant that it was more likely that their perspectives of the differences in teacher classroom manner (pedagogy) between primary school and high school would be ‘fresh’ in their minds. Student opinions about where social skills are learnt are discussed in Chapter Eleven, ‘I like her—she’s nice!’

The social skills focused on in discussions with participants in this study were interpersonal skills, self-awareness, self-control and assertion. These skills are developmentally appropriate for students in the middle years of schooling, which encompasses the ages and school level of the young people who participated in this study (see VCAA, 2004a, p. 13). In classroom observations of teacher pedagogy, the behaviours aligned with these social skills, such as giving compliments to the students, were noted and directed the interview discussions with student participants. Compliance is also a social skill and the reasons that students gave for following teacher instructions were interesting, especially for me as a teacher–practitioner. The information contained in Chapter Twelve, entitled ‘Could you please ...’, provides insight into teacher–student relationships, as well as data about what students observe of teachers in classrooms.

Teacher as Researcher

Teacher–researchers who study within an educational setting are said to be conducting ‘practitioner research’ (Robson, 2002). The practice of being a practitioner–researcher draws on the concept of identity. As an insider, I have my own understanding of the social construct of ‘school’; as a researcher, my relationships within the school change. There is a need to be mindful of epistemological concerns so that the research is ‘less focused on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of the participants’ (Creswell, 2007, p. 59). Reflexivity is necessary so that one does not ‘contaminate the research’. Patton (2002) state that reflexivity ‘calls for self-reflection, indeed critical self-reflection and self-knowledge, and a willingness to consider how who one is affects what one is able to observe, hear and understand in the field and as an observer and analyst’ (p. 299). Therefore, in this research, there were two challenges for me to overcome: first, my belief that social skills are important and should be modelled for students, and second, to ensure my classroom observations and the

discussions during interviews were interpreted accurately. Whilst acknowledging, my own belief that the modelling of social skills is important, as a researcher I needed to remain objective about other teachers' value and opinions about the importance of such modelling.

In conducting research, it is important to be mindful of the power relationship between researcher and participants. Rooney (2005) states the researcher having 'insider status does not guarantee that subjects will feel at ease and free to express themselves' (p. 11). I hoped that building trust with my interviewees would ensure that the data was honest and reliable. The issues involved in conducting research as an 'insider' are discussed in Chapter Five, 'Inside out'.

It is my contention that teacher-researchers have much to learn from researching in schools, not least because of the effect that such research has on contributing to the reflections of the students participating in the research. By engaging with the young people, and asking them open-ended questions about teachers and schools, the participating students had an opportunity to explore their own thoughts and opinions, by a means that would not have normally been available to them. However, there are possible concerns that practitioner-researchers can be vulnerable to both the complexities of the research environment and the political climate of the organisation in which they work. Gibbs and Costley (2006, p.239) write about practitioners being in a privileged position because of their 'ethic of care', which gives their research legitimacy, and issues of participant exploitation and manipulation can be managed. For example, researchers working within their own organisations may be more attuned to the concerns that could arise between researcher and those being researched and also may be better skilled at managing issues that could arise. In this study, I endeavoured to practice an 'ethic of care' and reflected on the ethical considerations necessary in research endeavours involving young people. I felt a strong responsibility to the participants who volunteered to participate in this research, particularly the students. Issues that should be considered in conducting research with young people are discussed in Chapter Four, 'Working with children'.

Chapter Two: What Has Been Reported Before ...

I had a terrible education. I attended a school for emotionally disturbed teachers.

Woody Allen (1935–)

Social competence and social skills are key components of social–emotional competence, which is important to success in school and in life. Research demonstrates that good social–emotional competence has a positive effect on academic performance, assists physical health, reduces the risk of maladjustment, failed relationships, interpersonal violence, substance abuse, unhappiness and is essential for lifelong success (Elias et al., 1997; Zins et al., 2004). Social skills include a range of learning-related skills, which for students enable them to study independently, work in groups, build and maintain friendships, and respond appropriately to adult feedback and correction (Gresham, Sugai & Horner, 2001). Research has distinguished social skills and social competence as follows: ‘social skills are behaviours that must be taught, learnt and performed whereas social competence represents judgements or evaluations of these behaviours within and across situations’ (Gresham et al., 2001, p. 333).

Definition of Social Skills

Social skills are the highly rule-governed behaviours that involve non-verbal skills, verbal skills and cognitive skills that humans employ to achieve social tasks such as forming friendships, working with others and generally interacting with others. Social skills are the important tools that humans use to initiate and maintain vital interpersonal relationships. Social skills can be thought to include skills in the following areas:

- communication
- understanding of non-verbal cues and signals
- understanding and awareness of emotions, both in one’s self and in others
- conversational skills
- social interactions and cooperation
- conflict resolution and problem-solving behaviours.

Social behaviours and the manner in which humans communicate have constituted topics of poets, philosophers and playwrights throughout history. To understand the importance of non-verbal cues and signals, one need only think of the messages conveyed through mime or the emotions that can be recognised from a photograph. Speaking to teachers in 1920, Thorndike (1920), who coined the term ‘social intelligence’, attempted to help them understand the many varieties of thinking skills of students. He was unsatisfied with the notion that all skills fell into the two categories of concrete intelligence and abstract intelligence. According to Thorndike (1920), the notion of social intelligence was ‘the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls, to act wisely in human relations’ (p. 228).

Linking the critical prerequisites of social skills to academic and interpersonal success, Elliott and Gresham (1987) defined the following three general types of social-skills definitions:

- a ‘peer-acceptance’ definition of social skills by which a child or adolescent is labelled as socially skilled if he or she is accepted by peers
- a ‘behavioural’ definition of social skills that indicates that social skills are situation-specific behaviours that increase the probability of positive reinforcement and decrease the probability of punishment
- a ‘social-validity’ definition of social skills by which behaviours exhibited in specific situations help to predict a child’s or adolescent’s attitude on important social outcomes. In school aged children and adolescents, these outcomes include i) acceptance by the peer group; ii) significant others’ judgements of social skills (e.g. parents and teachers); iii) academic competence; iv) self-esteem; and v) absence of psychopathology.

The social-validity definition of social skills has the advantage over the other definitions of not only specifying behaviours in which a child or young person is deficient, but also of defining these behaviours as socially skilled based on their relationship to socially important outcomes such as peer acceptance. Social validity appears to be the approach that has been most influential on much of the recent development in social-skills assessment.

Caldarella and Merrell (1997) highlighted the importance of the definition and assessment of social skills, and the need for a valid taxonomy for classifying social skills with an evidence-based foundation, expanding a meta-analysis of the behavioural dimensions of child and adolescent psychopathology conducted by Quay (1986). Using a total of 21 studies and 22,000 subjects, Caldarella and Merrell (1997) conducted their analysis using four principal levels of analysis: i) description of study characteristics; ii) identification of common social skills dimensions; iii) investigation of common social skills dimensions; and iv) the construction of an empirically based social-skills taxonomy. The five most common social-skills dimensions together with some of the behavioural characteristics identified through the Caldarella and Merrell (1997) meta-analysis were the following:

1. peer relations—compliments/praises peers, offers help or assistance, invites peers to play, has skills or abilities admired by peers, makes friends easily, has sense of humour
2. self-management skills—remains calm when problems arise, follows rules, compromises with others when appropriate, receives criticism well, responds to teasing by ignoring peers
3. academic skills—accomplishes tasks/assignments, listens to and carries out teacher directions, uses free time appropriately, produces work of acceptable quality for ability level
4. compliance skills—follows instructions and rules, shares belongings, responds appropriately to constructive criticism or when corrected, finishes tasks, and puts belongings away
5. assertion skills—initiates conversations with others, acknowledges compliments, invites peers to play, says and/or does nice things for self, is self-confident, makes friends, expresses feelings when wronged.

The outcome of the Caldarella and Merrell (1997) meta-analysis was to contrast characteristics of the five social-skills dimensions with opposing problem-behaviour dimensions, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: The five social-skills dimensions with opposing problem-behaviour dimensions

Social-skills Dimension	Opposing Problem-behaviour Dimension
Peer relations—compliments others, offers help, invites others to interact, sense of humour	Social ineptness (Quay, 1986)—poor peer relations, likes to be alone, teased by peers, shyness, is ignored by peers
Self-management—controls temper, follows rules, compromises, accepts criticism, cooperates with others, ignores distractions	Under-socialised Aggressive Conduct Disorder (Quay, 1986)—has behaviour marked by temper tantrums, negativity, bullying others, uncooperative, lazy, impulsive
Academic—accomplishes tasks, carries out directions, possesses acceptable work habits	Attention Deficit Disorder (Quay, 1986)—passivity, fails to finish tasks, inattentive and easily distracted
Compliance—follows directions/rules, uses time well, shares with others, keeps things clean	Oppositional Defiant Disorder (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-IV)—argues, defies authority, annoys others, vindictive, angry, loses temper
Assertion—initiates conversations, acknowledges compliments, invites others to interact, makes friends	Schizoid-Unresponsive (Quay, 1986)—will not talk, shy, likes to be alone, secretive, stares blankly, confused, appears sad, demonstrates lack of interest

Adapted from Caldarella and Merrell (1997)

While there is a degree of overlap in many of the behaviours in the five dimensions, for example, following instructions/rules is a skill in both the Compliance and Academic dimensions, the important point is that social skills can be viewed as a continuum, with success, health and competencies on one end and ill-health, pathology and incompetence on the other. Elliott and Gresham (1987, pp. 97–98) further conceptualised the classification of social-skills deficits in the following four categories:

1. social-skills deficits—child has not acquired the necessary social skills to interact appropriately
2. social-performance deficit—child has the appropriate social skills but fails to perform them through lack of opportunity or lack of motivation
3. self-control social-skills deficit—characteristic of a child for whom an emotional-arousal response has prevented skill acquisition

4. self-control social-performance deficit—child has social skills but performance is hindered by an emotional-arousal response and by problems in antecedent and consequence control (i.e. inconsistent performance).

Elliot and Gresham (1987) suggested that emotional-arousal responses could be anxiety, fear, anger or impulsivity and these could interfere with both the acquisition or performance of appropriate social behaviours. Social competence or an individual's repertoire of socially valid behaviours and responses was described by Gresham and Elliott (1993) as 'socially acceptable behaviours that enable a person to interact effectively with others and avoid socially unacceptable responses from others' (p. 139).

Researchers from the ATP (Prior et al., 2000), surveyed 940 young people aged nineteen to 20 using an instrument based on Gresham and Elliott's (1990) model of child and adolescent social competence, which proposed the following attributes as social competence:

- assertion—initiating behaviours and responding to the actions of others
- cooperation—helping others, sharing materials and complying with rules
- empathy—behaviours that demonstrate concern and respect for others' feelings and points of view
- responsibility—ability to communicate with adults and having regard for property or work
- self-control—responding appropriately to teasing, taking turns and compromising.

Reporting the findings from the ATP, Smart and Sanson (2003) found that social competence was a key attribute in young people that fosters wellbeing and interpersonal relationships.

Need for Social Skills in Society

Wellness implies a lifestyle with a sense of balance. This sense of balance arises from a balance, or harmony, within each aspect or 'dimension' of life ... Realistically, perfect harmony is almost impossible to achieve. However, the individual challenge is to seek this

balance, calmly and constantly; it is the state which we continually move towards.

(Lowdon, Davis, Dickie & Ferguson, 1995, p. 6).

As well as a sense of balance, wellbeing implies lack of illness. Writers such as Hettler (1984) have proposed several dimensions of wellness. In his opening address at the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) Conference *Supporting Student Wellbeing*, Masters (2004) proposed that wellbeing could be identified by five dimensions. These dimensions were the mental, emotional, spiritual, physical and social. The state of Australian children and adolescents' social and emotional health was researched between 2003 and 2007 when students and teachers from 81 schools across Australia, from prep to year twelve, completed the ACER Social and Emotional Well-Being Surveys. Published with funding from the Australian Scholarship Group (ASG), the report had as its principal author Professor Michael E Bernard, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, in collaboration with Andrew Stephanou and Daniel Urbach from ACER (Bernard et al., 2007). Their study found that a large percentage of Australian students are experiencing social and emotional difficulties. Included in the report are statistics that four-in-ten students worry too much; three-in-ten students are very nervous/stressed; two-in-ten students have felt hopeless and depressed for a week and have stopped regular activities; one-third of students lose their temper a lot and are quite mean to others (bully); two-thirds of students are not doing as well in their schoolwork as they could; and four-in-ten students have difficulty calming down (i.e. poor resilience) (Bernard et al., 2007, p. 5). A number of conclusions were made from the research, including that the lower the wellbeing of students, the greater the likelihood that students will display emotional, social and behavioural difficulties such as feeling lonely, losing their temper and drinking alcohol to excess. Further, both student and teacher surveys demonstrated that the higher the level of student social and emotional wellbeing, the lower the percentage of students who experience problems in their lives (Bernard et al., 2007, p. 6). The *ASG student social and emotional health report* (Bernard et al., 2007) contributes to the research that links the health and wellbeing of young people to their educational, family and community environments. In the report, students from the top ten per cent socioeconomic level rated significantly higher in their level of social and emotional wellbeing compared to those from the lowest 25 per cent socioeconomic level (Bernard et al., 2007, p. 7).

A sense of the state of mental health of Australian children can be gleaned from a work by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2007a) *Health of children in Australia: A snapshot 2004–05*. In this work it is stated that in 2004–2005, seven per cent of children aged fewer than fifteen years were reported to have some form of mental or behavioural problem as a long-term health condition, with rates rising from very low levels among children under five years to ten per cent of children aged ten to fourteen years (ABS, 2007a, p. 3). Additionally, there was a strong association found between mental-health problems and certain demographic factors, with high rates of mental-health problems among children and adolescents living in low-income, step/blended and one-parent families (Sawyer et al., 2001).

Further evidence is derived from the 2007 *National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing* (ABS, 2007b) conducted by the ABS from August to December 2007. Of the sixteen million Australians aged sixteen to 85 years, almost half (45 per cent or 7.3 million) had a lifetime mental disorder (i.e. a mental disorder at some point in their life) and one-in-five (20 per cent or 3.2 million) Australians had a twelve-month mental disorder. A mental health disorder is a clinically diagnosable disorder that significantly interferes with an individual's cognitive, social and/or emotional abilities (ABS, 2007b, p. 4). There were also 4.1 million people who had experienced a lifetime mental disorder but did not have symptoms in the twelve months prior to the survey interview (ABS, 2007b, p. 7).

More than ten years ago, Sawyer et al. (2001) reported that mental health (specifically depression) was of great concern to adolescents. Findings from the *ASG student social and emotional health report* (Bernard et al., 2007) suggest that Australian young people still have concerns regarding their mental health and wellbeing. Almost 50 per cent of students reported that they are not learning about their feelings and how to manage stress, while 40 per cent say they are not learning about how to make friends or how to solve interpersonal problems (Bernard et al., 2007). These findings should be of concern to educators, parents and community leaders.

'Whole-child' Education

Schools are incredibly important centres for social interaction; for some children and young people, school is the only formal institution they attend. As such, educational

communities and teachers have a crucial function in developing children and adolescents' social skills. School staff foster resilience and student wellbeing through building healthy relationships with students, encouraging a sense of belonging, promoting meaningful participation and teaching life skills to young people (Fuller, 2001).

International, national, state and school-mission statements set out holistic goals for students, including personal-development and social-development objectives. For example, the recent Council of Australian Governments' strategy document, *Investing in the early years*, sets out as a principle 'a focus on the whole child, across cognitive, learning, physical, social, emotional and cultural dimensions and learning throughout life' (Council of Australian Governments, 2009, p. 4). Indeed, the United Nations (1948, Article 26) *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states 'Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the full strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms'.

The preamble in Australia's *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008), states that 'schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion' (p. 4). While acknowledging that literacy and numeracy remain the 'cornerstone of schooling for young Australians', the *Melbourne Declaration* then states the following:

Schooling should also support the development of skills in areas such as social interaction [and] as well as knowledge and skills, a school's legacy to young people should include national values of democracy, equity and justice, and personal values and attributes such as honesty, resilience and respect for others. (p. 5)

The goals of the *Melbourne Declaration* are that Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence and that all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 7). The document describes confident and creative individuals as students:

who have a sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity that enables them to manage their emotional, mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing, relate well to others and form and maintain healthy relationships and embrace opportunities, make rational and informed decisions about their own lives and accept responsibility for their own actions. (p. 9)

The *Melbourne Declaration* also sets out a commitment to action, including the promotion of a world-class curriculum. Along with the broad and holistic educational

goals for young Australians that have been discussed, the curriculum that the education ministers of Australia's states and territories envisage as set out by (MCEETYA, 2008) develops the following:

A solid foundation in knowledge, understanding, skills and values on which further learning and adult life can be built. The curriculum will include a strong focus on literacy and numeracy skills. It will also enable students to build social and emotional intelligence, and nurture student wellbeing through health and physical education in particular. (p. 13)

In *The shape of the Australian Curriculum May 2009*, the National Curriculum Board (2009) accepted the *Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians* and used the 2008 goals to guide the direction of the Australian Curriculum. While acknowledging the broad outcomes of curriculum set out in the *Melbourne Declaration*, including the aim of building social and emotional intelligence, the National Curriculum Board's document also outlines explicit capabilities that are the goals of the Australian Curriculum (National Curriculum Board, 2009, p. 13).

It is worthwhile re-examining the National Curriculum Board's definition of social competence, as it should define the skills that students need to acquire to be assessed as *competent*. The goal of social competence is set out as enabling 'students to interact effectively with others by assessing and successfully operating within a range of changing, often ambiguous human situations' (National Curriculum Board, 2009, p. 14). Specific skills are then listed as follows: maintaining personal relationships, including initiating relationships (assertiveness); being self-aware (responsible); recognising emotions in others and being mindful of others' perspectives (empathy); conflict resolution (problem solving); being inclusive of others (accepting); and participating successfully in a range of social and communal activities (belonging).

Connection to School

Governments and policy makers recognise the importance of educating the 'whole child', and the preamble to Australia's *Melbourne Declaration* (MCEETYA, 2008) states that 'schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion' (p. 4). Schools are increasingly seen as 'an important if not central arena for health promotion and primary prevention ... in addition to the education of students' (Roeser, Eccles & Samoroff, 2000, p. 467).

McNeely, Nonnemaker and Blum (2002) stress the importance of school connectedness for positive student behaviour and learning. These authors report that when adolescents feel cared for by school staff and feel a sense of connectedness to their school, they are less likely to use illicit substances, engage in violent behaviours, or initiate sexual activity at an early age. According to the findings of the ATP (Prior et al., 2000), school bonding is the most important predictor in becoming a successful young adult. Teenagers' perceptions of the value of school, hard work and their opinions of teachers contribute to their sense of 'school connectedness'. Fuller (2001) proposes that a sense of belonging and fitting in, positive achievements and evaluations at school and having someone outside of family who 'believes in you', such as a teacher, are school protective factors that promote resilience, or the 'ability to rebound or spring back after adversity or hard times' (Fuller, 2001, p. 41). Noddings (2003) described the lifelong effect of good teachers:

Working with young children, good teachers are keenly aware that they might have devastating effects or uplifting effects on their students. Some of these effects last, or at least are remembered, for a lifetime. (p. 249)

Curriculum, Pedagogy and the Teacher

Learning in schools is as much about social development as academic achievement.

According to the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2007):

Cognitive, emotional, and social capabilities are inextricably intertwined throughout the life course. The brain is a highly integrated organ and its multiple functions operate in a richly coordinated fashion. Emotional well-being and social competence provide a strong foundation for emerging cognitive abilities, and together they are the bricks and mortar that comprise the foundation of human development. (p. 8)

The most important variable affecting students' experiences and outcomes at school is the teacher (Hattie, 2003). Governments and policy makers make huge investments in education and it is not surprising that the notion of teacher 'quality' and effectiveness is measured in dollars and cents. As Jensen (2010a) from the Grattan Institute reports:

The greatest resource in Australian schools is our teachers. They account for the vast majority of expenditure in school education and have the greatest impact on student learning, far outweighing the impact of any other education program or policy. (p. 5)

Jensen (2010b) goes further to say that 'improving teacher effectiveness would have a greater impact on economic growth than any other reform before Australian government' (p. 4).

Research into teacher effectiveness has largely been conducted with an interest in the academic outcomes of students. Analysis of the performance of students is carried out at a national level, through the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). Every year, all Australian students in years three, five, seven and nine are assessed on the same days using national tests in reading, writing, language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation) and numeracy. International comparisons of students are carried out by assessments such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), of which Australia is a member, conducts the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) every three years. This assessment compares the performance of fifteen-year-old students from 65 countries in reading, and mathematical and scientific literacy. Results from both national and international tests of students' academic performance result in tables of ranking. In Australia, NAPLAN results appear in the My School Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA, 2013b) website.

Unfortunately, as a consequence of the emphasis placed on students' reading, mathematics and science scores, students' wellbeing and acquisition of social competence are often relegated to a lower educational priority. The present manner of prioritising academic achievement could explain the current poor state of wellbeing and emotional health of Australian students as surveyed by Bernard et al. (2007, p. 5), who report that two-in-ten students feel hopeless and depressed for a week and stop their regular activities, four-in-ten students have difficulty calming down (resilience) and two-thirds of students surveyed are not doing as well in their school work as they could. Social competence is a key attribute in young people that fosters wellbeing and interpersonal relationships (Prior et al., 2000).

Social-skills programmes are often targeted for students with anger-management issues, mental-health issues or with disabilities, who are often in segregated schools. This is a model of 'disadvantage' and social-skills 'deficit'. Elias, Zins, Graczyk, and Weissberg (2003) researched the difficulties of, and possible strategies for, improving outcomes for students with mental-health issues. Their message is that there is a need for both prevention and intervention. Prevention can occur by implementing a whole-school

programme that exposes all students to good teacher practice involving coordinated strategies unified by a common set of values aimed at promoting social and mental wellbeing. One such programme proposed by Dwyer and Osher (2000) is based on a three-stage public-health model that first builds a school-wide foundation of programme delivery, then creates additional services that can intervene early for students at risk of severe academic and behavioural difficulties, and finally provides intensive interventions for students in need. In addressing the school-wide foundation, Dwyer and Osher (2000) stress the importance of developing a caring school environment to achieve academic and emotional wellness. Osher and Fleischman (2005) have suggested that students who have positive relationships with their teachers are better prepared to learn social and emotional skills and have reported that teachers who themselves model good social skills connect more positively with students.

Social Competence in the VELS (Prior to 2013)

Previously, in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) documents, social competencies fell within the VELS ‘Strand of Personal & Social Learning’, within the domains of ‘Interpersonal Development, Civic & Citizenship and Personal Learning’.

The VCAA published a discussion paper prior to the introduction of the VELS, *Social, emotional and cognitive development and its relationship to learning in school prep–year 10* (VCAA, 2004a). The purpose of the paper was to identify the generic skills necessary at each stage of development from prep to year ten. VCAA (2004a) acknowledged the changing role of schools in the twenty-first century and that the development of social, emotional and behavioural skills are fundamental to effective functioning in the global community. A summary of the social skills that accumulate through the stages of development as outlined in the report are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Social-skills accumulation through the stages of development

	Early Years	Middle Years	Years Nine and Ten
Social Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive relationships • Friendly behaviour • Negotiation • Resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperative learning • Conflict resolution • Emotional regulation • Assertiveness • Problem solving • Empathy • Group decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predicting consequences • Considering motivations • Peer resistance • Universal values and ethical conduct • Coping skills

Adapted from VCAA (2004a, p. 13)

The Australian Curriculum (Implemented 2013)

The new Australian Curriculum's Personal and social capability documents pay homage to the work of two authors, contributing significantly to social learning as a competence or capability in school education. The first is Gardner's (1983) *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences* in which the concepts of intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences were introduced as two of his eight intelligences. More recently, Goleman explored the concepts of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) and social intelligence (Goleman, 2006) in the educational domain. In 1994, Goleman was one of a group of educationalists and researchers who founded the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) at the University of Illinois, Chicago. CASEL contributes greatly to research and literature about personal and social learning and operates a website on which educational resources are available (CASEL, 2010). CASEL's social-emotional learning framework is used in Australia and internationally, and has provided the foundation for various social curriculums across states and territories, as well as for programmes such as Kids Matter and Mind Matters.

ACARA, who created the Australian Curriculum, have organised Personal and social-capability learning into four interrelated elements. These are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social management. CASEL has identified five core social and emotional competency areas, three of which are common to those of the Australian Curriculum, self-awareness, self-management and social awareness. The

remaining two elements are relationship skills and responsible decision making. In the Australian Curriculum literature on the Personal and social capability-Learning continuum (ACARA, 2013a), *Welcome to the Foundation to Year 12 Australian Curriculum*, there are various links between the capabilities, and examples of how students might demonstrate skills. For example, within the element ‘Self-awareness’, students might demonstrate their capability to recognise emotions by an activity involving investigating emotional responses to unfair play or unfair treatment at work (end of year eight).

Assessment of Student Social Competence

There has been little formal assessment and reporting of social competencies within the Australian states and territories’ educational systems. Given the specificity of the stages of development of the social skills in the Victorian system (Table 2), it is surprising that school reports previously (prior to 2013) did little more than comment on interpersonal development as a point on the yearly continuum and one line of text in a sample report on the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD, 2009a see Appendix 3 for DEECD Sample Secondary Template). It seems that parents received much of the assessment of students’ social competence through ad hoc, unsystematic teacher observations reported during parent–teacher interviews. However, data for student engagement and wellbeing is currently measured under the Accountability and Improvement Framework for Victorian Government Schools (DEECD, 2009b). Student outcomes for engagement and wellbeing are measured in the primary years by attendance and a mean score on the School Connectedness factor of the Attitudes to School questionnaire across years five to six, and in the secondary years by attendance and a mean score on the School Connectedness factor of the Attitudes to School questionnaire across years seven to twelve (see Appendix 4 for DEECD Attitudes to School questionnaire).

In the Australian Curriculum, Personal and social capability is not assessed directly. According to the ACARA My School website:

general capabilities are identified wherever they are developed or applied in content descriptions. They are also identified where they offer opportunities to add depth and richness to student learning through content elaborations. (ACARA website, 2013a, *F-10 curriculum, Organisation, General capabilities*)

Pascoe (2005) has advocated for the assessment of student social competence, and writes that ‘advances in educational measurement should establish assessment in the social domain at the forefront of progressive assessment methodologies’ (p. 4). Pascoe (2005) further cites a pilot initiative in the assessment of the social domain as having promise in Australia. This was a pilot project conducted by ACER and the Department of Education and Training, Western Australia (DETTWA). The assessments were an addition to the ongoing Monitoring Standards in Education (MSE), which assessed students in years three, seven and ten across all eight Key Learning Areas: the arts, English, health and physical education, languages other than English (LOTE), mathematics, science, society and environment, and technology and enterprise. The MSE assessments of social competence include teacher observation, self-reporting and student responses to scenarios; they result in a student-performance map (DETTWA, 2010). The testing schedule from the website is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: MSE Testing Schedule

Social Outcomes of Schooling	Interpersonal skills; social, moral and ethical development	Years three, seven and ten	2001
	Autonomy, independence and enterprise	Years three, seven and ten	2002
	Intrapersonal skills	Years three, seven and ten	2004

Adapted from the Department of Education and Training, Western Australia (DETTWA, 2010)

Note. At the time of writing, no reports on the outcomes of the assessment of Social Outcomes of Schooling were available on the MSE website.

The current condition of the Victorian curriculum seems to manifest the concerns of Alexander (2010) that the aims of curriculum have become detached from the actual daily practice of teachers. The prescribed ‘holistic’ goals of the Australian Curriculum and those previously of VELS aim to nurture the wellbeing of the child in all domains of social, emotional, spiritual, physical and mental wellbeing. The current state of the mental health of Australia’s children and adolescents (ABS, 2007b; Bernard et al., 2007; Sawyer et al., 2001) indicates that schools need to do more in positively promoting the social and emotional wellbeing of young people.

Teachers and Pedagogy

The notion of governments rewarding teacher performance with monetary incentives is controversial (Ferrari & Mahar, 2010). In such a scheme, it is envisaged that a teacher's effectiveness will be judged based on their students' achievements as measured by standardised academic tests. This idea of 'performance' does not necessarily acknowledge teachers who change the life trajectories of 'at-risk' students, many of whom are in alternative settings or special schools. In Australia, the term 'at risk' was first prominently used in a New South Wales (NSW) report on young women in care, titled *Girls at risk* (NSW Premier's Department, 1986). Currently, students labelled as 'at risk' are those young people with poor educational outcomes, who are deemed to be at risk of not completing senior secondary education (years eleven and twelve). The OECD (1995) lists a number of factors that can contribute to a young person being considered at risk. These include poverty, ethnic minority status and Aboriginality, family issues, geographic location and community factors. In Australia, Indigenous youth continue to be the most disadvantaged group according to all measures, including health, education, life expectancy and employment (ABS, 2009).

Children's life experiences and the people with whom they have contact are crucial to their development (Fuller, 2001). Secure and positive family experiences (such as a sense of belonging/connectedness, maintenance of family rituals, proactive problem solving and warm relationships with at least one parent) provide protective factors for children. These protective family factors can influence mental health, as well as social competencies, which ultimately influence 'success' both at school and in life. Other protective factors are provided by community, school culture and ethos, peers and individuals. Teachers are very much a part of the pivotal protective factor of having 'someone who believes in you'. Te Riele (2006a) suggests that positive teacher–student relationships can play a major role in re-engaging at risk students. Ryan and Patrick (2001) report better academic achievement by students who believe that their teachers care about them.

Resilience can be thought of as the ability to 'bounce back' from adversity or the many 'speed bumps' or difficulties that life brings. It is the capacity of an individual to recover from stressful life experiences (Fuller, 2001). To be resilient, a person must have a sense of connectedness, belonging and empathy with others (Resnick et al., 1997). The ATP is an ongoing longitudinal study involving children from over 1,000 families in Victoria.

Beginning with infants born in 1983, the study researched how the temperament of individuals affects a number of life factors. There is evidence indicating that for resilience (good adjustment despite risk), protective factors such as school belonging/connectedness are of great importance. Resnick et al. (1997) identified a group who had a high number of risk factors associated with their families (e.g. chronic illness, low income, marital disruption, drug addiction in parents, housing difficulties, single parenthood and loss of significant family members or friends) at eleven to twelve years of age, but did not display antisocial behaviours; this group was compared to a group with equal risk factors but who were persistently antisocial, as well as to a low-risk group. Protective factors that assisted the at-risk resilient group included greater parental monitoring, positive relationships with teachers and more involvement in structured activities with peers (Prior et al., 2000).

Each student is an individual and the product of many life factors. Protective and risk factors often coexist for many children and adolescents, and the term ‘at risk’ is too broad in one sense and too simplistic in another (te Riele, 2006b). It is also a term of ‘deficit’, where the students’ strengths and positive attributes are not considered. As Dwyer and Wyn (2001) note ‘how do we take risk factors seriously without demonizing those affected, but also how do we avoid demonizing them without belittling the difficulties they are trying to face?’ (p. 150). Te Riele (2006b) summarises the position by saying ‘the dominant conceptualization of “youth at risk” draws attention to what is wrong with youth, rather than to what may be wrong with schooling’ (p. 141).

The concept of ‘at risk’ also focuses on the notion of individual intervention, involving particular students, rather than a whole-school approach aimed at all students collectively within a school population. Te Riele (2006b) notes that to ‘serve marginalized youth, policy needs to change its focus from ‘fixing students’ to providing high quality education’ (p. 141). Inclusive schooling practices aim to achieve good educational outcomes for all students. In fact, recent findings from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), conducted by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) (2010) suggest that social capital has the potential to mediate the effects of disadvantage. Social capital has many dimensions and the working definition chosen by LSAY (NCVER, 2010) was that of the ABS (2004) which describes social capital as ‘networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within and amongst groups’ (ABS, 2004, p. 5). Using data from

LSAY (NCVER, 2010), analysts deduced four discrete social-capital factors: student connectedness with school; teacher–student relationships; influence of networks when thinking about the future; and participation in school-based activities. The analysis found that in addition to the influences of family background, school type and geographic location, social capital can assist to increase student rates of participation in education and training. The most important factors are teacher–student relationships and participation in school-based activities such as sport, music, debating and drama. Participation in sport was an indicator of possessing social capital for girls, while school connectedness played a significant role in promoting social capital for boys.

Teacher–student Relationships

A number of studies have sought to understand the relationship between teacher personality and teacher–student relationships (Fisher, Kent & Fraser, 1998; Martin, Marsh, McInerney, Green & Dowson, 2007) and students’ perceptions of the classroom environment (den Brok, Brekelmans & Wubbels, 2006; Infantino & Little, 2005), but these studies have relied on the use of questionnaires, rather than interviewing the young people themselves and gaining perspective ‘first hand’. This seems to perpetuate the statement made by van Manen (1999) that teachers ‘can only be pedagogically perceptive if we develop our understandings of how the young people we teach experience things, including our influence. Strangely, this question of how students experience their relationships with teachers is seldom asked’ (p. 19). Nevertheless, such research attests to the importance of quality relationships in schools and pedagogies that promote children’s sense of belonging and connectedness. Teachers and more specifically, their classroom practices are central to this. Stating that education in schools needs to be recognised as being about relational and emotional practice, Noddings (2003) further demonstrates this point by saying that ‘good teachers are keenly aware that they might have devastating effects or uplifting effects on their students’ (p. 24).

Chapter Three: I Have My Methods

The research methods we choose say something about our views on what qualifies as valuable knowledge and our perspective on the nature of reality.

(Glesne & Peshkin, 1991, p. 4)

The idea for this research came at a time when I was teaching in a small, alternative educational setting for students with challenging behaviours. These students were withdrawn from their mainstream schools to participate in an intervention programme. This of course constitutes a ‘deficit’ model; a model of intervention that tends to segregate those with challenging behaviours such as students who have disabilities, are less academically able or are from non-English speaking backgrounds. Many of the students in the behavioural unit were not liked by their peers at their mainstream schools and had very poor relationships with them.

As a teacher in mainstream schools, I had often included social-skills instruction in my day-to-day teaching and more explicitly in pastoral-care sessions; therefore, I had experience of both mainstream and specialist educational settings. I wanted to know what students learnt about social skills from the pedagogical practice of teachers in mainstream classrooms, as distinct from the ‘reactive’ or ‘deficit’ approach to social-skills instruction in an alternative setting. I became interested in examining whole-school approaches, especially for student acquisition of social skills

Epistemology

The research questions I had formulated could have been investigated through a number of approaches. However, I wanted to conduct research that sought and reflected the perspectives of students. The nature of the research I was to undertake suggested the need for a social constructivism epistemology or worldview. As described by Hamlyn (1995) ‘Epistemology deals with “the nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope and general basis”’ (p. 242). Crotty (1998) defines epistemology as ‘the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology’ (p. 3). My goal was to ‘rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation’ (Creswell, 2007, p. 20), their social construction of reality. Students’ conceptualisation about, and their engagement with school is ‘constructed’ by their experiences. Different people may construct different meanings of the same phenomenon. Indeed, as Crotty (1998) notes,

constructivism ‘points up the unique experience of each of us. He suggests that each one’s way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other, thereby tending to scotch any hint of a critical spirit’ (p. 58). However, as Hill, Laybourn and Borland (1996) state, ‘children’s own definitions and creations of their social worlds have been studied less often in their own right than as staging posts on the developmental journey towards adulthood’ (p. 130).

In order to construct the students’ ‘world view’ quantitative, qualitative methodologies or a combination of both could have been employed. As a maths/science teacher I was used to quantifying topics and assisting students to count, measure and to determine amounts. Guba and Lincoln (1994) state:

Historically, there has been a heavy emphasis on quantification in science. Mathematics is often termed the ‘queen of sciences,’ and those sciences, such as physics and chemistry, that lend themselves especially well to quantification are generally known as ‘hard’. (p. 105)

However, I wanted to expand on the type of research that I had carried out for my master’s and work more closely with students to see school ‘through their eyes’. I wanted to ensure that students’ voices were heard. I hoped, like Wadsworth (2006) ‘to shift from being the deemers and certifiers of Truth, to being the facilitators of inquiry for others to come to their own truths-for-the-purposes’ (p. 322). Jones and Sumner (2009) cite Brannen to describe the contrast between quantitative and qualitative researchers:

Quantitative researchers have seen qualitative researchers as too context specific, their samples as unrepresentative and their claims about their work as unwarranted—that is judged from the vantage point of statistical generalisation. For their part qualitative researchers view quantitative research as overly simplistic, decontextualized, reductionist in terms of its generalisations, and failing to capture the meaning that actors attach to their lives and circumstances. (p. 37)

Victorian Government schools are emersed in quantitative data such as the results from standardised tests, rates of student attendance, suspensions and opinion surveys. Hill et al. (1996) encourage researchers to engage with children rather than have ‘children feature purely as reactors and respondents to predetermined stimuli and questions’ (p. 129). Yates (2001) encourages ‘longitudinal and close-up listening to particular students [to] provide some sense of things that commonly get left out of public and policy discussions of good schools, and that are not able to be dealt with through quantitative forms of data-gathering’ (p. 17). As Gunter and Thomson (2007) declare about educational research:

Positivist epistemology dominates with an emphasis on students (and many adults) as objects to be identified and measured. As long as this approach is privileged then students remain sources of data for an externally determined performance regime. (p. 27)

According to Crotty (1998), the distinction between qualitative research and quantitative research occurs in the choice of research methods. In investigating whether Victorian Government schools provide opportunities, in the form of explicit teacher modelling, for the development of social skills and social competence, I needed to consider what methods and methodologies best supported answering this research question. The additional research questions about the value that students, teachers and school leaders place on social competence and the question of whether students identify teachers as exemplars of social skills also needed appropriate research methods.

Research Methods

Interviewing approaches

Dunne, Prior and Yates (2005) state that ‘the essential purpose of the researcher’s experience of the [research] setting is to transform into text the experiences they have there’ (p. 55). In addition to describing school settings, I wanted to ensure that I ‘captured the voices’ of the people who participated in my research and so ‘construct their school world’. Howard and Johnson (2000) use the term ‘authentic student voice’ when referring to educational research; this means creating research with students who talk about their lives and what affects them.

I decided to conduct interviews with students, teachers and principals. I believe, along with Dunne et al. (2005) that ‘the use of interviews in research suggests that the views and interpretation of certain social actors are important to ... [the] research question’ (p. 27). Patton (2002) states that ‘interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit’ (p. 341). Conducting interviews with teachers and principals was an appropriate method to elicit the value that teachers and school leaders place on social competence.

Patton (2002, pp. 342–348) suggests there are three approaches that may be applied in conducting interviews: the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach and the standardised open-ended interview. I chose to combine a standardised open-ended interview set of questions with a conversational strategy. The advantages of the standardised open-ended interview are the minimised variations in the questions that were asked of participants from the two different school settings, and where the data derived from the experiences of the participants can be examined and matched to the

same stimulus question. By combining this approach with the informal conversational interview approach, the disadvantage of not pursuing unexpected topics that can come with using a conversational strategy is overcome. As Creswell (2007) writes of social constructivism, 'the more open-ended the questioning the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life setting' (p. 21).

Previous studies to understand the relationship between teacher personality and teacher–student relationships (Fisher et al., 1998; Martin et al., 2007) and students' perceptions of the classroom environment (den Brok et al., 2006; Infantino & Little, 2005), have often relied on quantitative questionnaires rather than gaining students' opinions and perceptions first hand. In placing emphasis on interpreting students' perceptions through interviewing them, I was attempting to centre my research on the young person. Crivello, Camfield and Woodhead (2009) state, 'Involving children at different points in this [research] process affirms children as competent social actors, the experts in their own lives, and therefore valid sources of data' (p. 52). Qualitative interviewing allows the researcher to capture the perceptions and complexities of participants. This is in contrast to surveys and closed questionnaires, used in quantitative studies, which can restrict expression. As Patton (2002) writes:

Such closed instruments force respondents to fit their knowledge, experiences, and feelings into researcher's categories. The fundamental principle of qualitative interviewing is to provide a framework within which respondents can express *their own* understandings in their terms. (p. 348, emphasis in original)

Punch (2000a) suggests a number of ways in which conducting research with children is different from conducting research with adult participants. The development of rapport, of not imposing *the researcher's own* views and perceptions and ensuring question appropriateness are issues that need to be considered when conducting interviews with students. To refine the interview questions, a pilot test was conducted by interviewing one student and seeking feedback about question clarity and interview style. Punch (2000a) recommends that 'reflexivity should be a central part of the research process with children, where researchers critically reflect not only on their role and their assumptions.... but also on the choice of methods and their application' (p. 323). To build rapport with both students and school staff, I visited schools and conducted interviews on several visits over each of the three terms of the school year. As a practising teacher at the time of conducting this research, I felt confident in phrasing questions at an appropriate level for the students participating in the research. Additionally, as a teacher, I felt at ease

both in conversing with young people, asking questions, and eliciting deep responses through the use of probes. Patton (2002) states that probes ‘are used to deepen the response to a question, increase the richness and depth of responses, and give cues to the interviewee about the level of response that is desired’ (p. 372). As a teacher, I was also comfortable in school settings and speaking with school staff.

As I am a practising teacher conducting research in schools, the research could be termed ‘insider research’, a somewhat self-explanatory term that is used to describe research in which the researcher has a direct involvement or connection with the research setting (Robson, 2002). Insider research could be conducted in schools by any number of people who are members of the department of education or working within a school setting, including administrators, school leaders or research officers. I conducted what Robson (2002) terms ‘practitioner research’ (p. 382). Practitioner research, in this context, is research undertaken by a practising teacher. Dunne et al. (2005) provide insight into researcher identity by stating that it ‘involves the development of a critical awareness of oneself as a social and professional practitioner and is especially useful to those researching in insider situations or settings, which are similar to those where they normally function’ (p. 5). One aim of this research is to inform fellow practitioners’ pedagogy. In the past 20 years, there has been a great increase in practitioner research in education (Mercer, 2007). Mercer (2007, p. 2) notes that it is ironic that although so many people are now engaged in such research, there seems to be no corresponding growth in the literature on insider research.

The assistance of computer-software analysis of the transcripts was rejected for reasons that Patton (2002) describes:

The human being, not the software, must decide ... how to tell the story... The analysis of qualitative data involves creativity, intellectual discipline, analytical rigor, and a great deal of hard work. Computer programs can facilitate the work of analysis, but can’t provide the creativity and intelligence that make each qualitative analysis unique. (p. 442)

Focus groups

It was envisaged that students would initially be more relaxed in speaking with me in groups and then, as rapport was built over the course of several visits to the schools, students would feel comfortable to be interviewed individually. Thomas and O’Kane (1998) suggest that the information that can be gained from groups can be different to that obtained from the same participants interviewed individually. Kitinger (1994) notes:

Focus groups do not easily tap into individual biographies or the minutiae of decision making during intimate moments, but they do examine how knowledge and, more importantly, ideas both develop, and operate, within a given cultural context. (p. 116)

Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell and Britten (2002) found that focus groups are a valuable method for eliciting young people's views and experiences and complement personal interviews. Slade and Trent (2000) suggest that interviewing gave boys an 'active voice' in research. As Smyth (1999) aptly states 'it is not possible, in the end, to talk about teachers' work without also making some incursions into the world and experiences of students, despite the fact that much research tries to proceed as if these were artificially separated' (p. 68). Smyth (1999) describes this type of research as 'voiced research', 'the bringing into the picture of perspectives previously excluded, muted, or silenced by dominant structures or discourses' (p. 74).

As a guest in the two schools that agreed to participate in this research, I was limited by school schedules, students' class commitments and the time constraints of the study days that I could take from my own full-time teaching. As a result of these considerations, the majority of interviews were conducted as group or focus-group interviews. Patton (2002) has written that not all group interviews are focus-group interviews. However, for the purposes of this study the group interviews were focus-group interviews where I chose to combine a standardised open-ended interview set of questions with a conversational strategy to elicit deeper meanings where appropriate.

The use of focus groups began in the 1920s for the purposes of market research. While there has been an expansion of the use of focus-group interviewing as a source of data collection in social-science research, publications of guides to its use as a method are largely confined to adult participants (Morgan et al., 2002). There is growing evidence of the use of focus groups with children (see Hill et al., 1996; Morgan et al., 2002; Thomas & O'Kane, 1998). However, Morgan et al. cite Mauther's observation that researching 'children's lives remains at an exploratory stage' (p. 6), suggesting that this 'still holds true both generally and in relation to focus groups' (p. 6). Robson (2002) suggests that much of the research literature on focus groups is 'methodologically naïve' (p. 288).

Patton (2002) warns that the quality of the research information obtained from interviews can be dependent on the skills of the interviewer. Punch (2002a) suggests that using methods that are sensitive to children's capabilities allows children to feel more relaxed when participating in research with adults. The task to facilitate focus groups comprised

of children is more challenging than facilitating focus groups with adults because of the inherent power imbalance between the adult researcher and child participant (Morgan et al., 2002). As a practising teacher with seventeen years of teaching experience, I felt I had the skills to facilitate or moderate the focus-group interviews, as I was experienced in facilitating study groups of adolescents. Dunne et al. (2005) suggest that the facilitator ‘requires the researcher’s consciousness of their position within the production of knowledge, care with the social and emotional aspects of the social encounter and attention to the practicalities’ (p. 33). Patton (2002) cites focus-group expert Krueger

A focus group should be ‘carefully planned’ to obtain perceptions ‘on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment. It is conducted ... by a skilled interviewer. The discussion is comfortable and often enjoyable for participants as they share their ideas and perceptions. Group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments in the discussion’. (p. 386)

Observation and interviewing: framing the questions

To investigate the research question of whether the Victorian curriculum provides opportunities for promoting the development of social skills and social competence for students, I chose to explore whether students observe their classroom teachers modelling social skills and imitate and learn such social behaviour (Bandura, 1977). To frame the questions for the focus-group interviews with students I needed to observe the teachers social and emotional curriculum where such social-skills behaviours would be ‘on display’ for students. A ‘Teacher Observation Checklist—Social Skills’ (see Appendix 1) was devised based on observable behaviours characteristic of the three social skills of i) interpersonal skills (i.e. listening attentively and empathically, offering support, giving compliments and sense of humour); ii) self-awareness and control (i.e. temper control, coping with frustration or anger, describing one’s own emotions and behaviour, and accepting criticism); and iii) assertion (i.e. initiating conversations, inviting others to interact and acknowledging compliments). While this might suggest a positivist approach, the broader research question of whether there is opportunity for the development of social skills and social competence requires coming to know whether students are ‘conscious’ of this opportunity. Thus, it is a matter of connecting what exists in the classroom to the students’ interpretation of classroom practice. Therefore, the focus of the research is not on the quantitative data, but rather on the qualitative data gained from the student and teacher/school leaders’ interviews. This is somewhat of a deviation from the usual focus of educational data, which is generally quantitative in nature (e.g.

standardised-test results and survey results such as staff opinion surveys). Crivello et al. (2009) report that ‘there is a growing tendency towards multi-methods approaches within child-focused research’ (p. 57) and that ‘multi-methods approaches recognise that, as a social group, children possess a broad range of capabilities and preferences for expressing themselves’ (p. 58). This mixing of research methods is known as ‘triangulation’, and the use of different data sources is seen to strengthen a study by improving its validity/reliability. Patton (2002) cites Denzin’s term for the use of a variety of data sources in a study as ‘data triangulation’ (p. 247). Data triangulation may yield differing results, but as Patton (2002) notes ‘inconsistencies in findings across different kinds of data can be illuminative. Finding such inconsistencies ought not to be viewed as weakening the credibility of results, but rather as offering opportunities for deeper insight into the relationship between the inquiry approach and the phenomenon under study’ (p. 248). Annotations made in the ‘Teacher Observation Checklist’ when behaviours were observed, together with written notes, assisted me in contextualising behaviours and situations so that when speaking with students, it was ensured that the questions were relevant and about ‘real’ situations. Although they are able to be quantified, the teacher classroom checklists were not used to critique teachers or to make comparisons between teachers. The checklist was used with the aim of framing questions to students about the social-skills behaviours that teachers were modelling and in discussions with teachers about their classroom practices.

The issue of the disruptive nature of ‘looking in classrooms’ was an issue raised in this research, where the presence of a researcher could possibly disrupt, or negatively alter, the learning environment of the classroom. Hayes, Johnston and King (2006) believe that ‘looking in classrooms is one of the most basic requirements of school improvement, and yet is one of the least practiced skills of teachers and one of the most contentious methods of educational researchers’ (p. 1). With research conducted in classrooms, there is also the ‘inherent voyeurism of research and the risks of intensifying the already-strong gaze upon the child’ (MacLure, Jones, Holmes & MacRae, 2008, p. 2). It was important to me that all participants, school staff and students, appreciated the intentions of my being an observer in the classroom and understood the purpose of my research as much as possible; that these intentions and the purpose of the research was valuable both in my opinion and the opinions of the principals who had given me permission to carry out research in their schools.

Composition of interview groups

To investigate matters concerning young Australians usefully, it is increasingly important to recognize that the ongoing democratisation and liberalisation of Australian society, at least in part, has been a process of understanding and accepting difference. This is not just the rhetoric of understanding and accepting difference, and not just differences of perspective, but the genuine recognition that there may be different reality for others, upon which their views are based, and within which their views are equally efficacious. (Slade & Trent, 2000, p. 202)

A number of secondary-school principals in the Melbourne metropolitan area were initially approached via email to inform them of the research purpose and to invite them to allow their school staff and students to be approached to participate in the study. Two principals expressed interest in the research proposal and agreed to meet to discuss the study. After discussions, the principals of the two schools, referred to in this study as Hyacinth College and Waratah High,² agreed to allow me to conduct the research in their schools.

In 2012, Hyacinth College catered for just over 1,100 families, with the overwhelming majority of students being from English speaking backgrounds. Conversely, in 2012, Waratah High had an enrolment of 2,000 students from 76 different language backgrounds. At least four of the students who were interviewed in this study had experience of education in other countries, as they had attended school in their home countries before coming to Australia. Six of the eighteen young people who agreed to participate in this study had home languages other than English, with three students having been in Australia less than two years. I felt that their participation enriched the discussions and that their different backgrounds and experiences offered another perspective to the other members of the interview group.

Eight males and ten females participated in this study. Focus-group interviews ranged from two to six students, and some groups were composed of all girls, some of all boys and some that had a mixture of female and male participants. Hill et al. (1996) cite guidelines for focus-group interviews with children devised by Greenbaum based on market research. They concur with Greenbaum's optimum focus-group size of five to six

² For the purpose of anonymity, the names used in this study are not the real names of the two secondary colleges.

children and further suggest that the age variation of participants should be small. However, they did not state whether they agreed with his advocacy for single-sex groups, as ‘he believed that boys and girls are often hostile to each other and have marked differences in interests’ (p. 134). I encountered no difficulties between participants in the mixed-gender focus groups.

While Punch (2002b) writes ‘that young people are not a homogeneous group and they have different preferences so it cannot be said that a group or individual interview is more appropriate for conducting research with children’ (p. 49), many of the choices of number of students in the interview group were determined by circumstances beyond my control while in the schools. Excursions, student commitments and absences, tests, and specialist lessons were some of the issues that affected the participants’ availability for interview on the days that I attended their schools. There was no occasion in which a teacher denied me access to students, but there were occasions when students elected to stay in class rather than be interviewed by me.

Methodology

Methodology is not ... a recipe; it does not tell you just what to do. Rather it acts as a guide about what to pay attention to, what difficulties to expect and how to approach problems.

(Wenger, 1998, p. 9)

The choice of methodology was influenced by the research questions and the method of data collection and interviewing that I had chosen. The research question of whether Victorian Government schools provide opportunities, in the form of explicit teacher modelling, for the development of social skills and social competence was to be investigated from the students’ perspectives—their experience of school culture. While there are a number of reports that state the positive effects of social-skills training in general education (Ashcroft, 2004; Denham, Hatfield, Smethurst, Tan & Tribe, 2006; Schoenfeld, Rutherford, Gable & Rock, 2008) and in whole-school settings (Skiba & Peterson, 2003), there is very little research on the experience of students in such programmes. In conducting research, young people are increasingly being given a ‘voice’ about their experiences in life. Significantly, the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia’s (2010) report *Children and young people’s views on*

wellbeing specifically sought to speak to young people about what they considered important to their wellbeing.

I sought the perceptions of participating students by interviewing them about their classroom experiences. While many young people have significant relationships with at least one unrelated adult, the unrelated adults they often name as influential are teachers (Darling, Hamilton & Shaver, 2003). Hattie (2003) maintains that the most important variable affecting students' experiences and outcomes at school is the teacher. Research carried out by Martin et al. (2007) demonstrated that teacher–student relationships together with parent–child relationships are significantly associated with school achievement, motivation and general self-esteem, with teacher effects being stronger in the academic domain. Ryan and Patrick (2001) found that students' perceptions of teacher support and mutual respect were related to positive changes in their motivation and engagement. Positive teacher–student relationships have been associated with improved social outcomes for students (OECD, 2005).

Significant to this research are the perceptions of the nature of the relationships that students have with their teachers and the classroom practices (pedagogy) that teachers enact that either promote or hinder the forming of positive teacher–student relationships. Two methodologies informed this research. One was phenomenological research to 'describe the meaning for several individuals of their *lived experiences* of a concept or a phenomenon' (Creswell, 2007, p. 57, emphasis in original). Phenomenological research informed the research question of whether students viewed their teachers as exemplars or role models of social skills. Ethnography was the second methodology used in this research.

An ethnographical methodology was utilised in collecting data from students, teachers and school leaders to gain a sense of whether school culture, specifically teachers' social-skills modelling, promotes social-skills acquisition in students. The research question on the value that students, teachers and school leaders place on social competence as an outcome of education, utilised ethnography. I was interested in the created social culture of the schools in which I was a practitioner-researcher for several days each term over the course of a school year. Certain questions arose for my research. Was the 'cultural basis of their peoplehood' (Vidich & Lyman, 2000, p. 38) the same for principals,

teachers and students? Can student, teachers and principals be said to have the same 'culture' in a school?

The use of two methodological approaches, an eclectic approach, allows the lens of inquiry to turn and focus on the individual research questions. Such an approach to research has been termed a *bricolage* (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). I share Crotty's (1998) view, based on Lévi-Straus's *The savage mind*, that the notion of researcher-as-*bricoleur* is not the 'Jack of all trades' suggested by Denzin and Lincoln. As Crotty (1998) notes, true '*bricoleurs* are people constantly musing over objects, engaged precisely with what is *not* themselves, in order to see what possibilities the objects have to offer' (p. 50). The focus is not on the researcher but on that which is researched. Crotty (1998) states:

Research in constructivist vein, research in the mode of the *bricoleur*, requires that we not remain straitjacketed by the conventional meanings that we have been taught to associate with the object. Instead, such research invites us to approach the object in a radical spirit of openness to its potential for a new or richer meaning. It is an invitation to reinterpretation. (p. 51)

Being a practitioner-researcher draws on the concept of identity. In the social context of schools, as a practising teacher, I have values and knowledge and constructs of what I understand the social nature of schooling to be. When teaching, I have an understanding of my place in the classroom and the manner in which I might wish to be seen by others, including students, school leaders and parents. As a researcher, I understand that my social construct of the classroom must change. For example, as a teacher I know about classroom etiquette, at least in my school (though not necessarily in other schools). This is clearly linked to epistemology or 'how I know what I know'. As a researcher, my relationships in the schools changed. I have values associated with what I believe teachers should do in their classroom practice. As Stanley and Wise (1990) suggest, 'researchers' understandings are necessarily temporally, intellectually, politically and emotionally grounded and are thus contextually specific as those of the researched' (p. 23). There was a need to be mindful of my values and knowledge of education and schools during the research process, but being mindful of epistemological concerns does not mean that I needed to approach the research in a 'clinical' manner. This mindfulness of the researcher's prior knowledge was termed by Moustakas (1994) as 'transcendental' or 'psychological' phenomenology. Research of this kind is 'less focused on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of the participants' (Creswell, 2007, p. 59). Moustakas (1994) further addresses 'bracketing',

where one lays aside previous understandings or constructs as much as possible to view the phenomenon being researched with ‘fresh eyes’ (p. 34).

As a teacher, I am aware that ‘the object of our study is always contaminated by the frame of our observational stance’ (van Manen, 1999, p. 18). Reflexivity is the term used in qualitative research to describe both the ‘stance’ of the researcher during the process of inquiry and in the interpretation and writing stages of the report. Patton (2002) states that reflexivity ‘calls for self-reflection, indeed critical self-reflection and self-knowledge and a willingness to consider how who one is affects what one is able to observe, hear, and understand in the field and as an observer and analyst’ (p. 299). Thus, in this research there were two challenges on which to reflect. The first was to acknowledge my values about classroom pedagogy and practice, and my belief that social skills are very important and should be modelled for students, and the second was to ensure that my observations, and what was discussed during the interviews, was represented accurately. It is important to capture not only the words that individuals use but also the meaning. In a study of children’s conceptualisations of their wellbeing, Fattore, Mason and Watson (2007) remark ‘we ... agreed as we worked on the analysis, that mere inclusion of children’s words as quotes, does not necessarily reflect the meanings they are conveying to us’ (p. 17). The authors found through multiple interviews with individual children that understandings of meaning became clearer. Other strategies that Fattore et al. (2007) used to facilitate interaction included providing choices in the forms of participation, for instance individual interviews or peer-based/group discussions. Multiple interviews assist in building a rapport between researcher and the interviewee(s), which helps to authenticate the research. I support the following comment made by Patton (2002):

I find interviewing people invigorating and stimulating—the opportunity for a short period of time to enter another person’s world. If participant observation means ‘walk a mile in my shoes’, in-depth interviewing means ‘walk a mile in my head’. (pp. 416–417)

Phenomenological research

The lens of inquiry for this methodological approach focused on the third research question: *Do students identify teachers as exemplars/role models of social skills?*

Phenomenology is defined as ‘an empirically based approach that aims to identify qualitatively different manners in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand various kinds of phenomena’ (Marton, 1988, p. 53). Creswell (2007) cites the work of Stewart and Mickunas in suggesting that there are four philosophical perspectives

to consider in phenomenological research. The first perspective involves a return to the Greek conception of philosophy as a search for wisdom. The second perspective is that explained by Crotty (1998), who suggests that the researcher must lay aside previous understandings of the phenomenon under investigation and revisit it with fresh eyes so that ‘possibilities for new meaning emerge ... [and researchers] witness at least an authentication and enhancement of former meaning’ (p. 78). The German mathematician/philosopher Edmund H Husserl (1859–1938) termed this suspension of understanding as an ‘*epoche*’. The third philosophical perspective is what Crotty (1998) citing Natanson terms the ‘axis of phenomenology’ (p. 79), otherwise termed the ‘intentionality of consciousness’. As Creswell (2007) explains:

This idea is that consciousness is always directed toward an object. Reality of an object, then, is inextricably related to one’s consciousness of it. Thus, reality, according to Husserl, is not divided into subjects and objects, but into the dual Cartesian nature of both subjects and objects as they appear in consciousness. (p. 59)

The fourth philosophical presupposition flows on from the intentionality of consciousness, and refutes that there is a gulf between the research subject and object of research: ‘the reality of an object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual’ (Creswell, 2007, p. 59). As Patton (2002) explains:

There is no separate (or objective) reality for people. There is only what they know their experience is and means. The subjective experience incorporates the objective thing and becomes a person’s reality, thus the focus on meaning making as the essence of human experience. (p. 106)

Being mindful of the ontological (what is real), epistemological (what is true) and axiological (what is of value) concerns of the researcher is imperative in a phenomenological research approach. Reflexivity is certainly necessary but the lens of inquiry in this research is based on Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental or psychological phenomenology approach. Under this lens, the research is based less on the interpretations of the researcher ‘and more on a description of the experiences of participants’ (Creswell, 2007, p. 59). Moustakas (1994) suggests the use of ‘bracketing’ or the notion of *epoche* as Husserl termed the suspension of prior knowledge: ‘Transcendental can thus be said to mean “everything [that] is perceived freshly, as if for the first time”’ (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). I approached this research as a practising teacher, but I remained conscious of leaving my ‘values at the school gate ... [to] engage with the [school] world in new ways to construct new understandings’ (Crotty, 1998, p. 86).

Phenomenology is popular in educational research and has contributed to literature about experiences in schools (see Beutel, 2010; Kinash & Hoffman, 2008; van Manen, 1990). This study, like the research of Beutel (2010) and Kinash and Hoffman (2008), sought to explore the nature of teacher–student relationships. Data collection in a phenomenological research approach consists of in-depth interviews and multiple interviews with participants (Creswell, 2007). Moustakas suggests the participants be asked open-ended questions with following two broad general questions focusing the research inquiry lens. ‘What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?’ ‘What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?’ (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). Significant to this study are teacher–student relationships and the extent to which students’ experiences of teacher pedagogical practices influence viewing teachers as social-skills exemplars or role models.

Guiding questions used for the interviews conducted in this study include the following:

- Do teachers and school staff role model social skills? How?
- Is it important that teachers role model social skills? Is it important that teachers ‘get along’ with students, do not get angry with students, and show students how to get their point of view across to others?
- Is being able to relate well with other people (interpersonal skills), express your emotions, solve conflicts and control your anger (self-awareness and control) and put forward your opinion (assertion) important in society today? If so, is it important to learn/master these skills at school?
- Are teachers people who you think should demonstrate social skills? Are your teachers this year (year seven) different from your teachers in primary school:
 - think of how they get along with students
 - deal with frustrations/anger or show their emotion?
 - how they tell you how to get your point of view across to other people.

Within the school worldview or paradigm, the dominant discourse centres around the three ‘R’s ([r]eading, w[r]iting and a[r]ithmetic) or as Beutel (2010) summarises:

The key purpose of teachers' pedagogic interactions with students is on delivering a body of knowledge in order for students to reproduce this knowledge in examinations. (p. 80)

The challenging discourse in this research is that education is holistic and teachers need to facilitate social instruction within the school curriculum. Within this discourse is the belief that students should have a 'voice' in schools.

Ethnography

The lens of inquiry for the methodological approach of ethnography in this research focused on the first and second research questions:

Do Victorian Government secondary-school teachers explicitly model social skills so that students have the opportunity to develop social skills and social competence?

What value do students, teachers and school leaders place on social competence as an educational outcome?

Ethnography literally means 'writing about people' from the Greek word *ethnos* meaning 'a people'. Generally, an ethnographical process requires the researcher to spend extended periods immersed in the cultural group under investigation, most often as a participant–observer. An ethnographic study 'seeks to capture, interpret and explain how a group, organization or community live, experience and make sense of their lives and their world' (Robson, 2002, p. 89). The study of anthropology has a long tradition of using ethnographical approaches to study by observation of 'primitive' or 'exotic' cultures (Patton, 2002, p. 81).

Ethnographic inquiry is guided by the central assumption that groups of people existing and interacting over time will develop a culture (Patton, 2002). Crotty (1998) cites Mead in describing the notion of the social influences that shape people and their behaviour:

A person is a personality because he belongs to a community, because he takes over the institutions of that community into his own conduct. (p. 74)

There have been some informative ethnographic inquiries published about schools (e.g. Kickett-Tucker, 2008). While many 'schools' of ethnography exist today, including the emergence of virtual ethnography, that is, studies of people connected by electronic environments (Ruhleder, 2000), the focus of ethnographers has been to describe the culture of sometimes remote and exotic peoples—making familiar the things that seem strange. With insider ethnographies conducted by practitioner–researchers, the challenge

is the reverse—‘making the familiar strange’ (Blot, 1983, p. 186). In this study, my own ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions are ‘suspended’ while immersed in the different school cultures to focus ‘with fresh eyes’ on the observations and data. Such a neutral stance can be difficult because ‘the very process of observing becomes loaded with the theories of the world that researchers carry with them’ (Dunne et al., 2005, p. 67). Patton (2002) suggests that the observer’s own values and culture ‘raises doubts about the desirability, indeed, the possibility, of detachment’ (p. 84). Dunne et al. (2005) conclude that ‘what kind of research you have planned on doing shapes the data that you will get, as also does what kind of researcher you consider yourself to be’ (p. 67).

In ethnographic research, there can be distinctions based on interpretations and the application of findings. The *realist ethnographer* is an objective observer of individuals where participant data is reported ‘uncontaminated by personal bias, political goals, and judgement’ (Creswell, 2007, p. 70). However, in this approach, the culture is described and presented by the realist ethnographer’s choice of data review. Research conducted by Van Maanen (1988) characterises this approach, in which observations and comments from research participants are reported utilizing a third person objective narrative. In contrast, the *critical ethnographer* may seek an advocacy perspective for marginalised groups and study issues of power and control (Thomas, 1993).

A theoretical commitment in this study was to represent ‘the authentic student voice’ (Howard & Johnson, 2000). Thus, in this sense, this study could be thought of as realist ethnography. However, this research argues the necessity of incorporating the ‘student voice’ and thus, I have employed a critical ethnographic approach by which I advocate for students to be consulted about their own social development in schools. As Kinash and Hoffman (2008) attest:

the pedagogical relationship [is] ... a shared process of constructing and deriving meaning, so too is the research relationship with children a journey of negotiating understandings and exploring what it means to know together. (p. 78)

While these authors are advocating for young people to be not simply used as sources of information but rather as legitimate research partners, I would suggest extending this premise further and say that students’ perspectives are important and should be considered in educational decision making. Fullan (2003) provides a vision of student inclusiveness as ‘having a system where all students learn, the gap between high and low performance becomes greatly reduced and what people learn enable them to be successful

citizens and workers in a morally based knowledge society' (p. 29). School leaders are responsible for driving change in schools and developing a culture within the school community. In speaking of school leaders in this role, Roffey (2007) refers to Sergiovanni and defines moral leadership 'as the ability to build connections that transform schools from ordinary organisations to communities with a commitment to shared purpose' (p. 27). As Leren (2006) concludes:

Students know which methods and models work for them, what they see as interesting, and what they do not profit from. Their expertise as users of the school system should therefore be made the most of. I am not saying the students should determine everything, but I believe including them in the decision-making process is a wise thing to do. (p. 367)

Schools are hierarchical and this study investigates views of school culture from the perspectives of teachers, students and principals. School principals and assistant principals are members of the principal-class team, and represent school leadership in secondary schools. In describing educational discourse, MacLure (2003) comments on the oppositional 'binary structure of discursive realities' (p. 9) and suggests that these are 'everywhere to be found in the discourses of education' (p. 11). The advocacy of many researchers for the inclusion of the student voice in educational policy and practice suggests that the culturally divisive 'us' and 'them' theme is dominant in educational discourse.

Ethnographic research utilises many methods but 'depth rather than breadth is the norm' (Robson, 2002, p. 190). To this end, I utilised multiple interviews, classroom observation checklists and a research journal. The research journal allowed observations, overall impressions and emotional responses of the research process to be recorded. These mixed methods allow for triangulation, not for the purpose of research validity, but more to 'leave a discursive space ... to explore reflexively' (Dunne et al., 2005, p. 51).

Ethnographic research involves participant observation and can be considered 'dynamic research' in that the research framework changes with time and involvement in the study. In a study of the application of ethnographic research in hospital operating rooms, Byrne (2001) remarks on the cyclic nature of data collection and analysis. Hospital operating routine allows for data to be collected regularly, which facilitates regular data analysis and reflection upon implication of research findings. This concept shares something of the characteristics of action research where the data collected provides new information leading to reflection and the choice of a new action. In this research, multiple interviews

allowed for emerging themes and perspectives to be explored more deeply during subsequent interviews over the course of the school year and as rapport was developed with participants.

Theoretical Perspective

Theoretical perspective is described by Crotty (1998) as ‘the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria’ (p. 3). Since I was seeking to investigate the interpretations and values of the participants in this study, I took an interpretivist perspective. Creswell (2007) believes that interpretivism ‘emphasises the role of the researcher as an interpreter of the data and the individual who represents the information ... and acknowledges the importance of language and discourse ... as well as issues of power, authority, and dominance’ (p. 248).

Interpretivism emerged in contrast to positivism as a means of explaining human and social reality; humans could not be studied in the same manner as one studies rocks or atoms. Crotty (1998) quotes Schwandt as saying

Interpretivism was conceived in reaction to the effort to develop a natural science of the social. Its foil was largely logical empiricist methodology and the bid to apply that framework to human inquiry. (p. 67)

Interpretivism argues that it is impossible to understand people and the cultures in which they exist without appreciating how these people interpret and make sense of their world. As Creswell (2007) suggests, interpretivism requires openness on the part of the researcher to ‘suspend’ prior cultural understandings and a willingness to learn about the realities of the people being studied. Howe and Moses (1999) suggest that everything that makes humans what they are is created in social relationships where language is a critical component. Thus, social research must be ‘dialogical’, a term they quote Taylor as having coined (Howe & Moses, 1999, p. 32). Howe and Moses (1999) further suggest:

It must seek out and listen carefully to ‘voices’ embedded in their social context to gain true understanding of what people are saying and why they do what they do. And dialogue itself has consequences; Beliefs, culture, norms, and the like are not just there, waiting to be uncovered, but are negotiated and ‘constructed’ via interactions among researchers and those they study. (p. 32)

Patton (2002) cautions that the researcher must try to represent the social world as it actually ‘exists for those under investigation, rather than as the researcher imagines it to be’ (p. 53). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest ‘researchers deploy a wide range of

interconnected interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter in hand' (p. 4). The chosen interpretive perspective of this research needed to answer the research questions, but the approaches also needed to be attentive to issues of power and interpretation. The research involved child participants whose perspectives were to be reliably represented. These concerns are not new. Dunne et al. (2005) attest that issues 'of power in the research process and analysis of the social world have been significant, even in contradictory ways, in the move away from positivist social research' (p. 85). This research owes a debt to the postmodernist assumption that the validity of the findings cannot be 'divorced' from treatments of relationships of power (Howe & Moses, 1999, p. 36).

Interpretivism rejects the idea that the real world exists independently of the research process, and in studying people, it is inevitable that understanding, interest and caring may develop. Researchers are human too. As MacIntyre (1982) states:

The social sciences are moral sciences. That is, not only do social scientists explore a human universe centrally constituted by a variety of obediences to and breaches of, conformities to and rebellions against, a host of rules, taboos, ideals, and beliefs about goods, virtues and vices ... and their own explorations of that universe are no different in this respect from any other form of human activity. (p. 175)

Max Weber (1864–1920) is credited with having brought to interpretivism the premise of *Verstehen* (understanding). This contrasts with *Erklären* (explaining), which is the focus of natural-science research. *Verstehen* develops from personal contact and interaction with people over the course of extended time spent with them. Patton (2002) states that the 'tradition of *Verstehen* places emphasis on the human capacity to know and understand others through empathic introspection and reflection based on direct observation of and interaction with people' (p. 52). Meyers (1981) believes that understanding and empathy are entwined in interpretivism.

Both *Verstehen* and empathy depend largely on qualitative data. *Verstehen* is an attempt to 'crack the code' of the culture, that is, detect the categories into which a culture codes actions and thoughts ... Empathy in evaluation is the detection of emotions manifested in the program participants and staff, achieved by evaluators' becoming aware of similar or complementary emotions in themselves. (p. 180)

Extrapolating from the lens of empathy and *Verstehen*, this research has also embraced care theory. According to Noddings (1986), the researcher's conduct and choice of methodology in conducting educational research should reflect a concern to contribute positively to the school community. As Howe and Moses (1999) state:

the relationship between researchers and participants ought to exemplify caring, particularly trust and mutual respect ... Educational research should not be conducted on the basis of mere intellectual curiosity: much less should it be conducted in a way that is likely to be harmful to individual students or groups of students or destructive of school communities. Educational research should be 'for teaching,' Noddings says, not simply 'on teaching' (1986, p. 506). (p. 34, emphasis in original)

The ethical considerations of social and educational research are ones that have links with 'cultural relativism' in anthropology (Howe & Moses, 1999). Robson (2002) also states:

In its extreme form, philosophical relativism maintains that there is no external reality independent of human consciousness; there are only different sets of meanings and classifications which people attach to the world ... 'Reality' can be constructed only by means of a conceptual system, and hence there can be no objective reality because different cultures and societies have different conceptual systems. (p. 22)

This research investigated the reality for different groups of people within school systems. Students could arguably be said to have differing conceptual systems to the adults in the school world. The challenge is to view things from different perspectives. As Robson (2002) writes:

The success of theoretical accounts depends primarily on the analyst's capacity to invite, compel, stimulate, or delight the audience, and not on criteria of veracity.... To which a rejoinder might be that these aims need not be in opposition; those who regard striving for veracity as fundamental must also strive to fully engage their audience. (p. 26)

The Research Study

Design

This research employs a constructivist, qualitative methodology. Interviews with individuals and student groups were carried out in the naturalist setting of school and the research employed an interpretive theoretical perspective utilising both ethnographic and phenomenological methodologies.

Classroom observations were made of teachers who taught the student participants of this study to 'frame' and develop questions used in interviews with participants. The interview approach of using standardised open-ended interview questions with a conversational strategy was employed with students, teachers and principals to investigate the three research questions:

Do Victorian Government secondary-school teachers explicitly model social skills so that students have the opportunity to develop social skills and social competence?

What value do students, teachers and school leaders place on social competence as an educational outcome?

Do students identify teachers as exemplars/role models of social skills?

Individual interviews were conducted with teachers and principals. Multiple interviews and focus-group interviews were conducted with students. Ethics approval was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Ballarat and from the DEECD of Victoria. Participant identity was protected by the use of re-identifiable data, from which identifiers have been removed and replaced by a code.

Participants

The purpose of the study was initially raised with principals who then discussed it with school staff. When principal approval was achieved, I conducted an information evening, for interested parents of year seven students in one school and addressed year seven students in their classes at both participating schools. It was explained to interested participants that the research was about social skills with the intent to explore students' experiences about teachers' pedagogy in classrooms, their relationships with teachers and social competence gained in schools.

Teachers and students were invited to participate and consent forms were collected either from me (on the occasions on which the presentations were made) or from coordinating staff at each of the two schools who volunteered to participate in the study. Students were required to take consent forms home to gain and prove parent or carer consent. Eighteen young people chose to participate: eight males and ten females, all aged between twelve and fourteen years. Six students came from a background where their home language was not English; these students are termed as English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners by DEECD.

Having voluntary participation in this research could have resulted in a cohort of students who were the most engaged and motivated in their respective school settings, something of a non-heterogeneous sample. However, this does not appear to have been the case. Many of the students who were interviewed spoke of having difficulties at school, with several students disclosing that they had had instances of disruptive behaviour, absences, poor grades and suspensions for various reasons, including fighting.

I approached teachers who taught year-seven students to be interviewed during my visits to the school. Multiple visits over the course of the school year allowed the teachers to make appointments for interviews with me when it was most convenient for them. I attempted in all cases not to add to teachers' workloads and for the research to cause as little disruption as possible to the school programme. All teachers approached agreed to be interviewed and fourteen interviews were conducted, with nine females and five males. Interviewed teachers taught across a number of subjects and their years of practice ranged from one newly graduated teacher to several teachers with over 20 years of teaching experience each. One male and one female principal were interviewed.

Methods

This study was conducted in two government secondary schools in the Melbourne metropolitan region. Data was collected from in-depth interviews, focus groups, participant observations of classroom-teacher behaviours and a research journal. The research journal allowed observations, overall impressions and emotional responses of the research process to be recorded. Multiple interviews over the course of three school terms, or seven months, were conducted to build a rapport between the participants and myself, and therefore, assist in ensuring the response data was more reliable.

An interview approach of using standardised open-ended interview questions with a conversational strategy was employed with students, teachers and principals. The purpose of this was to develop and explore guiding questions and those that emerged during interviews and to ensure that complementary issues were explored in the two separate schools. To ensure that the same issues were explored with students, teachers and principals, the three interview schedules posed complementary questions. These questions concerned the value of social competency for individuals and the extent to which the concept of teachers as modellers of social skills was considered relevant and/or feasible.

Each interview was audio taped and later fully transcribed by a professional service that guaranteed transcription security via internet upload and download. Separate consent for audio taping was required and one teacher chose not to have the interview recorded, which meant that I took interview notes with this teacher instead of using an audio tape.

Interviews with principals were by appointment, were generally of one hour duration, and were conducted in their respective offices. These interviews focused on the value placed

by the school on social competence as an educational goal, as well as on the resources available (e.g. staff professional development) to teach social skills. The role of classroom teachers in modelling social skills for students was also a theme explored in interviews with principals. The lens of inquiry was on an ethnographic investigation of the school social culture.

Teachers who were approached and agreed to participate often chose to be interviewed in the staff room or a vacant classroom, usually during a period when they were not required to teach or at lunch times. Interviews lasted from 25 to 90 minutes with the average teacher interview being of 60 minutes duration. Interviews with students were conducted during class time with their teachers' permission to be absent from class. No teacher refused to allow a student to participate but some students chose (on occasions) to stay in class rather than leave for an interview. Student interviews were conducted in quiet spaces such as conference rooms, libraries and staff offices and varied in duration from 45 to 85 minutes. Nineteen focus-group interviews and four single-student interviews were conducted. Focus groups ranged in size from two to six students and consisted of all-girl, all-boy and mixed gender focus groups. School timetables and programmes dictated planning schedules on research days in schools, but participants' absences or other unexpected events, which can be common in schools, affected some research-day plans. Some flexibility and adaptability were necessary to utilise the available time effectively.

The lens of inquiry of student interviews focused on their perceptions of the phenomenon of teachers as exemplars or role models of social skills. The research also focused on investigating teachers and students' views on teacher–student relationships and interactions that develop and shape the culture of the school. This ethnographic approach sought to investigate the opportunities available to students within the school curriculum, specifically teacher pedagogy, to develop social skills and social competence.

Teacher pedagogy was observed during my visits to classrooms of year-seven teachers (with their permission). A Teacher Observation Checklist—Social Skills (see Appendix 1) was devised based on observable behaviours characteristic of the three social skills of i) interpersonal skills (listening attentively and empathically, offering support, giving compliments and sense of humour); ii) self-awareness and control (temper control, coping with frustration or anger, describing one's own emotions and behaviour, and accepting criticism); and iii) assertion (initiating conversations, inviting others to interact and

acknowledging compliments). Annotations made in the Teacher Observation Checklist when behaviours were observed, together with written notes, assisted me to put the teacher behaviours and situations in context to ensure that questions discussed with students and school staff were relevant and about ‘real’ situations.

To refine the interview questions, a pilot test was conducted by initially interviewing one student and seeking feedback about question clarity and interview style. Research questions were manipulated or re-posed when students appeared not to comprehend completely the meaning of the question. Care was taken when interviewing EAL learners to explain terms and some expressions, for example, when discussing the concept of a role model, an explanation of the term was provided to the students as follows: ‘someone you look up to, or someone that maybe you would like to be like’.

The research journal allowed observations, overall impressions and emotional responses of the research process to be recorded. In addition, by matching the dates of the interviews with the journal entries, a richer sense of the data was achieved that further strengthened the data triangulation of this research.

Interview transcripts were made available at the end of the school year for participants to view to check for authenticity and accuracy of transcription. One teacher took the opportunity to edit the manuscript where she felt the transcribed comments did not accurately reflect her intended meaning.

Transcript analysis

Data analysis began by reading the interview transcripts and looking for themes that emerged from participants. Transcripts were verbatim and the essential raw data for this research. Analysis of the respective groups of interview transcripts, principals, teachers and students, was initially performed in accordance with Robson’s (2002, pp. 487–488) outline of thinking, developing categories and progressive focusing. Patton’s (2002) requirement for a ‘sense of the whole’ was determined (p. 440).

Significant participant responses that had themes that related to the research questions about the phenomenon of teachers as role models or exemplars of social skills and the ‘culture’ of pedagogical teacher–student relationships, and school as it relates to social-skills acquisition were extracted and coded by hand.

Meanings were formulated by connecting emerged themes with significance by ‘creative insight’, a term used by Colaizzi in Kickett-Tucker (2008, p. 142), which means to connect the language to meaning. Themes and related meaning were examined and a detailed description of the findings of the phenomenon of teachers as role models or exemplars of social skills and the ‘culture’ of pedagogical teacher–student relationships and school as it related to social skill acquisition were made.

Chapter Four: Working with Children

In our story telling, the stories of our participants merged with our own to create new stories, ones that we have labelled 'collaborative stories'. The thing finally written on paper [is] ... a mutually constructed story created out of the lives of both researcher and participant.

(Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 12)

There are many ethical considerations when conducting research with children and young people. Permission to conduct research in a Victorian Government school requires approval from both the researcher's university and the DEECD ethics committees. Along with the primary concern of the welfare and safety of the child, there are also issues of confidentiality, privacy, informed consent, and differential power relationships. Further, the effect of the research on participants should be considered by the researcher. This chapter deals with the many issues involved in conducting research in schools and with young people, particularly when the focus of the research is to gain student perceptions and opinions first hand. While data is important, student perspective and context is paramount. As Smyth and Hattam (2001) suggest, 'we also need to understand something about how they [students] construct their subjectivity or lived experience, sociologically speaking' (p. 402).

This study is a consideration of what young people say that they observe about teachers' practice in classrooms, the relationships that they form with teachers and whether students view teachers as role models for acquiring social skills. Social-learning theory suggests that individuals learn through observation and modelling (Bandura, 1977). However, the observer's stance or perception is critically important. For example, Mitchell (1997) found when investigating children's opinions about smoking that some children viewed the behaviour positively because it was perceived by them to improve social status and maturity, while other children described smoking negatively. I approached this research believing, as do Thomas and O'Kane (1998), that young people are 'social actors with their own distinctive abilities to understand and explain their world' (p. 338). This distinction is critical when one considers that in developmental discourse and practice 'there is a general tendency ... for children to be studied for what they will become rather than as social actors in their own right' (Jones & Sumner, 2009, p. 42).

It is for this very reason that I chose to interview students. As discussed by Drew and Heritage (1992) ‘Conversation Analysis’ allows for the ‘ways in which discourses are actualised in the interactions through which teachers and children interpret, categorise, recognise and judge one another’ (MacLure et al., 2008, p. 1). The idea of this research was to capture students’ voices and make sense of their experiences in the classrooms, and to present faithfully what was said. Additionally, there was a desire to provide a platform for students to have their perspectives heard and acknowledged. This qualitative approach was a deliberate attempt to capture the richness of the lived experiences of the students. One student suggested that she could have talked about school endlessly:

There wouldn’t be enough words to explain school. If you had more questions this [the study] would be so long. (HC10)³

To quote Glesne and Peshkin (1991), ‘the research methods we choose say something about our views on what qualifies as valuable knowledge and our perspective on the nature of reality’ (p. 4). Building rapport with the students in this study over the period of the school year was an attempt to ensure the students felt comfortable with me so that they reported to me their true feelings and perspectives. I agree with Patton (2002) in that interviewing people is invigorating and stimulating and provided the ‘opportunity for a short period of time to enter another person’s world’ (pp. 416–417).

However, as Salgado and Clegg (2011) warn, ‘every utterance ... is always addressed to someone and so derives its meaning from the social relation it implies’ (p. 424). These authors write that a dialogical research epistemology must concern the notion of truth as multi-voiced and draw on Bakhtin’s (1973) theory of dialogical practice and the multiplicity of conversation:

The consciousness of others cannot be contemplated and analysed and defined like objects or things—one must *relate dialogically to them* to them. To think about them means to *converse with them*; otherwise they immediately turn their objectivized side to us; they fall silent and grow cold and retreat into their finalized objectivized images. (Bakhtin, 1973, p. 56, emphasis in original)

Salgado and Clegg (2011) state that there are ‘research traditions that explicitly value the complexities and ambiguities of conversation’ (p. 434); this is one such study. Such a research methodology could be likened to the research in which Smyth and Hattam

³ (HC10) refers to Hyacinth College, focus group interview number ten. Letters refer to the school where the interview took place and the numbers refer to the order of interview at the school.

(2001) engaged while exploring young people's reasons for 'dropping out' of school. These researchers credit Jipson and Paley (1997) with defining this as 'daredevil research' (p. 6). Such research has some risks, which are noted by Jipson and Paley (1997):

Choosing to take up the task of developing analytical practice that crosses irregular, unexplored terrain rather than to produce arguments within existing geometries of recognisable intellectual space is not usually an activity that accrues dividends in systems of academic exchange. (p. 6)

Student Voice

However, such research is also dynamic, rich and exciting and in some respects could be viewed as being beneficial to participants. As Smyth and Hattam (2001) report:

The 'data' was quite literally being created, rather than collected, and the representations we were confronting were 'epistemological eruptions' in the sense of being presented to us with 'imaginative rearrangements'... or opportunities to hear and reformulate repressed accounts of the trauma for young people as they made sense of what was ... a distressing and disturbing experience. (p. 404)

For some of the students interviewed in this study, there appeared to be feelings of relief or happiness in being able to express their perceptions and opinions about school. While none of the students interviewed had been expelled from school, many spoke of having had negative experiences at school such as being suspended, being unfairly chastised (in their opinion) by teachers, and even being hit at schools they had attended in other countries. Several students took the time and the opportunity presented in our sessions to share stories and experiences. Barber (2002) writes that a 'trust is required in others to offer a story—there is an assumption of a common ground of understanding, that one's story will be heard in good faith' (p. 385). One such story follows, and I include it as it echoes the following comments by Smyth and Hattam's (2001) concerning their research:

It certainly felt, sociologically speaking, as if we were moving in and around areas of 'political and epistemological eruption' ... as we tried to open up spaces for young people to tell their accounts, even if those accounts appeared to be non-linear, partial, fragmentary, and possibly being told for the first time to another human being. (p. 404)

The following is an example of the story telling that I felt privileged to have been allowed to hear, despite its somewhat distressing violence:

Interviewer: What do your parents think about fighting?

Female 1: Unacceptable.

Female 2: Coming from my mum, she fought every day of her life.

Interviewer: She's told you that, at school?

Female 2: My mum used to fight at school, at home.

Female 1: That was my mum.

Female 2: Was it? The story I remember ...

Female 1: That was only when she was really upset.

Female 2: The story I remember, my mum was really skinny at sixteen, so this boy, because out of the family, my mum was the most mental, the craziest one. So my cousin's dad was—they were playing poker and then they started yelling at him, wanted to bash him up, and then my aunty—my favourite aunty called my mum, and then my mum got the guys, took—they were fighting, fighting, they were hitting her. So they got—because the guy was big, so she carried him. I don't know how she did that. She carried him; she put him on the ground and started beating him up, both of them.

Interviewer: It's a bit—sorry.

Female 2: That is mental. I don't know how she did it. (WH8)

Methodology was discussed in Chapter Three but it is worthwhile at this point to reconsider a fundamental perspective that should be applied when conducting research with children and young people: care theory (Noddings, 1986). According to Noddings, the researcher's conduct and choice of methodology in conducting educational research should reflect a concern to contribute positively to the school community. Howe and Moses (1999) suggest that care needs to be demonstrated between researcher and participants, and that educational research should be purposeful and carried out in a manner that is not 'likely to be harmful to individual students....or destructive of school communities' (p. 34).

In an attempt to evaluate the experiences of the young people who participated in this study, I asked students at the end of the study to tell me how they had found participating. There were two reasons for this: i) to explore whether students had felt that their opinions *mattered*; and ii) to investigate whether there had been any benefit in participating in the research for the students. Boyle (2012) quotes Vygotsky who hypothesised that

personality ‘reaches the final stage during adolescence with the development of the capacity for self-reflection’ (p. 679). I hoped that students were reflecting on our discussions, and their classroom experiences and relationships with teachers. The following excerpt from an interview demonstrates this.

Interviewer: Has it [taking part in the research] helped in any way your understanding of the role of teachers, what they do?

Male 1: From primary schools to high schools, yes.

Interviewer: Yes?

Male 2: No.

Interviewer: No? Okay. Did it make you think about school more?

Male 1: Yes.

Male 2: Yes.

Male 3: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. What sort of things were you thinking about more or differently?

Male 1: That it’s important.

Interviewer: Do you really believe school is important?

Male 1: Yes.

Male 3: Yes. (WH11)

Many researchers advocate the necessity of paying heed to hearing students’ opinions, the student ‘voice’ (see Angus, 2006; Gunter & Thomson, 2007; Smyth & Hattam, 2001). Angus (2006) refers to Smyth’s ‘voiced research’ and writes, ‘the question of “how to pursue forms of leadership that listen to and attend to the voices of ... young people” is the “most urgent issue of our times”’ (p. 369). Hoban (2000) conducted research that evaluated the effects of collecting audio student feedback so that teachers could reflect on their classroom practice. He concurs with Rhine and argues that ‘the main value of educational research is to provide teachers with different ways of tapping into the

thinking of their own students as a source of personal reflection' (p. 134). In the first instance, I was interested in hearing the perspectives and opinions of students about their own teachers to use these perspectives to reflect on my own practice as a teacher. I asked myself whether I was listening to everyone that I taught in my own classes, and whether I was allowing everyone to feel comfortable to speak. When considering the students participating in the research, I was curious about whether I was allowing them to feel sufficiently comfortable to answer honestly the questions that I was asking them. It was important for me to know whether I was phrasing the questions intelligibly and at the right level for all students. This last point was a necessary consideration in this research, as many of the students that I interviewed at Waratah High were not native English speakers. DEECD refers to such students as EAL learners. Six of the eighteen students (33 per cent) who volunteered to participate in this study reported that a language other than English was their home language, and were therefore EAL learners at the time of this research.

As Patton (2002) states, reflexivity 'calls for self-reflection', and an ability to critically consider self, both as an 'observer and analyst' (p. 299). Thus, in this research there were two challenges for reflection. The first was to acknowledge my values about classroom pedagogy and practice, my belief that social skills are very important and should be modelled for students, and the second was to ensure that my observations and what I heard during interviews was indeed interpretive. It is important to capture not only the words that individuals use but also the meaning. In a study of children's conceptualisations of their wellbeing, Fattore et al. (2007) remark 'we ... agreed as we worked on the analysis, that mere inclusion of children's words as quotes, does not necessarily reflect the meanings they are conveying to us' (p. 17). The authors found through multiple interviews with individual children that understandings of meaning became clearer.

The following exchange reflects the 'dialogue' nature of my interviews with the students and something of the 'journey' that we took in our conversations, which I enjoyed very much.

Interviewer: So what about Circle Time. Did you do that in primary school?

Male 1: Yeah.

Male 2: No, oh yeah. First day.

Male 3: First day of the year.

Interviewer: Would you—the first day you were here?

Male 4: Oh no.

Interviewer: At primary school. Would you want to do Circle Time here? Yes?

Male 1: Not really.

Interviewer: [Acknowledging another student] You're saying yes ...

Male 2: We did it at the start of the year.

Interviewer: You did it at the start of the year. We sometimes do it at my school with my home group and we do like this Strength Card thing, where you pick up a card.

Male 1: Yeah we did that before at primary school.

Male 3: Didn't do that here?

Interviewer: Is that the sort of thing you'd enjoy doing?

Male 1: Miss, in primary school we had this game that you could bring [inaudible] and you make a circle and they pass it along and they put the cards in the middle and you pick a card.

Interviewer: Did you have to pick a card for someone else and give them a compliment?

Male 1: Yeah.

Facilitator: Are you good at giving compliments?

Male 3: No.

Male 1: In primary school, we played that Chinese Whisper in Circle Time and you are supposed to give compliments about the teacher. So the teacher started it and when it got around to me, it changed but I didn't change it, and it was rude.

Interviewer: So you didn't change it to the rude thing—is that what you're saying S...?

Male 1: No. I just passed it over the rude thing.

Male 2: It was funny as. It started off as—it was something like about the hurricane demolishes a city and then it ended up as like I run around the house and I was like what.

Interviewer: Do you think we're good at listening to each other?

Male 1: No.

Interviewer: That's really interesting. Now do you know why I'm recording it so I don't kind of think 'this is what they said and write it down'. So that's why I'm recording. (WH10)

Language and Communication

As part of the ethics process, I submitted my guiding questions to the university research-ethics committee. I was asked to rewrite some questions, as the panel felt that the vocabulary was not at a level appropriate for year-seven students. When interviewing students, especially EAL learners, it is crucial to ensure that language is pitched clearly and at the appropriate level. Crucially, the questions need to be sufficiently interesting to encourage participation. I have an entry in my research journal: 'I MUST ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS!' (02 September 2012), and so I strongly concur with Smyth and Hattam (2001) who state:

At the commencement, and at a very practical level, the struggle was to find a way of framing a question that was engaging enough for the young people to want to talk with us about, but at the same time was still faithful to what it was we were trying to explore and understand. (p. 405)

The students interviewed in the course of this study were generally enthusiastic about speaking with me. That I was a teacher and wanted to hear their opinions about school and teaching initially surprised them. As Punch (2002a) describes 'children are not used to expressing their views freely or being taken seriously by adults because of their position in adult-dominated society' (p. 325). Hoban and Hastings (2006) collaborated in a ten-year study using different forms of student feedback to enhance teacher reflection. In an introduction to a paper on this collaboration, Hastings reflects:

I still see student feedback for teachers as critical and over the 10 years I have been doing it, I can see the need now more than ever. Every time I try something new in terms of student feedback, it reinforces that students really do have a lot to say about how teachers teach and teachers have a lot to learn from what students say. (Hoban & Hastings, 2006, p. 1006)

The authors also highlight a serious ethical implication in using student data to stimulate teacher reflection: that of negative student feedback. Despite assigning pseudonyms or codes to transcribed comments included in research papers, there may be issues because teachers may still recognise the classroom situations and experiences about which the students are speaking. Students and teachers have not been identified in this study to maintain confidentiality. However, students providing opinions on teaching, whether through learning journals, surveys, taped interviews or observation schedules, ‘makes students vulnerable to possible retribution from teachers’ (Hoban & Hastings, 2006, p. 1016). While there is no easy solution for this possible consequence to student feedback, it is undeniable that accessing students’ classroom experiences can assist teachers to organise better their classroom practice. As Hoban and Hastings (2006) conclude:

if teachers become interested in gathering student feedback on teaching and learning, it could engage both teachers and students in a form of classroom research that has reciprocal benefits but also ethical implications. (p. 1016)

At the commencement of the research, I was attempting to discover what the students observed of teachers’ practice in modelling social skills. As the project progressed and I was ‘digging deeper’ into the students experiences and students became more comfortable in speaking with me, I became aware that some of the stories and the experiences that the young people were sharing with me were negative. In addition, it became clear from the students’ perspectives and the manner in which they chose to relate these to me that they felt some of their teachers behaved unfairly. This became something of an ethical issue for me both as a visitor to the school and someone who was not a classroom teacher to the students. As Howe and Moses (1999) state:

What intimacy and open-endedness mean for researchers employing qualitative techniques and procedures is that they are (whether they want or intend to or not) likely to discover secrets and lies as well as oppressive relationships. These discoveries may put research participants at risk in ways that they had not consented to and that the researcher had not anticipated. These discoveries may also put researchers in the position of having to decide whether to have an ethical responsibility to maintain confidentiality of participants or to expose them, as well as having to decide whether to intervene in some oppressive relationships. (p. 40)

As a practising teacher, I am bound by Victorian state mandatory reporting guidelines and did not feel that the possibility of student disclosures of risk or abuse would be an issue as the guidelines are clear as to how and what needs to be reported by teachers. I was

cognisant of the possibility of the need to inform students that I could not guarantee that any disclosures which compromised their safety could be kept confidential, and had stipulated the utilisation of the research schools welfare support network, when appropriate, in ethics and informed consent documents. Additionally, as a practising teacher, criticism about your own and other teachers' classroom instruction is something that students constantly mention, often to 'set teachers up', for example, 'Ms T lets us listen to our iPods!' Mercer (2007) states that 'insider researchers usually have considerable credibility and rapport with the subjects of their studies, a fact that may engender a greater level of candour than would otherwise be the case' (p. 7). I chose in such instances during the research, when students were severely critical of school staff or reported problems with their teachers, to take an advocate role. I found myself suggesting to students to speak with the teachers with whom they were having difficulties and talking with the students about the possible reasons for such teacher behaviour. The students knew that I too was a teacher and they would often ask about what I did in my classroom. Smyth and Hattam (2001) state that 'in setting out to examine the experiences and perspectives of young people, we were setting ourselves up to convey the view that schools may be at least partly responsible through their inability to "listen" to students who had "dropped out"' (p. 409). However, I had no 'responsibility' agenda; I was exploring what students perceived teachers to be doing in their classrooms about modelling social skills. I was happy that students were comfortable to give me honest comments and opinions, and while I felt I was a guest in the school, I advocated that the students communicate with their teachers. I reflected on my own practice in speaking with these students, and I believe that by 'giving permission' to my own students to communicate with and provide feedback to me, as I was encouraging the student participants to do, this was a benefit for the young people that I taught in my own school; certainly a benefit of a teacher being a researcher.

Children's Consent and Adult Gatekeepers

Informed consent, free of coercion, is one of the critical principles governing social research. To encourage participation in this research project, I conducted an information evening for families at Hyacinth College and I also spoke directly to students in the year-seven classes at both schools. My intention was to engage the students so that they were encouraged to participate, and to provide them with the responsibility of obtaining the

permission forms and informed-consent documents from school coordinators to take home to their families. Children are, of course, legally minors and so for this study, and others within education institutions, the approval of their legal guardian is necessary. As Punch (2002a) attests, ‘it is widely recognised that in order to gain children’s consent and involvement in research, one has to go via adult gatekeepers who are able to limit researchers’ access to the children’ (p. 323). I am unable to confirm this hypothesis (and did not think to ask students at the time) but I have no doubt, given the EAL status of many of the year-seven students at Waratah High, that the ethics documents may have presented a literacy challenge for some parents and therefore resulted in some young people not participating in this research. Nevertheless, some EAL learners are included in this study and I am grateful to those students who spoke with parents their parents on my behalf and participated in this study. As Jones and Sumner (2009) state:

While it is true that all socially excluded groups may lack opportunities for voice and participation, the conventional voicelessness of children has a particular quality and intensity ... Despite efforts to promote child participation their denial of voice in family, school and community decisions is still viewed as ‘normal’ and culturally acceptable in many parts of the developing (and developed) world. (p. 43)

One teacher who was interviewed in the course of this study was a Muslim woman. She described the traditional nature of some families within the Waratah High community and the fact that she considered herself something of an inspiration for some of the female students of a similar background at the school. The following is a reflection by this teacher of her path to becoming a teacher and suggests something of the lack of educational choices and opportunities for some of the students that she has encountered.

Ms J: That if a girl like myself, who has no one in their family to refer back to, to think of in terms of going out into the wider world or studying further or working. How do they negotiate that within their lives for the first—because they’ll be the first in their families as well. How do they negotiate that with their families, if the families have different expectations?

What if they say—I know at Acacia College⁴, I was told before a lot of Albanian girls would finish at year nine. Then they’d take them out—the parents would take them out and they’d get married. Then over time, I think the teachers would talk to the parents, and then they’d stay longer and longer. So they’d be here until year

⁴ Acacia College is not the true name of the school.

ten. Then the girls would be taken out, then year eleven, and year twelve. I was wondering are they—are the Afghani girls here going to go through something similar, or are they going to study until year twelve and then that's it? Or are they going to study at university and then that's it? Then they're expected to stay home and have children or...

Interviewer: So you're saying that in Acacia's case, they actually negotiated that rite of passage?

Ms J: Yeah, they got them to stay longer and longer at school.

Interviewer: Advocates?

Ms J: Yeah. I know M..., C..., A... and J... we were talking about that a long time ago with me.

Interviewer: That's interesting. So, school would have a really important place then.

Ms J: To change those girls' outcomes. I mean one year can make a big difference.

Interviewer: So is that happening here yet, do you think?

Ms J: I don't know because I haven't been here long enough. I think a lot of these—I think some of them have been—I know some girls in my classes before, from the past, have finished year twelve, and then have gone onto uni. But I don't know, because they haven't finished yet, what will happen later on?

Interviewer: After that. But I guess it's even getting past that post-compulsory at seventeen.

Ms J: To get past it and—it's a big thing too, for the parents—from the parents' point of view. If the community is expecting them to get their daughters married, let's say, and they're holding that off. Then they're seen as irresponsible, that why haven't you got your daughter married? Everybody else does. Your daughter's not going to get married. What are you doing? That could also happen too, so it's also...

Interviewer: It's family pressures, isn't it?

Ms J: Yeah, it could be. I've tried to talk to some of the girls about it, but some—often they're closed about it. They don't really want to talk too much about themselves. I think because that's personal. They're okay about talking about other things.

The preceding excerpt illustrates that for some students there may be impediments to their own opportunities to continue in education and/or choosing their own educational pathways. This also illustrates the possible difficulties of engaging such students in research studies.

Focus Groups and Power Balance

Student participants in this research were generally interviewed in groups ranging from two to six students. Individual interviews also occurred but only on four occasions. For the purpose of this study, these groups can be considered focus groups because there was reliance on 'interaction within the group based on topics ... supplied by the researcher' (Morgan, 1997, p. 12). It is important to consider the context and setting in which these groups met. Punch (2002a) suggests that 'research conducted at school should take into account that children may feel pressured to give "correct" answers to research questions' (p. 328). As I was asking students for their opinions and what they observed teachers doing in class, I felt that this was less of an issue in this research because it was not relying on the participants to have "the correct answer", it was clear that I was seeking their opinions. Obviously, there can be variation in the perceptions of students about their teachers and about the classroom environment, even from students within the same class. Patrick, Ryan and Kaplan (2007) suggest that 'students' own perceptions of dimensions of their classroom social environment ... [are] related to their motivation and engagement' (p. 94). Although the participation was voluntary in this research, it does not appear that this created a non-heterogeneous sample of only the most engaged and motivated students. Many students I interviewed spoke of difficulties at school, with several students disclosing instances of disruptive behaviour, absences, poor grades and suspensions for various reasons, including fighting. I am extremely grateful to the students who agreed to speak with me and feel honoured by their honestly and considered responses to my questions. Those students who are not achieving 'success' at school may

be referred to as ‘at risk’ students, or those students who may not complete secondary schooling and therefore young people who become exiles from formal schooling. On reflection, I am reminded of Fine and Rosenberg (1983), who comment:

Critical perspectives on social institutions are often best obtained from exiles, that is, persons who leave those institutions. (p. 257)

The reality of conducting the majority of interviews as focus groups had a number of possible positive implications for the participants. One of the strategies suggested to teachers to encourage English-language development for EAL learners is through small group conversations (Vale, Waxman, Diaz & Padrón, 2013). Such a strategy could be said to have been implemented by the focus group interview method utilised in this research. Interestingly, Hoban and Hastings (2006) argue that ‘high school students need some form of training to be metacognitive and needed a language to describe aspects of teaching and learning’ (p. 1011). I am not suggesting that by participating in my interviews, the EAL students gained a better understanding of English and a larger vocabulary. However, the availability of their peers to support them and assist them to frame their ideas was undoubtedly an advantage of a focus-group approach. One of the benefits of interviewing students in groups is that they have the opportunity to ‘bounce’ ideas off each other. In several instances, students were able to assist other students to explain a certain situation to me. Thomas and O’Kane (1998) investigated the manners in which researching with children is different from research with adults. They suggest that ‘in part the difference is due to children’s understanding and experience of the world being different from that of adults, and in part to the different ways in which they communicate’ (p. 337). Hearing different students’ perceptions of their teachers and their classroom environment provides an opportunity to better understand more clearly what the young people are describing.

I was mindful that in group interactions there can be a dominant person who either monopolises the time or attempts to dictate the group’s responses. Such a limitation was very seldom an issue because as a practising teacher, I had the skills to moderate such a situation, much as a teacher does in their own classroom during normal class discussions. Gibbs and Costley (2006) suggest that the practitioner–researcher may have either a powerful or a weak political position within the organisation compared to the participants. However, I was mindful that as a guest to the school, I needed to facilitate groups in a non-intimidating manner and not become ‘the teacher’, and thus, the (supposed) power

figure. This was of critical importance in maintaining the appropriate power balance to facilitate a group and create a relaxed atmosphere for the students. Part of this facilitation role was to encourage all participants to express their thoughts and not to be afraid to disagree with others' opinions. As Morgan et al. (2002) suggest, 'this task poses a greater challenge with children, in view of the inherent power imbalance and the tendency to view the facilitator as an authority figure, such as a teacher, and respond accordingly' (p. 8). Throughout the research, I was mindful to negotiate carefully, reflect on my role and facilitate the interviews in a balanced and sensitive manner. As Jones and Sumner (2009) attest:

Careful ethnographic and participatory research has an important role to play in highlighting the diversity and especially the cultural constructedness of childhood. (p. 45)

Validity

I interviewed students many times over the course of the school year to build a rapport with the students, and as Ennew (1994) notes, 'Lies and evasions are less likely when a researcher has built up a relationship of trust with children' (p. 57). Children may, as indeed can all research participants, choose not to speak of issues that could cause them distress or shame and may also be motivated to answer questions to appease or impress a researcher. In fact, during the interviews, one student disclosed that he was seeing a counsellor because of his parents' marriage breakdown. I asked him if he wanted to talk about it but he replied that he did not. Privacy is a central principle in the ethical treatment of social-research participants. The young people participating in this study were entitled to choose what information they wanted to disclose and were able to withdraw from the study at any time during the research. No student chose to withdraw from this study, but some students chose not to elaborate on some topics. This was their right of privacy, and it was my obligation to honour this in conducting the research.

Punch (2002a) suggests that manner in which we perceive the status of children affects the manners in which we listen to children, and reports that there is a tendency to view research with children as either entirely different from adults or the same as adults. Punch advises that whatever the stance chosen, it is important to consider that the conceptualisation of the status of children in research can affect both the methods that the researcher chooses to employ and the interpretation of the data collected. Punch further contests, in reference to work by Alderson (1995), that if children do not provide 'valid

and reliable data, it is not the fault of the children but of the researcher for his or her “adultist” attitudes towards them’ (p. 324). Careful consideration needs to be taken both in choosing the appropriate research methods when working with young people and in the interpretation of the research data. In working with children there appears to be an issue about ‘the possible misrepresentation of data and possible researcher incompetence and because, for the most part, it is one step removed from the face-to-face interactions with participants that are central to issues falling under the rubric of the protection of research participants’ (Howe & Moses, 1999, p. 44). These authors further suggest that ‘dialogue itself has consequences: Beliefs, culture norms, and the like are not just there, waiting to be uncovered, but are negotiated and ‘constructed’ via the interactions among researchers and those they study’ (Howe & Moses, 1999, p. 32).

I offered to share the results of this study with the participants in order to be open and honest about the purpose of the research and also to engage them in the research.

Interviewer: Are you interested in finding out what I’ve learnt from doing this?

Female 2: Mmm.

Female 1: Yes.

Interviewer: Cool. It might take me a bit of time to [write it up]. Did you learn anything from taking part in this?

Female 1: Well, yeah. You’re a teacher as well, aren’t you?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Female 1: Yeah, and you’re really nice and you actually sit here and listen to us instead of being like, no, sorry, you’re wrong, I’m right.

Female 2: Yeah. It’s like you’re not acting like a teacher ... When you say the word teacher, you imagine in your head they’re telling you what to do and blah, blah, blah but you understand; you’re just listening and stuff. If I said something about a teacher and said that their teaching is wrong, you wouldn’t be like, no, it’s right; what are you talking about?

Interviewer: Yeah, you’ve got to take the perspective of who’s under the experience, you know?

Female 2: Yeah. (HC10)

The question of data validity can be problematic but ultimately depends on the rapport and trust relationship that participants build with the researcher and the confidence that they have to talk about their view of the world. Jones and Sumner (2009) suggest that the criteria used to judge quantitative research, such as validity and robustness of data, may not be appropriate when applied to qualitative research. Contributing to this debate, they note the following:

although some might argue for replicability as a key issue in determining quality, others might argue that research is simply not replicable, not only because the context and people's lives will have changed from the exact point in time that the research was conducted, but also because a different researcher conducting the research would inevitably interact differently with the participants. (p. 38)

In the course of this research, I have come to consider the words in which students have given their perspectives to me and I cannot but conclude, as Mayall (1994) does, that:

However much one may involve children in considering data, the presentation of it is likely to require analyses and interpretations, at least for some purposes, which do demand different knowledge than generally available to children in order to explicate children's social status and structural positioning. (p. 11)

Purpose of the Research

The issue of the effect and benefits of the research with children is important and indeed touches on who in fact owns the data and how it should be reported. I concur with Howe and Moses (1999) who suggest the following:

Educational researchers, in particular, often hope that the new knowledge they produce will contribute to the improvement of educational practices, as well as better treatment of students. (p. 26)

With such an outcome in mind, it is my intention that this research will achieve the following:

- explore the value placed on social competence by students, teachers and school leaders
- contribute data about whether students identify teachers as exemplars of social skills
- inform teacher pedagogy

- provide an opportunity for students to participate in educational research and speak about their experiences of relationships with teachers.

In inviting students to participate in this research, I felt an obligation to the young people to represent faithfully their opinions and observations. While I did not engage in paid educational research, I nonetheless agree strongly with Thomson and Gunter (2011) in the following statement:

We felt a sense of obligation to the students which was not part of our paid contract but came from our researchers' ethics: we had a moral duty, we felt, to offer at the very least the opportunity to our research 'assistants', an opportunity to see the research results and to discuss their implications. (p. 20)

A major challenge in this type of research is in the interpretation and faithful representation of the perspectives of the student participants. Fine and Weis (1996) speak about 'working the hyphen' (p. 253), a term they use to describe the process of separating identities within research. On referring to the need for self-reflexivity they write:

Our obligation is to come clean 'at the hyphen', meaning that we interrogate in our writings who *we* are as we coproduce the narratives we presume to collect ... as critical ethnographers, we have a responsibility to talk about our own identities, why we interrogate what we do, what we choose not to report, on whom we train our scholarly gaze, who is protected and *not* protected as we do our work. (p. 263–264, emphasis in original)

My research was child-focused as the students were central to how the research questions were framed, how focus groups were facilitated, and how answers were transcribed with the young persons' 'intent' maintained. My research depended on the interpretations that I made of the data that the students shared with me.

Smyth and Hattam (2001) conclude the 'overwhelming importance of doing research ... [on the] multiple worlds young people inhabit' (p. 412). There is a need to talk to students more in schools and to involve them more in decision making. When I asked students who they felt was the most important person in school, many of them replied that the teachers were. This is of concern, as students should feel both important and central to the educational institutions in which they find themselves. As Angus (2006) notes, 'students are unlikely to make the active choice to succeed in school if school seems like a foreign country in which they're outsiders' (p. 376).

Just as child-focused research should be *with* young people rather than *on* young people, so too should education be *inclusive* of students rather than focused on student outcomes that ignore students' voices and perspectives. This study provides a small contribution to

‘student voices’ in educational research but one that describes the rich and rewarding results of researching with students.

Chapter Five: Inside Out

The Buddhist practice of simply being there, with a very precise and focused attention, listening, watching. Not being somewhere else, answering some question that hasn't been asked.

(O'Reilly, 1998, p. 3)

O'Reilly's (1998) description of mindfulness has been used before as a description of teacher-researchers (Austin et al., 1999, p. 130). Austin et al. (1999) write that the description suggests 'totally attending to the actions in the classroom as well as being aware of ourselves as reflective learners' (p. 130). Indeed, the quality of the teacher-researcher is critically important to the research process. When deciding to conduct qualitative research on a group of which the researcher is a member, the personal motivation for the research must be considered. The purpose of this chapter is to examine some of the literature about practitioners (such as teachers like me) who engage in research about groups to which they belong, and to consider some of the implications that such research creates.

I am a practising teacher who conducted research in two schools in which I did not teach. As a person engaged in research within an organisation of which I am a member (in this case within the Victorian Department of Education), the research could be considered 'insider research'. This term is self-explanatory, and is used to describe research in which the researcher has a direct involvement or connection with the research setting (Robson, 2002). In contrast, 'outsider researchers' do not belong to the group that they study. Insider research could be conducted in schools by any number of people who are employees of their department of education; such insider research could be conducted either by teachers, or those who work within a school setting as administrators, school leaders or research officers. I conducted what Robson (2002) terms 'practitioner research' (p. 382). Practitioner research, in this context, is research undertaken by a practising teacher. According to Loughran (2002), teacher-researchers 'can be characterised as those practitioners who attempt to better understand their practice, and its impact on their students, by researching the relationship between teaching and learning in their world of work' (p. 3). I have used the terms 'teacher-researcher' and 'practitioner-researcher' interchangeably in this study to refer to myself, as I was a practising teacher at the time of conducting this research.

Practitioner Research

In the past twenty years, there has been a great increase in practitioner research in education (Mercer, 2007). As noted, Mercer (2007, p. 2) believes that it is ironic that although there are many people engaged in insider research, there does not appear to have been a corresponding growth in the literature on such research. Insider research needs to be acknowledged as having both benefits and constraints, and considerations need to be made of the ethical concerns in conducting the research.

Dunne et al. (2005) provide insight into researcher identity by stating that it ‘involves the development of a critical awareness of oneself as a social and professional practitioner and is especially useful to those researching in insider situations or settings, which are similar to those where they normally function’ (p. 5). One aim of this research was to inform fellow practitioners’ pedagogy. Austin et al. (1999) propose that ‘most of us become teacher–researchers because we are perplexed with the complexity of teaching’ (p. 113). Motivation is a very important consideration of research and according to Brannick and Coghlan (2007) and may influence the energy that we expend on the endeavour. Brannick and Coghlan (2007) state that ‘insider researchers may have a strong desire to influence and want to change the organization. They may feel empathy for their colleagues and so be motivated to keep up the endeavour’ (p. 70). Another reason for engaging in a doctoral research project on this topic was to understand better how students experience teacher classroom pedagogy. I wanted to understand and report what is meaningful and significant to the students themselves. To achieve this, I needed to enter the culture of the classroom and develop relationships with the students who had agreed to speak with me.

Researcher Identity

Being a practitioner–researcher draws on the concept of identity. In the social context of schools, as a practising teacher, I have values, knowledge and constructs of what I understand of the social nature of schooling. When teaching, I have an understanding of my place in the classroom and the manner in which I might wish to be seen by others, including students, school leaders and parents. As a researcher, I understand that my social construct of the classroom changes. For example, as a teacher I know about classroom etiquette, at least in my school (but not necessarily in other schools). This is

clearly linked to epistemology or ‘how I know what I know’. As a researcher, my relationships in schools change but I have values associated with what I believe teachers should do in their classroom practice. As Stanley and Wise (1990) suggest, ‘researchers’ understandings are necessarily temporally, intellectually, politically and emotionally grounded and are thus contextually specific as those of the researched’ (p. 23). There was a need to be mindful of my values and knowledge of education and schools during the research process, but being mindful of epistemological concerns did not mean that I needed to approach the research in a ‘clinical’ manner. This mindfulness of the researcher’s prior knowledge can be described as ‘transcendental’ or ‘psychological’ phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34), where the research is ‘less focused on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of the participants’ (Creswell, 2007, p. 59). Moustakas suggests undertaking research with previous constructs being laid aside in order to gain a fresh perspective. Indeed, it is said that one advantage of outsider research is its objectivity. However, to consider insider and outsider research as a dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity is too simplistic (Hamdan, 2009, p. 381).

As a teacher–researcher, I was mindful of the following interpretation by van Manen (1999):

the object of our study is always contaminated by the frame of our observational stance ... [and] our interpretive frame seems to account for our perceptiveness as well as for our blindness. (p. 18)

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the term used in qualitative research to describe both the ‘stance’ of the researcher during the process of inquiry and in the interpretation and writing stages of the report. Patton (2002) states that reflexivity ‘calls for self-reflection, indeed critical self-reflection and self-knowledge and a willingness to consider how who one is affects what one is able to observe, hear, and understand in the field and as an observer and analyst’ (p. 299). Thus, in this research, there were two challenges to reflect on. The first was to acknowledge my values about classroom pedagogy and practice—my belief that social skills are very important and should be modelled for students, and the second was to ensure that my observations and what I heard during interviews was indeed interpretive. It is important to capture not only the words that individuals use but also the meaning. In a study of children’s conceptualisations of their wellbeing, Fattore et al. (2007) note the

following, ‘we ... agreed as we worked on the analysis, that mere inclusion of children’s words as quotes, does not necessarily reflect the meanings they are conveying to us’ (p. 17). The authors found through multiple interviews with individual children that understandings of meaning became clearer. Other strategies that Fattore et al. (2007) used to facilitate interaction included providing choices in the forms of participation, for example, individual interviews or peer-based/group discussions. Multiple interviews assist in building a rapport between the researcher and interviewee and assist in authenticating the research. My view concurs with that of Patton (2002) who reports the following:

I find interviewing people invigorating and stimulating—the opportunity for a short period of time to enter another person’s world. If participant observation means ‘walk a mile in my shoes’, in-depth interviewing means ‘walk a mile in my head’. (pp. 416-417)

In placing emphasis on interpreting students’ perceptions through interviewing them, I attempted to centre my research on the young person. Crivello et al. (2009) note that research about children should involve children as they are ‘the experts in their own lives’ (p. 52). I am aware of the power differential between an adult and a young person and a teacher and a student, but by ‘listening’ to the students, I hoped to conduct research *with* the student rather than *on* the student. I wanted to be inside the students’ world to understand how they experienced their classroom teachers’ classroom pedagogy. As Adams (1999) suggests:

The concept of situated knowledge implies that the data do not simply exist ‘out there’, being hidden or revealed by informants in response to the researcher’s presentation of self, but rather, that the data themselves are a product of the relationship between the researcher and her informants. Therefore, an honest presentation of our research requires that we include an explicit analysis of our data as the product of collaboration between ourselves and our informants. (p. 360)

Additionally, as I built relationships with the students that I was interviewing, I felt that I moved from being an ‘outsider’, to someone who was ‘inside’ their educational world and from whom they might even learn. The notion of research collaboration implies that knowledge and meaning can flow between all persons participating in a project. This notion of moving from an outsider to an insider researcher was particularly poignant when I received feedback from the students that indicated that by participating in the research, and talking with me, that they had learnt something.

Interviewer: Has it helped—has talking to me helped in any way understanding what teachers do?

Male 1: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes? M, do you think it's helped you understand what teachers do, or not really?

Male 3: Yeah.

Male 1: Miss, now I'll be good with the teachers.

Male 3: Same.

Interviewer: That's good. Did it make you think about school more?

Male 1: Yeah.

Male 2: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes? Did it help you—did it make you think about school or teachers differently?

Male 3: Yes.

Interviewer: I think you're telling me what I want to hear but not necessarily—is it making you think about school and teachers differently or not really?

Male 1: Miss, it does. (WH9)

Interviewer: Did you learn anything from taking part in the study?

Male 1: Yes.

Interviewer: What did you learn?

Male 1: How to behave, because before I was not, like, good attitude, now I have a better...

Interviewer: Seriously?

Male 1: Yeah, but not in 3D art and textiles, but English and all that, I'm better.

Interviewer: M, have you learnt anything? You don't have to say—I mean, if you didn't, you didn't. But if you did, it'd be nice to hear.

Male 3: Yeah.

Interviewer: You did? What did you learn?

Male 3: I learnt how to—not talking so much now and learn more better [sic].

Interviewer: Okay, thank you.

Male 2: Miss, I learnt how to work when your friend is talking to you and you distract...

Male 1: He talks to them.

Male 2: When they are talking to you, then you just ignore them, then they stop talking. (WH9)

Interviewer: Did you learn anything from taking part in the study?

Female 1: No.

Interviewer: Okay, no. S... what did you learn?

Female 2: Controlling your anger is important. (WH11)

One interview and the ideas and discussion it generated seemed to be a catalyst for action by two students:

They felt teachers should do more about bullying and asking how kids were. They decided to be proactive and start a fitness class. They took my card and are hopefully going to inform me how they go. (Research journal, 10 September 2012)

In my last interviews with students, I was particularly keen to find out whether participating in the study has caused them to think about school and teachers differently, or if they had learnt anything at all. In part, I wanted to ascertain whether participating in the study had influenced the students in any way and whether they were reflecting on teacher–student relationships.

Interviewer: Did you learn anything from taking part in this study?

Female 1: Yes.

Interviewer: What was that?

Female 1: I learnt how—I learnt what a teacher—you—what a teacher’s view on—I’ve learnt a little bit of a teacher’s view of students, because you shared a little something every now and then. (HC12)

On one occasion in the school gymnasium, I was observing a class but not conducting interviews. Some year-seven girls that were not involved in my study asked why a senior boy was shaking on a side basketball court. It was obvious to me that the young man was experiencing some very strong emotions, the predominant one being anger. There had been an altercation that I had witnessed and that I had ‘unpacked’ or explained for these girls. They did not appear to have understood the visual cues related to the boy’s emotional state or the body language between the teacher and the young man during the resolution of their conflict. The learning and teaching on this occasion was impromptu and contextual to answering their questions about the boy’s emotional display, which they appeared not to have understood. In my research journal, I described it as a ‘wonderful example’ since there were multiple emotions on display and it was also an example for those ‘in the audience’ to witness a resolution of conflict between a teacher and his student:

Wonderful example of a senior boy playing basketball [and then] leaving the court (teacher told him to ‘come here’—which he ignored). The boy was clearly angry and a couple of the year-seven girls asked why he (the student) was so shaky. I told them that he was angry, that something must have happened on the court and that he was ‘cooling down’. The boy sat for a few minutes and then went back to the court to speak with the teacher. I explained [to the girls] that he was probably sorting out the issue. (Research journal, 27 July 2012)

Insider–Outsider Status

In conducting research, consideration must always be given to the power relationship between the researcher and participants. Adams (1999) citing Warren writes that ‘fieldwork roles are negotiated, and respondents usually assign the field-worker to a role they see as her proper place in the social order’ (p. 339). This is an interesting point because teachers often have different positions of power in a school social order to what the students’ believe. The social-order power for an ‘outsider’ teacher is not strong, for example, casual relief teachers, or substitute teachers, are often not readily accepted by

students in place of a regular teacher. The students I interviewed not only agreed to participate in my study but appeared happy to speak with me, and sometimes offered opinions that implied they were reflecting on their views of teachers. However, in discussing the use of interviews in qualitative research, Rooney (2005) notes that having “‘insider’” status does not guarantee that subjects will feel at ease and free to express themselves’ (p. 11). Indeed, the validity of the students’ answers when I was interviewing them might be doubted, as I could not assume that I had gained their trust and created a rapport with them. Validity in research can be a complex and problematic issue, and dependent on the various ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of reality and truth for both the researcher and the participants. The reason I met with the students that were participating in the study on many occasions during the course of the school year was to build rapport and trust because as Rooney (2005) suggests, ‘one can never be sure if data is reliable and honest. It depends on the building of trust and confidence between researcher and researched’ (p. 11). When asked if they had enjoyed participating in this study, most students said that they had enjoyed the experience. As a teacher-researcher I believe that if I had not created a rapport with the students, and did not have their trust, that they would have not agreed to participate in the research and that they would have been unlikely to have said that they enjoyed the experience.

Interviewer: So, in talking about this research project, though, have you enjoyed talking with me about life at school?

Female 2: Yeah.

Female 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: What did you enjoy most about the experience?

Female 2: I reckon just talking over what we feel about teachers and how we think they should get better. (HC11)

While most students realised that I was a teacher and therefore, an ‘insider’, they knew me as an ‘outsider’ to their school. The extent to which this influenced what the students were comfortable in saying to me is difficult to assess, but the following dialogue suggests that my position as ‘insider–outsider’ was not something they dwelt on. Students recognised me, like an accepted visitor in one sense—someone who had been given permission by ‘authority’ to be in the school and work with the students. The following

exchange indicates that for these girls, the relationship was not so much about my status (they had forgotten that I was a teacher) but rather who I was.

Interviewer: Did you learn anything from taking part in this?

Female 1: Well, yeah. You're a teacher as well, aren't you?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Female 1: Yeah, and you're really nice and you actually sit here and listen to us instead of being like, no, sorry, you're wrong, I'm right.

Female 2: Yeah. It's like you're not acting like a teacher. (HC10)

Thomson and Gunter (2011) suggest that while the notion of the researcher as a binary of insider and outsider is useful, it can be somewhat limiting in the real experience of research in and with schools. In my study, as rapport was built with the students that I interviewed and relationships developed, the insider–outsider division blurred. Naples (2004) notes the ‘fluidity of insiderness and outsidership’ (p. 49) and suggests that one’s research position is not fixed but rather is dynamic and changeable. I had the fresh eyes of the outsider to the school, but was an insider to school protocol and organisational practices. However, I am a teacher and as I came to know the students, I began to feel more like an insider. Thomson and Gunter (2011) have suggested the notion of Bauman’s ‘fluid identities’ where ‘self-identification’ needs to be confronted continuously in the practice of reflexivity during practitioner research. In ‘going with the flow’ of research in the field, the researchers’ identity goes in and out of focus along the insider to outsider continuum. As Thomson and Gunter (2011) note:

The very act of creating the terminology of inside and outside researcher identities is a sociological practice of fixing and naming, an act of sense-making that promotes an illusion of stability. (p. 27)

Just as Thomson and Gunter (2011) found in their research at Kingswood High School, I too often experienced instability and sudden shifts between feeling comfortable within my role at the schools and feelings of isolation and uncertainty, for example, when communication problems arose at the schools in which I was undertaking the research. Examples of communication problems included not being informed in advance of excursions involving the year seven students, and unexpected changes to the school timetable, such as assemblies, when students would be unavailable to interview. At these

times, I felt very much like an outsider, ‘out of the loop’, but when I was interviewing students, I felt very comfortable because as a practitioner (a teacher), this is what I did every day. The following entries from my research journal illustrate some of my emotions in conducting this research, including feelings of frustration, anxiety, satisfaction, and at times, happiness:

Initial disappointment as when I arrived, I found out that year sevens were at the zoo together with their teachers. This was a glitch, made when I first went into the school—oh well. (Research journal, 15 June 2012)

Came to school and found that there was ‘Passport to Asia’ day ... Feeling a little depressed because it seemed like it would be another day where I didn’t achieve much! (Research journal, 19 September 2012)

Conducted two teacher interviews and got the sense that one especially felt delighted to have been asked about the topic. (Research journal, 19 July 2012)

These girls were very articulate in describing their dissatisfaction with teachers ... I think they really just wanted an opportunity to talk (connect) with someone. (Research journal, 27 July 2012)

Had an interesting conversation at lunch time regarding ‘what makes a good teacher’. C (whom I’d interviewed last time) reckons that you teach ‘who you are’. Had another interesting conversation with P about personal learning (which he teaches) and how it is difficult because it is inquiry based and not pastoral care. (Research journal, 16 August 2012)

The question is—do they see it and haven’t articulated this to me or am I not asking the right questions? (Research journal, 02 September 2012)

In my situation of being a part-time researcher who was working full time in a school with my own classes, there were feelings during the course of conducting my research that I was disappointing my own students. While simultaneously trying to build rapport with the students that were participating in my research, I was also trying to build relationships with my own students whom I had taught for only several months. It seemed ironic to me that I was leaving work with my own students to gain knowledge of teacher pedagogy. My absences from my own school contributed to personal feelings of guilt and

conflict, especially at times when there were problems at my own school to which I felt that I should have addressed more time and energy to try to resolve:

Mixed feelings being finished now. Had a quick chat to T [the principal] on the way out and talked about the overwhelming info, which was that the kids liked being talked to. It was a sublime/ridiculous situation, at the moment with this 'highbrow' research and the 'circus' which is Wattle College [my current school].
(Research journal, 27 November 12)

Conflict

Brannick and Coghlan (2007) note that due to 'trying to sustain a full organizational membership role and the research perspective simultaneously, insider researchers are likely to encounter role conflict and find themselves caught between loyalty tugs, behavioral claims and identification dilemmas' (p. 70). There are ethical constraints involved in practitioner research and according to Gibbs and Costley (2006), these include concerns regarding the researcher's freedom 'to seek outcomes from their research unencumbered by political, economic or social pressures in their quest for understanding, insight and truth' (p. 240). Practitioners such as nurses, social workers and teachers, while vulnerable to both the complexities of the research environment and the political climate of their organisations, are in a privileged position as practitioner-researchers because of their 'ethic of care' (Gibbs & Costley, 2006, p. 245). Brannick and Coghlan (2007) note that insider research is 'frequently ... disqualified because it is perceived not to conform to standards of intellectual rigor because insider researchers have a personal stake and substantial emotional investment in the setting' (p. 60). However, as Gibbs and Costley (2006) suggest, caring 'is the reframing of the research project as a mutual activity which has personal consequences other than a research report and which has its own legitimacy' (p. 244). Thus, caring affects the ethical approach of practitioner-researchers towards participants and the need for reflection of both the research process and its outcomes and implications. It is the connection between the practitioner-researcher *self* and the researched *community*. Gibbs and Costley (2006) suggest that through an ethical disposition of care, issues of exploitation and manipulation by practitioner-researchers can be managed.

In describing issues of power in research, Adams (1999) states that ‘field research is always a collaboration in which the researcher is not all-powerful’ (p. 332). In reflecting on her research experience in Uzbekistan, Adams (1999) likens her role to that of a ‘mascot researcher’, which had both advantages and disadvantages. Mascots are given special attention and access but may lose control over their research by having to be ‘good’ guests and compliant to their hosts’ direction of the research. Discussing the power relationship, Adams (1999) notes that power ‘is a slippery thing in research relationships, and it may be that the researcher adopts a role that leaves her feeling powerless at times’ (p. 339). In her research in Uzbekistan, Adams (1999) discusses being a guest in the country and having concerns about only having access to those areas chosen by her hosts: ‘only seeing the parts ... that were for company’ (p. 341). In this research, I heeded the advice of the senior staff of the two participating schools about the selection of the classes of students who were to be invited to participate in the study. In both schools, the classes were not those of the ‘high achievers’ or classes for which additional support is provided. As an ‘outsider’, I had to accept that the schools endeavoured to suggest classes that represented a good demographic cross-section of the student cohort.

Another challenge facing the practitioner–researcher concerns the manner in which the research results will be received. Morse (1998) notes the following:

it is not wise for an investigator to conduct a qualitative study in a setting where he or she is already employed and has a work role. The dual roles of investigator and employee are incompatible, and may place the researcher in an untenable position. (p. 61)

I had been invited to conduct my research in Waratah High and Hyacinth College after sending outlines of the research project to the principals. I felt no pressure from staff at the schools to conduct the research in any other manner than that which I had set out, and I was not placed under pressure to produce preferred outcomes for the schools. Indeed, staff and students were extremely generous with both their time and reflections. I believe that there are many advantages of being an insider researcher, including having pre-existing knowledge and experience of the organisation and the personnel involved as entries in my research journal attest:

After checking new timetables ... (Research journal, 10 October 2012)

Felt very 'at home' and comfortable going into Waratah High today. Kids seemed to recognise me and accept me within their realm also, which was fantastic!

(Research journal, 16 October 2012)

She [the interviewed teacher] had a number of points which I resonated with.

(Research journal, 27 November 2012)

However, researchers need to be accountable to the research participants and the intent of their research and therefore, it is vital that they are reflexive, and consider 'self' when conducting research in the field. As Nixon, Walker and Clough (2003) note:

Neither we nor the subjects we seek to understand are blank social slates—we are embedded within particular biographies and the communities from which we take our identities. This requires of us a deep and vigilant reflexivity in our research that is attentive to the effects of our own peripheral vision. (p. 102)

Conclusion

I believe that my own reflexivity on my position within the insider–outsider continuum added depth to my research. Being a practitioner–researcher and practising an 'ethic of care' has added rigour to the research findings because I was mindful of attending to all participants and the relationships developed throughout the research. In developing positive relationships with the students involved in this study, there were many instances that demonstrated that they did not relate to me either as insider or outsider, but rather as the person I am, neither teacher nor researcher, but rather as someone that talked with them. Winter (1989) has stressed that for the insider researcher the 'research process must demonstrably offer something over and above ... [the] pre-existing level of understanding' (p. 34). I believe a teacher–researcher has much to learn from researching in schools, not least because of the effect such research has on contributing to the reflections of the students participating in such endeavours. My research meant that at times, I was both an insider and an outsider or somewhere along that continuum.

My final comment is that something immediate has been gained from this research endeavour. As a teacher–researcher I ventured inside the young person's world and created a learning experience. The following excerpt demonstrates this:

Interviewer: Did you learn anything from taking part in this study?

Female 1: Yes.

Interviewer: What did you learn?

Female 2: There are some nice teachers out there. (WH8)

Chapter Six: I'm with You

One person helps another learn to practice reflective teaching in the context of the doing. And one does so through a Hall of Mirrors: demonstrating reflective teaching in the very process of trying to help the other learn to do it.

(Schön, 1987, p. 19)

Having described in the preceding chapters the methodology and methods used in this research, together with my position as a practitioner–researcher working with children, the ‘scene is set’ for describing the perceptions of participants in this study. Chapter Six examines the practice of team teaching as a vehicle for modelling teacher social skills for students. The presentation of the experiences of both students and teachers is used to provide evidence to consider the first research question:

Do Victorian Government secondary-school teachers explicitly model social skills so that students have the opportunity to develop social skills and social competence?

Team Teaching

Schools are communities in which providing innovative and purposeful individual learning experiences should be the aim of teaching and learning. As an initiative to inclusive classrooms in which students with special needs are served in mainstream classrooms, team teaching or co-teaching is one means for achieving such inclusion. Co-teaching has been something of a feature of the Middle Years Initiative (MYI) in Australia where the term ‘middle years of schooling’ is used for students who are aged between ten and fifteen years of age and who are in grades five to eight. Motivation to reform the middle years of schooling was driven by evidence of alienation and disengagement of young adolescents from learning. Pendergast (2005) comments:

An important aspect of the underlying philosophy of reform ... revolves around the seamless transition from primary school ... to secondary school ... leading to more effective learning, positive experiences in adolescence and a desire and capacity for lifelong learning. (p. 4)

The opportunity for students to witness the interactions and professional relationships that teachers develop in classrooms affords an excellent means through which teachers may model social skills.

Bauwens, Hourcade and Friend (1989) coined the term ‘cooperative teaching’ to represent the collaboration of a special-needs educator and teacher within a general classroom setting in which students with special needs are included. Cook and Friend (1995) shortened the term ‘cooperative teaching’ to ‘co-teaching’, which they defined as ‘two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse or blended group of students in a single physical space’ (p. 2). Davis (1995) likens the definition of ‘team teaching’ to a continuum: at one end, teachers are teaching the same course but taking turns at instruction, at the other end, team teachers plan and implement together. Friend, Reising and Cook (1993) present five co-teaching structures:

- ‘one teaches, one assists’—one teacher instructs the entire class, while the other teacher(s) provides educational and behavioural support
- ‘station teaching’—the co-teachers provide individual support to students at learning stations within the classroom
- ‘parallel teaching’—teachers collaborate to provide the same or similar material to different groups of students in the same classroom
- ‘alternative teaching’—a teacher provides specialised instruction to a selected group of students for a short period in a location away from the classroom
- ‘team teaching’—two or more teachers share curriculum planning, classroom instruction and other teaching responsibilities equally.

In its position paper, *Middle schooling: people, practices and places*, the Middle Years of Schooling Association (MYSA) (2008) define middle schooling as ‘an intentional approach to teaching and learning that is responsive and appropriate to the full range of needs, interests and achievements of middle years students in formal and informal schooling contexts’ (p. 1). In Australia, collaborative teaching is considered a practice to engage students in ‘relevant, meaningful and challenging learning’ (MYSA, 2008, p. 1). In inclusive education, co-teaching is considered a means of serving the requirements of students with special needs within mainstream classrooms. Carpenter, Crawford and Walden (2007) recommend team teaching as ‘a fairly low cost, yet innovative, method of enhancing instruction’ (p. 54). In this research, the word ‘team teaching’ will be utilised

as it was the term I used when interviewing principals, teachers and students about the collaboration of teachers within a classroom.

While there is some literature about the effects of team teaching (e.g. Carpenter et al., 2007; Jang, 2007; Murawski & Swanson, 2001; Scruggs, Mastropieri & McDuffie, 2007), most published literature is not empirical, but rather offers ‘how to’ information, and lacks evidence of the effectiveness of team teaching in its academic and behavioural outcomes. In an meta-analysis of co-teaching research, Murawski and Swanson (2001) argue that while ‘numerous authors currently espouse co-teaching as an effective alternative to service delivery for students with disabilities within the general education setting, very few provide experimental data’ (p. 264). Given the range of definitions and applications in team teaching and the different classrooms in which they may be applied (i.e. Davis’s [1995] ‘continuum’), there appears to be a degree of difficulty in conducting research into team teaching. However, there also seems to be rich data on the descriptions of team teaching, achieved through qualitative research such as interviews, observations and focus groups. Such qualitative data is of interest to this study as it reflects students’ classroom experiences with teachers. According to van Manen (1999), in a ‘project aimed at discovering how students experience the interactive dimension of teaching, the narratives collected from these students are strongly suggestive of pedagogical qualities that students admire or criticize in their teachers’ (p. 19).

It is beyond the scope of this study to assess the effectiveness of team teaching. Rather, the potential of school staff (especially teachers) to be exemplars of social skills is explored in this research through observations of classroom interactions and interviews with school staff and students. In this study, team teaching is consistent with the term as defined by Deighton (1971) as ‘two or more teachers [who] regularly and purposefully share responsibility for planning, presentation, and evaluation of lessons prepared for the same group of students’ (p. 89).

Team Teaching at Waratah High

At Waratah High, three teachers conduct a class of 50 students in year seven to ten. This is supposed to allow for inter-age mentoring and collaborative learning to occur naturally, as students from years seven through to year twelve are based in the same house for their six years of secondary schooling. However, because the school’s new buildings can cater

for both collaborative and independent learning, these class groups can break off into groups of seventeen with one teacher. This is an attempt by Waratah High to align the teaching and learning at the school with the organisational practices necessary to ‘engage young adolescents in relevant, meaningful and challenging learning’ (MYSA, 2008, p. 1), as outlined in MYSA’s (2008) position paper. The school’s house and class structures appear to be an attempt to adhere to the middle-schooling elements of ‘small learning communities that provide students with sustained individual attention in a safe and healthy school environment ... [and place] emphasis on strong teacher–student relationships through extended contact with a small number of teachers and a consistent student cohort’ (p. 1). However, there can be difficulties in aligning practice with intent. The example below demonstrates that continuity of house leadership teams has been an issue within the team teaching model:

Ms O: ... that was part of that deliberate planning too, that you’d be in a house and supposedly that the teams and the leadership teams would remain constant. Of course, that hasn’t been the case. I think S [the principal, is] trying to get that set, so at least she’s going to have maybe three years of leadership teams not moving. Because then at least there’s the consistency in the house. You’d get to be teaching kids in your house, and you will be following them from seven to twelve. So, a small school if you like ... with three hundred kids, the idea should be that all staff will know all the kids and they will know us.

The collaborative model of Waratah High (having classes of 50 students and three teachers) aims to adhere to the MYSA’s (2008) ‘small learning communities’ (p. 1). Some of the goals of these collaborative classrooms and some concerns are described by one head-of-house staff member:

Interviewer: What do you think that the students pick up on with regards to social skills?

Ms O: I think because we’ve got that collaborative model here [at Waratah], where you’ve got three teachers in a class of 50, some kids are going to get lost. Now they possibly would have got lost in a one to 25 anyway. Perhaps there’s less chance of getting lost if you’ve got three to 50, because you’ve got—effectively divide one staff with seventeen kids ideally.

However, there appeared to be some concerns from young people about having 50 students in a classroom.

Female 1: The classes get wild.

Interviewer: Okay, why are you wilder in year seven than you were in primary school?

Female 1: Now there's more people in class, like 50.

Interviewer: Is that too many people in class?

Female 1: Yes.

Female 2: There's too many. (WH11)

Interviewer: Smaller classes?

Male 1: Smaller classes, you learn more.

Interviewer: Do you think you do? Why do you think that is?

Male 1: Because you have lots of turns. Because if there's 50 kids, you can't get your turn. (WH9)

One of the problems seen with team teaching from a teachers' perspective is the need for effective planning. This was reiterated in a newly graduated, or beginning, teacher's comments about team teaching and his experience of it.

Interviewer: So do you think perhaps it might be better if we team taught?

Mr O: Yeah. I've done it before at another school. It's really good when it works. When all the teachers have enough time to prepare quality lessons that can be taught together, it works really well. I've seen it work well here as well.

Interviewer: So you think it would be a better opportunity for kids to sort of see teachers modelling? I see team teaching at Waratah High, which is where I am also doing [research].

Mr O: Yeah they do. The only problem with Waratah though is that the teachers want to do what they've always done, and they want to separate the classes

because it's easier. But I think it can work really well, but there's no time to organise that kind of stuff.

Interviewer: What sort of quality? When you are talking about quality lessons, what are you talking about? The quality of the subject matter or the quality of the delivery?

Mr O: No, I mean the quality of the way it's delivered and with 50 kids in the classroom, and three teachers, it's really hard. You can't teach that whole—it's really hard to teach the whole group at the same time with three teachers up the front. But I guess the best way would be to kind of have rotating groups or conversations between—like panel conversations. Discussing what work they have and each student has their own individual plan between different groups. The teachers kind of rotate between them.

Interviewer: So is this what you've seen in another school?

Mr O: No, well that's the only way that I can think of team teaching working as a team, instead of three teachers being in the same room. Like, we'd go over and talk to each other and see what was going on. But then we'd split back off to see or own groups and teach to our own students. The students don't see any discussion between teachers.

According to Scruggs et al.'s (2007) meta-analysis of published qualitative research, team teachers, or those teaching together, generally support team teaching. Teachers interviewed in this research agreed, but the 'how to' is expressed as a problem as can be seen from the following interview excerpts:

Ms O: Because the staff have to work collaboratively, there should be—the kids should be seeing professional interaction between staff, sharing of resources, a bit of humour as someone's doing something or other else. There's a bit of—so they should see a bit of banter going on. That things should be calm and pleasant, and we always talk to each other with respect.

Now I know that hasn't happened in all classes, and there's been some issues where staff have been really rude to other staff members publicly, in front of the kids. Condemning the model we're in, that this is rubbish, out loud in the

classroom: completely and utterly inappropriate. There's work going on in that regard, and I'm mentoring this particular person. Because no matter how much you disagree with what you're working in, it is what we're working in. So, the reality is draw the line [and] move on. The other thing is, working with that, you can disagree all you like and you might have—you might dislike this person for a whole lot of reasons. That's fine, but you must work professionally. You have to collaborate.

I'm going to team meetings with them to make sure that they keep themselves nice, which is a concern because you would think we're dealing with adults here. Some of these people are quite senior. But I suppose it's personality, isn't it? So what you would hope would be the kids are seeing positive role modelling, positive interactions, appropriate language is being used in the classroom. Staff don't swear, we're keeping calm, not losing our temper. One of the things I'm really keen on is staff should not be yelling at the kids. It does nothing. I know sometimes it makes you feel better. I've done it myself. There are times when the kid just pushes your buttons and you just lose it. You just think, why have I done that? The kid's won here.

So that's what you're hoping that the kids are picking up on. That when things don't go right, we don't scream. We don't rant. We don't rave. We don't have a hissy fit. We work through and try build up some resilience, and that's a challenge.

But I think most staff are very positive. Initially, there was a lot of negativity. It depends very much too on who you've got in your team. If you've got people who have a similar mindset and similar dedication to the job, I think you're home and hosed. But if you're with someone who's grumpy, grumpy, grumpy ... I think it would be very challenging. I've been in both. I've been in really successful teams, where it's been fun. You're looking forward to going to class because you're having a bit of fun and the kids see silly [jokes] going on between the three of you. We're all laughing. We make mistakes. It was all great. The other one's where it's all like, oh, I don't want to be here. The kids don't want to be here. Because it's just not working.

Interviewer: ... it does impact I think.

Ms O: I think it does. The kids pick up on it. The kids pick up on staff who are thrown in and teaching materials that they are not particularly comfortable with.

Among the deliberate architectural design features of Waratah High are open-plan learning spaces and the use of many windows in classes, offices and staffrooms. The school principal and leaders say that this allows working teams and individuals to be observed. This design feature provides more opportunity for students to see teachers modelling social skills as expressed in the interview excerpt below:

Interviewer: What do you think the students pick up on with regards to social skills?

Ms O: Yeah, I think the kids are watching all the time. One of the reasons why this place has been designed as such with all windows is that students can see you working. You can also see them working. Because we should be modelling that behaviour all the time ... So the collaborative team I think was designed to try and mimic that little communities of learning.

A number of the students interviewed at Waratah High expressed that they had not noticed the interactions of the team teachers in their classrooms in positive ways. Despite the expense of the new architecture and the well-meaning intentions of the teams of teachers and leadership, some students interviewed do not express positive experiences of teacher collaborations and modelling of social skills. Such student sentiments should cause concern. As van Manen (1999) states, ‘no matter what teachers say their feelings and intentions really are, what seems ultimately more important is how the students *experience* them’ (p. 21). This study is about the opportunity that team teaching affords as an opportunity for teachers to model social skills. However, some students expressed feelings of not being included in the team-teaching classroom and feelings of being sad as a result of non-inclusion in such classrooms. Producing such poor experiences and negative feelings are surely not the intentions of teacher collaboration. The following interview excerpts demonstrate the student reactions to the arrangements made for the students to observe staff:

Interviewer: What about the open staff rooms? I think the aim of that is so that you can see how the teachers interact. Do you even watch the teachers in the staffroom?

Female 1: No, waste of time. (WH4)

Interviewer: Do you learn anything from the way the teachers interact?

Female 2: I don't get how teachers call each other sir, miss. Just say their name or something.

Interviewer: Oh okay, so—oh, so if teachers are in the classroom together they go, sir if they're trying to get the attention of the ...

Female 1: They say Mr this or Ms ...

Interviewer: Oh, so they don't say like Carol, John ...

Female 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you think that's weird?

Female2: That's stupid.

Female 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, why is it weird?

Female 1: Because usually the teachers that we had, they called each other—they don't say sir or miss, they just say their name.

Female 2: They say Carol and stuff.

Interviewer: So, you know it's kind of false.

Female 2: Yeah.

Female 1: Yeah. (WH8)

Interviewer: Do you see the teachers interacting? Like what do you learn from the [team] teachers here at school?

Male 1: Our French teacher talks in another language.

Male 2: They talk in French.

Male 1: I said to them, why are you talking in French? He said it's none of your business, that's why. (WH7)

Interviewer: What about the teachers? I've asked this question before, but have you noticed anything more about the teachers interacting in your team-teaching environments, where you've got three teachers together. Do they ...

Male 1: The French teachers speak a different language.

Interviewer: They talk in French to each other do they?

Male 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you think that's so you don't know what they are saying?

Male2: Yeah.

Male 1: Yeah, but sometimes we can get it when they're talking about someone.

Male 2: I think talking like that to say rude words.

Interviewer: So, do you think you're talking about, you're saying they talk about the students?

Male 2: Yeah.

Interviewer: How does that make you feel?

Male 2: Sad. (WH10)

Interviewer: What do you mainly see the teachers—how do they work together?

Male 1: They talk about what they are going to do next, and in French.

Female 1: They talk in French.

Male 1: ... in French so we can't understand.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Female 1: We don't know if they are swearing or not. (WH3)

Many student observations of teacher interactions seem to be purely of the teachers speaking together:

Interviewer: All right. Anyone else see teachers interacting?

Male 1: Yeah. The teachers talk a lot.

Interviewer: Amongst themselves?

Male 2: Yeah.

Male 1: They talk about heaps of things. (WH10)

Interviewer: So what you're saying is that the teachers are talking together and distracted from the class?

Male 1: Yeah. (WH3)

Teacher Emotions on Display

While teachers and school leaders generally attempt to model appropriate behaviours in their classrooms and schools, some published authors, such as McKinley (1996), argue that negative interaction, specifically disagreement, can be a powerful example for students, particularly when the resulting discussions are respectful between the teachers. Carpenter et al. (2007) state that 'disagreement acts as an "ice-breaker" and facilitates a learning environment that encourages students to enter into civil and rational debate with instructors and with each other' (p. 56). As demonstrated by the example of the students who spoke of their feelings about the artificialness of the 'sir and miss' form of address between team teachers in classrooms, students appreciate honesty from their teachers and a certain degree of 'naturalistic' behaviour.

The students I interviewed in the course of this study who have witnessed teacher behaviours outside normal classroom pedagogical practice mention an appreciation of seeing their teachers as possessing 'human' behaviours:

Interviewer: Do teachers ever have arguments that you see?

Female 1: Not really, but I reckon that they do. Not everyone can be best friends with everyone.

Interviewer: Yeah, does it ever make you wonder that you never see teachers arguing whether that's real?

Female 1: Yeah. (HC6)

Interviewer: Have you ever seen teachers have fights?

Female 2: Yes, it was awesome.

Interviewer: Was that here [high school] or in primary school?

Female 2: Primary school, yes.

Female 1: When was that?

Female 2: Like, one teacher—like, I loved her, and then there was a mean teacher, she came along and started trying to boss her around and stuff. Like, the nice teacher, she just had enough because she's a good person and she doesn't deserve it, so then she, like, fought back. Then it was just like one big massive scrap, and it was Ms B and Ms H.

Female 1: Really? They're like best friends.

Female 2: Yes, and then, like, the principal had to get involved and say, well, if you want to keep working here, you're going to have to get along with each other, because there's nothing ...

Female 1: Is that—and then did they become friends?

Female 2: Yes.

Interviewer: So, did you hear the principal say that?

Female 2: Yes, I was there, because they did it in the classroom, because they just, like, were fighting. They were in my classroom, and they were fighting.

Interviewer: What did you think about that?

Female 2: I thought, like—I was—I thought it was good, because, like, the teacher always got yelled at. Like, the nice teacher always got yelled at for, like, stupid reasons, like why, didn't you print out my sheets, and stuff like that.

Female 1: Well, at least, like, they ended up getting over it though.

Female 2: Yes.

Female 1: Like, now they know how we feel, like, when we have fights.

Female 2: Yes, but here, it's like, you don't see any of that stuff. It's more education is the number-one priority.

Interviewer: Do you think that's real, or do you think that's ...

Female 1: What do you mean?

Interviewer: Well, that younger teachers don't argue, and don't have fights?

Female 2: They have to argue. Like, it's natural to argue—well, I reckon. But you get so over someone, you just have to explode, like, and say what you feel.

Interviewer: So, if you're not saying that happened here, do you think that's real [here at high school] or do you think they're ...

Female 1: I reckon they're just putting on a—just pretending, I reckon.

Female 2: Like, faking a smile and moving on.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you think that's a good thing for kids to see, or do you think it would be better to see the real stuff like you saw in primary school?

Female 1: The real stuff, because like ...

Female2: Real stuff, because you know ...

Female 1: It feels like we're, like, the only ones that have, like, problems, like between friendship groups, and they just go around with the staff members being, like, all nice and all this stuff. But in primary school, my teacher would actually tell me if she didn't like a teacher. Like, she was, like, really nice. That was Ms B, yes.

Interviewer: How did she explain that she didn't like someone?

Female 1: She would just be like—well, like one time, I hit this dude over the head with a tree branch because he was being mean to one of my friends. But like, she,

like, took me up to the front office, and then she asked the principal if she could borrow his office, and then she talked to me. She was like, I don't like some of the teachers—yes, I don't know. She was just like, not everyone is friends with everyone and you don't have to be, like, I don't like some of the teachers and they don't like me. So ...

Interviewer: So, did you appreciate her honesty?

Female 1: Yes. She, like, told me that when she was, like, a kid, she smoked and everything, and that was wrong, and all this stuff. Yes, she was like ...

Interviewer: So, do you like it when teachers do that, tell you ...

Female 1: Not many teachers do, though. They're like ...

Female 2: Very rare to find a teacher that would actually do that to you.

Female 1: Yes. (HC3)

The students in the previous dialogue are referring to teachers from their primary school. In Chapter Eleven, 'I like her—she's nice!' some differences between primary-school and high-school teachers and their pedagogy will be examined in a further effort to define what students are observing of teachers' classroom practices and their modelling of social skills.

This study does not contribute quantitative data about student outcomes from team teaching. What it provides are some student perspectives on observations of teacher interactions and behaviours that the young people have remembered sufficiently to remark on. Student reflection about, and comments on, teacher pedagogy are both very significant and powerful, and consistent with the notion of the importance of the student's experience put forth by van Manen (1999) in his essay about student experience of teacher classroom manner or pedagogy. Educators need to seek and understand their own students' experiences of their classroom practices. In terms of team teaching providing an opportunity to model social skills, it would appear from some students' perspective that it is not what teachers are trying earnestly to model appropriately that the students are observing (or even bothering to notice). Rather, students' interest and respect seems to be given to teachers and other school staff who interact with them in an honest and natural manner: 'warts and all'. It appears that these 'honest and natural' teacher behaviours build

a feeling of empathy within the students and an appreciation of their teachers' functioning as human beings; which may include situations of conflict and dislike of other people.

The following is a student talking about teachers having difficulties with other teachers:

It feels like we're, like, the only ones that have, like, problems, like, between friendship groups, and they just go around with the staff members being, like, all nice and all this stuff. But in primary school, my teacher would actually tell me if she didn't like a teacher. (HC3)

Research by McKinley (1996) suggests that there can be powerful learning for students in observing civil discussion between teachers and efforts made by these teachers for resolution of disagreements. For some of the students interviewed in this study there seems to be an appreciation for and attention given to observations of *honest teacher interactions*. Indeed, in referring to the findings of Crow and Smith, Carpenter et al. (2007) state the following:

team teaching learning environments take on the spirit and example set by the instructors, so that, if the teachers are amicable, work well together, use and enjoy humour, interact, collaborate and model different perspectives on issues, the environment takes on the same spirit and students assume the same attitudes and approaches to learning. (p. 56)

This would seem to be a description of the ideal social-skills modelling environment, and as we will explore in Chapter Eleven, 'I like her—she's nice!', students' explanations and opinions of 'good teachers' are very much intertwined in the classroom practices and pedagogy of these 'nice teachers'. However, in the opinions of the students interviewed in this study, behaviours that they take note of are 'nice-teacher behaviours' directly experienced by them, and they appear to have little interest in the interaction between team-teaching educators. Further, many students interviewed reported negative experiences of team teaching, which is surely a disappointing outcome and a lost learning opportunity.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on team teaching as a means of modelling teacher interactions and social skills for students. As has been explained, school leadership, and indeed some teachers, believe that team teaching presents greater opportunities to ensure that students are not overlooked in classrooms, and that the team-teaching classroom environment provides an excellent setting for teachers to role model social skills for students.

Unfortunately, from the perspective of teachers, there are problems with aspects of team teaching that have detrimental effects on such teaching, for example, shortage of resources, lack of professional development in team-teaching pedagogy and insufficient time to prepare quality curriculum.

Students commented negatively about their experiences of team teaching, citing large class sizes and, in particular, exclusion of students due to teacher interactions within classrooms. Additionally, students believed that teacher interactions within classrooms were artificial. The findings of this research do not support the assertion that team teaching is a mechanism through which teachers model social skills. However, students did suggest that conflict and interpersonal difficulties between teachers reassured them that they were not alone in having difficulties within their own peer relationships.

Chapter Seven: Should or Should Not—That Is The Question

Assessment is in dynamic interaction with teaching and learning.

(Gipps, 1994, p. 16)

This chapter discusses teacher opinions of assessing student social competence. By considering with school leadership and teachers the issue of social-competence assessment, the pedagogical philosophies of teachers and schools are examined to investigate the connection between the values placed on social competence with the daily practice, or pedagogy, of teachers in classrooms. Teachers are uniquely placed to observe student social behaviours and so the perception of teachers of their role in students' acquisition of social skills is important. The discussion about social-competence assessment, together with the findings about team teaching will be drawn together so that conclusions can be made about whether Victorian Government secondary-school teachers explicitly model social skills to provide students with the opportunity to develop social skills and social competence.

The debate about assessment in the social domain can be emotional, and the question of whether to assess the social competencies of students produced divided opinions from the teachers interviewed in this study. Given the abundance of international, national and state policies, and school-mission statements with references to goals of personal and social development in students, educating the 'whole student' would appear to be the objective of educational systems. Unfortunately, as a consequence of the emphasis placed on students' reading, mathematics and science scores, student wellbeing and acquisition of social competence are often relegated to a lower educational priority. Nevertheless, all teachers interviewed in this study expressed the opinion that social competence should be a goal in education. Comments such as the following are typical of the responses of the teachers interviewed in this study about the importance of social competence:

Interviewer: Do you think that social competence is important? Should it be an educational goal?

Ms O: I think it's really important. Because just in terms of the way we interact as human beings in society, we should be acting with respect and keeping our

emotions in control ... Because if you want to educate the whole child, it's more than just reading and writing and arithmetic. It's also how we get on as humans. I think it's really, really essential.

ACARA, who devised the Australian Curriculum, used the 2008 *Melbourne Declaration* goals to guide the direction of the new Australian Curriculum identified social competence as a specific competency in the new curriculum. The National Curriculum Board's (2009) definition of social competence is set out as that which enables 'students to interact effectively with others by assessing and successfully operating within a range of changing, often ambiguous human situations' (p. 14). Specific skills that are listed in this document include maintaining personal relationships, being self-aware, recognising emotions in others and conflict resolution.

Previous Assessment in the Social Domain

There appears to have been little formal assessment and reporting of social competencies within the Australian states and territories' educational systems in the past. Given the specificity of the stages of development of the social skills cited in the VELs curriculum (Table 4), it is surprising that school reports do little more than comment on interpersonal development as a point on the yearly continuum comprising one line of text in a sample report on the DEECD website (see Appendix 3 for DEECD Sample Secondary Template). It seems that parents receive much of the assessment of students' social competence in ad hoc, unsystematic teacher observations reported during parent-teacher interviews. However, data for student engagement and wellbeing is currently measured under the Accountability and Improvement Framework for Victorian Government Schools (DEECD, 2009b). Student outcomes for engagement and wellbeing are measured in the primary years by attendance and a mean score on the 'School Connectedness' factor of the Attitudes to School questionnaire across years five and six. In the secondary years it is measured by attendance and a mean score on the 'School Connectedness' factor of the Attitudes to School questionnaire across years seven to twelve.

Table 4: Social-skills accumulation through the stages of development

	Early Years	Middle Years	Years Nine and Ten
Social Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive relationships • Friendly behaviour • Negotiation • Resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperative learning • Conflict resolution • Emotional regulation • Assertiveness • Problem solving • Empathy • Group decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predicting consequences • Considering motivations • Peer resistance • Universal values and ethical conduct • Coping skills

Adapted from VCAA (2004a, p. 13)

If governments and educationalists are committed to social goals and to monitoring an effective, functional curriculum, should there be methods of assessment of social competence? According to Pascoe (2005) there needs to be assessment of social domains. Pascoe (2005) believes that ‘advances in educational measurement should establish assessment in the social domain at the forefront of progressive assessment methodologies’ (p. 4).

However, comparable and robust assessment methodologies in the social domain have not been fully developed and implemented across states and territories in Australia. While descriptions of the social skills in which students should be competent abound in curriculum documents, educators and school leaders still struggle to conceptualise the social outcomes of schools and the methods by which social and emotional development is achieved in young people. ACER began work in this area in the late 1990s and consulted with individual schools, guiding the development of questionnaire instruments and assistance for state ministries of education, together with developmental work for a variety of tertiary assessments.

Pascoe (2005) cites a pilot initiative in the assessment in the social domain in Australia. This was a pilot project conducted by ACER and the Department of Education and Training, Western Australia (DETWA) which began in 2001. The assessments were an addition to the ongoing MSE, which assessed students in years three, seven and ten across all eight Key Learning Areas: the arts, English, health and physical education, LOTE, mathematics, science, society and environment, and technology and enterprise.

The MSE assessments of social competence included teacher observation, self-reporting and student responses to scenarios and resulted in a student-performance map. The testing schedule from the website is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: MSE Testing Schedule

Social Outcomes of Schooling	Interpersonal skills; social, moral and ethical development	Years three, seven and ten	2001
	Autonomy, independence and enterprise	Years three, seven and ten	2002
	Intrapersonal skills	Years three, seven and ten	2004

Adapted from the DETWA (2010)

Note. At the time of writing, no reports on the outcomes of the assessment of Social Outcomes of Schooling were available on the MSE website.

The New Australian Curriculum

Gardner's (1983) *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences* and Goleman's (1995) concepts of emotional intelligence, as well as Goleman's concepts of social intelligence (2006) in the educational domain, have influenced the new Australian Curriculum. ACARA who have devised the Australian Curriculum have elected to organise Personal and social capability learning into four interrelated elements. These are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social management. CASEL has identified five core social and emotional competency areas, three of which are common to those of the Australian Curriculum: self-awareness, self-management and social awareness. The remaining two elements are relationship skills and responsible decision making. In the Australian Curriculum literature treating the Personal and social capability-Learning continuum, there are various links between the capabilities, and examples of how students might demonstrate these skills. For example, within the element 'Self-awareness' students might demonstrate their capability of recognising emotions by an activity involving investigating emotional responses to unfair play or unfair treatment at work (end of year eight). At the time of writing this thesis (2013), the Australian Curriculum is in its first full year of implementation and teachers who were interviewed had worked under the VELS curriculum structure and were accustomed to

reporting about students' social learning via written reports about collaborative group work or informally during parent–teacher interviews.

Teacher Understanding of Social Curriculum and Assessment

While the Australian Curriculum states the elements of Personal and social capability and provides examples of activities aimed at fostering its development in a continuum from early years to year ten, it does not explicitly set it out as a programme for teachers. It is not explicit but integrated into subjects; although, some schools are electing to develop the personal-social capabilities in pastoral-care sessions. If schools are electing to promote social–emotional learning during teacher led pastoral-care classes, teachers will need professional development in this area. There are many social and emotional programmes available to schools, many of which are commercial packages, able to be purchased as school and teacher resources. Some schools have adapted or developed their own programmes in collaboration with parents, students and school staff to teach the skills that their students need to build social and emotional competence. Despite this, social competence remains for many teachers an elusive concept. The secondary-school teachers interviewed in this study are by their own admission, not experts in teaching social skills. They acknowledge that social competence is important, but how to teach it is an issue. Indeed, there seems to be little research into the nature of social competence, or the ways it can be assessed and enhanced within school settings (Hoglund & Leadbeater, 2004). Additionally, Wight and Chapparo (2008) report that ‘there is little information about the particular social skills that teachers identify as barriers to school performance’ (p. 257) and Gresham et al. (2001) suggest that there is limited research regarding the social-learning problems of children with learning difficulties, many of whom are in mainstream classrooms.

Wight and Chapparo (2008) note that ‘teachers report that social competence at school is multidimensional and situational’ (p. 258) but that ‘as partners in children’s learning at school, teachers are able to provide ... valuable assessment information about whether children’s social skills match the social demands of the classroom’ (p. 259). While teacher observations of social interactions are often sought, and there are tools available such as the Teacher Skillstreaming Checklist (McGinnis & Goldstein, 1997), this and other instruments are based on teacher perceptions or judgements about behaviour. Sherrin (2012) states:

The collection of evidence of each child's development in the area of social competence needs to become a part of the overall data to give a true picture of the holistic education of the child. (p. 11)

The following comments suggest that some teachers are very aware of the subjective nature of assessing social competence.

Interviewer: Should we report on students' social competence?

Ms O: Oh, that's a good question. It's fraught I think, because it is so subjective.

Ms C: Yeah, to an extent, but you want to be very careful because that's going to be completely—it could be very varied in regards to who the teacher is, and what they're seeing, and how the kid is going to be behaving specifically for that teacher.

Ms C: Ooh, that's interesting isn't it? Because it's really hard to quantify isn't it? Again, I don't think it should, I think it would, I think it could certainly be perhaps a comment in the report, a personal handwritten comment. I think if you try and quantify it too much by any sort of scoring system or any sort of databank comments I think it would probably, I don't know it would be very hard to do and might not fully portray what it should.

So I think it should perhaps be, again as when we were at school, it might just be a comment by, a heartfelt comment by the form teacher would probably mean more than an assessed number.

One teacher felt very strongly about reporting on social competence, reflecting again on its multidimensional and situational aspects and how teaching staff are not always in the 'loop' about students' backgrounds and situations.

Interviewer: Should we report on students' social competence?

Ms B: That's a tough one. What, failing them because they're not acting like a proper human being or something?

Interviewer: Well it's competency based, so it would be if they have it or if they don't have it, not a fail.

Ms B: Maybe for our own records, but I don't think we need to confront with kids with that information, especially at a young age. It might be more damaging,

especially if the kid feels like they're having a few problems. To see it on paper might be a bit devastating for them. I don't know. I definitely think there should be some records that staff can access. We don't get given any information about kids and sometimes there's stuff you should know. We're just not told.

If a kid is—hasn't got parents or has come over as an unaccompanied minor, or doesn't have a mum or something. You might find that out half way through the year, but if you're not told these things up front—and sometimes it's good to know. You might cut a kid a bit more slack if you knew what they were going through.

Since schools are places of socialisation for students, teachers are in an excellent position to identify students who do not have positive relationships with their peers or are aggressive. For this reason, many programmes require students to be identified and targeted for intervention support to be provided by teachers. Research supports the idea that teacher perspective is very important in identifying students with social and behavioural difficulties because it is likely that such difficulties impede teaching (Webster-Stratton, Reid & Hammond, 2004). However, psychologists, school counsellors, occupational therapists, and other school support staff are often the professional personnel that provide targeted intervention assistance for students with social-skills difficulties, rather than teachers. As reported previously in this research, only one teacher interviewed in this study spoke about teaching social skills explicitly in a proactive manner.

The teachers interviewed in this research were sometimes unsure of the nature of their current reporting of the social competence of the students they taught. Some reported that social competence is communicated to parents only when there are problems.

Interviewer: Should we report on students' social competence?

Ms O: We report on it anyway, when we get parents involved when there's ongoing issues of concern with kids.

The difficulty for some teachers lies in the limitations of the report-writing framework or the focus on looking for deficits in social competence.

Interviewer: So, should we be reporting on students' social competence?

Ms D: Yes. I think we should. We usually have on some reports—and we've got also as well programmes where we can comment about the whole social skills and whatever else. But I think it needs to be taken a bit more seriously. It's not just the negative skills, I think we should also be praising the positive social skills as well that quite a lot of students do have. But you're not—we need to get more as a community and look at what people are doing. Instead of looking at the negatives, what are the good things we're doing?

Interviewer: So assuming that these reports on social skills don't have specific ...

Ms D: Yeah well, we can only report on the framework. We do have the behaviour in the classroom. We do comment on social skills and we do comment on whether it's outstanding or whatever. But really it's not very informative to parents.

The previous comment suggests that teachers are looking for more in the curriculum to support the development of social competence in the students that they teach: the 'how to'.

Interviewer: How do we achieve socially competent students?

Mr T: I think that's really complex. You've really got to deal with their psychology, their maturity levels, their intellectual—their capacities in terms of emotional intelligence, their growth, all that sort of stuff. I think we teach that sort of curriculum in things like health and human development. We don't do enough of that here. I think every school in this—I think it's an area of curriculum that we need to focus more on and become, well maybe if we focus more on it we'll become more explicit about it. There are kids here who need a lot of that sort of value adding if you want to call it that. I call it soft curriculum. I think that's not a bad word for it. Because we have the hard curriculum of gathering data ... VCE [Victorian Certificate of Education] is hard data. NAPLAN is hard data.

I think there's soft data and there's a social data and there's a soft curriculum, a social curriculum that we really—I'm not sure, we haven't really started to explore that fully yet.

Social competence is a key attribute in young people that fosters wellbeing and interpersonal relationships (Prior et al., 2000). However, Korinek and Popp (1997)

suggest that mainstream teachers are reluctant to take time from the academic curriculum to teach social skills. In the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2003) report *What works in developing children's emotional and social competence and wellbeing?*, the authors suggest that teachers find the idea of taking responsibility for emotional and social competence difficult because they already feel under stress. They also suggest that 'many teachers have personal barriers to working in this area due to their own lack of comfort with emotional matters' (DfES, 2003, p. 74).

Interviewer: Should we report on students' social competence?

Mr O: Like to parents?

Interviewer: Yeah in reports and things.

Mr O: I don't think—because I think it's really a touchy thing to be reporting to parents because it really does reflect on them. If you report that a student has really poor social competence, what does it say about the way that they've been brought up and what does it say about the parents' social competence?

Interviewer: Do you think it reflects on them?

Mr O: I think it would.

Ms C: I have a very, very different view to a lot of our families here about what social competence is about and what I expect, and also an even bigger difference to what I was brought up with.

Lewis (2001) suggests that primary-school teachers believe that it is their job to teach social skills, but as described in Chapter Eleven, 'I like her—she's nice!', the secondary-school teachers interviewed for this research engage in teaching social skills in a non-systematic and largely reactive manner, responding to perceived deficits in the students they teach, rather than teaching social skills explicitly and proactively. In an article on the marginalisation of Australian youth, te Riele (2006b) suggests that rather than using 'deficit logic' and targeting individuals for intervention, the whole-school system should be examined. However, traditionally, screening and assessment of social competence have been the foundation for intervention in social-behavioural problems of children and adolescents, students deemed 'at risk', and who subsequently attend alternative school settings. The concept of at risk also focuses on the notion of targeted intervention rather

than a whole-school approach. Te Riele states that to ‘serve marginalized youth, policy needs to change its focus from “fixing students” to providing high quality education’ (te Riele, 2006b, p. 141). Inclusive schooling practices aim to achieve good educational outcomes for all students.

Opinions varied between teachers on whether social competence should be assessed. This question could be linked to how we achieve socially competent students because if teachers are struggling with the ‘how to’, is it fair to ask them to assess students? Forster (2004) warns of the following possibility:

We need to be cautious about the kinds of understandings we infer that students have, and the relationship between those understandings and behaviour. Understanding social interactions, and the capacity to articulate these interactions, is not necessarily an indication of likely behaviours. Nor is it necessarily an indication of self-insight. (p. 83)

Social–Emotional Curriculum Delivery

According to research by Hawkins and Catalano (1992), young people benefit from ‘pro-social’ structured programmes that not only teach the skills, but have teachers model the skills, give them clear feedback on their attempts to practice them and positive reinforcement for using them as well. Given the structure of the activities that aim to develop social competency suggested in the Personal and social capability-Learning continuum in the Australian Curriculum documents, it is interesting to note conclusions made in the DfES (2003) research report *What works in developing children’s emotional and social competence and wellbeing?* Programmes for developing social competence that ‘do not include ... explicit skills training, but which attempt to teach attitudes and values alone have been shown consistently not to be so effective’ (p. 68). The suggested activities in the Personal and social capability-Learning continuum documents are about ‘describing’, ‘considering’, ‘discussing’, ‘listing’ and so on, rather than the explicit training suggested by Hawkins and Catalano (1992). As the DfES research report (2003) states:

Competence is generally thought to include not only knowledge, and attitudes but also behaviours and skills. Without their concrete realisation in behaviour, competences remain potential rather than actual. (p. 68)

Research shows that good social–emotional competence has a positive effect on academic performance, assists physical health, reduces the risk of maladjustment, failed relationships, interpersonal violence, substance abuse, unhappiness and is essential for lifelong success (Elias et al., 1997; Zins et al., 2004). Teachers are not experts in the field

of teaching social skills and many of the teachers interviewed in this study indicated that they would like professional development in the teaching of social skills. Social competencies or ‘social capabilities’ as they are termed in the Australian Curriculum, together with activities aimed to aid personal and social development are available on the ACARA (2013a) website, but unless teachers receive the appropriate professional development in the social domain, assessing against the competencies is an unfair task to set teachers who, if unsure of the teaching of social skills, would logically be as unsure of the assessment of social competence.

In the DfES (2003) report, the authors report that when dealing with a vast range of health issues, including emotional and social issues, a whole-school approach can be very effective. The DfES (2003) report reiterates the conclusion made by Wells et al. (2003) that in approaches to mental-health promotion ‘the most robustly positive evidence was obtained for programmes that adopted a whole school approach’ (p. 41). A need for a whole-school approach is reflected in the following teacher’s comment about developing student social competence:

Ms D: We need to get [together] more as a community and look at what people are doing.

Social competence has been connected to academic achievement (Zins et al., 2004; Elliot & Gresham, 1987). Goleman (2004) attests that ‘multiple research studies ... demonstrate that social and emotional learning programmes pave the way for better academic learning’ (p. viii). It would appear that if social competence is to be promoted, educators should observe academic proficiency and wellbeing in students. Not everything needs to be tested and assessed, and perhaps there is a way to resolve the uncertainty and reluctance of some teachers to assess in the social domain. ‘Observation and conversation’ was one method described by a school leader who was interviewed:

Interviewer: If we could test for social competence, how would we do it?

Mr H: Well, I’ll answer that question, if I can, by saying what I used to do as a teacher. I very clearly saw as part of my responsibility to promote positive behaviours in the classroom and we always had agreements around what was okay and what was not okay, and how we would communicate and what would

sound reasonable. So, in identifying kids that didn't have those competencies, it was primarily two observations. That was, I didn't actually run any tests per se.

So it was observation and conversation. Quite often, in the conversation, if a situation arose with a particular student and other students, it was the conversations of what the other kids said that actually gave you the information that you needed to support the student because of the behaviour that they were engaging in. That's blindingly obvious to me but to a teenager or a 13-year-old, it's not. So, that allows you to assist the person to work around that, and changing and modifying what they were doing.

The idea of student conversations being part of assessment gives students a voice in their learning and social development. In Pascoe's (2005) call for assessment in the social domain, it was reported that ACER and DETWA's MSE social-assessment tool had great promise (DETWA, 2010). Pascoe's (2005) support of the MSE supports the argument that student feedback should be part of any school assessment. By involving students in assessments about their learning, there is the opportunity for students to contribute their experiences about their engagement in their own learning. In response to low levels of academic achievement and high levels of student boredom and disaffection, Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) suggest more research needs to be conducted to characterise how students feel, behave and think. There appears to have been little advancement in involving young people in social assessments since Elliot and Gresham (1987) wrote that 'self-report measures of children's behaviour are not as frequently used as teacher ratings or sociometric techniques, but they represent a potentially important source of assessment information' (p. 97). Self-reporting would seem particularly relevant in a secondary school setting where self-awareness and self-management are two elements to be developed as capabilities within the new Australian Curriculum.

Schools are social institutions. Teachers are well placed to observe young people's social interactions, and are often called on to make judgements about students' behaviours and skills in social situations. In fact, teachers are a primary source of referral of children to professional staff for targeted intervention (Wight & Chapparo, 2008). Nevertheless, while many of the teachers interviewed in this study believed that social competence was an important educational goal, many were unsure of reporting to parents about the social competence of the students they taught. Research indicates that social skills need to be

taught explicitly and a whole-school approach is more powerful in facilitating student social–emotional development (DfES, 2003). Secondary-school teachers are reluctant to use the time available for the academic curriculum to teach social skills (Korinek & Popp, 1997) and some, but not all, of interviewed teachers, said that they would like professional development about teaching social skills. Finally, student self-reflection would seem an excellent means through which to gain feedback about student experiences of the classroom and school, and also to engage students in their learning, specifically on an emotional level. As Smyth (1999) so aptly states ‘it is not possible, in the end, to talk about teachers’ work without also making some incursions into the world and experiences of students’ (p. 68). The question of whether to assess in the social domain and specifically about social competence is complex, and for some teachers is a very emotional issue. Perhaps the final word should go to Albert Einstein.

Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.

Albert Einstein (1879–1955)

Conclusion

This chapter and Chapter Six have dealt with the first research question regarding the role of teachers in student acquisition of social skills. This chapter has focused on the opinions of teachers about assessment of students within the social domain. Such perspectives provide insight into the value that school staff place on social competence and its influence on teacher classroom pedagogy.

Teachers relayed their concerns about the subjective nature of assessing student social behaviours, and the possible effect of such assessments on young people’s wellbeing. Teachers also reported responding to perceived student social-skills deficits rather than enacting a proactive, whole-school social–emotional curriculum. If the two schools involved in this research are representative of Victorian government secondary schools in general, then it appears that little progress has been achieved in the development of social competence as an educational goal through whole-school initiatives. The opportunity to develop students’ personal and social capabilities rests with individual teachers who attempt to foster such social development as best they can. Such findings echo those discussed in Chapter Six about team teaching in that the success of such teaching

partnerships relies on the pedagogy of the individual staff, rather than carefully managed programmes and initiatives.

This chapter has drawn attention to research that suggests that structured whole-school programmes rather than simple ‘activities’ are more productive in developing social competency. In conclusion, this research has so far demonstrated that opportunities for the development of social competence through teacher modelling exist but that such opportunities are conducted randomly through the pedagogy of individual teachers working ad hoc within their own models of a social–emotional curriculum.

Chapter Eight: It's All about the Culture

Culture [is] the web of significance in which we are all suspended.

(Geertz, 1973, p. 5)

This chapter will discuss the second research question:

What value do students, teachers and school leaders place on social competence as an educational outcome?

Two strands of investigation form the basis of discussion around this research question. Chapter Eight examines school leaders', teachers' and students' perceptions of the school environment in an attempt to conceptualise the notion of 'school culture'. Additionally, students' perceptions of the classroom culture created by teacher pedagogical practices are examined and discussed.

Chapter Nine further explores the theme of school and classroom environments and teacher pedagogy from the perspective of student connectedness to school. Student descriptions of classrooms and teacher pedagogy are investigated and related to school cultures and expectations of educational outcomes.

School Culture

Schools are communities, as well as social institutions where traditions evolve and culture can be developed. Indeed, school culture is a complex dimension to conceptualise and understand, especially because it may be perceived differently by each of the members of a school community. Additionally, some writers will refer to a school's *ethos* or a school *environment*, instead of school culture. Glover and Law (2004) define school culture as 'the sum total of all the aspirations, relationships, and practices within a school' (p. 317). Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore and Ouston (1979) describe culture as 'individuals, actions or measures [that] may combine to create a particular ethos, or set of values, attitudes and behaviours which will become characteristic of the school as a whole' (p. 179). Deal and Peterson (1999) suggest that 'highly respected organizations have evolved a shared webbing of informal folkways and traditions that infuse work with meaning, passion, and purpose' (p. 1). Deal and Peterson (1999) state that:

this invisible, taken-for-granted flow of beliefs and assumptions gives meaning to what people say and do. It shapes how they interpret hundreds of daily transactions. This deeper structure of

life in organizations is reflected and transmitted through symbolic language and expressive action. Culture consists of the stable, underlying social meanings that shape beliefs and behavior over time. (p. 7)

School leaders are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that schools are safe, secure and stimulating learning environments for their students. From this mandate, individual schools develop student-engagement policy documents that articulate the school community's expectations in matters of school engagement, attendance and behaviour. These are to support the rights and expectations of all members of the school community. The DEECD (2013) document *Effective schools are engaging schools, student engagement policy guidelines* states that 'positive school cultures ensure that students feel valued and cared for, have meaningful opportunities to contribute to the school and can effectively engage with their learning' (p. 7). The document further suggests that a positive school environment is safe and supportive, has respectful relationships that value diversity, promotes pro-social values and behaviours, promotes student participation, engages parents and carers, practices prevention and early-intervention approaches, responds to individual students and makes links with community.

School Traditions

Deal and Peterson (1999) also consider the rituals, traditions and ceremonies in a school to be an element of its culture. Waratah High conducts a number of assemblies throughout the school year. These ceremonies may be house assemblies, junior or senior house assemblies or whole-school assemblies. The school also has an end-of-year presentation ceremony at a university hall. Parents are often invited to school assemblies. These assemblies are discussed by one staff member in the following comments.

Interviewer: Does the school support you modelling lessons or resource materials, PD [professional development] to encourage social competence in students that you teach or have contact with?

Ms C: I think the school certainly would support it and overall, over the whole school I think the expectations are there and you particularly see that if you came into something like a large assembly for the school, an ANZAC [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps] Day assembly, those sort of things, the assemblies where the high achievers from the previous year come in.

Just that, just teaching them what's appropriate, the expectations when you're at an assembly or a ceremony and it's very different from when you're at the footy, you can't just stand up and yell. They might not have been to concerts or any of the type of concerts where you have the expectations to sit quietly ... Some of them wouldn't have that, so I think it's in the big assemblies the principal team and the senior teachers will really try and instil into them what's socially, social etiquette ... So, that's where whole-school modelling and explicit guidelines are given, yes, is in the big assemblies.

In referring to the end-of-year presentation ceremony at a university hall, a teacher said the following:

... the parents come to that as well, but that's a really nice evening and it's done [in a] very traditional, formal way ... I think because the school's so old, a lot of the traditions have been there a long time. They really try and do it in quite a formal way, yes. I think that they're really nice occasions and the children, yes are ...

Interviewer: Do the children respond to that do you think?

Ms C: They do, yes, on the whole they do ... rise to the occasion.

Inclusive schooling practices aim to achieve good educational outcomes for all students. In fact, recent findings from the LSAY, conducted by NCVER (2010) suggest that social capital has the potential to mediate the effects of disadvantage. Social capital has many dimensions and the working definition chosen by LSAY (NCVER, 2010) was that of the ABS (2004), which describes social capital as the 'networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within and amongst groups' (p. 5). Using data from the LSAY (NCVER, 2010), analysts deduced four discrete social-capital factors: student connectedness with school; teacher–student relationships; influence of networks when thinking about the future; and participation in school-based activities. The analysis found that in addition to the influences of family background, school type and geographic location, social capital assists in increasing student rates of participation in education and training. The most important factors are teacher–student relationships and participation in school-based activities such as sport, music, debating and drama.

Participation in sport was an indicator of social capital for girls, while school connectedness played a significant role in promoting social capital for boys.

The principal at Waratah High believes that the school's house system encourages student connectedness and assists in the development of strong teacher–student relationships as evidenced by the following excerpt:

So, I think this school ... [has social] competency generally, but since we've had the physical building, so it's a bit like Hogwarts here, there's seven houses. We can have competitions ... it's absolutely phenomenal and so on ... athletics day ... the teachers from each house and students from the house all have ... [the same] colours and they build relationships together. House choirs is another example where teachers volunteer to work with a house choir over a term and there's a wonderful competition each term ... and all of these competitions go to the House Cup.

The strength of the house system is emphasised in the following comments made by staff members from Waratah High:

Interviewer: How do we achieve socially competent students? Having them in the right setting?

Mr T: I think there's soft data and there's a social data and there's a soft curriculum, a social curriculum that we really haven't really started to explore that fully yet. [The] question of identity for example. The house system works absolutely fantastically well because of the kids and especially the staff, will identify with the house ... I think the admin have underestimated the strength of feeling and the strength of identity that being in this particular house system gives; the people have tapped into. Because last year there were people [who] had to move and they were—staff were just shattered.

Interviewer: Is it good having a house system where the kids follow ...

Ms C: Yeah, I love it.

Interviewer: It's something that you think is definitely an advantage?

Ms C: Huge, absolutely huge. I think it's important ... that ... connectedness to other people or that connectedness to community.

Another teacher describes how the students identify with their house and its staff:

Ms O: [The] kids are quite - the thing I've noticed with the kids here is that they become quite territorial and quite possessive ... They'll be very respectful and they'll be very protective of you.

Both Waratah High and Hyacinth College, like many schools, use organisational systems such as houses or sub-schools and ceremonies such as assemblies to create a sense of belonging and connection and foster relationships between staff, students and community. Jensen (2009) attests that high-poverty schools achieve positive student success by providing after-school enrichment activities such as music lessons, archery, chess, ballet, technology and journalism, reporting that one school's attitude is that 'because our students have less, we must provide more' (p. 95). However, many of the prevention and social-emotional promotion initiatives used in schools are disjointed, which does not contribute to their collective effectiveness. Zins and Elias (2006) report that on average schools implement fourteen practices to promote social-emotional learning and pro-social behaviours in their student cohorts, including pastoral-care sessions, recreational activities and informational posters and brochures. Zins and Elias (2006) urge that since academic achievement is linked to social-emotional competence, teacher instruction of both curriculum domains should be taught in an integrated, coordinated manner (p. 233).

There are many advocates for whole-school approaches to promoting mental health and wellbeing. For example, the Education Department of Western Australia's (2001) focus paper, *The students at educational risk strategy's pathways to health and wellbeing in schools: A focus paper*, states that 'effective mental health promotion in schools requires complementary action in and between the areas of curriculum, school organisation and environment, and partnerships with parents and service providers' (p. v).

Comments from the teachers interviewed in this study did not convey a sense of a whole-school approach to social competence or a sense that social learning was a whole-school priority. Indeed, the comments seemed to reflect a fragmented approach to social learning in their schools, which indicated that such teaching arose through teacher choice and promotion rather than a collective approach. This is reflected in the following comments:

Interviewer: Does the school support you in modelling lessons, resource materials or PD, to encourage social competence in the students that you teach?

Ms J: I'd say yes. They've developed programmes or activities that you could possibly use, and handbooks. So, I think there is help, if you want it.

Ms B: No. The curriculum's—everything is so set. There's very little time for—to deviate, no matter how interested kids might be in something—and not enough time to cover everything that's there. So there just isn't the time to have specific units of work on it. In the past, there was but not since we've been this big thing [a larger school].

Mr O: I've seeked [sic] it out, but I haven't had time to actually—I know there's a teacher here who is the wellbeing coordinator who does have stuff like that. But I haven't had time to actually get it and sit down and learn how to deliver it.

Ms F: They certainly advocate PDs ... [But I get support] only off my colleagues. Not really from a school top-down [approach].

Student Engagement

Student learning depends on a number of factors and one vital aspect is the engagement of the learner. Fredricks et al. (2004) consider student engagement as having three elements: behavioural engagement, emotional engagement and cognitive engagement. Behavioural engagement describes students' involvement in academic and social/extracurricular activities; such involvement is considered essential for achieving academic success and preventing school failure (student disengagement from schooling). Emotional engagement refers to student relationships with teachers, peers and school staff, and is thought to connect students to the school community and influence their willingness to perform their school work. Cognitive engagement represents a sense of commitment to school tasks, including a willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills. Fredricks et al. (2004) believe engagement to be a multifaceted construct, and that for each of the elements there exists a continuum of the degree to which a student may be committed. For example, in behavioural engagement a student may simply comply with instruction at one end of the spectrum or may go further and

participate in the Student Representative Council (SRC) at the other end of the behavioural-engagement continuum.

In this thesis, student emotional engagement in school is examined in the chapters treating teacher–student relationships: Chapter Ten, ‘Could students be taught by robots?’, and Chapter Eleven, ‘I like her—she’s nice!’ Student perceptions about the differences between primary and secondary-school teachers, discussed in Chapter Eleven, suggest that the young people interviewed responded more favourably to teachers who recognised and rewarded good behaviour, involved students in decision making and negotiated consequences for students’ inappropriate behaviour. In Chapter Ten, students described ‘good’ teachers as those that have a sense of humour, take an interest in their students and initiate conversations with them, and endeavour to make work fun.

School Discipline Approaches

Behavioural engagement, which encompasses student compliance, will be examined later in this thesis, in Chapter Twelve which is entitled ‘Could you please...’. However, it is worth mentioning that a whole-school approach to behaviour management should include explicit teaching, modelling and promotion of pro-social values and behaviour expectations in accordance with these values. It is also noteworthy that students perceive schools to be supportive and caring when approaches to discipline are considered sympathetic and negotiable. Referring to the research of Batten and Russell (1995) and Dwyer, Stokes, Tyler and Holdsworth (1998), te Riele (2006a) states that ‘flexibility is highlighted as the most important aspect of a school organization that is supportive of the needs of young people’ (p. 67). Discussing the ‘zero tolerance’ approach to discipline (which makes suspension and expulsion mandatory for breaches of certain school rules), Brown (2010) states that ‘schools and districts must reinforce their commitment to students in trouble through strategies that advance, rather than hinder, their academic and socioemotional development’ (p. 451).

From the perspective of these students interviewed, there appears to be little flexibility in some aspects of the approach to discipline at their school, and little exposure to learning about conflict resolution.

Interviewer: What happens in high school [when a fight occurs]?

Female: They just suspend you, give you a detention.

Interviewer: So if you've had a suspension and a detention is there any kind of restorative thing afterwards to help you make it up?

Female: No.

Male1: No.

Male 2: No difference, you stay home. You do nothing. (WH2)

Interviewer: What do you learn most from how teachers treat you?

Male 1: Giving detentions. (WH5)

Male 1: Miss, I wish we could treat teachers the way they treat us.

Interviewer: That's a really interesting question because I haven't asked that one before. So if I was a student and you were now the teacher what would you be doing?

Male 1: Giving you a detention.

Male 2: A suspension. (WH5)

In an article about students marginalised from mainstream schooling, te Riele (2006a) comments on the institutional-discipline approach of two 'alternative' senior secondary colleges that is considered by its students to be more caring and supportive than their previous mainstream secondary schools. The schools' approaches incorporated 'perceived reasonableness of the rules ... [and a] more sympathetic approach to implementing them' (te Riele, 2006a, p. 65). Discussing teacher 'ethics of care', Garrison (1997) suggests that caring teachers 'sometimes choose to break rules rather than students' (p. xvii). The following from student interviewees suggest that there are teachers working in schools that listen to students and are flexible in their approaches to discipline. The following comments demonstrate that these teachers are more appreciated by students, for demonstrating greater flexibility in student management, than other teachers at their schools:

Interviewer: Do you have someone that if something was happening at home or if you had a secret that you were concerned about ... Is there somebody at school that you feel you could tell?

Male 1: Ms O, she's nice ... Like if you get sent out of your class, you would go to Ms B, she'll give you a lunch detention, but if you go to Ms O, she'll say, what happened? It's just fine.

Interviewer: So you like the people who give you an opportunity to hear your side of the story?

Male 1: Yeah.

Male 2: Miss, yesterday, I got in trouble and I went to Ms O and she said, what happened? Another teacher made me in trouble and she said, go, you're not in trouble.

Interviewer: So you like people who let you [tell your side of things]?

Male 2: Yes. (WH7)

The degree to which students engage cognitively in school and classroom activities may be difficult to quantify, but it is clear that the students interviewed in this study expressed greater willingness to attend to work tasks for particular teachers. This willingness seemed to depend on the relationship that the student had with the teacher. The more positive the relationship, the more the child was likely to attempt tasks. Attempting tasks would seem a necessary precursor to comprehending complex ideas and mastering difficult skills, which is one definition of cognitive engagement. Bernard et al. (2007) report that the social and emotional wellbeing of young people is related to the presence of positive adults, such as teachers, in their lives, which in turn contributes to social, emotional and achievement outcomes. The following comments reflect the difference in the work ethic in different subjects of a student who had previously mentioned liking his Italian teacher in an interview:

Interviewer: Do you think you can achieve in all your classes ...?

Male: Not really.

Interviewer: Is that your opinion or the opinion of the teachers?

Male: No, it's mine.

Interviewer: Really, why don't you think that you can achieve?

Male: I don't really get much work done.

Interviewer: Is that a choice thing?

Male: Yep.

Interviewer: You work really well in Italian, don't you?

Male: And maths.

Interviewer: Cool, well so you [will] do alright in those [subjects], won't you?

Male: Yeah. (HC9)

It would be ideal if the whole-school policy initiatives, rather than just individual teachers, worked collectively, with a whole-school focus, to cater for each individual in the school community so that all needs are met. For some teachers, working in isolation in an unsupportive, and 'zero tolerance' environment can be very difficult. Smyth and Hattam (2001) note that school can be 'as much a struggle for the schools and teachers as it is for the young people' (p. 403). Indeed, in discussing the idea of at-risk students, researchers have tended to view students who are not likely to achieve success at school as having a deficit that belongs to the individual young person. Te Riele (2006b) notes that the 'dominant conceptualization of "youth at risk" draws attention to what is wrong with youth rather than to what may be wrong with schooling' (p. 141). Te Riele (2006b) also offers the following view:

Marginalized students are not identified through their personal characteristics, but through their relationship with (mainstream) schooling. In other words, marginalized students are those who are not served well by ... secondary schooling. (p. 140)

Inclusiveness

Schools need to be inclusive of all students. The choice in this study of conducting 'voiced research' (Smyth & Hattam, 2001) and speaking directly with students was an attempt to gain an insight into students' perceptions. These perceptions were generally about the teachers with whom the students had directly come into contact each day at

school—the physical ‘face’ of the school social culture. In theorising how young people are constructed by social institutions, Furlong (1991) suggests the following:

pupils do not reject abstract social structures, they reject real teachers going about the day to day business of schooling. (p. 297)

The perspectives of students who consider themselves ‘different’ are therefore of interest in gaining insight into whether schools are truly inclusive. Definitions of inclusive education are generally focused on the nature of the students being educated together, their differences related to social class, gender, ethnicity, and mental and physical ability. As Leeman and Volman (2001) argue:

The ideal of inclusive education is in many cases primarily based on theorizing on educational opportunities: educating pupils together must provide all pupils with a good chance of success in school ... inclusive education cannot be defined exclusively in terms of academic achievement in the basic skills; the social-cultural outcomes of education should be part of this concept. (p. 368)

The teachers interviewed in this research appreciate the diversity of their students, but more needs to be done to be inclusive of all young people in their classrooms as demonstrated in the following discussion:

Interviewer: Have you had PD on teaching social skills?

Ms B: No.

Interviewer: Would you want PD on this?

Ms B: Yeah, why not, if it was tailored to our clientele ... Because some things—you’ve got to take into account their cultural background, things like that. If they’re from a culture where—if a teacher’s talking to you, in other countries you don’t look at them in the eye. It’s a mark of respect to be looking down. We have to tell them, here you look the person in the eye. If it was something that told us what the differences were in different cultures ...

Interviewer: Or just facilitated a conversation around those differences.

Ms B: Yeah, that would be good.

The following student comments about inclusion in schools are insightful and suggest that from the perspective of at least one young person interviewed in the course of this study, there are feelings of exclusion and being treated differently:

Interviewer: Do you feel like you belong in class?

Male 3: No.

Interviewer: Why's that?

Male 3: Because I'm the odd one out of all the boys. I like all the girly stuff.

Interviewer: Do people treat you differently?

Male 3: Yes.

Interviewer: Do teachers treat you differently?

Male 3: Yes. They all call me games box or ...

Interviewer: The teachers do?

Male 3: No, not teachers, students.

Interviewer: Is that difficult?

Male 3: I'm used to it because it's been happening since—I don't know—primary school.

Interviewer: So do you get assistance from teachers about how to ...

Male 3: Yes. I ... [But] it only lasts for about one day. Then it starts all back again.

Interviewer: So do you want teachers to do something different?

Male 3: Yes.

Male 2: I hate it when you tell the teacher that someone's bullying you. The first thing the teachers do is yell at the person, which actually makes it all worse.

Interviewer: So what do you think they should be doing to help you if you're getting bullied or ...

Male 3: Talk to you about it and see how you feel about it.

Male 2: Then do something ...

Male 3: Then try and talk to the person about it, but not say that you told them.

Male 2: I told the other teachers and they can watch out for them.

Male 3: Yes.

Interviewer: Are you happy with—have you mentioned that to teachers here?

Male 3: No.

Interviewer: Do you not feel confident that they'll handle it the way that you want it handled?

Male 3: Yes.

Interviewer: That's a shame, isn't it? Do you want to have teachers that are more reliable, that you can say things [to]?

Male 3: Yes. (WH5)

School Leaders

While there are many opportunities for all members of a school community to lead—from students to teachers to principal—for the purposes of this study, school leaders refers to principal class personnel. At each of the participating schools in this research the principal was supported by a number of assistant and/or associate principals who formed, with the principal, the school's leadership team, or school leaders⁵. School leaders are charged with the responsibility of developing student engagement, attendance and behavioural policy at their schools. Fullan (2003) notes that leaders 'have a special responsibility to establish shared cultures' (p. 67). School cultures must be inclusive of the entire school community. For example, Jacobs and Harvey (2010) found that academic achievement is enhanced when school leadership provides an academically oriented context in which values and expectations of high academic achievement are part of the school culture. Roffey (2007) suggests that principals should have 'an inclusive leadership style' by which staff feel 'supported and valued' (p. 22). Chatterjee (2006) argues that it is less the 'common objective' that induces the best accomplishments from people but the 'shared subjective'. Chatterjee (2006) believes that the 'consciousness of a

⁵ In this research the views represented as those of the 'school leaders' of both Waratah High and Hyacinth College are the opinions of the interviewed principals.

shared subjective is the essence of a human community. Objectives lead people away from themselves. Shared values lead people towards themselves' (p. 159). A leader may set the vision of a school but the school culture grows from collective work towards a meaningful objective. As Roffey (2007) states:

There is a symbiotic relationship between [the] goal of a caring community and the processes by which this comes about. How people feel about their school and themselves within it matters not for academic attainment but also for much broader social outcomes. The emotionally literate principal is active in taking account of this. (p. 27)

While many staff members in the interviews spoke of good processes and traditions within their schools, there appears to be a lack of a whole-school approach and common language about social–emotional learning curriculum. The intent and vision of leaders and teachers to work towards enabling students to develop social competence is clear but the teachers spoke of working autonomously or at best in small networks to facilitate this. Teachers also spoke about the inflexibility of the curriculum and time constraints around developing programmes to facilitate social competence in the students that they teach. One teacher declared the following:

Mr T: I have never been in a more tightly or regulated environment, except maybe the army.

This mismatch of intent and process affects the collective effectiveness of the schools in connecting and engaging students, as well as hinders the establishment of a whole-school culture of caring and support. School culture should be developed and defined as a whole-school culture in which 'culture is interwoven with the specific characteristics of the school population ... [and where there is] a culture of support across the whole school, and a sense of community and positive atmosphere' (te Riele, 2006a, p. 67).

Regrettably, many of the students interviewed in this study speak of inflexibility within their schools in relation to disciplinary actions and the subsequent feelings of disconnection with school. Teachers' relationships with students can be damaged when they the teachers do not have the flexibility to 'bend the rules' and modify consequences. Whole-school culture has a vision and a common language, but also the flexibility to meet the needs of all the members of the school community, thereby creating an atmosphere of positivity, care and support.

The final words in this chapter are from students who were nearing the end of their first year in secondary college. The question that needs to be asked is whether these schools are missing opportunities to really connect with students by allowing their school cultures to simply ‘evolve’ rather than working towards creating strong *whole-school cultures* that support and care for *all members* of the school community. The following comments suggest that these young people do not feel as connected to school as their teachers and school leaders would hope:

Interviewer: Do you have a sense of belonging in class and at the school?

Female 1: What does that mean?

Female 2: What do you mean?

Interviewer: Well, do you feel like you’re a part of it, do you feel that you belong here, do you feel like this is where you should be, that you’re comfortable here?

Female 1: I don’t know.

Female 2: I feel comfortable here, but I don’t like coming. Not that I’m, like, scared or anything, I just hate school. (HC8)

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated school staff and students’ perceptions of school culture as a means of exploring students’ sense of connectedness and belonging to school. Existing literature demonstrates that connectedness to school and a sense of belonging contribute to student wellbeing, school engagement, academic achievement and social–emotional capability.

This research demonstrates reliance by school leadership and teachers on such traditions as house systems and whole-school occasions such as assemblies, ceremonies and performances to create the school culture. Students did not report a connection to school through such means, although school leaders and teachers reported feelings of attachment to school via such structures.

This chapter has demonstrated that student connectedness and engagement is generally formed with individual educators by virtue of a teacher’s personality and interpersonal skills, which are reflected in the teacher’s classroom pedagogy. This demonstrates that

students are engaging with classroom cultures created by individual teachers, rather than with an entire social–emotional culture created at the whole-school level.

Chapter Nine: Is School for You?

Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.

Aristotle (384–322BCE)

This chapter further explores the relevance of students' feelings of connectedness to school via the accommodation of their social–emotional needs by school staff. In Chapter Nine, the provision of students' social–emotional learning is examined from the perspective of the student participants to frame the importance that is placed by schools on social competence as an educational goal.

It is compulsory for young Australians to attend school for approximately twelve years. In fact, 'long-service leave' is a term being used to describe initiatives or programmes for students in year nine who have been at school for ten years and who therefore, are deemed to have earned a break from 'traditional' school work. The ages at which Australian children start school vary across states and territories but generally, students in Victoria begin attending primary school from age four to six. They then transition to secondary school from age eleven to thirteen, and may complete senior secondary education by seventeen or eighteen years of age. School is compulsory for Victorian students from ages six to seventeen. For some young people, this pathway through schooling can be without major incidents and happy memories are created. However, for too many students, schooling can be a difficult and unrewarding period of their lives.

The Social and Emotional Health of Australian Young People

Between 2003 and 2007 the state of Australian children and adolescents' social and emotional health was researched. Students and teachers from 81 schools across Australia, from prep to year twelve, completed the ACER Social and Emotional Well-Being Surveys (Bernard et al., 2007). The findings support the claim that a large percentage of Australian students are experiencing social and emotional difficulties. A number of conclusions were made from the research, including that the lower the wellbeing of students, the greater the likelihood that students will display emotional, social and behavioural difficulties such as feeling lonely, losing their temper and drinking alcohol to excess. In the Bernard et al., (2007) study, both student and teacher surveys show that the higher the level of student social and emotional wellbeing, the lower the likelihood that they experience problems in their lives at the time of the study.

Such findings become more meaningful (and real) reading the following account from a student interviewed in this study:

Female: I nearly killed a kid because of a teacher.

Interviewer: How?

Female: I was really angry on a teacher, I was just holding one of my friends' neck.

Interviewer: Wow.

Female: He started choking.

Interviewer: See, I want to be talking to you about anger because you don't want it to take over your life. You want to be in control. Are you worried that sometimes you get so angry that you are out of control?

Female: Yes. (WH11)

Statistics from the ABS's (2007a) *Health of children in Australia: a snapshot 2004–05* state that in the period 2004–2005, seven per cent of children aged younger than fifteen years were reported to have some form of mental or behavioural problem as a long-term health condition, with rates rising from very low levels among children under five years to ten per cent of children aged from ten to fourteen years. Students spoke to me of feelings of pressure and stress at school:

Female 2: Like, my best friend has to go to counselling because of this school. Like, last year, she was, like, I love life. Come here, she has to go to counselling. She's twelve.

Female 1: Now she smokes, drinks—she's in year seven.

Interviewer: You think that has happened because of ...

Female 1: She wants to get out of this school.

Female 2: Stress, because of teachers—like, her trying to understand and not understanding—teachers writing on her report that she's not understanding. Her mum has a go at her, teachers having a go at her.

Female 1: She wants to get out of this school ... She's trying to get suspended and everything.

Female 2: She has been suspended, like, four times. She just wants to get out of here. Like, sometimes I even want to get out of here. (HC3)

There were comments made by students in this study that suggested that they had friends at school for whose mental health they felt concern. Apparently, some students post comments on sites such as Facebook and Tumblr that suggest they are unhappy with school and their teachers:

Female 1: A lot of people, like, when like, the teacher is like—when they actually do their head in, people, like, post on Facebook, like all this crap, and they just go 'spazzo' on Facebook.

Female 2: Like, that's the way of getting it out. Like, Facebook has, like, tuned into like real emotional ...

Female 1: But, like, it makes them feel, like ...

Female 2: Better.

Interviewer: Now, that's a very interesting point. So, you think people are—and I'm just doing this so I get a real sense of what your answer is—you're saying that people vent their emotions on Facebook by writing how they're feeling?

Female 1: Yes, like ...

Female 2: Yes. They don't tell real humans, they write it on Facebook and, yes.

Interviewer: So, do you find surprises on Facebook when you get that people are feeling like that, or do ...

Female 2: Yes.

Interviewer: ... you get a sense of that when you're here in the school?

Female 1: No, like, I know ...

Female 2: I'm like, yes, I know how you feel.

Female 1: I know how they feel. Like, I would comment on it, yes ... some people would just be like, I swear to God, it's like some of it causes, like, emos.

Female 2: Yes.

Female 1: Like, because they get so frustrated with, like, the teachers and stuff, and they don't listen.

Interviewer: Just explain to me what you mean by, go emo?

Female 1: Like, they cut their wrists and they like ... wear all their hair—and dye it black—and wear it all over their eyes.

Interviewer: Have you got people in year seven like that?

Female 1: Like, they're not really, like, cut their wrists, but like, they're like, real like ...

Female 2: Depressed and stuff.

Interviewer: So, you've got people in year seven, in your year level, that are very depressed?

Female 2: Yes, year seven—twelve years old, or thirteen.

Interviewer: How do you know that they're really depressed? Are they the people saying things on Facebook, or ...

Female 2: You can just tell. Yes.

Female 1: Yes—no—yes, and the look of them. Like ...

Female 2: There's another one, it's Tumblr—which is, if you see a photo—and usually you go on someone's—like, it has become so popular. You go on someone's, and it's got, like, all these depressed things about, like, their crushes, about school, about parents, about best friends, about everything. Then, it's like, I'm not good enough. Then, like, you think, what's this person going through? Then you see them at school and they're, like, smiling and stuff, but then you go back home and go on their Tumblr, and it's like, fake a smile, move on and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Really? So, people in year seven here?

Female 1: Yes, they're like ...

Interviewer: Do the teachers know about it?

Female 1: They don't—I really do not think they care. (HC3)

School Factors

Te Riele (2006b) argues that Australian youth who have been identified as at risk of not completing senior secondary school are being marginalised by 'combinations of school factors, interacting with out-of-school factors' (p. 135), which are different for each individual. The OECD (1995) lists a number of factors such as poverty, ethnic minority status and Aboriginality, family issues and geographic isolation that contribute to the risk of school failure. In Australia, Indigenous youth continue to be the most disadvantaged group according to all measures, including health, education, life expectancy and employment (ABS, 2009). School factors contributing to early school leaving according to te Riele (2006b) are that 'many school leavers ... find the curriculum uninteresting, uninspiring and irrelevant to their own present and future life ...[and] not reconstructed to cater for their interests and needs' (p. 135). In the words of Munns (2007):

The challenge remains for those concerned about social justice and education to find ways through which educationally disadvantaged students might be encouraged to embrace classrooms and a school system that have worked against the majority of their people over long periods of time. Low socio-economic status (SES) students still bear the greatest brunt of the educational losses from schools and classrooms that at one level offer hope and achievement for all, but deliver loss, devaluation and exclusion for many. (p. 301)

Students are not to 'blame' for their feelings and perceptions that school systems are not interested in them, or that they are actually working against them. No matter what the intentions, students' feelings about their schools begin with the relationships and manner of the classroom teacher. Van Manen (1999) suggests that students' experiences of teacher pedagogy are 'ultimately more important' (p.21) to consider than teacher intentions. The following student comment very poignantly illustrates the manner in which classroom teachers can affect the students' experience of being at school:

The teachers actually say they don't, like, really like working here—they're like; all I want to do is teach you this and go home. (HC3)

Connection to School

Successful schooling is about more than student attendance and retention. Outcomes should include aiding 'students' self-esteem and positive disposition towards learning' (te Riele, 2006a, p. 69). The Fair Go Project (FGP) is an action-research project, which began as a pilot project in 2000, into student engagement in Priority Schools.⁶ It is being conducted by a team of researchers from the University of Western Sydney (School of Education and Early Childhood Studies) and the Priority Schools Program (NSW Department of Education and Training). The FGP's aim is to investigate classroom pedagogies that 'offer students a sense of belonging and achieving, learning communities delivering powerful messages that school is a place for them, and education is a resource that they can profitably deploy in their present and future lives' (Munns, 2007, p. 302).

In speaking to the young people in this study, I was exploring the students' opinions of how they would like to be taught and investigating the positive pedagogies to which they responded within their classrooms. I was also interested in whether the students believed they were important and had 'power' in the classroom. This is an attempt to 'capture the voices' as Smyth and Hattam (2001) have so aptly termed research that attempts to understand the lived experiences of students.

I was very interested in trying to understand whether students have confidence that they can succeed at school and believe that opportunities are available for them to achieve success. Munns (2007) reflects that 'students can feel valued within an atmosphere of sharing and reflection, where their voices as learners are encouraged and respected' (p. 309). Osterman (2000) considers that supportive networks for students are crucial and that being deprived of such supportive and stable relationships can cause stress and have far-reaching negative consequences. Osterman (2000) believes that 'the concern ... is how schools as social organizations, address what is defined as a basic psychological need, the need to experience belongingness' (p. 323). In this study, 'belongingness' is defined as the belief by students that they are accepted by and have a 'connection' or positive relationship with their different teachers and their school community.

Teacher Pedagogy

⁶ The Priority Schools Programs are equity programmes aimed at improving educational outcomes for students living in the poorest communities in New South Wales.

In attempting to understand how students feel in the classroom, I posed questions about who is important in the classroom, who has the power in the classroom and whether the students felt valued and had a sense of belonging in the classroom and at school. To ‘balance’ my discussions with the students, I observed a number of classes at Waratah High and Hyacinth College. By observing classes, I believed that I could ‘frame’ the teachers’ interactions with students in my conversations with students. I was hoping that teachers modelled these social skills for students in their classrooms. The social skills and their associated behaviours are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Teacher classroom behaviours

Social Skill	Teacher Behaviour			
Interpersonal Skills	Listening attentively	Offering support	Giving compliments	Sense of humour
Self-awareness and Control	Temper control	Coping with frustration	Describing own emotions	Accepting criticism
Assertion	Initiating conversations	Inviting others to interact	Acknowledging compliments	

During my observations of fourteen classes at Waratah High and Hyacinth College, I observed teachers modelling and demonstrating all of the behaviours listed in Table 6. The following is an account in which students acknowledge that they notice some teacher mannerisms and interactions in class:

Interviewer: Thank you for agreeing to talk to me today. Now, I was going to ask you about Ms V’s class because I reckon they’re really interesting because I fill in an observation sheet looking at the things that Ms V does. Because you know how we were talking about kind of social skills and things, and she does some amazing things. Can you think of any of the amazing things she does in the class?

Female 1: Keeps us, like ...

Female 4: She keeps us entertained, and she’s really nice, and then she gives out lollies to reward us, and then we eat them.

Interviewer: Yes. I know that some people got up to five stickers, or something, and so they get a Mars Bar or something. You got six stickers, yes?

Female 4: Yes, I got that, but I don't really like Mars Bars, so ...

Interviewer: Okay. Do you see the other stuff she does?

Female 4: Yes, she's really nice. Like, she went on the Italy trip, and she like told us about it, and we look forward to it.

Interviewer: Do you—okay, I'll tell you one of the things I noticed a lot, is that she gives a lot of compliments to people. Did you notice that?

Female 4: Yes.

Interviewer: I've even written down some of the things she says, like, you know, she will say, bravo, if you do a really good answer, and then she'll tell you that you've done a good job. Because she was telling you all you'd done a really good job, because you remembered stuff over the holidays. Do you remember all that?

Female 3: Yes.

Female 2: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes. So, she gives a lot of compliments, and she also goes around to you and initiates conversations. I don't know whether you noticed, I think—next to you, the girl with the phone. You know how she came up and she looked at your friend's phone cover. Do you remember that?

Female 1: No.

Interviewer: Now, these are the sorts of things like—now, isn't it interesting that I've kind of seen all these things, and you didn't quite pick up? Even though the girl was sitting next to you—so, you weren't aware of the conversation that she started?

Female 1: No.

Female 4: Because we're used to her, so like, she's ...

Interviewer: Okay, that's a good point. So, you're used to her, so that's just her style. So, she tells lots of stories, and is ...

Female 4: She's funny.

Female 1: She's our home-group teacher next year.

Female 4: Then, like, she put on music one time, and she was just dancing. She's just funny.

Female 2: Like, and she did sit-ups when she was late, and stuff. That was funny.

Female 1: Yes.

Female 4: Yes.

Interviewer: Really, because she was late and she apologised?

Female 4: Then we were like, do 60.

Interviewer: Do 60?

Female 4: Yes, 60 push-ups, so she did 60 push-ups.

Interviewer: Did that surprise you that she did that?

Female 4: Yes, because we were just joking, and then she was like, yes, okay, I was late. (HC8)

For many students interviewed, the things that they noticed teachers doing in class were very basic observations of movement, the manner in which they spoke to students and the instructions that they gave to the class.

Interviewer: Okay, now, I've got questions, can you list the things that teachers do in class? What are they doing in class?

Female 1: Teaching.

Female 2: Well.

Interviewer: Yes, okay, I'm trying—I'm going to try and break it down so that I can kind of go, because I kind of have an idea what I do, but ...

Female 2: Well, Mr O, he either, like, when people need help he goes to help them or he goes around the room and sees what everyone is doing. Or he writes up on the board or he's like on his laptop for what five seconds. He's just standing around ... Ms F sits on her laptop or her phone. Ms B is just looking at everyone.

Female 1: She's sort of like ...

Male 1: She just stares off.

Interviewer: Oh really, does she move around the room or is it from a position?

Female 2: Sort of slowly ...

Female 1: It's from her seat.

Female 2: Yes, she's like from her seat or really slowly.

Female 1: Sometimes she walks around really slowly.

Female 2: Kind of creepy.

Female 1: But sometimes, she's like ...

Female 2: Yes, and Ms B ... she just stands and holds a book or she's either reading a book to us, because that's what we have to do. Ms—who else do we have, Ms ...? What do you say?

Female 1: What?

Female 2: I think that's all the teachers.

Male 1: Ms K just stands there.

Female 2: Oh yes, Ms K just stares or just likes yells at J and J most of the time.

(HC5)

The Bernard et al. (2007) report on the social and mental health of Australian of young people states that:

teacher actions are important contributors to student social and emotional well-being [SEWB], and that teachers of students with higher levels of SEWB are receiving good grades from students for their relationships with students, the motivation they provide, and the conversations and discussions they have in class or individually about making friends and about important learning skills as well as “feelings” and how to cope with stress. Students with lower levels of SEWB perceive the absence of many positive actions of teachers that research indicates contribute to student success and well-being (p. 7).

Positive social skills that teachers model translate in students' minds to happier classrooms and more positive learning environments but not necessarily as having

teachers providing an explicit modelling of a social skill that they might learn. This can be seen in the following comments from students:

Interviewer: [I]f teachers are getting angry, should they show they're getting angry?

Female 1: No.

Female 2: Not really. They should say those of you that are making me really angry, can you just please calm down.

Interviewer: Have you got teachers that don't get angry?

Female 1: Ms V, she doesn't like, she just says, guys and like, please be quiet, I'm trying to teach you and that. She doesn't really scream, she only screamed like what, two times this year.

Interviewer: Do you learn anything when teachers are a bit more like, that don't lose their temper and don't yell?

Female 1: Yes.

Female 2: Not really.

Interviewer: So you don't learn anything, but you say you do? What are you learning?

Female 1: Well we learn better because they're more like, okay, lesson is, instead of aargh.

Male: Oh, when you put it that way, yes.

Female 1: Yes. (HC5)

The following excerpt suggests that students have in their minds that academic learning is quite distinct from personal, social–emotional learning.

Interviewer: So how should, how would you like teachers to teach, how should they teach?

Female 2: Oh in a fun, nice way.

Female 1: Yes, like let's all party.

Interviewer: Would you learn though if you were partying?

Male 1: Yes.

Female 1: We'd learn social skills.

Female 2: And dancing skills.

Interviewer: There's a point, so you can't—are you saying you can't get social skills while you're doing kind of academic work?

Female 1: Well not really ...

Interviewer: Okay that's interesting.

Female 2: Or, like when I ask sometimes in class we're not allowed to talk, so it's kind of hard to teach all skills. (HC5)

These discussions with students about their teachers behaviour, the manner in which teachers give instructions and classes are conducted demonstrate that students appear to process teachers' classroom pedagogy by concluding that they 'like' or 'dislike' the teacher and the subject. Bernstein (2000) suggests that the nature of the manner in which teachers relay knowledge to students, their pedagogic communication in the classroom, can reinforce differences in society such as power balances, and social status. The broader implication of teacher classroom pedagogies and Bernstein's (2000) concept of teacher pedagogy as 'message systems' is that many students interviewed in the course of this research are not inspired to feel that they belong and are important in the classroom. This is clear in the following excerpt:

Interviewer: Do you feel valued as an individual and a learner in the classroom?

Female 1: No.

Female 2: What do you mean by that?

Interviewer: Well, I'd say that your parents care for you and think you're important, and I'm wondering whether you feel cared for and feel important in classrooms.

Female 1: I don't feel important.

Female 2: I feel cared for but I don't feel important.

Female 1: Same.

Female 2: Actually no, I don't think I'm even cared for apart from B [friend].

Male: I don't really notice.

Female 1: Yeah, I agree with M, I don't really notice. I don't really ...

Female 2: I care about myself.

Interviewer: Should you feel important in the classroom?

Female 2: Not really.

Male: No. You just do your work or muck around.

Female 1: It's your choice. (HC9)

Interviewer: Do you feel valued as an individual and as a learner in the classroom?

Female 3: Valued, like—what does that mean?

Interviewer: Well, do you feel like people respect [you] and that you're important?

Female 4: So, no.

Female 3: Well, like, you're important to yourself.

Interviewer: Of course.

Female 3: Like, and then the teachers probably think that you're important.

Interviewer: You believe that, the teachers believe that you're important?

Female 1: No, not some.

Female 3: Probably. Yes, maybe some—like, not all ... (HC8)

Interviewer: Do you feel like ... do you feel like you've got any power in the classroom?

Male: No, not really.

Interviewer: Really, who's got all the power in the classrooms?

Female 1: Probably the teacher.

Female 2: Yes, [Ms B] does.

Female 1: You knew my answer ... The teacher because she has the power to send you out of the room and the power to give you detention and the power to give you a [rubbish pick-up duty] but you don't have the power ...

Female 2: To say no.

Female 1: ... to say no. (HC9)

Interviewer: Do you feel like you have any power in the classroom?

Male 1: No.

Male 2: No.

Male 3: It depends if it's talking about friends or the teachers. If it's the teachers, no. If it's friends, we make them laugh, yes.

Interviewer: I see. Is the power all with the teacher?

Male 1: Yeah, Miss, in the classroom the teachers are allowed to yell at you. But when you yell, they say go quietly. (WH7)

The students interviewed in this research appear to appreciate the value of an education and spoke of education as being a means of getting a good job:

Interviewer: Do you think it's important to get an education?

Female 1: Well to get a good job, yeah, but if you don't want to get a good job and you just want to be a parent and that's your job, then no, but you would have to take like birthing classes which is education, like to have your baby ... (HC9)

Interviewer: So what's the teacher's primary job in class?

Female 2: To be on time, to help you learn. Like because ...

Male: To teach us.

Female 2: Yes because—but my mum said, because I said I hate high school because it's hard. But they said; think of it this way, it's helping you to get a good job. I said okay [and] then I said I don't want to go into year eight. My mum says it's one step closer for getting out of school. I'm like yes. (HC5)

Interviewer: What do you learn most from your teachers?

Female: Our subjects—what they teach us. That's the only thing they are teaching us. What to do. (HC6)

Reflecting on the state of Australian children and adolescents' social and emotional health (Bernard et al., 2007) and the problems students are experiencing (described at the beginning of this chapter), there appears to be a great deal that schools *could* do and *need* to do to help young people while they are at school. The students who were involved in this research expressed interest in learning how to control their anger and get along with people, and in learning strategies for resolving conflict with their peers. This is evident in the following comments from students:

Interviewer: Do you get strategies from teachers or welfare people about how to get along with people?

Male 1: Not really.

Interviewer: Would you like to have some information?

Male 1: Yes.

Interviewer: Would that sort of thing be something you'd be interested in doing?

Male 2: Yes. (WH5)

Interviewer: Do you get an opportunity at school to ever talk about how you're feeling or your emotions or anger management and stuff like that?

Male 1: Yes. We have counsellors and stuff.

Interviewer: So they come into class and talk about this sort of ...

Male 2: We did once, about bullying.

Male 3: Oh yes, we had this big conference about it.

Male 1: Last term.

Interviewer: Is there a lot of bullying in Waratah?

Male 1: Yes.

Male 2: Heaps.

Male 3: In our grade there's a lot.

Male 1: Yes, plenty.

Male 2: All sorts of bullying.

Male 1: I've been in five school fights, big school fights.

Interviewer: Yes, you were saying before. Is that because you find it difficult to get along with other people, or other people pick on you? Which way is it?

Male 1: Just these girls annoy me.

Interviewer: Girls that annoy you?

Male 1: Other people pick on me [as well]. (WH5)

Students expressed that schools are important and that getting an education is the primary outcome of school. It is clear that students notice what their teachers are doing in class but usually through a lens focused on the academic instruction. They emotionalise the messages from their teachers and will usually express positive opinions of a teacher or subject as being 'nice'. Teachers are modelling social skills such as assertion by initiating conversations and inviting others to interact, but students appear not to view these interactions from a personal-learning perspective.

The students' feelings of not being important and not belonging in class are of great significance. Student social-emotional wellbeing must be considered in academic teaching and learning. As McFadden and Munns (2002) attest:

A focus on teaching and pedagogy without reference to the identities and experiences that students bring to the pedagogical relationship will always be focussed on one-half of the explanation of and solution to resistance and engagement. (p. 361)

The possibility that students only view school as a place to learn about academic subjects should be of concern to educators and school leaders. Despite students' desire to learn about issues such as peer relationships, controlling anger and bullying, there appears to be a belief that these skills cannot be learnt at school. While some teachers promote positive interactions in class and model social skills, there is a perception by students that it is fostered only by some teachers and that such modelling is ad hoc, and certainly not part of a whole-school approach. However, the students who were interviewed did not seem to *expect* to gain social-emotional learning in the schools they attended. Is it not surprising then that some students feel pressured by the academic rigours of schooling and the impersonal nature of the classroom? As a result of not teaching social and emotional skills through a whole-school approach, do schools run the risk of disengaging students as early as in year seven (or perhaps even earlier)? Some of the students interviewed in this study speak of school negatively and expressed opinions that suggest they view school simply as a place to socialise and meet friends:

Interviewer: What about you, M? Do you like school?

Male 1: Yes, it's alright. You see your friends, you don't see your friends anywhere else; it's the only place to make friends.

Interviewer: Oh really, the only place to make friends?

Male 1: Yes.

Interviewer: Oh well, you'd be making mates at the footy and stuff wouldn't you?

Male 1: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, so there are a few other places.

Male 1: But you make the most at the school. (HC5)

Te Riele (2006b, p. 135) suggests that Australian youth who have been identified as at risk of not completing senior secondary school are being marginalised through a combination of school factors that interact with factors related to their out-of-school life, and these are different for each student. It is sobering to read the comments of some year-

seven students whose words suggest that even at this early stage of their secondary schooling, they are unhappy, to the extent that they miss days of school. Their comments about their experiences of schooling suggest that ‘school is not for them’:

Interviewer: So sometimes you’re absent because you don’t want to be here [at school]?

Male 1: Yes.

Male 2: Yes.

Interviewer: What are the main reasons why you don’t want to be here?

Male 1: I just don’t like it.

Interviewer: Arguments with people or ...

Male 1: Just don’t like it.

Male 2: Just don’t like it, so you just invite friends over and hang out. (WH5)

Interviewer: Is school for you?

Female 1: No.

Female 3: No. I’m just going to say that ...

Female 2: I don’t know.

Female 3: Yes and no ...

Female 2: Yes.

Female 4: All right, well, for starters ... Yes, because I actually want to learn and get a good job, and no because it’s just boring and wastes half my day when I can just be shopping. (HC8)

Interviewer: Do you really think ... I’m asking you whether ... students’ experiences of year seven can be so bad that they maybe don’t like school anymore?

Female: Yes, because I don’t like school anymore ... (HC12)

Conclusion

This thesis supports existing research indicating that Australian youth are experiencing social and emotional difficulties. Student participants in this study reported feelings of not being able to control their anger, wanting to learn strategies to resolve conflict with peers, and being worried about the mental health of friends. As stated previously, students engage with teachers who create caring and supportive classroom environments via positive pedagogies. Such teachers model high levels of classroom behaviours demonstrating the social skills of assertion, self-awareness and control, and good interpersonal skills. While young people do not necessarily recognise all such behaviours in classrooms, they acknowledge that such pedagogical practices result in more positive learning environments in which they are more actively engaged.

Although school leadership and teachers attest to valuing student social competence as an educational goal, the reality in schools appears to be that there is no whole-school planning to develop such competence in the young people for whom they are responsible. Individual teachers model pro-social behaviours, but students do not regard this as explicit instruction, seeing it rather as the ‘personality’ of their teachers. Students engage productively with teachers with good interpersonal skills but do not necessarily develop along the Personal and social capability-Learning continuum (ACARA, 2013a). In particular, this chapter has demonstrated that school practice contradicts educational intent of ‘educating the whole child’ in all dimensions of learning and the curriculum , and that students are at risk of poor social–emotional development, and even disengagement from schooling, through poor teacher pedagogy and/or negative experiences of school culture.

Chapter Ten: Could Students Be Taught by Robots?

The task of the storyteller is to make a place where wisdom, who is like the shy animal, can come out and graze.

A Jewish saying

Having examined the opportunities for explicit modelling of social skills by teachers and for social competence to be important in school culture, the discussion now focuses on the third research question:

Do students identify teachers as exemplars/role models of social skills?

Chapter Ten describes and discusses students' views of their classroom interactions with teachers and begins to conceptualise students' opinions of 'good' teachers. This idea is explored further in Chapter Eleven, 'I like her—she's nice!', which reports on student responses when asked about the differences in pedagogy between primary and secondary-school teachers, and their perceptions of the differences in learning outcomes between primary and secondary schools. Chapter Twelve, 'Could you please...', is the final chapter to examine teachers' position as role models. In this chapter, compliance as a social skill is investigated as an insight into teacher–student relationships.

'Whole-child' Education

International, national and state policies and guidelines, and school-mission statements set out holistic goals for students, including personal-development and social-development objectives. For example, the recent Council of Australian Governments' (2009) strategy document, *Investing in the early years*, sets out as a principle 'a focus on the whole child, across cognitive, learning, physical, social, emotional and cultural dimensions and learning throughout life' (p. 4). Indeed, the United Nations (1948, Article 26) *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states that education 'shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the full strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms' (United Nations, 1948).

The preamble to Australia's *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) states that 'schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and

wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion' (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 4).

While acknowledging that literacy and numeracy remain the 'cornerstone of schooling for young Australians' (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 5), the *Melbourne Declaration* then states that 'schooling should also support the development of skills in areas such as social interaction [and] as well as knowledge and skills, a school's legacy to young people should include national values of democracy, equity and justice, and personal values and attributes such as honesty, resilience and respect for others' (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 5).

Despite the all-encompassing goals of education, assessment in mainstream secondary education concentrates on the academic domain, focusing on curriculum-content knowledge and competencies. Educators and researchers who value students' wellbeing and desire students to gain competency in the social curriculum have concerns about this narrow lens of focus in education. As Fattore et al. (2007) remark:

Standard measures on educational achievement, for instance, tell us little about children's own perceptions about the quality of their education or the processes by which they learn. Children are seen as objects of determinants, both internal and external, rather than as engaged social actors with varying levels of control over their environments. The assumption is that children's social engagement is irrelevant, or that they lack agency. (p. 9)

Another goal of Australian education policy, one tied to political and economic goals, is student retention to the end of senior secondary education. This policy is 'designed to provide a clear incentive for young people to remain in education and training rather than enter a labour market for which they are ill-equipped or unprepared' (Kemp, 1999, no page). Despite this initiative, many young people still leave school before completing secondary school. For some young people, work and financial gain is more attractive, but for many students, school simply does not meet their needs or situation. More disconcerting is the notion that many students are disconnected from the school community during or by the middle years of schooling as described by Pendergast (2005, p. 5).

Unfortunately, as a consequence of the emphasis placed on students' reading, mathematics and science scores, student wellbeing and acquisition of social competence are often relegated to a lower educational priority. This priority of academic achievement could explain the current poor state of wellbeing and emotional health of the Australian students surveyed by Bernard et al. (2007). These authors report that two-in-ten students

feel hopeless and depressed for a week and stop their regular activities, four-in-ten students have difficulty calming down (resilience) and two-thirds of students are not doing as well in their school work as they could (Bernard et al., 2007, p. 5). Social competence is a key attribute in young people that fosters wellbeing and interpersonal relationships (Prior et al., 2000), and promoting this competence needs to be a priority in schools.

Teacher–student Relationships

According to the LSAY, conducted by the NCVER (2010), the most important factors contributing to student connectedness with school are teacher–student relations and participation in school-based activities such as sport, music, debating and drama. A longitudinal study by Mouton (1991) found that students who were at high risk of school failure, because of negative life factors, but who were successful in school, credited their success to their relationships with teachers and other school staff, and peers. According to Mouton and Hawkins (1996) ‘many researchers identified attachment to school as contributing to student self-esteem, motivation, effort, behaviour and academic achievement’ (p. 297). These authors also report, as did the LSAY, that there is a link between school involvement and school attachment.

Such research attests to the importance of quality relationships in schools, and pedagogies that promote children’s sense of belonging and connectedness. Teachers, and more specifically, their classroom practices are central to creating such a sense. Noddings (2003, p. 249) suggests that good teachers are aware of the profound lifetime effects that their teaching practice can have on the students that they teach. Students’ perceptions of the level of teacher support and mutual respect were identified by Ryan and Patrick (2001) as being directly related to positive changes in the students’ motivation and engagement.

Schools are incredibly important centres for social interaction; for some children and young people, school is the only formal institution they attend. Research literature emphasises that what is important in schools is what is happening in the classrooms. In a synthesis of over 500,000 studies of the sources of variance on student achievement, Hattie (2003) attests to the pivotal influence and importance of the teacher within the educational system. By suggesting that the teacher in the classroom can make the greatest

difference, Hattie (2003) reports that ‘we need to ensure that this greatest influence [the teacher] is optimised to have powerful and sensationally positive effects on the learner’ (p. 3).

This research has investigated the nature of the relationships between students and teachers. The theme of this dissertation is embodied in the view of Fenstermacher (2001) who suggests that ‘the manner of a teacher takes on particular importance, insofar as it serves as a model for the students’ (p. 649). In seeking to discover whether students ‘see’ the teacher modelling social skills and therefore, learn from teacher classroom practices, I asked the students interviewed whether they thought they could be taught by robots. This question reflected an earlier question to the students about the importance of *what* they are taught as opposed to *how* they are taught. This constitutes the critical thinking behind Hansen’s (2001) ‘*manner* and *method*’ conjunction or the *intellectual* (academic) and *social* dichotomy in the goals of education. The students in this study were asked if they could distinguish these elements in their ‘curriculum’:

Interviewer: Now here’s the important question—one of my important questions because they’re all important: is it what you learn or how you learn that’s important?

Male: How you learn.

Female: How you learn, because I’m not a very—I have to be hands-on. I can only learn if I’m hands-on stuff, so I can’t really learn off the board. Say if a teacher’s trying to teach me off the board, I’ll just go, I don’t get it. I don’t understand it on the board. (HC11)

Interviewer: What’s the difference?

Female: Because what you learn is—like you’re learning Italian or maths—but how you learn is how you want to learn, how you can get it; because if you don’t get maths, then you do it your way; so, that’s how you get it, how you do it. (HC13)

The students interviewed appeared to distinguish between curriculum content and its delivery style and method by their teachers (pedagogy). The students also made mention of having different learning styles, although this was not always accommodated by their

teachers in lessons. Reflecting on the concept of *learning*, Noddings (2003) suggests that a meaningful approach would be to study what the best teachers do to personalise learning: ‘what form or level of learning is called for *this* topic, for *this* student, in *this* situation?’ (p. 244).

Interviewer: So do you think how you learn is being acknowledged by your teachers?

Female 1: No.

Interviewer: Your learning style?

Female 2: No, not really. (HC11)

Students were also able to expand their ideas on why they would not like to be taught by robots.

Interviewer: Could you be taught by robots?

Female 1: What do you mean?

Interviewer: Do you want the human element in a teacher ...

Female 2: Yeah, I reckon you do.

Interviewer: ... or do you think you could just be—if it’s all about knowledge, you could just sit on your laptop all day, couldn’t you and learn?

Female 2: If there was a robot going around, it wouldn’t be as good as having a human actually coming up to you and teaching you.

Interviewer: So what’s the human touch that you want?

Female 1: Interaction.

Female 2: Taking notice, that if you don’t understand something, they can actually go over it again with you. (HC11)

As mentioned earlier, the work of Bernard et al. (2007) into the mental health and wellbeing of Australian students, found two-thirds of the students they surveyed were not doing as well in their school work as they could. With this statistic in mind, and with the

aim to improve student wellbeing, it appears crucial that teachers *interact* with students in class and are not robots who simply spout forth information. Teacher–student relationships in classrooms require feedback about whether students understand the work presented, as well as how they are coping with the work and indeed the classroom environment. As Hoban (2010) states:

Teachers get feedback all the time in various ways, such as how students answer questions in class, what they write in their books, their motivation to learn and answers in tests. But this feedback is generally about *what* is being taught in terms of whether or not students understand the content of their instruction. Rarely is feedback about *how* the students are learning. (p. 143)

In analysing the need for feedback, the Victorian schools' *Student Attitudes to School Survey* (in which students are asked to fill in a questionnaire about their feelings and sense of belonging to their school) (DEECD, 2009b) should be considered. This survey is a questionnaire and students are rarely interviewed personally. This survey is given to all students around Victoria regardless of their level of English-language comprehension. Students in the interviews disclosed to me that they did not complete the survey honestly. It is the method of data collection, rather than the intent, that I question because thoughtful and honest student feedback, via direct conversations, needs to be prioritised, as students are the major priority in educational communities, and all efforts in schools should be made to improve their learning outcomes, in all curriculum domains.

Te Riele (2006a) has commented that the most important school-based risk factor of disadvantaging youth educational outcomes is profoundly negative teacher–student relationships. Te Riele (2006b) comments on students marginalised by their educational experiences as not having 'their needs met by schools, in terms of relationships with teachers or peers, teaching style, curriculum, or school culture and structure' (p. 141). Hattie (2003) maintains that the most important variable affecting students' experiences and outcomes at school is the teacher. Research carried out by Martin et al. (2007) demonstrates that teacher–student relationships, together with parent–child relationships are significantly associated with school achievement, motivation and general self-esteem, with teacher effects being stronger in the academic domain. Ryan and Patrick (2001) found that students' perceptions of teacher support and mutual respect were related to positive changes in their motivation and engagement. The relationships that teachers create with students are important and can have profound and lasting effects on the students. Barber (2002) claims that 'few studies have analysed the bonds between the secondary teacher and his/her students' (p. 383). As Main and Bryer (2007) note, 'there is

little published evidence of either training or research on relationships in middle schools in Australia' (p. 100). The notion of teacher–student relationships and the classroom and school climates that they create will be explored in Chapters Ten and Eleven of this thesis. Teaching is a caring profession. As Williams (1998) emotively states:

Surely, nurturing children as they progress through their fragile formative years, teaching them the wisdom they need to get through life, and helping them to grow, be healthy, and happy adults must be one of the most important tasks any of us could face? (p. 39)

Discussing teaching as a moral practice, Pring (2001) examines teaching as a narrative with two levels: the 'impersonal' and the 'personal'. In the impersonal narrative, subject matter is discussed and learnt as examined, criticised and developed ideas, but as Pring (2001) states:

[There is the] 'personal' level at which young people try to make sense of the world and the relationships around them and at which they find, or do not find, valuable forms of life to which they can give allegiance. This personal narrative is where young people seek to understand who and what they are, partly, of course, in relation to other young people and to the wider society. (p. 110)

In thinking about the dimensions and quality of the teacher–student relationship, it is critical to listen to the perceptions of the student, which is the objective of this research. The students I interviewed agreed with the research findings of Noddings (2003) that 'it matters to students whether or not they like and are liked by their teachers' (p. 244). This is clear in the comment of one student:

Female 1: It's obvious because if they like you, they're more likely to talk to you, like, if they see you wandering around or anything. But teachers that don't like you, you can usually tell, they never talk to you and they're always angry with you and mean. (WH8)

Female 2: You know, I hate teachers because I had detention, right, and I could hear the teachers talking about year seven picking on little kids, and I could hear them talking about how stupid they are, how they don't have friends and stuff. (WH8)

Teacher Qualities

What are the qualities of the teachers that students like and think are good teachers? This has been the subject of much research and debate by government policy makers and educational leaders. Outcomes based curriculum and standardised testing in Australia,

together with the publication of statistics of 'school rank' place pressure on schools to be in competition both nationally and internationally. For example, 'performance pay' for teachers is based around the language and practices of the business world as expressed by Pring (2001):

Once the teacher 'delivers' someone else's curriculum with its precisely defined 'product', there is little room for that *transaction* in which the teacher, rooted in a particular cultural tradition, responds to the needs of the learner. When the learner becomes a 'client' or 'customer', lost is the traditional apprenticeship in which students are initiated into the community of learners. When the 'product' is the measureable 'targets' on which 'performance' is 'audited', then little significance is attached to the 'struggle to make sense' which characterises the learning of what is valuable. (p. 108)

The debate surrounding performance pay has angered many educators, as it is seen to assess and evaluate educational practice as an exercise that is results (output) driven, focusing on the destination rather than the 'journey' of education. For students in classrooms, the teachers' manners and day-to-day performance has the power to engage and motivate or disengage and disenchant. In research examining declining rates of school achievement and retention of Australian boys in years nine to eleven, Slade and Trent (2000) found the general view of the boys was that the adult world was 'not listening' and 'not really interested'. The students in this study stated many of the common characteristics of what they believed were 'good teachers' as follows:

Interviewer: Why do you relate to [some teachers] better?

Female 2: Because they're funny and awesome.

Female 1: And they understand kids and listen to their opinions.

Interviewer: So, are they someone you could tell things to?

Female 2: Yeah.

Female 1: Yeah. (WH8)

Male 1: Them being fun, funny, nice and listen to you.

Male 2: They are really nice. They understand you. They don't just yell at you straight away, they listen first. (WH11)

Female2: Because she's really nice. I don't know. She just lets us—the last fifteen minutes she lets us play games. Then everyone likes her because of that and

because she's nice. I like her accent. I always talk to her about problems and she listens and she tells me stuff. (HC13)

Female 1: I like Miss D because she's just nice all the time. Well, actually not all the time but she understands, yeah.

Female 2: Yeah. If you do something wrong, she'll have a go at you but she doesn't yell at you for stupid things. She understands if you did something wrong by accident. In other classes, they'd be down on you straight away but she doesn't.

Female 1: Miss D, she talks about her family. We were talking about me before because I play the clarinet and she said, that's nice but I'm not going to see you there because I have to help M with her dancing and all that, so she's—I don't know. I don't know; she explains a lot.

Female 2: She's good to talk with. You can talk to her about anything and she can have a laugh with you. (HC10)

Interviewer: So do teachers talk to you in class?

Female 1: Miss D does.

Female 2: Yeah.

Female 1: Not really any other teacher.

Interviewer: So is this an attempt to get to know you? What is Miss D talking about?

Female 1: The weekend. She talks about everything.

Interviewer: Do you think teachers should do that?

Female 1: Yeah.

Female2: Mmm.

Interviewer: Do you think it's part of getting to know their students?

Female 1: Yeah. I told her I wanted a dog for my birthday, and she's like, oh, what breed and stuff, where are you going to get it from?

Female 2: I find that you should be able to talk to your teachers about what you've done and ...

Female 1: What you're going to do on the weekend or what you're going to do over Christmas, or something. (HC11)

Interviewer: So what do you think should—what should be the rules for teachers?

Female 1: Be nice to kids, don't yell at them.

Female 2: Don't say shut up.

Female 1: Listen to their opinions and make work funner [sic]. (WH8)

Interviewer: But would you say Mr N and Ms C talk to you more in class?

Male: Yeah.

Interviewer: What do they talk about?

Male: About our learning, make stories, made up stories, he's funny.

Interviewer: Mr N's stories?

Male: Yeah.

Interviewer: I've heard of his stories. What are they about?

Male: [Unclear] yesterday in science he told us a lot of stories about, like other countries, what happens, why the tiger is striped and other stuff. (WH9)

The notion of a 'good' teacher in the opinions of these students is one who listens, has a sense of humour, a teacher who takes an interest in them, initiates conversations and tries to make the work fun, often by playing games. Conversations and the sharing of information is something that the students also reported as appreciating. Once a rapport was established, students reported that they often reciprocated by sharing information as well. Story telling was particularly well liked by students as evidenced by the following excerpt from a teacher:

Interviewer: How did you—when you first met them [the students] is there a process you go through to get to know them or introduce yourself to them?

Mr N (teacher): Well with me because I have an overseas background and I know I speak with an accent, I speak a lot—I talk a lot to get them to understand what I’m saying first. Then because I have a lot, I tend to bring in a lot of stories and they like that because they find the relevance in what we’re doing by the stories that we share. So that’s the first thing I do.

Then I allow them to ask me questions as well, and sometimes the question is still totally irrelevant and I tell them that we can do that later but stick to the point. So, they know that whatever they’re doing it’s got to be relevant to what we’re doing at the time. There are other aspects of it but we can save that for a lunch time to come back and ask and they’ve got to learn that.

Interviewer: Do you find that many take that opportunity to talk to you?

Mr N: They don’t always come back but they might ask the question next period.

But they don’t forget. Sometimes they only remember the stories but to me that’s a good start. So, they actually remember what happened the previous lesson and then we build on that skill and the next time they might remember the more important bits and that sort of thing.

Interviewer: Yes. So, the stories are stories from your family or stories from family or stories regarding the subject?

Mr N: No, no, no. Just anything which I can think of that related to the situation at the time to sort of stress the point. To give them another way to understand what it’s all about. Sometimes I make them up too when I can’t think of any story. Then they can usually tell when I make them up. Then now because this is term three it comes to a point where they say ‘you’re making it up again aren’t you’—they can tell. But they know why I’m doing it.

Barber (2002) states that trust ‘is required in others to offer a story—there is an assumption of a common ground of understanding, that one’s story will be heard in good faith’ (p. 385). These shared experiences in classrooms can lead to a sense of belonging on the part of both student and teacher. The notion of the classroom environment and

culture created by the teacher has been discussed in the preceding chapters of this thesis, but the current question of whether students could be taught by robots would be ‘no’ in the opinions of the students who participated in this research. These students expressed that they wanted human interaction with their teachers, and articulated the difference in characteristics between teachers they like and those that they do not like. They perceive good teachers to be the ones that listen to them and share information and stories. The students seem to know intuitively that while content is important, it is the manner in which it is conveyed that provides them with ‘life lessons’. Additionally, it is important to young people that they are liked by their teachers. Zins and Elias (2006, p.233) attest that good schools, who prepare students to ‘pass the tests of life’, integrate instruction in academic and social–emotional learning in order to maximise ‘students’ potential to succeed in school and throughout their lives’. Surely students would not be able to achieve these educational goals by sitting in front of computers, completing on-demand tests and being taught by robots.

Conclusion

Existing research highlights the need for school connectedness and a sense of belonging for student wellbeing and engagement with school. Quality relationships with teachers are a significant factor in students feeling supported and connected to their learning environment. This study offers a new model of understanding young people’s sense of belonging to school, a model created from the perspectives of the students themselves.

This discussion contained in this chapter demonstrates that students are seeking connections with their teachers and enjoy having positive relationships with them. Students are able to articulate specifically the pedagogical practices by which they assess a teacher as ‘good’ or ‘nice’. The model of a good teacher, from a student perspective, is one who listens to students, has a sense of humour, takes an interest in the young people, initiates conversations, and attempts to make learning fun.

Having discussed the nature of the types of interactions with teachers that students would like, the next chapter continues the exploration of the phenomenon of teacher–student relationships. In the following chapter, the discussion focuses on the perceptions of the students of the pedagogies of their primary and secondary-school teachers, and their views of the nature of their relationships with teachers in different educational sectors.

Chapter Eleven: I Like Her—She's Nice!

The direction in which education starts a man, will determine his future life.

Plato (429–347BCE)

Introduction: Teacher–student Relationships in Primary School and Secondary School

There are notable differences between primary and secondary schools, including the age of the students, class organisation, curriculum and educational purpose. In primary school, most subjects are taught by one teacher and the same group of students go to specialist teachers for subjects such as art, music and physical education at certain times during the week. Thus, during the course of a school year, a class of primary-school students will spend most of their time at school with one teacher. In secondary school, there are increasingly more subjects from which to choose as students progress from junior to senior secondary school, and students are grouped with different individuals in classes taught by specialist teachers. There is an initiative in middle-years education (years five to eight) to expose students to a small group of teachers as a means of developing teacher–student relationships. This is described in the MYSA (2008) position paper *Middle schooling: People, practices and places* as an ‘emphasis on strong teacher–student relationships through extended contact with a small number of teachers and a consistent student cohort’ (p. 1). Consistent with this thinking has been the use of a core group of teachers in some schools to provide instruction in multiple subjects with the same groups of students. For example, year-seven students may have the same teacher for mathematics and science, and this teacher may also be their pastoral-care teacher. Some of the students interviewed in this study spoke of having more teachers in high school as an advantage over primary school:

Interviewer: Is high school better than primary school?

Female 2: In some ways. I like how we get to go to other classes ... I like to encounter more teachers—different teachers every day. (HC10)

Female 1: [High school] because it's different. You get to do different subjects and different teachers. In primary school you just have the same teacher. (HC13)

One rather insightful statement came from students who made the comment that having one teacher the whole time, as in primary school, was better. When asked whether being taught by a small cohort of high-school teachers helped build better relationships, they responded as follows:

Interviewer: Are you closer to them [the teachers that you have for lots of classes]?

Male 1: No.

Interviewer: The ones that you spend more time with? So it's not related to how much time you spend with them, it's actually related to how they treat you?

Female 1: Yes.

Female 2: Yeah. (WH11)

In Australia, the traditional division of school institutions into primary and secondary schools is becoming less common. The ACARA (2013b) My School website states that in Australia, there are three general school types: primary schools, secondary schools, and combined schools (offering both primary and secondary schooling). However, the students interviewed in this study have all attended primary schools catering for prep to year six and are now attending secondary colleges that serve students in years seven to year twelve. As previously mentioned, year-seven students were specifically selected for this research because they have the most recent memories of teacher pedagogy in primary school. The discussion in this chapter aims to compare the students' impressions of the modelling of social skills between primary and secondary-school teachers.

Primary and secondary-school teachers in Australia are trained differently, and teacher employment sites such as Recruitment Online reflect this. Primary-school teacher positions are advertised as 'Primary Generalists' while secondary-school teaching positions are advertised by subject, for example, mathematics, physical education or combinations of 'methods' (e.g. English/humanities). While students in primary school may have access to specialist teachers, such as art or science teachers, the majority of subjects are taught by their classroom teacher. Primary students will learn the basics of writing, grammar, mathematics, geography and history as the foundation of their education. Secondary-school teachers build on these foundations in specialist classes,

preparing the students for further education and/or employment. The purpose of the two types of schools is to educate students, but there is one important difference. The notion that primary schools, specifically the teachers, seek to help students learn social skills such as making friends, getting along with others, and managing their emotions was tested in this study by asking the students of their experiences in primary schools. In an article about student classroom misbehaviour, Ferrari (2012) reports that La Trobe University education professor Ramon Lewis believes that primary schools have always viewed part of their job as teaching social skills but secondary schools do not. Ferrari (2012) quotes Lewis as saying ‘secondary teachers see themselves as teaching subjects, they don’t see themselves as developing students. What we’re talking about here is really another part of the curriculum’ (p. 15).

Explicitly Teaching Social Skills

The thirteen secondary-school teachers interviewed in this research were asked if they explicitly taught social skills. Of these thirteen teachers, only three said that they did not explicitly teach social skills. One of the three teachers who reported that they did not explicitly teach social skills said the following:

Interviewer: Do you explicitly teach social skills to your classes?

Mr N: Not really explicit.

Interviewer: Well there are social skills programmes that you can purchase and they give formal instruction.

Mr N: No, I don’t, that’s not my job. I’m just the subject teacher.

The other teachers spoke of including social-skills instruction within the curriculum. Within the views that they expressed, there was something of a spectrum of how this is managed within the classroom. At one end of the spectrum, there are the teachers who say ‘we don’t use a program. I think it’s probably just how we want our classrooms to run and what we expect of them and what they expect of us as well’ (Ms M) or ‘basic manners’ (Ms B). On the other end of the spectrum are teachers who use programmes with which they have had some experience:

Interviewer: Do you explicitly teach social skills in your classes and if so, is there a package on what ...

Ms C: You can. A year ago, I taught a subject called peer support, which was fantastic; it was so much fun. We did a lot of games relating to body language and how we talk to people and all those sort of things and how to deal with people we don't know or may look different to us, which was fantastic; it was a great course. I can't remember who it was originally run by. You used to go out and do PD on it and then come back and teach it. I think the majority of the social skills that you actually teach is a lot more organic.

I will stop a class and talk about body language or smiling; how can you tell the different kinds of smiles, how do you know when somebody's really smiling and when they're pretending, what is it about somebody's face when you can tell that it's not a very nice smile and you want to get the hell out of there; those sort of things. As I say, I think that's more of an organic sort of thing that comes up when it needs to be.

Interviewer: [When] something's happened in the class?

Ms C: Yeah, or there's a question raised or maybe something's popped up in a text that you're reading and you want to talk about it.

Interviewer: Are there lots of opportunities for that sort of [thing]?

Ms C: It depends how you run your class. I think, depending on your cohort, there's going to be some classes that are going to need a lot more of that for whatever reason; they've got stunted social skills. Again, I think you can teach that within the curriculum that you're teaching with whatever the prescribed curriculum is. I think you can actually teach a lot of that. Yeah, I think that's wonderful. I think that one of the good things is the fact of where you've got such small class sizes.

When it's working, it's working unbelievably well in that those sort of things you can go into a bit more, rather just having to push through the curriculum because you've got to get something done. You can have that scope for a bit more depth.

Another teacher spoke of using a number of social-skills activities, including ‘Circle Time’ or physical activities half way through class sessions to get the students moving about. Three teachers mentioned that they teach social skills only at the junior level (years seven, eight or nine) or exclusively to year-seven students. One teacher who works at Waratah High spoke of a programme that she and two others were writing for the year-seven students that they team teach. One member of the team had used the programme previously, and they were tailoring it at the time that I interviewed this teacher. One teacher stated:

Ms F: So, that was what we started—but I suppose we’re starting to target more individual students now that the overall approach [of teaching social-skills] didn’t work for.

This comment about targeting social-skills instruction represents another dimension in social-skills education, which is social-skills training being provided as an intervention strategy for students seen to have deficit. None of the other teachers interviewed in this study expressed having had experience or knowledge of the use of social-skills programmes for targeted students (i.e. working with individual or small groups of students).

Social-skills intervention programmes are often operated in alternative or special educational settings and are frequently targeted to students with mental-health issues, disabilities, or anger-management issues and other behaviours of concern. This could be viewed as a ‘deficit’ model of action. Discussing strategies used to improve educational outcomes for students with mental-health issues Elias et al. (2003) emphasise the need for prevention and intervention. Whole-school initiatives provide for early intervention, but as Dwyer and Osher (2000) stress, there is the importance of developing a caring school environment in which to embed these initiatives to achieve academic and emotional wellness in students. Further, authors such as Zins and Elias (2006) and Schoenfeld et al. (2008) believe that social-skills instruction can, and should, be provided in daily academic instruction. Roeser et al. (2000) maintain that schools are ‘an important if not central arena for health promotion [and] primary prevention ... in addition to the education of students’ (p. 467).

Korinek and Popp (1997) suggest that mainstream teachers are reluctant to take time from the academic curriculum to teach social skills but note that when students are taught

social skills as a separate subject, they have difficulties applying the skills. These authors advocate incorporating social and academic learning in mainstream classes to meet the needs of all students, including those at risk of school disengagement. Given that for most young people, the majority of their experiences of socialisation occur at school, Gresham et al. (2001) advocate learning social skills in the context in which students need to apply them— in school.

Most of the teachers interviewed responded to the question of whether they explicitly taught social skills by suggesting that if they see a need they respond to the best of their ability (i.e. teaching social skills as a target or intervention strategy). This is demonstrated in the interview excerpt below:

Interviewer: Do you explicitly teach social skills in your classes?

Mr O: With my year sevens I've kind of had to. I'm their home-group teacher as well so it's—I haven't done any specific lessons in home group, but I've kind of tried to get the class to work together on their maths work. I've tried different ways to do it and it's really hit and miss.

Interviewer: Trial and error.

Mr O: I haven't actually found a solid way to get the kids to work well together with different people that they don't normally socialise with. But I've had to actually talk to the whole class about respecting each other and letting each other have the chance to speak, and helping each other and not throwing stuff at other people.

Some teachers expressed a reliance on the school rules to provide the foundation for social-skills instruction. In Chapter Eight, the discussion centred on school culture as a setting for social-skills acquisition. Students spoke about their preferences for engaging with teachers who recognised and rewarded good behaviour. Despite teachers reporting that whole-school approaches were not implemented in their schools, the following teacher comments suggest that for some secondary-school teachers, the classroom and school rules, which themselves may be different, suffice as social-skills behaviour guides. Such an approach to behaviour management is at odds with research that emphasises the importance of consistent whole-school policies (Lewis, 2000).

Interviewer: So, do you explicitly teach social skills in your classes?

Ms J: Just classroom rules, and referring back to them when things don't go right. So, if students don't respect each other or the teacher, or they're not punctual, I look back to the school rules ... I think that's the explicit side of it.

Ms O: Social skills, I would have—I suppose explicit teaching of [it] is that—you've got a group presenting something. The rest of you need to sit down, shut up and listen and pay respect, please. You're constantly battling that.

The secondary-school teachers whose comments are included in this research have expressed a wide variety of perspectives of what constitutes explicit social-skills instruction—a spectrum of methods. At one end of the spectrum, there are teachers using some form of formal instruction, modelled on published programmes (e.g. Tribes and Peer Support). At the other end are teachers who rely on school expectations (rules) to guide social-skills knowledge.

Student Observations on the Differences between Primary-school and Secondary-school Teachers

The question this chapter seeks to answer is what the students themselves observe as the differences between primary and secondary-school teachers in terms of social-skills instruction, specifically the social skills of interpersonal relationships, assertion, and emotional control that are the focus of this research. Lewis (2001) found that there are differences in disciplinary strategies between primary and secondary-school teachers. In Lewis' (2001) research, responses from student questionnaires indicated that secondary-school teachers used less of the following techniques: perceived recognition and reward for good behaviour, student involvement, non-directive hints and discussion with students aimed at exploring their reasons for behaving inappropriately and negotiating a win-win solution. Research by Pierce, Cameron, Banko and So (2003) found that reward systems can enhance intrinsic student motivation to meet 'progressively demanding and achievable standards' (p. 577). Student discussion of inappropriate behaviour would seem to be an ideal time to explore social learning and a real opportunity for students to learn strategies for gaining emotional control and improving peer relationships. The work of Slade and Trent (2000) found that in the perceptions of secondary boys, the adult world is 'not listening' and that school expects adult behaviour but does not deliver an 'adult

environment' (p. 214). In research on students' views of teacher–student relationships in primary school, Leitão and Waugh (2007) considered three aspects to be important: the teachers' connectedness with students, availability to students, and communication with students. Sensitivity to individual students' emotional state and/or needs and good listening skills are two mechanisms by which teachers may demonstrate connectedness and communication with students according to these authors. Many of the students interviewed in this study expressed comments that confirm the findings of Lewis (2001) that primary-school teachers are employing student discussion, student involvement and use of incentives as strategies for discipline. Additionally, in referring to the disciplinary strategies that their primary-school teachers used, the students interviewed often referred to the positive relationship that they had with that teacher as a consequence of being involved in discipline decisions. Cattley (2004) reports that Australian and Japanese students perceive teachers to be more supportive in primary school, with a significant decline in the early secondary years. The student participants of this study regularly spoke of the availability of their primary-school teachers and the time that they spent with students to work out problems.

Interviewer: Do you think [your high-school] teachers help you resolve problems with other students or friends?

Female 1: They do in primary school but I haven't really seen it here.

Interviewer: Okay and do they give you strategies to get along with people in school?

Female 1: No.

Female 2: No, not really. (HC7)

Female 1: I was really naughty in primary school and my teacher, she took me into the office and she's like, yeah, I used to smoke when I was in high school, I was like a rat and all this, but it's not good to be like that, and she had a full-on heart-to-heart conversation. (HC10)

Female 2: We had Golden Rules and they were one of them, treat people how you want to be treated or speak to people how you want to be spoken back to.

Interviewer: They haven't talked about that here in high school?

Female 2: Not really. (HC4)

A number of the students mentioned specific strategies that primary-school teachers gave them on anger management. It is noteworthy that Bernard et al. (2007) reported from surveys involving over 10,000 students that ‘one-third of all students say they lose their temper a lot ... [and] four in ten students say they have difficulty calming down (poor resilience)’ (p. 5). Below are student comments about anger-management strategies implemented by teachers in primary school:

Interviewer: Do the year-seven teachers or the primary schools—do they teach you how to get along with people, control your anger and understand your emotions, and express yourself and resolve problems?

Female 1: Yes, in primary school we did. Like, we had [class] meetings ... Like, they would be, like, well, we can help you make friends if you want. Then, if you had, like, anger-management problems, they'd like help you get over it. (HC3)

Interviewer: Do you think they [the teachers] told you how to control your anger in primary school?

Male 1: Kind of.

Female 1: Mine did ... My teacher, Mr B, he just—you had to take deep breaths or go outside and get a drink and if you want to just breathe and then just close your eyes and yes just relax.

Interviewer: Okay so strategies? What about you M?

Male 1: I don't know, like just say, wait outside until they come and then they'd come outside and they'd tell you to go get a drink. Then you'd come back and then you wouldn't do any work for like five or ten minutes until you'd calmed down.

Interviewer: Okay and that was in primary school?

Male 1: Yes. (HC5)

Interviewer: How are primary teachers different to the year-seven teachers in dealing with anger and frustration and showing their emotions?

Female 2: Last year my teacher let us get a drink and eat and take a walk around the oval ... we'd take a walk with a friend. He'd let us pick a friend. I used to pick my friend A and we'd walk around and she'd help me calm down. The teacher, when we'd come back, he'd said are you feeling all right? I said yeah. If I'm not feeling all right, he lets me have a drink and just calm down and not do any work until I'm [calm]. (HC2)

This same student then goes on to talk about the difference in secondary-school teacher strategies for such issues:

Interviewer: That's different this year because ...

Female 2: They still make us do—one teacher—I can't remember who—I think B was really mad and she was like, well can you calm down and do your work?

Female 1: Not calm down, take a break, just breathe. Just calm down and do your work.

Interviewer: It's a bit more abrupt is it

Female 2: Yeah.

Interviewer: ... in secondary school?

Female 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you think so too, M? Was it different in primary school to high school?

Male 1: Well, it's different because if you like primary school and you're used to an old school to go to—but, when you start a new school, you make new friends with new teachers and you realise the teachers are more mean and aggressive. If you're angry or something, they'll just put you outside for about two minutes. They'll walk out and they'll talk to you and then they'll send you back inside. So, that would be like warning one. If you do it again, you'll be like a lunch-time detention. Then, if you do it again, it'd be an after school. (HC2)

The students interviewed recalled specific efforts and opportunities made by their primary-school teachers in which there were attempts to resolve peer conflicts and

strategies suggested to assist students to calm down when angry or to control their anger. Young people who were participants in the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia (2010) report suggest that education could be improved by ‘having lessons about life ... rather than just teaching facts’ (p. 57). While students in this research spoke of being too ‘old’ for specific activities such as Circle Time, they also said that they would appreciate an opportunity to express themselves and talk about issues:

Interviewer: Do you think you could do Circle Time in high school?

Female 1: No ... It's too big and you're not a little kid anymore. You're like ...

Female 2: It feels like you're a little blip in high school. (HC10)

Interviewer: Is that something that you did in primary school, Circle Time?

Male 1: Yeah, Circle Time like, nearly every day.

Interviewer: Was that sort of like a check in to see how you were, how you were feeling?

Male 1: Yeah.

Male 2: Our teacher put cards in the middle and you have to pick two cards and you have to say why did you pick them two.

Interviewer: The Strength Cards, like I'm brave or I'm funny, I'm a good friend, that sort of thing? Is that the sort of stuff you'd like to be doing now?

Male 1: Yes, especially in the morning.

Male 2: Not all the time, just ...

Interviewer: Just sometimes?

Male 2: Yeah. Like, once a week.

Interviewer: Once a week to check in and see how you're feeling?

Male 2: Yeah, once a week.

Interviewer: Do you have times when you would just like to tell the teachers how you feel?

Male 1: Never.

Male 2: Sometimes when you tell the teachers, they don't care. (WH9)

Interviewer: So, how do people learn to control their anger and not speak to people like that [angrily]?

Female 2: Maybe if they go into a quiet room like this and maybe someone talks to them and tells them to express everything. It wouldn't be recorded. A nice quiet room like this and then the person probably sitting where M is and then the person that needs to help control their anger and they talk about his feelings—her or his feelings—and try to make it all better. They keep on coming up—maybe two or one times an week. I reckon that would help.

Interviewer: Do you think you need to talk to someone at some stage during the week to remain calm?

Female 2: Sometimes. (HC2)

Lewis (2001) asserts that secondary-school teachers, in comparison to their primary-school counterparts, employ less student involvement and discussion on their inappropriate behaviours. The distinctions perceived by students between their primary and secondary-school teachers' resolution of student conflict is highlighted in the following excerpt:

Interviewer: Did you like your teachers there [in primary school]?

Male 1: Yeah.

Male 2: If we had a fight we didn't get suspensions or detentions, we didn't have detentions.

Female 1: They just gave us lunch times.

Interviewer: But if you have fights with people it's because you're not getting along with them. So how do the primary teachers sort out things like that?

Female 2: They tell the principal—no, the vice principal or they tell us to go outside and we have to make up before we get in.

Interviewer: Okay. So is that different to high school?

Female 2: Yes.

Interviewer: What happens in high school?

Female 2: They just suspend you, give you a detention.

Interviewer: So if you've had a suspension and a detention is there any kind of restorative thing afterwards to help you make it up?

Female 2: No.

Male 1: No.

Male 2: No difference, you stay home. You do nothing.

Interviewer: Okay. So let me see if I've understood that. So in primary school when you had fights with people they helped you make up?

Female 2: Yeah.

Male 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: With the person?

Female 2: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yes, you're saying yes. But in high school if you have fight with someone, you get a suspension or a detention?

Female 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: Then they don't help you make it up with the person?

Male 1: No.

Female 1: No.

Male 2: No, not at all.

Interviewer: Do you think they should?

Female 2: No. Yes.

Male 1: Yes.

Male 2: Yes.

Female 1: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think teachers can help you to make it up with friends?

Male 1: Yeah, they could.

Female 1: Maybe—most teachers can ...

Male 1: ... but they don't want to. (WH2)

Recognition and Reward

The Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia (2010) report *Children and young people's views on wellbeing* suggests that 'being acknowledged or made to feel special when you have done something well was said by focus group participants to be really important to them' (p. 61). In this research, several of the students mentioned the use of incentives by their primary-school teachers, which was again consistent with the work of Lewis (2001), who found that secondary-school teachers use less perceived recognition and reward for good behaviour as a discipline technique compared to their primary school colleagues.

Interviewer: Are the teachers very different from primary school compared to high school?

Female 1: Yeah, kind of. My teacher last year would give us raffle tickets and at the end of every week we'd have just, you know raffle draws ...

Interviewer: Oh, okay, so were the prizes in year six for behaving?

Female 1: Yeah. (HC1)

Interviewer: Has there been a difference in how your year-seven teachers treat you compared to your primary teachers?

Female 1: Yes.

Female 2: Yes.

Interviewer: So, I think that you've indicated that you prefer the treatment from the primary schools?

Female 2: Yes. Like, last year, my teacher Mr G, like, every hard session, like maths, he'd take us outside for, like, ten minutes to play a game. Or, he'd like—while we were reading, like, I don't know, but for me, music helps me concentrate a bit more.

Female 1: He'd play the guitar.

Female 2: He played the guitar and sing to you, and he was a pretty good singer, so it was pretty good. But here, it's just like, horrible.

Female 1: Education is everything.

Female 2: It actually feels, like in primary school, it's like heaven. (HC3)

Female: Okay, in our primary school, when we finished our maths, they just said we can have free time, but now, they just give us more. (HC2)

The students in this study demonstrated having positive responses to teachers who made time for students, and who demonstrated an interest in them. Young people want to be able to trust teachers to be able to have 'someone at school to talk to' (Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia, 2010, p. 68). Students in this study responded favourably to teachers, both primary and secondary, who listened to their version of events and who attempted to assist them to solve problems. The Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia (2010) reports that being 'listened to and having their ideas taken seriously made young people feel that they were respected' (p. 62). This idea can be summarised in the following student's words:

Interviewer: Give me a sentence that describes your relationship with the teachers here at high school.

Female 1: I behave for some teachers because they're nice and I don't behave for other teachers because they're mean and don't give you any chances. I figure I'm going to get in trouble if I do the slightest thing wrong, so what's the point? But I behave for strict teachers that actually at least give you a chance. (HC12)

Zins and Elias (2006) assert that ‘competences are taught most effectively within caring and well-managed learning environments’ (p. 238). Well-managed learning environments are those in which there exist negotiation and students’ voices are heard. Lewis (2001) maintains that negotiation of consequences for inappropriate student behaviour, and discussion about student management is the discipline choice of primary-school teachers, and the students interviewed in this study express positive memories of primary-school experiences of management of their behaviours and issues. In this study, secondary-school teachers whom the students viewed as managing behaviour consistently and with ‘caring’ strategies were deemed by the students to be teachers with whom they could relate and who were ‘nice’ teachers. Ideally, all teachers should aim to have positive relationships with their students. Once a positive relationship is established, students benefit greatly from *proactive* social-skills instruction where the direction of class activities might be determined by the focus of the class discussions and the needs of the students. In fact, the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia (2010) reports that the perception of some young people is that there are many ‘bad kids’ who do not respect teachers and this ‘was said because they had never been encouraged to develop social skills or had limited exposure to different experiences’ (p. 62). It would be encouraging if the following students’ remarks were about high school as well as primary school:

Interviewer: When do you think you get social skills and how do you get social skills?

Female 1: Well it depends. Social skills—you can try and learn from someone or try and watch something on the computer or let mum and dad tell you or you can just learn from other people. If you’re actually talking and you’re in a group, you hear what they’re saying and try and learn that.

Interviewer: Have you done that yourself?

Female 1: Yes, last year—during primary school. (HC2)

Interviewer: [Are schools] just giving kids information about subjects, or are we actually telling you how to become confident, how to get along with people?

Female 3: I reckon we learnt that much and kind of stuff in primary school more than high school. (HC8)

Students speak of wanting opportunities to talk about issues in secondary school. There is clearly a need for this, so perhaps it is a question of how secondary schools achieve this. Certainly, consultation with students is crucial, as is the development of trust and positive teacher–student relationships. While secondary-school teachers do not explicitly teach social skills, there appears to be a need to incorporate such learning into a broader social–emotional curriculum, ‘more learning about human interactions would be helpful and interesting, if it centred on people rather than being a scientific approach’ (Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia, 2010, p. 62). As Cattley (2004) states:

There is no doubt ... that there are important implications for the need to increase both teachers’ awareness of and the amount of emotional support they extend to students especially in the middle years of schooling. (p. 280)

Conclusion

The students in this study speak of learning about social skills in primary school through activities such as Circle Time, Golden Rules and discussions with their teachers. They reported that their teachers in primary school also helped some students with strategies to calm down and control their anger. However, secondary-school teachers, while acknowledging that social competence is an important educational goal, do not explicitly teach social skills. Some of the teachers interviewed spoke of utilising activities with classes when they witnessed conflict or problems between students. That is, secondary-school teachers respond to a ‘deficit’ (or not practiced) social skill which is a *reactive* approach. Only one secondary-school teacher mentions purposefully incorporating social-skills activities in classes—a *proactive* method. During my observations of secondary classes, there were some good examples of social-skills learning in the domains of interpersonal assertion and control of emotions (see Appendix 1 for Teacher Observation Checklist—Social Skills). In many instances, the observations of these social skills were richer in the classes of teachers that the students spoke of as being ‘nice’ and to whom they relate best. Unfortunately, a great deal of this classroom practice is missed by students, who most often mention or remember the specific social-skills instruction sessions or strategies given to them by their primary-school teachers.

This chapter describes student perspectives of the differences in teacher pedagogy between primary and secondary-school teachers, specifically in the personal and social domain of the curriculum. Students in this study confirmed findings in the existing

literature that state that primary-school teachers explicitly teach social skills, while secondary-school teachers do not.

The majority of secondary-school teachers in this research believed themselves to be teaching social skills in their classes. Discussion revealed that a variety of approaches to social-skills instruction was utilised, but such instruction occurred randomly and autonomously in classrooms, and no classroom instruction of students occurred by means of a developmental social–emotional curriculum programme with a whole-school pedagogical approach. Therefore, the conclusion made from the examination of the opinions and perspectives of both students and secondary-teachers, discussed in this chapter, is that secondary-school teachers do not explicitly teach social skills to students.

Students described learning about social skills in primary school, but not in secondary school. Through the opinions of the students interviewed in this study, this chapter supports existing literature that states that adolescents want better social–emotional learning opportunities in schools specifically to gain skills in resolving conflicts with their peers, controlling anger and talking about their emotions. In particular, this chapter contributes significant data about student perspectives regarding specific teacher pedagogy that contributes to positive teacher–student relationships. Such pedagogy includes the acknowledgement of appropriate student behaviour, discussion with students about the reasons for inappropriate behaviour and the subsequent negotiation of consequences for poor behaviour.

Chapter Twelve: Could You Please ...

You teach me, I forget. You show me, I remember. You involve me, I understand.

Edwin O Wilson (1929–)

Introduction: Student Compliance and Teacher Pedagogy

This chapter explores student compliance as part of this research on teachers as role models of social skills. Students' views on the reasons they behave for teachers are of interest to this research because the good behaviour of students reflects the nature of the relationships that students form with teachers. Such views also suggest the teacher pedagogies to which students might respond more favourably and from which learning outcomes might be improved.

Compliance is a social skill. According to Caldarella and Merrell (1997) in their taxonomy of positive behaviours, compliance is one of the five dimensions of positive social behaviours. Research findings indicate that good social-emotional competence not only has a positive effect on academic performance, but also assists physical health, and is essential for lifelong success (Elias et al., 1997; Zins et al., 2004). Social skills include a range of learning-related skills that enable students to study independently, work in groups, build and maintain friendships, and respond appropriately to adult feedback and correction (Gresham et al., 2001).

Elliott and Gresham (1987) proposed three general categories of social-skills definitions. The first is 'peer acceptance', which refers to the social-skills behaviours of children and adolescents who are accepted by peers. This definition has the disadvantage that the specific behaviours that lead to acceptance or rejection are difficult to identify and therefore target in interventions to assist students who appear unpopular. The second is the 'behavioural' definition of social-skills, which refers to social-skills behaviours that are situation specific, and decrease the probability of punishment and increase the likelihood of positive reinforcement. The advantage of this definition is that as a situation-specific behaviour, controlling variables such as antecedents and consequences can be identified and used in intervention programmes for students who need assistance with social skills. However, this approach to defining social skills does not consider whether these behaviours are socially important to the child or adolescent. The final definition is 'social validity'. According to Elliot and Gresham (1987) social validity is

defined by 'behaviours exhibited in specific situations that help in predicting a child's attitude on important social outcomes' (p. 66). Social outcomes that are important for children and adolescents include peer acceptance, popularity and the judgement of behaviour of 'significant others' (i.e. teachers and parents) (Caldarella & Merrell, 1997). The advantage of the social-validity definition is that specific behaviours can be identified and it implies that the social outcomes are important to the young person whose social functioning is being studied.

Consequences of Poor Social Skills in Young People

When young people have deficient social skills they may be rejected by their peers and miss social opportunities in school. School does not provide as rich an experience for students with social-skills difficulties as for those who display adequate social functioning. Walker, Colvin and Ramsey (1995) found that social-skills deficits, particularly those relating to peer and teacher acceptance, are associated with many factors that make young people vulnerable to developing antisocial and violent behaviour. As Noddings (2003) notes about the nature of teacher–student relationships, 'it matters to students whether or not they like and are liked by their teachers' (p. 244).

Teachers are well placed to observe young people's social interactions, and are often asked to make judgements about students' behaviours and skills in social situations. In fact, teachers are a primary source of referral of children to professional staff for targeted intervention (Wight & Chapparo, 2008). Observational assessments of social interactions made by teachers and parents are generally used to provide information regarding child and adolescent behavioural problems. For example, observations can be made about which children are poorly accepted, rejected or unpopular with their peers. Social-skills difficulties can arise for two reasons, these being difficulties in response acquisition or response performance (Bandura, 1977). Response-acquisition deficits may occur in a person who has not learnt the appropriate socially competent response, while response-performance deficits may occur in an individual who fails to display the social behaviours of which he or she is capable. Social-performance deficits can be due to an individual's lack of opportunity to perform the behaviour or may be due to a lack of interest or motivation in displaying appropriate social behaviour. As Caldarella and Merrell (1997) succinctly state, the question is 'do social skill deficits cause one to develop pathological behaviour or does the pathology lead to social skills deficit?' (p. 265). Such a profound

question is not answered in this thesis but its consideration, rather, suggests that deficits in social competence can cause, or be the cause, of significant difficulties in life. It is not the purpose of this study to examine the social competence of the students who participated. However, it could be argued that in giving their consent to be involved in the research, the student participants displayed a degree of self-assuredness and social confidence.

Compliance and Motivation

The notion of compliance is of interest in this research because it refers to pro-social behaviours that can be observed (or in this study, acknowledged to be practiced by the students) and suggest there exists motivation to perform the appropriate behaviours (display compliance). Under Elliott and Gresham's (1987, p.66) definition of social validity, significant others, for example, teachers', judgements of social skills provides the important criteria, or motivation, for social function. Therefore the desire by students to comply with teacher instruction could suggest that they care about the relationship that they have with the teacher. Ryan and Patrick (2001) report that 'students' perceptions of teacher support, and the teacher as promoting interaction and mutual respect were related to positive changes in their motivation and engagement' (p. 437). Work by Eccles et al. (1993) contributes to the literature about the effect of classroom and school characteristics on motivation, especially the importance of positive teacher–student relationships for positive student motivation. These authors also suggest that students who are given opportunities to participate in school and classroom decision making have greater motivation.

Fredricks et al. (2004) define school engagement as being multifaceted and having three domains of behavioural engagement, emotional engagement and cognitive engagement. Fredricks et al.'s (2004) definition of emotional engagement is of particular interest in the investigation of student compliance with teacher instruction because it suggests 'choice' on the part of the students:

Emotional engagement encompasses positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, academics and school and is presumed to create ties to an institution and influence willingness to do the work. (p. 60)

For the students involved in this study, there appears to be a correlation between their behavioural engagement (i.e. doing the work and following the rules) and their emotional

engagement with their teacher. There was a general consensus by the young people interviewed in this study that they behaved for the teachers that they liked as demonstrated by the following excerpt:

Interviewer: Are you better behaved for teachers that you like?

Male 1: Yes

Male 2: Yes. (WH11)

Female 1: Yeah we are. (WH8)

Male 1: Yeah.

Male 2: Yeah. (WH9)

In this research, students' self-assessment of behavioural engagement was connected to their emotional engagement with teachers by asking the young people questions about the characteristics of those teachers for whom they behaved. As Fredricks et al. (2004) report, teacher support has been shown to influence all domains of school engagement: the behavioural, emotional and cognitive. Ryan and Patrick (2001) found that young adolescents' motivation and engagement was related to the classroom social environment:

Perceiving their teacher as supportive was especially important for students' confidence relating to the teacher, self-regulated learning, and disruptive behaviour. When students moved into a middle school classroom with a teacher they perceived as supportive, their efficacy for communicating and getting along with their teacher increased and they engaged in more self-regulated learning. Furthermore, when students believed that their teacher tried to understand them and was available to help, they engaged in less off-task and disruptive behaviour in the classroom. (p. 454)

In this study, the students interviewed indicated that they want to interact with teachers, and have described the 'best teachers' as those who 'understand kids and listen to their opinions'. Further, a 'good teacher' has a sense of humour, takes an interest in their students, initiates conversations and tries to make the work fun. The following comments demonstrate student perceptions of teacher pedagogy and its relationship to student compliance:

Interviewer: Think about the teachers that you do like, what is it about them that you like?

Female 2: Them being fun, nice and listen to you. (WH11)

Interviewer: Are you better behaved with teachers that you like?

Female 2: Mmm, because they respect you and you respect them. (HC10)

Interviewer: Are you better behaved with teachers that you like?

Female 1: Yes.

Interviewer: Does that take an effort?

Female 1: No.

Interviewer: How do you know to be better behaved for the teachers you like?

Female 1: First, I need to get to know them. Sometimes, when I see them, I think I don't like this one. They're going to be mean. I know it. With Mr W I knew and he is.

Interviewer: Now that's interesting because my next question is how long do you think it takes to get to know a teacher? ... Do you reckon you know straight away?

Female 1: Some teachers—like Mr R, I didn't like him at first. But then, when I got to know him and he started teaching me advanced maths, then I kind of liked him, because I like being more challenged. I don't like the easy stuff because I won't concentrate on it because I think it's pointless. He gave me some advanced stuff and ...

Interviewer: You, like, changed your opinion when he seemed to cater for your interests and your—what you're good at?

Female 1: Yeah. (HC12)

These comments demonstrate that compliance as a social skill is fostered in an environment in which engagement is promoted. Conversely, negative student feelings may be barriers to pro-social behaviours such as compliance. Bernard et al. (2007) report that 'teacher actions are important contributors to student social and emotional wellbeing' (p. 7). Elliot and Gresham's (1987) view of self-control social-skills deficits and self-control social-performance deficits suggests that emotional arousal prevents the performance of socially appropriate behaviours. Stress, anxiety and fear are emotions that can cause difficulties in social-skills performance. In a review of school-based prevention

and youth development interventions by Greenberg et al. (2003), the authors (referring to the work of Eccles and Gootman [2002] and Weissberg and Greenberg [1998]) states that ‘interventions are most beneficial when they simultaneously enhance students’ personal and social assets, as well as improve the quality of the environments in which students are educated ‘(p. 467).

Strong emotions such as stress and fear can be barriers to social-skills performance, and by extension, a demonstration of social competence by students (Elliot & Gresham, 1987). Several students who participated in this research had experiences of schooling in other countries before moving to Australia. Some students commented on the use of corporal punishment in their previous schools and the feelings that such actions invoked:

Male 1: I got hit.

Interviewer: At school?

Male 1: In my country ... Pakistan.

Interviewer: Pakistan, oh. Do you think teachers should hit students?

Male 1: No.

Interviewer: Where did you get hit? Did you get hit on the hand?

Male 1: Hand, back, legs, everywhere.

Male 2: That’s stupid, that’s a stupid rule.

Female 2: That’s what happens in Africa too.

Interviewer: Do you think it teaches kids anything?

Male 2: Stupid.

Male 1: No. It makes me scared ...

Female 2: I think it does but it doesn’t.

Interviewer: How do you mean?

Female 2: Like it teaches them not to be rude to the teacher and it keeps them like focused on the work but then, like it teaches them also to be really angry at the teacher and hate her.

Interviewer: Does it make you behave because you think it is a good thing to behave or does it make you behave because if you don't behave you are going to get hit?

Male 1: Yes.

Male 2: Yes, because you're not going to get hit.

Interviewer: So it sort of doesn't teach you; it's what I call policing rather than teaching do you know what I mean?

Male 1: Yes.

Interviewer: Like if someone is going to hit me, I kind of think I'd better not do that. (WH11)

The Learning Environment

The need for a positive and calm learning environment cannot be overstated, particularly for young people who are victims of abuse or trauma. The Child Safety Commissioner's (2007) publication *Calmer Classrooms* was an initiative for creating a supportive school climate and advocated the need for quiet and relaxed teacher voices in classrooms. This demonstrates that the school climate, and more immediately the classroom environment, is extremely crucial to the formation of positive teacher–student relationships, and to the desire and ability of students to demonstrate social skills such as compliance. *Calmer Classrooms* suggests that to create connections and to defuse conflict with young people, who have suffered abuse or trauma, teachers should:

be in control of the relationship without being controlled. The teacher should be the one to set the tone, rhythm and emotional quality. Not being able to control you emotionally will eventually teach the child it is safe to trust you. (p. 18)

The Child and Safety Commissioner (2007) also suggests:

Regular routines in the classroom; warning the children of changes to routine; supporting the child's anxiety when there are transitions and other changes will help to develop internal structure, and will assist in the development of a strong relationship with the teacher. (p.19)

In a study on reducing disruptive behaviours in students with serious emotional disturbance, Musser, Bray, Kehle and Jenson (2001) note the importance of teacher voice, reporting that ‘delivering the request for compliance in a statement form with a firm but quiet tone of voice’ (p. 295) strengthens the effectiveness of the message. These authors also found that positive reinforcement and teacher movement around the classroom also aided compliance by students. Student participants in this study commented on teacher pedagogy and specifically about teachers ‘yelling’:

Interviewer: Here’s a question for you. Do you think—are you better behaved for teachers that you like?

Male 1: Yeah.

Male 2: Yes.

Male 3: For Ms C.

Interviewer: Okay. So is that everybody saying that? M?

Male 4: We we always behave because [we’re] scared.

Interviewer: Hang on. I need to know the difference. Are you behaving because you’re scared of the teacher or are you behaving because ... you don’t like upsetting her or you don’t like hearing her yell?

Male 4: Yell. (WH10)

Further exploring the students’ descriptions and opinions of the teachers with whom they relate positively, the students mentioned the teacher’s use of voice (i.e. not yelling) as one of the characteristics by which a teacher might be judged as ‘nice’. It is important to remember that Elliot and Gresham (1987, p.98) report that stress, fear and anxiety as emotions that may inhibit the acquisition or performance of social skills.

Interviewer: Do you have any specific teachers that you relate to best? Which ones do you like best? Which ones do you get along ...

Female 1: Ms V, Ms M. That’s it.

Interviewer: Why do you relate to these teachers better?

Female 1: Because they're nice.

Interviewer: So define nice for me though?

Female 1: Doesn't yell a lot. (HC12)

Interviewer: Would you like me to be teaching you?

Female 1: Yes please.

Male 1: Yes.

Interviewer: Why's that?

Female 1: Because you're nice.

Interviewer: Thank you very much. But can you be more specific?

Female 1: Because you're not strict. You don't yell and when R's annoying you, you just—you ignore her. (HC13)

Musser et al. (2001) found that positive reinforcement and teacher movement aided compliance by students. Pierce et al. (2003) found that rewards enhance motivation and it has been reported that being acknowledged when having done something well is important to young people (Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia, 2010). Such positive reinforcement, in the form of an incentive for good behaviour is demonstrated in the following student comments:

Interviewer: Does Ms D have to give many detentions?

Female: No.

Male: No.

Female: They're all like—been asked [to behave] because they know they're allowed to play games. If they're good they get to play games at the end. (HC13)

The following comments from two students suggest that their specific misbehaviour and defiance in the situation they describe was a direct response to perceived teacher behaviour.

Female 1: I'm a bit naughty in maths class, like the other day.

[Laughter]

Female 1: He [the teacher] was annoying me.

Female 2: That was funny as.

Female 1: Then I was playing on my phone and I didn't want to get off it, and then he's just like, put it away and I'm like, no. He's like, put it away. I'm like, no. (HC11)

These comments contrast greatly with the following comments in which classroom behaviour that I observed indicated respect and a positive relationship with the teacher. As students' perceptions of teacher support and mutual respect are related to positive changes in their motivation and engagement (Ryan & Patrick, 2001), doing the 'right thing' in class (voluntarily by a student and by their own initiative) would imply that the young person respects the teacher.

Interviewer: Are you better behaved for the teachers that you like?

Female 1: Yes. Ms D.

Interviewer: Is that yes, M?

Male 1: Yes.

Interviewer: So that's true. So you do—I actually did—remember, I think I've talked to you about this before; being [in] Ms V's class—you even took your earphones out and popped them in your pocket and ...

Male 1: Yes.

Interviewer: It was just amazing. I could tell that you really respected her; that you were doing the right thing. (HC13)

Students speak of, and appear capable of 'turning on' and 'turning off' good behaviour. The students interviewed in this study spoke about the function of their behaviour as being an attempt to achieve one of two purposes: to achieve or gain something such as a reward or positive acknowledgement, or to avoid something such as punishment or verbal abuse. While students in this study have indicated that they comply with instructions to avoid being yelled at by their teachers, the majority indicated that they behaved for

teachers they liked and with whom they have a positive relationship. Previous discussion in this research has examined the ‘essence’ of teacher–student relationship (see Chapters Ten, and Eleven) and described from the students’ perspectives how they *experience* the classroom. Musser et al. (2001) suggest that teacher movement around the classroom and the conspicuous posting of four or five positively stated behaviourally based rules promote student compliance. Teacher classroom pedagogy is the product of individual educators, but may also be a reflection of the school culture. Student management protocols, for example, may be prescribed by school leaders, with the classroom teacher having little flexibility, or autonomy, in issues of student discipline. Many student participants in this research speak of the inflexibility of school disciplinary procedures as a reason for feelings of disconnection with school. School culture was explored in Chapter Eight, where students’ perspectives suggest that they engage with classroom cultures created by individual teachers. Students do not report responding to a positive whole school culture where social-emotional wellbeing is being promoted. While a consistent, whole-school approach is desirable for the promotion of the behaviours associated with pro-social behaviour (Lewis, 2000), the teachers’ perspectives described in this thesis suggest that they are working independently of a whole-school culture in promoting social competence in the students that they teach. Acknowledgement for good behaviour is important for student motivation and engagement (Pierce et al., 2003; Ryan & Patrick, 2001) and consistency in approaches that lead to positive student behaviour are achieved most effectively by a consistent approach in all classrooms within a school, a whole-school approach.

Classroom Observations

As part of this research, I attended classes to observe classroom pedagogy. A classroom observation sheet was utilised during the class observations to record the teachers’ interactions with students. Observations of interactions were based on three social skills: i) interpersonal skills; ii) self-awareness and control; and iii) assertion. Instances of the teacher modelling these social skills through specific behaviours (see Table 7) was noted and recorded on the sheets during class observations (see Appendix 1 for Teacher Observation Checklist—Social Skills).

Table 7: Teacher classroom behaviours

Social Skill	Teacher Behaviour			
Interpersonal skills	Listening attentively	Offering support	Giving compliments	Sense of humour
Self-awareness and control	Temper control	Coping with frustration	Describing own emotions	Accepting criticism
Assertion	Initiating conversations	Inviting others to interact	Acknowledging compliments	

One conspicuous observation was the lack of student–teacher interactions in the team teaching classrooms observed at Waratah High. In only one of the four classes observed were there more than ten observed positive teacher behaviours directed at students. At Waratah High, classes of 50 students are instructed by three teachers in sessions of over one hour in duration. In contrast, observations at Hyacinth College generally demonstrated a higher number of positive teacher behaviours in the single-teacher classes of approximately twenty students. In total, ten classes were observed at Hyacinth College. Observed behavioural interactions of interest, specifically, teacher modelling of positive behaviours related to the social-skills of interpersonal-skills, self-awareness and control, and assertion, ranged from four to 38 during classes that were approximately one hour and fifteen minutes in duration. The classes that were richest in their number of positive interactions were with the teachers with whom the students interviewed had reported they had good relationships, and for whom they behaved well. Interestingly, there was greater teacher movement around the classroom and no instances of loss of control or anger display in these classes. Other behaviours that occurred frequently included paying compliments to students, behaviours indicating that the teacher was coping with their own frustration (e.g. not being able to log on to a computer, student’s phone ringing in class), and finally, teachers describing their own emotions during class with comments such as ‘I get angry with putdowns’, ‘I get pretty upset, don’t do that’ and ‘the world is beautiful’.

There were not a great number of classes observed and the observation certainly did not include all the teaching situations at the two schools that participated in this study. Nor was it possible to observe all the teachers of the students who agreed to be interviewed in this research. I observed as many of the classes of the teachers for whom students expressed respect and with whom they professed to have a good relationship. These

‘respected’ teachers’ classroom behaviours, their pedagogy, were rich in behaviours that are reported to promote and reinforce pro-social behaviours in the students they teach. They are modelling social skills. The social skills of particular interest to this research (interpersonal skills, self-awareness and control skills, and assertion) were observed to be practised by the teachers in this study for whom students expressed respect and by whom they perceived as ‘nice’ teachers. In addition, in previously discussed interviews presented in Chapter Eleven, students speak of the ‘nice’ teachers as those who acknowledge appropriate behaviour with rewards and incentives, negotiate consequences for inappropriate behaviour, and listen to students.

Dimensions of Teacher–student Relationships

The relationship between teacher and student could be described as having two dimensions. The first dimension is that created by the behaviour of the teacher (teacher pedagogy) within the instructional classroom setting, and the second dimension is that of teacher manner (interpersonal behaviour), which involves the acknowledgement and respect shown towards the individual students. These two dimensions serve to promote pro-social behaviours such as compliance. The irony is that some secondary-school teachers do not appreciate the need to provide emotional support to students: ‘*I’m just the subject teacher!*’ (emphasis intended) or do not have the skills to provide such support: ‘*I haven’t had any PD on teaching social skills*’. Such attitudes are counterproductive as research demonstrates that good social–emotional competence has a positive effect on academic performance (Elias et al., 1997; Zins et al., 2004). As Ryan and Patrick (2001) suggest, ‘where teachers report they attend to students’ social as well as academic needs, students reported more help seeking—an indicator of engagement’ (p. 438).

The students interviewed were asked to summarise the nature of teacher–student relationships. The following comments are enlightening:

Interviewer: How long do you think it takes to get to know a teacher?

Female 1: Not very long. You can just tell by their personality.

Female 2: I liked Ms D, because I remember S and J and J always used to come home saying, oh, Ms Ds is a really good teacher. I just thought ...

Female 1: Picked it up.

Female 2: Yeah, and she is. (HC11)

Interviewer: Give me a sentence that describes your relationship with teachers here at high school.

Female 1: I behave for some teachers because they're nice and I don't behave for other teachers because they're mean and they don't give you any chances. I figure I'm going to get in trouble if I do the slightest thing wrong, so what's the point? But I do behave for strict teachers that actually at least give you a chance. (HC12)

The preceding comments suggest that students respond strongly to the interpersonal skills of the classroom teacher and also to the classroom pedagogy of their teachers. Students respond favourably to, and teacher-student relationships are strengthened by, teacher pedagogy which includes discipline flexibility and 'second chances' when students are in trouble.

Teachers are very busy in classrooms and there are many stresses. Nevertheless, teacher-student relationships are created within these conditions. Zins and Elias (2006) assert that 'competences are taught most effectively within caring and well-managed learning environments' (p. 238). It is worthwhile to note that Lewis (2001) contends that primary-school teachers believe that part of their job is to teach social skills, whereas the secondary-school teachers interviewed in this study did not as a group profess to be confident in explicit social-skills instruction. The students interviewed most often mention or remember the specific sessions in social-skills instruction or strategies given to them by their primary-school teachers. According to Barber (2002), most research into teacher-student relationships has been 'in the context of the primary school, and few studies have analysed the bonds between the secondary teacher and his/her students' (p. 383). The students interviewed in this study did not acknowledge observing much of the classroom behaviours of their teachers towards other students, and so it would seem that the most important factor for these students in forming their opinions of teachers comes from the direct behaviour of the teachers towards them as individuals. This supports the findings of Ryan and Patrick (2001) who suggest that 'students' perceptions of teacher support, and the teacher as promoting interaction and mutual respect were related to positive changes in their motivation and engagement' (p. 437). However, as Barton (1986) notes, 'when not implementing a program, teachers typically prompt and reinforce pro-social behaviour at an alarmingly low rate' (p. 356). Lewis (2001) supports the idea

that teachers do not always exhibit behaviours that promote optimal outcomes in the behaviours of students:

teachers are seen by students to react to classroom misbehaviour by increasing their use of coercive discipline which inhibits the development of responsibility in students and distracts them from their schoolwork. (p. 307)

While there is a lack of positive modelling of behaviour in some classrooms, the students interviewed during this study expressed that there were teachers that fostered respect and positive teacher–student relationships. These teachers were the ones for whom the students acknowledged that they behaved well. My observations of these teachers’ classes were that they were rich in positive social–emotional behaviours such as giving compliments, initiating conversations, describing the teachers’ own emotions and coping well with frustration. However, the interviews with the students suggest that the students’ analysis of the teacher as a ‘person’ is the key factor to which the students react. While the students are not consciously looking for or recognising ‘pro-social behaviours’ in their teachers, the classroom environment appears to be created by the use of the teachers’ own interpersonal skills to which students respond positively. There appears to be a correlation between the teachers that were observed to demonstrate many (greater than ten) positive teacher-initiated social behaviours and the teachers for whom students expressed respect and affection. That is, positive social–emotional classroom learning environments were created by the teachers who demonstrated pro-social qualities such as listening to students, complimenting students and acknowledging and rewarding good behaviour.

I did not ask the teachers if the creation of the classroom social environment was a conscious act, and whether it was important to them but it would have been an interesting question to ask. Lewis (1999) suggests that classroom discipline is a significant concern for teachers and parents, and is a cause of stress for many teachers. Lewis (2001) also suggests that students’ social behaviour may be influenced by classroom discipline and advocates ‘trying to make less responsible students more responsible through increasing their use of rewards, hints, discussion and involvement in rule making’ (p. 317). The notion of student responsibility would be accomplished in a supportive classroom environment in which teachers demonstrate support and interest in their students. Lewis (2001) suggests that teachers experiencing stress from discipline-related issues could promote student responsibility by involving students in classroom decision making about

discipline. Students in this study spoke of respecting teachers who listened to their ‘side of the story’ and negotiated the consequences of bad behaviour with them, thus, making them a part of the decision-making process and making them responsible for the consequences of their own behaviour.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed teacher pedagogies that promote compliance to teacher instruction. The data relating to the students’ perspectives on teacher pedagogy contributes to the literature about the nature and formation of good teacher–student relationships that contribute to school engagement and positive learning outcomes for young people.

It has been demonstrated that students comply with instructions, and behave for teachers that they like and respect. The students interviewed described such teachers as acknowledging and rewarding positive behaviours, rather than using punitive measures to maintain classroom order. Students respond more cooperatively to teachers who do not yell, and who initiate interaction by moving around the classroom. The discussion has demonstrated that many classroom behaviours of teachers are not noticed by students, who rather than reporting noticing ‘pro-social behaviour’ or ‘positive social-skill role modelling’, report responding to their teachers’ personality and interpersonal skills. These skills include teachers initiating conversations, having a sense of humour, and discussing and being able to describe their own emotions. This research suggests that students respond positively to teachers whose use of good interpersonal skills, and acknowledgement of students prompts student engagement and compliance by creating a caring and supportive classroom learning environment.

This and the preceding two chapters of this thesis have answered the third research question:

Do students identify teachers as exemplars/role models of social skills?

The investigation and discussion of whether students regard their teachers as role models or exemplars of social skills has contributed to a greater understanding of how students view teacher behaviour and how teachers can create a social environment that promotes student compliance and influences student motivation and engagement.

Chapter Thirteen: Conclusion

The goal of social competence is set out as enabling 'students to interact effectively with others by assessing and successfully operating within a range of changing, often ambiguous human situations'.

(National Curriculum Board, 2009, p. 14).

Introduction: The Need for Social Competence

It should be the purpose of education to keep pace with the needs of society and provide good 'schooling' to ensure the best possible educational outcomes for students. In Australia, the new Australian Curriculum has used the goals of the 2008 *Melbourne Declaration* to outline holistic goals for education that include considerations for the cognitive, social, emotional and physical wellbeing of the students. However, the changing nature of the national and global societies in which we live pose challenges for Australian youth. Sawyer et al.'s (2001) research (conducted more than ten years ago) found that mental health, especially depression, was a major concern for adolescents. ABS (2007a, p. 3) data from 2004 to 2005 indicate that ten per cent of young people aged ten to fourteen years are affected by some form of mental or behavioural problem as a long-term health condition. Schools are incredibly important institutions for socialisation for children and young people. As such, educational community members, especially teachers, are critically placed to assist in the development of social skills and social competence. Good social skills and social competence constitute key factors that assist wellbeing and interpersonal relationships (Prior et al., 2000). Conversely, social-skills deficits, particularly those relating to peer and teacher acceptance, have been associated with many factors that make young people vulnerable to developing antisocial and violent behaviour, both during school and later in life (Walker et al., 1995). The final factor of the background research for this study is about what young people report about social-emotional learning. Surveys conducted between 2003 and 2007 involving over 10,000 young people found that 50 per cent of students reported that they were not learning about their feelings and how to manage stress, while 40 per cent said that they were not learning how to make friends (Bernard et al., 2007, p. 107).

As a practising teacher in mainstream schools, I had taught students who appeared to have poor social skills. As a teacher in an alternative educational setting for young people with

behaviours of concern, I found that the majority of students presented with poor social skills and reported interpersonal difficulties with peers and adults, especially teachers. It struck me that these young people were also often not liked by their peers.

Aims and Research Questions

This thesis has aimed to explore the acquisition of social skills by students via their interactions with teachers in school. The essence of this study was to determine whether students felt they could succeed at school and believed that opportunities were available for them to become socially competent through schooling. The research did not attempt to ascertain the social competence of students either qualitatively or quantitatively, although discussion about assessing student social competence was explored in conversations with school leaders and teachers. The thesis concentrated on collecting the opinions and perspectives of students, teachers and school leaders to gain an understanding of the interactions of teachers and students in the social domain of teaching and learning in school. Qualitative data from student experience is a focus of this study and through the data gained from the research, the thesis aims to improve the connection between research, and teaching and learning practice in schools.

Specifically, the research investigated whether Victorian Government secondary schools provide opportunities, in the form of explicit teacher modelling, for the development of social skills and social competence in students. The research questions were the following:

- *Do Victorian Government secondary-school teachers explicitly model social skills so that students have the opportunity to develop social skills and social competence?*
- *What value do students, teachers and school leaders place on social competence as an educational outcome?*
- *Do students identify teachers as exemplars/role models of social skills?*

To address the three research questions, transcripts from student, teacher and school-leader interviews and focus-group discussion were collected, interpreted and reflectively analysed. The discussion in this thesis focuses on what the participants themselves report. This of great value to the literature, as there has been little research that uses the

perceptions of students themselves about school (Hill et al., 1996). Generally, the investigation of students' attitudes and opinions is conducted by using questionnaires and surveys. This thesis used the students' own conceptualisations about school that have been 'constructed' by their own experiences. This research aimed to describe these student experiences and the experiences of teachers and school leaders to investigate the development of student social skills and social competence.

Outcomes for the Researcher and Participants

At the time of the study, I was a practising teacher, so the study was conducted as a practitioner–researcher (Robson, 2002). This research has provided insight into my own practice, as well as enabling the young people who participated the opportunity to reflect about teachers, teacher classroom manner (or pedagogy) and school culture. Seeking student views and placing value on student perceptions of the social–emotional curriculum may have made school more meaningful for students and facilitated these young people in having a greater sense of belonging and connectedness to school.

Methodology

The conclusions made in conducting this research arose from an application of interpretive phenomenological and ethnographical methodologies within a social constructivism epistemology or worldview into the social–emotional curriculum, school culture, and teacher pedagogy of two Victorian Government secondary schools with a special emphasis on the 'lived experiences' of students. The discussion deals with the ethnographic and phenomenological aspects of the investigation into whether Victorian Government secondary schools provide opportunities, in the form of explicit teacher modelling, for the development of social skills and social competence. Ethnographic inquiry is guided by the central assumption that groups of people existing and interacting over time will develop a culture (Patton, 2002).

Discussion

A number of themes emerged through the interviews with participants. In the discussion of these topics in the chapters of this thesis, it is evident that many themes evolve in threads throughout the thesis. It is useful to consider the three research questions individually to draw conclusions, weaving the threads that will bind this thesis together.

Do Victorian Government secondary-school teachers explicitly model social skills so that students have the opportunity to develop social skills and social competence?

Team teaching—Chapter Six

School leadership in this study spoke of team teaching as a vehicle through which teachers could model social skills. Team teaching in this study was consistent with the term defined by Deighton (1971) as ‘two or more teachers [who] regularly and purposefully share responsibility for planning, presentation and evaluation of lessons prepared for the same group of students’ (p. 89). There is a belief expressed in the literature that team teaching provides an opportunity for students to witness the interactions and professional relationships that teachers develop in classrooms (Carpenter et al., 2007). In inclusive education, team-teaching is seen as a means of serving the requirements of students with special needs within mainstream classrooms.

Teachers and team teaching

Most research literature on team teaching is on ‘how’ to team teach rather than on the effectiveness of its outcomes and experimental data about team teaching is very limited (Murawski & Swanson, 2001). A single teacher in a classroom may individually set the tone of the lesson, but multiple teachers must consult and enact a shared lesson and pedagogies. Teachers in this study reported problems with some aspects of team teaching such as teacher movement or transfers, lack of preparation time, teacher personalities and dynamics.

This research on team teaching demonstrated that the intent in schools is not always reflected by what occurs in practice. Waratah High School’s intention to create an ‘emphasis on strong teacher–student relationships through extended contact with a small number of teachers’ (MYSA, 2008, p. 1) was not always achieved due to the movement of staff around the school. Once teaching teams are established, adequate planning time is required. This was reflected by one teacher who said that team teaching is ‘really good when it works’ but stressed the need for all teachers to have ‘enough time to prepare quality lessons that can be taught together’ (Mr O).

If team teaching is to achieve the outcome of explicitly modelling social skills, teams of teachers need to be acting collaboratively within a planned pedagogic strategy. The

pedagogical intention behind good team teaching was described by a member of school leadership, who emphasised that the staff have to ‘work collaboratively’ and that the students should be ‘seeing professional interaction between staff ... a bit of humour ... a bit of banter ... things should be calm and pleasant, and we always talk to each other with respect’ (Ms O). However, the same member of leadership acknowledged that this environment is not always achieved, ‘I know that hasn’t happened in all classes, and there’s been some issues where staff have been rude to other staff members publicly, in front of the kids’ (Ms O).

This research found that in the schools interviewed, team teaching did not serve the purpose of explicitly modelling social skills for students. This research has found that much of the pedagogy of teachers, including teachers teaching in teams, has been enacted in classrooms individually and independently. While a whole-school approach to team teaching is advocated, teams operated as separate units.

Students and team teaching

The lack of a whole-school approach leading to teams operating as separate units could reflect an organisational problem related to combining classes to create a larger class for team teaching. While school leadership viewed team teaching as a means of ensuring that students do not ‘get lost’ in classes, students reported feeling that there are too many people in the class, which limited opportunities to answer questions, with one student saying that the ‘classes get wild’. This study did not attempt to assess quantitatively the learning outcomes of students through team teaching. Rather, students were asked about the culture created in team-teaching environments. Patrick et al. (2007) suggest that there can be variations in students’ perceptions of classes, even when in the same class, and that ‘students’ own perceptions of dimensions of their classroom’s social environment were related to their motivation and engagement’ (p. 94). Students from this research described the disadvantage of large class sizes, saying they were a problem ‘because you can’t get your turn’. Contributing to class discussions and answering questions was important to students because they viewed this as a means to learning, with one student reporting that in ‘smaller classes, you learn more ... because you have lots of turns’. Clearly, some students feel that they are not supported and engaged in the classroom due to large numbers of students in the class.

Teacher promotion of interaction is one factor that positively influences student motivation and engagement (Ryan & Patrick, 2001). However, students in this study reported negative feelings about the team-teaching environment because they felt teachers engaged in artificial conversations in the classroom, addressing each other as 'sir' or 'miss', which the students felt did not represent genuine interaction between the teachers. This is evidenced in the following student comment: 'I don't get how teachers call each other sir, miss. Just say their name or something ... That's stupid' (WH8). For students to perceive teachers as teaching social skills it is necessary that they perceive the social interactions between teachers as genuine and natural. The students in this research were dismissive of teacher interactions in team teaching because they did not seem to follow the social rules of society in general.

Ryan and Patrick (2001) report that teachers 'help to construct the social environment by creating norms and rules for student social behaviour in the classroom' (p. 438). Teacher pedagogy sets the social tone of the lesson and if explicit modelling of social skills such as assertion and interpersonal skills is to be achieved, students must be involved in the classes. When asked about teacher interactions in the team-teaching classes, a number of students mentioned seeing interactions that they perceived negatively such as teachers behaving unprofessionally by speaking about students in front of other students or being overheard speaking unfavourably about students. Students recounted instances of teachers speaking among themselves, with their attention distracted from the class. In LOTE classes, it was reported that teachers spoke in other languages, which, apart from leaving students feeling excluded, gave the students the distinct feeling that they were being discussed, often unfavourably. Students reported that 'we can get it when they're talking about someone ... I think they're talking like that to say rude words' (WH10). One student reported feelings of being treated in a dismissive manner by one teacher, 'I said to them, why are you speaking in French? It's none of your business, that's why' (WH7).

Students in such classroom environments do not feel supported or respected by their teachers. In the absence of teacher support and mutual respect, students are unlikely to experience positive engagement and motivation. This breakdown in positive teacher-student relationships may account for the disinterest that students have in making use of the school design feature discussed in this study of large glass windows looking into staffrooms and classrooms. Despite this being seen by school leaders as an asset to facilitate student observation of teacher interactions, and modelling of social skills,

students reported little interest in observing others. Except in the circumstance of school breaks when it was cold outside and staff appeared warm inside, students did not mention purposefully observing other classes or staff.

Teacher feelings on display and team teaching

Conflict resolution requires good social skills. Teachers modelling behaviours leading to the resolution of conflict has the potential to be important for young people in the context of developing social competence. McKinley (1996) suggests that negative interaction, specifically disagreement, can be a powerful example for students, particularly when the resulting discussions between the teachers are respectful. Carpenter et al. (2007) report that 'disagreement acts as an "ice-breaker" and facilitates a learning environment that encourages students to enter into civil and rational debate with instructors and each other' (p. 56). Unfortunately, the young people in this research reported teachers having conflict with each other but did not report teachers resolving their problems in a manner that modelled conflict resolution for them.

Initiatives such as the Child Safety Commissioner's (2007) *Calmer classrooms* were suggested for working with children and young people who had suffered trauma and abuse, and the strategies put forward in the report support fostering the wellbeing of all students. Central to concept of wellbeing is the relationship between the teacher and the student and the notion of supportive classrooms. Stress caused by displays of anger and loud arguments between adults should not occur in classrooms. However, several students in this study mentioned having witnessed disagreements and problems between teachers and they felt this was 'normal' behaviour. In one instance, a student spoke of feeling 'less alone' about having problems with her own friends after she had witnessed staff disagreement. Demonstrating that they have disagreements and problems appeared to humanise teachers for the students, and the students seemed to appreciate this. After hitting another student, one student described a positive experience with a teacher who took the student to the principal's office and spoke honestly to the student about their own experiences. The student recalled the teacher saying 'I don't like some of the teachers ... not everyone is friends with everyone and you don't have to be, like, I don't like all the teachers and they don't like me' (HC3).

It appears that school staff need to tread the fine line between exhibiting professional conduct and exhibiting behaviours that are honest and natural that 'humanise' teachers for

students. Students astutely stated that ‘it’s natural to argue’ and valued the teachers who took the time to describe and explain the nature of relationships to the students. Teachers who painted the world honestly for young people were remembered fondly.

Conclusions on team teaching

In this research, school leadership spoke of team teaching as a vehicle for teachers to model social skills. The reality is that teachers find the processes of good team teaching difficult and the students interviewed reported negative experiences of team teaching. However, team teaching could offer an opportunity for students to learn social behaviours in situations in which teachers are able to model positive and respectful conflict resolution with other staff for students to observe. Students made particular mention of their appreciation of teachers who took the time to explain interpersonal relationships to them, even if this meant admitting that not all staff members in the school team like each other. Students valued this and generally made reference to having had good relationships with these teachers. Osher and Fleischman (2005) have reported that young people who have positive relationships with their teachers are better prepared to learn social and emotional skills. For teachers working in teams the social culture of the classroom is created by the combined pedagogy of the team of teachers, and when teams do not work collaboratively, a positive social–emotional learning environment may not be achieved, and teachers’ relationships with students may be adversely affected.

Student social competence and its assessment—Chapter Seven

Schools are social institutions in which teachers witness students’ social behaviour on a daily basis. Teachers are consulted about students’ social skills and provide ‘valuable assessment information about whether children’s social skills match the social demands of the classroom’ (Wight & Chapparo, 2008, p. 259). Research suggests that ‘teachers report that social competence at school is multidimensional and situational’ (Wight & Chapparo, 2008, p. 258) and reporting on social competence requires analysis of student behaviour that can be complicated and subjective. While teachers are asked to comment on where a child may have social-skills difficulties, teachers are often not trained specialists in providing social-skills training, and as such, reporting on deficits is one thing, whilst providing instruction in social-skills, in order to address need, is the difficulty.

Assessing and reporting student social competence

Assessment of social skills as a component of the discussion around explicit modelling of social skills suggests the degree of commitment of the school and staff to social–emotional learning and the effect of this commitment being demonstrated in teacher pedagogy. Social competence is identified as a specific competency in the new Australian Curriculum’s ‘Personal and social capability’ page of the ACARA (2013a) website. Interviewed school leaders and staff believe that students need to be socially competent and that social competence should be an educational goal: ‘if you want to educate the whole child, it’s more than just reading and writing and arithmetic. It’s also how we get on as humans. I think it’s really, really important’ (Ms O).

ACARA have organised Personal and social capability learning in the Australian Curriculum into four elements: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social management. Activities are suggested but not as a programme for teachers. The difficulty for teachers is that there appears to be little research into the nature of social competence, or the ways in which it can be assessed or enhanced within school settings (Hoglund & Leadbeater, 2004). Therefore, while the concept of assessment is worthwhile, the means by which assessment occurs poses problems for teachers.

Sherrin (2012) believes that the ‘collection of evidence of each child’s development in the area of social competence needs to become a part of the overall data to give a true picture of the holistic education of the child’ (p. 11).

Victorian teachers, who are required to provide assessment information through their observations of social interactions of young people in schools, are relying on their own judgements or perceptions about student behaviours. The difficulty lies in the subjective nature of such assessments. As Elliot and Gresham (1987) attest, there are a number of factors that may lead to apparent social skill deficits, including lack of opportunity or motivation, or the arousal of strong emotions such as stress in the child. Such factors could be perceived by students to be present in classrooms, where the teacher may be viewed to be unsupportive or where the student–teacher relationship is not positive. One teacher astutely mentions the point of subjectivity in social–competence assessments:

Ms C: You want to be very careful because ... it could vary in regards to who the teacher is, and what they're seeing, and how the kid is going to be behaving specifically for that teacher.

In assessing student social competence, the teachers' own level of social competence may be a factor, especially in light of research that suggests that teachers who themselves model good social skills connect more positively with students (Osher & Fleischman, 2005).

Consistent with the findings presented in the *Middle schooling: People, practices and places* (MYSA, 2008), some schools use a core group of teachers to provide instruction in multiple subjects for the same groups of students. Secondary-school home-group teachers are generally selected on this basis. As such, many teachers interviewed were in favour of including a comment on social competence in the student's report from someone such as the home-group teacher, but were unsure of the effect, on students and parents, of such comments and the current state of social-competence reporting. Many teachers felt that a personalised, and possibly hand-written, comment from the home-group teacher, would be beneficial and more supportive of the student, rather than an assessment score of social competence, given the difficulty of quantifying social competence.

Another difficulty that teachers mentioned was that they did not know the 'full story' about a student and felt that this might affect the students' personal and social learning. Personal information regarding students is not always known to school staff. Teachers know this and are concerned about the possible effect on the student of assessing social competence, especially if the assessment is perceived as negative.

The teachers in this study also reported being unsure of the current state of social-competence reporting. Often such reporting is only about behavioural deficits or negative social skills, and these may not be informative for parents, as such reporting does not address how the school or teacher plans to deal with such deficits. Victorian secondary-school student reports are based on describing what the student has achieved, or can do, which is a model of strength-based reporting. How to report on student social competence is still a problem for teachers. Teachers in this study suggested that there may be personal barriers to reporting social competence due to its emotional content and the fact that such reporting may be a reflection on parenting, 'what does it say about the way that they've been brought up and what does it say about the parents' social competence' (Mr O).

It appears that many teachers have concerns about the reporting of social competence. Whilst often called upon to comment to specialist staff about social-skill deficits, secondary-school reports describe student strengths and accomplishments. Teachers are aware of the subjective nature of observation of student social behaviour, and stress that they are often not privy to knowledge about students' personal circumstances, and disclose concern as to the impact that formal social competence assessment may have on the young person and their family. Many teachers were in favour of a personal note from a teacher who knows the student well, such as a home group teacher, to provide social functioning feedback to the young person, rather than assessing formally student social competence.

Teaching social competence

Lack of knowledge around the teaching of social skills may lie at the heart of secondary-school teachers' difficulties in assessing social competence. By their own admission, secondary-school teachers are not experts in teaching social skills and many teachers interviewed reported that they wanted professional development in this curriculum domain. Many teachers spoke of teaching social skills in an unplanned, reactive, manner when there appeared to be a need within a class they were teaching. This approach of targeting students constitutes a deficit model, an intervention, rather than a whole-school, promotional approach. Te Riele (2006b) notes that to 'serve marginalized youth, policy needs to change its focus from "fixing students" to providing high quality education' (p. 141). Research by Hawkins and Catalano (1992) suggests that young people benefit from 'pro-social' structured programmes that not only teach the skills, but have teachers model the skills, give clear feedback on their attempts to practice them and positive reinforcement for using them as well. This is consistent with the findings in the DfES (2003) report that explicit behaviours, and not just values and knowledge need to be taught for social-skills training to be effective.

Whole-school approaches to student social competence

Teachers report working on social-emotional learning curriculum individually in classrooms, and this suggests that opportunities to teach and model social-skills vary between teachers, and that social-skill promotion is not supported as a whole-school approach. Wells et al. (2003) support whole-school approaches 'that aim to involve everyone in the school including pupils, staff, families and the community, and to change

the environment and culture of the school ... approaches [that] may require changes in teachers' attitudes, beliefs or behaviour' (p. 217). Many teachers reported wanting professional development in teaching social-skills, with the first step being to find out what is happening in their own schools, 'we need to get more as a community and look at what people are doing' (Ms D). DfES (2003) suggests that 'the most robustly positive evidence was obtained for programmes adopted as a whole school approach' (p. 41). Interviewed teachers are not confident in facilitating social-emotional learning, such as teaching social-skills, and the assessment of social competence and whole-school social-emotional programmes would support teachers with resources, and whole-school pedagogical approaches, including common language, in the delivery of social curriculum.

Self-reporting and student social competence

One teacher made mention of including student self-reporting as part of the assessment process of social competence. As far back as 1987, Elliot and Gresham wrote that 'self-report measures ... represent a potentially important source of assessment information' (p. 97). In facilitating social competence, teachers assist students to recognise, regulate and express their social and emotional characteristics, in order to function successfully in school and in their lives. Self-reporting would seem particularly relevant in a secondary school where self-awareness and self-management are two elements within the new Australian Curriculum, and would also afford students the opportunity to provide feedback on their own learning. By involving students in assessments about their learning, there is an opportunity for students to contribute their experiences about their engagement in their learning.

Conclusions on student social competence

This research suggests that opportunities to teach and model social skills vary between teachers, and social-skills promotion is not enacted through a whole-school approach. This research also suggests that secondary-school teachers are not confident in facilitating social-emotional learning such as teaching social skills. The assessment of social competence is similarly problem bound. One solution to the problem of assessment of student social competence might be to involve young people themselves in their assessment- a social validity model (Elliott & Gresham, 1987, p. 66). Student involvement, such as student self-report, offers young people the opportunity to be

involved in their own social development, and is in line with the new Australian Curriculum elements of self-awareness and self-management.

What value do students, teachers and school leaders place on social competence as an educational outcome?

School culture—Chapter Eight

School culture is a complex dimension to conceptualise and understand. Glover and Law (2004) define school culture as ‘the sum total of all the aspirations, relationships and practices within a school’ (p. 317). School leaders are charged with ensuring that schools are safe and secure, and provide a stimulating learning environment for students. The Victorian DEECD’s (2013) policy guidelines for engaging schools suggest that ‘positive school cultures ensure that students feel valued and cared for, have meaningful opportunities to contribute to the school and can effectively engage with their learning (p. 7). This goal is achieved by ensuring that the school culture promotes a feeling of connectedness to school in the students. Teachers reported that such connectedness is achieved through rituals, traditions and ceremonies that take place within the school.

School events, school connectedness and school culture

Deal and Peterson (1999) consider the rituals, traditions and ceremonies within schools to be an element of its culture. Assemblies and ceremonies were part of the fabric of the two schools involved in this study, and were viewed by teachers as being wonderful events in which the students ‘rose to the occasion’. Such occasions were described as formal, with expectations of good student behaviour during proceedings. One teacher interviewed considered that assemblies created an environment in which teachers instilled in students socially acceptable behaviour, ‘teaching them what’s appropriate’. Such occasions provided the opportunity for ‘whole-school modelling’ and ‘explicit guidelines’ (Ms C) to be provided.

Conforming to social etiquette, for example, behaving appropriately at a theatre is not the same thing as social competence. Many teachers reported students’ positive behaviour at school ceremonies, such as assemblies, as evidence of correct social functioning, or social competence. It is significant that the students interviewed did not mention the traditions and ceremonies of the schools as providing them with a sense of belonging and connectedness. Greater emphasis on such systems was made by teachers and school

leaders, with students placing greater emphasis on the school classroom as a means of connection to the school.

The LSAY (NCVER, 2010) suggest that social capital, or a students' understanding of the social systems that have benefit or value for them, is enhanced through student school connectedness, positive teacher–student relationships, the influence of community links when thinking about the future, and participation in school-based activities. Participation in sport is an indicator of social capital for girls while school connectedness plays a significant role in promoting social capital for boys (NCVER, 2010). Waratah High teachers and school leaders reported the house system as assisting student connectedness to school. Teachers' comments suggested that this system encourages student connectedness to the school. However, the students did not report similar feelings of connectedness through house affiliations.

Whole-school approach to school culture

There are many advocates for whole-school approaches to promoting social competence, mental health and wellbeing in students. For example, DETWA (2001) states 'effective mental health promotion in schools requires complementary action in and between the areas of curriculum, school organisation and environment, and partnerships with parents and service providers' (p. v). Teachers in this study suggested that a whole-school approach was not occurring in their schools and the degree of social-skills instruction varied between teachers in the same school. When asked if resources were available to encourage social competence, teachers suggested a range of opinions but there was a clear consensus that there was no whole-school approach to implementation. Teachers also emphasised that there was a lack of time for including social-skills instruction in their pedagogy and lack of support from school leadership. A whole-school approach to student social–emotional learning, integrated with other areas of the curriculum, would assist in the creation of a school culture which supports and cares for students' social–emotional wellbeing.

Inclusiveness and school culture

Good schools should be inclusive of differences related to social class, gender, ethnicity, and mental and physical ability. As Leeman and Volman (2001) argue:

The ideal of inclusive education is in many cases primarily based on theorizing on educational opportunities: educating pupils together must provide all pupils with a good chance of success in school ... inclusive education cannot be defined exclusively in terms of academic achievement in the basic skills; the social-cultural outcomes of education should be part of this concept. (p. 368)

Social-learning theory suggests that individuals learn through observation and modelling (Bandura, 1977). As such, an individual being treated differently in a negative manner by teachers is not good role modelling for other young people. One student interviewed said that both students and teachers treat him differently because he is ‘the odd one out of all the boys’ because he likes ‘all the girly stuff’ (WH 5). It is important that teachers model inclusiveness for students as part of the creation of a school culture in which all students are able to feel a sense of connectedness.

Another great need in Australian education is to ensure the accommodation of the growing numbers of students who come from other countries. In this research, one-third of the student participants came from backgrounds where English was not their home language. One teacher spoke of the need for differences in culture to be explained to the teachers so that they were able to understand the students better. In all areas of difference, teachers and all school staff must lead students in creating a culture in which people from all backgrounds feel accepted and connected to school, but teachers spoke of needing and wanting professional development in a social–emotional curriculum, including the teaching of social skills to be truly inclusive of all young people. School staff need to be knowledgeable about their students, and be able to offer flexibility in classroom and school practices and policies, such as dress codes and student management procedures in order to accommodate all students’ social–emotional wellbeing in a school culture of inclusiveness.

Individual treatment and school culture

Garrison (1997) suggests that ‘outlaw teachers’ or those who care will ‘sometimes choose to break rules rather than students’ (p. xvii). Research suggests that teachers themselves react badly to harsh disciplinary approaches aimed at students. Smyth and Hattam (2001) find that schooling ‘can be as much a struggle for the schools and teachers as it is for the young people’ (p. 403). Teachers, bound to harsh codes of discipline in which they have no leeway to make individual judgements seem to create risk situations for some students who suffer within the school culture. Students reported that they do not respond favourably to rigid disciplinary strategies that do not cater for individual situations or

needs. Students reported a great to desire to be given the opportunity to explain their side of an incident. Student comments demonstrated the perception of the discretionary nature of behavioural consequences, with some teachers punishing students without and discussion but others asking ‘what happened’. The students expressed great appreciation of having a teacher listen and demonstrated that they engage with teachers who involve students in decision making about the consequences of their behaviour.

Conclusions on school culture

This research demonstrates that while there appears to be common consensus amongst school staff about social competence as an educational goal, there appears to be a lack of a whole-school approach in creating whole-school culture. Students have demonstrated that they perceive the individual approach of teachers in creating a classroom culture as a connection to school, rather than the ceremonies and traditions that school staff place emphasis on to connect students to school. A school culture needs to allow flexibility for teachers to make their own judgements regarding student management in order to be inclusive of both teachers, and students. Teachers indicate that they need help in being inclusive of all students and do not know how to successful include all students. Information and professional development about student backgrounds and cultures, together with collaboration between all school staff is necessary to create a supportive and caring school culture which promotes social–emotional wellbeing.

Student connectedness through teacher classroom pedagogy—Chapter Nine

It is important that students feel connected to school to promote positive student behaviour and learning, and to diminish student involvement in a range of adolescent health-risk behaviours (McNeely et al., 2002). Bernard et al. (2007, p. 6) report that a large percentage of Australian students are experiencing social and emotional difficulties and also find that the lower the social–emotional wellbeing of students, the greater the likelihood that students will display emotional, social and behavioural difficulties.

Sawyer et al. (2001) report that mental health is a concern for adolescents and Bernard et al. (2007) state that almost 50 per cent of students report issues concerned with their lack of learning about social–emotional issues such as managing stress, and understanding their feelings. Difficulties in dealing with conflict and interpersonal relationships are also identified by a high percentage of young people as of concern (Bernard et al., 2007). Prior

et al. (2000) report that teenagers' opinions of teachers contribute to their sense of 'school connectedness'.

The FGP is a project that aims to investigate classroom pedagogies that 'offer students a sense of belonging and achieving, learning communities delivering powerful messages that school is a place for them, and education is a resource that they can profitably deploy in their present and future lives' (Munns, 2007, p. 302). The FGP places the importance of teacher pedagogy into perspective and emphasises the need for teachers' classroom practices to interrupt 'the discourses of power that have historically worked against poor students' (p. 301). Hattie (2003) describes teachers as the most important variable affecting students' experiences and outcomes. Teacher pedagogy is a significant factor in students' feelings of connection and belonging to school.

Student emotions and student connectedness

Given the statistics concerning young people with mental-health issues and concerns about social-emotional skills, it is not surprising that the students interviewed spoke of personal issues such as not being able to control their anger and that they were aware of 'depressed' students at their schools.

There are whole-school mental-health-promotion programmes available to schools such as MindMatters and KidsMatter. However, neither of the schools involved in this research employed a whole-school approach to mental-health promotion or emotional wellbeing. Some students blamed the teachers for the stress and frustration that they felt and expressed strong feelings that teachers did not care about the students' wellbeing, 'I really do not think that they care' (HC3).

In an educational system that values academic achievement, assessed through mechanisms such as standardised tests, secondary-school teachers could quite easily feel like they are simply purveyors of academic information. Worse still is the perception of students that school is only about academic learning. This narrow view of the purpose of schooling is encouraged by students feeling that their teachers are not interested in their wellbeing, reporting the belief that teacher attitudes are 'all I want to do is teach you this and go home' (HC3).

Teacher modelling positive social skills and student connectedness

To frame conversations with students about their classroom experiences, I observed classes to determine if teachers modelled social skills. Particular notice was taken of the behaviour of teachers whose classrooms students reported as respectful and caring. Osher and Fleischman (2005) state that teachers who themselves model good social skills connect more positively with students. While it was not the purpose, or intention, of this research to assess teacher social competence, observations of classroom pedagogy of teachers was made to frame conversations with student participants.

The social skills of interest in this study were interpersonal skills, skills of self-awareness and control, and assertiveness. Teachers were observed to model these social skills in a number of instances in different classes. Student observations of these behaviours varied enormously between students, and some teacher behaviours that I observed were not perceived at all by some students. Teacher classroom behaviours that are noticed by most students are teacher movement around the classroom, and the manner in which teachers speak to students and provide instructions (volume and tone). These are expressed by students in perceptions such as ‘she keeps us entertained, and she’s really nice’ (HC8), as well as ‘when people need help he goes to help them or he goes around the room and sees what everyone is doing’ (HC5).

Conclusions about student connectedness through teacher classroom pedagogy

Ryan and Patrick (2001) found that students’ perceptions of teacher support and mutual respect were related to positive changes in student motivation and engagement. Students spoke more positively of classrooms where their teachers modelled respect and displayed support for them. However, when specific pro-social behaviours of their teachers were highlighted to students, they did not understand this behaviour as constituting explicit modelling of social skills. While teachers modelling positive social skills results in happier classrooms and more positive learning environments, students do not necessarily consciously perceive such behaviour as explicit modelling of social skills that they might learn. There appears to be a distinction in students’ minds about social learning not occurring concurrently with academic learning.

This finding supports research that has found that explicit or focused instruction on social–emotional learning, not simple and irregularly scheduled activities, is most effective in achieving social competence in students (DfES, 2003, p. 68). It would seem that despite social competence being spoken about as an educational goal, the explicit

modelling of social skills varies greatly between teachers (and is not consciously perceived by students) and I did not observe explicit social–emotional instruction in classes.

In order to develop social competence in students, schools should adopt a method of explicit instruction that focuses on delivering social–emotional learning across all curriculum areas, through a shared pedagogical approach, which is supported by a caring and supportive whole-school culture. Teachers need to role model ‘pro-social’ skills for students, and acknowledge and reward positive student behaviours.

Do students identify teachers as exemplars/role models of social skills?

Teacher – student relationships—Chapter Ten

Positive teacher–student relationships are greatly important. While there is literature available on the nature of teacher–student relationships from the perspective of teacher personality (Fisher et al., 1998; Martin et al., 2007), these studies have relied on the use of questionnaires rather than on interviewing young people to gain a ‘first-hand’ perspective (as this thesis has sought to achieve). Te Riele (2006a) comments that the most important school-based risk factor to disadvantage student educational outcomes is profoundly negative teacher–student relationships.

Mouton (1991) reports that young people deemed at risk of school failure, but who were actually successful at school, credit their relationships with teachers as part of their success. Noddings (2003) attests that to students ‘it matters whether or not they like and are liked by their teachers’ (p. 244). Students want to interact with teachers, and positive interactions are important to the students. The student participants in this study were able to articulate their perceptions of whether they were liked by individual teachers, reporting that it is ‘obvious if they like you’ and that when they ‘don’t like you, you can usually tell (WH8).

This comment is at odds with conduct in professional relationships in which personal feeling should not be evident in the relationship. Making negative personal feelings known does not constitute inclusive teacher pedagogy. However, this comment is a student’s perception that has not been challenged or talked about in the classroom as part of a discussion on interpersonal relationships. Giving permission, and the opportunity, for students to critique teacher pedagogy and provide teachers with feedback on the effect of

pedagogy on their learning can be a method by which students may become more engaged in their learning, empower student self-reflection and ultimately improve teacher–student relationships.

Teacher qualities in teacher – student relationships

Students reported that ‘how’ one learns is as important as ‘what’ one learns. They expressed a desire for human interaction that could not be replaced by robots: ‘If there was a robot going around, it wouldn’t be as good as having a human actually coming up to you and teaching you ... if you don’t understand something, they can actually go over it again with you’ (HC11).

Students made special mention of those teachers who told stories in class, speaking of a teacher who ‘made up stories’ and was ‘funny’ (WH9). Barber (2002) notes that ‘trust is required in others to offer a story—there is an assumption of a common ground of understanding, that one’s story will be heard in good faith’ (p. 385).

This thesis has been an exploration of the participants’ perceptions, and especially those of the young people who, if ever fortunate enough to be asked their opinion of school, are generally handed a questionnaire or survey that leaves little room for dialogue to evolve to express their true feelings. Students continually referred to the teachers to whom they related best as ‘nice’ teachers. The students interviewed expressed that the best teachers ‘understand kids and listen to their opinions’ (WH8), they are ‘really nice’ and ‘understand you’ (WH11), they ‘don’t just yell at you straight away, they listen first’ (WH11) and don’t ‘say shut up’ (WH8). They ‘can have a laugh with you’ (HC10) and ‘make work funner [sic]’ (WH9). The students appreciate teachers who treat them in what they view as a respectful manner, as the following student expresses, ‘just say, normally if you’re on your phone or something the teacher would take it off of you but Ms V will just say, all right, you need to get off your phone now, we’re doing this’ (HC4). Students reported enjoying having a rapport with teachers and it seems that once a rapport was established, they reciprocated in sharing information, ‘I find that you should be able to talk to your teachers about what you have done’ (HC11). This research found that good teachers who had earned the title of *nice* listen to students and treat them with respect, have a sense of humour, take an interest in their students, initiate conversations, and try to make work fun.

Conclusions about teacher – student relationships

This research demonstrates that students respond favourably to teachers whose classroom pedagogy includes pro-social behaviours, such as initiating conversations, and whose interpersonal skills, such as storytelling, establish and strengthen teacher-student relationships. Students spoke of engaging more strongly with their learning in the classrooms of the teachers with whom they had positive teacher-student relationships.

Comparing teacher pedagogy in primary and secondary classrooms—Chapter Eleven

The students' perceptions of the differences in classroom manner between primary-school and secondary-school teachers was investigated in the belief that the students' reflections would provide insight into the differences between teacher pedagogy in the different educational settings and the effect of this on students. In an article about student classroom misbehaviour, Ferrari (2012) reports that La Trobe University education professor Ramon Lewis believes primary schools have always viewed part of their job as teaching social skills that secondary schools do not. Ferrari (2012) quotes Lewis saying that 'secondary teachers see themselves as teaching subjects, they don't see themselves as developing students. What we're talking about here is really another part of the curriculum' (p. 15).

Primary-school teachers and teacher pedagogy

The students interviewed in this research confirmed this view. Students generally expressed the opinion that they learnt social skills at primary school, and referred to specific activities such as class meetings, Golden Rules (e.g. treating others how you would like to be treated) and Circle Time. Students also described strategies through which the teachers helped students to acquire social skills such as helping them to make friends or with anger management. One student expressed learning social skills from observing the group behaviour of others in primary school:

Female 1: Well it depends. Social skills—you can try and learn from someone or try and watch something on the computer or let mum and dad tell you or you can just learn from other people. If you're actually talking and you're in a group, you hear what they're saying and try and learn that.

Interviewer: Have you done that yourself?

Female 1: Yes, last year—during primary school. (HC2)

Secondary-school teachers and teacher pedagogy

Conversely, the students reported a lack of confidence that their secondary-school teachers were willing to help facilitate conflict resolution or assist in interpersonal issues between students, saying that they ‘could’ help students to make up with friends after an argument ‘but they don’t want to’ (WH2).

Students spoke of wanting a means by which they could talk about their feelings in school. They expressed a desire to have opportunities in secondary school to ‘check in’ about how they are feeling ‘like once a week’ (HC2). They also reported occasions on which they would appreciate the opportunity to talk to someone to help them stay calm, to ‘help to control their anger and ... talk about his feelings—her or his feelings—and try to make it all better’ (HC5).

Teacher approaches to discipline were also noted by students to be different between primary school and high school, and students generally spoke more favourably about the tendency of having good behaviour recognised and rewarded in primary school than simply having bad behaviour punished, with one student noting that ‘in our primary school, when we finished our maths, they said we can have free time, but now [in secondary school], they give us more’ (HC2).

For many students, school provides the only social institution, apart from the family, in their lives. It can be the only social setting in which they can develop, refine and practice social competencies. However, as Bernard et al. (2007) attest, a large percentage of adolescents report that they are not learning about how to manage interpersonal relationships and make friends. Although many teachers interviewed claimed they teach social skills, this research found that secondary-school teachers do not explicitly teach social skills to students. The only exception was in the case of one teacher who integrated Tribes, Circle Time and other similar activities for learning social-skills regularly in classes. This finding supports the research of Korinek and Popp (1997), who suggest that mainstream teachers are reluctant to take time from the academic curriculum to teach social skills. Some teachers interviewed reported that they initiated some social–emotional activities only when there was a need with a class—a ‘reactive’ approach—

such as when students were not ‘getting along’. Several teachers mentioned relying on the school rules to guide and create pro-social behaviour. Social-skills instruction is often used in situations of deficit, but research by Dwyer and Osher (2000) recommends a school-wide foundation. A whole-school platform on which social–emotional learning is built provides the opportunity for all students within a school to develop social competence, and is based on developing positive behaviours rather than focusing on negative behaviours, or deficits, in student behaviours. Indeed, Schoenfeld et al. (2008), and Zins and Elias (2006) believe that social-skills training can be provided through daily academic instruction. According to Roeser, Eccles and Samoroff (2000) schools are ‘an important if not central arena for health promotion [and] primary prevention ... in addition to the education of students’ (p. 467).

Conclusions about teacher pedagogy in secondary and primary classrooms

This research demonstrates that students believe that they learn about social-skills by explicit instruction and activities, in primary school but not at secondary school. Students spoke of the different discipline approaches of primary school teachers and secondary school teachers, and spoke more favourably of primary school teachers who more readily acknowledged and rewarded appropriate ‘pro-social’ student behaviour. Students spoke of wanting a forum in secondary school in which they could talk about their feelings, learn about managing strong emotions and maintaining relationships, as they had in primary school, but that there were no opportunities for this in secondary school. Teachers reported that they did not explicitly teach social skills, but some teachers spoke of initiating some social–emotional activities in response to negative student behaviours in their classrooms. Such ‘reactive’ social-skills teaching does not suffice for effective social-skills learning, which is most successful when delivered across the curriculum by whole-school programmes supported by a whole-school school culture.

Student compliance—Chapter Twelve

According to Caldarella and Merrell (1997), compliance is a social skill and in their taxonomy of positive behaviours, compliance is one of the five dimensions of positive social behaviours. The desire of students to comply with teacher instruction suggests that they care about the relationship that they have with the teacher. Ryan and Patrick (2001) report that ‘students’ perceptions of teacher support, and the teacher as promoting interaction and mutual respect were related to positive changes in their motivation and

engagement' (p. 437) and that students who perceived their classroom teacher as supportive 'engaged in less off task and disruptive behaviours' (p. 454). Eccles et al. (1993) suggest that students who are given opportunities to participate in school and classroom decisions may have greater motivation, and engage in less school misconduct (p. 99).

Positive teacher engagement and student compliance

There was a general consensus among the students interviewed that they behaved for the teachers that they liked and who demonstrated respect for them 'because they respect you and you respect them' (HC10). One student stated that they 'behave for some teachers because they're nice ... I don't behave for other teachers because they're mean and don't give you any chances' (HC12). The same student stated that they 'behave for strict teachers that actually at least give you a chance' (HC12). This echoes Ryan and Patrick's (2001) statement that 'perceiving their teacher as supportive was especially important for students' confidence relating to the teacher, self-regulated learning, and disruptive behaviour' (p. 454).

Therefore, compliance as a social skill can be fostered in an environment where positive engagement is promoted. Students reported that receiving acknowledgement or recognition for positive behaviour encouraged them to follow teacher instruction. They generally remembered positive acknowledgement for good behaviour occurring from their teachers in primary school, with practices such as prizes being awarded in year six for good behaviour. One student recalled that after 'every hard session, like maths, he'd take us outside for, like, ten minutes to play a game' (HC3).

Negative teacher engagement and student compliance

In contrast, student compliance may be gained by the use of teacher coercion such as corporal punishment (although not in Victorian schools). Some students in this study spoke of experiences of corporal punishment in the educational institutions that they had attended overseas, including Africa and Southeast Asia. These students acknowledged that they had behaved well but had done so out of fear of being hit, saying that it 'makes me scared' (WH11). They also agreed that it did not teach them much except to hate the teacher, 'it teaches them also to be really angry at the teacher and hate her' (WH11). Some students mentioned that teachers yelling at them created their compliance, but

spoke negatively of the relationship they had with teachers who exhibited this type of behaviour.

The need for a positive and calm learning environment cannot be overstated. Musser et al. (2001) report that delivering a request for compliance 'in a statement form with a firm but quiet tone of voice' strengthens effectiveness (p. 295). These authors also found that positive reinforcement and teacher movement aided compliance by students. Students in this study remarked favourably on the experiences they had of positive reinforcement and suggested that such experiences assisted them to follow teacher instruction.

Students in this study insisted that they behaved and complied with the instructions of teachers that they liked and respected. Students also explained that the 'liked' teachers involved them in classroom decisions and listened to their side of a story when things went wrong. I observed the classes of these teachers and noted many instances of positive teacher behavioural interactions towards all students in their classes. Such behaviours included paying compliments, describing emotions and coping with frustrations.

Role models for students

Students named parents or family members, peers, celebrities and sporting identities as their life role models. The following excerpt demonstrates one student's perceptions of the qualities of a role model:

Male 2: Friends ... they're your sort of role models because they sort of know when you get angry and how you get angry. They know you and know how to calm you down. People who are like respectful to you and are loving and thoughtful, that sort of your role model too. (WH1)

Several students (only from Hyacinth College) listed a number of teachers as role models by virtue of how 'they get the job done' (HC2) or because they are nice teachers.

Generally, teachers were not reported to be social-skills role models for students. Only one student reported having taken note of a teacher modelling behaviour that the student applied in another situation. In this instance, the student had noticed that the teacher stamped her foot to indicate annoyance or frustration when the class was behaving poorly. This student thought she would do so too. Therefore, rather than yell at her brother when he was annoying her, this student mimicked her teacher's behaviour, 'I did what Ms V does, like stamp my foot at my brother and he goes ... I'm sorry, I'm sorry' (HC5).

The following student's comments elucidate student feelings on teachers as role models and their perceptions of the concept of role models:

Male 2: I think people that—because I think that if you want to be a teacher, like, if you want to be like that person, then you sort of look up to them and they're your role model. But if you have no interest in teaching or have no interest in what they're doing, they're not your role model. You still respect them because they teach and all that stuff but they're not your role model because that's not what you're interested in. But you still respect them for what they're doing for you.
(WH1)

Students report mutual respect, listening and teachers taking an interest in their students as important qualities in the teachers with whom they have relationships that lead to student compliance. These same qualities are also those noted by students from Hyacinth College who identified certain teachers as role models. Students reported that these qualities are important for positive and productive teacher–student relationships.

Conclusions about student compliance

This research describes student compliance as being fostered in classrooms where student engagement is promoted by teachers who acknowledge and reward positive behaviour. Students spoke of complying with teacher instruction through the use of negative reinforcement, such as teachers yelling at them, but spoke of poor teacher–student relationships as a result of such pedagogical methods. Students report demonstrating compliance for teachers whom they liked and respected, and who modelled behaviours such as paying compliments, describing emotions and coping with frustrations. Whilst students report pro-social behaviours in teachers assist in the development of positive teacher–student relationships, they do not perceive secondary-school teachers as social skills role models.

Conclusions

The focus of this research has been to determine whether the opportunity to develop social skills and social competence is available to secondary students in Victorian Government schools. To investigate this, three research questions were developed to

generate an understanding of the culture of schools and the experiences of the students in these schools.

This research contributes to knowledge about the manner in which the classroom social environment influences student engagement and leads to students acquiring social skills. Past studies seeking to understand the relationship between teacher personality and teacher–student relationships (Fisher et al., 1998; Martin et al., 2007) and students’ perceptions of the classroom environment (den Brok et al., 2006; Infantino & Little, 2005) have relied on impersonal methods of data collection such as questionnaires. This research is unique in that the investigation of teacher pedagogies and the effect of this on teacher–student relationships is explored through first-hand perspectives gained from interviews with participants.

This thesis contributes to the research on teacher–student relationships both in secondary school and in primary school. As Barber (2002) notes, ‘few studies have analysed the bonds between the secondary teacher and his/her students’ (p. 383), while Main and Bryer (2007) point out that ‘there is little published evidence of training or research on relationships in middle schools in Australia’ (p. 100). By involving young people, this research provided an opportunity for students in secondary schools to participate in educational research and express their opinions about their experiences of school and their relationships with teachers. Smyth (1999) describes this type of research as ‘voiced research’; ‘the bringing into the picture of perspectives previously excluded, muted, or silenced by dominant structures or discourses’ (p. 74). Young people’s own perspectives and ‘voice’ have not been widely reported in social-skills research, which has ‘traditionally’ focused on social-skills intervention outcomes. This research adds to the literature about adolescent wellbeing, as social skills and social competence are crucial to wellness and health (Hettler, 1984). The findings of this thesis complement emerging literature about youth wellbeing such as the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia’s report *Children and young people’s views on wellbeing* (2010), which specifically sought the perspectives of young people about what they considered important to their wellbeing.

This thesis demonstrates that school leaders and teachers agree that social competence should be an educational goal. This is in accordance with the preamble to the *Melbourne Declaration* (MCEETYA, 2008), which states that ‘schools play a vital role in promoting

the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians' (p. 4). The *Melbourne Declaration* further states that 'schooling should also support the development of skills in areas such as social interaction' (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 5).

Social competence has a number of different definitions in research literature.

Researchers from the ATP (Prior et al., 2000) utilised an instrument based on Gresham and Elliott's (1990) model of child and adolescent social competence, which proposed the following attributes as social competence: assertion, cooperation, empathy, responsibility, and self-control. The Australian Curriculum's Personal and social capabilities utilise four organising elements: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social management (ACARA, 2013a). The National Curriculum Board's definition of social competence is that it is a quality that enables 'students to interact effectively with others by assessing and successfully operating within a range of changing, often ambiguous human situations' (National Curriculum Board, 2009, p. 14). Whatever definition is selected, social competence, as a component of social-emotional competence has been demonstrated to have a positive effect on success in life, including assisting physical health, academic performance, and relationship success (Elias et al., 1997; Zins et al., 2004). Hettler (1984) proposes that emotional and social happiness are two dimensions of wellness.

Students believe that socially competent young people are popular and have many friends. This thesis has demonstrated that formal arrangements to facilitate students learning social competence, such as team teaching, are problematic because insufficient professional development has been made available to teachers, and time constraints limit the opportunity to prepare quality lessons. Students reported that larger class sizes, in which team teaching operates, reduce opportunities for participation. Ryan and Patrick (2001) find that young adolescents' motivation and engagement was related to the classroom social environment, and students who believe their teachers to be unsupportive may be less engaged. This thesis concludes that this may indeed be the case for students in large team-teaching classes, as students reported negative feelings about their relationships with their teachers in such classrooms.

Secondary-school teachers in this study reported that they need professional development in the area of a social-emotional curriculum. This finding is confirmed in the DfES

(2003) report, *What works in developing children's emotional and social competence and wellbeing?*, which states that 'teachers need to be convinced of the importance of emotional and social education, and may need education in this area' (p. 74). There was considerable variation in the approaches used by teachers to incorporate social-skills instruction in classes. Some teachers included little or no formal daily instruction, while other teachers considered every action in the classroom as part of social-emotional instruction. There appears to be no whole-school agreement about the extent to which social-skills instruction, as part of social-emotional learning, is incorporated in classes, and such instruction appears to be left to individual teacher's discretion, choice (and personal capabilities). This contrasts with advice from Hawkins and Catalano (1992), who report that young people benefit more from 'pro-social' structured programmes that not only teach social skills, but have teachers model social skills, and provide students clear feedback on their attempts to practise the skills, with positive reinforcement for using such skills.

This thesis also found that because teachers work independently and in isolation in social-skills instruction that their opinions and their confidence levels differ about the formal reporting of social competence. Specifically, teachers are confused about the format of social-competence reporting and have concerns about the effect that such reporting might have on students and their parents or guardians.

The variations in teacher practice in social-skills instruction in secondary schools and classrooms points to significant differences between intent and practice within schools. Alexander (2010) suggests that the daily practice of teachers is detached from the 'holistic' aims of curriculum. This thesis has demonstrated that there are considerable differences in the perceptions of the social-emotional curriculum within schools, and between teachers and their classrooms. Reasons for teacher apprehensiveness about teaching social skills have been suggested in previous research. Wight and Chapparo (2008) note that 'teachers report that social competence at school is multidimensional and situational' (p. 258) and therefore a difficult curriculum element for teachers to conceptualise and assess. Korinek and Popp (1997) report that teachers are reluctant to take the time from the curriculum to teach social skills. The secondary-school teachers in this study reported that they are not experts in teaching social skills, and need professional development in this domain. Such factors limit the opportunity for students to develop social skills through teacher instruction. Moreover, this thesis found a distinct lack of

whole-school, strategic social–emotional curriculum planning in schools, together with few resources and little teacher professional development in pedagogy. In the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2003) report *What works in developing children's emotional and social competence and wellbeing?*, a number of features of successful programmes which promote student social–emotional competence are discussed. The report suggests that effective programmes must include 'regular and predictable work to develop skills across the curriculum, and reinforce these skills...across the whole school' (p. 68). This thesis supports the DfES (2003) report recommendations regarding the use of positive acknowledgment and reinforcement of 'wanted' student behaviours, and avocation of the use of explicit instruction and role modelling of pro-social skills by teachers.

This thesis supports the work of Bernard et al. (2007) who report that a large percentage of Australian students are experiencing social and emotional difficulties. Students in this research study reported feelings of not being able to control their anger and being aware of 'depressed' students at their schools. Students described that teachers modelling positive social skills translated into happier classrooms and a positive learning environment, but they did not report recognising such behaviour as explicitly modelling social skills that they could consciously learn and endeavour to repeat. The findings of this thesis, specifically those regarding the teacher behaviours that create supportive classrooms, confirm the research of McNeely, Nonnemaker and Blum (2002), who researched the importance of school connectedness for positive student behaviour and learning. Students suggest that secondary-school teachers instruct them in academic subjects and that social skills were taught at primary school. Lewis (2001) suggests that primary-school teachers believe that it is their job to teach social skills, and student participants in this research were able to identify the activities in primary school through which social skills were taught and developed.

The young people in this research stated that the academic curriculum is the primary focus of secondary school and did not mention a social–emotional curriculum at school. Such prioritising of the academic curriculum and achievement in schools does not support 'whole-child' education, with its holistic educational goals as outlined in the *Melbourne Declaration* (MCEETYA, 2008). It also suggests that the current poor state of the wellbeing and emotional health of young people (Bernard et al., 2007) is not being addressed in schools.

Students report that they want interactions with teachers. Noddings (2003) states that ‘it matters to students whether or not they like and are liked by their teachers’ (p. 244). The findings of this thesis support such findings and research such as that of Ryan and Patrick (2001), who found that students’ perceptions of teacher support and mutual respect were related to positive changes in their motivation and engagement. Importantly, this thesis provides insight into the social processes that influence student motivation and engagement, an area in which little research is available (Patrick et al., 2007). The students in this study reported that they engage with teachers who recognise and reward good behaviour, involve students in decision making and behavioural consequences, have a sense of humour, take an interest in them, initiate conversations and make work fun. It is important to remember that positive teacher–student relationships have been associated with improved social outcomes for students (OECD, 2005).

Ryan and Patrick (2001) note that ‘when students believed that their teacher tried to understand them and was available to help, they engaged in less off-task and disruptive behaviour in the classroom’ (p. 454). This thesis has demonstrated that students behave for teachers that they like and respect, outlining the interpersonal skills and behaviours of teachers to which students respond positively. These skills include the teacher paying compliments, describing emotions and coping with frustration. Other behaviours that students noticed were generally whether the teacher moved around the classroom (demonstrating interest and engagement with students) and the tone of voice used by the teacher.

This thesis has demonstrated that while school leaders believe that teachers are behaviour role models for students, the students do not identify teachers as role models of social skills. This thesis describes that students and teachers all place value on positive teacher–student relationships. Hattie (2003) finds that the teacher is the most important variable affecting student outcomes at school. The potential in this area lies in the desire that students have for positive relationships and interactions with teachers. Such positive and healthy relationships between school staff and students in turn foster young people’s wellbeing, and are considered a protective factor in mental health (Fuller, 2001). Importantly, te Riele (2006a) suggests that positive teacher–student relationships can play a major role in re-engaging ‘at-risk’ students.

Bernard et al. (2007) report that ‘teacher actions are important contributors to student social and emotional wellbeing’ (p. 7). A focal point for schools intending to implement social–emotional curriculum is in the value that students place on the interpersonal skills of teachers and the positive classroom atmosphere created by such teachers. Explicit social-skills instruction from teachers that students respect has the potential to facilitate age-appropriate student social-skills acquisition and social–emotional learning. A whole-school approach and professional development would mitigate variance between classrooms, facilitate the development of a shared teacher pedagogical approach in delivering social–emotional learning across the school curriculum and aid in the development of a caring and supportive school culture which promotes social competence in students. However, the importance of social–emotional learning must be an agreed educational goal of all school staff, and time and resources must be allocated to teachers to instruct in this aspect of the curriculum. Many students are missing the benefits of the positive social-skills that teachers are modelling in classrooms because they perceive secondary-school teachers to be exclusively academic instructors. Secondary schools need to create an understanding in students that they are providers of social–emotional learning, and staff need to teach social skills explicitly within a whole-school approach. With the implementation of such practices, the holistic goals of education in the domains of personal and social learning can be achieved.

Limitations

The conclusions of this thesis must be considered in light of the fact that the study involved a relatively small number participants, students (n=18), teachers (n=13) and principals (n=2). While ten secondary schools were approached by email in 2011, only two school principals responded and agreed to meet to discuss the research proposal. Fortunately, these two school principals agreed to allow staff and students to be approached to participate in the study. Other schools could not be approached in person, as I was unable to visit those schools to propose conducting research during the following school year. The limited number of participants in the study affects the extent to which the thesis findings can be considered representative of all schools in the state of Victoria. While university ethics approval was received in time for the beginning of the school year in late January, 2012, DEECD approval was not received until the first term had commenced. This meant that a reduction in the number of proposed research days in

schools during the first term of school. Two visits per term had been proposed for each school over the four terms of the school year to build rapport with participants, especially students. Each research day 'lost' was a sizable portion of those available to me. Additionally, meeting the young people at the beginning of their time in secondary school would have been advantageous in capturing their initial impressions.

I was a practising full-time teacher at the time of conducting the research. This meant there were limitations on the time available as study leave to attend the two schools to conduct the interviews and class observations. One effect of the time restraint was that the visits needed to be scheduled one term in advance. As such, unexpected problems arose such as one day when I attended a school only to discover that all the year sevens were on an excursion to the zoo. At other times, students had moved classes, and locating the participants meant that interview time was shortened.

All participants were volunteers. The two principals agreed to allow me to approach staff and students to volunteer to participate in the study. Teachers were approached individually and, graciously, none refused to be interviewed, although several teacher interviews had to be scheduled weeks in advance due to timetabling constraints or teacher obligations such as yard duty on the school-visit days. These timetable constraints also affected my ability to match class observations with interviews as schedules (theirs and mine) had to be synchronised.

The recruitment of students was difficult because the research proposal was explained to students while they were in their usual classes. There would be a number of reasons why students may have been inattentive, distracted or otherwise disinterested in listening to an outsider during these classes. However, school-leadership members were most helpful in reminding students of the research and distributing the necessary forms and information during the initial weeks of the research. An additional problem of recruitment was the large cohort of EAL young people at Waratah High. Obviously, the proposal was explained in terms believed to be suitable for young people at this year level, but the research documents were in English and there was a reliance on students to explain the research to parents to gain their consent. Although impossible to quantify, difficulties with spoken and/or written English may have been an issue in the recruitment of student participants.

School leadership selected the cohort of students to be approached to participate in the research. Consequently, students from accelerated academic-learning programmes and students requiring additional support were not a part of this study and their comments and perspectives are not included in this research. It could be argued that having voluntary participation in this research resulted in a cohort of students that were the most engaged and motivated in their respected school settings. However, this does not appear to have been the case, as many of the students interviewed spoke of having difficulties at school, with several students disclosing that they had instances of disruptive behaviour, absences, poor grades and suspensions for various reasons. Students were selected from the same classes because of the requirement of observing teacher instruction in classes the time constraints involved in such observations. These students may already have been grouped together due to learning needs, or academic ability. This also possibly reduced the breadth of experiences and background of the student participants in this research.

Year-seven students were selected for this research because of their position to have a fresh perspective of secondary school and their recent experiences of primary school. The inclusion of the perspectives of a range of secondary students would have been in facilitated a greater possibility for comparison and contrast of student opinions of the connections between teacher pedagogy and teacher–student relationships.

Another possible limitation is that because the interviews were conducted at the schools, the students in the interviews may have been wary of speaking aloud comments that they felt were unfavourable of teachers and school. Firstly, because they may have been afraid of being overheard and secondly, because they may have lacked confidence that I would maintain absolute confidentiality with their comments.

Trust and rapport with the interviewer was an integral component of this research, the purpose of which was to describe faithfully the participants' perceptions and opinions. If neither trust nor rapport was achieved, there is a great likelihood that truthful and personal comments would not be disclosed to me as the researcher. At times, students sought confirmation that comment sources would not be identified but generally seemed comfortable to speak with me. A student evaluation through feedback was sought in the last interviews with students. All of the young people answered in that they enjoyed participating and no student declined to participate in further interviews once the research process had commenced.

Whenever adults conduct interviews there can be power balances, especially in the case of a teacher interviewing students in school. Participants may presume there are ‘correct answers’ or that they need to provide answers to ‘give a good impression’. As a practitioner–researcher, I was keenly aware of this possibility, and did all that was possible to build rapport and trust with the students. Over time, the students seemed to grow more comfortable with the interview process. Power balances can also be present in focus-group interviews, with participants (i.e. the students) possibly reluctant or unwilling to disclose opinions in front of peers. This concern may have been lessened in this research by the fact that students were from the same class and were already familiar with each other. Most participants in the focus-group interviews appeared to be friendly and cooperative with each other, and there was no evidence of conflict or other hostile confrontations while the interviews were being conducted.

There was some variation in interview venues, with some interview rooms being better than others. A quiet conference room was booked at one of the schools, but in some instances, interviews were in the offices of school leaders. For principal interviews, this was appropriate, but for the students such venues may have been intimidating and too formal for conversational interview techniques. Interviews with teachers were by necessity in staff rooms or classrooms, which were often noisy and did not offer privacy. Teachers did not seem to mind this but at times audio quality was compromised, and the resulting transcripts had parts that were unintelligible.

Implications for Further Research

This thesis offers insight into the manners in which teacher pedagogy shapes teacher–student relationships, and student acquisition of social skills. A relatively small number of participants were involved. The question of how students gain social skills and social competence is valid and worthwhile, deserving further inquiry across a larger number of schools and with greater representation of participants from different life circumstances. Replicability is not the issue in this research, but rather the gathering of insight and opinions is needed to understand school experiences from different perspectives. Further research is needed to ascertain the role of teachers in the development of student social competence, including the contribution made by the culture of school and teacher pedagogy.

The examination of the role of gender was beyond the scope of this thesis, but an important direction for future research would be the investigation of whether the teacher pedagogies that link teacher–student relationships and social competence are the same for boys and girls.

Interviewing has merit as a research method, particularly because it has the advantage of giving participants a ‘voice’. Strategies to encourage young people to participate in research, and opportunities for them to do so, need to be increased. Further research about social–emotional learning in collaboration with students would be timely and relevant.

Student self-reporting would seem particularly relevant in secondary-school settings in which self-awareness and self-management are two elements to be developed as capabilities within the new Australian Curriculum. Self-reporting methodologies and best-practice methods need to be investigated to serve best the intentions of providing students opportunities to comment and contribute views about their education.

While there are currently concerns about the mental health of young Australians and a large percentage of young people say that they are not learning about how to make friends or how to solve interpersonal problems (Bernard et al., 2007, p. 107), not all secondary students want to participate in activities such as Circle Time (which is practised in some primary schools) in secondary school. However, a number of students in this study stated that they would like a forum or process in school through which they could ‘check in’, or talk about issues once or twice a week. Further research in consultation with students is needed to develop social-skills programmes enacted in secondary schools that are appropriate for secondary students, and place focus on whole-school approaches.

Investigation into strengthening teacher-training programmes to enable secondary-school teachers to better support the social and emotional needs of secondary students is necessary.

Appendix 1: Teacher Observation Checklist—Social Skills

The Teacher Observation Checklist—Social Skills was devised and based on observable behavioural characteristics of the following three social skills of teachers: i) interpersonal skills (listening attentively and empathically, offering support, giving compliments and sense of humour); ii) self-awareness and control (temper control, coping with frustration or anger, describing one's own emotions and behaviour, and accepting criticism); and iii) assertion (initiating conversations, inviting others to interact and acknowledging compliments). The checklist was used to frame questions to students about the social-skills behaviours that teachers were modelling, and to guide discussions with teachers about their classroom practices.

Time	Interpersonal Skills				Self-awareness and Control				Assertion		
Five minute intervals	Listening attentively √ = observed	Offering support √ = observed	Giving compliments √ = observed	Sense of humour √ = observed	Temper control X = loss of control/anger display	Coping with frustration √ = observed	Describing own emotions √ = observed	Accepting criticism √ = observed	Initiating conversations √ = observed	Inviting others to interact √ = observed	Acknowledging compliments √ = observed

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

The interview approach of this research utilised a variety of questions, including open-ended questions with a conversational strategy. Questions were standardised for each group of participants: students, teachers and principals to investigate the three research questions:

- *Do Victorian Government secondary-school teachers explicitly model social skills so that students have the opportunity to develop social skills and social competence?*
- *What value do students, teachers and school leaders place on social competence as an educational outcome?*
- *Do students identify teachers as exemplars/role models of social skills?*

Principal Interview

Purpose of the principal interview

- Access features that are in place
- Determine the goals for student social competence
- Evaluate leadership concerns towards social-skills acquisition and students.

Materials to be collected

- Social-skills instructional materials
- Strategic plan
- Annual Implementation Plan (AIP)
- Student Attitudes to School data?
- Pedagogy Policy

Date:

Principal's name:

.....

Principal Interview Guide

Features that are in place?

- Do you have school social values or motto?
- Are the school rules, for example, stated as personal bests or values? (Are staff explicitly asked to model the 'values'?)
- What are the school 'rules'?
- Do you acknowledge students for doing well socially? If so, how is this done? (i.e. Is this a acknowledged from leadership, all staff, or just teachers etc.?)

Social competence goals

- Is student social competence in your top-three-to-five school-improvement goals?
- What are your top-three school-improvement goals?
- Is there an allocated amount of money in the school budget specifically for improving students' social competence?
- Do you have a team at the school responsible for promoting/improving student social skills?
- Does the school have a Pedagogy Policy or Teaching and Learning Guide? If so, does it say anything about teachers' role modelling social skills?
- Do you have any documents in the school that guide teacher pedagogy towards modelling social skills for students?

Social-skills programmes

- Do you use a social-skills 'package' at the school? (e.g. *Guide to social and emotional learning in Queensland state schools*. Department of Education, Training and the Arts. (2008) If so, when (what year) was it implemented?
- Do staff receive professional development in social-skills curriculum/programmes?

Testing for social competence

The National Curriculum Board's (2009) goal of social competence is set out as enabling 'students to interact effectively with others by assessing and successfully operating within a range of changing, often ambiguous human situations' (p. 14).

- How would you test for social competence?
- Do you comment on social competence in your students' school reports?

Student opinion surveys

- How do you use the Student Attitudes to School Survey data?
- Do you think data from the Student Attitudes to School Survey could/does inform teachers' role modelling of social skills? For example:
 - i. My teachers put a lot of energy into teaching our class
 - ii. My teachers are well prepared
 - iii. My teachers listen to what I have to say
 - iv. My teachers are good at helping students with problems
 - v. My teachers help me do my best
- Do you think this student data could/does inform about social competence? For example:
 - i. I get on well with other students at my school
 - ii. I get on really well with most of my classmates

Opinions

- How important is it that staff model good social skills? (i.e. this research is focusing on assertion, self-awareness and control and interpersonal skills)
- Where are most teachers relationships formed with students: in the classroom or in other activities?
- Who do you believe are students' reference group (if any) for social skills?

Any other comments?

What do you hope to find out from this research project?

Teacher Interview Guide

(For the tape: name, sex, group, school, length of time teaching, length of time at the school.)

- Do you think that students look up to you and want to ‘be like you’ or do you feel that they ‘don’t want to be like you’?
- What do you think the students pick up on with regards to social skills (especially assertion, self-awareness/control and interpersonal relationships)?
- Do you believe that your being respectful to students is reciprocated by students to you and others? Does your behaviour affect students?
- Do you think that your behaviour towards certain students influences other students’ behaviour towards these students?
- Do you think that you have an influence on students’ social skills outside of the classroom?
- Do you explicitly teach social skills to your class(es)? If so, is it a programme ‘package’?
- Have you had PD on teaching social skills? Would you want PD on this?
- Does the school support you (e.g. modelling lessons, resource materials, PD) to encourage social competence in the students that you teach?
- Do you think social competence is important? Should it be an educational goal?
- How do we achieve socially competent students?
- Should we report on students’ social competence?
- Who do you think are year-seven students’ reference group, especially in terms of social skills?
- What makes a good teacher?

Student Interview Guide

(For the tape: name, age, sex, group, school.)

1. Questions

Social skills

- What do you think the term ‘social skill’ means?
- (Brainstorm and list number of concepts thought of by the students)
- What sort of skills do you need to:
 1. Relate/interact (get along) well with friends?
 2. Relate/interact (get along) well with family?
 3. Be successful at school?
- What skills do people need to:
 1. Interact together (interpersonal skills)?
 2. Solve problems between people and not lose their tempers (self-awareness and control)?
 3. Put their opinions forward and ‘stand up for themselves’ (assertion)?
- When do you think you ‘get’ social skills? How do you ‘get’ social skills?
- Can you tell if people have good social skills? What are they like and how do they behave?
- Do teachers and school staff role model social skills? How?
- Is it important that teachers role model social skills? Is it important that teachers ‘get along with’ students, do not get angry and show students how to get their point of view across to others?
- Is being able to relate well with other people (interpersonal skills); express your emotions; solve conflicts and control your anger (self-awareness and control); and

put forward your opinion (assertion) important in society today? If so, is it important to learn/master these skills at school?

- Are teachers people who you think should demonstrate social skills? Are your teachers this year (year seven) different from your teachers in primary school?

Think of the following:

- how they get along with students
- how they deal with frustrations/anger or show their emotions
- how they tell you how to get your point of view across to other people.

About teachers

- Do you look up to teachers and say ‘I want to be like them’ or do you feel ‘I don’t want to be like them’?
- If a teacher picks up litter, for example, would it have any effect on you? Is it more likely to make you be careful not to litter?
- Do you think the fact that they are respectful (and have good interpersonal relationship skills) encourages you to be respectful?
- Does the way some teachers react to certain students influence how you treat these students?
- Has there been a difference in how your year seven teachers treat you compared to your primary-school teachers? Do they teach you how to get along with other people, control your anger/understand emotions, express yourself or resolve fights/conflict?
- Who are the people you see as role models? What qualities are you looking up to?
- What qualities should a teacher have and demonstrate?
- What do you think makes a good teacher?
- What group of people would teachers be role models for in terms of how they treat people?

- Is it that you feel that you do not want to behave like teachers or is it that it is not an issue?
- Are there other school staff (e.g. chaplain, welfare teacher, integration aid, office staff, nurse) that you relate to best? What qualities do they have? What do they role model? [reference group]
- Are teachers different outside of the classroom?

2. Additional questions

- Do teachers greet you in school/class/the yard? Do they have conversations with you?
- Can you list the things that teachers do in class?
- How should a teacher teach? Can you explain how you would like to be taught?
- What do you think are the things that you should learn at school? Are there other things beside academic things (e.g. maths, science, and English)?
- What are the ‘life lessons’ or personal things you should learn?
- How do you learn about ‘personal learning’? How do you learn this?
- Do you learn any personal habits from teachers? Do they role model?
- Do you notice teachers in staff rooms together?
- If you were a teacher, how would you teach kids?
- What things are important for kids to know? How would you go about teaching them?
- Are there clubs at recess/lunch times?
- What skills do you need as a teacher?
- Would you like to be a teacher? Why/why not?
- Do you think teachers role model social skills—skills to survive in society and get along with people?

- Do teachers help you resolve problems with other students/friends? Do they give you strategies (advice) about how to get along with people at school?
- Do teachers smile at you when they see you in the corridor/yard or outside of class?
- Are teachers late? Do they take their shoes off when you have to? What do you think of that?
- Do you like school?
- What do you think is the main job of teachers?
- What do you learn most from how teachers treat you?
- What do you learn most from teachers in class?
- What do you learn most from teachers' behaviour towards you and other students in class?
- Do you want teachers to be human?
- When you transition to year eight, do teachers help you find new friends?

3. Further questions including family views about education

- Do you have a sense of belonging (in class and in the school) and believe that you can 'achieve' in your classes?
- **Who is the most important person in the classroom? In the school?**
- Do you feel that you have any power in the classroom or is it all with the teacher?
- Do you feel valued as an individual and as a learner in the classroom?
- Do you see teachers interacting? What do you learn? (Are there team-teaching opportunities?)
- Do you talk about school at home with your parents (guardians) and family? If so, what do you talk about?

- Do you help other students/comfort other students when they seem upset? Do you introduce yourselves to other people and initiate conversations? If so, where did you learn to do these things?
- Do your teachers encourage you to try new things?
- Do you know what your parents or close family think about school? Do you think that it is important to get an education?
- Do you see schools as places that work for you?
- What sort of things do you enjoy doing at school?
- Do you think that you will complete year twelve and/or go to further education?
- What level of education have your parents got?
- How many days have you been absent this year?
- Have you been referred to the office or coordinator this year?
- Have your parents attended school with you for any reason this year?
- Do you ever negotiate what you learn and how you learn it?
- Are you encouraged to ask questions in class?
- Are you involved in the assessment of tasks?
- How were classroom expectations set out at the start of the year? How do teachers explain the rules (expectations) of the classroom to you?
- How do teachers encourage you to stay on task?
- Yes or no: I am capable? We do this together? We share?
- Is school for you?

4. Summing up—evaluation

- What have I been talking about, specifically with regard to teachers?
- Do you have specific teachers that you relate to best? Why do you relate to these teachers best?
- Do teachers talk to you in class? What do they talk about?
- Have you done surveys about teachers and school? Would you prefer to do written questions or talk to me?
- Is it good to talk? Should teachers ask how you're going?
- How could classes be better?
- Do you see teachers interacting? Do teachers get along? Do you learn anything?
- Are you better behaved for teachers that you like (compliance)?
- How long does it take to get to know a teacher?
- What did the teachers do to make you like them? (If Mr N or Ms V or Ms Cook took French, would you like it?)
- **Are you different now? What's different?**
- What's important to learn at school?
- Is it what you learn or *how* you learn that's important?
- Is high school better than primary school? Are the teachers different?
- Can you tell me about your experiences or the relationship that you have with your teachers?
- Do teachers teach you about controlling your anger, being more assertive, or getting your voice heard?
- We've talked about these things (emotions, anger, voice), do you get the opportunity to talk about these (e.g. in Circle Time)?

- Would you like Circle Time?
- Are teachers different with important visitors? In what way?
- How should teachers treat you when you're naughty?
- **Could we be taught by robots?**
- Do you ever work in groups? Do teachers put you in groups with friends or others?
- Have you enjoyed year seven? How is it better? How were teachers in primary school?
- Would you like me to be teaching you?

5. Student evaluation of taking part in this research project

- Did you enjoy talking with me?
- What did you enjoy most about the experience?
- Was there anything that you didn't like?
- Has it helped in any way understanding the role of teachers? Did it make you think about school more? Did it make you think about school and teachers differently?
- Do you think other students share your views? Why/why not?
- Were there questions that I didn't ask or should have asked?
- Were the questions easy to understand?
- Are you interested in finding out about what I learnt from doing this study?
- Did you learn anything from taking part in this study?
- Was taking part what you expected?
- Any other comments?

Appendix 3: DEECD Sample Secondary Template

Appendix 3 provides a sample Victorian Government secondary school report (prior to 2013) demonstrating ‘Interpersonal Development’ as a point on the yearly continuum.

This was taken from the DEECD website: *Teacher support resources: Sample secondary report template*. (DEECD, 2009a).

SAMPLE SECONDARY TEMPLATE

(Note: while the version on screen is in colour, it will print in black and white.)

ELIZABETH WONG

Science

Year 8 Semester 1

	Rating	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
Science	C			●		
Thinking Processes	B				●	
Interpersonal Development	C		●			

Work habits

	Needs Attention	Acceptable	Very Good	Excellent
Effort		●		
Class Behaviour			●	

What Elizabeth has achieved

Elizabeth has achieved a sound understanding of the particle model and is able to use this knowledge to explain the structure and properties of different types of matter. Her timeline project on 'The Changing Earth' demonstrated a sound understanding of ecosystems and the impact humans can have on those systems. Her research project was well presented and clearly showed she can now locate, select and use information effectively from a range of different sources. Elizabeth is skilled in designing experiments to test simple hypotheses and she is able to safely and accurately use a range of equipment and chemicals. She has continued to develop her skills in making accurate observations and in recording her observations using appropriate language and formats. Elizabeth has well developed interpersonal skills and is able to work effectively with others to complete group tasks.

Areas for improvement/future learning

Elizabeth needs to continue to develop her skills in drawing valid conclusions from experimental data. She must ensure that the available data supports her conclusions. Elizabeth also needs to make sure that all tasks are completed and submitted by the due date as some of her homework tasks were overdue. Finally she needs to make sure that she regularly reviews her level of understanding of the work and seeks assistance when she requires it.

The school will do the following to support Elizabeth in her learning

Activities and worksheets will be provided which support Elizabeth to plan her homework and to regularly review her level of understanding of the learning outcomes we are working to achieve in each unit of work. Elizabeth's parents will be informed when work is overdue via Elizabeth's diary.

What you can do at home to help Elizabeth's progress

Check Elizabeth's diary on a regular basis to monitor her completion of homework tasks and support her to keep to her homework timetable. Assist Elizabeth to monitor her understanding by asking her to explain in her own words the ideas she is learning about in class.

Teacher: Ms Chris Blackman

June 2006

Ratings:

- A Well above the standard expected at this time of year
- B Above the standard expected at this time of year
- C At the standard expected at this time of year
- D Below the standard expected at this time of year
- E Well below the standard expected at this time of year

Legend:

- Your child's achievement this year
- The expected level of achievement

Appendix 4: DEECD Student Attitudes to School Survey

Data for student engagement and wellbeing is currently measured under the Accountability and Improvement Framework for Victorian Government Schools (DEECD, 2009b). Student outcomes for engagement and wellbeing are measured in the primary years by attendance and a mean score on the 'School Connectedness' factor of the Student Attitudes to School Survey across years five to six and in the secondary years by attendance and a mean score on the 'School Connectedness' factor of the Student Attitudes to School Survey across years seven to twelve.

2012 Attitudes to School Survey—Factors and Questions

Wellbeing

Student Morale: The extent to which students feel positive at school

I feel positive at school
I feel cheerful at school
I feel relaxed at school
I feel happy at school
I feel energised at school

Student Distress: The extent to which students feel negative at school

I feel tense at school
I feel negative at school
I feel frustrated at school
I feel depressed at school
I feel uneasy at school
I feel stressed at school

Teaching & Learning

Teacher Effectiveness: The extent to which teachers deliver their teaching in a planned and energetic manner

My teachers are easy to understand
My teachers put a lot of energy into teaching our class
My teachers explain how we can get more information
This school is preparing students well for their future
My teachers are well prepared

Teacher Empathy: The extent to which teachers listen and understand student needs, and assist with student learning

My teachers listen to what I have to say
My teachers really want to help me learn
My teachers provide help and support when it is needed
My teachers are good at helping students with problems
My teachers explain things to me clearly
My teachers help me to do my best
My teachers understand how I learn

Stimulating Learning: The extent to which teachers make learning interesting, enjoyable and inspiring

My teachers make the work we do in class interesting
My teachers make learning interesting
My teachers are inspiring to listen to
My teachers make school work enjoyable

School Connectedness: The extent to which students feel they belong and enjoy attending school

I feel good about being a student at this school
I like school this year
I am happy to be at this school
I feel I belong at this school
I look forward to going to school

Student Motivation: The extent to which students are motivated to achieve and learn

Doing well in school is very important to me
Continuing or completing my education is important to me
I try very hard in school
I am keen to do very well at my school

Learning Confidence: The extent to which students have a positive perception of their ability as a student

I am good at my school work
I find it easy to learn new things
I am a very good student
I think I am generally successful at school

Student Relationships

Connectedness to Peers: The extent to which students feel socially connected and get along with their peers

I get on well with other students at my school
I am liked by others at my school
I get on really well with most of my classmates
My friends at school really care about me

Classroom Behaviour: The extent to which other students are not disruptive in class

It's often hard to learn in class because some students are really disruptive
It's often hard to listen to the teacher in class, because other students are misbehaving
The behaviour of some students in class makes it hard for me to do my work

Student Safety: The extent to which students feel they are safe from bullying and harassment

I have been bullied recently at school
I have been teased in an unpleasant way recently at my school
Students are mean to me at this school
I have been deliberately hit, kicked or threatened by another student recently
Other students often spread rumours about me at my school

Glossary

ACARA

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority is responsible for a national curriculum from kindergarten to year twelve.

ACER

The Australian Council for Educational Research.

Circle Time

Circle Time refers to any time that a group of people are sitting together for any activity involving everyone. In schools, Circle Time may be formal or informal. This activity provides time for listening, communication and learning new concepts and skills such as social skills.

DEECD

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria).

KidsMatter

KidsMatter is a mental-health and wellbeing framework for primary schools and early-childhood education and care services.

MCEETYA

The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. From 1 July 2009, this body realigned with the Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education (MCVTE) to become two councils, the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) and the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE).

MindMatters

MindMatters is a national Australian mental-health initiative for secondary schools funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. It is a resource

and professional-development initiative that supports Australian secondary schools in promoting the mental health, and social and emotional wellbeing of all the members of school communities.

My School®

A website of ACARA, which lists the statistical profiles of almost 9,500 Australian schools.

MYSA

The Middle Years of Schooling Association. After the 2013 Annual General Meeting, this body became known as Adolescent Success.

Primary School

Primary school begins in pre-year one, termed ‘prep’ in Victoria, and finishes after completion of year six except in Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia, where it finishes after completion of year seven.

Secondary School

Secondary schools begin in year seven except in Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia where they begin in year eight.

Social-emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning can help students develop the understanding, strategies and skills that support a positive sense of self, promote respectful relationships and build student capacity to recognise and manage their own emotions and make responsible decisions.

Special School

Schools designated as ‘special’ or alternative by their school authority are those that require one or more of the following characteristics to be exhibited by the student or situation before enrolment is allowed:

- mental or physical disability or impairment
- social or emotional problems, including behaviours of concern
- in custody, on remand or in hospital.

SDQ

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire is a brief behavioural-screening questionnaire for three to sixteen year olds that consists of 25 items divided into five scales: emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, poor-relationship problems, and pro-social behaviour.

Tribes

Tribes is an approach to learning where through a number of agreements a school culture is created and a learning community developed. Tribes school staff work together in supportive groups. The four agreements are:

- attentive listening
- appreciation/no put downs
- mutual respect
- the right to pass.

VCAA

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, is the department responsible for the senior secondary Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) assessments, exams and conduct of state-wide testing.

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