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## Religious schools in Australia's education system: An investigation of the social and civic implications

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system: An investigation of the social  
and civic implications

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Religious schools in Australia's education system: An investigation of the social and civic  
implications

Graeme L. Cross

This thesis is presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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School of Education

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## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

## ***Abstract***

In the past 20 years the number of religious schools present within Australia's educational marketplace has grown prolifically. In response, concerns have been raised and it has been asserted that the lack of religious diversity within these schools may impede development of the competencies young Australians need in order to engage relationally in pluralistic social settings. Social capital theorists refer to the act of engaging relationally in the midst of social diversity as *bridging* and the relational networks that form as being a source of *bridging social capital*.

This study sought to understand how the educative environment of religious schools influenced development of the ability to *bridge*. Three schools from Australia's Christian school sector participated in this multiple case study. The data collection methods used included semi-structured individual interviews with graduates, their parent(s) and an employer or a colleague from the workplace of each graduate. The data derived from these interviews (50 in total) provided insights into the post-school social worlds of the graduates and the influences that had shaped their social and civic development. In addition to these triangulated data, one focus group interview was conducted with educators at each of the participating schools.

Careful analysis of the data found that formation of the attributes needed to bridge did not appear to be significantly influenced by the degree of religious diversity present within the student body of the graduates' schools, but had been shaped by other aspects of their school environment and features associated with their broader social-ecologies. In addition to elucidating this phenomenon, this study also provides insights into a network of Christian schools that have rarely been the subject of educational research and yet are prominent within Australia's education sector. It also contributes to the rigorous and at times contentious discourse around two issues that confront educational leaders and theorists: 1) The role of schools in the formation of social and civic values; and 2) The tensions associated with the expression of religious freedom in a liberal democracy and the presence of religious schools in the educational marketplace.

## ***Declaration***

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- i) Incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- ii) Contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
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20<sup>th</sup> September 2014

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Four years ago, when the decision was made that I would commence full-time study and embark upon this PhD journey, little did I realise how much I would enjoy the opportunity to re-enter the world of educational research. It really has been an honour and privilege to undertake this project and become part of the community that is Edith Cowan University's (ECU) School of Education.

When I reflect back over this period of study, it is absolutely obvious that the completion of this project would not have been possible without the help, assistance, support, advice and encouragement of many people. While it is not possible to name everyone who has contributed, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and honour some whose contribution has been substantial.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the three superb ECU supervisors who have worked closely with me on this project. I have truly valued their willingness to take me on as a student and to guide and teach me the principles and practices of educational research. Throughout the journey, they have shown belief in this project and in me, even when I doubted my own capacity to see it through to the end. I am truly indebted to Associate Professor Jan Gray who has been on this journey with me from the beginning and Associate Professor Glenda Campbell-Evans who kindly agreed to work alongside Jan when Professor Terry de Jong was unable to continue.

During the first year of this project I had the privilege of working with the late Professor Terry de Jong. I will never forget the email that Terry sent me soon after having my proposal reviewed and candidature confirmed. In it he advised me that he had been diagnosed with cancer and would not be able to continue in his supervisory role. While I was saddened by this news and concerned for him and his family as they faced the uncertain road ahead, I was grateful for the time I had spent with this wonderful man. There is no doubt that his influence on the design of this research project has been substantial and significant. It was a sad day when on the 23rd of December 2013 Terry lost his battle with cancer. He will be remembered by many, including me, as an inspirational and generous man.



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## ***Chapter One***

### ***Introduction***

#### ***Background***

Foundational to the formation of Australia's education system has been the principles of egalitarianism (Maddox, 2014) and equal opportunity for all - or in colloquial terms, ensuring a 'fair go' for every young Australian. Those who have shaped it, including its founders, have held the view that every child, irrespective of their family's wealth, ethnicity, culture or religious beliefs, should have access to a quality education that equips them to take their place as an active and engaged citizen in society. This aim continues to be voiced in the contemporary educational discourse (Bonnor & Caro, 2007; Packer, 2013).

One of the challenges that confronted its founders and continues to be contentious today, are the tensions associated with the place of religious belief and expression in schools. The national conversation amongst the founders centred on how an education might be provided for young Australians, which developed them in all areas of learning, but was also respectful of the diversity of religious beliefs and traditions of their families. Some legislators referred to this as "the religious difficulty" (Maddox, 2014, pp. Kindle Edition 1021-1024).

This 'difficulty' is resolved by some theorists and policymakers by separating religious belief and its expression from education and advocating a form of secularism that moves religion from public places like schools and into the privacy of homes and churches (Pike, 2004). This approach is reflected in Maddox's (2014) summation of the history that has shaped the development of Australia's schools. She writes:

To achieve this, the system's founders concluded, with greater or lesser degrees of personal regret, classrooms would need to be secular, which meant keeping out any religious content, whether activities such as prayers or Bible readings or lesson materials such as 'Scripture history'. (pp. Kindle Locations 3682-3687 )

This view of education that advocates the relegation of religion from schools remains prevalent in the contemporary discourse. Referring to a question asked in the New South Wales (NSW) Legislative Assembly by Henry Cohen in 1897, Maddox (2014) writes:

Cohen's question, 'What offence can there be to anybody's religion in teaching children to read, write and count?', might strike many modern readers as so obvious as to be merely rhetorical. However, you do not have to look terribly far in twenty-first -century Australia to encounter the argument that teaching children the 'three Rs' without at the same time teaching them 'the particular dogmas of their church' is not merely inadequate but actively dangerous. (pp. Kindle Locations 3734-3737)

This separation of religious belief from a young person's education is sometimes deemed to be incomprehensible, particularly by many who either hold strongly to a religious worldview (Edlin, 1999) or judge this form of secularism to be inconsistent with the practice of classical liberalism and the freedom of religious expression within a western democracy (Callan & White, 2003). Those who would challenge this view of secularism argue that religion and education cannot be so easily separated (Pike, 2004), particularly when the remit of schools extends beyond the simple transmission of reading, writing and mathematical knowledge and skills. They view the educative function of schools as also contributing significantly to developmental areas within the *affective domain* (Bloom, Krathwohl, Engelhart, Furst, & Hill, 1956), and argue that this enters the sphere of character development and the shaping of social, moral and civic values. All of which, cannot, arguably, occur without the influence of some form of metaphysical, philosophical or religious presuppositions about what constitutes the "good life" (Smeyers & Wringe, 2003, p. 322) or "worthwhile life" (Herman, 1990, p. 5).

In a school setting, what is taught in this area of learning will essentially be founded on some form of explicit or implicit worldview assumptions, which may be religious or secular. In a school founded on a religious ideology, it is likely that what is taught will align with the presuppositions about life, meaning and purpose that form its orthodoxy. In other school settings, the influence of a worldview, or multiple worldviews, will inevitably be present and influential, but may not be so easily recognisable and labelled.

For the advocates of classical liberalism, it is important to allow different conceptions of 'the good life' to shape how children are raised. This of course has implications for the freedoms extended to parents and to the structure of educational systems. Smeyers and Wringe (2003) highlight the role and legitimacy of conflicting presuppositions within a liberal democracy when they assert:

Though liberals may sometimes question the right of parents to impose their way of life on children, in the main, it is a central tenet of the liberal outlook both that many versions of the good life are possible and that among such versions there is no definite criteria of choice. At the very least, there must be a presumption that many chosen ways of life (secular or religious) are of sufficient moral value for it to be permissible for children to be brought up according to their values, customs, and traditions (pp. 322-323).

The implication is that if the goals of schooling include the affective domain, then the desired outcomes will be shaped by how educators and leaders conceptualise the good life and define it within the curriculum, culture and pedagogical practices of a school. At times, there may be continuity between the aspirations of parents and what is being promoted in the school, but this will not always be the case. In the context of a school where secular presuppositions shape the teaching and learning programs, including in the affective domain, parents who define the good life through the lens of a religious orthodoxy may find some teaching antithetical. The converse may also arise, where parents who hold to a secular orthodoxy object to what is taught in a religious school.

It is this 'religious difficulty' and the tenets of liberalism that have contributed to the significant growth of religious schools within Australia's education system. In recent times, successive governments have adopted policies that have allowed parents to choose an education that they deem most closely aligns with their beliefs and values.

It is widely acknowledged that in the past 20 years, Australia's educational landscape has altered as a result of the growth in the non-government sector and the emergence of religious and faith based schools (Buckingham, 2010). In addition to the government/public, Catholic and Anglican schools that have historically provided educational services, many of the new schools have been

established by church groups representing what have been termed as Australia's 'minority faiths', including, inter alia, Islamic, Baptist, Adventist and Assemblies of God (Buckingham, 2010).

Arguably, one of the consequences of this trend is a greater degree of religious segregation within the school aged population. Classrooms that once tended to reflect the diversity of Australia's population may well be becoming more homogenous. One of the concerns emerging in response to this prolific growth is the potential for the social cohesion of Australian society to be undermined (Bonnor & Caro, 2007). It has been suggested that the immersion of young Australians in religious schools may impede their social and civic development. It is feared that they may not develop the skills necessary to form relationships that transcend religious differences (Klenowski, 2009; Maddox, 2014; McGaw, 2006). It has been suggested that these skills are more effectively nurtured in non-religious or secular schooling environments, like those within Australia's public school system (Packer, 2013).

The aim of this study was to investigate how development of the social and civic capabilities required to become active and relationally engaged citizens is impacted when young Australians are educated in religious schools, where they may have limited opportunities to interact with peers who do not share their religious identity.

Within the national conversation around this issue of religious schools and the social and civic implications, the concept of *bridging social capital* has entered the vernacular. In addition to applying this concept, the following quotation also captures the concerns and fears associated with the growing presence of religious schools in Australia's education sector. McGaw as cited by Bonnor and Caro (2007) has suggested that:

Given the growth of the non-government sector, we need specifically to consider whether that development, in the name of choice and, with government funding, in the name of fiscal fairness, has positive or negative effects on educational outcomes and on bridging social capital and, ultimately, social cohesion. (p. 107)

### ***Bonding and bridging social capital***

Within the discourse associated with the impact of this growth on educational outcomes and social cohesion in Australia, the concept of *social capital* and its various forms (*bonding social capital* and *bridging social capital*) was introduced to many Australian educators by Barry McGaw (2006). Essentially, these concepts allow researchers and theorists to explore the social world and to identify the presence of what might be termed a social resource that is accessible and useful to individuals and communities. In the same way as the term *human capital* refers to the skills and knowledge of an individual or a community, *social capital* denotes the presence of relational connections and networks that represent a beneficial resource. To help define this concept further it may be helpful to consider how theorists view the interface between human capital and social capital in an educational setting. It is conceivable, for example, that a parent may have considerable human capital in the form of mathematical knowledge that is beneficial to their child. However, if their relationship is dysfunctional (i.e. trust is negligible or absent) and social capital is, therefore, in short supply, then the child is unlikely to benefit from this rich source of human capital. In this context, social capital might be seen as the conduit through which human capital can pass (Coleman, 1990; Hoffmann & Dufur, 2008). It is also important to note that social capital as it is defined by Putnam (2000) can reside in both a single relational connection, or a network of relationships and the key to identifying it is to observe the presence of trust and reciprocity. He posits that where individuals are prepared to trust others and to give or contribute in the knowledge that one day their generosity may be reciprocated, social capital is deemed to be present. When seeking to identify the presence of social capital, he also denotes a distinction that can be made based on the degree of trust that is observed. It is in these situations where the terms 'bonding' and 'bridging' are applied.

Putnam (2000) contends that bonding social capital is evident when high levels of trust (or *thick trust*) and norms of reciprocity characterise a relationship or relational network. He suggests that it is common for this to be evident when a social identity is shared (e.g. familial, cultural or religious). This form of social capital is viewed by some theorists as being critical to the well-being of the individual and includes the familial, intimate and 'close' relationships within a person's social context (Coleman, 1990). Bridging social capital, in contrast, is formed when relationships are established with people who may not share a common social identity and a

lower level of trust (or *thin trust*) is present (Kawachi, Kim, Coutts, & Subramanian, 2004; Putnam, 2000).

### ***The national conversation***

It is these concepts of bonding and bridging social capital that have been adopted in recent years by McGaw (2008) and others as a means to frame a national conversation. When applying them to the growing presence of religious schools within Australia's education sector, some theorists have asserted that students attending these schools may be embedded in a social context that is dense in bonding social capital, but devoid of opportunities to develop the social and civic competencies needed to form bridging social capital in the pluralistic world beyond the school grounds (Bonnor & Caro, 2007; Dill, 2009; McGaw, 2008). Ken Boston, as cited by Wilson (2003) in the following quotation, describes the bridging and bonding social capital concepts and intimates that public schools are better placed than religious schools and others within the non-government school sector, to develop the competencies required to develop bridging social capital. He states:

Bridging refers to relations among people who initially may be strangers to each other; perhaps divided by culture, religion and most potently by the social and economic means at their disposal...Bridging is accomplished when children and young people learn that common principles, values, norms of justice and reasonable behaviour are the means for understanding different points of view and getting on well with each other. Learnt in public schools, these are the building blocks of trust so essential to a liberal society and economy.

Public schools are the only universally accessible institutions available to accomplish and enhance such bridging as well as bonding, and to lay down the foundation for future reserves of trust, across classes, religions, suburbs and cultures. (p. 26)

This sentiment is sometimes expressed by others, but without necessarily making reference to the concepts of bonding and bridging social capital. When referring to concerns associated with the growth of religious schools in Australia's education sector, Buckingham (2010) contends that the most ardent of critics suggest that they are "mono-cultural enclaves" and a breeding ground for intolerance and bigotry (p. 1). Similarly, Gundara (2008) writes when referring to the

growing presence of religious schools: “To allow such groups to become separate is an act of deep educational folly” (p. 340).

If the concerns of the theorists referred to above are valid and the graduates of religious schools lack the social and civic competencies required to engage relationally and form bridging social capital in pluralistic social contexts, then this may have significant consequences not only for Australia’s social cohesion, but also the effectiveness and efficiency of its workplaces and ultimately, its economic prosperity. When referring to Australia’s workplaces and those beyond its borders, Curtis and McKenzie (2001) assert that their long term effectiveness is dependent not only upon the technical skills and intellectual abilities of the graduates of the nation’s schools, training organisations and universities, but also upon their personal attributes. These attributes that include what might be termed social and civic competencies, enable employees to form relationships in pluralistic workplaces that transcend cultural, religious and social differences and provide the means through which organisational aims can be achieved. It is therefore, important to ensure that Australia’s schools are equipping young Australians with these essential competencies – and this goal is reflected in the policies of Australian governments and the statutory bodies that govern the work of schools.

### ***The role of schools***

In Australia, the education authorities responsible for developing the curriculum that guides the teaching and learning programs implemented in schools have often referred to the need to nurture development of these competencies. For example, Western Australia’s Curriculum Framework that was published in 1998 included a set of explicit values, which were intended to underpin all elements of the curriculum implemented in schools. Included within the values was reference to the development of a social value referred to as *social and civic responsibility*. It is defined in the framework as follows:

The commitment to exploring and promoting the common good and meeting individual needs without infringing the basic rights of others. This includes the encouragement of each person to participate in democratic processes, to value diversity of cultural expression, to respect legitimate authority, to promote social justice and to support the



use of research for the improvement of the quality of life. (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 1998a, p. 325)

A similar expectation of schools is expressed within Australia's recently developed National Curriculum. Within it, reference is made to seven capabilities, of which one specifically relates to the area of *personal and social responsibility* and includes the capacity to engage relationally with others (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2014).

The presence of these social values or capabilities highlights the importance that the Australian community places on this area of learning and development. It is also clear that at times, different conceptual labels are adopted in the literature to describe various facets of the social world, which need to be carefully defined for the purposes of this study. For example, reference has been made above to social values and capabilities – but what is meant by these terms and others that are used to describe these social phenomena?

### ***Defining some key terms***

#### ***Values, principles and virtues***

The concept of *values* is used throughout this study to identify the foundational views, stances and ideas that shape and characterise the behaviour of individuals and communities. Some authors adopt a higher degree of specificity and make distinctions between *values*, *principles* and *virtues* (Andrew, 1995; Benson, 2000), however, for the purposes of this study, they have been treated as being synonymous. This approach is reflective of how the terms tend to be used in contemporary and 'everyday' contexts.

#### ***Social and civic attributes***

A subtle distinction is made in this study between the terms defined above (values, virtues and principles) and the notion of *attributes*. In this study, attributes are viewed as the characteristics or qualities that can be recognised in the behaviours of individuals. In effect, the attributes that might be observed as behavioural phenomena reflect the presence of some underlying or foundational values, principles, or virtues. For example, 'tolerance' can be espoused as a value, virtue or principle that is important to an individual; however, their observed behaviours may indicate that this is not an attribute that characterises their social interactions.

### ***Social and civic capacity, competency or capability***

When referring to the observable presence of multiple attributes (as defined above), the terms *social and civic capacity, competency or capability* are applied. For example, if the social values and attributes of an individual have enabled them to engage relationally in pluralistic social contexts, then terms like competence and capability may be applied as an evaluative measure.

Within this study, when reference is made to these competencies or capabilities, the terms 'social' and 'civic' are often coupled together, so that both the relational and citizenship dimensions are highlighted. Often in the narrative of educators, reference is made to the social outcomes of schooling and their importance, but it is not always automatically coupled with the idea of civic outcomes. When the term civic is used in this way, it serves as a reminder that social competence and the capacity to build and maintain relationships and friendships can have both negative and positive consequences within the wider community. For example, a school graduate may be socially competent and have the capacity to form close relational connections where a high level of trust is present, but these connections may be with members of a gang that is actively involved in criminal and anti-social activities. Such a young person may well be socially competent, but their failure to recognise that they also have responsibilities as citizens of a broader community would suggest that they are not socially and civically competent. If social competence and community harmony are desirable educational aims, then it seems reasonable to assert that social competence cannot be isolated from this civic dimension. It is worth noting the distinction that is made by Bronfenbrenner (2005c) between being socialised and civilised. He contends that "being socialised is not necessarily the same as being civilised. Nazi youth were also products of a socialisation process" (p. 217). When evaluating competence or capability in this study, both the social and civic dimensions are considered.

In addition to stating how the notion of social and civic competence was broadly defined in this study, it is also important to consider how it was evaluated and the criteria against which such judgments were made. For the purposes of this study, the findings of research undertaken by the Curriculum Corporation (2003) and funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training were used. In this study, the researchers sought to explore the area of values education in schools and identify (1) the values that schools might seek to nurture, and (2) how it can be undertaken more effectively. One of the outcomes of this

multiple case study, that involved 69 schools, was the identification of a set of what are referred to as shared or common values (Curriculum Corporation, 2003). These values were identified as being nurtured by the schools involved and were deemed to be a good starting point for discussions within school communities. The researchers recognised that any discussion pertaining to values can often become “highly contested,” particularly if there is a sense that a set of values is being imposed by one group upon another (Curriculum Corporation, 2003, p. 16). Hence, it was deemed to be important that this set of values did not become mandated for use in all schools, but simply used as a starting point for dialogue. The values identified included: tolerance and understanding, respect, responsibility, social justice, excellence, care, inclusion and trust, honesty, freedom and being ethical. While the intent of the researchers involved in the research project was to provide this set of values as a tool to engage in dialogue with school communities, for the purposes of this study, they have provided the means to add some specificity to the broad area of social and civic competencies. It has been assumed that if the Australian school communities involved in the above-mentioned study determined that these social values should be nurtured in the schools that serve their communities, then they may also provide the basis for considering how social and civic competence might be evaluated.

### ***Pluralistic social contexts***

The term pluralistic has been adopted in this study to define the nature of Australia’s community and workplaces. Pluralism is defined eloquently by Hill (1991) in the following way:

The term is applied to societies in which no one world view or unified value stance exercises a monopoly over the minds of its citizens: hence personal convictions and lifestyles differ, while a middle ground of civic and economic co-operation is maintained by pragmatic negotiation at the level of procedural values. This implies that societies in which governments are striving to enforce a unitary world view – notably under Islamic and Marxist regimes – are by definition not yet pluralistic in policy....But pluralism is more than a social state of mind, whereby one has become sensitive to the problematic status of all systems of belief and value, given the plurality of options now presented to human consciousness in the global village. (p. 75)

By adopting this term, it is clear that the social context being described is one where people from various worldview or ideological backgrounds or life-stances come together and no single worldview is predominant. An alternative would be to use the term 'secular' to define Australia's workplaces that bring together people from a diverse range of backgrounds, but in contemporary language, this has sometimes come to mean 'non-religious' rather than its classical meaning which acknowledges the presence of multiple worldviews, including those with a religious foundation (Benson, 2000; Maddox, 2014).

### ***Religious schools***

When referring to religious schools in this study, the term 'religious' is being used to denote the presence of a foundational worldview that includes a belief in the supernatural, or a God, or multiple Gods. This of course is not the only way that religion can be defined. Others view it more broadly to include any coherent set of beliefs that contain a view about God (i.e. existence or non-existence) and human origins (Noebel, 2008). Secular-Humanism that has at its foundation the presupposition that there is no God is viewed by many, including the Supreme Court of the United States of America, as a religion (Noebel, 2008). So, while it is reasonable to assert that to be deemed religious, a worldview or ideological perspective does not necessarily need to include a foundational belief that there is a God, this study will adopt the contemporary use of the term. Therefore, when referring to religious schools in this study, reference is being made to those schools whose foundational beliefs include a view that there is a God or multiple Gods.

### ***Social-ecology***

This term is used to describe the multifaceted and multilayered social environment that shapes the social development of a child. Integral to this study was a presumption that the socialisation of children and adolescents is not shaped solely by the educative environment of their school. The term *social-ecology* refers to what Bronfenbrenner (2005a) conceptualises as the various *socio-ecological systems* that shape human development and the process of socialisation, of which the school is but one element. In this study, the influence of the school was viewed as acting in confluence with other socio-cultural contexts within the social-ecology of a child, including the family.

Now that the context and background to this study has been described and the key concepts and terms have been defined, the central issue and research aim can be stated.

### ***The Issue***

It is apparent that some educational leaders and theorists are concerned that young Australians who are educated in religious schools may not be equipped with the social and civic values and attributes needed to effectively engage in pluralistic social contexts, including Australia's workplaces (Bonnor & Caro, 2007; Dill, 2009; Gundara, 2008; McGaw, 2008). It is claimed that their social and civic development may be impeded by the educative environment in which they are immersed. When the research literature is investigated (see Chapter 2), it is apparent that there is a scarcity of empirical research evidence to support or challenge this view. The intent of this research study was to investigate this claim, provide insights into its veracity and develop an understanding of the influences that shape the development of social and civic values and attributes.

### ***Research Aim***

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*To investigate how the development of young Australian's social and civic capabilities is impacted when they are educated in religious schools where there is a high degree of religious homogeneity within the student body.*

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### ***Narrowing the scope – identifying a network of schools***

While this study's aim was to consider the social and civic implications of religious schools within Australia's education sector, it was necessary to identify a specific group of schools that would become the focus of the inquiry. In light of the concerns of the theorists described earlier in this chapter, the study focused on a network of schools where the student body was likely to be characterised by a high degree of religious homogeneity. It was also a network that had undergone considerable growth and had been the subject of criticism, particularly from theorists

who feared that the schools may be impeding the educational and social development of their students (Maddox, 2014; Symes & Gulson, 2005). For the purposes of this study, these schools are referred to as *evangelical Christian schools*.

This group of schools includes those within Australia's 'Christian School Sector' whose ideology and practices are consistent with those of the representative peak bodies including: Christian Schools Australia (CSA), Christian Education National (CEN) and the Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACS). Sometimes this group of schools is defined by the title 'fundamentalist', but this is deemed by Maddox (2014) to be inadequate because while it may be applied to some schools within the sector, it does not define them all. An alternative label that Maddox (2014) adopts to describe them is "themelic," which she defines as meaning "foundation" (p. Kindle location 1868). She adopts it because its meaning distinguishes the group of schools "by its self-identified 'foundation' in Christ" (p. Kindle location 1868). The key point to be made is that this group of schools is not easily labeled, but has been present and growing within Australia's education sector.

Most of these schools that are represented by the above mentioned peak bodies aim to be accessible, affordable and share a commitment to providing educational programs that are compliant with the mandated government curriculum, but are embedded in a Christian world-view or life-stance (Edlin, 1999; Etherington, 2008). One of their defining features is the freedom to speak openly about matters of faith and belief, which is not confined to classes in comparative religions. The Christian faith and the 'spiritual' dimension of life influences many elements of the schools program and management practices. For example, prayer, Bible reading and opportunities to discuss matters of faith are often part of daily school activities (Etherington, 2008). The CSA website defines its schools and educational programs in the following way:

Christian school education rests on a belief that the development of the whole child requires that we are deliberate about the beliefs and values of their home and school environments. The spiritual development of children is not an annexe to their education; it is an integral part of it. Beliefs, values and issues of faith therefore sit at the centre of the curriculum in the Christian school.

Spiritual development provides meaning, context and purpose to the pursuit of excellence in the academic, cultural, physical and social development of students. A Biblical, Christian view has it that meaning comes not just from knowledge about God, but knowledge of God. Such knowledge comes from belief and relationship. Our aim is for students to know what they believe and why; that their character is formed on the basis of sound beliefs and values. Our objective is that in their life after school, our graduates reflect the hope and purposeful service characteristic of those who follow Jesus. (Christian Schools Australia, 2011, pp. About Christian Schools, para. 2-3)

Unlike other faith-based or religious schools operating in Australia, many in this network of evangelical Christian schools require all prospective employees to have a personal Christian faith, before they will be considered for an appointment to a position. The implication is that there will also be a greater degree of religious homogeneity amongst staff members, compared with other schools and sectors. Where other faith based schools may insist that staff members are supportive or empathetic of the school's religious foundation or ethos, few outside of this network, insist on each staff member having a personal Christian faith.

This narrowing of the scope of the study and the identification of this specific network of schools is reflected in the composition of the overarching question below, which guided the inquiry.

### ***Overarching Question***

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*How is the capacity of graduates to form bridging social capital in post-school pluralistic social contexts, including workplaces, shaped by their engagement in an evangelical Christian school and its confluence with other sociocultural contexts present within their socio-ecological worlds?*

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The inclusion of a reference to workplaces within the overarching question acknowledges that they represent a significant pluralistic social context within the post-school social worlds of the graduates, which became a major point of focus for the inquiry. While other pluralistic social contexts were of interest, the workplaces of graduates were viewed as a context where their

capacity to bridge and form bridging social capital could be investigated. The following four subsidiary questions provided a framework that guided the investigation.

### ***Subsidiary Questions***

#### ***Question 1:***

*How do the graduates of these schools navigate the challenges associated with forming bridging social capital in post-school pluralistic social contexts, including workplaces?*

#### ***Question 2:***

*How has development of the graduates' social and civic values and attributes been shaped by the various socio-cultural contexts within their social-ecologies?*

#### ***Question 3:***

*How does the presence or absence of bonding social capital within the social ecologies of these graduates influence their capacity to form bridging social capital in post-school pluralistic workplaces and other social contexts?*

#### ***Question 4:***

*To what extent do the graduates of these schools exhibit the social and civic values and attributes required to form bridging social capital in their post-school pluralistic social worlds, including workplaces?*

### ***Thesis structure***

This thesis consists of eight chapters. This chapter, Chapter 1, provided an introduction and exploration of the rationale for the study. The discussion briefly touched on some of the complex issues that have confronted Australia's policymakers who have been responsible for shaping the nation's education system, namely, the teaching and expression of religious beliefs and practices in schools and classrooms. This was followed with a description of some of the drivers that have spawned the prolific growth of religious schools within Australia in recent years, and has caused some writers, educational leaders and educators to sound a word of



caution and question whether such a trend may have negative consequences for social cohesion within Australian society. The chapter then described how these concerns have provided the impetus for this research and concluded by clarifying the meaning of some key terms and introducing the study's central issue, aim and research questions.

Chapter 2 begins by noting the scarcity of empirical research that has investigated or explored the educational outcomes of religious based schooling. This is followed with a summary of the existing research, including studies that have considered the social and civic, as well as the academic outcomes of religious schooling. The extremely limited research that has been undertaken to specifically consider the educational outcomes of what in this study are referred to as *evangelical Christian schools* is also discussed. The chapter concludes by describing the limitations of the existing research.

The design of the current study is outlined in Chapter 3. After describing the ontological, epistemological and axiological perspectives of researcher, all facets of the study's methodology are outlined.

Chapters 4-6 discuss the findings of the study. Chapters 4 and 5 focus specifically on how attendance at a religious school and the influences of other socio-cultural contexts (e.g. family, church community) were found to impact the development of social and civic competencies. The discussion then moves away from the formative influences and describes how being educated in a religious school was found to impact the relational dynamics of graduates' when they entered and engaged in the pluralistic social world beyond the confines of school. Within these three chapters, 13 key findings are presented.

Chapter 7 provides a discussion around the six themes that were identified as being significant within the data. In addition to referring to the key findings presented in Chapters 4-6, the discussion also contrasts them with the existing literature. In addition to noting where the key findings of this study confirm what has been found by other researchers, inconsistencies are also acknowledged.

The final chapter, Chapter 8, titled 'Conclusions and implications' begins with a brief overview of the study and then revisits the research questions. A response to each of the questions is

presented in the form of assertions that arise from the study. This is followed with a description of the study's limitations, contributions to knowledge and implications for theory, policy and practice. It concludes by outlining some recommendations and opportunities for further research.

## ***Chapter Two***

### ***Literature Review***

This chapter explores the limited literature available that relates to religious schooling and its impact on the development of social and civic competencies. After noting references in the literature that highlight the scarcity of research in this area, the discussion presents a summary of the studies that have been conducted and concludes by describing their limitations.

The summary explores four broad areas within the literature including (1) The social and civic outcomes of religious schools, (2) The academic outcomes of religious schools, (3) Social capital and schools, and (4) Evangelical Christian schools and their idiosyncrasies. The first area refers to the literature that specifically explores the impact of religious schools in the social domain of education. Included are references to both research studies and theoretical explorations. In the second area, studies that have compared the academic outcomes achieved by religious and non-religious schools are considered. While this discussion refers to academic or scholastic outcomes that are not the central focus of this study, it serves to provide some insights into the work of religious schools more broadly. The third area explores the social capital literature that specifically relates to the sphere of education and the social domain. In recent years the social capital concept has been applied across a range of research areas including, inter alia, public health (Szreter & Woolcock, 2003; Wood, 2006), delinquency (Hoffmann & Dufur, 2008; Wright, Cullen, & Miller, 2001), mental health (Mellin & Weist, 2011), juvenile crime (Salmi & Kivivuori, 2006), economic development (Woolcock, 1998), community development (Putnam, 2000) and education. In this discussion, the social capital concept's application in the sphere of education is explored. In the final area, reference is made to some international research studies that have been conducted with the intent of providing insights into the idiosyncrasies of evangelical Christian schools.

Before commencing the exploration described above, it is important to note that while there is a scarcity of research that is specific to the social and civic implications of religious schooling, much has been written about religious schooling from philosophical and theological perspectives. Broadly speaking, the philosophically based literature considers the role of

education within society and wrestles with the complex questions that confront educators, policymakers and political leaders. It is apparent within this literature that there are many legitimate and contested perspectives on what constitutes a quality education, including contrasting views about the fundamental question of what should constitute the aims of education within the world's liberal western democracies. This of course has implications for all facets of how schools are operated and the practices that are adopted within classrooms. The theological literature explores similar questions, but draws on the religious orthodoxy to consider the aims and practices of religious schools. In the case of the evangelical Christian schools that are of particular interest in this study, the literature considers the Christian worldview and how it might shape educational practices and policies. For the purposes of this review, the focus will be limited to the literature that specifically provides insights into the educational outcomes of religious schooling and particularly the social and civic implications.

### ***Scarcity of research***

In her paper *The rise of religious schools*, Buckingham (2010) provides a historical account of the emergence of religious schools within Australia's education sector and explores the educational implications of their growing presence. Within the discussion, reference is made to the concerns that have been raised by critics about the potential for these schools to balkanise the community and undermine social cohesion. After enunciating this concern or fear, Buckingham (2010) notes the scarcity of international research that either confirms or allays it. A similar observation has been noted by others. For example, when referring to the influence of religious schooling on the development of social and civic outcomes in the context of Europe, Pugh and Telhaj (2007) describe the absence of research when they write: "...quantitative evidence on the attainment effects of Catholic and other faith schools is scarce" (p. 236). The following quotations also highlight the scarcity of European research.

Any debate about the nature and outcomes of faith schooling is extremely limited in Britain due to a lack of national research projects related to faith schools and an absence of faith community interpretations of data sets held at national level by the DfES and OFSTED. (Gardner & Cairns, 2005, p. 239)

The extent to which faith schools do offer significantly different models of education, both theoretical and practical, which are able to impact on individual pupil attainment or their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, or on overall school outcomes, is for the most part untested. We need, therefore, to work towards developing an agenda for research into faith schools. (Lawton & Cairns, 2005, p. 250)

While it is apparent that the research that pertains to the outcomes of religious based schooling is limited, even less is known about the network of schools referred to in this study as evangelical Christian schools. Referring to a study conducted by Long (1996) that explored the emergence of Australia's 'Christian school sector' and growth of this network of schools, Maddox (2014) writes: "...this sector has been the subject of very little research, and arguably of even less national discussion" (p. Kindle Location 241). When the literature is viewed, it is evident that much of it has been conducted to investigate the contributions of various sectors within the educational landscape and tends to take a broad view and include evangelical Christian schools within the categories of 'independent schools' or 'religious schools'. The consequence is that little is known about their unique characteristics. The few studies that have been conducted are discussed later in this chapter.

### ***The social and civic outcomes of religious schools***

Within the literature, some writers assert the superiority of public education to nurture formation of the social and civic competencies that are needed by young people when they enter pluralistic social contexts in their post-school worlds (Bonnor & Caro, 2007; Gundara, 2008; Maddox, 2014; Packer, 2013). Their view is that social cohesion is threatened by the social exclusion policies and fee structures that often apply in the non-government schooling sector. Wilson (2003) contends that while this view is promulgated by some politicians, academics and education bureaucrats, there is no research evidence to support it. Dill (2009), referring to international research, goes a step further and states: "This argument, for the most part, is grounded in theory more than data: The empirical research on school sector and civic education generally shows neutral to positive effects" (p. 1268) in favour of private or non-government schools.

When reviewing 21 quantitative studies and comparing the impact of school choice in the United States of America and the formation of civic values, Wolf (2007) in his conclusions states:

In summary, the empirical studies to date counter the claims of school choice opponents that private schooling inherently and inevitably undermines the fostering of civic values. The statistical record suggests that private schooling and school choice often enhance the realization of the civic values that are central to a well-functioning democracy. (Wolf, 2007, p. 72)

In a study that acknowledged the work of Wolf as cited above, Dill (2009) went a step further and explored the socialisation mechanisms within private American schools and the extent that beyond graduation, students engaged in civic adult behavior. In the conclusions, the author writes:

Consistent with the other studies in this area, the findings show that private schools produce “good citizens” as much as public schools, even after controlling for a host of factors. They seem to do at least an equally effective job as public schools in preparing students for public life in a democratic society. (p. 1284)

In an American study conducted by Godwin, Ausbrooks & Martinez (2001), the following statement was made in the introduction:

Despite the frequency with which its advocates assert the superiority of the public schools, none of the key research that concerns either the development of tolerance or the effects of public schools has examined empirically whether public schools are more effective in teaching political tolerance. (p. 543)

In the Godwin et al. (2001) study cited above, the researchers arrived at two conclusions. The first was to dispel the assertion of the public school advocates that public schools more effectively nurture the civic attributes like tolerance. They found that when it comes to teaching *democratic attitudes and values*, public schools are not achieving superior outcomes to private schools. They also found that “tolerance or support for democratic norms” is not increased by simply increasing “ethnic diversity” within classrooms (p. 545).

A similar conclusion was drawn by Dijkstra and Veenstra (2001) whose research was conducted in the Netherlands, where the education system has been shaped by “a powerful process of segregation along religious lines” since 1917 – this process is sometimes referred to as “pillarisation” (p. 183). After investigating the influence of faith-based schools on “character development, training in social and cultural skills and preparation for the labour market,” (pp. 183-184) and comparing their outcomes with those of other schools within the education sector, they concluded that: “At present there seems to be little evidence to support strong differential effects” (p. 203). Essentially, they were unable to discern any significant differences between the outcomes achieved by faith-based schools and others.

The most recent international research study published that explored the influence of religious schooling on a range of the educational outcomes, including the development of social and civic attributes, was undertaken in North America. Drawing upon data generated from interviews with graduates across the schools involved in the study, the researchers reported that the: “graduates of all non-public schools report their schools prepared them well to engage in relationships” (Pennings, Seel, Neven Van Pelt, Sikkink, & Wiens, 2011, p. 25). While this finding contributes to the discourse surrounding the work of religious and other non-public schools, its reliance on the graduates' perceptions of their relationship building capacity and the absence of data from alternative sources that can provide a degree of triangulation are significant limitations.

Similarly, in research conducted in England and Wales, Francis (2005) investigated the development of social and civic values and religious beliefs amongst 13-15 year old boys who attended Christian schools like those of specific interest in this study. Francis (2005) described the findings as follows:

Pupils attending the Christian schools are more likely to be surrounded by boys who are themselves committed to belief in God and whose belief in God is grounded in the inerrancy of scripture. They are more likely to be surrounded by boys who have a positive view of the church, and of religious education in schools, and who reject superstitious beliefs. Pupils attending the Christian schools are more likely to be protected from boys who hold liberal attitudes toward alcohol, tobacco and sex.

Pupils attending Christian schools are less likely to be troubled by bullying and more likely to respect their teachers. Pupils attending Christian schools are much more likely to feel good about life and about themselves. Many 'Christian' parents may feel satisfied that this is precisely what they are purchasing for their 13–15-year-old boys when they elect to send them to an independent Christian school. In many ways the distinctiveness of the 'Christian' community is being reproduced within the Christian school. (p. 139)

Interestingly, when reflecting upon the findings of the study, Francis (2005) identified some challenges that he asserts need to be faced by the Christian school movement. The questions raised are very similar to those that have been central to this current study.

What happens when school life is over and these pupils are released from their highly specialised environment into the wider world of tertiary education or work? How well will they have been equipped to handle the dialogue between the faith in which they have been educated and the values environment of their secular host society? The next task for empirical research concerned with the effects of independent Christian schools on their pupils should be to follow the experiences of those pupils educated in independent Christian schools as they embark on the next decade of their lives. (Francis, 2005, pp. 139-140)

In summary, it is clear that the limited international research that has been conducted tends not to indicate that being educated in a religious school has an adverse impact on the development of social and civic competencies. It would appear that the impact of religious schooling on the development of these competencies tends to be equal with, or marginally superior to, public schooling. On the basis of the findings of this limited number of studies, it would seem that the religious or non-religious nature of the school a child attends has negligible influence in the social domain. It is important to note that none of the research within the literature and presented above has been conducted in an Australian context and has rarely investigated the experiences of graduates within their post-school social worlds.



### ***The academic outcomes of religious schools***

Within the literature that has sought to compare the educational outcomes of religious schools with others, some have focused on academic or scholastic development. This research is often cited by parochial stakeholders on both sides of the 'school choice' or public versus private/independent school debate. For example, Anderson (1992) refers to a longitudinal research study conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) that compares sectors and concludes that when scholastic attainment is assessed, students attending private schools have a small but significant edge over those attending public schools. The author goes on to caution readers about drawing conclusions from such studies, because others have challenged such findings and assert alternative explanations for the variation.

In American based research conducted by Coleman, Hoffer and Kilgore in 1982 and cited by Coleman (1987), the researchers found that in the areas of mathematics and verbal skills, the attainment of students enrolled in catholic or other private schools was higher than those from similar backgrounds enrolled in public schools. They found that this relationship did not apply to science skills. It is important to note that this research is not without its critics. For example, Anderson (1992) argues that the methodology employed by Coleman and his colleagues may be flawed and refers to a re-analysis of the data that was conducted by Murnane (1986). In the re-analysis, an additional variable was included, which represented the 'social climate' of the teenagers' schools. With the inclusion of this variable, the strength of the relationship between scholastic performance and school type (i.e. Catholic or other) disappeared. While this may challenge some of the assertions made by Coleman and his colleagues in this study, it highlights the significance of the social context or relational networks that surround a child during their formative years.

In a British study, Schagen and Schagen (2005) investigated the impact of faith-based schooling on what are sometimes termed *value-added measures*. This form of school performance assessment quantifies the academic growth of cohort groups of children over time and makes comparisons across schools. In value-added terms, the researchers found that Jewish schools outperformed other Christian and non-religious schools, but few other patterns were identified in the data.

In a research study exploring student attainment in mathematics and the influence of faith based schools and social capital, Pugh & Telhaj (2007) investigated schools in Belgium, where full government funding is distributed consistently across both the private and government school sectors, without significant political influence. The authors note that in the community of Flanders, “70% of secondary students attend private schools, which is one of the world’s largest percentages of private enrolments” (p. 240). This makes the Flemish data particularly interesting, because the influence of different foundational ideologies of schools can be considered, without the variations ordinarily associated with funding inconsistencies across sectors – which is the case in Australia. In this study, the authors concluded that:

The modest positive relationship between faith schooling and student attainment is not the consequence of selection bias but arises from forms of social capital that are more readily available in faith schools than in non-faith schools. However, the limitations of social capital theory and evidence caution against radical policy conclusions. (p. 265)

In summary, based on the research cited above, it appears that when comparative studies are conducted that explore the academic outcomes of schools, there is no evidence to suggest that religious or faith based schools are inferior to others. If anything, the evidence suggests that in some areas they may produce superior outcomes, but this may be the result of the social dynamics or the presence of social capital within the school communities.

### ***Social capital and schools***

Consistent across many international research studies is recognition that the ‘social context’ of students significantly influences their development – a point already noted in the above discussion and regularly referred to in the writing of Putnam, who is recognised as one of the pioneers of the social capital concept. He states: “Statistically, the correlation between high social capital and positive child development is as close to perfect as social scientists ever find in data analyses of this sort” and “social capital is second only to poverty in the breadth and depth of its effects on children’s lives” (Putnam, 2000, pp. 297-298). When making reference to the above statements, he includes a qualifier and cautions against drawing the conclusion that a causal relationship exists. He contends that other variables may be contributing to the strong correlation; however, in his view, the evidence is compelling. Social capital or the social context

in which a child is immersed seems to have a significant influence on social development and scholastic attainment.

Some of the research by Coleman and Putnam has suggested that the social and civic development of children attending religious schools may be enhanced because of the rich social networks that exist within a religious/church community. For example, in a research study conducted by Coleman and his colleagues, it was found that the drop-out rate of students prior to graduation was lower in the 'Catholic schools' (3.4%) and 'non-Catholic and religiously homogenous schools' (3.7%) than both the 'other private/non-religious' (11.9%) and 'public schools' (14.3%). The authors concluded that this variation was attributable to: "the community surrounding the Catholic school, a community created by the church, was of great importance....In effect, this church and school community, with its social networks and its norms about what teenagers should and should not do, constituted social capital beyond the family that aided both family and school in the education of the family's children" (Coleman, 1987, p. 36)

Referring to the American context, Putnam (2000) also highlights the important place that religious communities have within society. He writes:

Faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America....as a rough rule of thumb, our evidence shows, nearly half of all associated memberships in America are church related, half of all personal philanthropy is religious in character, and half of all volunteering occurs in a religious context. So how involved we are in religion today matters a lot for America's social capital. (p. 66)

If the above assertions made by Coleman and Putnam are applicable in an Australian context, it is conceivable that children who are actively involved in a church community and attend the evangelical Christian schools of interest in this study, may derive developmental benefits from the rich source of social capital that surrounds them. However, it is possible that it is limited to the bonding form. Some writers acknowledge the benefits of the bonding social capital that exists within religious and homogenous social groups, but question the capacity of schools embedded in them to equip students to develop the social and civic competencies required to

form bridging social capital, which is deemed as critical to the achievement of social cohesion within communities (Maddox, 2014; McGaw, 2007; Pennings, et al., 2011).

### ***Evangelical Christian schools and their idiosyncrasies***

Within the literature there are many sources that provide insights into the philosophical and theological principles that shape these schools and their approaches to curriculum design and pedagogy. However, empirical research that provides insights into their idiosyncrasies and explores their educational outcomes is extremely scarce. In addition to the research study referred to earlier by Pennings et al. (2011), one of the few conducted with the aim of developing an understanding of the educational outcomes or implications of this form of schooling was conducted by Peshkin (1986). The findings of this study are documented in a book titled: *God's choice: The total world of a fundamentalist Christian school* (Peshkin, 1986). In this study, a team of researchers immersed themselves in the life of an American fundamentalist Christian school and described in detail their observations and conclusions. It is conceivable that this may be the most comprehensive study of a Christian school available in the literature, but the methodology utilised and its focus on a single school, limits its generalisability.

The strength of this work is that it allows the reader to be immersed in considerable rich data, which Peshkin and his team collected during the 18 months spent observing, interviewing and documenting their experiences. It does, however, have three significant limitations with respect to this current study. Firstly, it focuses on a single school in an American context and thus it has limited application as a means of informing thinking about Christian schools in Australia. Any comparison must take into account differences that may be attributable to the pervading culture. Secondly, the research provides insights as a snap-shot in time. The data for this research study was gathered during the period 1978-1980 and published in 1986. It must be acknowledged that most of Australia's evangelical Christian schools were being pioneered during this period and their contemporary practices may not be consistent with the observations documented by Peshkin and his colleagues. Thirdly, the study does not explore the influence the school has had on the students beyond graduation and upon transition into the wider society, a point that is acknowledged by the author in the following statement:

The most meaningful impact of schooling is best measured when students have left and settled into those activities (work, marriage, post-school friendships, childrearing, etc.) which will characterise their life as adults, but BBA [Bethany Baptist Academy] is too new to support such measurement. Nonetheless, I will try to suggest what appears to be the contribution of the BBA experience to its students. (Peshkin, 1986, p. 13)

While few research studies have provided such comprehensive and rich insights into the dynamics of a Christian school, it is clear that its context-bound nature limits the applicability of its findings into a contemporary Australian context.

The assertion of Peshkin (1986) noted above regarding the value of measuring the influence of schooling by listening to the voices of graduates is also noted by Annette (2011) who, when referring to the broader influence of faith-based communities contends:

What is needed is much more research both quantitative and qualitative and, given the hermeneutic challenge, we need a wider range of qualitative case studies where we can listen to and better understand the voices of young people themselves about their involvement in faith communities and how faith might shape the ways in which they experience civic engagement. (pp. 394-395)

In addition to the North American studies by Pennings et al. (2011) and Peshkin (1986) referred to above, one study has been conducted in Britain, which has focussed specifically on the educational outcomes of a Christian school. In a case study conducted by Pike (2009), the research investigated how a secondary school in a relatively low socio-economic area in Britain had drastically improved the academic attainment of its graduates over a period of three years. The improvement was deemed to be so substantial that it was declared to be the most improved academy in the country by one of the government's statutory education authorities. Those interviewed as part of Pike's (2009) study attributed the transformation to a change in school ethos and a significant whole school emphasis on character development. These changes were initiated after management of the school shifted from the state/government to the Emmanuel Schools' Foundation (ESF) (a private Christian education provider) as part of Britain's academies program. It is important to note that while this school shared some similar characteristics with

Australia's evangelical Christian schools, there were a number of significant differences in their approach to Christian education, which limits the capacity for comparisons to be made. The study does, however, provide some interesting insights into the influence of a Judeo-Christian ideology on a school's approach to character development.

### ***Limitations of previous research***

In summary, it is clear that there is a scarcity of international research associated with religious schools and their influence on the development of social and civic competencies. It is also apparent that even less is known about Australia's evangelical Christian schools.

Within the literature there are some studies that have investigated and compared the impact that various school types, including those founded on a religious ideology, have on academic or social and civic outcomes. The studies that have considered the academic or scholastic domain provide no substantive and conclusive evidence that would indicate that religious based schools produce superior or inferior outcomes. It is also apparent that the limited number of international studies that have explored the social and civic implications have not supported the assertion that public schools, by virtue of their diversity and universal accessibility, are able to produce superior outcomes. The research does not support the view that private and religious schools are less able than public schools to produce graduates who are civically minded and socially competent. In the American context, this view is often described as being grounded in theoretical or ideological positions, rather than empirical data. There is no research that provides insights into the Australian context and the outcomes of evangelical Christian schools.

It must also be noted that many of the research studies conducted in this field have been quantitative in nature. Few have entered Christian school settings, gathered rich data through interview and/or observation and sought to understand the complexities associated with the social and civic development of children and young people in these schools. Many have limited the gathering of data to the administration of surveys and gaining access to broad-based national testing data, which provides limited capacity to understand how values and attitudes are formed and influence behavioural patterns.

Finally, it is also evident that there is a scarcity of research that explores the impact of multiple socio-cultural contexts on the social and civic development of children and young people. Crosnoe and Cavanagh (2010) make the point that very few studies have been conducted that explore developmental outcomes and link the socio-developmental influences of multiple contexts - including schools, families and peer-groups. This study did not limit its investigation to the role of evangelical Christian schools and their influence on the development of social and civic attributes. It also considered the influence of socio-cultural contexts beyond the school, including family, church communities and other social/sporting or cultural type social settings.

## ***Chapter 3***

### ***Research design***

#### ***Introduction***

This research study explored the impact that a reduced degree of religious diversity within the student body of a school has on the formation of a child's social and civic competencies. Of particular interest were the competencies that enable young people to graduate from school and form bridging social capital within post-school pluralistic social contexts. In addition to considering the effect of the school, this research also aimed to understand how its influence operated in confluence with other socio-cultural contexts (e.g. family, church community etc) that are present within a developing child's social-ecology. The chapter begins by outlining the ontological, epistemological and axiology perspectives that have influenced the research design. This is followed with a presentation of the rationale for the methodology, data collection and data analysis methods that were employed. The chapter concludes with a description of the study's quality assurance measures.

#### ***Ontological, epistemological and axiological perspectives***

All researchers entering the social world do so with philosophical assumptions that shape the way they design projects, conduct research and construct meaning (Hughes, 1990). By making clear the assumptions about how the social world is understood by the researcher, onlookers or readers of the research are better equipped to judge the theories or knowledge claims that emerge (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Included within the philosophical assumptions are the researcher's ontological, epistemological and axiological perspectives (Cresswell, 2007). Before exploring each, it must be stated that the significant connection (Hughes, 1990) and alignment between ontological and epistemological assumptions, makes the task of conceptually separating them problematic (Crotty, 1998).



The ontological stance requires the researcher to consider: ““What kind of being is the human being? What is the nature of reality?” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 33) and what are its characteristics? (Cresswell, 2007). Or put differently, what is: “The nature of existence” and the “structure of reality” (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). At the heart of these questions is the need to resolve what is ‘real’ in the social world and if there is a reality that transcends the human mind (Lincoln & Guba, 2003).

Like Huberman and Miles (1994), the ontological position of the researcher who undertook this study is one of transcendental realism. Realists accept that in the social world, absolute truth is either abstruse or beyond the reach of the researcher, but there is a reality that exists, which transcends the human mind and exists in the objective world, which can be known (Crotty, 1998; Huberman & Miles, 1994). Adherents of this view believe that patterns and regularities exist in the social world that can be studied and from them, theories or constructs can be derived that help us understand it (Huberman & Miles, 1994).

Those who share this perspective also acknowledge that the patterns and regularities emerge from a socially constructed world, which is historically and culturally shaped - so there is a degree of relativism or interpretivism that must be accepted (Crotty, 1998; Huberman & Miles, 1994). The consequence is a reluctance to hold unswervingly to the theories or constructs that emerge from social research, instead recognising the tentative, subtle and contextual nature of patterns within the social world, which are derived from the multiple realities expressed through the voices and actions of participants (Cresswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998).

Guba and Lincoln (1994), as cited by Crotty (1998), contend that embracing a realist position, presupposes that the inquirer must adopt a position of detached objectivity, which is ordinarily associated with the positivist tradition. Such a view would deem the realist ontological assumptions incompatible with a social constructionist epistemological position. Crotty (1998) asserts that this position is rejected by numerous scholars and goes on to suggest, after a thorough exploration of the issues, that: “Realism in ontology and constructionism in epistemology turn out to be quite compatible” (p. 11).

The epistemological perspective that guided this research study was social constructionism, which as noted above, is compatible with the ontological assumptions of the transcendental realist.

Foundational to social constructionism and social constructivism is the assumption that phenomena or 'reality' in the social world is understood or known by listening carefully to the voices of participants in the field and/or observing their behaviours (Cresswell, 2007). Of interest to the researcher are not simply the actions of participants, but also the associated meanings that are attached to them (Schwandt, 2003).

Differentiating social constructivism and constructionism poses difficulties, because of the divergent views that prevail in the literature (Crotty, 1998). The adoption of a constructionist stance to achieve the purposes of this study was informed by the view of Crotty (1998) who, after acknowledging the lack of consensus, asserts that it may be helpful to limit constructivism to: "meaning making of the individual mind" (p. 58) and to adopt constructionism when meaning making is broadened to include recognition of multiple voices and the influence of culture within the social setting or context. If the former perspective is adopted, each participant's account of the meaning they derive is attributed value and respect, without attracting any critical or opposing views that may be offered by others. Constructionism, in contrast, welcomes multiple and conflicting views of social reality and recognises that participants take action and engage in behaviours that are embedded within cultural and historical contexts (Crotty, 1998).

In addition to making explicit the ontological and epistemological stances normally stated in research studies, it is also necessary in this case, to explore the notion of axiological considerations. That is, the values and biases the researcher brings to the study (Crotty, 1998). This is necessary because the focus of this inquiry entered a sphere of the social world where ideological and world-view positions can become dichotomous and rather than lead to an insightful and robust exploration of the relevant issues, the dialogue can become visceral. This research aimed to enter the sphere of religious schools and more specifically, evangelical Christian schools, where educational programs are imbued with a Christian world view. There is a scarcity of research that provides insight into these schools and it is conceivable, that this may arise, in part, because researchers experience difficulty gaining access. Alan Peshkin (1986)

describes in considerable detail the challenges he, as a 'non-Christian' social researcher, had to confront trying to access a similar network of schools in America to conduct his case study research. His account suggests that gaining the trust of those responsible for the governance of the schools was difficult, because of concerns that he and his team members would not be respectful of their Christian beliefs and values.

After spending 17 years working in public schools in WA, including three years as a deputy principal and five years as a principal, the researcher who undertook this study took up a principalship in an evangelical Christian school. He remained in the position for 8 years, until he resigned at the end of 2010 to take up full-time study as a PhD Candidate within Edith Cowan University's School of Education. He has, therefore, developed an understanding of both the government/public and independent/Christian school approaches to the delivery of educational services to the community. He is acutely aware of the parochial nature of the discourse associated with the sectarian debate and the view held by some that challenges the legitimacy of evangelical schools to exist in the marketplace. It is therefore, critical for him to make explicit his axiological position.

The researcher is aware that Australia's constitution clearly states that religious schools, including evangelical Christian schools, have a legitimate place within the education sector (Brennan, 2010). Also foundational to Australia's legal framework is the premise that parents, not the state, are charged with the responsibility for raising and educating children. It is therefore appropriate that parents provide an education for their children by engaging in a partnership with a school that shares, or is respectful of, their values and beliefs.

The researcher's life is defined by a Christian worldview and he aspires to the values, *inter alia*, of 'loving your neighbor as yourself' and 'doing unto others as you would have them do unto you'. His previous experience in Christian schools and personal world view, allowed him to gain access to this group of schools, whose work he sought to more fully understand. The challenge that confronted him in this study, was to ensure that quality assurance measures were embedded into the research design so that the patterns and concepts that emerged from the data were not forced by the values and beliefs he held. In this study, the supervisors have had a crucial role in this process. In addition to guiding the study, they have, at each point of the data

collection and data analysis phases, interrogated the processes and ensured the integrity of the data and the conclusions that have been drawn.

## ***Methodology***

This study employed an embedded multiple case study methodology and involved graduates from three evangelical Christian schools within Perth's metropolitan area. This approach was adopted because it provided the most effective means to address the overarching research question, which was introduced in Chapter 1. Yin (2009) recommends a case study approach when the following criteria define a research study: 1) the researcher is seeking to explain phenomena and adopts 'how' and 'why' research questions; 2) the researcher has limited control over the phenomenon being studied; and 3) when the investigation has a contemporary rather than a historical focus. Consistent with these criteria, this study aimed to explore and describe phenomena and was defined by a 'how' research question. It also investigated phenomena over which minimal control could be exercised. While it is acknowledged that when a researcher enters the field and interacts with participants there is a degree of influence exerted on the social context, in this study, this was not the calculated, intentional and substantial manipulation that is employed in an experimental research design. The behavioural events of interest in this study could not be manipulated: "directly, precisely, and systematically" (Yin, 2009, p. 11). Finally, the study did not have a historical focus where the data sources were limited to documents and artifacts. Its contemporary nature allowed the researcher to include interviews and observations as sources of evidence.

Case studies allow the researcher to collect rich data through a variety of methods including interviews, observation, document analysis, questionnaires and the evidence can be quantitative, qualitative or a combination of the two (Eisenhardt, 2002). Such an approach allows the researcher to explore the complexities of the phenomena and produce rich, grounded, holistic descriptions that are bounded in a real context (Huberman & Miles, 1994). The methodology also allows the researcher to explore phenomena in a unique situation where there are potentially "more variables of interest than data points" (Yin, 2009, p. 18). Adopting a case study approach in this study provided the means to explore the complexities of the *social ecologies* (Bronfenbrenner, 2005a) of graduates from evangelical Christian schools and

investigate the influences that had impacted development of the social and civic attributes of interest in this study.

Integral to the study's methodological design was the application of Bronfenbrenner's (2005a) *Bioecological Perspective*, which recognises the complex and dynamic nature of the influences that shape human development. This model posits that cognitive, emotional and social development is influenced by the relations between an individual and the complex social systems that constitute their social ecology. These systems are conceived as being nested around an individual and each layer acknowledges the presence of social and cultural forces that influence their development. It also advocates adoption of the society in which children grow up as the preferred research laboratory to study human development. Of particular significance for the design of this research study is Bronfenbrenner's (2005b) assertion that the dynamics of human development are most effectively investigated by viewing it from multiple vantage points including home, school and the other settings within the social systems that constitute the social ecology of an individual. Importantly, the adoption of a case study methodology provided the means to holistically explore these complex interrelationships that influence the social development of children and adolescents, rather than viewing the impact of religious schooling in isolation.

Case study research can incorporate single or multiple cases (Yin, 2009). A single case approach, suggests Yin (2009), is most appropriate where: "the case represents (a) a critical test of existing theory, (b) a rare or unique circumstance, or (c) a representative or typical case, or where the case serves a (d) revelatory or (e) longitudinal purpose" (p. 52). The multiple case approach, has the distinct advantage over the single case, of providing the opportunity to strengthen the claims made and increase their generalizability through replication (Yin, 2009). In effect, the more cases that are added to the design, the greater the likelihood that the evidence will be deemed robust (Yin, 2009). This approach is sometimes referred to as a *collective case study* (Simons, 2009). Conversely, the addition of too many cases can compromise the richness of the data gathered because time in the field on each case is likely to be reduced (Schofield, 2002). A balance must be found between the number of cases that will strengthen the claims and the resources available – including the time allocated for data collection. Three schools were invited to participate in this study, which was deemed to be manageable given the resources available

and allowed for the opportunity to identify patterns that were consistent or inconsistent across the cases.

The criteria for identifying cases for inclusion in a study can be done using either *literal* or *theoretical replication* logic (Yin, 2009). The former involves the selection of cases where the researcher anticipates that similar patterns will emerge and extraneous variations can be minimised (Yin, 2009). In contrast, the latter approach involves the inclusion of cases where the researcher: “predicts contrasting results but for anticipatable reasons” (Yin, 2009, p. 54). Each approach serves different purposes and any decision to take a specific path must be informed by the theoretical framework of the study (Yin, 2009). This study aimed to investigate and identify the patterns that may be similar or consistent across the cases, hence a literal replication logic was applied. To achieve literal replication, a careful analysis was conducted of the evangelical Christian schools operating in Perth, Western Australia. This involved an analysis of each school’s ideology, mission, purpose and significant policies (e.g. enrolment and employment). On the basis of this analysis, three schools were invited to participate – further details of the process and criteria are outlined below (see heading – The cases).

Within the context of both single and multiple case studies, decisions must be made about the *unit(s) of analysis* (Huberman & Miles, 1994; Yin, 2009). This research design adopted an *embedded design* (Yin, 2009), where the schools involved were identified as the context, but a sub-level unit of analysis was adopted, i.e. the graduates. The focus of this research inquiry was to investigate the experiences of graduates and develop an understanding of how their social ecology (of which the school is a part) had influenced development of their social and civic values and attributes. In this study, the unit of analysis was not the same as the case or context (i.e. the school). However, while the school is not the unit of analysis, its role within the graduates’ social ecology was investigated.

Consistent with the protocols of an embedded design, the data gathered specific to each school/case was retained in discrete *databases* and compared and contrasted – it was not simply ‘pooled’ (Yin, 2009). As anticipated, some of the patterns that were identified in the data were unique to a specific school, while others were evident across all cases. The retention of data in discrete databases allowed such a differentiation to be successfully achieved and provided the means to undertake a *cross-case analysis* (Huberman & Miles, 1994; Yin, 2009).

Application of the triangulation principle associated with case study research provided the means to strengthen the validity and reliability of the evidence generated (Yin, 2009). It also allowed the researcher to view the developmental influences from multiple vantage points, as recommended by Bronfenbrenner (2005b). In this study, triangulation was achieved by introducing multiple sources of evidence including data derived from the graduates, their parents, their employer or a work colleague, educators in their school and documentary evidence that was sourced from the school, education authorities and the Christian School Sector's peak bodies.

### ***The cases***

The processes of recruiting schools for inclusion in the study were as follows:

1. Initially, a list of all of the evangelical Christian schools in Perth Western Australia was compiled. The inclusion of schools required that their ideological foundation, mission, purpose and policy positions were consistent with those of the peak bodies who represent the Christian School Sector (Christian Schools Australia, Christian Education National and the Australian Association of Christian Schools).
2. In order to identify three (3) schools that were most alike so that literal replication could be achieved, an analysis was conducted. The following criteria guided the identification of 'like' schools:
  - a. Socio-economic profile
  - b. Availability of K-12 (Kindergarten – Year 12) programs for a minimum of 12 years (i.e. since 1999)
  - c. Size of student population (i.e. total K-12 enrolment).
  - d. Employment policies
  - e. Enrolment policies

The inclusion of socio-economic profile as a criterion provided the means to identify schools that brought together students from the broadest possible range of families across the socio-economic spectrum. These schools tend to be those that set their fees at lower levels and/or

offer generous discounts for those with limited financial means, so that they are accessible to families on low-middle as well as high incomes.

To identify schools that had similar 'mid-range' socio-economic profiles, the Australian Government's Socio-Economic Status (SES) index was used. In order to take into account socio-economic differences when allocating public funding to schools, the Australian Government uses a socio-economic index, which is generated using the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) Census data. Each school receives what is referred to as a Socio-Economic Status (SES) score. All of Western Australia's non-government schools fall into a range of SES scores between 87-126 and the schools selected for inclusion in this study fall into a narrow band between 100-106 (Australian Government - Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2013). This narrow range within the middle of the spectrum ensured that the schools were more likely to bring together young Australians from a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds.

The inclusion of the second criterion associated with the accessibility of programs for a minimum period of 12 years served an important purpose. In order to investigate the influence of evangelical schooling on the development of social and civic competencies, it was preferable to include schools that students could attend for the duration of their schooling years. If for example, a school had only been operating for a period of five years or only offered high school programs (Years 7-12), then the impact of a graduate's schooling could not be solely attributed to it. The remaining seven to nine years spent at other schools would also have been influential. Each of the schools selected for inclusion had offered K-12 programs within their respective communities since 1999.

The third criterion sought to identify schools of similar size (i.e. student population). This was deemed to be a factor that could influence the social dynamics of the school and the impact it may have on the social and civic development of students. By identifying 'like schools', the focus of the inquiry could remain fixed on factors deemed to be unique to the religious orientation of the schools, rather than the dynamics associated with large and small student populations. Each of the schools selected had similar student numbers/populations (i.e. greater than 1000).



The fourth criterion, employment policies, was particularly important because it highlighted a feature that was a significant distinguishing feature of many evangelical Christian schools and was viewed by them as being important to retaining their educational ethos and vision (Christian Schools Australia, 2014). Unique to this network of schools has been the practice of discriminating on the basis of religious belief when employing staff. Their intent has been to ensure an alignment was achieved between the personal ideological or religious perspectives of staff members and the school's foundational religious beliefs and ethos. In Western Australia, the legislation governing employment practices includes an exemption for religious institutions, including religious schools, to discriminate in this way when employing staff (Australasian Legal Information Institute, 2014). When employing staff, all three schools insisted that applicants were to have appropriate qualifications, hold to a Christian worldview and be in active membership of a Christian church community.

The only significant difference between the participating schools was the nature of their enrolment policies, the final criterion. Both Flynn and Wilberforce Christian Colleges had open enrolment policies, which meant that the allocation of enrolment places was not limited to children from families who define themselves as being 'Christian'. Luther-King Christian College, in contrast, during the period up to and including the time when this study commenced, limited enrolment access to children whose parent(s) was in membership of a Christian church and held to a Christian worldview. Inclusion of this school with a different approach to enrolment was *purposive* (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Its inclusion provided an opportunity to contrast the social development of graduates who were educated in this school with a higher degree of religious homogeneity within the study body, with graduates from the open enrolment schools, where a higher degree of religious heterogeneity was anticipated.

The table below (see Table 1) highlights the similarities and differences across the three schools that agreed to participate.

Table 1 – School selection criteria

Criteria	Flynn Christian College	Wilberforce Christian College	Luther-King Christian College
Socio-economic profile	100-106	100-106	100-106
Availability of K-12 programs since 1999	√	√	√
Student population	√	√	√
Employment policies – ideological/religious alignment	√	√	√
Enrolment policies	Open	Open	Closed

### ***The graduates***

The principles of *theoretical* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) or *purposive* (Huberman & Miles, 1994) *sampling* guided the process of identifying graduates for inclusion in the study. Unlike *random sampling*, adopted in quantitative studies, purposive sampling involves the identification of participants who are most likely to provide the data that will allow the researcher to achieve a study's theoretical aims.

In order to investigate the nature of religious homogeneity and consider the claim that students who are embedded in a social-ecology with a greater degree of religious homogeneity may be less able to form bridging social capital in pluralistic contexts, including workplaces, it was important to consider carefully the graduates who were invited to participate. The sampling of graduates for involvement was guided by the following criteria, which sought to identify those who were embedded in a social ecology where the home and school were imbued with Christian beliefs and values and bonding capital was likely to be dense within the relational networks.

The graduates invited to participate in this study were required to have:

1. completed the majority of their schooling in an evangelical Christian school – preferably the school involved in the study.
2. graduated from Year 12 in 2010 or 2011.
3. taken up employment in a part-time or full-time position within a workplace that would be defined as pluralistic.
4. been raised in a family that was closely connected with a Church community.

A preliminary list of graduates who satisfied the criteria was established in collaboration with the participating schools. Using the criteria below, the researcher selected 12 students from the list (per school) to be extended invitations to participate in the study.

The criteria applied were as follows.

1. Preference was given to those who spent the most time in the school.
2. Where possible, an equal number of males and females were extended invitations.

Should the above criteria have failed to adequately limit the number of candidates to the required quota, the balance of places were to be offered based on the alphabetical order of the graduates' surnames.

Once the school had extended an invitation to the graduates and they had agreed to consider participating in the study, the researcher made contact with them either via email or phone. At this point, comprehensive details of the study were provided including the information letter and consent form (see Appendices C and D). When contact was made with the graduates and an invitation offered, the nature of the commitment required was clearly described. They were advised that they would be expected to participate in one individual semi-structured interview and to grant permission for the researcher to conduct interviews with their parent/guardian(s) and their employer (or a work colleague).

A total of six graduates from each of the three schools agreed to participate in this study, which gave a total of 18.

### ***Data collection***

Case study data can be collected using a variety of means including documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation and physical artefacts (Yin, 2009). Each of the sources of data has advantages and disadvantages and a researcher must carefully consider the merits of each when designing a study. While interviews have inherent weaknesses associated with being time-consuming and open to a greater degree of researcher bias, they offer a means of gathering rich data that can be focussed and expose "causal inferences and explanations" (Yin, 2009, p. 102). Interviews can be unstructured/open-ended,

semi-structured or structured (Cresswell, 2007). Where the intention of the researcher is to avoid *forcing* the data through the application of too many predetermined ideas (Glaser, 1978), an unstructured approach to interviews is preferable. This study adopted a semi-structured approach to the interviews conducted with the graduates, parents and workplace contacts. It provided sufficient scaffolding to gather data in the specific areas of focus, but allowed latitude for participants to explore concepts that they considered important to the investigation – thus keeping the data *grounded* (Glaser, 1992).

Despite the fact that focus group interviews may have been a time-efficient means of gathering data from the graduates and parents involved in this study, the tactic was not adopted because of its inherent limitations. It is not an effective means of gathering the narratives of individuals (Barbour, 2007). Individual interviews are superior in this context and were adopted when interviewing the graduates and parents because: 1) the participant does not have to compete with others for opportunities to tell their stories; 2) their views are less likely to be influenced by the presence of other participants; 3) the researcher is better able to transcribe the narrative when it is not being clouded by other voices and 4) participants may be less inhibited and more likely to speak openly and honestly – particularly about sensitive matters (Barbour, 2007).

It is important to note there were a small number of occasions when interviewing parents that more than one participant was invited to participate. If both of a graduate's parents agreed to participate in an interview, they were interviewed as a couple. It was assumed that the parents were likely to feel at ease being interviewed together and little would be gained by conducting individual interviews with them. It was also deemed to be a more efficient use of field-work time.

The intent of interviewing educators was not to elicit individual narratives, but to provide an opportunity for them to offer insights into the dynamics of their schools and the curriculum and pedagogical approaches adopted to nurture the development of the social and civic competencies that were of interest in this study. This was ideally suited to a focus group approach, because the aim was to access the perspectives of a specific group of people, who were able to provide informed insights (Barbour, 2007) into the educative environment within evangelical Christian schools. Unlike the interviews with graduates, parents and workplace contacts, where it was important to avoid the potential for other voices to contaminate the data,

there were benefits to be derived from engaging the educators in a focus group interview format. It provided a context where the individuals who were colleagues and accustomed to collaborative interactions, could clarify their thinking and views through the dialogue generated by others, but care was taken to ensure that all participants were able to contribute to the discussion and no-one was able to dominate proceedings (Cresswell, 2007). Barbour (2007) recommends that focus group size should not exceed eight, mainly because of the difficulties associated with voice identification during the transcription and analysis phase – hence the focus group size adopted for this study was eight participants. One focus group was formed per case/school, giving a total of three focus group interviews. The following criteria were provided to the schools to guide the formation of their focus groups:

- Each participant must be on staff as a teacher or an educational leader.
- The focus group should ideally include at least one teacher from both the primary and secondary areas of the school.
- A minimum of one member of the school's leadership team (i.e. principal or deputy principals) should be involved.
- The composition of the group should include representation of both males and females.
- At least one teacher who is involved in the delivery of curriculum associated with civics and citizenship related educational programs should be invited to participate.
- If possible, a minimum of one teacher who has worked closely with the 2010 and 2011 graduates should be included.

The three stage sequence of data collection for this study is outlined below. The structure allowed the voices of graduates and others who had different vantage points to be considered (Bronfenbrenner, 2005b). Consistent with the social constructionist paradigm, the intention was to hear the voices of the graduates, their parents, workplace colleagues and the educators associated with each of the schools and allow them to attach meaning to their experiences (Charmaz, 2006). It was particularly important to hear the voices of the graduates because they were able to reflect upon the forces that had shaped their social development and describe their experiences when entering post-school pluralistic contexts like their workplaces.

### Stage 1: Semi-structured interviews

<p><i>Number of interviews conducted</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Graduates (18)</i></li> <li>• <i>Parents (17)</i></li> <li>• <i>Workplace Contacts (15)</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Total number of interviews (50)</i></p>	<p>All of the first round of interviews with the graduates, their parents and workplace contacts were undertaken during this initial stage. Individual and semi-structured interviews were conducted with the graduates and workplace contacts. If more than one parent or guardian was prepared to participate in the study, then both were involved in a single interview. All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and imported into N-Vivo for analysis.</p>
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### Stage 2: Documents (Content Analysis)

<p><i>Number of interviews conducted</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Graduates (18)</i></li> <li>• <i>Parents (17)</i></li> <li>• <i>Workplace Contacts (15)</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Total number of interviews (50)</i></p>	<p>Throughout the interview processes conducted in Stages 1 &amp; 3, documents related to the emerging patterns and concepts were obtained. Each of the documents was scanned and imported into N-Vivo for analysis.</p>
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### Stage 3: Educators – Focus Group

<p><i>Number of focus group interviews conducted (3)</i></p>	<p>Following completion of the data gathering and analysis processes in the previous stages, three (3) focus group interviews were conducted – i.e. one per participating school. A semi-structured approach was adopted for the focus group interviews. The questions included in the interview schedule were developed by drawing upon the patterns that had been identified within Stages 1 and 2 and aimed to provide participants with an opportunity to reflect upon the role of the school in the development of social and civic values and attributes. The interviews were digitally recorded and imported into N-Vivo for partial transcription and data analysis. Where necessary, follow up interviews were conducted with participants where clarification was required on specific themes, which had emerged during the interview.</p>
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Once collected, the data were organised into five databases (Yin, 2009) within N-Vivo, which included (1) Graduates (2) Parents (3) Workplace contacts (4) Educators and (5) Documents. The establishment of discrete databases in this form provided the means to systematically collect data from multiple sources and analyse it, achieving *data triangulation* or *converging lines of inquiry* (Yin, 2009). Patton as cited by Yin (2009) asserts that the application of a variety of data collection methods allows the researcher to achieve *methodological triangulation*. These forms of triangulation increase the likelihood that any findings or claims emanating from the research will be credible (Stake, 1995). The use of databases in this way also provide the means for researchers to more readily make available the raw data, so that a critical reader, upon request, can inspect it (Yin, 2009) – subject to compliance with the observed ethical protocols protecting the identity of participants.

Data collection methods and a study's sources of evidence must cohere with the research question, the nature of the data to be collected and the role or stance the researcher plans to adopt. When referring to the role of the researcher within a study, Stake (1995) asserts that case study researchers can adopt any of the following: advocate, evaluator, biographer or interpreter. An overview of the data collection methods, the sources of evidence and the roles of the researcher throughout this study can be found in Appendix Q. The overview includes a description of how these important facets of the study align with the research questions.

## ***Data analysis***

Throughout the data collection phases, the data were imported into the N-Vivo 9 software program for coding and analysis. Consistent with the *constant comparative method* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously. The process has been described as a “zig-zag” approach (Cresswell, 2007, p. 64), where the researcher oscillates between collecting data in the field and conducting analysis, each time allowing the emerging themes to inform the next stage of data collection.

This approach was not used in the same way as the grounded theorists apply it, where substantial changes are sometimes made to the methods or techniques used throughout the data gathering process in response to the outcomes of data analysis. In this study, the changes made were largely refinements intended to enhance the quality of the data being generated throughout the interview process. For example, when it was obvious that interviewees did not fully understand a question contained within the interview schedule, alternative lines of inquiry were considered and implemented. Adopting this approach allowed the data collection tools to be refined in response to any unanticipated patterns that emerged from the data (Glaser, 1992) or issues that arose. The refined interview schedules can be found in the Appendices (K-N).

Integral to the data collection process was the preparation of *field notes* (Eisenhardt, 2002) following each activity in the field. These notes provided an opportunity to document specific personal details about the participants and the setting, which were deemed important to the study - for example, the gender and year of graduation of each graduate. They also provided the means of capturing and documenting any early impressions that emerged during the interview and the opportunity to make reflexive notes. These notes included reflections on the problems that were encountered with the interview questions or any biases that were influencing the framing of questions or responses to participant comments (Richards, 2009).

### ***Topic coding***

A process of coding the data was the first stage of *data reduction* (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Initially this involved systematically working through the data *line-by-line* (Charmaz, 2006) and generating labels, or what are often referred to as codes. While coding in this form has its origins in grounded theory methodology, case-study researchers endorse it as an effective data reduction strategy in case studies (Huberman & Miles, 1994; Simons, 2009).



During this phase of data analysis, the N-Vivo system was used to attach conceptual labels/codes, or what the N-Vivo system refers to as nodes, to each line, sentence or paragraph within the data. At the end of this process, a total of 665 nodes had been developed. Much of the analysis at this stage was what Richards (2009) refers to as *topic coding* where each passage of text is grouped based on either the topics anticipated by the researcher when designing the research study, or others that become evident through the data analysis process. Further reduction of the nodes was achieved by using N-Vivo's folder system, which enabled the nodes to be grouped into 15 key topics, each with subfolders. During this process of review, nodes were also merged where two or more had been coded with similar labels.

### ***Analytical coding***

In addition to topic coding, a process of *analytical coding* (Richards, 2009) was undertaken throughout the data reduction process. This form of coding is at a higher level of abstraction to topic coding and refers to the formation of conceptual labels that describe or define the patterns and themes that are identified within the data. This form of coding was undertaken using different means at each stage of the analysis process.

During the initial phases and prior to completion of the topic coding phase, tentative ideas about patterns or themes that might be present in the data were recorded using N-Vivo's annotation and memo features. Annotations were generated when ideas specific to a section of the transcript required documentation (Richards, 2009). In contrast, memos were prepared to record any tentative patterns or theories that were not specific to a particular passage within the transcripts, but were identified as possibly transcending multiple data sources.

The intermediate phase of data reduction involved the application of analytical coding to discover the key themes present within the 15 topic folders, subfolders and nodes. This process of reviewing and refining the coding and raising the level of conceptual abstraction is described by Richards (2009) as being critical, because it moves the analysis from describing the content of the data, to exploring and discovering its meaning. Richards (2009) refers to this process as *coding on*. Using the 15 key topic folder labels that were generated when topic coding as headings, a comprehensive process of *memo writing* (Corbin & Holt, 2005; Cresswell, 2007; Glaser, 1978) was undertaken. Effectively, this involved telling the story that was unfolding in

the data in the form of a narrative. Throughout this stage, careful attention was made to identify and differentiate when a phenomenon was attributable to an individual or multiple participants. Whenever a statement was made in the memo that referred to a pattern, theme or phenomenon, the initials of the participants to whom it applied were recorded in brackets as a point of reference. This not only provided a means of accountability as part of the quality assurance measures, but also enabled the extent to which the phenomenon applied beyond an individual participant to be established. The retention of discrete databases throughout this process provided the means to not only identify the commonalities and differences that were attributable to individual participants, but also allowed patterns or themes specific to a particular case (i.e. school) to be considered. This tactic allowed both *within-case* and *cross-case analyses* (Huberman & Miles, 1994) to be undertaken.

In the final phase of analytical coding, the memo making documents were closely examined and coded, again using the N-Vivo software. The outcome of this coding was the identification of 9 preliminary key themes. It was from these themes and a process of continual review, refinement and re-examination of the coding and narrative that provided the foundation for identifying the key findings of this research study.

### ***Quality assurance measures***

Incorporated into the research study's design were the following measures, which aimed to challenge the researcher's decision making and analysis processes and minimise the imposition of theoretical and ideological assumptions on the data. The credibility of the research findings of any study is contingent upon the integrity of the research process. The measures described below provide the means through which the researcher was held accountable and challenged where necessary.

### ***Reflexive writing***

Throughout the study, reflexive notes were kept in order to record the decisions that were made and the rationale that had underpinned them. The decisions made by researchers are influenced by their values and beliefs and recording and reporting them, allows the assumptions to be challenged by others (Cresswell, 2007) and in the case of this study, the research supervisors.

### ***Supervisors – audit of coding***

Periodically, the research supervisors were involved in an audit of the coded data. Allowing them to view and analyse the coded data provided the means of checking that it was allowed to *emerge* and remain grounded, rather than being *forced* into the researcher's theoretical presuppositions (Glaser, 1992).

### ***Member checking***

In some research projects a process of member checking is incorporated into the quality assurance measures. This often takes the form of a series of follow-up interviews, which provide an opportunity for the analysed data to be checked for veracity (Stake, 1995). An alternative approach was adopted in this study. By embedding the audio files from interviews, transcripts and codes (nodes) within the N-Vivo system, the veracity of any claim could be tracked. During the data analysis phase of this project, the research supervisors were provided access to all of the data in all of its forms, so that the veracity of the claims made could be assessed.

### ***Triangulation***

Stake (1995) contends that accurate description and logical interpretation in case study research can be enhanced through the application of triangulation protocols, where different sources of data provide insights into the phenomena under investigation. In this study, *data triangulation* and *methodological triangulation* tactics, as conceptualised by Patton and cited by Yin (2009), were integrated to strengthen confidence in the conclusions being drawn from the data. The multiple data sources included the graduates, parents, employers/work-colleagues, educators and documents. The data collection methods included individual interviews, focus group interviews and the content analysis of documents.

## ***Chapter 4***

### ***Findings: The role of the school within the social ecology***

The aim of this study was to explore the influence that religious based education provided within Western Australia's evangelical Christian schools has on the development of the social and civic competencies required to sustain our democratic society and promote social cohesion within our pluralistic communities. The data generated have provided insights into three broad areas, which are explored in the following three chapters. The first of the areas, addressed in this chapter, considers the role of the school as a socio-cultural context within the social ecologies of the graduates and its impact on the development of their social and civic values and behaviours. Chapter 5 continues to explore the formation of social and civic values and behaviours, but opens the lens and looks more broadly to consider other influential socio-cultural contexts beyond the school that form part of a child's total social ecology. Then finally, in Chapter 6, the focus moves away from an analysis of the formative influences and considers the post-school relational challenges that the graduates have had to confront and navigate since leaving school. It is this last area that adopts an evaluative posture and considers how the religious school context has influenced the relational dynamics of the graduates' post-school social worlds. In summary, the three areas include:

- The role of the school within the social ecology
- The confluence of socio-ecological contexts
- The post-school relational dynamics

It is imperative to recognise that any discussion on the formation of values and behaviours cannot be undertaken in a reductionist way, where complexity is denied or ignored. The data generated in this study highlights the vast array of influences that have been present within each graduate's social ecology and it is acknowledged that no two accounts are the same. What follows in this chapter is not an exhaustive list of the features identified within the schools that have shaped the values and behaviours of graduates, but a description of some that appear to

have been significant. The chapter begins by contrasting the approaches of the schools to the development of social and civic values and attributes. It then describes the impact that the schools appeared to have on the formation of graduates' social and civic values and attributes and identifies two facets of the educative environments of the schools that the data suggested had been influential. In the final section, the impact of enrolment practices on social and civic development is discussed. Throughout the chapter, five key findings are presented.

In addition to identifying the drivers that have shaped the formation of the graduates' social and civic capabilities, the following narrative also aims to provide insights or a 'snap-shot' into the characteristics of this network of evangelical Christian schools, which rarely feature in the educational literature, except when they are grouped within the broader classification of 'independent' or 'religious' schools. When this form of grouping occurs, both the substantial and subtle differences between the evangelical Christian schools that are central to this study and the other schools that fit these broader classifications are lost. By collecting rich qualitative data specific to this group of schools, it is possible to develop a more nuanced understanding of their communities and the nature of the educational programs.

Throughout Chapters 4-6 a referencing system has been adopted, which links the statements made with the data source. Where a statement is made that draws on some specific data, a bracketed reference indicates the source. In cases where it was important to acknowledge the specific school being referred to, an acronym has been applied. This occurs most often when referring to data derived from the focus group interviews. For example, where the data are associated with Wilberforce Christian College (W) and were generated during the focus group interview (FG), the following reference is applied: (W-FG). Where the data were derived from a follow up interview with a focus group participant, a two has been added to denote it (W-FG2). Similarly, in situations where the data source was documents obtained from a specific school, say Wilberforce, the reference notation would be (W-D). Where it has been deemed unnecessary to identify the school in the reference, it is not included. This is often the case when referring to data generated from graduates (G), parents (P) and employers/workplace contacts (E). The same applies when a direct quotation is applied to a single participant who was involved in an individual interview. In this situation, the graduate's initials are used as the reference code. For example, when a comment is attributable to Bill Norris, the reference will

read (BN). If it is the parent of Bill Norris, a P is added to the reference (PBN). Or in the case of his employer or workplace contact, the reference will read (EBN).

In order to indicate the number of participants who made a claim or shared a view from the total number involved, a numerator and denominator system is used. The numerator indicates the number of participants who made similar claims and the denominator denotes the total number for whom the phenomenon applies. For example, in a situation where 14 of the 18 graduates (G), across the three schools, offered a similar perspective on a specific phenomenon, the reference (G-14/18) is applied. If however, the data only applied to graduates from a single school, the denominator is changed to six (6). So, if half of the graduates from a single school shared a similar perspective on a matter pertaining to their school, the reference would read (G-3/6). The same approach applies to the data generated from the parents' (P) and employer/workplace contacts' (E) interviews.

A table of data source acronyms can be found in Appendix P. In order to protect the identity of the individuals and schools involved in the research study, pseudonyms have been used.

### ***The contrasting approaches of schools***

All of the schools involved in this study viewed the teaching of values as a high priority within what might be described as a holistic approach to teaching and learning where the intellectual, physical, social and spiritual dimensions of human development are interwoven throughout the curriculum (L-D, L-FG, W-D, W-FG, F-D, F-FG). Also common was the unequivocal recognition that the schools' espoused values were derived from a Christian worldview or ideological foundation (L-D, W-D, F-D). While these common elements across all three cases were present, the approaches to promoting and teaching the values varied. The following summaries of the schools' approaches highlight the similarities and differences.

### ***The Wilberforce Christian College approach***

On the walls of most classrooms throughout the school was a statement of the school's core values, which included honesty, respect, responsibility, service, compassion, perseverance and self-discipline (W-D, W-FG, G-2/6). These values were documented during the foundation year of the college through a rigorous and spirited dialogue amongst the school's leaders (W-FG).

Other than some minor changes to the definitions during a recent process of review, they have remained unchanged since the school's establishment 15 years ago (W-FG).

During the primary school years (Kindergarten to Year 6) these values were a point of reference for both explicit (W-D, W-FG2, G-1/6) and implicit teaching (W-FG, W-FG2). In addition to references within correspondence (e.g newsletters and classroom communication) with families where the values were promoted and discussion was encouraged (W-D), teachers also spoke formally and informally about them with students (W-FG2). Rather than allocating a specific weekly session to the teaching of Christian education or 'beliefs and values' in the primary school, an integrated approach had been adopted (W-FG2). The Principal stated that on a daily basis, reference would be made to the school's values both through the integrated curriculum and the informal interactions with students, which may include times when social or behavioural issues were addressed (W-FG2). During the course of a school year, most primary classroom teachers aimed to explicitly teach all of the values, mainly through the exploration of Bible stories and themes that are integral to the Christian tradition (W-FG2). It was quite common for the day to commence with 'mat time', where a Bible story with links to the school's values was discussed with students (W-FG2).

During the secondary school years (7 to 12) a different approach was adopted. In addition to a degree of integration within the various curriculum areas, a specific program that explored beliefs and values was included within the timetable of each student (W-FG, G-4/6). Up to and including Year 10, this consisted of a weekly class where specialist teachers were responsible for the oversight and delivery of the program (W-FG). Through the senior years, the school conducted three 'Seminar' days per year, where the normal teaching and learning program was suspended and a conference type values based program was organised by the specialist teachers (W-FG). The focus of this program was to develop in students an understanding of different worldviews, including the Christian framework (W-FG). A shift in focus happened in the program as students' progressed from the lower to upper secondary years. Initially the program began with an exploration of the major Biblical stories and themes and links with the school's values and the Christian worldview (W-FG, G-1/6). As they progressed towards and into the senior years, the program broadened to explore the perspectives of different philosophers of the past, religious traditions and their associated worldviews (W-FG, G-2/6). This exploration was

conducted by using four questions as a lens through which each worldview could be considered: “1) What is real? 2) Who is well off? 3) What is goodness? and 4) How do you become a good person?” (W-FG). These classes were viewed as “awesome” (BN) and “interesting” by some students because they explored different world views and promoted tolerance and understanding (G-2/6, P-1/5). When asked if this positive perspective was shared by others, one graduate said: “I think a lot of students enjoyed it” (BN) and its success he attributed to the quality and competence of the teacher. Another graduate echoed this view and said: “Yeah, I think a lot of people liked it” (ST). In general, the graduates from Wilberforce attributed considerable influence to the role of the school in the formation of their faith and values and also spoke positively about their Christian education type classes (G-5/6).

### ***The Flynn Christian College approach***

Like Wilberforce, Flynn had a document displayed in most of the classrooms, which referred to some of the values that were viewed as being important to the school (SV, F-FG). It was referred to as the “Charter of Goodwill” (F-FG). This was developed during the tenure of a former deputy principal and was intended to be a point of reference as part of the school’s behaviour management processes (F-FG). While the charter remained on display in many classrooms and was referred to by one of the graduates (SV), its status had diminished since the departure of the school leader who introduced it (F-FG). The evidence suggests that the document was no longer a significant point of reference for staff and students and was not embraced across the school in the same way as the values statements at Wilberforce (F-FG).

When focus group participants were asked about the teaching of social and civic values, one of them stated, in reference to the high school program: “Explicitly, we teach Christian values and morality through the Christian education program. And that is one hour per week. And I'd say that one quarter of that program is based on ethics and that (*sic*) kind of values” (F-FG). Another participant who was familiar with the primary school program said that teachers generally allocated one lesson per week to Christian education, but added that most would also start each day with a Bible based thought or focus (F-FG). One of the graduates in their interview explained that he recalled the emphasis of the primary school Christian education lessons being on teaching the major themes of the Bible (CK). He also mentioned that often, anecdotal teaching of values was done by making reference to Biblical principles. When exploring the



characteristics of the secondary school approach to Christian education, it was clear that there was a shift in emphasis during the progression between the junior high to senior high school years (G-2/6, F-FG). During the junior high school years, the lessons had included a blend of Bible teaching and social justice issues, with the poor being a major focus (F-FG). During the transition towards and into the senior years, the program's content had changed its central themes. One of the focus group participants stated: "...as the years go higher up, increased (*sic*) look at ethics, right and wrong, and looking into our place in contemporary situations: medicine, sexuality, legal issues, spending of money - those types of things" (F-FG). When probed a little further about the nature of the senior years program, the participant elaborated by saying that the program included an exploration of world religions and their worldviews, in addition to "ethical theory and where our rights and wrongs come from" (F-FG). The participant explained that their program was not like other schools where a comprehensive focus on worldviews was undertaken (F-FG). The nature of the program described in the focus group was consistent with the descriptions provided by the graduates who made specific reference to the Christian education program during their interviews (G-5/6).

In addition to providing a description of the Christian education program's content, a number of graduates also spoke about the dynamics of the classes and the way they were viewed by students. They noted that the classes encouraged respectful debate and dialogue (G-2/6) and tolerance and understanding of other religious views and perspectives (KS). They noted that students were free to challenge the Christian world view if it was being presented, but respect for all was demanded (G-2/6). One graduate suggested that the fundamental aim of the classes was to "get the best out of people" and he added that the classes were viewed favourably by students, including those who were not Christians, because it was relaxed (NK). Another graduate commented that it was not viewed as indoctrination, but as a forum where ideas were presented for people to think about (NK). Simone Vinteck also pointed out that the classes were not "holy, deep spiritual talk", but tended to be "light and fun" and an exploration of life and the place of Christian faith within it (SV). Simone also said that everyone enjoyed the way the teacher approached learning in this subject area, irrespective of their own belief systems, but noted that this was not the same for all of the classes (SV). She said that some of her friends who were in other classes did not view the program as positively (SV).

### ***The Luther-King Christian College approach***

The approach at Luther-King was quite different from the two other schools. No apparent effort had been made to be explicit about the set of social and civic values that the school sought to uphold. Instead, the focus was on teaching and promoting the values implicit and explicit within the Biblical narrative (L-FG), which the school educators asserted, aligned with the values embedded within the curriculum documents that shape the teaching and learning programs in West Australian schools (L-FG). It is important to note that a change in approach throughout the primary school had occurred in recent years. A whole of primary school program had been developed which involved the formal and informal teaching of specific character traits or values across all years in a cyclical manner (L-FG). When asked about where the traits or values were being derived, the school leader indicated that a commercial package known as 'Character First' was being used as the basis for the initiative (L-FG). This program was not operating in the school during the tenure of the graduates involved in this study, so it had not influenced their social development.

During the graduate interviews, it became apparent that the absence of any explicit statement of values promoted by the school limited their understanding of some of the values included within the curriculum documents that have guided the work of Australia's schools. During the graduate interviews, participants were asked to describe their understanding of some of the values and it was apparent that they were less confident defining them than their peers from the other two schools. While most could describe what was meant by values like 'care', 'respect' and 'honesty', when questioned about 'social justice,' it was clear that they were unfamiliar with it (G-3/6). However, it was evident that their lack of understanding was limited only to the conceptual label, because once it was explained, they were able to describe in detail numerous programs operating in the school that aimed at promoting social justice principles (G-3/6). It would seem that through its curriculum, the school was committed to the principles, but the conceptual label may not have been part of the school's vernacular during the tenure of these graduates.

When asked about the school's Christian education program and its role in the formation and development of social and civic values, the focus group participants described an approach that was significantly different when contrasted with the other schools (L-FG). Where the other two

schools transitioned from teaching the values from a Christian worldview framework in the primary years to an exploration of multiple worldviews as students approached and entered the senior years, the evidence suggests that Luther-King's approach is quite different (L-FG, W-FG, F-FG). Their program remained centered on the Biblical narrative throughout the secondary years (L-FG). One of the participants explained that during each of the high school years, the program focused on a Biblical theme or section of the Bible (L-FG). For example, the book of Matthew was explored in Year 7, Mark's gospel in Year 8 and the book of Ephesians in Year 9 - which included a special emphasis on ethical issues (L-FG). When referring to the senior years' program, one of the focus group participants made the following comment:

Year 11 is hope for a shattered world. Looking at Genesis - so the foundations. And then Year 12 - well in Year 12 we do let Form teachers do whatever they want to do and they do a variety of different things. That is the world religions one and they do not all do that because a lot of the kids say they do not like it. It is boring and its dull etc. And that sort of thing. So they don't all do that now. But that is what we offer. (L-FG)

The above reference to the students' perceptions of the program was consistent with the sentiments expressed by some of the school's graduates (G-3/6) who did not view the program favourably and made comments like: "[the program] was the class everyone hated, even the people who loved Jesus the most hated that class, it was just the worst. It was boring" (BS). Another graduate, when referring to her senior years said: "I remember having it and we, like, we didn't really do much, we had a teacher and she couldn't really control the class and we had a naughty class, so we watched a few videos and, like...but it wasn't really ... it wasn't really as good a class as it should have been, I think" (FI). Possibly the most critical of the program was Samantha Irwin who, amongst other things said: "In Luther-King, like, we have a, like, [name of the program] where we learn about every religion and stuff and every person hates it, like, it's boring, we don't listen and because of that, like, the teachers don't even teach it, you know what I mean, like, it's by our Form teacher usually, they have a million things to do" (SI).

Not all of the comments made in the interviews expressed negative sentiment about the program, but it does seem that its effectiveness may have been dependent on the competence of the teacher responsible for its delivery. The parent of Sean Dannit reported that her son

thoroughly enjoyed the senior years' program, but it would seem that his teacher was highly competent and respected by the students (PSD).

It appears that the intent of the Year 12 program at Luther-King was to introduce students to the alternative worldview perspectives associated with other religions of the world, but this was not a program that had engaged many of the students. It was also interesting to note that Form teachers were responsible for its delivery, which was quite different from the approach adopted by other schools where it was taught either by specialist teachers or those with a specific interest in it (L-FG, W-FG, F-FG).

### ***Key Finding 1***

The most obvious commonality when the approaches of schools were contrasted was the importance that the educators within the school communities placed on the development of the values that are consistent with the Christian worldview. The emphasis of all three schools on the importance of nurturing the development of social values is clearly evident in the data. Not only do the schools espouse the importance of this in their documents, but the narrative of participants suggests it is reflected in their practices – including curriculum design. It is this commonality that is reflected in the first key finding.

#### **Key Finding 1 (KF1)**

*Nurturing development of the values that are integral to a Christian worldview was a high priority for the school communities, but the nature and quality of their explicit teaching programs varied.*

This Key Finding specifically notes that the schools' commitment as defined by the educators who participated in the study and reflected in the schools' approaches to curriculum, was to those values that are integral to the Christian worldview as distinct from those that have been embedded within the documents produced by Australia's education authorities – although the Luther-King educators asserted that there was a significant alignment between them.

While all of the schools were committed to teaching these values, it was clear that there were significant differences in their approaches and the extent to which they engaged and impacted the students. The data suggest that only one school had developed a set of core values that were the reference point for teachers throughout the school, to guide both their explicit teaching, as well as the informal and anecdotal learning opportunities that arose. It was also apparent that while the other two schools had not documented their core values, they were implied and taught because they were consistent with, and integral to, the Christian world-view that was foundational to the schools' operation and mission. The values were taught in all schools both formally through Christian education type studies programs and integrated within other classes or lessons. One of the significant differences across the schools was the way the values were taught in the high school years. For some schools, there was a strategic shift over time towards the exploration of values and ethics through the lens of multiple worldviews, while one school tended to sustain a greater emphasis on the teaching of a Christian worldview throughout its Christian education type program. The evidence also suggested that there were significant differences in how favourably students viewed the programs and engaged in them. It was difficult to determine whether this variable student feedback was in response to curriculum design differences, the competence of the teachers responsible for its delivery, or both.

### ***The impact of the schools on values formation***

In addition to exploring the approaches that the schools had adopted to nurture the development of social and civic values, the interview questions also sought to investigate the degree to which the work of the schools had been seen by graduates and their parents as being an influential force or driver. In other words, having established 'what' the schools had done and the different approaches they had adopted to values development, the question that arises is how effectively, or significantly, did the schools' work contribute to the formation of the graduates' social and civic values? To answer this question, the voices of the graduates and their parents must be heard. The graduates bring a unique perspective because they have been enmeshed in the relational and instructional dynamics of the school and are able to draw upon their first-hand experiences in the discourse. Parents, in contrast, offer the perceptions of onlookers who have observed their child's development during the schooling years. They are in

a position to make some valid judgments about the role of the school in the development of their child's values and behaviours.

During the interviews with graduates and parents, participants were asked to comment on the influences that had shaped the graduates' social and civic values, including the role of the school. The list of social values used as a reference point in the interviews were derived from those developed by the Curriculum Corporation (2003) and have been embedded in various forms throughout the curriculum documents of Australia's education sector. In response to specific questions relating to each of the social and civic values listed in the interview schedule (see Appendices K & L), it became evident that in confluence with other socio-cultural contexts within the graduates' social ecologies, the schools had been influential, as described below. However, the degree of influence of the school was variable, depending on the value under consideration. At times, the school's influence was deemed to be significant, but in other instances, it was difficult for participants to extricate its contribution from the impact of other factors within the broader social ecology.

### ***The development of 'responsibility'***

When discussing the development of 'responsibility' as a value, participants often referred to the school as having a significant influence. The requirement to complete school work and be held accountable by teachers was seen as providing an environment where learning 'responsibility' was made possible (G-12/18, P-3/17). A parent whose child had moved from overseas said that the Australian approach of requiring students to accept a higher degree of responsibility for their learning outcomes (i.e completion of class and homework) had a positive influence on the development of this value for her child (PSI). One graduate commented that the role of the school in this area can be as simple as positively encouraging and reinforcing the behaviour of students when they take initiative and act responsibly (LS). Another referred to the influence of the school's behaviour management practices as the means to challenge and shape the formation of this value (NK). Keith Keen and his parent described how his involvement with the Student Council had taught him about responsibility and forced him to become responsible (KK, PPK). Reference was also made to the expectations communicated to students about being representatives or ambassadors for the school and therefore, highlighting the need to be responsible (SV).

### ***The school amongst other influential contexts***

When discussing many of the values, participants were able to describe various aspects of the schools' policies, practices and curriculum that had contributed to the formation of their values, but with the exception of 'responsibility', they experienced difficulties specifically recognizing or attributing influence to the school. Often it was the case that while some graduates indicated that the role of the school had been substantial, others considered it to be an equal contributor alongside other influences or, occasionally it was deemed to be minimal. This inability to specifically extricate the influence of the school from other drivers applied when exploring the values of 'care', 'honesty', 'inclusion and trust', 'ethical behaviour', 'respect', 'social-justice' and 'tolerance and understanding'. For example, when discussing the value 'honesty', considerable discussion with the participants tended to focus on the confluence of family, church and school contexts in its formation (G-7/18, P-5/17), but in a few cases, the role of the school was specifically acknowledged as being substantial (G-3/18). Similarly, when the role of the school in the formation of the value 'care' was considered, the varied responses included: minimal (BN), occurring organically within Christian community (family, church and school) (G-2/18), being encouraged by the school (G-6/18, P-5/17) or having a profound impact (KD). Kevin Dean who moved from another school to Wilberforce during his primary school years and experienced a cultural change, described Wilberforce as having a more "caring" culture. For him, the role of the school in the development of this value was deemed to be significant. He stated: "...the school has made me a lot more of a caring person than I reckon what I would be if I went to another school" (KD).

When discussing the role of the school in the development of the value 'ethical behaviour', the role of the school was specifically acknowledged by some graduates. Reference was made to the impact of Christian education type classes, where they were provided with an opportunity to develop an understanding of ethics and ethical behaviour (G-7/18), but exploration of this value was problematic – because of the complexities inherent within the concept. What does it mean to behave ethically? To make this judgment, it presupposes a standard against which it can be made - but, is there a standard? How does one decide if behaviour is ethical? After completing a number of interviews and recognizing the challenges associated with exploring it, the interview questions were rephrased. In the latter interviews, graduates and parents were simply asked about the extent to which the Christian world-view influenced the graduate's personal ethics

and decision making. What became apparent was that for the many of the graduates, their ethics and values appear to be derived from a Christian Worldview (G-8/18, P-1/18)<sup>1</sup>, although other perspectives were also deemed to be influential (G-3/18).

### ***Culture and curriculum***

Within the narrative of both the graduates and parents, a theme that consistently emerged was that the schools' influence on the development of the graduates' values and behaviours was the product of what was modeled, expected, demanded and/or explicitly taught. This might be referred to as the impact of the schools' culture and curriculum.

At times, the participants attributed minimal influence to what was taught, but referred to the values that were modeled and promoted within the school culture. For example, some of the participants stated that 'care' was not so much taught formally in the school context, but it was modeled and promoted within the culture (G-2/18, P-1/17).

It was common for references to be made to the influence of their school's cultural expectations on the formation of values. For example, when the role of the school in promoting the development of 'respect' was discussed, participants noted its influence and explained that it tended to be something that was learnt through relational interactions and the cultural expectations, rather than explicit teaching (G-9/18, P-4/17). One graduate and her parents suggested that the school expected people to be respectful of others (PSV, SV) and modeled the value, by being willing to listen to the views expressed by students (SV). When referring to 'respect', one parent used the word "strict" to describe the school's expectations (PNK). Another referred to the presence of the value in the Flynn school prayer and the school's motto (PSV). Some graduates from Wilberforce and a parent from Flynn suggested that the way the schools' enrolment policies were open and welcoming of everyone irrespective of their own personal beliefs and values (G-2/18, PSV), and the genuine interest teachers took in students,

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<sup>1</sup> This reference to the data may understate the influence of the Christian world view on ethical decision-making because, in the main, it is limited to the responses of participants interviewed after the question was modified in the schedule.



helped to create a climate where the value of ‘tolerance and understanding’ could be fostered (LS).

Drawing on the data, it was also clear that participants recognised that a school’s cultural expectations that influence and shape the social and civic values of students is impacted by the schools’ behaviour management and discipline processes (L-FG, F-FG, G-1/18, P-5/17). Where the formal and informal teaching and modelling of values promote and affirm the pro-social behaviours being espoused in a proactive way, the sanctions applied when student behaviours are challenged equally shape the school’s cultural expectations.

While the impact of cultural expectations on the formation of the graduates’ values was acknowledged by many participants, the impact of explicit teaching was also mentioned at times. When discussing the role of the school in the formation of ‘tolerance and understanding’ and ‘ethical behaviour’, reference was made to the influence of Christian education type classes in the program. For some, these classes were seen as a forum where values and life skills and the importance of tolerance was discussed (G-8/18, P-1/17). Teaching the principles of ‘social-justice’ was also described as being integral to elements of the ‘Society and Environment’ curriculum taught in schools (W-FG, F-FG, L-FG). Participation in school activities like the Samaritan’s Purse Christmas Appeal and 40 Hour Famine with a focus on teaching students about the principles of ‘social-justice’ was also recognised as being influential within the programs of all three schools (G-16/18; P-9/17). However, as already noted, not all of the schools referred to, or used ‘social-justice’ as a conceptual label when referring to these activities. It would seem that at Wilberforce and to a lesser extent, Flynn, the term ‘social justice’ was used regularly and embedded within the vernacular of the majority of the graduates involved in this study. However, at Luther-King, the term may not have been linked to the activities that might be considered social justice initiatives. Instead, they were conceptualised as simply being part of Christian service or mission.

### ***The pursuit of ‘excellence’ - a misunderstood value***

When exploring this value, it became evident that participants viewed and understood it in different ways. Interviewees often made reference to how it was defined by them in their family context and recognised that, in some instances, this was different to how it was understood and

communicated by the educators at the graduate's school. Often 'excellence' was described as being about 'striving' and always 'doing your best' and not so much about the achievement of 'perfection' (G-5/18, P-4/17), but for two graduates the importance of winning and the adoption of a competitive posture was integral to it (G-2/18). In some cases, participants explained that their own understanding of excellence was inconsistent with what had been espoused and reflected in the schools' practices (G-1/18, P-2/17). One parent who was associated with Flynn suggested that in the high school, 'academic achievement' was probably rewarded and recognised more than 'striving for excellence' and the notion of rewarding those whose efforts reflect a desire to do their best at all times (PKS). It seems that this value can be defined and understood in different ways and therefore, a degree of ambiguity may surround its definition and how it was reflected in the behaviour of the graduates. If there was a lack of clarity around how this value was defined within the school communities, then it is conceivable that recognising its presence in the behaviour of graduates and schools was also problematic. It could also be that like other concepts, for example 'quality' or 'beauty', it is something that is recognisable but difficult to define.

When asked about the extent to which the schools had influenced the formation of this value, there was a variety of responses. The Wilberforce graduates referred to it as being a stated core school value and indicated that it had been promoted strongly (G-5/6), with an emphasis on doing your best (G-3/6, P-1/5). It was viewed by a few as mainly applying in the academic domain (G-1/6, P-1/5). Those connected with Flynn also suggested that the pursuit of excellence had been encouraged by the school (G-3/6, P-4/6), but some indicated that its impact had been negligible (G-3/6) or was more prevalent in the primary school (P-3/6). In one specific case a parent suggested that no-one at the school had encouraged her daughter to aspire to excellence (PCC). Similarly at Luther-King, some suggested it had been encouraged (G-3/6), but also acknowledged the limited impact of the school in this area (G-1/6, P-1/6). However, a Luther-King graduate referred to an individual teacher whose influence on him achieving excellence had been significant, particularly during the senior years (KK). Other Luther-King graduates also named specific teachers who had encouraged them to pursue excellence (G-2/6). The evidence suggests that the degree of influence the school has had on the formation of this value is difficult to establish, however, it is clear that the teachers within it can have a significant impact.

The influence of individual teachers on the formation of this value was also evident when one graduate made a contrast between two of her teachers. She described how the teachers from the same specialist learning area and with whom she had very positive relationships, had modelled different attitudes towards excellence and academic expectations. She explained that her Year 9 teacher demanded very little work from the students and the graduate attributed the difficulties she experienced in the senior years to a lack of rigour in this class (SI). In contrast, the graduate said of her senior years teacher “...he always, like, put in so much effort to make us do well, like, constantly, and he’s always, like, meet up for extra tutoring and that..” (SI). When referring generally to the senior years teachers, the graduate’s parent also acknowledged their commitment to excellence and preparedness to support her daughter and: “go the second mile” (PSI). This sentiment was shared by the parent of another graduate when referring to some specific teachers who had encouraged her child to excel (PKK). Another graduate made a similar observation and suggested that a greater sense of partnership developed with teachers in the senior years because they shared a common goal (SM). Referring first to the experiences in primary and middle school she said: “Before it was kind of just like, we didn’t have a goal in mind that we were trying to aim for but in year 11 and 12 you know that there’s going to be this exam at the end of year 12...”(SM). So, it would seem that teachers do have the capacity to foster and nurture the formation of this value, but the evidence suggests that not all teachers do. It would also appear that it may happen more in the senior years than in other phases of schooling.

## **Key Finding 2**

The findings described above highlight the role of the school within the social ecology and its influence on the development of social and civic values and behaviours. It is clear that the graduates and their parents attribute significant influence to the school in concert with other socio-cultural contexts and this is reflected in the following key finding.

### **Key Finding 2 (KF2)**

*In confluence with other socio-cultural contexts within the graduates’ social ecologies, the schools’ culture and curriculum have influenced the formation of the graduates’ social and civic values and behaviours.*

While the influence of the school is evident, it must be noted that it is more pronounced with respect to some values and less for others. For example, when referring to 'responsibility' as a value, the data indicate that the schools' influence was deemed to be significant. However, for other values ('care', 'honesty', 'inclusion and trust', 'ethical behaviour', 'respect', 'social-justice' and 'tolerance and understanding'), it would seem that socio-cultural contexts beyond the confines of the school have either acted in concert with the school, or have been more influential.

This finding does not assert that the role of the school has been more substantial relative to other socio-cultural contexts, for example the family context, but simply indicates that it has been significant and acted in concert with other influences that have shaped the formation of social and civic attributes.

It was also apparent that in this area of social and civic values development or formation, the schools' curriculum and the explicit teaching of values can be influential, but the cultural expectations and modeling of values also have a profound impact. The data also highlight the fact that people understand the value 'excellence' differently. It seems that this ambiguity is reflected in the different ways that the value is understood between socio-cultural contexts (i.e. school – home) and within them (e.g. inconsistent expectations and modeling by teachers within a school).

### ***Teacher-student relational distance***

When the graduates were asked to discuss the role of the school and its teachers in the formation of their social and civic values and behaviours, some named specific teachers as being significant and influential. However, the data revealed that this was more likely to be the case in schools where the social dynamics allowed teacher-student relational distance to be minimised. It was clear that the relational dynamics were not always consistent across the schools. The evidence suggests that there was a higher degree of teacher-student relational connection within two of the schools (Wilberforce and Luther-King) and a greater degree of relational distance present in the third (Flynn).

When the graduates and parents of Wilberforce and Luther-King reflected upon the schooling years, many identified at least one member of staff with whom they had a good or close relationship (Wilberforce G-6/6, P-5/5) (Luther-King G-6/6, P-3/6). For some of the graduates, the degree of trust and influence was deemed to be particularly significant. They named the teachers amongst those adults whom they considered to be particularly significant within their social ecologies (Wilberforce G-3/6, P-3/5) (Luther-King G-2/6, P-3/6). In some cases, more than one teacher was named as being influential (Wilberforce G-3/6) (Luther King G-1/6).

Below is a summary of the data that provide insights into the teacher-student relational dynamics operating within the three schools. It begins by highlighting the high degree of relational connection between staff and students that is apparent at Wilberforce and to a slightly lesser degree, Luther-King. The summary concludes by describing the dynamics that define Flynn and the renewed focus on relationship and community building that is underway in the school.

### ***Wilberforce Christian College***

The teachers at Wilberforce were generally referred to positively and as having good relationships or rapport with students by all interviewees (G-6/6, P-5/5). One of the graduates referred to all of her teachers as being “amazing” and particular emphasis was directed towards those involved with Years 10, 11 and 12 (DM). One parent qualified his positive reference to the teachers at Wilberforce as being “really, really good” by saying that a few were “less positive” and “one was pretty useless” but did not remain at the school for long (PBN).

Some of the female Wilberforce graduates spoke of particularly close relationships with some teachers who were deemed to have been influential and for some had become significant sources of emotional support and encouragement (G-3/3, P-3/3). The Form teachers of two female graduates (BS, LS); and a classroom teacher of another (DN) had become particularly close and were able to recognise when they needed advice or emotional support (G-3/3). One of Leanne Sutton’s teacher’s had become a “father figure” in the place of an absent and abusive biological father (LS, PLS). The male graduates at Wilberforce did not report having this kind of “deep” personal connection with teachers, but tended to speak about having good relationships and getting on particularly well with a small number of them (G-3/3). During the primary school

years, one of the graduate's male primary school teachers was recognised as filling a gap caused by his absent father who was fulfilling work responsibilities overseas (PBN).

The positive influence that specific teachers had on the graduates during their time at Wilberforce was recognised by all of the interviewees (G-6/6, P-5/5). One parent stated that the influence of some key secondary teachers had been "extremely positive" (PDM). Two parents referred specifically to the capacity of teachers to connect and come to understand the graduates' worlds (P-2/5). Leanne Sutton said that the teachers had demonstrated their care by taking an interest in "who you are" and were close enough to notice when something was not right (LS). When referring to one of the teachers whose influence had been particularly positive, Brianna Evans said: "...he actually cared about students really kind of deeply" (BE). Her mother also recognised the quality of her relationship with this teacher and said that she did develop a "closeness with him, in that he, I think, saw her, he saw beyond that mask" (PBE). It was this teacher who had realised that the graduate was struggling emotionally in Year 11 and sought assistance for her (BE, PBE). The graduate attributed his departure from the school as having some impact on her mental and emotional regression in Year 12 (BE).

### ***Luther-King Christian College***

The graduates generally spoke positively about the relationships they had with their teachers (G-4/6, P-2/6), deemed them to be "pretty good" (BS) or referred to some as being particularly significant and influential (SD). For Sean Dannit, having at least a few solid relational connections with teachers enabled him to navigate the challenges he had to confront with other members of staff (PSD). While not all spoke enthusiastically about their teachers, it would appear that during their senior years at school, all either relationally connected with most of their teachers and/or were close to one or more (G-6/6, P-3/6).

The evidence suggests that for a number of graduates, having a close relational connection with at least one staff member during the schooling years was significant and provided emotional support for a number of them (G-3/6, P-3/6). In one case, the relationship came about simply because a teacher took the time to speak with students and engage in their social worlds (PKK). Another used the term "approachability" to describe why she felt her daughter had been able to connect easily with her teachers (PLT). There was also evidence to suggest that the students

involved in the student leadership program seemed to have connected with the teachers at a different and closer level than others (G-2/6).

### ***Flynn Christian College***

A greater degree of distance appears to define the staff-student relational dynamics at Flynn. While many positive comments were made about the quality of the school environment and its positive impact (referred to later in this chapter when discussing pastoral care), very few graduates or their parents referred to the relational connections between staff and students as being close. Unlike the other two schools, the graduates rarely named teachers when identifying those who had been influential or significant within their social ecologies. This is consistent with the dialogue generated during the focus group interview with the educators involved with the college. The participants referred to the school as being in transition from a culture that was heavily influenced by its discipline policy to one where the focus was shifting to relationship building, community building and “walking alongside people” (F-FG). When asked about this transition, one participant stated: “Absolutely, and I think that the focus is entirely on community. This notion of community is a concept that we are grappling with at both the micro and macro level” (F-FG).

When referring to the teachers at Flynn, Simone Vinteck and Kelvin Stacey were the most positive and said that they liked all of them, but Simone did go on to mention one who was not as helpful as others had been. Kelvin Stacey’s parent spoke most highly of a teacher who had shown considerable compassion, empathy and worked diligently with her son (PKS). Nathan Keever spoke positively about his primary school teachers and indicated that two secondary teachers had been particularly influential and significant (NK). His parents also noted that some teachers had provided him with one-on-one tutoring and the Chaplain and Deputy were deemed to be particularly influential in his life (PNK).

Other graduates limited their positive assessments to just some of their teachers (SM), or suggested they were all “alright” or concluded that none of them were “nice” or the kind of people with whom you wanted to converse (CC). When wanting to make the point that the teachers at her school did not really care about students, Christine Cotter said: “Like teachers don't even remember your name sometimes” (CC). She also said: “I don't think the teachers

really cared about us at Flynn....I don't think the teachers, no-one goes to the teachers at that school.”

It would appear that Chris Keever had a polite type relationship with teachers, but none were deemed to be significant or influential. He suggested that schools were generally concerned with getting students equipped to enter their preferred post-school destinations and their relational connection is not significant and does not extend beyond the schooling years (CK). He stated:

I wouldn't say they care that much, if you know what I mean. It's kind of like, oh yeah, you got your results into uni. At the end of the day they have their figures which say this many students go to this uni, this was our average, you know, ATAR score and that sort of thing. So I guess it doesn't ... they don't really care too much, just the percentage of what graduates or how the students get into uni, if you know what I mean. (CK)

He also said:

I'd say probably teachers or staff at the school. I wouldn't say there's really any relationship, they were my teacher, they taught me. After that I had nothing ... well, obviously I'd say hi or something if I saw them but wouldn't really have too much to do with them. (CK)

### ***Relational dynamics in the senior years***

One of the common elements that emerged upon analysis of the data was the shift in relational dynamics between the commencement of the high school years and the senior years. One graduate of Flynn described how she felt a greater degree of relational connection with teachers during her senior years of school when compared with other periods of schooling (SM, PSM). She described it by saying:

I felt a lot closer to some of the teachers in the high school years because it felt like I was trusting them more than I would have been when I was younger, like, I had more dependence on them - like, with regards to grades and stuff. Before it was kind of just



like, we didn't have a goal in mind that we were trying to aim for but in year 11 and 12, you know that there's going to be this exam at the end of year 12. (SM)

A similar sentiment was expressed by a graduate from Luther-King who described some differences in her experiences between the middle and senior years of schooling (SI). This was also noted by this graduate's parent who, when referring to the relational connections between her daughter and senior years teachers, suggested that they were prepared to support the graduates' and "go the second mile" (PSI). This sentiment was shared by the parent of another graduate of Luther-King when referring to some specific teachers who had been significant sources of encouragement and support during the senior years (PKK). It is conceivable that this higher degree of relational connection during this period arises because the teachers and graduates share a common goal that is associated with examinations or 'end of year' results. It may also be symptomatic of a growing relational maturity that occurs throughout the high school years.

### **Key Finding 3**

The findings described above highlight the differences that existed in the relational dynamics of the schools involved in this study. The evidence suggests that the graduates of Wilberforce and Luther-King experienced a greater degree of relational connection with their teachers than those associated with Flynn. It also appears that the graduates from the schools where a greater degree of relational connection was present were more likely to name teachers as being influential and significant contributors within their social ecologies, who had impacted the formation of their social and civic values and behaviours. These insights have formed the basis for the following key finding.

#### **Key Finding 3 (KF3)**

*The degree to which the graduates attributed influence to their school and its teachers for development of their social and civic values and behaviours was contingent upon the teacher-student relational distance present within their school community.*

### ***Pastoral care structures and relational connection***

The findings described to date have highlighted the different degrees of teacher-student relational distance that were present in the schools. In addition to recognising this feature, the data also provided insights into the structural dimensions of the pastoral care programs operating within the schools, which seemed to impact how connected people were within the school community: including both the teacher-student and student-student relationships. While on balance the pastoral care dimension of all three schools was highly valued by the families involved, it does appear that some structural differences between them has contributed to the degree to which a sense of community, belonging or relational connectedness was established.

### ***Pastoral care – an important and valued feature of the schools***

All of the schools involved in this study shared a common commitment to pastoral care and a desire to provide a safe and nurturing environment that fosters learning and healthy social and emotional development (W-FG, L-FG, F-FG). For many of the families involved, this dimension of all three schools was deemed to be of high quality (G-2/18, P-9/17). The word nurturing was used by some parents to describe the school environment (P-4/17), while others defined it as controlled, safe, supportive and secure (PSM) or “caring” and “nurturing” (PKS). Another parent affirmed the quality of the school environment and said it was “incredibly nurturing...positive - it was healthy” (PSI). One parent specifically noted that the school environment at Luther-King in which his daughter had been associated had been “safe also for her spiritual needs” (PFI). This sentiment was also expressed by another parent associated with Flynn (PKS). A parent whose child attended Wilberforce said: “I think the best thing about the school was the fact that they allowed Leanne to be Leanne and allowed her to be unique” (PLS).

There was a suggestion made by some families that the quality of the pastoral care may be superior in one particular area of their school. Two families who valued the quality of the pastoral care dimension at Flynn suggested that the primary school may have been more effective than the secondary school in this area (P-2/6), but another parent associated with the same school felt that the high school was superior (PSM). It is conceivable that these observations reflect the experiences of their children, which it seems, may have been different. While these differences were apparent, what is clear is that many of the families viewed the pastoral care dimension of the schools favourably.

### ***Pastoral care structures***

Building community and creating a school culture where students experience a sense of belonging was recognised by the focus group participants (educators) from all three schools as being critically important (W-FG, L-FG, F-FG). While the overall perception of parents and some graduates, as reported above, is that quality pastoral care is a valued feature of these schools, it would seem that some structural differences in their approaches are producing variable outcomes. For example, earlier in this chapter it became evident that the sense of relational connection that the graduates experienced, particularly with the staff, varied between the schools. This raises an interesting question. What pastoral care structures or approaches most effectively foster the formation of strong relational connections, build community and nurture the formation of social and civic values and behaviours?

Pastoral care programs, by nature, are multifaceted and complex, which was clearly evident in the data. There were many school practices that participants reported as having a bearing on the creation of a culture and social environment that promoted the well-being of students, including, inter alia: approachability of school leadership (G-1/18, P-2/17), behaviour management/discipline policies (L-FG, F-FG, PSD), form-group/home-group arrangements (W-FG, PST), extra-curricular programs (W-FG, SV), rewards systems (PLS, W-FG2, L-FG) and how the school responds to and manages relational issues and conflict (L-FG). When the approaches of the three schools were compared, many similarities became apparent. However, there is one structural dimension that is unique to Wilberforce, which seemed to have had a significant impact on the relational connections and networks of the graduates.

The form-group/home-group structures that Wilberforce's secondary school had in place were not evident within the other participating schools. Earlier in this chapter it was noted that of all of the schools, the graduates from Wilberforce reported having a greater sense of relational connection with the school's teachers than those who attended Flynn and Luther-King. It is possible, that this sense of belonging and connection reported by the graduates and their parents could, at least in part, be attributable to this particular feature of the school's practices. One of the parents of a graduate from the school made the following statements, which highlight some of the features of the school, including the form/home group (HG) structure, referred to here with the acronym HG:

I would say because the teachers are able to get alongside the kids now, yes, they do it during school, but they also ... there's a lot of investment by the school in extra-curricular activities. And that doesn't happen in many government schools at all. So they've always got sporting stuff after school, whatever, music programmes, camps, and so the teachers can get alongside and see what's happening in his world. And they'll, if they notice anything that's, oh, that needs talking about, or caring for, the school will jump in and get alongside him. And they just do it. They don't do it overtly, they just do it.

....No, he talked lots about ... there would have been a [HG] at the school, it was a group sort of thing. What is it? [HG]. Don't know what it stands for. It's sort of the group of students that go through the years altogether, yet they go off and do their different subjects.

...[HG] has got ... don't know if that's peer mentoring group, it could be. It's a group that goes through together, and the teacher that he had, a fellow, Tom, he always seemed to respect well, and I sense that that's because the respect went the other way as well.  
(PST)

During the focus group interview with the staff from Wilberforce, participants described the structure of the HG or form group arrangements referred to so positively by this parent and others. They explained that for the duration of their high schooling years (Years 7-12), students were placed, "ideally" in 'like' gender groups of 15 students and had a form teacher appointed to them (W-FG). Each of the groups was coupled with another group of the opposite gender, so on occasions during each week, they met as a mixed gender group of 30 students with two teachers. Wherever possible, these groups remained together with the allocated teacher for the duration of the high school years. The key to the structure's success appears to have been the regular contact students have with their 'like gender' form teacher throughout their high schooling years. This teacher became the main point of contact for the students in the group and facilitated many discussions that pertain to life and the values that shape it. They met each morning for 15 minutes and for one hour once per week. It was evident that a high degree of trust and subsequent relational connection was established in these groups, which provided a

safe place where many complex and even sensitive issues relevant to the students could be explored. One of the focus group participants stated:

...we also see the importance of ongoing relationship as being a really significant part of providing a great caring environment for our kids. Generally, having at least one person in the school that knows those kids intimately, and can share their stories and build up a bank of stories and shared experiences over time, that can feed into the camp programs that run in the senior years and that culminate with the year 12 retreat in their last year here where, they reflect on their story with us over a period of time here. So, that is something that we think seems to work. (W-FG)

When describing the structures at Wilberforce, it was pointed out that the school's educators were conscious that they did not want to create a culture of dependency through their approach to pastoral care (W-FG). When referring to situations where students needed support and assistance to work through difficulties, the teacher who oversaw the pastoral care program described what was communicated to students – she said: "...we are not going to enable you [a student] to become dysfunctional and need us all the time....we will support you, we are not going to run your life with you, but here is support" (W-FG). The aim, she explained, was to help, assist and support in every possible way, without creating a culture of dependency (W-FG). While this was the intent, there was some evidence to suggest that at least two of the graduates appeared to have developed a degree of dependency on the school community despite having completed their studies six months earlier (G-2/6).

While this structural dimension of Wilberforce's approach to pastoral care was recognised as producing positive outcomes, it cannot be viewed in isolation from the complete suite of features that influence the climate and culture of schools. For example, a common theme that emerged in all three focus groups was the important link between behaviour management/discipline practices and pastoral care (L-FG, W-FG, F-FG). This point was also made by one of the Luther-King parents who spoke about the influence of school leadership on school culture and climate. She referred to a period in Luther-King's history when the school's leadership approach to school discipline created a culture that she said was "awful.....terrible" (PSD). Based on her comments, it would seem that the enforcement of discipline standards was starting to overshadow the importance of relationship building (PSD). The complexities

associated with the interface between discipline policies and procedures and relationship building was also recognised as an issue that was being addressed by the educators involved at Flynn (F-FG).

#### ***Key Finding 4***

It is clear that all of the schools involved in this study were committed to creating and maintaining effective pastoral care structures, which built community and nurtured the formation of social and civic values and behaviours. It was also evident that the parents from all three participating schools viewed the pastoral care approaches of the schools favourably. The following Key Finding recognises the intent of the schools' programs, but highlights that the approaches adopted by each school varied.

#### **Key Finding 4 (KF4)**

*The schools' pastoral care structures and practices intended to support the formation of social and civic values and behaviours varied.*

#### ***Enrolment practices and the relational implications***

During the interview process, a number of questions were asked of participants that aimed to determine the degree of diversity present within the student body of the school, because it is anticipated that this may have implications for the development of social and civic values and behaviours. In student populations, diversity can be defined as the presence of students where there are differences in gender, culture, ethnicity, socio-economic circumstances and religious or ideological beliefs. All three schools involved in the study brought together students with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and to some extent, socio-economic circumstances. The measure of socio-economic status or disadvantage applied to Australian schools (i.e the Socio-Economic Status or SES Index) would suggest that these schools were not 'exclusive' or only accessible to families deemed to be socio-economically advantaged. In a range that applies from the lowest socio economic index for WA's non-government schools of 87 and the highest of 126 (Australian Government - Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations,

2013), the schools involved in this study fell into the middle range of 101-106. Another measure used to compare Australian schools is the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA). Against this measure, there was only a marginal difference between the schools involved in this study and their neighbouring public schools. For example, Wilberforce has an ICSEA value that is only marginally higher than the nearest public primary school (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2013). In fact, it could be argued that the difference is negligible. Where the greatest distinction could be made between the schools was in the area of religious or ideological diversity. The evidence that is presented below suggests that the enrolment practices of the schools had implications for both the degree of religious diversity present within the study body and the school based friendship networks of the graduates.

Two of the schools (Wilberforce and Flynn) operated 'open enrolment policies' and the other (Luther-King) was 'closed', up to and including the time when this study was undertaken (L-D, W-D, F-D). In order for a family to enrol their children at Luther-King prior to 2012, they had to be in membership at a Christian Church and complete an enrolment application form that included a requirement to describe their commitment to the Christian faith (L-FG). This pre-requisite did not apply in the other two schools (W-FG, F-FG). When asked about the percentage of students enrolled in their schools who were from families who did not necessarily declare a Christian faith and were not active members in a Christian Church, the focus group participants suggested that this was the case for approximately 90% of Flynn students and 80% of the Wilberforce student body (W-FG, F-FG). When a similar question was asked of Luther-King educators, references were made to the fact that diversity was more in the form of religious expression, because as one participant stated: "There are 500 churches represented here" (L-FG). It would seem that students at Luther-King were more likely to share some common foundational religious beliefs – however, they came from an array of Christian traditions and denominations. So, it was clear that a higher degree of religious homogeneity within the student population was present at Luther-King.

When exploring the friendships of the graduates during their schooling years, it was evident that those from open enrolment schools (Wilberforce and Flynn) often had non-Christian friends within their network and were at ease forming relationships that transcended these differences

in beliefs (G- 12/12, P-7/11). A number of graduates from the open enrolment schools described how within their friendship networks during their schooling years, the majority had not shared their Christian faith (G-5/12). Brianna Evans and her parent described how many of her school friends now shared her beliefs and attended Church with her, but they were 'non-Christian' when they first became friends in Year 7 (BE, PBE). Simone Vinteck referred to the religious diversity within her school friendship network when she described how many of her friends did not share her faith, but would attend special events with her:

All the girls in my group [this was a group of approx. 12 girls] were not Christian, there was one other girl [name of student], the two of us went to Church. Nobody else in our group did, but we all got along great and they all would come to Church, like if there was something happening, if there was an event, we would all go to Church together. (SV)

In comparison, the graduates from Luther-King responded quite differently. When they were asked about their relational connections or friendships during the schooling years with peers who did not share their religious identity, it was evident that the majority were connected with a church community (G-6/6). One graduate reported that all of her school friends were active in their churches and committed to their Christian faith (LT). The following comment made by Sean Dannit referring to the students at Luther-King provides some insights into the context:

Oh, and they all would have been Christian, or their parents were Christian. Or at least their parents said they were Christian, because, particularly Luther-King, one of your parents has to be Christian. Um, so, most of the time, both are, but sometimes, and then, so the kids usually attend a church so they have an idea of Christianity, or whatever. (SD)

Some of the participants explained that while many of the students at Luther-King attended a church, it did not mean that they necessarily had a personal Christian faith (G-6/6, P-3/6). Reference was often made to peers who had once been involved in Church and had pulled away (G-2/6) or whose commitment to Christianity and church was not evident (G-5/6) or who just "didn't care about it" (BS). It was also suggested that while some students may have been involved in church, they "didn't act like it" (SD), instead engaging in behaviours that might be



deemed as inconsistent with the generally held Christian values and beliefs espoused by the school and upheld by many in the community (G-3/6).

### ***Key Finding 5***

The evidence described above suggests that it cannot be assumed that there is a high degree of religious homogeneity within all evangelical Christian schools. In this study, Luther-King certainly appeared to have a relatively high degree of religious homogeneity within the school community, but this was not the case for the other two schools. The two open enrolment schools had a relatively high degree of religious heterogeneity or diversity, which may not be dissimilar to their public school counterparts. However, it is conceivable that if the alignment of social values could be measured and compared rather than religious affiliation, the degree of diversity may not be as pronounced. It was apparent within the data that when selecting schools, an alignment of values between the home and school was important for many of the parents involved in this study (see Chapter 5: School choice and the alignment of values).

It was also clear that the students who attended open enrolment schools had developed friendships with school peers who did not necessarily share their religious or ideological beliefs and social identity. In contrast, the friendship networks of students attending the closed enrolment school tended to reflect the high degree of religious homogeneity within the student population and not the diversity of beliefs present within the wider community. The school peers these graduates befriended were unlikely to be from families who had little or no contact with Christian churches and the Christian faith. This of course, largely reflects the demographics of the school and not necessarily the capacity of the graduates to form friendships that transcend religious differences, which is of particular interest in this study. It must be noted that these findings are limited only to friendships that have formed with school peers and does not account for relationships outside of the school context. This will be considered in the next chapter, where socio-cultural contexts beyond the school are explored. The phenomena described above are reflected in the following key finding.

**Key Finding 5 (KF5)**

*The schools' enrolment practices significantly impacted the religious diversity of both the student body and the graduates' friendship networks that formed on campus.*

**Summary**

This chapter has considered the role of the participant schools in the formation of the graduates' social and civic values and behaviours. Drawing on the data generated throughout the study and the subsequent process of analysis, five key findings specific to the role of the schools were identified. In addition to recognising the high priority that the educators placed on their role in the formation of social and civic values, the data revealed that each school's culture and the design of their values related curriculum influenced the realisation of their aspirations. It was also evident that the social dynamics associated with the degree of teacher-student relational distance present within the specific school community was influential. The data suggested that it had a direct bearing on the impact the graduates' attributed to the school and its teachers for the formation of their social and civic values and behaviours. The key findings also highlighted the variation in pastoral care and enrolment approaches adopted by the schools and how they had influenced the social development of the graduates.

While the findings presented in this chapter have recognised that the role of the school in the formation of the graduates' social and civic values and behaviours has been significant, the study's data revealed that the impact of the school could not be viewed in isolation from other influential and inextricably linked socio-cultural contexts. In the next chapter, a broader perspective is presented, which considers the confluence of the school with these other significant socio-cultural contexts within the social ecologies of the graduates.

## **Chapter 5**

### ***Findings: The confluence of socio-ecological contexts***

There is considerable evidence in the data to indicate that the school's role in the formation of social and civic competencies does not occur in isolation, but in confluence with other socio-cultural contexts. The following discussion draws upon the voices of the graduates and parents and seeks to understand how the various socio-cultural contexts have interacted and influenced the formation of the graduates social and civic values and behaviours. The discussion begins by considering the influence that values alignment across the socio-cultural contexts has on this area of development. It then shifts and considers the presence and influence of adult mentors within the social ecology and concludes by exploring how the formation of social and civic values and behaviours is impacted by how parents manage what has been termed the *mantle of safety and shelter*.

### ***Values alignment across socio-cultural contexts***

During the interview process, the graduates and parents were asked to describe the key drivers that shaped the development of the graduates' social and civic values. The interview schedules provided opportunities for them to comment on the formation of each of the values that are integral to this study - (see Question 8 in Appendices K and L for further details). When the data were analysed, it became apparent that while the family as a socio-cultural context was often the most significant influence within the social ecology, it was clear that it operated in concert with others. The findings suggest that the degree of values alignment across and within contexts had implications for the development of social and civic values.

### ***School choice and the alignment of values***

For many of the parents involved in this study, it was clear that the alignment of values was an important consideration when deciding on the school their child would attend. Their decision making was influenced by a desire to achieve an alignment between the values that were taught in the home with those that underpinned the school's *modus operandi*. Essentially, many

wanted their children educated in a school where Christian values were foundational and aligned with those of their family (P-11/17). The following comment reflects the sentiment expressed by those who considered Christian values important in the decision making process:

I wanted them to have the values that are in the Christian school and you know, I am a firm believer in that fact that who you hang with you become like....you know, people send their kids to Christian schools, even if they are not Christians, because they like the values they stand for. (PSV)

However, this was not always the only driver that influenced school choice. In one case, a family did not view Christian values as a high priority at the point of enrolment, because other factors were influencing their decision making - but they stated that over time, it became extremely significant (PNK). Others indicated that while the Christian foundation was important, the school's academic standard was the first priority (PKK) and the coeducational nature of the school was also deemed important (PLS). The negative view of other school systems was also a significant driver for some families. In some instances this was based on their perceptions and for others, it was the product of their personal experiences. For many, the public school system was viewed negatively (P-14/17) and two parents excluded the catholic school system as an option for the same reason (P-2/17). The importance of Christian foundational values was sometimes coupled with a view that the independent or 'private' schools were better able to deal with discipline or behavioural issues than schools in the public system (P-4/17). One parent described their decision making process in the following way.

...we came to Perth and Wilberforce started at about the same time. Bill was too young to go to school, in fact he couldn't even get into a kindy group when we first came. Childcare was all full. [Bill's older brother] went to a local government school for one year when we first arrived, and we knew that Wilberforce was starting out, and we wanted them to go to a private school, mainly because they were selective and they had the ability to get rid of troublesome kids, which they can't do in a government school. (PBN)

Despite the fact that other variables were influential and significant in the school choice decision making process for parents, it is clear that an alignment of values between the home and school

was an important consideration for many of the families. It is also evident that the degree to which this kind of alignment is prevalent across various socio-cultural contexts (e.g family, school and church) had a bearing on the social development of the graduates.

### ***Values alignment and the complementary effect***

The data generated in this study revealed that the formation of some of the graduates' social and civic values had been significantly shaped by the collective influence of two or more socio-cultural contexts. During the interview process, it was common for the graduates to attribute influence to the collective voices and attitudes of people across the different contexts and it would seem that their alignment had, what might be termed, a 'complementary' effect on the development of values. One of the graduates described the effect by suggesting that the people who constituted the socio-cultural contexts operating within her social-ecology, including the school, "backed up" the values that were important, espoused and modeled by her family (SV). The findings of this study, as described below, reveal that for the graduates involved, the greatest degree of 'complementary' alignment is evident within the data associated with the values of 'responsibility', 'respect' and 'honesty'. For some, the complementary effect also applied to the values of 'tolerance and understanding', 'social justice' and 'care'.

The degree of alignment for a number of the graduates appeared to be substantial with respect to the formation of 'responsibility' as a value. For nine of the 18 graduates, the influence of the family was predominant (G-4/18, P-6/17), but for seven of them, this was described as being coupled with the school (G-5/18, P-4/17) or the product of the influence of family, school and church contexts (G-2/18).

The family context was also specifically noted as being important in the shaping of 'respect' as a value for 11 of the graduates (G-6/18, P-7/17). But again, the role of the school was also deemed to have had a significant influence for 13 of the graduates (G-5/18, P-8/17). For some, the church community was also acknowledged as being influential alongside the other two contexts (G-2/18, P-3/17).

When formation of the value 'honesty' was explored, some participants described the role of the home and family (G-7/18, P-3/17) and school contexts as being influential (G-10/18, P-5/17). Some even considered that the role of the school in this area had been more significant than the

home context (G-2/18). Others recognised the alignment of values between the contexts and suggested that the role of the school had been to affirm what had been taught and established in the home (P-3/17). Reference was also made by some graduates to the church as being influential within the total social-ecology when they stated that all contexts had been influential (G-3/18) - and one parent suggested that she had observed a growth in this value over time, which she attributed to her daughter's involvement with her church (PLS).

It was more difficult to establish from the data the role of the various socio-cultural contexts in the formation of 'tolerance and understanding', 'social-justice' and 'care'. There was evidence to suggest that home, school and church contexts had been influential to varying degrees, however, it was difficult to make any claims that applied to the majority of graduates. What could be established from the data was that for some of them, alignment was evident across at least two socio-cultural contexts with respect to these values – 'tolerance and understanding' (G-2/18); 'social-justice' (G-2/18, P4/17) and 'care' (G-2/18).

When discussing the interaction of the various socio-cultural contexts within the social ecologies of the graduates, it became clear that an alignment of values across contexts was not always evident and occasionally, one context appeared to be compensating for issues that were apparent in another.

### ***Values alignment and the compensatory effect***

In addition to establishing that for many of the graduates an alignment of values was apparent across the socio-cultural contexts, in a small number of cases, there was evidence to suggest that at times, the limited influence of one socio-cultural context on values formation had been compensated for by another. For example, when discussing the formation of 'responsibility' as a value, the parents of Bill Norris stated that their influence was secondary to the school and church and suggested that they had not done very well in this area (PBN). It would seem that in this case, a deficiency in one socio-cultural context has been compensated by others.

A similar phenomenon seemed to be evident within the social-ecology of Danielle Monteen. When exploring various values during the interview, she often attributed their formation to the influence of the school and church community contexts and tended not to make any reference to her family's influence (DM). It was also interesting to note that at times, not only did Danielle

acknowledge the school/church community as a significant driver in the formation of some of her values, but her Mum did the same (DM, PDM). As the interview progressed with Danielle, it became clear that she viewed her family as being dysfunctional and at one point she said: “Church is awesome. Family sucks, church is awesome” (DM). In her case, it would seem that the school and church communities had compensated for the dysfunction present within her family context. It would also appear that like Danielle, other graduates had also experienced a degree of dysfunction in their family context and the school and/or church community had compensated for this deficiency (KD, BE). It appears that in these cases, one or more socio-cultural context(s) had compensated for the consequences of dysfunction in another. So, while values alignment across multiple contexts may have had a ‘complementary’ effect on the development of many graduates’ social and civic values and behaviours, the evidence also suggests that one or more socio-cultural contexts have at times ‘compensated’ where misalignment and dysfunction has been present in another.

### ***Values misalignment and the confusion effect***

It was clear that with respect to many of the values investigated in this study, there was a significant degree of alignment across socio-cultural contexts within the social-ecologies of the graduates, where a complementary effect could be identified. There was also some evidence to suggest that at times, one or more socio-cultural contexts compensated for any dysfunction that may have been hindering the development of values in another. Although the evidence generated in this study is not substantial, it also seems possible that a misalignment of values may produce a degree of confusion.

When exploring the value of ‘excellence’, it was clear that participants experienced difficulty identifying the drivers that had shaped the formation of this value. It was also evident, as described in Chapter 6, that this value did not characterise all of the graduates. Some, by their own admission, indicated that excellence was not something that was important to them. It was also apparent that unlike other values, they were not always able to define it easily. It is possible that this lack of clarity or confusion is the result, in part, of a lack of values alignment across or within the socio-cultural contexts.

In the context of the school, it is possibly not unreasonable to assume that how people understand and define excellence is conveyed through the curriculum, administrative policy, pedagogical practices and relational interactions. Based on the comments of one parent, it seems that sometimes there is a lack of continuity between how this value is espoused, communicated and modeled in the school and home contexts, and this may have created a degree of confusion for their child. This parent, who is associated with Luther-King, said that their family's definition, which focused on 'doing your best,' was often communicated to their children along with the Biblical principles on which their view had been formed, but it was not necessarily consistent with the school's philosophy and practice (PKK). In contrast, another parent, whose child was a graduate of Wilberforce, felt that the school's definition matched her own, which focused not on the pursuit of perfection, but on doing your best (PLS). She recounted how for her child (who had been involved with elite sport), this meant that just winning an event was not enough, because she had the capacity to win and not really do her best. So, while it may be possible to establish an alignment of understanding across socio-cultural contexts, it would seem that this was not always achieved. The consequence of this kind of misalignment might be termed a 'confusion' effect.

A degree of misalignment around this value of excellence could also be inferred from the comments made by two parents who indicated that the schools their children had attended had negligible influence on its formation (P-2/17). One of the parents said that her child's understanding of excellence had been learnt through her home context and that no-one from the school had inspired her daughter to pursue excellence (PCC).

To date, the impact of a misalignment of values has only been considered 'across' socio-cultural contexts within the social-ecology of a graduate. The data generated in this study also highlighted the potential for a misalignment to arise 'within' a socio-cultural context and to potentially create a degree of confusion. It is clear that a misalignment can occur within both the family and school contexts. For at least one family, there was evidence to demonstrate that a misalignment occurred. During one of the few parent interviews where both parents were involved, it was apparent that there was a misalignment of values between them in a number of areas. Both the tenor of the dialogue and some specific statements exposed areas of misalignment and disagreement. The narrative included statements like: "[Father's name] will



probably answer and say we disagree on things,” .... “[Mother’s name] and I are going to disagree” and “We probably disagree on that.” It was also evident that when seeking advice and direction, the graduate tended to gravitate to one parent and not the other, suggesting that one parent’s perspectives and advice was valued over another.

In addition to the misalignment that can occur in the family context, the potential for it to arise within the school context was described in Chapter 4 and under the heading ‘The pursuit of excellence - a misunderstood value’. Other than noting it here, it will not be discussed further at this juncture.

### ***Key Finding 6***

The data summarised above centred on the impact of values alignment across socio-cultural contexts on social development. The findings of this study indicate that for this group of graduates, the degree of alignment had implications for the development of their social and civic values and behaviours. Some identified two or more socio-cultural contexts as having a significant impact on the formation of some specific values, which suggested that the contexts were operating in concert and had what might be termed a ‘complementary effect’. The values where this effect was observed included ‘respect’, ‘responsibility’ and ‘honesty’. The data also revealed a few instances where issues or dysfunction appeared to be present in one socio-cultural context (e.g. the family) and while little impact for the formation of some specific values was attributed to it by the participants, another (e.g. the school and/or church) was deemed to have had a significant impact and a ‘compensatory effect’. There was also evidence to suggest that with respect to some of the values (e.g. ‘excellence’), some graduates’ lack of commitment to it, or understanding of its definition, may have arisen because of the absence of a shared understanding of the value that transcended the socio-cultural contexts. The data also highlighted a few instances where conflicting definitions were applied or promoted in the different contexts and the implication might be termed a ‘confusion effect’. The findings also highlighted how this effect can apply within a single socio-cultural context (e.g. family), where the adults present did not share a common understanding of some specific values. Finally, it was also clear that for many of the parents involved in this study, values alignment between their family context and school was important and had implications for the development of

social and civic values and behaviours. The following key finding highlights these phenomena.

**Key Finding 6 (KF6)**

*The degree of values alignment across socio-cultural contexts impacted formation of the graduates' social and civic values and behaviours.*

***Influential voices within the social ecology***

One of the presuppositions underpinning this study is the view that the school is not the sole driver within the social ecology that shapes the formation of a child's social and civic values and behaviours. In order to gain an understanding of the key drivers, participants were asked questions that enabled insights to be gathered about the relational dynamics present within the graduates' total social ecology and to identify the people whose influence in the formation of their values had been significant. In addition to identifying the most influential voices, the following summary also considers the social development implications of stability and instability within the relational network.

***The trusted adult voice(s)***

The process of socialization that forms an individual's social and civic values and behaviours occurs in the midst of a myriad of voices that vie for the attention of the developing person. Amongst the voices are often some that are louder and more influential than others. In order to understand the key developmental drivers, it was important to identify whose voices had been predominant within the social ecologies of the graduates – and particularly the presence or absence of adult voices.

When the graduates and parents participating in this study were asked to describe the people who had been the most significant in the lives of the graduates, it became evident that many were embedded in a rich relational network where a number of significant adults across various socio-cultural contexts have been influential. For others however, the influential adult voices

were fewer in number. The findings of this study suggest that while it cannot be claimed that all of the graduates had close adult relational connections in each of the socio-cultural contexts, the majority had at least one quality relationship somewhere within their social ecology with an adult whose advice and direction they valued.

For some, the most influential voices were those of their parents, or a parent (G-7/18, P-3/17) and four described the relationship with their parent(s) as being close and open (G-4/18, P-3/17). One of these graduates spoke of the whole family being very close and described the sensitive nature of the things she would openly discuss with her parents, which was indicative of the deep relational trust present in their relationships (SM). For others it was evident that they had an amicable relationship with both parents, but there was a 'closeness' or a greater degree of intimacy with either Dad (KS) or Mum (G-2/18, P-4/17).

In other cases, there appeared to be an amicable relationship between the graduate and parent(s), but it was not necessarily close (G-6/18, P-4/17) and open/honest (G-1/18, P-2/17), or relatively speaking, as close as the graduate's relationship(s) with a sibling(s) (G-2/18) or their friends (FI, PSM). It is difficult to determine from the data how relationally close two of the graduates were with their parent(s) (G-2/18).

For those whose relationship with their parent or parents was not deemed to be as close, the trusted and influential adult voice had been either someone connected with the church (G-6/18) and/or school community (G-5/18) or extended family (KD). For example, Leanne Sutton described how a teacher who was also a member of her church community had become an influential person in her life. She said: "So Mr [teacher's name] was definitely a very good mentor. He became a father figure to me, very much so, and he still is, to be honest, and I still see him a lot to this day" (LS). The parent of Danielle Monteen recognised the important role that members of the school and church community had played in the life of her daughter (PDM). It was clear that she did not go to her parents for advice and direction (PDM, DM), but rather sought it from her youth leader and his wife from within the church community (PDM).

The evidence is clear, that for the vast majority of the graduates involved in this study, there was at least one significant and influential adult voice that was distinguishable from the others (friends, peers etc) that were present within their social ecologies. It was also apparent that

while often the significant adult voice was that of the graduate's parent(s), for others it was not. For them, other adult voices had emerged from either the school community, church community or the extended family.

### ***The collective adult voice***

For a number of the graduates, there was more than one single adult voice that was influential within the social ecology. For this group, significant adult voices either from within the graduates' extended families or beyond the familial network, had joined with the others to become a collective and influential voice that had helped to shape their social development.

When asked to identify the people within the social ecology whom the graduates had turned to for advice and direction, it became evident that for 11 of them, members of their extended family were a significant source (G-6/18, P-7/17). For six graduates, grandparents had been very involved and important within the social ecology (G-2/18, P-4/17). One parent referred to the graduate's grandparents as being the "absolute keys to his life" (PST). Uncles, aunties and close family friends were also closely connected with six of the graduates (G-2/18, P-4/18). In one case, reference was also made to the graduate's girlfriend's parents (ST, PST).

It was also evident that for nine of the graduates, adults from within their church communities had been significant and influential (G-9/18, P-2/17). For many of the graduates and their families, involvement in a church community had been a high priority (G-11/18, P-12/17). For seven of the graduates, the relationships had been with church/youth leaders (G-5/18, P-7/17), a church intern (BN, PBN) or an older member of the church community (PLT). For Brianna Evans, this kind of relational connection within the church community was a recent development and one that was deemed beneficial (BE).

At times, participants from Wilberforce (G-3/6, P-3/5) and Luther-King (G-2/6, P-3/6) identified adults (usually teachers) from within the school community as being important sources of advice and direction. For some, mainly from Wilberforce, the strong relational connection had been retained post-school (G-4/18, P-3/17).

In a small number of cases, participants also named adults from beyond the familial, church and school contexts. The parent of one graduate referred to various sporting coaches who had been actively involved and influential in the social development of her daughter (PLS) and another graduate named his swimming coach (KK).

So, it is apparent that in addition to having at least one adult voice within their social ecologies, many actually have multiple adult voices emanating from the various socio-cultural contexts that were also influential. Based on the evidence, it seems that collectively, these voices have been integral to the graduates' social development.

### ***The absence of adult voices***

While many of the graduates were relationally connected with many adults throughout their social ecologies as described above, for some, the adult voices appear to have been less prominent than those of their siblings and friends. For three of the graduates, friends were viewed by their parents as being a significant source of advice for their child (P-3/17). In addition to the perspectives of parents, some of the graduates made the following comments, which provide insights into the role of siblings and friends.

When referring to her brother, Christine Cotter said:

We go to each other before we go to Mum and Dad. We usually don't tell Mum and Dad stuff. We just go to each other and we are like, coz, coz, now that I've got my licence and stuff especially, like we'll just go for a drive and we'll just hang out and we tell each other everything.

Francine Innis described how her friends and siblings had become important sources of advice when she said:

Yeah. Probably when I was really little I would go to my mum and dad but, I don't know, I think I'd rather, like, think about stuff all by myself, like, or I would probably ask my friends, or maybe my sisters.

In contrast, other participants described how parents remained important mentors, but they also valued the input of friends (G-3/18) and siblings (G-5/18, P-1/17). For this group, the voices

of friends and siblings were significant, but this was rarely in isolation from those of adults within their social ecology.

For those where the adult voices were less prominent, the evidence suggests that this may have been the product of relational distance in the family context (including extended family) (P-3/18) or where the graduate was not strongly connected into social contexts (e.g. church community) where opportunities may arise for them to form close relational connections with other adults (P-3/17).

It would also seem that in the absence of quality relational connections with adults throughout the social ecology, the voices of the peer group or siblings became more audible and prominent.

### ***Relational stability within the social ecology***

Another facet of the dynamics that appeared to have impacted the relational connections within the social ecology of graduates was the degree of relational stability. For eight of the graduates, there had been a high degree of continuity within the ecology where the influential voices were constant over time, particularly during the formative developmental years (G-9/18, P-7/17). Within this group, two appear to have retained a high degree of stability even post-graduation (G-2/18), but for the others, the transition from school has brought about significant changes to the relational network (G-7/18, P-7/17).

When reflecting upon the formative and post-school years, it seems that ten of the graduates' relational networks were characterised by considerable instability, which had impacted on their social development (G-7/18, P-7/17). Some described the ramification of having to emigrate from their country of birth and be uprooted from their family, friends and way of life (G-2/18, P-2/18). Relational issues and conflict had arisen between the parents of four graduates, which had a destabilising effect (G – 3/18, P-2/17). Two of them had felt the impact of parental separation and/or divorce (G-2/18, P-1/17). For another two of the graduates, extended periods when their fathers had been absent from the home because of work commitments was also viewed as having a negative impact on their social and emotional development (P-2/17).

The data also suggest that the period of transition post-school can have a destabilising impact on the social ecology and the relational network can undergo considerable change. For three of the

graduates, their strong connection with the church community was deemed to have provided a degree of continuity in their friendship network as they had transitioned from school (G-2/18, P-2/18). Keith Keen explained that retaining a group of Christian friends had helped him make sense of some of the post-school challenges or awkward situations he had negotiated on the university campus (KK).

In addition to the church or kinship type communities providing a degree of stability and support, involvement in sporting organisations had been important for Leanne Sutton. Her involvement in sport was viewed as an important and positive influence because it had provided somewhere to direct her thinking and energy when her home life was unstable and tense because of the actions of her Dad (LS). The role of her 'out of school' activities as a source of stability was also referred to by her mum when she spoke about Leanne's transition from school:

To be honest, it wasn't ... I have to be honest. When she graduated from school, a lot of the kids were very upset they were leaving school. Their whole life was changing. They're graduating. They're going on to something completely different. Leanne and I had this discussion, we went, "You know what, it's only one area of my life. It's really not such a big deal." She's kept the connection with [the sport program]. She kept the connection with dance. She kept the connection with other things like the church. So she didn't actually walk away from the school. She walked away from schooling, but not the school. (PLS)

The transient nature of youth leaders within the social ecology also appeared to be a dynamic within the social ecology that had a destabilising impact. It was apparent within the data that the transient nature of the youth leaders/pastors in Barbara Steele's church community had negatively impacted on her at a critical time during her senior years (BS). When things were not going so well, the departure of her mentors within the church left her without the social and emotional support she had drawn upon in the past (BS). When Keith Keen spoke about youth pastors, he too referred to their transience. It appeared that this phenomenon had a destabilising impact on three of the graduates (G-1/18, P-2/17).

### **Key Findings 7 & 8**

When the influences on social development both within and beyond the school that form part of the graduates' social ecologies are considered, it is apparent that the majority had at least one quality relationship with an adult. It is also clear that for many, this adult was their parent(s). For others, the influential adult was connected with the church, school community or extended family. While for some of the graduates only one adult voice was identified, for the majority, there were multiple adult voices whose influence on social development had been significant.

It also became evident that the degree of stability within the social ecologies of the graduates during the formative years varied. For some, their relational networks had remained relatively stable, but for others, there was a degree of instability, which in some instances had an adverse impact on the graduates' social and emotional development. At times, the instability was the product of the transience of some significant adults.

Finally, the data also revealed that in a small number of cases, the graduates turned to their friends as the main source of advice and direction because of a lack of connection with adults throughout the social ecology. The evidence suggested that this tended to happen when the graduate was not relationally connected within the family, church or kinship type relational community.

#### **Key Finding 7 (KF7)**

*The social development of the vast majority of the graduates was positively impacted by at least one significant and trusted adult voice, but for many, the collective voice of multiple adults across socio-cultural contexts was influential.*

#### **Key Finding 8 (KF8)**

*When there was an absence of quality relational connections with adults within the graduate's social ecology, the voices and influence of the peer group and siblings was more prominent.*



### ***Managing the ‘mantle of safety and shelter’***

Throughout the interviews conducted with graduates, parents and educators, references were made to the notion of being *sheltered*. Its use by participants indicated that it tended to apply in situations where throughout the formative years, a graduate’s exposure to people and their ideas or perspectives from beyond the Christian community was minimal. It was also apparent that some participants viewed the label as representing a continuum, where a graduate’s upbringing might be defined as being ‘extremely sheltered’, a ‘bit sheltered’ or ‘not sheltered’.

In the context of the interview discussions pertaining to this concept or label, it was evident that a tension existed for parents and educators. While the provision of a safe and secure home and school environment where the children in their care could grow physically, intellectually, socially, emotionally and spiritually (W-D, L-D, F-D, P-17/17) was deemed to be of critical importance, they also recognised the need to ensure that it was not so restrictive that it produced in children an unhealthy naivety. Put differently, the tension to be managed related to the need to provide a degree of shelter from any experiences or ideas that might hinder healthy growth and development, but also provided opportunities to foster an awareness of the world beyond the confines of the family context.

For the purposes of this study, the overarching label that describes this tension or phenomenon is referred to as managing the mantle of safety and shelter. The notion of a *mantle of safety* has been derived from the vision that underpinned the establishment of Australia’s Royal Flying Doctor Service under the direction and leadership of its founder, John Flynn (Royal Flying Doctor Service, 2013). His vision was to provide a mantle of safety for the people living and working in outback Australia, by using air-transport to deliver health and pastoral services in response to need.

Upon analysis of the data generated in this study, it became evident that how schools and parents manage this mantle of safety (or mantle) impacts the formation of social and civic values and behaviours and the skills needed to successfully transition upon graduation into society. This summary of the findings begins by looking at how the participants applied the concept of being sheltered and then explores how the mantle is managed by educators in the school and parents in the broader social ecology.

### ***Perspectives on the notion of being sheltered***

The concept of being sheltered or ‘too sheltered’ arose during the interviews with some of the Luther-King graduates. This notion of being sheltered was rarely mentioned by graduates and parents associated with the open enrolment schools, but it was referred to often by those linked with Luther-King, the closed enrolment school. Based predominantly on the interviews with Sean Dannit and Samantha Irwin, it would seem that students at Luther-King were sometimes labelled according to the degree to which they were sheltered (G-2/6). Sean Dannit made the point that his involvement with sport outside of the school context meant that he had not been “super-sheltered” and this had developed an awareness of the ‘world’ and prepared him for the post-school transition (SD). He contended that being too sheltered, suppressed development of the skills, knowledge and attributes needed to navigate the relational challenges beyond the Christian community (SD). When describing how the term sheltered was used by students as a label, Samantha Irwin’s statements suggested that when it was applied by those in her social network, it was condescending (SI). To be deemed too sheltered was a put-down (SI). She also mentioned that when discussing the dynamics of various cohort groups with one of the senior school leaders with whom she had a close relationship, the extent to which they had been sheltered formed part of the conversation (SI).

There was divergence within the views expressed about how sheltered the Luther-King schooling environment was for students. Some participants explained that it was inaccurate to assume that the student body was somehow devoid of the normal features of the youth culture (G-2/6, P-2/6), which might include the use of course language, alcohol experimentation and sexual promiscuity. Referring to the students at Luther-King, Latisha Tannock’s parent said that in reality:

...not all of them are going to be Christian kids, not all of them are going to come from both Christian parents and have very sheltered backgrounds, you know, and that’s why I said, a lot of the kids now, even before they left school, there were kids who were smoking and drinking and, you know, just acting like typical 17-year-olds of, you know, what you’d expect. (PLT)

Others, however, viewed the experience of Luther-King students as being sheltered (LT, SI). Latisha Tannock referred to herself as being “pretty” sheltered (LT) and Samantha Irwin spoke of the collective experience of the students when she said: “We were so sheltered, so sheltered...” (SI). When Latisha made this comment, it was a comparative statement, because reference was made to her experience at Luther-King relative to her perceptions of what happens in neighbouring public schools. She suggested that if she had been sent to a public school, it would have been a bit of a shock, because she said even the continual use of coarse language by others would have been in stark contrast to her home and church contexts (LT).

Two of the parents associated with Luther-King suggested that the school could do more to prepare students for the post-school relational challenges by raising their awareness of the world beyond school (P-2/6). It is possible that avoiding the complex and controversial issues associated with youth culture may inadvertently develop a naivety, which leads to diffidence and an inability to connect relationally beyond the Christian community. One parent contended that raising awareness may better prepare graduates for the challenges and temptations in their post-school worlds (PBS). For example, Samantha Irwin’s awareness of the different paths that can be taken in romantic relationships was not addressed at school or home, but the teaching and advice of her pastor and his wife had shaped and influenced her thinking in this area (SI).

The term ‘sheltering’ was not used often by interviewees associated with Wilberforce. It would seem that it did not form a significant part of the vernacular. It is evident that those involved recognise that the open enrolment approach adopted by the school provided opportunity for students to engage in what was essentially a pluralistic social context. Referring to the school environment and other social contexts outside of the church community, the parent of Stephen Taylor suggested that Stephen’s social interactions in many diverse environments had provided opportunities for him to develop an awareness of life’s complexities (PST). He went on to suggest that he had always been able to get to know people from all different walks of life and hear their stories, including the “tough nuts” (PST).

Like Wilberforce participants, the term was not used often by interviewees associated with Flynn. One parent spoke positively about the open enrolment policy of the school and suggested that because of it, students were not sheltered (PCC). Having made that statement, the same parent said of her daughter: “I would say she is still very, very naïve – um, in a beautiful

way” (PCC). Another parent commented: “Our kids are quite naïve, even at this point in time, to how the rest of the world really operates. You know, they live in a bubble, quite frankly” (PSV). It is conceivable that these different perspectives elucidate both the complexity of the concepts associated with being sheltered, and the different standards against which one measures the degree of sheltering that has happened for the graduate. One graduate was explicit about the standard against which she was comparing Flynn when she stated that students from the school are a lot more sheltered than those attending other schools (SM).

It is clear from these insights that the notion of being sheltered is more likely to form part of conversations amongst the graduates from Luther-King, where a closed enrolment policy shapes the profile of the student body. It could also be said that Luther-King provides a more sheltered educational environment. While the findings support this conclusion, it is interesting to note that participants associated with all three schools recognised the difficulties that schools face when managing the mantle. They acknowledged that how this is done impacts the development of some of the social attributes that are important for graduates as they transition into their post-school pluralistic worlds, including ‘responsibility’ and having an awareness of what to expect in the post-school world.

### ***School management of the mantle***

The need for schools to promote and encourage students to become independent workers and to take responsibility for their learning (CC) actions and problems (PKS) was deemed to be important by some of the participants. Christine Cotter’s parent felt that this outcome was achieved, but another parent was concerned that too often, schools miss the opportunity to promote independence by “mollycoddling” the students (PKS). When referring to this facet of schooling, Christine Cotter’s parent went on to highlight how important the schools communication strategies had been in this area, including the vigilant use of homework diaries (PCC). She felt that this strategy allowed her daughter to develop her independent learning skills (PCC).

The need for schools to fulfil their legal responsibilities and duty of care and at the same time, provide sufficient freedom for students to develop the capacity to be responsible, was recognised as a tension by one graduate (SV). She suggested that schools like hers “cotton-

wooled a bit too much” and therefore, limited the development of this attribute (SV). When explaining her views on this matter, reference was made to the differences between university and school, where the former requires students to take complete responsibility for their learning and the latter retains a fair degree of control (SV) (e.g. reminders and follow up when assignment deadlines are close).

When the importance of developing an awareness of the post-school world that the graduates would be entering and the role of the school in this process was raised by some participants, the following comments were made. In an interview with a parent from Luther-King, the way a teacher in the senior years had often spoken about what to expect beyond school at university was appreciated by her daughter (PSI). Raising this awareness, it seems, had helped the graduate enter this new environment with confidence (PSI). The need to raise awareness about the world beyond school, including the challenges associated with navigating the drug and alcohol culture, was deemed by a few participants to be something that Luther-King could do more effectively (G-1/6, P-2/6).

Coupled with the need to raise awareness in these areas for students, the teaching of sexuality and sex education within the school’s curriculum was also raised as an issue by a graduate from Luther-King who said:

I’ve noticed, like, they don’t teach Sex Ed. at our school at all.....when I was in Year 12, there was some people that didn’t really know anything about that kind of thing and it was kind of weird, people (*sic*) that don’t know anything about, like, drugs and stuff.  
(BS)

It is difficult to determine the veracity of the claim that the school did not teach these topics during the period that this graduate’s friends were attending the school, but it is clear that these topics are not avoided in all of the schools involved in this study. For example, a parent associated with Wilberforce contended that the approach of Christian schools to teaching sexuality was more sensitive and consistent with her preferences, because they were more likely to ensure that the content is always age appropriate (PLS). She is of the view that too often, children are exposed to elements of sexuality too early (PLS).

The evidence summarised above provides some insights into the implications of how the mantle of safety and shelter is managed by the school. It is clear that the participants recognise that the school's role is significant. When the broader social-ecology that surrounds each graduate is considered, it is apparent that parents also have a significant impact in this area.

### ***Parental management of the mantle***

Like schools, parents also provide a mantle of safety and shelter for their children and the data generated in this study indicates that how this is managed has implications for the social and emotional development of their children. Throughout the formative years, their decision making often determines the dynamics of the social ecology in which the child grows and develops. The summary of the findings provided below suggests that for the majority of the graduates involved, the mantle has rarely been restrictive to a point of where they have had no close relational contact with people and their perspectives from outside of the Christian community. It also highlights some parenting challenges and issues that have had implications for the social development of the graduates.

The evidence suggests that the majority of parents involved in this study had not actively limited opportunities for their children to relationally connect with those who did not necessarily share their Christian beliefs and values or social identity. Put differently, few parents appear to have intentionally made relational segregation a priority. Almost without exception, the social ecologies of the graduates during their formative years had included relational connections with people who have not been connected with the church or Christian community (G-16/18). The contact had been extensive for those attending open enrolment Christian schools, who on a daily basis, had interacted in a school community that largely reflected the diversity of Australia's pluralistic community, although the socio-economic differences may have been less pronounced than in some of the public schools (see Chapter 4 – 'Enrolment practices and the relational implications' for further discussion on the socio-economic differences). It is also evident, as pointed out elsewhere, that Luther-King (the closed enrolment school), had a greater degree of religious homogeneity when compared to the others involved in this study, however, there were students enrolled who did not hold to Christian values, beliefs, morals and mores.

In addition to the relational contacts with students in their schools, a number of the graduates and their families described how they had been involved in activities beyond the church and school boundaries, which have brought them into contact with people who had little or no connection with the Christian faith or church communities (G-9/18, P-4/17, E-1/15). These activities include participation in sporting, cultural and social/community organisations. For nine of the graduates, their involvement in sport had been a significant influence within the social ecology (G-9/18, P-3/17). Sean Dannit (Luther-King graduate) made the point that his involvement in sport had stopped him from being sheltered or 'being in a bubble' (SD). It would seem that his involvement with community sporting teams had provided a context where he made friends with a number of boys who did not share his religious or ideological beliefs (SD, PSD), but it was suggested by his parent that these friendships were not as close or deep as those within the school or church contexts (PSD). Stephen Taylor's involvement in a football club had provided some challenges that he had to navigate and determine at what point he would participate in activities and when he would refrain (PST). His Dad made the point that he had always been able to draw a line that he will not cross, including during his time with a football club, which was rough and heavily influenced by the drug culture (PST). Others reported being involved in dance (LS, PLS), music (G-2/18), Scouts (DM, PDM), Girl Guides (SM) and secular workplaces (G-3/18, P-1/17). In addition, some of the graduates had been relationally connected with people who did not share their religious convictions through family, extended family or close family friends (G-8/18, P-4/17).

It would seem that only four graduates had minimal contact with people from outside of the church or Christian community during their schooling years and all of them were female graduates from Luther-King (G-4/6, P-3/6). Until Samantha Irwin graduated and commenced work and university studies, her contact was largely limited to a few non-Christian students attending the school. Even her involvement in sport was limited to teams formed through the school. It was interesting to note that her younger brother had been actively involved in sport beyond the school program, which, it could be assumed, had provided him with greater exposure to the world beyond the Christian church community (PSI). Barbara Steele's situation was similar (PBS, BS), although, she commenced work at a bakery when she was in Year 9, which brought her into contact with work colleagues who did not share her beliefs or have connection with the church community (BS). Latisha Tannock's contact with people beyond the church

community had also been minimal, but she had been involved in a secular theatre group, which involved confronting and negotiating some challenging situations (LT). Francine Innis did have some contact with people from beyond the Christian community because of the nature of her family network, but it would appear that her relational connections beyond the church community had been limited (FI, PFI). This became evident when another graduate included her in a list of school friends who she considered to be extremely sheltered (SI). The relatively high degree of shelter was also apparent when Francine referred to the period during her late teen years when the realisation that not everyone held a Christian Worldview came as something of a surprise. When referring to this period of her life and people having a Christian faith she said “I didn’t know that anyone else wasn’t, kind of thing” (FI).

The evidence summarised above highlights the fact that the majority of parents involved in this study had not managed the mantle of safety and shelter in such a restrictive way that it could be defined as being ‘too sheltered’. However, it would appear that some of the students associated with the closed enrolment Christian school had been substantially more sheltered than others. It was evident that even the social ecologies of this small group of graduates had not been so restricted as to be devoid of relational connections with those who did not share their social identity, which was closely aligned with their Christian beliefs and values. For a number of the graduates from the closed enrolment school, their involvement in sport and other similar community type activities had provided opportunities for relationships to form that transcended the religious or cultural differences they may have had with others.

### ***Key Finding 9***

The extent to which the graduates involved in this study had been equipped with the social and civic attributes that enabled them to relationally connect with people when they entered the pluralistic post-school world, is a central focus of this study. Of particular interest in these findings is the extent to which the graduates have had the opportunity, during their formative years, to relationally connect with people from beyond the Christian community. That is, with those who do not necessarily share their family’s Christian worldview. It was apparent in the data that the extent to which this had occurred was impacted by how the parents and educators had managed the mantle of safety and shelter. The data highlighted the challenges associated with ensuring the mantle was managed in such a way that the social ecology nurtured social and



emotional growth, fostered an awareness of the pluralistic world and avoided the potential to socially isolate or shelter the graduates so much that an unhealthy naivety formed. While the findings do not comprehensively describe all facets of the associated challenges, they do highlight the inherent complexities and tensions.

The extent to which the graduates had contact with people from beyond the church community who did not share their Christian worldview was referred to by some participants as the degree to which they had been sheltered during their upbringing. This term was used mostly by the graduates who attended the closed enrolment school – Luther-King. While these students made judgments about the degree of sheltering that defined their own social-ecology and that of their peers, this rarely entered the narrative of graduates from the open-enrolment schools. Analysis of the data also revealed that the extent to which a student’s social-ecology was deemed to be sheltered was relative. The standard against which judgments were made tended to be related to the perceptions they had of their peers in other schools. When the socio-cultural context of the school is viewed in isolation, the evidence suggests that the closed enrolment school (Luther-King) environment was more sheltered than the open enrolment schools (Flynn and Wilberforce). However, to make any valid judgments about the opportunities the graduates had to relationally connect with people from beyond the Christian community, the total social-ecology must be considered.

When this broader perspective is adopted, it is clear that almost without exception, the graduates involved in this study had engaged relationally, during their formative years, with people from beyond the confines of their Christian community, both at school and elsewhere – and this is captured in the following Key Finding.

#### **Key Finding 9 (KF9)**

*With the exception of a small number of female students attending the closed enrolment school, the relational networks of the graduates during their schooling years included people from beyond their church community who did not hold to a Christian worldview.*

While the relational networks of the graduates during their formative years had included people who did not hold to a Christian worldview, this Key Finding does not quantify the relational connections in such a way that judgments can be made about their sufficiency to nurture formation of the social and civic attributes that are central to this study. The extent to which these attributes have been formed and are evident in the behaviours of the graduates is the focus of the next chapter.

### ***Summary***

This chapter has explored how the graduates' social and civic development had been influenced by the various socio-cultural contexts that constitute their social ecologies. Where in Chapter 4 the focus was on the educative role of the school, this chapter has taken a broader view and considered how its influence has interfaced with other socio-cultural contexts. Within the chapter, four key findings were presented. The first, (KF6) noted that the degree of values alignment across the socio-cultural contexts within the graduates' social ecologies had an impact on the formation of their social and civic values and attributes. The data revealed that the form of the alignment could have a complementary or compensatory effect. There was also some evidence to suggest that a misalignment of values within a graduate's social ecology can create what was described as a 'confusion effect'. Key Finding 7 revealed that the social and civic development of the graduates was positively impacted by the trusted voice of at least one adult within their social ecology, but for many, the presence of multiple voices appeared to have a 'complementary effect'. Closely related to this finding was Key Finding 8, which noted that the voices of peers and siblings became more prominent and significant when a trusted and respected adult voice was absent from the social ecology. The impact of relational stability during the formative years was also noted in the narrative. The chapter concluded with an exploration of the notion of sheltering and how schools and families manage the mantle of safety and shelter. Key Finding 9 noted that very few families had managed the mantle in such a way that the graduates had been sheltered to a point where they had been substantially isolated from people beyond the church and Christian community.

To date the findings presented have been limited to those that relate to the formative influences that have shaped development of the graduates social and civic values and attributes. In the

following Chapter, the focus shifts and investigates how the graduates have fared after leaving school and entering the workforce and pluralistic social world.

## ***Chapter 6***

### ***Findings: The post-school relational dynamics***

In the previous two chapters, the formative years of the graduates have been the focus. In Chapter 4, the role of the school within the social ecology and how it impacted the formation of social and civic values and behaviours was considered. The discussion in Chapter 5 broadened the scope of the investigation by looking beyond the school and considered other significant socio-cultural contexts that had been influential within the graduates' social ecologies. In this chapter the focus shifts and explores the post-school relational worlds of the graduates. The aim is to provide insights into the dynamics that define their post-school social worlds. The voices of the graduates and parents will be heard once again, but importantly, the observations and perceptions of employers and workplace colleagues will become prominent in the discourse. As people who were independent of the familial social network, it was employers and workplace colleagues who were uniquely positioned to make some evaluative judgements about the social and civic values evident within the behaviours of the graduates and their capacity to relationally connect in the workplace – including with those who do not necessarily share their personal values and religious or ideological beliefs.

### ***Evidence of values and behaviours***

The discussion below begins by exploring the extent to which the values under investigation were evident in the behaviours of the graduates. The values that are central to this study were derived from a list compiled by the Curriculum Corporation (2003) and have been embedded in various forms within the regulatory curriculum documents that shape the teaching and learning programs of Australian schools. Further details about this list of values and why they were selected for use in this study can be found in Chapter 1 (see heading - Social and civic capacity, competency or capability).

All of the values identified by the Curriculum Corporation are explored below, with the exception of one, namely 'ethical behaviour'. It became evident during the interviews that the ambiguity

and complexity associated with how people define this concept was problematic. Not only did they find it difficult to determine what was meant by the term, it was equally challenging to comment on the extent to which it was evident in the behaviours of the graduates. In response to this issue, refinements were made to the questions included in the interview schedules. Instead of asking about ethical behaviour as a value, the questions were reframed to explore how the Christian worldview impacted the personal ethics of the graduates. In the interviews conducted after this change was made, it became evident that for many of the graduates, their ethics and values were influenced by the Christian worldview (G-8/18, P-2/17)<sup>2</sup>.

### ***Some values clearly evident***

The data generated in this study indicated that the behaviour of the graduates, as observed by their parents and employers or workplace contacts, reflected the presence of many of the social and civic values under investigation. It is important to note that the employers' perspectives were sometimes different from the parents', but the collective observations enabled the following conclusions to be drawn. It was apparent that the graduates were characterised by the following values: care (P-15/17; E-14/15), honesty (P-12/17; E-15/15), respect (P-10/17; E-14/15), responsibility (P-9/17; E-10/15), and tolerance and understanding (P-6/17; E-14/15).

At times during the interviews, recognition of the presence of a value was acknowledged and qualified. For example, when discussing the presence of the value 'respect', one parent qualified their statement by suggesting that the graduate was generally respectful, but it was dependent on their mood (PBN). In another case, consistent with the view of the employer (EBS), Barbara Steele's parent indicated that Barbara was characterised by the value 'respect' (PBS), but she added, that at times she could be disrespectful (PBS).

Similarly, when exploring the value 'responsibility', some qualifying statements were made. The parents of Bill Norris said that when it came to others, he was pretty good at taking responsibility, but this was not always the case when it came to keeping his room tidy (PBN).

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<sup>2</sup> These figures only include the data collected after the change was made to the interview schedules. Not all participants were given an opportunity to respond to the revised question.

Danielle Monteen's parent said that she was very responsible, but had not always been that way, particularly during what she called the "rotten teenage years" (PDM). One employer qualified her response by saying that the graduate was responsible "most of the time", but acknowledged that like everyone, she occasionally "had her days" (ELT). The employer of Nathan Keever confirmed that he is generally responsible, but indicated that he needs to be reminded occasionally about some of the workplace expectations – but he added that when Nathan is prompted, he responds immediately (ENK). Similarly, the employers of Bill Norris and Sean Dannit highlighted the exemplary way they responsibly fulfilled their duties, but noted that they were less reliable when it came to completing some minor, but important, administrative tasks (EBN, ESD).

### ***Inclusivity and the challenges***

Determining the extent to which the value 'inclusivity' was reflected in the behaviour of the graduates was more difficult than exploring the values discussed above. Few parents were able to comment with confidence about it, possibly because they did not always get to see their child interacting in pluralistic type environments like workplaces. However, employers and those in the workplace seemed to be better placed to make judgments about the presence of this value. Based on their observations, it was clear that the graduates were characterised by it (E-14/15).

Despite the fact that employers and workplace contacts viewed the graduates in this way, some of the graduates themselves shared an interesting perspective. A few described being 'inclusive' as a challenge and it seemed that their personality type may have been influential. Bill Norris described this value as a personal priority and something he would like to embrace, but at times, he had found it difficult because his shyness was an impediment (BN). Leanne Sutton also found being inclusive a challenge in some contexts, particularly when older men were involved (LS). This difficulty appeared to arise because of past relational conflict experienced within the family context (PLS). For some of the graduates, it would appear that they enjoyed the security of their close friendship networks and seeking to be inclusive of others, in some situations, was viewed as introducing the potential to destabilise something they valued (P-2/17). It also seemed that while they have not actively excluded others, at times they may not have proactively engaged and included them (P-2/17).

### ***Excellence and personal priorities***

The evidence suggests that excellence is a value that defined some of the graduates (E-8/15), but not all, and it did not universally characterise them in all contexts. It seems that for some of them, its presence tended to be contingent upon their personal priorities (G-1/18, P-3/17). One parent explained that for her son, excellence had been pursued only in situations where the 'end' was desirable (PSD). In his case, excellence had been pursued in sport because it was attainable, but seeking to gain a high ATAR (Year 12 graduation score/ranking) had not been a high priority, because he believed that the Dux type awards and high academic achievement were out of his reach (PSD).

For some graduates, this was deemed to be a value that did not characterise them. Some parents stated that their children pursued excellence at times, but they would not consider it to be a character trait (P-2/17). For example, Francine Innis's parents stated that she had pursued excellence for many years at school, but it "tapered off" during her senior years (PFI). Francine also acknowledged that she had not always pursued excellence (FI). In one case, a parent indicated that excellence was an important value for her, but it was not reflected in her daughter's character (PSI). When her daughter was interviewed, she acknowledged that the pursuit of excellence had not been a high priority for her (SI). The graduate explained that she had often viewed herself as having limited capacity to achieve in some areas of learning and therefore, this became an impediment to her pursuit of excellence (SI).

Exploring the notion of 'excellence' elicited some interesting responses from employers. It became apparent during the interviews that distinguishing between mediocrity and excellence helped the employers understand the concept and provide meaningful comments. Many affirmed the presence of this value in the graduates without qualification or reservation (E-8/15), but others were either ambivalent, or of the view that it was not reflected in the behaviours observed in the workplace. In two cases it seemed that the graduates' pursuit of excellence applied mainly to their studies and not to their part-time work (E-2/15). Some of the employers noted that excellence tended to be evident when employees were seeking to forge a career in the industry, rather than viewing it as a means of generating an income while training

for entry into another vocation (E-2/15). Another employer said that very few young employees actively pursued excellence all of the time, but the graduate involved in this study with whom she had contact had “most of the time” (EBE).

For other graduates, the employers or work-colleagues were less certain about the presence of this value. The employer of Nathan Keever suggested that this value was not present in Nathan’s behaviours when he commenced in the workplace, but over time, it had developed as a result of training and mentoring (ENK) – a point confirmed by the graduate (NK). This sentiment was not unlike the comments made by Barbara Steele’s workplace contact who initially had been uncertain about Barbara’s commitment to excellence. She went on to say that her view of Barbara had changed on the basis of some recent work she had produced, which was of an excellent standard, but there remained an element of doubt about whether she was truly committed to it (EBS). A lack of self-discipline and desire to achieve excellence was noted by the employer of Bill Norris. It seems that while he was a reliable, competent and produced quality work, a lack of desire and self-discipline impeded the realisation of his full potential (EBN). When discussing Kevin Dean, his work colleague stated that he will always get the job done, but at times, the quality is not of an ‘excellent’ standard (EKD).

Closely related to the value of ‘excellence’ is the concept of ‘work-ethic’. While there was a degree of ambivalence about the former in the data, the latter was recognised as something that did characterise the graduates. The data indicated that the vast majority of them adopted a good work ethic in the workplace, which was appreciated by employers (E-13/15).

In summary, it would appear that while some of the graduates involved in this study had been committed to excellence in both their educational/training endeavours and workplaces, a number were not characterised by it in all spheres or contexts, particularly during the period immediately following graduation from school. It is important to recognise that the graduates involved had only been out of the school context for a period not exceeding 24 months. It is possible that this phenomenon could change for some graduates once their workplace and vocational aspirations align upon completion of their post-school education and training.

It is apparent that in their work/education context considered in this study, the graduates’ personal priorities had often determined where excellence was pursued, or mediocrity was



deemed acceptable. It also seemed that while excellence may not have always defined the way they approached the role in their workplace, many adopted a good work ethic. It is also conceivable that how the notion of excellence was defined by participants may have introduced a degree of ambiguity to the discourse and influenced the findings in this area.

### ***Social justice: an ambiguous concept***

When exploring the notion of 'social justice' as a value, it was clear that the term itself was not well understood by a number of the graduates (G-5/18) and it was therefore, more difficult to establish the extent to which they were committed to the associated principles. While their conceptual understanding of the value was sometimes difficult to establish, it was clear that the vast majority were actively involved in social justice type initiatives and various forms of philanthropy and community service (G-12/18; P-6/17; E-6/15). Those activities included: scout program leadership (DM), youth group leadership and mentoring (G-2/18, PDM), church volunteering (G-2/18), school community based programs (G-2/18, PLS), children's program leadership at church (G-6/18), World Vision (KK, PKK), Juvenile Diabetes (PLS), overseas mission/aide work (G-2/18, PBE), leadership within a youth camping and adventure program (ST), coaching and assisting with sport programs (PLS, LS) and volunteering within a political party (SI).

### ***Tolerance and managing relational distance***

When considering whether the behaviours of the graduates' reflected the value 'tolerance and understanding', some parents confirmed its presence (P-6/17), as did all of the employers/workplace colleagues with the exception of one (E-14/15). What was of particular interest in relation to this value was a phenomenon that appeared to influence how graduates interacted within different social environments or contexts. It seems that the degree of tolerance extended to others is conditional upon the values alignment apparent between the graduate and those with whom they are interacting. Some of the participants described how the graduates create what might be termed *relational distance* in situations where their own values misalign with others (G-2/18, P-4/17). How this tactic of creating relational distance was used by the graduates to navigate the social contexts in their social worlds will be explored in greater

detail later in this chapter, but for the moment, the discussion will just focus on its link with the value 'tolerance and understanding'.

One of the graduates described this phenomenon eloquently by making a distinction between 'different and interesting' and 'different and annoying' behaviours (DM). In effect, she asserted that tolerance and understanding was extended to people who were 'different', but not in all cases. It seems that religious, ethnic, gender and socio-economic 'differences' were transcended, but where a person's behaviour was confronting to a point of creating significant discomfort, dissonance or unease, a degree of relational distance was established. In effect, when people within a social context were 'different and interesting', the graduate would 'actively engage' and form relationships. If however, one or more people within the context were 'different and annoying', the graduate would 'create relational distance'. Based on comments made by the graduate's employer, it would also appear that even when this distance is created by the graduate, respectfulness and politeness would remain evident (EDM). This sentiment was consistent with comments made by other participants. For them, tolerance was extended and friendship pursued by the graduates, but only in a 'reserved way' when a point of significant divergence of personal values and moral standards had been passed (ST, P-4/17). For example, if drug taking entered the context, relational distance was created (PBS). It cannot however, be assumed, that the graduates involved in the study always keep complete relational isolation in situations like this, because there is evidence to suggest otherwise (G-3/18).

### ***Key Finding 10***

When this study's data were analysed, it was clear that the personal values of the graduates, as reflected in their behaviours and personal priorities, were generally consistent with those being used as a point of reference in this study. The vast majority were characterised by the following values: 'care', 'honesty', 'respect', 'responsibility' and 'tolerance and understanding'.

While the graduate and parent interview data did not conclusively demonstrate the presence of the value 'inclusivity', the data generated from the interviews with employers and workplace contacts clearly indicated that this was a value that defined the graduates.

The data also revealed that the value 'excellence' was less evident in the behaviours and

priorities of the graduates than the other values being investigated in this study. Analysis of the data generated during the interviews with the employers and workplace contacts revealed that only half of them acknowledged, without reservation, the presence of this value in the graduates' behaviours. However, the vast majority of them asserted that the graduates' were characterised by a good work ethic. It would appear that in the workplace, the graduates were prepared to fulfill their responsibilities and work diligently, but excellence did not define their attitudes and behaviours.

A close analysis of the data associated with the value 'tolerance and understanding' also revealed an interesting relational dynamic. It was apparent that relational distance was managed by the graduates in a responsive way in social contexts. Being 'tolerant', it seems, was contingent upon the degree of values alignment within a relational context.

Finally, analysis of the data revealed that the behaviour of many of the graduates reflected a degree of commitment to the value 'social justice', however, it was not necessarily a high priority or an important principle that characterised them.

#### **Key Finding 10 (KF10)**

*The graduates involved in this study were characterised by many of the social and civic values that have been embedded within the contemporary curriculum documents of Australian schools.*

### ***The management of post-school relational connections***

So far in this chapter, the extent to which the social and civic values that are central to this study were evident in the behaviours and priorities of the graduates has been established. The aim of this next section is to investigate the relational dynamics of the graduates in their post-school social worlds and consider how well equipped they have been to enter pluralistic social contexts and build relationships, particularly with those who do not share their religious beliefs.

The discussion begins by describing the experiences of the graduates during the period of transition between school and their new social contexts, identifies the relational challenges they have had to confront, and explores how they have navigated them. It then considers the influence that a high degree of religious homogeneity within the graduates' social ecologies during their formative years has had on their capacity to build relationships with people who do not necessarily share their social identity.

### ***Navigating the post-school social transition***

It was apparent that most of the graduates from each of the schools had transitioned with relative ease into their new post-school social worlds, including their education and training destinations and workplaces (G-12/18; P-11/17; E-14/15). There was also substantial evidence to suggest that the graduates had been able to connect relationally in these new contexts, including with those who did not necessarily share their worldviews (G-16/18; P-12/17; E-11/15).

When reflecting on this period of transition, many of the participants communicated that it was not turbulent and did not generate any significant cultural shock (G-12/18; P11/17; E-2/15). When contrasting the school environment and their post-school worlds, the most obvious differences mentioned were the frequent use of course language (SI, PKK) and the openness with which "sex and drugs and that kind of jazz" was discussed (SI). Reference was also made by Keith Keen to the language used by some of his university peers when referring to others. He explained that at times the university crowd would start "bagging" different groups and despite trying to distance himself from it, he found himself feeling "ashamed" about getting caught up in it (KK).

When the data was analysed case-by-case (i.e. school by school) specifically looking to identify groups of graduates who encountered significant challenges in their post-school social worlds, there were no significant patterns, with the exception of one. While for three of the graduates from the closed-enrolment school (Luther-King) the transition had not been problematic (G-3/6, P-3/6), their three classmates whose broader social ecologies had been more sheltered had faced greater challenges during this period of transition (G-3/6). This latter group of three graduates had moved from a school and social world where the Christian faith was pervasive throughout the whole environment and into post-school contexts where the expression of

religious belief and values was far less prevalent. Two of the graduates from Luther-King whose social ecologies had been quite sheltered provided some insights that highlighted the differences between their school and university experiences.

Samantha Irwin stated that she was initially surprised by the way some of the boys felt at ease to comment on the body shape of her friends and some of the topics of conversation that they viewed as normal and acceptable (SI). Despite being surprised by comments like this, she explained that she made sure it did not show (SI). Similarly, Francine Innis did not describe the transition as being a “culture shock”, but as being a “pretty big change” from the “Christian environment” to which she was accustomed (FI). Referring to her experience and that of her friends she said:

Yeah, it's so weird not being around, like, it's just instilled in you, like, at Luther-King, like, that's just, like, common knowledge, like, Christianity and stuff but being around people and they've never heard of, like, things to do with what we've grown up with, it's strange. Yeah, but it wasn't, like, crazy, big shock, like.” (FI)

The prolific use of course language in conversations was also noted by Francine as something very different from her school experience (FI).

These kinds of challenges were not significant for the vast majority of the graduates involved in this study. It would appear that the graduates from all three schools had entered these new environments with relative ease and some, it seems, had done so with a degree of enthusiasm and confidence. For example, when referring to Latisha Tannock's transition from school, her parent said: “It's been quite a smooth transition, really, overall from school to university” (PLT). Similarly, Barbara Steele who entered a training program post-school said:

Like, college is a lot easier than I expected, not like school-wise but just with the people, like, even though no one else is, like, a Christian or anything I still find it easy to get along with people because that's how I was, like, taught in school just to be nice to everyone.” (BS)

When reflecting on this period of transition, her parent communicated a similar sentiment: “No, I think she's coped much better with that than going from the primary school to high school”

(PBS). It seems that the transition was also easy for Bill Norris. His employer used the phrase “highly successful” to communicate his observations of Bill’s capacity to transition into new post-school social environments (EBN).

The parent of Samantha Irwin made a similar observation of her daughter when she said:

I think she is one of those kids who adjusts fairly easily and because she is fairly open and tolerant, she is not so shockable. Do you know what I mean? She is aware and she has an awareness, so she sees things. While she might not be comfortable, you know, a bit appalled by something, she is not going to let it affect her too much. (PSI)

When referring to the transition from Flynn to university, Simone Vinteck described it in the following way.

Like when, when I was leaving school, in Year 12, I was, at the end of Year 12, I was heart-broken. I did not want to leave high school. I really loved school....I did great subjects coz every subject that I did I really enjoyed - maybe except Maths and English [laugh]. No, I did enjoy them as well...Yes, I really loved high school and I really didn't want to leave. But, then, once I left, now I'm kind of liking uni. So I'm not so fussed about leaving high school now that I'm in uni. I thought...life can't be any better than high school. Like I don't want to do anything else except high school, and then I went to uni and I went: 'You know what, I think it can be! Uni is alright. I quite like it.' (SV)

It was apparent that the transition from school into their post-school social worlds had been navigated with relative ease by the graduates. With the exception of some challenges that were relatively confronting for a small group of students from the closed enrolment school, they had adapted successfully.

In addition to getting a sense of the challenges that the graduates had to confront when entering these new social contexts, of particular interest to this study was the extent to which they had been able to build relationships. Essentially, the aim was to establish whether they had been able to enter these social environments that bring together people from a diverse arrange of backgrounds and form relationships that transcended their differences.

### ***Building relationships in post-school pluralistic social contexts***

To understand how successfully the graduates had been able to build relationships in these new contexts, it was important to listen to the voices of the graduates, parents and particularly the employers or workplace contacts.

When the experiences of the graduates and the observations of parents and employers were considered, it was clear that the graduates did, at times, face challenges in these new post-school contexts (G-1/18; P-3/17; E-1/15), but the vast majority had been able to form relationships with those who did not necessarily share their worldview (G-16/18; P-12/17; E-11/15).

The interview data revealed many references that acknowledged the capacity of graduates to connect relationally in their workplaces with people who did not share their religious beliefs. When asked about Leanne Sutton's capacity to build relationships of this type, her workplace colleague said: "Absolutely! she can communicate with a whole range of varied people and beliefs. It's never been an issue at all" (ELS). When wanting to describe Brianna Evan's capacity to build relationships that transcended significant differences, her employer described how Brianna had formed a relationship with one of her colleagues who lives an "alternative lifestyle" and is older than her (EBE). She also noted that Brianna had developed a good working relationship and friendship with another colleague who defined herself openly as being "bisexual" (EBE). Danielle Monteen's employer indicated that Danielle's long term connection with others in her team had enabled "very, very strong bonds" to form (EDM), which transcended their religious differences. He explained that she was able to connect naturally with others because: "She probably always tries to see the good in people..." (EDM). To illustrate Sean's relational capacity, his employer commented that he had been able to form a relationship with a more "difficult" older employee who "doesn't like taking direction very well" (ESD). She said: "Sean can give him advice without him getting his back up" (ESD). According to his employer, Keith Keen has relationally connected with many on the team in his workplace, including a boy from a very different cultural, socio-economic and religious background (EKK). The employer suggested that his easy-going and inclusive nature had allowed this relationship to form (EKK). It was also noted by the manager that Keith had been able to relationally connect with another team member who did not share his Christian world-view and was described as a

“colourful character” (EKK). Barbara Steele developed a very close friendship with a girl in her course (EBS, BS, PBS) who shared her sense of humour, but did not share her Christian faith (BS, PBS) or morals (BS). Barbara’s parents said they were like “peas in a pod” (PBS). When asked what she meant by that, she referred to sharing a “sense of humour” (PBS). The employer of Bill Norris made an interesting comment when referring to the tactics that Bill had used to build relationships. He described how he was able to establish points of common interest and interact in such a way that their different religious or ideological beliefs became a point of “discussion”, not a “tension” point (EBN).

While it is apparent that the graduates had been able to build relational connections in these new post-school contexts, some had done so with greater confidence than others. For example, Christine Cotter, Kevin Dean and Kelvin Stacey were all quieter by nature and seemed to be more tentative when they entered these new social situations, but this did not appear to have mitigated their capacity to form relationships (KD, PKS, E-2/15).

It was also clear that the graduates had navigated some significant challenges in their workplaces. At times, they had found points of difference between themselves and their work colleagues around issues of work ethic (G-2/18, P-2/17, E-1/15). Others had navigated intergenerational tensions (G-2/18) and dealt with people who were deemed to be ‘difficult’ (G-5/18, P-2/17). While most were at ease engaging with those from a different age group (G-11/18; P-11/17; E-10/15), others had found it more difficult (ENK, PBS). For example, it would seem that Nathan Keever had some character traits that were culturally awkward and caused some employees to limit their relational connection with him (ENK). He acknowledged in his interview, that he had tended to converse mainly with those who were his age in the workplace (NK). While Leanne Sutton experienced no difficulty connecting relationally with people who were older than her, she did find it more difficult to connect relationally with older men, mainly because of the way she has been treated by her father, particularly during her formative years (LS). Another challenge that was faced by a graduate arose when she was asked to join a group of peers who were planning to write a letter of complaint to management about their instructor, but the graduate did not agree with the action being proposed and had to diplomatically exclude herself (BS).



When considering the relational dynamics of the workplace and the capacity of the graduates to form relationships that transcended differences in beliefs and values, it was apparent that a distinction could be made between what happened within the confines of the workplace and outside of it. Two of the employers noted that the graduates tended not to socialise outside of work hours with their colleagues as much as others. For example, after acknowledging the capacity of Latisha Tannock to develop sound working relationships within the workplace, including with people very different from her, her employer went on to state that Latisha did not connect socially outside of work with her colleagues as much as some of her peers (ELT). A similar observation was made by Kevin Dean's workplace contact. He explained that Kevin had a network of school friends that remained "tight" and he appeared to be less interested in socialising with his work colleagues outside of work hours (EKC). It seems, therefore, that some of the graduates tended to maintain a degree of relational distance with their work colleagues.

It is also important to note that the evidence derived from the interviews indicated that the capacity to develop relational connections with people in post-school environments, including with those whose social identity and religious beliefs may be different from their own, does not vary across the schools. It seems that the nature of the enrolment policy and the degree of religious homogeneity present in the student body had negligible influence. All of the graduates had been able to enter workplaces and other social contexts and connect relationally, including with those who did not share their Christian beliefs and values (G-16/18; P-12/17; E-11/15). There was no evidence to suggest that those from the closed enrolment school lacked the social and civic attributes required to form relationships that transcended the differences present within pluralistic workplaces and post-school education and training institutions.

### ***Key Finding 11***

Upon analysis of the data, it was clear that most of the graduates involved in this study had transitioned with relative ease from school and into their post-school social contexts. All had been able to form relationships in their workplaces and other pluralistic contexts, including with those who did not necessarily share their worldview. The data also revealed that the graduates had confronted various challenges when they entered these post-school social contexts, but they were more pronounced for a small group of students who had attended the closed

enrolment school and whose social ecology might be defined as very sheltered. The following key finding provides a summary of what was revealed upon analysis of the study's data.

**Key Finding 11 (KF11)**

*The graduates involved in this study were able to connect relationally in their post-school pluralistic social worlds, including with those who did not necessarily share their religious beliefs, but those whose total social ecologies were more sheltered found aspects of the transition confronting.*

***Navigating the post-school relational challenges***

In addition to establishing 'if' the graduates were able to connect relationally in post-school pluralistic contexts, the data also revealed insights into 'how' they navigated some of the challenges that confronted them. One of the tactics they employed was the management of what has been defined in this study as relational distance. This concept recognises that some relational connections are closer than others. This difference in relational distance is something that the graduates appeared to carefully manage and at times, established on the basis of the degree to which they experienced an alignment or misalignment of values.

When entering a social context that brought together a diverse range of people, there was a tendency for the graduates, in some circumstances, to create some relational distance, while being friendly, respectful and polite (G-12/18, P-7/17). The evidence suggested that the creation of relational distance often occurred not on the basis of religious differences becoming evident, but at the point where there was a significant misalignment of values. Stephen Taylor's parent described this point as the "line" that Stephen drew and would not cross (PST). Prior to Stephen's departure to work in the mining industry, he and his parents discussed the clash of values he was likely to experience and the importance of making good choices, which he appeared to be making (PST, ST). During the interview, Stephen described the challenges that had confronted him and the tactics he had employed to ensure he connected socially with his

colleagues, but was not pressured to compromise his personal values. He explained how he intentionally allocated some time for socialising over a few drinks, but made sure he did not get caught up in the drinking culture (ST). Similarly, the parent of Latisha Tannock suggested that Latisha's clarity about how she wants to live her life and her ingrained values provided the compass for knowing when to create some relational distance (PLT). Both Latisha and Stephen appeared to have established, with a degree of clarity, their personal moral and ethical boundaries, which determined at what point they distanced themselves from situations or individuals (G-2/18, P-2/17). Similar boundaries appeared to be influential for other graduates (G-1/18, P-2/17). Bill Norris referred to this notion of establishing boundaries as an inner-resolve in the face of pressure to compromise and also referred to becoming more careful and guarded in situations of this kind where pressure was exerted by people he did not know well (BN). Christine Cotter had maintained friendships with some of her non-Christian friends, but one had started to move in different circles and make lifestyle choices that were inconsistent with Christine's values, so some 'distance' appeared to be forming in their relationship (PCC).

There was also some evidence to indicate that some graduates adopted a precautionary posture in new social contexts, while others were proactive. Francine Innis explained that when she entered new social contexts she would initially create some relational distance and "suss people out" in order to determine if they shared some common values (FI). Her approach might be deemed to be precautionary and may reflect her more quiet or cautious nature. It would appear that Brianna Evans, who was also more socially reserved, may have adopted a similar approach in contexts like her pluralistic workplace (PBE). This tactic also seemed to be employed by three others (G-1/18, P-1/17, E-2/15). In contrast, a more proactive rather than cautious posture was adopted by Stephen Taylor and some other graduates (G-5/18). Stephen would actively engage in relationship building and seek to develop friendships until it became apparent that there was a significant misalignment of values, and then relational distance was created in a responsive way (ST, PST). It seems that initially, Stephen would give people "the benefit of the doubt" (PST).

Kevin Dean is another graduate who tended to adopt a cautious posture when entering a new social context. When asked about Kevin's capacity to connect with each member of the workplace team, his colleague explained that initially, Kevin was very quiet and noted that he

“takes a while to warm up to people” (EKD). After overcoming this initial period of diffidence, it appears that he then tended to develop some confidence. This was evident when his work colleague added that now “he’s friends with everyone and gets on with his work and gets on well” (EKD). A qualification was added to this comment when Kevin’s work colleague indicated that there was one person in the workplace with whom Kevin did not connect particularly well, but he explained that everyone found this person difficult, because he was deemed to be lazy (EKD).

Irrespective of whether the graduates were proactive or cautious when managing relational distance, there was no evidence to suggest that they were disrespectful or condescending towards others. For example, when Danielle Monteen was in a situation where she needed to work alongside someone whom others in the group struggled with, her employer explained that she made the best of it and just created some distance by not fully and enthusiastically engaging (EDM). Kelvin Stacey and Stephen Taylor seemed to adopt a similar approach when values clashed or if frustrations arose (G-2/18, PST). It was apparent that when values dissonance arose, it was unlikely to be confronted or raised in the workplace, but was discussed with the graduates’ parents (G-2/18, P-7/17). Even when dealing with difficult people, Barbara Steele’s parent was confident that Barbara would always be respectful and tolerant (PBS). This view was confirmed by her employer and was consistent with the content of the interview with Barbara (BS, PBS, EBS). The employer of Latisha Tannock made the point that unlike other members of staff, Latisha was always courteous and respectful towards her workmates (ELT).

Many of the graduates either avoided (LS) or minimised their exposure to situations where they knew that excessive consumption of alcohol or drug use would be involved (G-8/18, P-3/17, E-2/15) or “clubbing” was the preferred activity of the group (LT). While some had developed close friendships with people engaged in that culture, some would refuse to be involved in events of that nature (LS). Others would strategically limit their involvement so that they found the balance between being socially connected, but not engaging to a point where their self-imposed moral or ethical boundaries were compromised (G-5/18, P-3/17, E-2/15). When referring to many of the friends of Bill Norris who were caught up in the party scene, his employer said of him: “he’s just slowly pulled out of those social circles or made decisions not to conform to their actions” (EBN). It is important to note that while this phenomenon of creating

distance when ‘clubbing’ or excessive drinking etc was involved characterised many of the graduates, it did not apply to all. At least one of the graduates and his friends actively engaged in activities of this nature (KS).

### ***Emotional strength and the management of relational distance***

The evidence suggests that these personal ‘boundaries’ that were defined by the graduate’s values and influenced their decision making may be indicative of their emotional strength. The parents of Stephen Taylor stated that they trusted Stephen to make good decisions and observed that: “ Everyone loves Stephen in the group, but they know that his boundaries are pretty solid” (PST). In the interview with Stephen, he made the point that: “I’ve never been one to get pressured into stuff really, and that has helped a lot” (ST). Another parent referred to this phenomenon as the point where a clash of values would cause her daughter Barbara to walk away from a situation, despite what others may think (PBS). The parent of Latisha Tannock described how Latisha’s personal values were “ingrained” or the “fabric” of who she was, so when confronted or challenged, she would react (PLT). This kind of strength or maturity was also acknowledged by her employer (ELT). Interestingly, this maturity was evident when Latisha respectfully challenged a workplace peer who questioned her views and attitude towards the use of illegal drugs (PLT, LT). The employer of Danielle Monteen also recognised a similar strength when he said that: “she lives her values” and distances herself when others may engage in anti-social type behaviours (EDM). A similar sentiment was expressed by the employer of Bill Norris who said, “I think he’s a really strong character...I think he knows what he believes and why he believes it” (EBN). He also acknowledged Bill’s capacity to remain strong in situations where pressure to compromise was present and noted that this attribute had been observed by Bill’s friends (EBN). It was also evident that while being surrounded by friends was important to Samantha Irwin, she retained a clear sense of her ‘boundaries’ and was able to apply them even in situations where the pressure to conform and compromise was present and those around her were making different choices (PSI, SI).

The extent to which the graduates’ decision making did not appear to be influenced by the perceptions of others was also noted and viewed by some participants as being connected with their emotional strength. For example, the employer of Latisha Tannock indicated that Latisha’s emotional strength was not contingent upon gaining the approval of her work colleagues and

this was viewed as a sign of maturity (ELT). Similar sentiments were expressed in reference to other graduates (P-4/17). One parent conveyed it by saying that their daughter did not fear people (PSV). Danielle Monteen's comments about the culture at Wilberforce seemed to suggest that not only were the students prepared to be different, but how they were viewed by those from other schools did not matter (DM). It would appear that Danielle's cohort of Wilberforce students celebrated not having to comply with the expectations of their peers from other schools (DM). She referred to some games students played together as part of the Wilberforce way of life and proudly suggested that they were probably viewed by others as being strange (DM).

The evidence suggested that this kind of emotional strength characterised 13 of the graduates involved in the study (G-3/18, P-12/15, E-7/15). For a small number, this kind of strength was less evident in the data (G-5/18, P-3/17), although for Brianna Evans who had experienced significant emotional challenges during her senior years at school, there was evidence to suggest that she had become socially and emotionally stronger since graduation from school (PBE, BE, EBE). During his high school years, Sean Dannit's parent had been concerned how connected his emotional strength seemed to be with pleasing his friends (PSD). She explained that she was relieved now, because with maturity, this had become less apparent (PSD).

### ***Key Finding 12***

The data summarised above and conveyed in the following Key Finding, indicate that the graduates navigated some of the relational challenges they faced in post-school pluralistic contexts by carefully managing the degree of relational distance they established. For some, they entered the new social context cautiously and retained substantial relational distance until the degree of values alignment or misalignment with others could be determined. If they were able to establish that there was no significant misalignment of values, then a closer relational connection was fostered.

Others were less cautious and more proactive. This group entered a new social context and only created relational distance when they became aware that there was a misalignment of values.

In effect, the establishment of relational distance was responsive rather than precautionary.

What is particularly important to note is that worldview or religious differences were not the impetus for forming relational distance. The data revealed that it was on the basis of a misalignment of values that relational distance was formed or maintained, not religious or worldview differences. Finally, the data also revealed that the capacity to establish relational distance in situations where the pressure to compromise was present was viewed by a number of participants as arising from the graduates' social and emotional strength.

#### **Key Finding 12 (KF12)**

*When engaging in post-school pluralistic social contexts, the graduates did not create relational distance in response to religious differences, but tended to do so when a misalignment of values became evident.*

### ***The composition of post-school friendship networks***

In the preceding discussion, the focus has been on establishing 'if' the graduates were characterised by the social and civic attributes that are central to this study and 'if' they had been able to relationally connect in post-school pluralistic social contexts. The discussion to date has also provided insights into 'how' they had navigated the social challenges that confronted them. While this study has shown that the graduates were characterised by many of these attributes and did demonstrate the capacity to form relationships in these contexts, the nature of their schooling and social ecologies did appear to have influenced the composition of their post-school friendship networks.

When the parents and graduates were asked to identify the graduates' closest friends, it became apparent that for 13 of the 18 graduates, those named as being 'close' held to Christian beliefs and values (G-8/18, P-9/17). For 16 graduates, those described as being close friends included former students from their school (G-13/18, P-8/17, E-1/15). The friendship networks of 13 of

the graduates included people who were connected with their church community (G-10/18, P-12/17).

The following quotations provide some insights into the composition of the graduates' post-school relational networks. Both of these graduates attended Luther-King – the closed enrolment school. Referring to some former school friends who attended his university, Keith Keen stated:

...there's two people who I maintain the most close contact with and that's [name of friend], she's a girl studying physiotherapy from my school. There's also [name of friend] and he's an engineer at [name of university] and he's also come from our school. So it's just those two people....Actually, there would also be ... there's another girl and she studies speech pathology and she also went to our school. So it's mainly those three people and the church community, because I haven't really left the church community because once you leave school I guess everyone just branches out. (KK)

Samantha Irwin's parent referred to Samantha's friendship network, which is predominantly made up of school friends, in the following way:

Her best friend is [name of friend]. She has maintained that close friendship and there is actually a core group of them, five or six of them who spend a lot of time together. She goes through stages of spending an awful lot of time with the girls and then everybody gets really busy and does their own thing and then she reconnects and stuff like that. But there is a lot of friendships still from school that she has carried through and then she has connected with others at uni as well. (PSI)

Where differences became evident between the relational dynamics of those who attended open as opposed to the closed enrolment schools, was when the number of non-Christian friends within their friendship networks were compared. Seven of the 12 graduates attending the open enrolment schools named amongst their 'close' friends both Christian and non-Christian people (G-8/18, P-2/17). In fact some indicated that most of their friends did not share their Christian faith (G-2/18). In contrast, no graduate from the closed enrolment school had a high percentage of 'close' friends who were non-Christian and only two appeared to name non-



Christian people in this network (G-2/6, P-1/6). It is conceivable that this may be attributable to the fact that for many graduates, their school friends remained connected within their post-school 'close' relational networks and this, therefore, reflected the degree of religious diversity within their schools. Some graduates from both the 'open' and 'closed' enrolment schools had made friends with non-Christian people post-school, but it seems that they may not be as relationally 'close' as those who share their Christian faith.

It is conceivable that for many of the graduates, the richness of the relational networks established in the school and church contexts had created a sense of belonging and reduced their desire to extend their 'close' friendship network to include others from these new post-school social contexts. Kevin Dean, who had a network of school friends that remained "tight" post-school, appeared to be less interested in socialising with his work colleagues outside of work hours (EKD). This was quite different for Kevin's work colleague who was involved in the study. Unlike Kevin, he was less connected with his own school friends post-school and when he entered the workplace, he was keen to re-build a new friendship network (EKD). He recognised this as a significant difference between himself and Kevin (EKD). A similar phenomenon was evident in Latisha Tannock's workplace and social ecology (ELT, LT). Her employer recognised that unlike other young people employed in the business, Latisha's confidence was not contingent upon wanting to be "liked" or closely connected with everyone in the workplace (ELT). She acknowledged that where other staff spent a lot of time socializing outside of hours, Latisha tended to maintain a degree of distance (ELT).

It was also apparent that the relational closeness or intimacy experienced by the graduates was generally greatest in relationships where their Christian beliefs and values were shared or they were connected within the same church community. It was clear that friendships did form with those who did not share these things, but it seemed in comparison, where there was an alignment of both religious beliefs and values, a higher degree of relational closeness or intimacy characterised the relationships (G-8/16, P-2/17, E-1/15). The parents of two graduates suggested that some of the friendships their child had with those who did not share their Christian beliefs and values tended to be more "superficial" (PKS, PBS). Brianna Evans said that when some of her school friends became Christians, their friendships deepened – but she also acknowledged that this may have been attributable to their growing maturity (BE).

### **Key Finding 13**

The following Key Finding acknowledges that the open or closed nature of each school's enrolment policy and the subsequent degree of religious homogeneity within the student body, did not appear to impact development of the graduates' capacity to form relationships that transcended religious differences. However, it does highlight the influence that the schools' enrolment practices and policies had on the composition of the graduates' post-school friendship networks.

#### **Key Finding 13 (KF13)**

*While the graduates from both the open and closed enrolment schools demonstrated a capacity to form relational connections in post-school pluralistic social contexts, the friendship networks of those from the open enrolment schools were more likely to include people who did not share their religious beliefs.*

### **Summary**

The aim of this chapter has been to provide insights into the post-school social worlds of the graduates and to identify the relational dynamics operating within them. In addition to providing a summary of the relevant data, five key findings were presented.

The chapter began by describing the extent to which the social and civic values that provide the foundation for social cohesion in the community and have been used as a reference point in this study, were evident within the behaviours of the graduates. The evidence presented suggested that the behaviours and personal priorities of the graduates consistently reflected the presence of some values, but not others (KF10). Those that were readily identifiable as characterising the graduates included 'care', 'honesty', 'respect', 'responsibility' and 'tolerance and understanding'. There was also evidence, based on the perspectives derived mainly from interviews with the employers, that the value of 'inclusion and trust' was also present. The value least evident in the behaviours of the graduates across all contexts was excellence. It seemed that while some of the graduates were defined by this value, there were a number whose pursuit of excellence was

contingent upon their personal priorities. It was noted that in the workplaces of the graduates, the employers acknowledged that many had a good work ethic, but some of the graduates were not always committed to excellence in their role. The data pertaining to the extent to which the principles of social-justice were understood and practiced by graduates were largely inconclusive. While the data analysis process provided evidence that some graduates could not define the concept, many were involved in related volunteering and philanthropic activities.

The discussion then moved on to describe the relational dynamics inherent within the post-school social worlds of the graduates, with a view to gaining insights into the challenges they had to confront. The data revealed that most of the graduates had transitioned with relative ease into the various pluralistic contexts they had entered and had been able to form relationships, including with those who did not necessarily share their religious beliefs or social identity (KF11). It was also apparent that a small number of graduates whose social ecologies had been particularly sheltered experienced the greatest challenges and found some aspects of the transition confronting (KF11).

One of the central aims of this study was to understand how the graduates navigated the relational challenges that confronted them as they moved from the social context of the school into pluralistic social contexts like a workplace. Of particular interest was a desire to establish if the graduates, having been embedded within a social ecology during their formative years where many of the people involved shared common Christian beliefs and values, experienced any unique challenges as they entered these new contexts – and if they did, how did they navigate them? The data summarised in this chapter demonstrated that the graduates were all able to form relationships in these new contexts, including with people who did not necessarily share their religious beliefs, but in situations where a misalignment of values arose, relational distance was created (KF12). It was also noted that some parents and employers viewed this capacity to manage relational distance as being associated with being socially and emotionally strong.

Finally, the data summarised in this chapter identified that while the capacity to form relationships in post-school pluralistic contexts did not appear to be influenced by the degree of religious homogeneity present within the social ecologies of the graduates, it did impact the

composition of the graduates' post-school friendship networks. Those from open enrolment schools where there was a higher degree of religious heterogeneity were more likely to name people who did not share their religious beliefs as close friends. However, it was also evident that for many graduates, irrespective of the degree of religious homogeneity present in their social ecologies, there was a tendency for less relational distance to be present in relationships where there was an alignment of both their values and religious beliefs (KF13).

Now that all of the key findings have been presented, the next chapter introduces and discusses the key themes that have emerged from an analysis of the data. In addition to referring to the key findings of this study, comparisons are also made with other research and theoretical views expressed in the extant literature.

## **Chapter 7**

### ***Discussion***

This chapter draws on the findings outlined in Chapters 4 -6 and introduces six themes. The first three themes describe some of the key influences that appear to have shaped development of the graduates' social and civic values and behaviours. The final three themes provide insights into the post-school social worlds of the graduates and the extent to which their behaviours had exhibited the social and civic competencies required to successfully engage in pluralistic communities.

In addition to referring to the findings of this study, the discussion that follows also draws upon the literature. The reality is that there is a scarcity of research that pertains specifically to the questions of interest in this study. While this is the case, there are some studies that can be drawn upon and articles that offer theoretical perspectives, which provide a backdrop against which the findings of this study can be considered.

The six themes explored in this chapter include the following.

#### *Developmental influences*

1. The role of schools can be significant
2. Relationally connected adults can have a synergetic influence
3. Exposure to religious diversity aids social and civic development

#### *Post-school relational dynamics*

4. Social and civic competencies acknowledged
5. Relational challenges are navigated, but can be confronting
6. Resilient friendship networks and their presence

## ***Theme 1***

### ***The role of schools can be significant***

One of the central aims of this study was to understand how the formation of social and civic values and behaviours is influenced by the socio-cultural environments that exist within Western Australia's evangelical Christian schools. This research has revealed that the teachers and school leaders of the participating schools all deemed the nurturing of values that are integral to the Christian world view, as being a high priority (KF1). It was also clear that they have had an impact in this area, but it was difficult to separate it from the influence of other socio-cultural contexts within the broader social ecology that surrounds each child – particularly the family. Despite the complexity of the interface between socio-cultural contexts, the research revealed that some of the key drivers that determined the efficacy of the school in the area of social and civic attributes formation were school culture and curriculum (KF2).

School culture is described by Carrington (2007) as including the: “beliefs, values, habits and assumed ways of doing things” within the school community and she goes on to suggest that it can develop as the product of “osmosis” or “purposeful leadership” (p. 31). When the graduates involved in this study were asked to reflect upon their school experiences and the extent to which the shaping of their social and civic values had been impacted by them, it was common for reference to be made to aspects of their school's culture, as distinct from the formal and explicit teaching of values that occurred within the context of Christian education or ‘beliefs and values’ type classes. For example, when referring to the value ‘respect’, many referred to the cultural expectations and relational dynamics within the school as being influential (KF3).

This finding is consistent with those of a case study conducted in Britain, which found that school culture had a significant impact on a range of outcomes, including in the social and academic domains. In this research, Pike (2009) entered what was deemed to be one of England's most academically improved schools, which had undergone a significant change in leadership and school ethos. The study revealed that the significant improvement in academic outcomes was viewed by students and staff as being the product of an intentional and strategic focus by the school's leadership on the development of character and social and civic values and attributes. The participants involved in the case study undertaken by Pike (2009) pointed to the school's

core values and their explicit promotion throughout the organisation as having a significant influence. The core values that were described by the school leadership as having a Judeo-Christian foundation included the following: “honourable purpose, humility, compassion, integrity, accountability, courage and determination” (Pike, 2009, p. 26). For this school, purposeful leadership and its impact on organisational culture had brought about a change in the social and civic values and attitudes of its students.

The current study also found that some specific facets of a school’s culture appeared to have a significant impact on the formation of social and civic values and attributes. One cultural dimension that was highlighted in the data and varied across the schools was the degree of relational distance that defined the relationships between teachers and students. The evidence revealed that where a ‘relational closeness’ between teachers and students was fostered by the school culture, the graduates were more likely to include the school amongst the significant influences on their social and civic development (KF3). The data revealed that at Wilberforce and Luther-King where the school cultures were defined by a higher degree of relational closeness between the teachers and students, the graduates were more likely to attribute influence to the school (KF3). In contrast, it was apparent that during the tenure of the graduates involved in this study, a greater degree of teacher-student relational distance was present at Flynn. Consequently, the graduates and their parents were less likely to recognise the school as having had a significant impact (KF3).

This is consistent with the findings of a large scale study conducted in North America where the graduates from evangelical Christian schools described how effectively they felt they had been prepared for the social/relational demands of their post-school social worlds. The graduates reported being well prepared and this was attributed to the quality of the relationships they had with their teachers (Pennings, et al., 2011). Similarly, in a study conducted by Hoglund and Leadbeater (2004) that explored the effects of school and family social ecologies on the development of social competencies, a link was found between the presence of social capital in the form of quality relational connections in the school and their formation.

It was also noteworthy in the current study that the different approaches adopted as part of each participating school’s pastoral care structures and practices had a direct impact on the teacher-student relational dynamics and subsequently, their effectiveness in the area of values

formation (KF3, KF4). While the culture at both Wilberforce and Luther-King encouraged a relational closeness between teachers and students within the school community, there were some unique pastoral care structures in place at Wilberforce that appeared to be particularly effective. It was clear in this research study that the pastoral care practices and how the role of the high school form teacher was defined and structured had a significant bearing on the relational dynamics of the school and its capacity to nurture formation of the social and civic values of interest in this study (KF2, KF3, KF4).

The influence of the schools' curriculum on the formation of social and civic values and behaviours was found to be less pronounced in this study than school culture, however it was deemed to be significant for some graduates - particularly those involved at Wilberforce (KF2). It was clear that the quality of the 'Christian education' or 'beliefs and values' type programs and the competence of the teachers responsible for their delivery had a direct bearing on its impact. This is not to say that the only component of a school's curriculum that influenced the formation of social and civic values and behaviours was these formal programs. For the schools involved, the nurturing of Christian values and beliefs was a high priority (KF1) and imbued both the formal and informal, or explicit and implicit teaching and learning programs provided by the schools.

Finally, it is important to note that while it was anticipated that the enrolment policies and practices of the schools may impact formation of the social and civic competencies required to effectively engage in pluralistic social contexts, this was not evident in the data. It is often claimed that the graduates from schools where it is assumed that there is a high degree of religious homogeneity will be less likely to develop these social and civic competencies (Klenowski, 2009; Maddox, 2014; Packer, 2013).

The first facet of the claims described above that this study challenges is the perception that the student populations of these schools inherently have a high degree of religious homogeneity. This study has found that this is not necessarily the case. It has shown that the degree of religious diversity present within the school's student population was influenced significantly by its enrolment policies and practices (KF5). Within this multiple case-study, two of the schools (Wilberforce and Flynn) had open-enrolment policies and practices, and the student population was religiously heterogeneous in nature. In fact, the data indicated that the vast majority of



students enrolled in the schools did not come from families who shared a Christian worldview and were active participants in a church community. In contrast, the student population at the closed enrolment school (Luther-King) had a greater degree of religious homogeneity. It is therefore inaccurate to presume that all of these schools are what some critics have referred to as “mono-cultural enclaves” (Buckingham, 2010, p. 1), where all of the students and their families share similar religious beliefs. This research has found that while this may be the case for some of the Christian schools operating within Australia’s education system, it does not characterise all of them.

Based on these assumptions, it would be reasonable to expect that development of the social and civic competencies of the graduates attending the closed enrolment school (Luther-King), where a greater degree of religious homogeneity defined the graduates’ school based social networks (KF5), would be inferior to those who attended the open enrolment schools (Wilberforce and Flynn). The findings of this research do not support this assertion (KF2, KF10, KF11). This study found that the development of social and civic competencies was influenced more significantly by the culture, curriculum and pastoral care structures operating in the school than the degree of religious homogeneity within the student body (KF2, KF4, KF10, KF11).

It is therefore clear that the relational connections between teachers and students that reflected the priorities of school leaders and were fostered by the school’s culture and pastoral care structures, had a significant impact on the development of social and civic competencies. However, this research study also found that the schools did not operate in isolation from other socio-cultural contexts. The data revealed that the voices of the teachers whose relational connections had provided them with the opportunity to influence development of the graduates’ social and civic competencies were often joined by other adult voices throughout the graduates’ socio-ecological worlds (KF6, KF7). It is the confluence of these adult voices that is described in Theme 2.

## **Theme 2**

### ***Relationally connected adults can have a synergetic influence***

Throughout the interviews with the graduates and their parents, it became evident that those deemed to have the greatest impact on the formation of the graduates' social and civic values and behaviours were adults who were present in various socio-cultural contexts throughout their social ecologies (KF7). For some of the graduates, there were multiple adult voices that were acknowledged as being significant. For others, the adult voices were fewer in number (KF7) and when this was the case, the data revealed that the influence of the peer group and siblings became more pronounced (KF8). It was also noted that at times, where there was a degree of relational dysfunction present in the family context, the influence of adults in other socio-cultural contexts became more significant (KF7).

The findings of this study are consistent with those of others that have been undertaken by researchers with an interest in child social development and the role of social capital. The social capital concept is used by researchers to define the density and 'closeness' of relational connections within a socio-cultural context (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 2000). For example, a child in a family context where their relationships with parents, siblings and extended family were defined as 'close', would be deemed to have substantial family social capital resources (Crosnoe, 2004). Similarly, a child would be considered to have limited school social capital resources if they attended a school where they experience a high degree of teacher-student relational distance and pro-social behaviours are not nurtured in classrooms (Crosnoe, 2004).

Referring to research undertaken by Crosnoe (2004) that explored the relationship between family and school social capital and its impact on social and intellectual development, Parcel, Dufur and Cornell-Zito (2010) introduced two helpful concepts. They suggested that when social capital was found across multiple socio-cultural contexts, a *boosting effect* can arise (p. 833). For example, while not referring specifically to the development of social competence but to academic achievement, Crosnoe (2004) found that outcomes were boosted when family social capital, defined by an emotional closeness in parent-adolescent relationships, was coupled with high levels of social capital at school. The second conceptual label introduced by Parcel et al. (2010) recognises the presence of a *compensating effect* (p. 833). This label highlights the

capacity of social capital resources present in one context to compensate for a deficiency in another. This phenomena was recognised in research conducted by Parcel and Dufur (2004) where the negative effects of diluted family social capital arising from high numbers of siblings was mitigated by the presence of social capital within the context of a church community.

These boosting and compensating effects were evident in the relational dynamics operating within the social ecologies of the graduates involved in the current study. This study has revealed that development of the graduates' social and civic attributes was shaped by their engagement within multiple socio-cultural contexts (KF6, KF7). The data also revealed that at times, the social capital present in two or more contexts was influential and represented what Parcel et al. (2010) refer to as a boosting effect and in this study was labelled a complementary effect (see Chapter 5). It was apparent that within the social ecologies of many of the graduates were adults who were relationally close and constituted a substantial reservoir of social capital (KF7). In addition to simply being present and relationally close, the data also revealed that in many instances, the influential adults shared a commitment to the values being espoused and nurtured within the school context. This was particularly obvious when the reasons for choosing a Christian school were explored with the graduates' parents. It was clear that for many, this choice was driven by a desire to have the school affirm the values that were being taught in the home and church. In effect, their aim was to establish an alignment of values or what Coleman (1990) referred to as *closure* (p. 593). The research undertaken by Coleman (1987, 1988) found that social values and cultural norms and mores were nurtured most effectively when alignment or closure was present within the child's social ecology. In his research that focused on Catholic schools in the United States of America, he asserted that the alignment of values present within the communities into which these schools were positioned provided the benefit of a greater sense of values alignment or closure (Coleman, 1990). It is important to note that while the concept of closure developed by Coleman provides a useful tool to explore this facet of the social world, some of his research findings built around the concept have been challenged (Anderson, 1992).

There was also evidence in the current study to demonstrate that for some graduates who were relationally distant from their parents and family, their relational connections with other adults at school and/or within the church community had a compensatory effect (KF7). It is beyond the

scope of this research to establish whether the impact of the complementary effect or compensatory effect produced a greater or lesser degree of social and civic competence. The data did not allow the graduates to be ranked from the most to the least competent and therefore provide the means to determine the magnitude of the effects. However, the data did provide sufficient insight to determine that the graduates were characterised by many of the social and civic attributes of interest in this study (KF10, KF11), irrespective of whether they had experienced a compensatory or complementary effect. The main point to be made at this juncture, is that the evidence indicated that a complementary effect was evident for many of the graduates, where multiple voices throughout their social ecologies collectively shaped the formation of their social and civic values and attributes (KF7). It was also apparent that the relational connections in socio-cultural contexts beyond the family (e.g school, church or sporting club etc) did in some cases, have a compensatory effect when relational dysfunction was present in the family context. Without exception, all of the graduates had been significantly influenced by at least one adult within their social ecology who was relationally close (KF7) and at times, this was not a family member.

It is also important to note that while a small number of graduates did not have close relational connections with their parents and were significantly influenced by adults from other socio-cultural contexts, this was rare. When asked about the people who had most influenced them, it was common for the graduates to identify adults from various contexts throughout their social ecology (KF7), but to then point out that their parents or a parent, had the most significant impact on the formation of their social and civic development. This phenomenon is consistent with the research studies cited by Dufur, Parcel and McKune (2008, 2013), which found that when the interface between home and school social capital and its impact on child social development and emotional health was explored, while both were recognised as being influential, the evidence indicated that the effect of family social capital was stronger. In fact, when exploring the interaction between school and family social capital and adolescent substance use, they concluded: “Even when youth are spending 7 or more hours a day at school, social capital created in families is much more useful in deterring problem behaviour than is capital created at school” (Dufur, et al., 2013, p. 96).

In addition to the adult voices within the social ecology of the graduates participating in this study, the evidence also highlighted the presence and influence of siblings and peers (KF8). Many of the graduates referred to their importance within their friendship networks, but it became evident that their influence was generally more substantial when the relational ties with significant adults were less prevalent (KF8).

The findings of this study and the others drawn upon from the literature as described above, highlight the synergetic influence that relationally connected adults can have on the social and civic development of children. It is clear that this development does not arise from the influence of socio-cultural contexts like a school community operating in isolation, but in confluence with others – including the family. The evidence also suggests that at times, the confluence of relationally connected adults within multiple socio-cultural contexts can have a complementary or compensatory effect. Coupled with the presence of relationally connected adults and their impact on the development of social and civic competencies, this study also found that the extent to which the graduates had interacted with people who did not share their religious beliefs was influential. It is this finding that is explored in the following theme.

### ***Theme 3***

#### ***Exposure to religious diversity aids social and civic development***

Earlier in this chapter (Theme 1) it was noted that the degree of religious diversity within the student body of the schools attended by the graduates participating in this study, did not appear to impact development of their social and civic attributes and capacity to engage relationally in post-school pluralistic social contexts. While this was the case, the data generated in this study also highlighted that religious diversity within the school context cannot be viewed in isolation from each graduate's broader social ecology. When the social dynamics beyond the school were investigated, it became evident that the degree of religious diversity did have ramifications.

For the majority of the graduates involved, their social ecologies throughout their schooling years were defined by a high degree of religious diversity. This was particularly the case for those who attended the open enrolment schools (Wilberforce and Flynn) (KP5). These students

interacted with people from many religious backgrounds both in their schools and when participating in activities outside of the school context (e.g sporting clubs, scouting groups etc). For some who attended the closed enrolment school (Luther-King) where they tended to have school based friendship networks that were defined by a high degree of religious homogeneity, their involvement in community based sporting and cultural clubs and activities often brought them into contact with people from diverse religious and ideological backgrounds (KF9). The exception applied to a small group of girls who had attended the closed enrolment school and whose involvement in social activities beyond the Christian community had been minimal (KF9). For this group, even their involvement in weekend sport tended to be limited to school based teams and therefore, reflected the religious homogeneity present within the student body of the school. Their contact with peers who did not share their religious beliefs and values had been minimal during their schooling years.

This study's findings revealed that this group of graduates, whose social ecologies had brought them into minimal contact with people from beyond their church community during their schooling years, were just as socially and civically competent as the other graduates (KF10, KF11, KF12). The data generated during the interviews with employers and workplace contacts indicated that the graduates' capacity to enter and engage relationally with work colleagues who did not necessarily share their religious beliefs did not vary based on the degree of religious diversity that was present within their social ecologies during the schooling years (KF11).

Where a distinction could be made in the data between this small group of graduates and the others, was when the challenges associated with the transitioning from school and into their post-school pluralistic worlds were discussed. While this group of girls had successfully navigated the challenges associated with this transition and did not experience a substantial 'culture shock', they did find aspects of it confronting (KF11). For those who attended the open-enrolment schools, the transition was far less confronting, because the socio-cultural contexts into which they had been embedded during their schooling years tended to reflect the diversity found in their post-school pluralistic social contexts.

An analysis of the literature relevant to this theme reveals that very little is known about the influence of religious diversity on the development of the social and civic competencies required to navigate the challenges associated with this post-school transition period. What can be found

tends to be limited to theoretical explorations rather than empirical research. There are many writers who postulate that the absence of religious diversity within the schools attended by children will impede their social development and undermine social cohesion within workplaces and communities (Bonnor & Caro, 2007; Klenowski, 2009; Maddox, 2014).

So far in this chapter the discourse has focussed on the influences that appear to have impacted development of the graduates' social and civic competencies. In the discussion that follows, the focus shifts from the developmental influences associated with the formation of social and civic competencies, to an exploration of the post-school social worlds of the graduates. The themes that follow draw on this study's findings and provide insights into: a) The extent to which the social and civic competencies integral to this study were reflected in the graduates' behaviours; b) The relational challenges that were navigated by the graduates and the aspects that some of them found confronting; and finally, c) The resilient friendship networks that were present within the social-ecologies of the graduates.

## ***Theme 4***

### ***Social and civic competencies acknowledged***

One of the key desirable outcomes of a child's education, about which there is wide agreement, is for them to develop the social competencies required to promote social cohesion within the community (Brennan, 2010; Curriculum Corporation, 2003; Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 1998b). The importance of this outcome within the minds of community leaders and educators has become more prevalent as immigration and globalisation has brought together people from a great diversity of cultural and religious backgrounds into our communities (Buckingham, 2010). It is therefore crucial that our schools nurture development of the competencies that enable young Australians to form relational connections that transcend these differences.

In order to determine whether the graduates involved in this study were socially and civically competent, the social and civic values and attributes that were identified within the Curriculum Corporation's (2003) 'Values Education Study' were used as a reference point. Drawing on the triangulated data, this study found that the graduates were characterised by many of the values

that were identified as being important by the researchers involved in Values Education Study (KF10). It was apparent that their behaviours reflected the presence of the attributes that not only enabled them to build relational connections, but also to be viewed as responsible citizens within their workplaces and broader community. It was common for those who worked alongside the graduates in their workplaces to describe them as being responsible and having a good work ethic (KF10). It is important to note that they were not characterised by all of the values and attributes being investigated. For example, when exploring their commitment to 'excellence' it was clear that this was not an attribute that was reflected in their behaviours in all contexts. However, they were deemed to be 'caring', 'respectful', 'honest', 'responsible' and 'tolerant'. It would appear that it is the presence of these attributes that has been foundational to their capacity to engage relationally in post-school social contexts.

It was also evident within the data that the graduates were able to form relational connections that transcended religious differences in both their post-school pluralistic workplaces and other education and training type contexts (KF11). However, as previously noted, a small number of them, when entering these contexts, found some of the challenges that they had to face confronting (KF11).

The findings of this study challenge the perceptions and claims found in the literature that assert that the students who are educated in Christian schools that form part of Australia's education system, may lack the social and civic competencies required to form relational connections in pluralistic social contexts (Bonnor & Caro, 2007; Buckingham, 2010; Dill, 2009; Maddox, 2014). These claims are evident in the following comment of Maddox (2014). When questioning the legitimacy of taxpayer funded religious schools within Australia's educational landscape and advocating that children are best educated in schools that are 'free, secular and compulsory,' Maddox (2014) draws on statements made in 1873 by William Hemmant in the Queensland Parliament and writes:

...the children sitting at school desks in one decade would, in the next, have to work together as fellow citizens, and "making distinctions when young", particularly on the basis of religious denomination, was likely to teach them "to think that other children were either better or worse than themselves." (pp. Kindle location 3841-3843)



The view espoused is that segregated schooling on the basis of religious affiliation is likely to impede development of the competencies necessary to relationally connect with fellow citizens in the nation's workplaces and broader community. Some contend that 'free, compulsory and secular' public schools where students from all religious and worldview backgrounds come together is the only schooling context that can truly nurture formation of these competencies and the building of social cohesion within communities (Klenowski, 2009; Maddox, 2014; Packer, 2013).

While there is an absence of empirical research in the area of religious diversity and its impact on social and civic development, one American study has considered the impact of ethnic diversity (Godwin, et al., 2001). The researchers involved in this study explored the impact of ethnic diversity within public and private schools on the development of tolerance and the social and civic attitudes and values that underpin a democratic society (Godwin, et al., 2001). They concluded:

First, public schools currently are not outperforming private schools when it comes to teaching the attitudes and values central to democratic citizenship. Second, simply increasing the ethnic diversity within a classroom does not increase tolerance or support for democratic norms. (Godwin, et al., 2001, pp. 545-546)

These conclusions are not dissimilar to those of the current study, which focussed predominantly on the impact of religious rather than ethnic diversity. Its findings challenge the assertion that being educated in these evangelical Christian schools will inevitably impede development of the social and civic competencies required to build relational connections in pluralistic social contexts. The findings have shown that the graduates involved have all been able to engage relationally in their multi-cultural and multi-religious workplaces and communities (KF11).

Interestingly, this is consistent with the findings of a recent research project undertaken by Pennings et al. (2011) in North America, which aimed to: "determine if Christian schools were indeed dividing and weakening communities or if Christian schools are instead trending toward serving a public good by generating graduates who are committed to their communities and to larger cultural engagement" (p. 24). In effect, they were seeking to identify whether the

graduates of North America's Christian schools were engaging within the community, or remaining in segregated or isolated networks. Their findings indicated that the graduates were not only engaged, but felt that their high schools had prepared them with the social attributes needed to connect relationally (Pennings, et al., 2011).

When referring to the capacity of the graduates to establish relational connections that transcend religious and cultural type differences, it is important to make a distinction between relationships that are defined by what Putnam (2000) refers to as "thick trust" and "thin trust" (p. 136) and where the labels "bonding" and "bridging" social capital might be applied (Putnam, 2004, p. 669). Social capital researchers and theorists like Putnam (2000) differentiate between the relationships that exist within networks that are defined by high or low levels of trust. A distinction is made between networks with high levels of trust or "thick trust" (p. 136) where the members are "trustworthy" (p. 137), with those where loose relational connections are made and "thin trust" prevails (p. 136). It is within the relational networks defined by 'thick trust' that Putnam (2000) suggests, bonding social capital resides. In contrast, he posits that where thin trust and a higher degree of relational distance defines the relationships as individuals reach out to those who do not share their familial or social identity, bridging social capital is said to reside. While Putnam (2000) concedes that he is unaware of any "reliable, comprehensive, nationwide measures of social capital that neatly distinguish 'bridgingness' and 'bondingness'" (pp. 23-24) it has been possible in this small scale qualitative study to explore this distinction.

When the social networks of the graduates involved in this study were investigated, it was evident that the relational connections formed beyond the 'Christian community' and in post-school pluralistic contexts and workplaces, were often defined by thin trust and, therefore, deemed to reflect the presence of bridging social capital. It is on the basis of these conceptual definitions that this study has found that all of the graduates have the social and civic competencies required to form relationships of this nature and build bridging social capital (KF10, KF11).

While the presence of bridging social capital was evident in the relational networks of all of the graduates (KF11), the dynamics of their post-school friendship networks where bonding social capital resides did vary (KF13). This phenomenon will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter (see Theme 6).

On the basis of the findings of this study, it would appear that the assertions of those who have fears about the presence of evangelical Christian schools within Australia's segregated education system and their potential to undermine the social cohesion of our workplaces and broader community, may well be unfounded. It would appear that it is too simplistic to assume that social and civic competence can only be nurtured where the 'melting pot' or 'crucible' effect (Gollnick & Chinn, 1983) is present in the form of school environments that are defined by a high degree of religious diversity. Clearly, such an assertion is not supported by the evidence.

While the findings of this study indicate that the graduates were able to engage relationally in Australia's pluralistic workplaces and other social contexts, it is important to note that they did face some challenges when entering post-school pluralistic social contexts. In the following theme, the dynamics of these post-school relational challenges and how they were navigated are considered.

## ***Theme 5***

### ***Relational challenges are navigated, but can be confronting***

In order to gain insights into the social and civic competence of the graduates involved in this study, careful attention was directed towards understanding the challenges they had to confront during the period of transition between graduation from school and entrance into their post-school pluralistic worlds. At the outset of the study, it was deemed to be conceivable that the segregated nature of their schooling and the religious teachings to which they had been exposed, may have impeded the graduates' capacity to establish relationships in these new social contexts. In effect, this study aimed to determine whether the 'hot-house' approach to schooling, as some have defined it (Maddox, 2014), created a social environment that was so sheltered, different and removed from the pluralistic community beyond its boundaries, that their graduates might become overwhelmed by the challenges they are forced to confront during the transition. The fear of some commentators is that rather than engaging and connecting relationally in these post-school pluralistic social contexts, those from faith-based schools may be intolerant of others who do not share their religious beliefs and values and will withdraw or segregate themselves (Buckingham, 2010).

Before discussing the findings, it is worth noting that no attempt has been made in the research design of this study to make a comparison between the challenges confronted by the graduates of evangelical Christian schools, and others within the education sector – for example public schools. It is therefore, beyond the scope of this study to ascertain the magnitude of the transitional challenges for this group of graduates relative to those who attended other schools. This study's aim has been to listen to the voices of the graduates, their parents and those who work alongside them in workplaces, and to discover the nature of the challenges, if any, that they have had to confront and how they have navigated them.

The exploration of this transition period conducted as part of this study, found that the graduates involved had successfully transitioned and did so with relative ease, but a small number whose social ecologies, including their school contexts, were significantly 'sheltered' because of the way the Mantle of Safety was managed, found some aspects of the challenges confronting (KF11). It was also apparent that there was no evidence to suggest that the graduates were intolerant of others on the basis of religious belief, ethnicity, socio-economic background and gender (KF10, KF11) or isolated themselves relationally in their workplaces (KF11), however, there were times when they intentionally created relational distance in a responsive way (KF12). The behaviour of the graduates and the way they created relational distance might be defined as them displaying 'tolerance with limits'. The 'limit' being the point at which the behaviour of other individuals exposes a significant misalignment of values between them and the graduate.

For many of these graduates, but not all, the 'limit' was described as the point where remaining relationally connected meant being closely associated with or engaged in activities involving excessive consumption of alcohol, drug use or 'clubbing' (i.e regularly going out to nightclubs). This was often the point at which the graduates appeared to create some relational distance. Importantly, this did not necessarily involve total isolation from the individual or group, but a degree of relational withdrawal was maintained. While the behaviours mentioned above that defined the 'limit' for the graduates were specifically stated, it is possible that there were others that may trigger the formation of relational distance.

It was clear that most of the graduates sought to actively engage with others when they entered these pluralistic social contexts and that their initial posture tended to reflect their personality.

Those who were more outgoing, vivacious or gregarious appeared to embrace the opportunity to connect and only created relational distance when they recognised the point at which the 'limit', as defined above, was reached. Others, who were more reserved or quiet by nature, tended to retain a degree of relational distance until it was clear that no significant misalignment of values existed. At this point they connected without any concern that the 'limit' might be reached.

While the majority of the graduates did not find the transition challenging, a small group of graduates from the closed enrolment school (Luther-King) found a few aspects confronting. This group of female graduates, who during their schooling years had minimal contact with people from beyond the Christian community, found the extensive and frequent use of course language and sexual references within general conversations, both surprising and mildly confronting. Importantly, there was no evidence to suggest that these things were deemed to be a reason to create relational distance. It was viewed as something that was different from what they had experienced during the schooling years and was easily navigated (KF12).

Much of the literature pertaining to faith-based or religious schools raises concerns about the potential for graduates to experience significant relational challenges when they enter their post-school worlds. These concerns were summarised succinctly by Buckingham (2010) when she suggested:

Perhaps the biggest assumption about religious schools is that because they allow students to segregate into more homogeneous groups, and because religious instruction may have strict stances on morality and behaviour, they create intolerance and undermine social harmony. According to this position, religious schools produce inferior citizens. (p. 27)

It is also widely acknowledged that there is very little research that tests this assumption and what is available, tends to challenge it (Dill, 2009; Pennings, et al., 2011; Wolf, 2007). The findings of this research study have shown that there is no evidence to indicate that the graduates were characterised by their employers or workplace-colleagues as being intolerant (KF10). It is also clear that they have been able to successfully navigate the challenges

associated with forming relationships that transcend the religious differences present within some of Western Australia's pluralistic workplaces and other social contexts (KF11).

It is also clear that even if the graduates involved in this study held to some personal moral values based on the religious stances they may have been taught in their schools (i.e. on matters like sexuality, marriage, abortion and family life), this did not appear to become an impediment to their capacity to establish relational connections (KF11). Even if their stances were different from those of their peers in their workplaces, they were not identified as being associated with the 'limit' that prompted the formation of relational distance. In fact, there is evidence within the data that highlighted situations where some graduates had formed relationships with workplace colleagues who very plainly had different perspectives on some of these matters.

In a study conducted in North America that compared the attitudes and values of graduates from various school sectors, it was found that those from Christian schools, and religious home-educated contexts, were more likely than public-school and Catholic school graduates to hold to personal moral values that were consistent with the traditional Christian perspectives (Pennings, et al., 2011). It is possible that like their counterparts in North America, the graduates involved in this study may have similar personal moral values that reflect what Buckingham (2010) refers to as the "strict stances" that are sometimes taught by religious organisations. However, as noted earlier, even if this was the case, there is no evidence to suggest that holding these different stances had limited their capacity to form relationships that transcended these potential differences (KF-11).

In summary, the findings of this study have indicated that most of the graduates transitioned into their post-school social worlds with relative ease and were able to navigate the relational challenges that confronted them.

In addition to exploring the extent to which the graduates were socially and civically competent and identifying how they navigated the relational challenges that confronted them in their post-school social worlds, this study also discovered that many of them had a core of close friends who remained connected throughout this transition period. It is this discovery that is described within the following theme.

## **Theme 6**

### ***Resilient friendship networks and their presence***

The gaining of insights into the social/relational dynamics of the graduates' social ecologies during the 24 month period post-graduation, was a significant objective within this study's research design. It was anticipated that this would provide the means to determine if the graduates were endowed with the social and civic competencies required to engage in the social world beyond the school. One of the results of this investigation has been to identify within the post-school social ecologies of many of the graduates, a relational 'friendship network', which had at its core a group of 'close' friends who had remained connected since their time together at school (KF13). In addition to these school friends, these networks often included others from the graduates' church communities. The evidence generated in this study suggests that these friendships had often been sufficiently resilient to withstand the substantial changes associated with this transition period. It was also apparent that the use of social media and various forms of electronic communication had helped the graduates maintain these friendships, even though for many, their time spent face-to-face when compared to their school days, had reduced significantly. These 'close' relationships, that are characterised by the presence of thick trust, might be defined as constituting a source of bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000).

When the composition of these friendship networks was examined closely, it was evident that many of those named as 'close friends' by the graduates shared their Christian faith, but this was not always the case (KF13). The evidence suggested that because the 'core' group within the network was made up of 'school friends,' its composition tended to reflect the degree of religious homogeneity present within the student population of their school. It was found that during this period of 24 months post-graduation, those who attended the open-enrolment schools were more likely to name amongst their 'close friends,' people who did not necessarily share their religious beliefs (KF13). It is important to emphasise the point that this was the case for the period of 24 months following graduation, because it is conceivable that the dynamics of these relational networks may alter over time.

It was also evident that in some cases, when the graduates' social ecologies during their schooling years brought them into regular contact with people who did not share their religious

beliefs (KF9), the dynamics of their relationships changed over time, as the degree of trust 'thickened' and by definition, increasingly took on the features of bonding social capital. This is consistent with Putnam's (2000) conceptualisation of social capital and its forms. He states: "In short, bonding and bridging are not 'either-or' categories into which social networks can be neatly divided, but 'more or less' dimensions along which we can compare different forms of social capital" (Putnam, 2000, p. 23). In short, it is clear that the relational connections of the graduates are organic rather than static in nature and can transition from 'thin trust' where bridging social capital resides, to 'thick trust' and the formation of bonding social capital.

The presence of these resilient friendship networks did not appear to limit the willingness and capacity of the graduates involved in this study to engage relationally with people in post-school pluralistic social contexts including workplaces (KF11, KF12). The evidence has shown that they have all established 'low trust' relationships in these contexts, which have transcended religious differences (KF11). However, the observation was made by two of the workplace contacts/employers that the graduates with whom they had contact, tended not to socialise with their work-colleagues much outside of work hours, when compared to other employees who had recently graduated from different schools (KF13). It was suggested by these workplace contacts/employers that the graduates involved in this study were strongly connected into social networks beyond their workplace and unlike some of their workplace peers, did not have a need to establish the kind of 'high trust' social connections in the workplace that provided a sense of belonging (KF13).

When the literature is reviewed, it is clear that there is an absence of research that has investigated the dynamics that define the post-school relational networks of graduates who have attended Australia's Christian schools. However, there is one international study that provides some insights closely related to this theme and the role of trust, which is sometimes viewed as the glue that allows relationships to be formed and sustained. This study did not investigate the dynamics of the relational networks of graduates from Christian schools and their capacity to form relationships that transcended religious differences, but considered how trusting the graduates were of others in various spheres of community life, when compared to graduates from other school systems. Before referring specifically to it, it may be beneficial to consider for a moment the role of trust and trustworthiness in communities and societies.



Essential to the formation of relational connections in social settings that contribute to social cohesion within communities is the capacity of individuals to trust others and be trustworthy. Putnam (2000) asserts that the prevalence of trust is a key element of civil communities and he suggests that: “A society that relies on generalised reciprocity is more efficient than a distrustful society” (p. 135). He also goes on to suggest that: “Generalised reciprocity is a community asset, but generalised gullibility is not. Trustworthiness, not simply trust, is the key ingredient” (Putnam, 2000, p. 136). According to Putnam (2000), the keys to social cohesion within communities are for individuals to be trustworthy and have a preparedness to trust others, but without being gullible. So, the question arises: Are the graduates of Christian schools trustworthy and are they prepared to trust others?

In the international study referred to above and undertaken by Pennings et al. (2011) in North America, the researchers compared a range of measures across school sectors and sought to understand, *inter alia*, the willingness of school graduates to trust others within their communities, including those in their workplaces (Pennings, et al., 2011). They found that there was no “statistically significant” difference between the trust extended to “co-workers and people in general” by the graduates of Christian schools when compared to those who had graduated from government schools (p. 37). While this international study has established that no significant difference is evident between the graduates of Christian schools and their counterparts who completed their schooling in North America’s public or government schools, this finding is not inconsistent with those of this Western Australia based study. This study does not purport to make comparisons with the graduates from other sectors, but has found that the graduates of Western Australia’s Christian schools who participated, demonstrated a willingness to trust others in their workplaces and form ‘thin trust’ relationships (KF11). It might also be argued that the presence of the values of care, honesty, respect, responsibility and ‘tolerance and understanding’ (KF10) might also suggest that their employers and others would deem them to be trustworthy.

In summary, it is apparent that many of the graduates involved in this study were embedded within resilient friendship networks, the core of which had been sustained during the post-school transition period. While these ‘thick trust’ networks that were a source of bonding social capital were present within their social ecologies, the evidence suggests that they did not

impede their willingness and capacity to establish ‘thin trust’ relationships (bridging social capital) in pluralistic post-school social settings including their workplaces (KF11). However, there is some evidence to suggest that these ‘thick trust’ relational connections within their social worlds may have mitigated their desire or need to participate in as many out-of-hours social activities with their work colleagues. The findings also highlighted that the ‘thick trust’ relationships within these friendship networks were not limited to relational connections with those who were connected within a church community or shared the graduates’ religious beliefs— although it was evident that ‘thick trust’ relationships with peers from beyond the Christian community were more likely to be present within the social ecologies of those who attended the open-enrolment schools (KF13).

### ***Summary***

In this chapter, six themes have been discussed, each of which has brought together the findings of this study and juxtaposed them with the relevant literature. The first of the three themes described the key factors that the research found influenced development of the social and civic competencies required by graduates to engage relationally in post-school relational contexts. The discussion associated with the first theme identified the significant impact that a school can have and highlighted the school characteristics that appeared to be influential. Despite the assumptions of some of the educational theorists, the ‘open’ or ‘closed’ nature of the schools’ enrolment policies was not deemed to influence development of these competencies. What did appear to determine the school’s influence was the degree of relational closeness between teachers and students, which was fostered by features of the school including pastoral care structures and culture. Aspects of the schools’ curriculum were also recognised as being significant. Theme 2 described the synergetic impact that relationally connected adults throughout the graduates’ social ecologies had on the development of the graduates. The third and final developmental theme highlighted the positive impact that exposure to religious diversity within the social-ecology appears to have had as a means of reducing the extent to which the relational challenges during the transitional period were confrontational.

The remaining themes (4-6) described the post-school relational dynamics that were evident in the social worlds of the graduates. The discussion associated with Theme 4 posited that the graduates did exhibit the social and civic competencies required to establish relational

connections in their post-school pluralistic social worlds. Theme 5 explained that while the transition into these new social contexts was relatively seamless for many of the graduates, there were some challenges that needed to be navigated, some of which were confronting for those whose social ecologies had been more sheltered. The discussion also noted that when entering these post-school pluralistic social contexts, the graduates' behaviours did not show any signs of intolerance. They did, however, create relational distance when the 'limit' of their tolerance was reached. This limit was not associated with religious, ethnic, gender or socio-economic differences, but tended to be in response to recognising a significant misalignment of values. The final theme (Theme 6) described some of the dynamics associated with the post-school friendship networks of the graduates. The discussion highlighted the presence, within the graduates' social worlds, of what were defined as 'resilient friendship networks'. These networks included a core group of close friends that was often established during their time at school together. It was noted that these 'close' or 'thick trust' relationships did not appear to limit the formation of 'thin trust' relationships in their post-school workplaces, but may have reduced the desire of some graduates to engage in social activities with workplace-colleagues and peers outside of work hours. It was also apparent that those deemed to be part of this 'core' group of friends were not necessarily connected with the Christian community or hold Christian beliefs. However, the naming of close friends from beyond the Christian community was more likely to occur in the social networks of the graduates who attended the open-enrolment schools.

## ***Chapter 8***

### ***Conclusions and implications***

This final chapter reflects back over the research journey that has been undertaken in this study and offers some conclusions and implications. It begins by describing: why the study was commenced, the overarching research question that focussed the inquiry, the methods that were adopted to generate the data and the findings and themes that have emerged. This is followed by an outline of the study's: assertions; contribution to knowledge; limitations; implications for theory, policy and practice; and recommendations. The chapter concludes by identifying opportunities for further research and offering a final remark.

### ***Overview of the Study***

This research study has sought to explore the impact that a lack of religious diversity within the student population of a school has on the development of a child's social and civic values and attributes. It was initiated in response to some concerns that have been raised in the literature by some prominent Australian educational leaders, writers and theorists (Bonnor & Caro, 2007; Buckingham, 2010; McGaw, 2006). These concerns centre on the substantial growth in the number of religious schools operating within Australia's education sector and the potential for this to undermine social cohesion within the community. Essentially, it has been suggested that if this unmitigated growth continues and the nation's children are increasingly educated in social environments that do not reflect the religious, ethnic, cultural and socio-economic diversity of the wider community, it may have a balkanising influence on the wider community. When these concerns are raised within the literature, it is also often noted that the issue of religious segregation in the schooling sector has rarely been the subject of empirical research – particularly in Australia (Buckingham, 2010; Maddox, 2014).

The identification of these concerns, the gap in the research literature and the interest of the researcher responsible for this study in the educative function of schools and their impact on the development of social and civic values and attributes, provided the main impetus for it to be

undertaken. The researcher's experiences working as a teacher and administrator/leader in both Western Australian public schools and an independent/non-government religious school also stimulated some interest in this topic.

In order to explore this issue, a network of schools was identified where it was likely that the social setting into which students were immersed was defined by a high degree of religious homogeneity. These schools form part of what is referred to as Australia's Christian School Sector and were labelled for the purposes of this study as evangelical Christian schools.

The introduction by Putnam (2000) and Coleman (1988) of the 'bridging social capital' and 'bonding social capital' concepts into the research nomenclature and the more recent references to them by McGaw (2006) within Australia's educational discourse, provided the means to explore the relational dynamics that were of interest. These concepts have been defined elsewhere in the thesis (see Chapter 1 – Bonding and bridging social capital), but in simple terms they allow researchers to distinguish between different forms of relationships and relational networks. Of particular interest in this study was the ability to identify 'thin trust' relationships that form in the midst of diverse or pluralistic social settings, transcend differences (including religious) and become a source of what social capital theorists refer to as bridging social capital. It is the application of this concept that provided a lens through which this study was able to explore the issue and concerns described above.

The application of Bronfenbrenner's (2005a) *Bio-ecological theory of human development* and his conceptualisation of how socio-ecological systems impact human development also influenced the design of this research study. It was this theoretical framework that highlighted the need to consider the impact of schools, not in isolation, but in confluence with the many other influences and socio-cultural contexts that can and do shape the social development of children and young people.

It was against this backdrop that the overarching question and four subsidiary questions were formulated. The wording of the overarching research question that guided this inquiry was as follows.

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### ***Overarching Research Question***

*How is the capacity of graduates to form bridging social capital in post-school pluralistic social contexts, including workplaces, shaped by their engagement in an evangelical Christian school and its confluence with other sociocultural contexts present within their socio-ecological worlds?*

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The adoption of multiple case study methodology using literal replication logic (Yin, 2009) provided the means to gather rich qualitative data. Three large evangelical Christian schools from Western Australia, with many common features, agreed to participate in the study and were able to recruit some of their recent graduates who were prepared to participate in an individual interview and allow the researcher to conduct follow up individual interviews with their parent(s) and a contact from their workplace (either their manager or a colleague). During the initial phase of data collection, 50 semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with graduates, parents and workplace contacts. These triangulated data were supplemented with data generated from (1) semi-structured focus group interviews (three in total) involving a group of educators at each of the participating schools; and (2) document analysis. The documents gathered included a small number of newsletters, posters and reports from the participating schools.

The data analysis process employed a range of techniques predominantly drawn from those advocated by grounded theorists (Charmaz, 2006) and other qualitative researchers (Huberman & Miles, 1994; Richards, 2009). From the analysis, key findings were generated that allowed some key themes to be identified and contrasted with the literature. It was on the basis of this analysis that the following conclusions were drawn.

### ***Assertions***

Described below are a series of assertions, which have been informed by the discussion around the key themes that were introduced in the last chapter. They are presented below in the form of responses to the four subsidiary research questions, which have guided this study.

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**Research Question 1**

*How do the graduates of these schools navigate the challenges associated with forming bridging social capital in post-school pluralistic social contexts, including workplaces?*

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This study anticipated that the graduates would encounter some social challenges when they left the schools and entered pluralistic social settings associated with workplaces and tertiary educational institutions. The nature of the challenges and how they were navigated by this group of graduates was the central focus of this research question.

The findings have established that for many of the graduates, the challenges were not substantial. The data revealed that they had transitioned with relative ease as noted in Assertion 1A. For many, they were already well accustomed to interacting in social contexts with people from a diverse range of religious backgrounds. With the exception of a small number who attended the closed enrolment school and whose broader social ecologies provided limited exposure to people from beyond their religious communities, the challenges the graduates' confronted were neither substantial nor confronting. Importantly, the small number of graduates who initially found aspects of the transition confronting were able to successfully navigate these challenges.

**Assertion 1A**

*The graduates transitioned into post-school pluralistic social contexts with relative ease and tended not to describe the process as being significantly challenging, but a small number did note that some cultural differences were initially confronting.*

Assertion 1B highlights a tactic that the data revealed was employed by the graduates when entering post-school pluralistic social settings. It was apparent that in these circumstances where they were seeking to negotiate the social terrain, the graduates tended to strategically control, in a responsive way, the relational distance that was maintained in these contexts. This

distance was established when the ‘limit’ of their tolerance was reached. Importantly, the evidence indicated that this did not appear to be employed in response to religious or worldview differences, but only in situations where the graduates became aware that a significant misalignment of values confronted them. What constituted this ‘limit’ or a significant misalignment is described in Chapter 6 (see - Navigating the post-school relational challenges).

**Assertion 1B**

*One of the tactics adopted by many of the graduates when navigating the relational sensitivities found within post-school pluralistic social contexts, was to create relational distance in a responsive way when a significant misalignment of values became evident. The evidence demonstrated that this tended not to occur on the basis of differences in religious beliefs. It was employed when the ‘limit’ of their tolerance had been reached.*

In summary, this research question asked ‘how’ the graduates navigated the relational challenges associated with this period of transition. It has elicited the identification of two phenomena, which have been presented as Assertions 1A and 1B. The first recognised that the challenges to be navigated were not substantial and the second described a tactic that appeared to be employed by many of the graduates when engaging in post-school pluralistic social contexts.

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**Research Question 2**

How has development of the graduates’ social and civic values and attributes been shaped by the various socio-cultural contexts within their social-ecologies?

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The intent of this research question was to focus attention on the influences that had shaped development of the graduates’ social and civic values and attributes. The extent to which their



involvement in religious schools had been influential was of particular interest. However, the collective impact of their schooling experience in confluence with other socio-cultural contexts into which the graduates had been immersed during their formative years was equally important.

Assertion 2A begins by noting that the impact of the schools' enrolment practices and the subsequent degree of religious diversity that characterised the student bodies of the participating schools did not appear to have a significant impact on the formation of social and civic values and attributes. It then describes the influences that were significant, including features associated with the school environment and the presence of relationally connected adults throughout the graduates' social ecologies.

This assertion challenges some of the claims made in the literature. Based on the evidence generated in this study, the assumptions made by those who speculate that diversity within the student bodies of schools, including religious, is a prerequisite to nurturing the formation of the social and civic values and attributes that are foundational to social cohesion within the community (Bonnor & Caro, 2007; Maddox, 2014) may be groundless. This study has found that the effect of school culture, pastoral care practices and curriculum was more substantial than the participating schools' enrolment practices.

It is also important to note that the final element of Assertion 2A is consistent with other social capital research, which highlights the important role that relationally connected adults within a developing child's social-ecology can have on a range of outcomes (Coleman, 1990; Crosnoe, 2004), including the development of social and civic competencies (Coleman, 1990; Parcel, et al., 2010). This study found that the collective voice of relationally connected adults had a significant impact on the formation of social and civic values. It was also clear that at times, the absence of a relationally connected and influential adult within one context was compensated for by an adult or multiple adults in another.

**Assertion 2A**

*The development of social and civic values and attributes was not significantly influenced by the degree of religious diversity within the student bodies of the graduates' schools, but by*

- a) the culture and pastoral care practices that defined each school's social environment;*
- b) the quality of those aspects of the curriculum intended to nurture the formation of social and civic values and attributes; and*
- c) the synergetic influence of relationally connected adults throughout the graduates' social-ecologies*

While the findings of this study as highlighted in Assertion 2A have shown that the schools' enrolment practices and the subsequent degree of religious diversity within the student body did not appear to have a significant impact on the formation of social and civic values and attributes, it was noted that a lack of exposure and interaction with peers from different religious or worldview backgrounds across the total social-ecology did have some ramifications. In this study there was a small number of graduates whose backgrounds might be defined as being significantly sheltered because their contact with the pluralistic world beyond their school and church community was minimal. Importantly, this had not substantially impeded development of their social and civic values and attributes (Assertion 2A) and their capacity to form 'thin trust' relationships (a point that is made in the forthcoming discussion associated with Assertion 4). However, it was noted that their transition was less seamless than for the others, because this small group did find aspects of the culture within pluralistic contexts confronting when they entered them for the first time. Assertion 2B describes this phenomenon.

**Assertion 2B**

*Exposure to social contexts, either at school or beyond, that provided opportunities for the graduates to come into contact with people from diverse religious or worldview backgrounds, minimised the extent to which they found some of the features of pluralistic social contexts confronting upon initial engagement.*

It is sometimes evident in the literature that an assumption is made that all schools with a religious foundation and particularly those defined in this study as evangelical Christian schools, will have a high degree of religious homogeneity within their student body and broader school community. Sometimes the concept used to describe them is “religiously exclusive schools” (Lane, 2006, p. 14). This study has established that such an assumption is erroneous. Two of the participating schools did not place any restrictions on enrolment and the student body was reflective of the kind of diversity present within the wider community. The findings clearly indicate that the percentage of students and their families whose religious beliefs align with the foundational beliefs of these open-enrolment schools do not constitute the majority of those involved in the school community. It is therefore important to adopt a more nuanced perspective of these schools by acknowledging the connection between enrolment practices and the degree of religious diversity that is likely to be found in a school. Assertion 2C highlights this finding of the study.

**Assertion 2C**

*The degree to which a school’s student population is defined by a high or low degree of religious diversity is influenced not by the religious ideology or foundations of the school, but by the ‘open’ or ‘closed’ nature of its enrolment policy.*

The central focus of this research question has been to identify the influences that have shaped formation of the graduates’ social and civic values and attributes. The adoption of a bio-ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 2005a) has provided the means to view not only the role of the school, but to also investigate and consider all facets of the graduates’ complex social worlds. The data generated as a result of this broad inquiry and the subsequent analysis has enabled the key influences to be identified and described in the above discussion.

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### *Research Question 3*

How does the presence or absence of bonding social capital within the social ecologies of the graduates influence their capacity to form bridging social capital in post-school pluralistic workplaces and other social contexts?

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This study has found that during their schooling years the graduates appear to have formed ‘thick trust’ relationships that constituted bonding social capital. These relational connections often included close friendships with people from a number of socio-cultural contexts including their family, school and church communities. It was also evident that a resilient friendship network was present within many of the graduates’ social worlds, which had formed during their schooling years and was sustained beyond graduation. Interestingly, it was noted that the presence of these substantial relational networks did not appear to impede their capacity or willingness to form bridging social capital in post-school pluralistic social contexts, including workplaces. It is this point that is captured in Assertion 3.

These findings challenge the assumptions that sometimes appear within the literature. It has been suggested that independent and religious schools like those involved in this study are able to promote and nurture the formation of bonding social capital, but not the capabilities associated with forming bridging social capital. Referring to the independent and religious schools, Ken Boston as cited by Packer (2013) states that they: “are very good at confirming and strengthening existing identities” and then goes on to suggest that their lack of diversity undermines their capacity to develop “bridging devices” and the capacity to form bridging social capital (p. 7). This study has provided insights, which challenge the veracity of these claims.

#### ***Assertion 3***

*The presence of thick trust relationships that constitute bonding social capital within the social networks of many of the graduates did not impede their capacity or desire to form thin trust relationships and bridging social capital in post-school pluralistic social contexts.*

The findings of this study suggest that the presence of bonding social capital within the social ecology of school graduates does not necessarily limit their willingness or capacity to form bridging social capital. In fact, while it is not a major finding of this study, there is some evidence to suggest that rather than actually impeding, the presence of bonding social capital may well have a bolstering effect.

It was not the intention of this study to make comparisons between the social and civic competence of the graduates of evangelical Christian schools with those from other school networks or systems. The aim of this qualitative study was simply to establish the extent to which the graduates' behaviours reflected the presence or absence of these important competencies. While this has been the case, at times during the semi-structured interviews with workplace contacts (employers or colleagues), they did make comparisons. What may be an important distinction was made by two of the workplace contacts. They noted that the graduates involved in this study appeared to have a maturity or emotional strength that meant they were not looking to the workplace to form what might be termed 'thick trust' relationships. In contrast, they suggested that some of the graduates from other schools did not appear to be well connected into relational networks beyond the workplace and were therefore looking to workplace peers to build their friendship network. That is not say that the graduates involved in this study were not prepared to allow 'thin trust' relationships to deepen to the point of becoming 'close'. In fact, the evidence suggests that this had happened at times. What it does highlight is that the formation of resilient friendship networks during the schooling years may be beneficial. It is conceivable that in the same way as the confidence of young children to explore and take risks is bolstered by what psychologists and pediatric specialists refer to as "secure attachments" or "secure relationships" with adults (Sims, Guilfoyle, & Parry, 2006, pp. 454-455), the presence of a resilient friendship network may be beneficial for adolescents and young adults.

In summary, this study has found that the presence of bonding social capital in the social-ecologies of the graduates did not appear to hinder their capacity or willingness to form bridging social capital in pluralistic contexts, including workplaces.

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#### **Research Question 4**

*To what extent do the graduates of these schools exhibit the social and civic values and attributes required to form bridging social capital in their post-school pluralistic social worlds, including workplaces?*

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This final research question served to focus attention on the social and civic competencies of the graduates. Its intent was to ascertain whether the graduates' behaviours in post-school pluralistic contexts were indicative of their presence or absence.

In addition to providing insights into the specific social and civic values that appeared to characterise the behaviours of the graduates, this study also found that they had entered these pluralistic social contexts in their post-school worlds and formed thin trust relationships that signified the presence of bridging social capital. Assertion 4 describes what was found.

#### **Assertion 4**

*The graduates exhibited the social and civic attributes required to form bridging social capital in post-school pluralistic social contexts, including workplaces. Their behaviours did not reflect the presence of intolerant attitudes or give any indication that they lacked the social and civic competencies needed to form relational connections that transcended religious and other differences.*

It is important to note that no claim is being made to suggest that in the area of social and civic competence, the graduates involved in this study were in some way superior to those from other schools. Such a conclusion cannot be drawn because this inquiry has not been undergirded by a comparative research design and methodology. What this study does offer is some insights that challenge the veracity of the unsubstantiated claims that appear in the literature concerning the

social outcomes of independent religious schools. The view that the graduates of religious schools (including evangelical Christian schools), will be characterised by intolerance and an inability to form bridging social capital in post-school pluralistic social contexts is not supported by this study's evidence. While it was found that there was a 'limit' to the tolerance that the graduates generally extended to others, it is clear that the 'limit' was not triggered by the religious differences that may exist amongst people within pluralistic social contexts. In fact, one participant suggested that religious differences that exist in these contexts tended to be a point of 'interest' rather than 'tension'.

### **Summary**

The exploration of the four subsidiary research questions above has allowed the various facets of the overarching research question to be considered.

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### ***Overarching Research Question***

*How is the capacity of graduates to form bridging social capital in post-school pluralistic social contexts, including workplaces, shaped by their engagement in an evangelical Christian school and its confluence with other sociocultural contexts present within their socio-ecological worlds?*

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It is clear from the data generated in this study and summarised in the above assertions, that the graduates involved, who had all attended evangelical Christian schools for the majority of their primary and secondary schooling, were able to form bridging social capital in the post-school pluralistic contexts they had entered. It was also apparent that their capacity to do so did not appear to have been impeded by the religious educational environment in which they had been immersed. In fact, it was evident that development of the social and civic values and attributes that have enabled them to form bridging social capital appeared to have been enhanced by some specific elements within the school environment – namely, school culture, pastoral care practices and curriculum.

This study has also highlighted the need to recognise that the shaping of social and civic values and attributes and the impact of the school cannot be viewed in isolation from other sociocultural contexts. It was apparent in the data that all of the graduates were able to form

bridging social capital when they entered their post-school pluralistic worlds. This was even the case for those whose total social ecologies were more sheltered and a greater degree of cultural adjustment was necessary when navigating the cultural differences.

Finally, it was also evident that while the social ecologies of many of the graduates were defined by rich relational networks and the presence of bonding social capital, this did not appear to impede their capacity to form bridging social capital.

### ***Limitations of the Study***

The findings of this study have been ascertained by gathering and analysing rich qualitative data, however, it is imperative to acknowledge some of the study's limitations. Importantly, it is context bound and therefore, the results cannot be generalised to other populations or contexts. When referring to context bound research logic, Walton as cited by Stuart Wells, Hirshberg, Lipton & Oakes (2002), draws a parallel between the establishment of findings and securing a ship with anchors when he states that the outcome is: "intended to provide at least one anchor that steadies the ship of generalisation until more anchors can be fixed for eventual boarding" (p. 335). This research study has not produced a grand theory, but has generated insights within a bounded case study context, which constitute what might be termed *substantive theory* (Richards, 2009). It has contributed to knowledge by identifying the influences that shape the formation of social and civic values and attributes. It has also provided insights into the idiosyncrasies' of evangelical Christian schools. To use Walton's metaphor (Stuart Wells, et al., 2002), by securing this single conceptual anchor, this research now provides the basis for others to be attached through further research. Importantly, while these findings apply to the evangelical Christian schools involved in this study and may provide a glimpse into the impact of religious schools in general; further research is required before formal or grand theories can be applied to this broader classification of schools.

In addition to the limitations associated with generalisation, there are others that must be noted. It is important to recognise that the sample of graduates may not be representative of their broader cohort groups. This study relied on graduates volunteering their time to participate in an interview and agreeing to allow the researcher to interview their parent(s) and a workplace contact (employer or colleague). It is conceivable that the magnitude of the



commitment required and the voluntary nature of the design attracted graduates who were civically minded and socially confident.

Finally, it must also be acknowledged that this study did not gather data that enabled comparisons to be made between the social and civic competence of the graduates of the participating evangelical Christian schools and those from other school systems. This was beyond the scope of this study.

### ***Contributions to Knowledge***

In addition to considering how the findings and assertions of this study contribute to knowledge, the following discussion also identifies some unique aspects of the research methodology that were adopted, and may serve to inform further educational research that investigates the social and civic outcomes of schooling.

In broad terms, this research contributes by providing insights into the educative process that shapes the formation of a developing child/adolescent's social and civic values and attributes and the role of the school within it. It also offers knowledge that will generate a more informed discussion about the social outcomes of religious schools, including evangelical Christian schools, within Australia's education sector. Essentially, it addresses some significant gaps in the educational research literature and contributes to what might be termed the *social values and schools discourse*.

Much of this discourse within the literature is founded on a philosophical base and with limited reference to empirical research. The philosophical dialogue tends to explore the complexities associated with the big questions associated with social values and the role of schools. For example, if part of the role of schools is deemed to include the nurturing of social values, then decisions need to be made about which values will be promoted. In a pluralistic society, this becomes a point of contention and a topic that divides philosophers. Similarly, the discourse includes divergent perspectives on the appropriateness of religious schools to operate within a pluralistic society and to teach their beliefs and social values, which may not necessarily be widely held or endorsed in the wider community. Such a discussion raises issues associated with the principles of the 'freedom of religion' and the 'rights of citizens' within a liberal democracy. It also exposes tensions associated with the concept of the 'separation of church and state'.

While this philosophical dialogue makes an important contribution, at times, assertions are made that may not necessarily reflect reality - because of the absence of empirical research to confirm or challenge them. The current study contributes by offering some empirical evidence in response to the assumption or claim that is embedded within some of the literature and has been highlighted throughout this study. Put simply, it is claimed that development of the social and civic competencies required to form relationships that transcend religious differences will be impeded if children are educated in religious schools, where the religious diversity of the wider community is not reflected in the school setting.

This assumption is sometimes referred to as the crucible effect, which asserts that social engagement in diverse social contexts as part of a child's schooling experience is essential to the development of social and civic competencies. The findings of this study challenge this assumption and evoke the need for a more nuanced view to be adopted.

The contribution of this study extends beyond the body of knowledge associated with the role of the school in the development of social and civic competencies. It also offers insights into how the various socio-cultural contexts within a developing child's social-ecology interact.

Finally, there are aspects of the theoretical positioning of this study that contribute to knowledge in the area of educational research. The researcher is not aware of any educational research that has adopted a theoretical framework that has applied both the principles of social capital theory (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 2000) and the bio-ecological perspective of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005a). While these theoretical frameworks have been applied in educational research studies separately, rarely have they been used together. Their use in this way provides a means to explore the social development of children and adolescents in a holistic manner. It allows the researcher(s) to explore the influence of a school setting, while also acknowledging the forces at work in the broader social ecology of the developing child.

The gathering of triangulated qualitative data from school graduates, parent(s) and workplace contacts as occurred in this study, is also rare within educational research. It is conceivable that this data gathering method is rarely used because of the challenges associated with recruitment of participants, but in this study, it has provided the means to generate rich and insightful data that have aided the investigation.

## ***Implications for theory, policy and practice***

### ***Theory***

The results of this research have generated what Richards (2009) refers to as substantive theory, because it is “particular to the substance of the data” (p. 137). Earlier in this chapter a number of assertions were described that were presented in response to the research questions. These assertions formed what might be termed substantive theory, because they are grounded in contextualised data. In addition to this contribution to theory, this study also offers the following theoretical propositions, which, subject to further confirmation from additional studies, may take on the status of *formal theory* (Richards, 2009). To use the ship and anchor metaphor introduced earlier in this chapter, this study has secured one conceptual anchor that has steadied the ship, but others need to be attached by conducting further research and determining the utility of these propositions beyond this study’s bounded context. The distinction to be made between the assertions already presented and the following theoretical propositions is that the former are grounded in the contextual data set and the latter, while based on the evidence, speculate what may be applicable more broadly.

The theoretical propositions are as follows:

- A religious school’s culture, pastoral care structures and curriculum have a greater influence on the development of its students’ social and civic values and attributes and their capacity to form relational connections in the midst of diversity than the degree of religious homogeneity present within the student body.
- The presence of relationally connected adults throughout a child or adolescent’s social ecology can have a synergetic impact on the development of their social and civic values and attributes.
- The presence of a resilient friendship network within the social ecology of an adolescent can provide a source of emotional security and strength during the period of transition between school graduation and their engagement in post-school pluralistic social contexts.
- When entering post-school pluralistic social contexts, the graduates of evangelical Christian schools find the cultural differences less confronting if they have had

opportunities, during their formative years, to engage relationally with peers who do not share their religious beliefs and values. It is not crucial whether this occurs at school or in other social contexts.

### ***Policy***

In the area of educational policy, this research offers some insights that will serve to contribute at a variety of levels, including national, state and the local school community.

At a national level, it contributes to the discourse that surrounds (1) the issue of religious schools and their place within Australia's schooling sector and (2) the role of schools in the formation of social and civic values and attributes.

Firstly, it cautions against adoption of the presumption that the educative environment created by religious schools is inherently devoid of religious diversity within the student population and impedes development of the social and civic values and attributes that young Australians need to become active and relationally engaged citizens. On the basis of these findings, it is clear that a more informed and nuanced view of these schools should be adopted and maintained by policymakers.

It is also apparent on the basis of this study that if one of the goals of education and the work of schools is to develop the social and civic competencies of the nation's children and adolescents, then educational leaders must consider placing a greater emphasis on the important role of school culture, pastoral care structures and curriculum. At present, all Australian schools are being encouraged to consider how pursuit of this goal should influence their policies and practices.

Australia's educational policy development is currently being shaped by the Melbourne National Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians that was formulated by the Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA, 2008). In addition to promoting equity and excellence, the Melbourne Declaration specifically states that one of the goals of schooling in Australia must be to see that all young Australians become: "successful learners, confident and creative individuals; *active and informed citizens* [italics added]" (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 7). Inclusion of the reference to citizenship recognises that schools have an

important role in this area of development. This research study has provided insights into this dimension of schooling and some of the practices that foster development of the values and attributes that young Australian's need in order to become active and informed citizens.

While there are arguably substantial benefits to be gained by including citizenship education within the curriculum of Australian schools, educational leaders may want to consider how this interfaces with character education. This study and the research conducted in Britain by Pike (2009) have demonstrated that character education may need to be considered as the foundation of citizenship education. In essence, development of the social and civic values or virtues that shape attitudes and behaviours may have a greater impact on social cohesion within the community, than an education that focuses predominantly on understanding what it means to be a citizen within a democratic society.

### ***School and parenting practices***

This study has confirmed that the development of young Australians' social and civic competencies can be influenced by the work of schools. It has also provided insights into the facets of schooling and the social ecologies of children and adolescents that foster and impede this development. These findings have implications for both school practices and how parents shape the educative environment of their developing children. Highlighted in the following discussion are the school and parenting practices that have been identified as being influential including: purposeful teaching in the social and civic domain; establishing strategic pastoral care arrangements; facilitating exposure to worldview diversity; and nurturing healthy relational connections with adults and peers. Prior to beginning an exploration of these practices, it is important to consider the extent to which they have a legitimate place within the purview of school practices in Australia.

The work of schools in Australia is regulated by statutory bodies that are established by government. Included within the scope of their responsibilities is development of the curriculum frameworks that guide the teaching and learning programs of Australia's schools. In recent years, agreement has been reached to move from a state-based curriculum, to a national approach. The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the National Curriculum,

which is currently being phased into schools. In addition to the frameworks that guide teaching and learning within the traditional learning areas (Mathematics, English, Science etc), the National Curriculum also describes seven ‘capabilities’ that schools are required to address. Included within them is an area that focuses on the social and civic domain. It is titled ‘Personal and social responsibility’ and is defined in the documentation as follows:

In the Australian Curriculum, students develop personal and social capability as they learn to understand themselves and others, and manage their relationships, lives, work and learning more effectively. The capability involves students in a range of practices including recognising and regulating emotions, developing empathy for others and understanding relationships, establishing and building positive relationships, making responsible decisions, working effectively in teams, handling challenging situations constructively and developing leadership skills. (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2014, p. 1)

The findings of this study may serve to assist schools as they consider how this area of learning will be addressed. If the aim of schools is to develop in students the social and civic competencies required to engage in pluralistic social contexts, then the following practices may want to be considered.

#### *Purposeful teaching in the social and civic domain*

This study found that the purposeful teaching of explicit social and civic values and their worldview foundations in a school context can have a significant impact, particularly if there is continuity between what is espoused and modelled by educators. While it is sometimes suggested that ‘values are caught and not taught,’ this study’s findings offer a different perspective and suggest that such an assertion may be too simplistic. There is evidence to indicate that the explicit teaching of social values can also be influential, however, its effectiveness hinges on the competence of the teachers involved and the quality of the curriculum.

The use of the term ‘purposeful’ in the heading above refers to the deliberate or intentional actions of a school to teach and model the social and civic values and attributes that are identified by a school community as being important to nurture. Such teaching can take the form of *incidental* and *programmed* learning opportunities. The former recognises that throughout the day-to-day social interactions between teachers and students, opportunities arise to develop in students these important social and civic competencies. For example, when dealing with inter-student conflict or classroom behavioural issues, teachers are presented with profound teaching moments, where reference can be made to a school community’s social and civic values and their implications can become the framework for discussion. The latter refers to the programmed or scheduled lessons that teachers prepare, which may form part of a *discrete* subject that specifically explores the area of beliefs/worldviews and values, or be *integrated* into another area of learning - for example, ‘Studies of society and environment’. It is common in faith-based schools like the Christian schools involved in this study to include a discrete subject into the school timetable that explores this area of learning. This forms part of what has been referred to in this study as Christian education or ‘beliefs and values’ programs. Schools of all types, (religious and non-religious) may want to consider how this approach to teaching and learning might be reshaped and applied in their unique contexts.

In addition to establishing that this form of purposeful teaching can have a significant impact, this study has also demonstrated that some schools do this more effectively than others. Based on the findings of this study, schools may benefit from carefully reviewing this area of teaching and learning and looking to those who have well developed purposeful approaches for advice, insights and ideas. It may also be beneficial for networks of schools to identify teachers who are highly regarded and competent in this area of teaching and learning and allow them to share their expertise, programs and pedagogical approaches. This is particularly important, because in addition to demonstrating the positive impact that the inclusion a discrete subject like this can have, the findings have also shown that when poorly taught, it can be despised by students and therefore become counterproductive.

The discourse in schools around this theme may also benefit from exploring the distinction that can be made between values and virtues. Throughout this study, the terms have been used interchangeably because this reflects their contemporary usage. However, the tendency for any

dialogue surrounding this area of learning to move from a robust intellectual exploration to a polarised exchange may be reduced if a distinction is made between them. Some writers apply the term values to what might be termed shared or personal preferences. When applied in this way, values are viewed as changing over time and may or may not be shared by others. In a shared sense, reference can be made to values that are common to a group, for example 'family values,' 'religious values,' 'Australian values' or 'Catholic values' (Benson, 2000). At an individual level, they become personal values. For example, in a school context, a teacher may come to value the inclusion of golf within a physical education program, but others may not. Equally, some may applaud the inclusion of a religious studies course in a high school program and others despise it. What is valued by one person, is not necessarily viewed in the same way by others. Personal preferences are reflected in the relativistic world of values.

In contrast, virtues are defined by some as identifying the principles that operate within the social world that transcend personal belief or preference and have a moral dimension. Benson (2000) elucidates this distinction by noting that personal preference does not apply when matters of 'justice' or 'honesty' are considered, as evidenced when Australian governments establish Corruption and Crime Commission type hearings. Participants do not have the option to suggest that they do not personally value justice and honesty in these contexts and use this as a reason to exempt themselves from proceedings. Rather, they are principles that are upheld by society and recognised as the basis for maintaining civility. Therefore, it could be argued that our community may benefit from making this distinction and identifying virtues like 'integrity' and 'honesty' and making them foundational within the social and civic domain of school curriculum.

Finally, and most importantly, this study has shown that the development of social and civic competence through purposeful teaching in schools is most effective when it is supported by a pro-social school culture. It is clear that formal teaching in this area of learning is less effective when it is not supported and reflected within the multifaceted and multilayered social dynamics that constitute school culture. If social competence is one of the desired outcomes of schooling, then it is important that schools adopt a pro-social mindset and consider every interaction with students as a social and civic learning opportunity – including those associated with the implementation of school discipline and behaviour management policies. Maybe consideration



should be given to renaming these documents and procedures as social and civic coaching or training policies, and reframing their purpose.

The role of school culture and the need to review it as part of each school's commitment to continuous improvement is reflected in a tool that is being used by Australian schools. The 'National School Improvement Tool' (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2012) has been developed to assist schools and provide a framework to review current practice and formulate improvement plans. Its developers acknowledge that it does not identify all of the characteristics of effective schools, but suggest that it will focus the attention of schools on the practices that research has identified as being associated with quality schooling. Within the nine domains that schools are encouraged to review is the area of school culture. It is this domain of school culture that the current study has shown can significantly impact on the formation of the social and civic values and attributes of young Australians. The use of this tool and the insights gained from this research study may allow schools to identify the practices that will nurture the formation of these important social and civic competencies.

#### *Strategic pastoral care*

The important role of strategic pastoral care structures was identified within this study. It was apparent that in addition to nurturing social and emotional well-being, these structures can also support the development of social and civic competencies. Based on the findings of this study, schools may want to consider reviewing their approach to pastoral care and identifying strategies that might foster the formation of closer student-teacher relational connections. High schools may also want to learn from the practices of Wilberforce and consider their unique approach to defining and establishing the role, function and structure of what are traditionally known as 'form groups' or 'form classes'.

#### *Exposure to worldview diversity*

The findings of this study highlighted some of the challenges that the graduates faced when entering post-school pluralistic social contexts. It was noted that the graduates who had attended the closed enrolment school and whose social ecologies had significantly limited their contact with people from beyond the Christian church community found some of these

challenges confronting. This research encourages parents and schools to think carefully about the degree to which children and adolescents are sheltered and the need to raise an awareness of the diversity of religious and worldview positions that are held within a pluralistic society.

If the goal is to prepare young people so that they can make a seamless transition into pluralistic social contexts upon graduation from school, then parents and schools need to consider this issue and the knowledge and skills required to achieve it. This study found that the graduates who achieved this goal had been immersed in an educative social environment (i.e. school and beyond) that developed an awareness of the diversity that existed in society. They were also equipped with the values that enabled them to be tolerant of others who were different from themselves, but at the same time were aware of the need to establish 'limits'. It was also evident that during their formative years they had opportunities to form relationships with peers who did not necessarily share their religious beliefs or social identity. For some this occurred at school, but for others it was elsewhere in their broader social world.

#### *Healthy relational connections with adults and peers*

In addition to the importance of relationally connected teachers within the school context, this study also found that the social development of the graduates benefited from the presence of relationally connected adults throughout their social ecologies. On the basis of this study's findings, parents may be able to support the development of their children by actively encouraging the formation of relational connections with trusted adults, both within and beyond the family and school contexts.

Importantly this research also found that the presence of what this study defined as a resilient friendship network was important for the developing adolescent, particularly during the transition period after graduation from school. This network appeared to provide a significant source of emotional strength.

On the basis of these findings, the developing adolescent may profit from both the presence of relationally connected adults and a network of close friends. Wherever possible, parents may want to consider nurturing the formation of these healthy relational connections.

### *Summary*

The findings of this study have implications for theory, policy and practice. In addition to the study's contribution in the form of substantive theory, it also offers some theoretical propositions, which provide the foundation for further research and the potential to establish formal theory. In the area of policy, the study contributes to the educational discourse by identifying the key features of schools that appear to influence the formation of social and civic competencies and the implications of being educated in a religious or faith-based school environment. This research has also highlighted some school and parenting practices that were identified as having a significant influence in this area of development.

### ***Recommendations***

The following recommendations are based on the previous section that described the implications of this research to theory, policy and practice.

1. In the public discourse associated with schools and their influence on the formation of young Australians' social and civic competencies, a more nuanced and informed view of the impact of Australia's religious schools should be encouraged amongst theorists, educators and policymakers. The adoption of simplistic perspectives about the character and outcomes of religious schools that are built on assumptions rather than empirical evidence is counterproductive within the conversation about what constitutes quality schooling.
2. When educational leaders and teachers are exploring how schools might more effectively nurture development of social and civic competencies, the domains of school culture, pastoral care practices and curriculum should be a central focus – rather than simply asserting the need for diversity in all of its forms within school communities.
3. When planning parent and teacher education workshops within school communities intended to highlight how the social and civic competencies of young Australians can be nurtured, school leaders should consider emphasising the important role, within each child's social ecology, of relationally connected adults and the presence of a resilient friendship network during the period of transition beyond graduation.

### ***Implications for further research***

There are many opportunities for further research that emerge from this study. Firstly, there is a need for research to further explore the theoretical propositions stated earlier in this chapter. Doing so would establish their utility beyond the bounded context of this study. It would also be particularly interesting for further research to adopt a comparative design, which considers the impact of various school types (religious and non-religious) on the formation of social and civic competencies.

There is also a need for research to investigate the specific aspects of school culture, pastoral care structures and curriculum that most effectively nurture development of these competencies. As Australian schools implement the National Curriculum and wrestle with how they will address the requirement to develop in students the capability to become active and informed citizens, there is an opportunity for an action research methodology to be employed. Such an approach may provide valuable insights into the strategies that are found to be effective and the challenges that confront schools in this sphere of teaching and learning.

Finally, there is also scope to undertake a longitudinal study that would provide some valuable insights and test the findings of this study. Such a study would be less reliant than the current study on the reflections of graduates and benefit from the capacity to gather data in situ - that is, by exploring the ecological picture at different points in time during the transition period (both before and after graduation).

### ***Final remark***

In broad terms, this study set out to investigate how development of the social and civic competencies required to become active and relationally engaged citizens is influenced by the educative environment of a religious school. Integral to the study's aim was a desire to test the veracity of a claim that is often found in the educational literature, which asserts that the absence of religious diversity within the student body of a school will undermine development of these competencies. It was also the intent of this study to provide insights into a network of schools that have rarely been the subject of educational research in Australia.

The impact of religious segregation was explored by evaluating the social and civic competence of some graduates who attended three of Western Australia's evangelical Christian schools and investigating how formation of their social and civic values and attributes were shaped by their school experiences and factors beyond the school.

In addition to providing some unique insights into this network of schools, this study's findings also contribute to knowledge by identifying the influences that appear to shape the formation of social and civic values and attributes – including the impact of a child/adolescent's school experiences. Importantly, on the question of the influence of religious segregation and a lack of religious diversity within the student body of a school, this study's findings do not support the above-mentioned claim. This study found no evidence to suggest that the young Australian graduates of these schools lacked the social and civic competencies required to engage relationally in the pluralistic social contexts that formed part of their post-school social worlds.

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## ***Appendix A***

### **Letter to school principals**

(Insert Name)  
Principal  
Address Details

Dear (Insert Name)

#### **REQUEST TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH STUDY**

Further to our recent conversation, this letter and attachment formally invites your school to participate in the research study, which I am undertaking to fulfill the requirements of a PhD in Education at Edith Cowan University (ECU). The aim of the study is to investigate the role of evangelical Christian schools in the development of the social and civic attributes that graduates need to effectively enter and engage in a pluralistic workplace. The concept of social capital (which is difficult to define in unambiguous terms), is also a central concept within the research and will be used to understand the nature of the relational networks in the school, home, community and workplace contexts. The research project has approval from the Faculty of Education and Arts Ethics Sub-Committee.

In order to achieve the above aim, this research study will target students from families who are actively involved in a Christian church; who have spent the majority of their primary and secondary schooling years at an evangelical Christian school; and graduated from Year 12 in 2010 or 2011.

If permission for your school to participate is granted, a list of graduates who fit the above profile will be established in consultation with your staff. Each of the identified graduates will be contacted and asked if they are currently employed in a part-time or full-time position on either a casual or permanent basis. Twelve (12) of the identified graduates will be forwarded a letter outlining details of the study and inviting them to participate. Information letters and consent forms will be sent to all graduates for signing and for any who are under the age of 18, the parents will be asked to sign the consent form.

Once a graduate agrees to participate in the project, a series of interviews will be arranged including:

- 1) A semi-structured individual interview with the graduate.
- 2) A semi-structured interview with the graduate's parent(s).

- 3) A semi-structured individual interview with their employer or a colleague from their workplace.

NB: If access to personnel from the workplace is denied, an interview will be arranged with the coach of a sporting team or leader of a social group in which the graduate is involved.

- 4) A follow-up semi-structured interview with the graduate.

Once all of the data from the above interviews and other documentary sources are collected and analyzed, it will be presented to focus groups of educators at each of the participating schools. Each group will include eight (8) educators, the composition of which will be discussed with principals during Semester 2 2012 or Semester 1 2013, in the lead up to the focus group interviews.

All information collected during the research project will be treated confidentially. The interviews will be digitally recorded. All data collected will be stored securely on ECU premises for eight (8) years. At the end of this period, it will be destroyed. The digital recordings will be transcribed and all names and identifying features will be removed to protect the identity of participants and places. Access to the data is restricted to me and the research supervisors listed below.

Please be aware that the data collected will be retained beyond completion of this research study and may be used for subsequent studies undertaken by me during the eight (8) year period that it is held on-site at ECU. It is possible that further insights may emerge from the data gathered that will be of interest to evangelical Christian schools and the broader education sector.

The findings of the research will be published and care will be taken to ensure confidentiality is retained by using alternative names whenever a reference is made to people or places.

Foundational to this research project is a desire to support schools and parents in the process of equipping and preparing young people, so that they can successfully enter and engage in workplaces that bring together people from a diversity of social, cultural and religious backgrounds. My hope is that, through your school's participation, some valuable lessons will be learnt that will benefit your school community and others who share a common educational context and ideology.

All of the interviews and other forms of data gathering will occur between March 2012 and June 2013. If you have any questions about this project titled: *Developing bridging social capital in a pluralistic workplace: The influence of religious homogeneity in Western Australia's evangelical Christian schools*, please contact me on 0439 699 995.

Alternatively, my supervisors can be contacted: Associate Professor Jan Gray (08 9370 6320 or [jan.gray@ecu.edu.au](mailto:jan.gray@ecu.edu.au)) or Associate Professor Terry de Jong (08 6304 5854 or [terry.dejong@ecu.edu.au](mailto:terry.dejong@ecu.edu.au)).

If you would prefer to speak with someone who is aware of the project but not involved in its direct oversight, please feel free to contact:

ECU Research Ethics Officer,  
Kim Gifkins  
(08) 6304 2170.

If you are prepared to approve the involvement of your school's graduates in this project, can you please complete the attached form and return it to me in the enclosed reply paid envelope. Please note, participation in this project is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time and there will be no penalty for doing so.

Upon receipt of the signed letter of approval, I will make contact with you to discuss which staff members are best placed to assist with the compilation of the list of graduates who will be invited to participate in the project.

Yours sincerely

Graeme Cross  
School of Education  
Edith Cowan University

(Insert Date)

## ***Appendix B***

### **Consent form for principals**

#### **Research Project Title**

*Developing bridging social capital in a pluralistic workplace: The influence of religious homogeneity in Western Australia's evangelical Christian schools.*

Please read the following information, enter details as required and sign at the bottom if you agree to participate in this study.

I \_\_\_\_\_ (print name) have read the information included in the letter preceding this consent form and have been informed about all aspects of the research project and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I give my permission for \_\_\_\_\_ (name of school) to participate in this research project.

I agree that the research data gathered for this study may be published, provided that the graduates and school are not identifiable.

I am aware that I can contact Assoc. Professor Jan Gray or Assoc. Professor Terry de Jong if I have any further queries, or if I have concerns or complaints. I have been given their contact detail in the Information Letter.

I understand that the graduates and their parents, employers/workplace colleagues or sporting coaches/social group leaders who agree to participate in the study will be interviewed and the interactions will be digitally recorded and transcribed. I am aware that this will also apply to the focus group interview involving eight (8) staff from the school.

I understand that the researcher will be able to identify participants but that all of the information will be coded, kept confidential and will be accessed only by the researcher and his supervisors. I have been informed that all digital recordings of interviews and any other forms of data collected will be stored in a locked cabinet in a secure location at ECU for eight (8) years and will be destroyed after that time. It is also understood that any names (people and places) referred to in the transcripts will be replaced with pseudonyms, so that the identities can be protected.

I understand that no person or place (including school) will be identified in any report, thesis, or presentation of the results of the research.

I am aware that Graeme Cross may use the de-identified data for subsequent research projects during the period of eight (8) years that it is retained in a secure place at ECU.

I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time without penalty.

Principal's Signature:	Date:
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## ***Appendix C***

### **Letter to graduates**

(Graduate's Name)  
 Graduate of (Insert School Name)  
 Address Details

Dear (Graduate's Name)

#### **INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**

I am undertaking a research project, which aims to learn from the experience of graduates of evangelical Christian schools in WA, who have entered a workplace that brings together people from different backgrounds. If you are employed in a workplace like this in either a full-time or part-time capacity, I am hoping that you will consider meeting with me and sharing your experiences.

By listening carefully to you and other graduates, I hope to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how social and civic skills and attributes are formed and the role of the school, home life and social networks in their development.

This research project will enable me to complete the requirements of a PhD in Education, which I have undertaken through Edith Cowan University (ECU). The project has ethics approval from the Faculty of Education and Arts Ethics Sub-Committee. Endorsement has also been received from the Principal of your school - (Insert School Name).

Should you agree to participate, I will arrange a suitable time for an initial interview. During the interview, I will ask a series of questions that will help you reflect upon, and speak about your experiences during the schooling years and your recent move into the workforce. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers to the questions that will be asked, because the focus is on hearing your story. I expect the initial interview will take approximately 1.5 hours.

In addition to the interview with you, I'd also appreciate the opportunity to interview one or both of your parents and, on a separate occasion, your workplace line-manager/employer or a work-colleague. Ideally, it would be great to interview your line-manager, but if you feel uneasy about me doing that, I'm happy to meet with one of your work-colleagues. If for some reason, no-one at your workplace is available for interview, we may opt to speak with a coach or leader from a sporting or social group in which you are a member.



Everything that is said during the interviews will be treated as strictly confidential. No-one, including your parent(s), will be privy to your statements. The interviews will be digitally recorded and then transcribed. All names and identifying features will be removed from the transcripts to protect the identity of participants. The recorded data and transcripts will be stored securely on ECU premises for a period of eight (8) years. At the end of this period, all data will be destroyed. Access to the data is restricted to me and the research supervisors listed below.

You have the option to withdraw from the interview at any time, particularly if you experience any degree of discomfort or distress when responding to the questions.

Please be aware that the data collected will be retained beyond completion of this research study and may be used for subsequent studies undertaken by me during the eight (8) year period that it is held on-site at ECU. It is possible that further insights may emerge from the data gathered that will be of interest to evangelical Christian schools and the broader education sector.

The findings of the research will be published and care will be taken to ensure confidentiality is retained by using alternative names whenever a reference is made to people or places.

If you have any questions regarding this project titled: *Developing bridging social capital in a pluralistic workplace: The influence of religious homogeneity in Western Australia's evangelical Christian schools*, please contact me on 0439 699 995.

Alternatively, my supervisors can be contacted: Associate Professor Jan Gray (08 9370 6320 or [jan.gray@ecu.edu.au](mailto:jan.gray@ecu.edu.au)) or Associate Professor Terry de Jong (08 6304 5854 or [terry.dejong@ecu.edu.au](mailto:terry.dejong@ecu.edu.au)).

If you would prefer to speak with someone who is not involved in the direct oversight of this project, Kim Gifkins (ECU Research Ethics Officer) can be contacted on (08 6304 2170).

Participation in this project is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty for doing so. If you are prepared to participate, please complete the attached form and send it to me in the reply paid envelope, or via email to [glcross@our.ecu.edu.au](mailto:glcross@our.ecu.edu.au).

Yours sincerely

Graeme Cross  
School of Education  
Edith Cowan University

(Insert Date)

## ***Appendix D***

### **Consent form for graduates**

#### **Research Project Title**

*Developing bridging social capital in a pluralistic workplace: The influence of religious homogeneity in Western Australia's evangelical Christian schools.*

I \_\_\_\_\_ (print name)

formerly of: \_\_\_\_\_ (print name of school)

have read the attached invitation letter and been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in the study and understand that I can ask the researcher any further questions, should they arise.

I understand that my contact information will not be released to any third party.

I understand that the interview will be digitally recorded so that it can be transcribed (converted into typed text).

I understand that any references to people and places in the transcripts will be replaced with alternative names to protect the identities of those involved.

I agree that the research information may be published but I will not be identified.

I am aware that I can contact Assoc. Professor Jan Gray or Assoc. Professor Terry de Jong if I have any further queries, or if I have concerns or complaints. I have been given their contact details in the Information Letter.

I understand that the researcher will be able to identify me but that all of the information I give will be coded, kept confidential and will be accessed only by the researcher and his supervisors. I have been informed that all digital recordings of interviews and any other forms of data collected will be stored in a locked cabinet in a secure location at ECU for eight (8) years and will be destroyed after that time. It is also understood that any names (people and places) referred to in the transcripts will be replaced with pseudonyms, so that the identities can be protected.

I understand that no person or place (including school) will be identified in any report, thesis, or presentation of the results of the research.

I am aware that the researcher (Graeme Cross) may use the data collected for subsequent research projects during the period of eight (8) years that it is retained in a secure place at ECU.

I understand that I will be involved in an initial interview that will take approximately 1.5 hours and a follow up interview that will be 1 hour in duration.

I understand that the researcher will also conduct interviews with my parent(s) and my workplace line-manager/employer or a work-colleague. If no-one from my workplace is available to participate in an interview, I agree to involve a coach from my sporting team or a leader from a social organisation in which I am a member. It has been made clear that the statements made in all of the interviews will be treated as strictly confidential and that the other parties (parents, employers or coach/leader) involved will not be privy to the comments that I make.

I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. This includes any occasion where distress or discomfort arises when responding to the questions. I am aware that should the researcher develop any serious or significant concerns for my welfare or well-being, assistance may be sought from an appropriate government agency.

Signature:	Date:
Signature of Parent:  <i>(Only required for Graduate's who are under 18 Years of age)</i>	Date:

## ***Appendix E***

### **Letter to parents**

(Parent Name)

Address Details

Dear (Parent)

#### **INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**

I am undertaking a research project, which aims to investigate how graduates of Christian schools in Perth, Western Australia navigate the challenges associated with entering a workplace or social/sporting group that brings together people from different backgrounds. (Name of Graduate) is a participant in this study and as his/her parent(s), I would like to conduct an in-depth interview with you, at a time that is mutually convenient. The duration of the interview is contingent upon the time you are able to make available to me, but will definitely be no longer than 1.5 hours.

By listening carefully to parents like you, I hope to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how social and civic skills and attributes are formed and the role of the school, home life and social networks in their development.

This research project will enable me to complete the requirements of a PhD in Education, which I have undertaken through Edith Cowan University (ECU). The project has been approved by the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee. Endorsement has also been received from the Principal of (Insert School Name).

Should you agree to participate, I will arrange a suitable time for us to meet. During the interview, I will ask a series of questions that will help you reflect upon and speak about your observations. Everything that is said during the interview will be treated as strictly confidential. No-one, including your child, will be privy to your statements. The interview will be digitally recorded and then transcribed. All names and identifying features will be removed from the transcripts to protect the identity of participants. The recorded data and transcripts will be stored securely on ECU premises for a period of eight (8) years. At the end of this period, all data will be destroyed. Access to the data is restricted to me and the research supervisors listed below.

Please be aware that the data collected will be retained beyond completion of this research study and may be used for subsequent studies undertaken by me during the eight (8) year period that it is held on-site at ECU. It is possible that further insights may emerge from the

data gathered that will be of interest to evangelical Christian schools and the broader education sector.

The findings of the research will be published and care will be taken to ensure confidentiality is retained by using alternative names whenever a reference is made to people or places.

If you have any questions regarding this project titled: *Developing bridging social capital in a pluralistic workplace: The influence of religious homogeneity in Western Australia's evangelical Christian schools*, please contact me on 0439 699 995.

Alternatively, my supervisors can be contacted: Associate Professor Jan Gray (08 9370 6320) or Associate Professor Terry de Jong (08 6304 5854).

If you would prefer to speak with someone who is not involved in the direct oversight of this project, Kim Gifkins (ECU Research Ethics Officer) can be contacted on (08 6304 2170).

Participation in this project is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time and there will be no penalty for doing so. If you are prepared to participate, please complete the attached form and send it to me in the reply paid envelope, or via email to [glcross@our.ecu.edu.au](mailto:glcross@our.ecu.edu.au).

Yours sincerely

Graeme Cross  
School of Education and Arts  
Edith Cowan University

(Insert Date)

## ***Appendix F***

### **Consent form for parents**

#### **Research Project Title**

*Developing bridging social capital in a pluralistic workplace: The influence of religious homogeneity in Western Australia's evangelical Christian schools.*

I \_\_\_\_\_ (print name),

parent(s) of \_\_\_\_\_ (name of graduate)

have read the attached invitation letter and been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in the study and understand that I can ask the researcher any further questions, should they arise.

I understand that my contact information will not be released to any third party.

I understand that the interview will be digitally recorded so it can be transcribed (converted into typed text).

I understand that any references to people and places in the transcripts will be replaced with alternative names to protect the identities of those involved.

I agree that the research information may be published and that I will not be identified.

I understand that I will be involved in an in-depth interview, the duration of which will be negotiated, but will not exceed 1.5 hours.

I am aware that I can contact Assoc. Professor Jan Gray or Assoc. Professor Terry de Jong if I have any further queries, or if I have concerns or complaints. I have been given their contact details in the Information Letter.

I understand that the researcher will be able to identify me but that all of the information I give will be coded, kept confidential and will be accessed only by the researcher and his supervisors. I have been informed that all digital recordings of interviews and any other forms of data

collected will be stored in a locked cabinet in a secure location at ECU for eight (8) years and will be destroyed after that time. It is also understood that any names (people and places) referred to in the transcripts will be replaced with pseudonyms, so that the identities can be protected.

I understand that no person or place (including school) will be identified in any report, thesis, or presentation of the results of the research.

I am aware that the researcher (Graeme Cross) may use the data collected for subsequent research projects during the period of eight (8) years that it is retained in a secure place at ECU.

I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time without penalty.

Signature:	Date:
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## ***Appendix G***

### **Letter to workplace or social/sporting group contact**

(Employer/Colleague/Coach/Leader's Name)

(Insert Business/Club Name)

Address Details

Dear (Employer/Colleague/Coach/Leader's Name)

#### **INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**

I am undertaking a research project, which aims to investigate how graduates of Christian schools in Perth, Western Australia navigate the challenges associated with entering and participating in a workplace or social/sporting group that brings together people from different backgrounds. (Name of Graduate) is a participant in this study and as his/her (Insert employer, work-colleague, coach/social group leader), I would like to conduct a short individual interview with you, at a time that is mutually convenient.

During the interview, I hope to ask you some questions that will help me explore and understand the nature of your (Insert workplace, sporting or social group) and investigate how (Insert Graduate's Name) has gone about forming relationships with you and any other (Insert staff members, team-mates or members) involved in your (Insert business or club). The duration of the interview is contingent upon the time you are able to make available to me, but will definitely be no-longer than 1 hour.

This research project will enable me to complete the requirements of a PhD in Education, which I have undertaken through Edith Cowan University (ECU). The project has been approved by the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee.

Should you agree to participate, I will arrange a suitable time for us to meet. During the interview, I will ask a series of questions that will help you reflect upon and speak about your observations. Everything that is said during the interview will be treated as strictly confidential. The interview will be digitally recorded and then transcribed. All names and identifying features will be removed from the transcripts to protect the identity of participants. The recorded data and transcripts will be stored securely on ECU premises for a period of eight (8) years. At the end of this period, all data will be destroyed. Access to the data is restricted to me and the research supervisors listed below.



Please be aware that the data collected will be retained beyond completion of this research study and may be used for subsequent studies undertaken by me during the eight (8) year period that it is held on-site at ECU. It is possible that further insights may emerge from the data gathered that will be of interest to evangelical Christian schools and the broader education sector.

The findings of the research will be published and care will be taken to ensure confidentiality is retained by using alternative names whenever a reference is made to people or places.

If you have any questions regarding this project titled: *Developing bridging social capital in a pluralistic workplace: The influence of religious homogeneity in Western Australia's evangelical Christian schools*, please contact me on 0439 699 995.

Alternatively, my supervisors can be contacted: Associate Professor Jan Gray (08 9370 6320) or Associate Professor Terry de Jong (08 6304 5854).

If you would prefer to speak with someone who is not involved in the direct oversight of this project, Kim Gifkins (ECU Research Ethics Officer) can be contacted on (08 6304 2170).

Participation in this project is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time and there will be no penalty for doing so. If you are prepared to participate, please complete the attached form and send it to me in the reply paid envelope, or via email to [glcross@our.ecu.edu.au](mailto:glcross@our.ecu.edu.au).

Yours sincerely

Graeme Cross  
School of Education  
Edith Cowan University

(Insert Date)

## ***Appendix H***

### **Consent form for employers/work colleagues or social group coach/leader**

#### **Research Project Title**

*Developing bridging social capital in a pluralistic workplace: The influence of religious homogeneity in Western Australia's evangelical Christian schools.*

I \_\_\_\_\_ (print name)

Of

\_\_\_\_\_ (name workplace or sporting/social group)

have read the attached invitation letter and been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in the study and understand that I can ask the researcher any further questions, should they arise.

I understand that my contact information will not be released to any third party.

I understand that the interview will be digitally recorded so that it can be transcribed (converted into typed text).

I understand that any references to people and places in the transcripts will be replaced with alternative names to protect the identities of those involved.

I agree that the research information may be published and that I will not be identified.

I understand that I will be involved in a short interview, the duration of which will be negotiated with the researcher, but will not exceed 1 hour.

I am aware that I can contact Assoc. Professor Jan Gray or Assoc. Professor Terry de Jong if I have any further queries, or if I have concerns or complaints. I have been given their contact details in the Information Letter.

I understand that the researcher will be able to identify me but that all of the information I give will be coded, kept confidential and will be accessed only by the researcher and his supervisors.

I have been informed that all digital recordings of interviews and any other forms of data collected will be stored in a locked cabinet in a secure location at ECU for eight (8) years and will be destroyed after that time. It is also understood that any names (people and places) referred to in the transcripts will be replaced with pseudonyms, so that the identities can be protected.

I understand that no person or place (including school) will be identified in any report, thesis, or presentation of the results of the research.

I am aware that the researcher (Graeme Cross) may use the data collected for subsequent research projects during the period of eight (8) years that it is retained in a secure place at ECU.

I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time without penalty.

Signature:	Date:
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## ***Appendix I***

### **Focus group participant**

(Insert School Name)

Address Details

Dear participant

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group interview, which is an important part of a research project I am undertaking to fulfill the requirements of a PhD in Education at Edith Cowan University (ECU). The aim of the study is to investigate the role of evangelical Christian schools in the development of the social and civic attributes that graduates need to effectively enter and engage in a pluralistic workplace. The concept of social capital (which is difficult to define in unambiguous terms), is also a central concept within the research and is being used to understand the nature of the relational networks in the school, home, community and workplace contexts. The research project has approval from the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee. Endorsement has also been received from the Principal of your school.

The focus group interview will be no longer than 1 (one) hour.

By listening carefully to the educators involved in the focus groups, I hope to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how social and civic skills and attributes are formed and the role of the school in their development.

During the interview, I will ask a series of questions that will help participants reflect upon the work of the school. Everything that is said during the interview will be treated as strictly confidential. The interview will be digitally recorded and portions of it will be transcribed. All names and identifying features will be removed from the transcripts to protect the identity of participants. The recorded data and transcripts will be stored securely on ECU premises for a period of eight (8) years. At the end of this period, all data will be destroyed. Access to the data is restricted to me and the research supervisors listed below.

Please be aware that the data collected will be retained beyond completion of this research study and may be used for subsequent studies undertaken by me during the eight (8) year period that it is held on-site at ECU. It is possible that further insights may emerge from the data gathered that will be of interest to evangelical Christian schools and the broader education sector.

The findings of the research will be published and care will be taken to ensure confidentiality is retained by using alternative names whenever a reference is made to people or places.

If you have any questions regarding this project titled: *Developing bridging social capital in a pluralistic workplace: The influence of religious homogeneity in Western Australia's evangelical Christian schools*, please contact me on 0439 699 995.

Alternatively, my supervisors can be contacted: Associate Professor Jan Gray (08 9370 6320) or Associate Professor Glenda Campbell-Evans (08 6304 2500).

If you would prefer to speak with someone who is not involved in the direct oversight of this project, Kim Gifkins (ECU Research Ethics Officer) can be contacted on (08 6304 2170).

Participation in this project is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time and there will be no penalty for doing so. Prior to the commencement of the interview, it is important that the attached consent form is completed and signed.

Yours faithfully

Graeme Cross  
School of Education  
Edith Cowan University

(Insert Date)

## ***Appendix J***

### **Consent form - focus group participants (educators)**

#### **Research Project Title**

*Developing bridging social capital in a pluralistic workplace: The influence of religious homogeneity in Western Australia's evangelical Christian schools.*

I \_\_\_\_\_ (print name),

of \_\_\_\_\_ (name of school)

have read the attached invitation letter and been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in the study and understand that I can ask the researcher any further questions, should they arise.

I understand that my contact information will not be released to any third party.

I understand that the interview will be digitally recorded so portions can be transcribed.

I understand that any references to people and places in the transcripts will be replaced with alternative names to protect the identities of those involved.

I agree that the research information may be published and that I will not be identified.

I understand that I will be involved in a focus group interview, the duration of which will not exceed 1 (one) hour.

I am aware that I can contact Assoc. Professor Jan Gray or Assoc. Professor Glenda Campbell-Evans if I have any further queries, or if I have concerns or complaints. I have been given their contact details in the Information Letter.

I understand that the researcher will be able to identify me but that all of the information I give will be coded, kept confidential and will be accessed only by the researcher and his supervisors. I have been informed that all digital recordings of interviews and any other forms of data collected will be stored in a locked cabinet in a secure location at ECU for eight (8) years and will be destroyed after that time. It is also understood that any names (people and places) referred to in the transcripts will be replaced with pseudonyms, so that the identities can be protected.

I understand that no person or place (including school) will be identified in any report, thesis, or presentation of the results of the research.

I am aware that the researcher (Graeme Cross) may use the data collected for subsequent research projects during the period of eight (8) years that it is retained in a secure place at ECU.

I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time without penalty.

Signature:	Date:
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## ***Appendix K***

### **Interview schedule – school graduate (revised - version 4)**

#### **Semi-Structured & In-Depth Interview Schedule**

##### Interview introduction

- Thank you for agreeing to meet with me and to participate in this research project.
- Introduce myself.
- Are you clear about the aims of this research project? Let me explain.
- I hope to develop an understanding of how social and civic skills and attributes are formed and the role of the school, home life and social networks in their development.
- By speaking with you and others, I hope to learn from your experiences both during the school years and more recently, as you have transitioned into different social environments since graduation.
- The questions and topics that I raise with you are a guide only. You do not have to answer my questions if you feel uncomfortable or do not want to.
- There are no right and wrong answers to the questions that I raise. They have been designed to help me understand your experiences.
- My hope is that you will be able to speak openly and honestly.
- I will be recording this interview and producing transcripts, but please be assured; your identity will remain confidential. All references to people and places will be replaced with alternative names so that your identity can be protected in any published documents.
- Everything you say to me is confidential. It is important that you are aware that the only time I am required to breach that confidence, is if you say something that indicates that someone is at risk of harm – that is, you or someone else you mention. If this was to happen, I would notify you first and then seek help from others.
- If you want to take a break, or stop the interview completely at any time, just let me know.
- Do you have any questions?



### Interview Questions

#### Your Story

- 1) Tell me about yourself – tell me your story. I'd encourage you to go back as far as you can remember and recall the most significant events that have impacted your life and the people who have been most influential.

Possible probes:

- a) What events do you consider to be the most significant?
- b) Tell me about your family.
- c) How involved have you and your family been within a church community?
- d) Tell me about the place of the Christian faith in your life, both past and present.
- e) How would you describe your 'personal characteristics'? eg temperament, passions, strengths and weaknesses?

#### The Workplace (or Social/Sporting Club)

- 2) Tell me about the job you have (or role) and how you came to be a part of this workplace/sporting club/social club.

Possible probes:

- a. Why was this workplace or club attractive to you?
- b. Did anyone assist you in the process of finding and/or applying for the position?

- 3) Since starting in the workplace you've had to build relationships with people. Tell me how you have gone about doing this and the challenges you've had to confront.

Possible probes:

- a. Who do you trust in the workplace and who do you think would say that you are trustworthy?
- b. Describe how people in the workplace, including you, support and assist each other, even in situations where they do not have to.
- c. If you have not already done so, can you tell me about how you get on with your managers and supervisors (or coach/leader).

#### Relational Network – Schooling Years

- 4) Tell me about the relationships and friendships that were most important to you during your time at school. These may include relationships with students, teachers or others on

staff at the school.

- 5) During your senior years at school, did you have any students in your classes with very different cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs or social values to you? Tell me about your relationship with them?
- 6) During your schooling years, did you develop any close friendships/relationships with people who were not connected with a church community? If you did, where did you meet them and how did the friendship form?  
Possible probes:

- a. Who are the people who have had significant influence, or to whom you have turned for direction or advice during this period?
- b. Outside of your church community, have you or any members of your family been involved in any other social, sporting, religious or cultural groups? If yes, please describe the type of group and how you or your family members were involved.

#### **Relational Network - Post School**

- 7) Since finishing school, there have probably been some changes in your relational and friendship network. Tell me about the most significant relationships in your life now and what changes have occurred since leaving school.

Possible probes:

- a) Who are the people who are most influential in your life now?
- b) How involved are you and your family in the church community now?
- c) Are you or your family relationally connected with anyone outside of your church community?

#### **School Impact - Reflections**

- 8) Following is a list of social and civic attributes. Tell what each one means to you and describe how the school has impacted its development.
  - a. *Tolerance and understanding*  
Accepting other people's differences and being aware of others.
  - b. *Respect*  
Treating others with consideration and regard.
  - c. *Responsibility*  
Being accountable for and in charge of a course of action – responsibility for one's own actions, including the exercise of self-discipline; responsibility for the way in which one interacts and cooperates with others especially for resolving differences in constructive, non-violent and peaceful ways; responsibility for one's role in and

contribution to society; and responsibility for one's own role in the maintenance and preservation of the environment).

- d. *Social justice*  
Being committed to the pursuit and protection of the common good where all persons are entitled to legal, social and economic fair treatment.
- e. *Excellence*  
Seeking to accomplish something noteworthy and admirable individually and collectively, and performing at one's best.
- f. *Care*  
Caring for self and showing interest in, concern for and, caring for others.
- g. *Inclusion and trust*  
Being included and including others, listening to one another's thoughts and feelings actively, and creating a climate of mutual confidence.
- h. *Honesty*  
Being truthful and sincere, committed to finding and expressing the truth, requiring truth from others and ensuring consistency between words and deeds.
- i. *Being ethical*  
Acting in accordance with generally agreed rules or standards for right [moral] conduct or practice.

*Close*

- Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about the challenges you have had to confront entering and engaging in the workplace?
- Do you have any questions or concerns that you'd like to raise with me?
- Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I really appreciate your willingness to be involved in this research project. I look forward to meeting with you again later in the year.

## ***Appendix L***

### **Interview schedule – parent(s) (revised - version 3)**

#### **Semi-Structured & In-Depth Interview Schedule**

##### **Interview introduction**

- Thank you for agreeing to meet with me and to participate in this research project.
- Introduce myself.
- Are you clear about the aims of this research project? Let me explain.
- I hope to develop an understanding of how social and civic skills and attributes are formed and the role of the school, home life and social networks in their development.
- By speaking with you and other parents, I hope to understand something about the educational experiences that have influenced your child's development and the relational social networks that have been influential.
- Of particular interest to me is the role of evangelical Christian schools in the development of young people from church going Christian families.
- The questions and topics that I raise with you are a guide only. You do not have to answer my questions if you feel uncomfortable or do not want to.
- There are no right and wrong answers to the questions that I raise. They have been designed to help me learn from your experiences and observations.
- My hope is that you will be able to speak openly and honestly.
- I will be recording this interview and producing transcripts, but please be assured; your identity will remain confidential. All references to people and places will be replaced with alternative names so that your identity can be protected in any published documents.
- Everything you say to me is confidential. It is important that you are aware that the only time I am required to breach that confidence, is if you say something that indicates that someone is at risk of harm – that is, you or someone else you mention. If this was to happen, I would notify you first and then seek help from others.
- If you want to take a break, or stop the interview completely at any time, just let me know.
- Do you have any questions?

### Interview Questions

1) Tell me (graduate's name) story? I'm particularly interested in the experiences and events that have been significant in his/her life and the people who have been influential.

Possible probes:

- a) During the teenage years, from whom did he/she seek advice and direction? Who had the most influence over decisions and choices? Were there any significant adults in their life?
- b) Within your son/daughters relational network, who would you say is 'closest' to them? Have there been any changes in this network since leaving school?
- c) How influential has the Church community been in the past?
- d) Tell me about the place of the Christian faith in his/her life, both past and present.
- e) How would you describe his/her 'personal characteristics'? eg temperament, passions, personality and strengths/weaknesses?

2) I'm interested to know why you decided to send (graduate's name) to (school's name).

3) How would you describe the contribution the school has made to the development of your son/daughter's character (social skills and civic attributes) and their preparation for adult and working life?

Possible probes:

- a) Are there any specific elements of the school's curriculum or environment that have either fostered or impeded your child's character development?
- b) Tell me about the significant and positive relationships your son/daughter had with teachers and students.
- c) Were there any relationships that were significant, but had a negative impact on the decision making and character development of your son/daughter?

4) During the schooling years, did your son/daughter develop any friendships/relationships with people who were not connected with a church community? If they did, where and how did the friendship(s) form?

Possible probe:

- a) Outside of your church community, have you or your children been involved in any social, sporting or cultural groups? If yes, please describe the type of group and nature of involvement.
- 5) Your son/daughter has recently left school and taken up a place in the workforce. Can you please describe for me:
- a) Why this particular job was attractive.
  - b) The nature of the work your child is doing in the workplace.
  - c) Any people (colleagues or managers) in the workplace that your child has spoken about. If possible, describe for me the nature of the relationships they seem to share and how well you think your child gets along with them.
  - d) When people enter the workforce, they are often confronted with the need to develop effective working relationships with others who often have different attitudes, personalities, beliefs and values. Has your son/daughter encountered anyone in the workplace with whom they've found it difficult to connect with relationally because of differences?
- 6) Is there anything that you believe (graduate's name) school could have done to more effectively prepare him/her for the social/relational demands that confront young people beyond the school environment?
- 7) Is there anything that you think you could have done as a family to more effectively prepare your child the social/relational challenges that confront young people when they enter the workplace?
- 8) All schools in Australia aspire to developing in students' the social and civic values that promote social cohesion in our communities. The following list of values have been taken from the Values Education Study, which was commissioned by the Australian Government and prepared by the Curriculum Corporation (2003).

As I describe each value, can you please indicate if you consider (name of graduate)'s behavior and attitudes reflect it and describe how you think the school has influenced its development.

- a) *Tolerance and understanding*  
Accepting other people's differences and being aware of others.
- b) *Respect*  
Treating others with consideration and regard.
- c) *Responsibility*  
Being accountable for and in charge of a course of action – responsibility for one's own actions, including the exercise of self-discipline; responsibility for the

way in which one interacts and cooperates with others especially for resolving differences in constructive, non-violent and peaceful ways; responsibility for one's role in and contribution to society; and responsibility for one's own role in the maintenance and preservation of the environment).

- d) *Social justice*  
Being committed to the pursuit and protection of the common good where all persons are entitled to legal, social and economic fair treatment.
- e) *Excellence*  
Seeking to accomplish something noteworthy and admirable individually and collectively, and performing at one's best.
- f) *Care*  
Caring for self and showing interest in, concern for and, caring for others.
- g) *Inclusion and trust*  
Being included and including others, listening to one another's thoughts and feelings actively, and creating a climate of mutual confidence.
- h) *Honesty*  
Being truthful and sincere, committed to finding and expressing the truth, requiring truth from others and ensuring consistency between words and deeds.
- i) *Being ethical*  
Acting in accordance with generally agreed rules or standards for right [moral] conduct or practice.

- 9) Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about the way (graduate's name) has navigated the challenges associated with the transition from school to the workplace?

Close

- Do you have any questions or concerns that you'd like to raise with me?
- Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I really appreciate your willingness to be involved in this research project.

## ***Appendix M***

### **Interview schedule – work colleague**

#### **Semi-Structured & In-Depth Interview Schedule**

##### **Interview introduction**

- Thank you for agreeing to meet with me and to participate in this research project.
- Introduce myself.
- Are you clear about the aims of this research project? Let me explain.
- I hope to develop an understanding of how social and civic skills and attributes are formed and the role of the school, home life and social networks in their development.
- By speaking with you and other people in workplaces and sporting/social clubs, I hope to understand how school graduates go about developing working relationships, including with those who have different attitudes, personalities, values and beliefs.
- The questions and topics that I raise with you are a guide only. You do not have to answer my questions if you feel uncomfortable or do not want to.
- There are no right and wrong answers to the questions that I raise. They have been designed to help me understand your experiences and observations.
- My hope is that you will be able to speak openly and honestly.
- I will be recording this interview and producing transcripts, but please be assured; your identity will remain confidential. All references to people and places will be replaced with alternative names so that your identity can be protected in any published documents.
- Everything you say to me is confidential. It is important that you are aware that the only time I am required to breach that confidence, is if you say something that indicates that someone is at risk of harm – that is, you or someone else you mention. If this was to happen, I would notify you first and then seek help from others.
- If you want to take a break, or stop the interview completely at any time, just let me know.
- Do you have any questions?

##### **Interview Questions**

- 1) Tell me about your role within this workplace and how you came to be a work colleague of (name of graduate)?
- 2) In a normal shift, what is the nature of the interactions you have with (name of graduate)? How much contact do you have? How closely do you work together?
- 3) Please tell me about each person with whom (name of graduate) must interact closely with in the workplace and how well they have been able to work together.



- 4) Is there anyone in the workplace with whom you think (name of graduate) has developed a particularly good working relationship? Who are they and why do you think they work together so well?
- 5) Is there anyone in the workplace with whom you think (name of graduate) experiences difficulty working alongside? If there is, why do you think these difficulties arise?
- 6) All schools in Western Australia aspire to developing in students social and civic values and attributes. The following list of values have been taken from the Values Education Study, which was commissioned by the Australian Government and prepared by the Curriculum Corporation (2003).

If you are able to do so, as each value is described, please indicate if you consider (name of graduate)'s behavior and attitudes reflect it and provide an example of an incident(s) that causes you to form this view.

- a) *Tolerance and understanding*  
Accepting other people's differences and being aware of others.
- b) *Respect*  
Treating others with consideration and regard.
- c) *Responsibility*  
Being accountable for and in charge of a course of action – responsibility for one's own actions, including the exercise of self-discipline; responsibility for the way in which one interacts and cooperates with others especially for resolving differences in constructive, non-violent and peaceful ways; responsibility for one's role in and contribution to society; and responsibility for one's own role in the maintenance and preservation of the environment).
- d) *Social justice*  
Being committed to the pursuit and protection of the common good where all persons are entitled to legal, social and economic fair treatment.
- e) *Excellence*  
Seeking to accomplish something noteworthy and admirable individually and collectively, and performing at one's best.
- f) *Care*  
Caring for self and showing interest in, concern for and, caring for others.
- g) *Inclusion and trust*  
Being included and including others, listening to one another's thoughts and feelings actively, and creating a climate of mutual confidence.
- h) *Honesty*  
Being truthful and sincere, committed to finding and expressing the truth, requiring truth from others and ensuring consistency between words and deeds.
- i) *Being ethical*  
Acting in accordance with generally agreed rules or standards for right [moral] conduct or practice.

Close

- Do you have any questions or concerns that you'd like to raise with me?
- Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I really appreciate your willingness to be involved in this research project.

## ***Appendix N***

### **Interview schedule – workplace manager or social/sporting group**

#### **Manager/Leader/Coach**

#### **Semi-Structured & In-Depth Interview Schedule**

##### **Interview introduction**

- Thank you for agreeing to meet with me and to participate in this research project.
- Introduce myself.
- Are you clear about the aims of this research project? Let me explain.
- I hope to develop an understanding of how social and civic skills and attributes are formed and the role of the school, home life and social networks in their development.
- By speaking with you and other people in workplaces and sporting/social clubs, I hope to understand how school graduates go about developing working relationships, including with those who have different attitudes, personalities, values and beliefs.
- The questions and topics that I raise with you are a guide only. You do not have to answer my questions if you feel uncomfortable or do not want to.
- There are no right and wrong answers to the questions that I raise. They have been designed to help me understand your experiences and observations.
- My hope is that you will be able to speak openly and honestly.
- I will be recording this interview and producing transcripts, but please be assured; your identity will remain confidential. All references to people and places will be replaced with alternative names so that your identity can be protected in any published documents.
- Everything you say to me is confidential. It is important that you are aware that the only time I am required to breach that confidence, is if you say something that indicates that someone is at risk of harm – that is, you or someone else you mention. If this was to happen, I would notify you first and then seek help from others.
- If you want to take a break, or stop the interview completely at any time, just let me know.
- Do you have any questions?

### Interview Questions

- 1) Tell me about the selection process and the reasons you decided to employ (name of graduate)?

NB: If the interview is with a coach or social group leader, the question will be: Tell me about how (name of graduate) came to be a part of your team/social group.

- 2) What is the nature of the work that (name of graduate) does as your employee?

NB: For a coach/social group leader, the question will be: What is the nature of the role that (name of graduate) has in your team or club.

- 3) Please tell me about each person with whom (name of graduate) must interact closely with in the workplace and how well they have been able to work together.
- 4) Based on your observations, do you think that (name of graduate) has developed any particularly strong relational connections with particular members of staff (or the team/club)?
- 5) Have you observed any relational difficulties that (name of graduate) has experienced in your workplace (or team/club)?

Possible probe:

- a) If there have been some relational difficulties, can you please explain why you think they have arisen.

- 6) All schools in Australia aspire to developing in students' social and civic values and attributes. The following list has been taken from the Values Education Study, which was commissioned by the Australian Government and prepared by the Curriculum Corporation (2003).

If you are able to do so, as each value is described, please indicate if you consider (name of graduate)'s behavior and attitudes reflect it and provide an example of an incident(s) that causes you to form this view.

- a) *Tolerance and understanding*  
Accepting other people's differences and being aware of others.
- b) *Respect*  
Treating others with consideration and regard.
- c) *Responsibility*  
Being accountable for and in charge of a course of action – responsibility for one's own actions, including the exercise of self-discipline; responsibility for the way in which one interacts and cooperates with others especially for resolving differences in constructive, non-violent and peaceful ways; responsibility for

one's role in and contribution to society; and responsibility for one's own role in the maintenance and preservation of the environment).

- d) *Social justice*  
Being committed to the pursuit and protection of the common good where all persons are entitled to legal, social and economic fair treatment.
- e) *Excellence*  
Seeking to accomplish something noteworthy and admirable individually and collectively, and performing at one's best.
- f) *Care*  
Caring for self and showing interest in, concern for and, caring for others.
- g) *Inclusion and trust*  
Being included and including others, listening to one another's thoughts and feelings actively, and creating a climate of mutual confidence.
- h) *Honesty*  
Being truthful and sincere, committed to finding and expressing the truth, requiring truth from others and ensuring consistency between words and deeds.
- i) *Being ethical*  
Acting in accordance with generally agreed rules or standards for right [moral] conduct or practice.

- 7) Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about the way (graduate's name) has navigated the challenges associated with the transition from school to the workplace?

*Close*

- Do you have any questions or concerns that you'd like to raise with me?
- Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I really appreciate your willingness to be involved in this research project.

## ***Appendix O***

### **Focus group – interview schedule**

#### **Question:**

*How does your school contribute to the development of the social and civic values and behaviours graduates need in order to successfully enter and engage relationally in secular or pluralistic contexts, including the workplace?*

Areas that might be explored.

- Religious, cultural, ethnic and socio-economic diversity within the student population.
- School policies, procedures or practices that promote or impede the development of students' social and civic competencies.
- Curriculum
  - Careers education and understanding the dynamics of a secular/pluralistic workplace.
  - Creating an 'awareness of the world', rather than naivety – including drugs, alcohol and sexuality.
  - Leadership training and civic engagement activities.
  - Christian education studies and its structure (primary and secondary).
  - Other?
- Pastoral care

Social and civic values include, among others:

- Care
- Excellence
- Honestly
- Inclusion and Trust
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Social Justice
- Tolerance and Understanding
- Ethical behaviour

## Appendix P

### Pseudonym Coding Table

Schools	Code
Flynn Christian College	F
Luther-King Christian College	L
Wilberforce Christian College	W
Data Collection Sources	
Graduate(s)	G
Parent	P
Employers/Workplace Contacts	E
Documents	D
Focus Group	FG
Focus Group Follow Up Interview	FG2

Graduates	Code
<i>Flynn Christian College</i>	
Christine Cottor	CC
Chris Keever	CK
Nathan Kelty	NK
Sharon Mason	SM
Kelvin Stacey	KS
Simone Vinteck	SV
<i>Luther King Christian College</i>	
Sean Dannit	SD
Samantha Irwin	SI
Francine Innis	FI
Keith Keen	KK
Barbara Steele	BS
Latisha Tannock	LT
<i>Wilberforce Christian College</i>	
Kevin Dean	KD
Brianna Evans	BE
Danielle Monteen	DM
Bill Norris	BN
Leanne Sutton	LS
Stephen Taylor	ST

## Appendix Q

### Data collection and research questions alignment

<b>Research Question 1</b>  <i>How do the graduates of these schools navigate the challenges associated with forming bridging social capital in post-school pluralistic social contexts, including workplaces?</i>			
<b>Rationale</b> This question focused the research on the experiences of the graduates.			
<b>Nature of the data</b>	<b>Role of the researcher</b>	<b>Data collection method</b>	<b>Source of data</b>
Qualitative Words Stories	Interpreter	Semi-structured interviews	Graduates
<b>Aims of the interviews</b> The questions within the interview schedule aimed to elucidate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The nature of the work the graduate was doing and the interpersonal relationships that were critical to the effective execution of their role.</li> <li>• The relational dynamics of the workplace, including identification of colleagues with whom the graduate connects with easily and trusts; and those where there was a degree of distrust or awkwardness.</li> <li>• Any relational challenges that had been difficult to navigate because of social or civic attribute deficiencies.</li> <li>• The strategies the graduate had employed in the process of navigating the relational challenges associated with forming bridging social capital.</li> </ul>			
<b>Links to semi-structured interview schedule</b> See Appendix K – Questions 2 & 3			



<b>Research Question 2</b>			
<i>How has development of the graduates’ social and civic values and attributes been shaped by the various socio-cultural contexts within their social-ecologies?</i>			
<b>Rationale</b> This question focused attention on the role of the school and its confluence with other social –cultural contexts within the social ecology.			
<b>Nature of the data</b>	<b>Role of the researcher</b>	<b>Data collection method</b>	<b>Source of data</b>
Qualitative Words Stories	Interpreter	Semi-structured interview	Graduates
		Focus group interviews	Educators
		Content analysis	Documents
<b>Aim of the interviews (Graduates)</b> The questions incorporated into the interview schedule sought to gain an understanding of how the participants social and civic development had been influenced by their experiences at school and beyond.			
<b>Links to semi-structured interview schedule</b> See Appendix K – Questions 4,5,6 & 8			
<b>Aim of the interviews (Parents)</b> The intent of this question was to explore the ‘broader’ educational experiences (i.e. beyond the school context) that may have influenced development of the graduates’ social and civic attributes and their capacity to form bridging social capital.			
<b>Links to semi-structured interview schedule</b> See Appendix L – Question 3			
<b>Aim of the focus group interviews (Educators)</b> The questions posed in the focus group interviews were developed after analysis of the data generated from the graduate, parent and employer/workplace contact interviews was completed. The interview schedule provided opportunity for the educators to reflect upon the role of the school within the social ecology of the graduates and identify the aspects of the curriculum or school environment that had influenced their social development.			
<b>Links to semi-structured interview schedule</b> See Appendix O			

<b>Research Question 3</b>			
<i>How does the presence or absence of bonding social capital within the social ecologies of these graduates influence their capacity to form bridging social capital in post-school pluralistic workplaces and other social contexts?</i>			
<b>Rationale</b> This question allowed the research inquiry to explore the broader social ecology of the graduates and consider the relationship between bonding and bridging social capital.			
<b>Nature of the data</b>	<b>Role of the researcher</b>	<b>Data collection method</b>	<b>Source of data</b>
Qualitative Words Stories	Interpreter	Semi-structured interview	Graduates Workplace contacts Parents
		Focus group interviews	Educators
<b>Aims of the interview (Graduates)</b> The interview questions allowed the researcher to explore the relational networks into which the graduates were embedded and where social capital resides, so that the interaction between bonding and bridging social capital could be explored. It was also important to provide the graduates with an opportunity to describe the broader social-ecology, so that if other variables were influencing their capacity to form bridging social capital, they could be identified.			
<b>Links to semi-structured interview schedule</b> See Appendix K – Questions 1 - 7			
<b>Aims of the interviews (Parents, Workplace Contacts and Educators)</b> The questions were similar to those asked of the graduates (see above) and provided an opportunity to triangulate the data collected during the graduate interviews.			
<b>Links to semi-structured interview schedule</b> Workplace manager: See Appendix N – Questions 2-7 Workplace colleague: See Appendix M – Questions 3 - 5 Parents: See Appendix L – Questions 1, 2, 4, 5, 7 & 8 Educators: See Appendix O			

<b>Research Question 4</b>			
<i>To what extent do the graduates of these schools exhibit the social and civic values and attributes required to form bridging social capital in their post-school pluralistic social worlds, including workplaces?</i>			
<b>Rationale</b> This question shifted the focus and aimed to elicit judgments about the capacity of the graduates to engage in pluralistic contexts like workplaces and form bridging social capital.			
<b>Nature of the data</b>	<b>Role of the researcher</b>	<b>Data collection method</b>	<b>Source of data</b>
Qualitative Words Stories	Evaluator & Interpreter	Semi-structured Interviews	Graduates Workplace Contacts Parents
		Focus Group Interviews	Educators
		Content Analysis	Documents
<b>Aim of the interviews (Graduates)</b> The interview questions invited the graduates to make judgments about how well prepared they had been to engage in their pluralistic workplace and to form bridging social capital. They were also presented with a list of social and civic attributes and asked to comment on the extent to which they felt they were reflected in their behaviours.			
<b>Links to Semi-Structured Interview Schedule</b> See Appendix K – Questions 4 - 8			
<b>Aim of the interviews (Parents &amp; Workplace Contacts)</b> The interview questions invited participants to make judgments about how effectively the graduates had engaged in their pluralistic workplace and formed bridging social capital. Participants were also presented with a list of social and civic attributes and asked to describe the extent that they characterised the behaviours of the graduates.			
<b>Links to semi-structured interview schedule</b> Workplace manager: See Appendix N – Questions 1 - 7 Workplace colleague: See Appendix O – Questions 1 - 6 Parents: See Appendix L – Questions 5,7 & 8			
<b>Aim of the interviews (Educators)</b> The questions contained within the interview schedule provided an opportunity for the educators to explore their role within the social-ecology of the graduates and consider how effectively their graduates are being prepared for engagement in post-school pluralistic contexts, including workplaces.			
<b>Links to semi-structured interview schedule</b> Educators: See Appendix O			
<b>Aim of document search</b> Any documentation that provided insights into the effectiveness of this group of schools to prepare their students with the social and civic attributes needed to engage in a pluralistic workplace were secured and analysed.			