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Student Engagement and Democratic Justice in Education: For One and for All?

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Abstract

The argument developed throughout this thesis is that student engagement is an important equity issue. The focus, from an equity perspective, is on students from low socio-economic backgrounds because they are the most dependent on education to improve their future life circumstances, yet they are the ones whose engagement tends to be marginalised within the dominant culture of schooling. The impetus for this inquiry developed as a result of a young friend's broken relationship with education that took my mind back to my junior secondary years. I argue, from a historical perspective, that young people from low socio-economic backgrounds tend to be positioned as the "educational Other". There are pockets of hope, however, within schools that work comprehensively to engage the full diversity of their student populations in inclusive, non-marginalising, socially just education.

The theoretical framework for the inquiry draws on Nancy Fraser's (2008) notion of democratic justice with its principles of equal cultural value and parity of participation. Specifically, this investigation was based on the conviction that schools do not need to do something different, on the margins, to engage students from low socio-economic backgrounds; rather, schools need to ensure that all students have equitable access to the opportunities of being engaged in their education, free from social divisions and hierarchies of worth.

The aim of this investigation was to understand how one school, through its people, policies, processes and provision, operated to engage its junior secondary students from low socio-economic backgrounds in social and academic relationships with school and school learning. Student engagement in this study has been contextualised in relation to the interconnections between students' everyday experiences of engagement and the macro-level influences on those experiences.

The investigation was operationalised through a case study approach involving Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) and ethnographic methods. Within the YPAR component, a team of five student volunteers from years 7 to 10 devised and conducted investigations into student engagement with their peers across the junior school. The ethnographic component of the inquiry afforded me the opportunity to participate overtly in the daily life of the school over an 18-month period and to investigate the first year of implementation of a whole-school engagement initiative.

The inquiry found that students from low socio-economic backgrounds were interested in their engagement with school and school learning. The inquiry also revealed that the engagement and participation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds was more likely to be marginalised than that of their more advantaged peers.

The findings suggest that the students' engagement had been enhanced by democratic justice in the form of flexible learning spaces and personalised learning that had been responsive to the students' wellbeing and learning needs, and that had prioritised the students' participation in their learning, their school and their community.

Overall, the findings of this inquiry have reinforced the need for schools to be both vigilant in relation to removing obstacles to the engagement of students from low socio-economic backgrounds and to be visionary with regard to instigating initiatives that promote a socially just educational model that engages all students.

Student Declaration

I, Margaret Ellen Callingham, declare that the PhD Thesis by Publication entitled *Student Engagement and Democratic Justice in Education: For One and for All?* is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signature ██████   Date

Dedication and Acknowledgements

This study is dedicated to "Billy Blue-Eyes" and all the other young people from economically poor backgrounds whose educational needs have been marginalised in junior secondary school.

Thank you to Victoria University and, specifically, to Professor Kitty te Riele, Dr Alison Baker and Associate Professor Mark Vicars for their support and assistance.

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Thank you to my five co-researchers – Christy, Lachlan, Brayden, Torie and Katie – who embraced this project so wholeheartedly and provided inspiration to me as I conducted my research alongside them.

Thank you also to academic colleagues. Patty Towl, your encouragement and wisdom uplifted me through the hard slog. Roger Holdsworth, your generous support of the student-researchers, this project and me was very much appreciated.

I would also like to acknowledge Brenton Thomas, from Fresh Eyes Australia, who provided editing services for the thesis in accordance with the requirements of the university-endorsed *Guidelines for Editing of Research Theses*, which form part of the Australian Standards for Editing Practices.

Thank you to my family, without whose support I would never have been able to undertake or complete this all-consuming endeavour.

Furthermore, I acknowledge God's grace in my own lifelong journey of learning.

Preface

This thesis by publication (TBP) is not a conventional doctoral dissertation because several years have passed between the initial academic publication, in 2013, and this thesis submission in 2019. A TBP, it could be argued, tends to be more transparent of the developmental nature of the research project and its processes. The inclusion of four academic publications in this thesis means that it presents a different format to a conventional thesis. The format includes a three-part exegesis with four academic publications incorporated within – three journal articles and one book chapter. The three parts of the exegesis, however, follow the format of a conventional dissertation:

- Part 1 comprises four chapters that provide an overview of the project.

- Part 2 comprises three chapters that present the findings.

- Part 3 comprises two chapters that provide a discussion and conclusion.

From a formatting perspective, each of the publications is presented in the body of the exegesis as its own chapter. The first publication, which is a literature review, is presented in Part 1. The other three publications are presented in Part 2 as findings chapters. Unlike conventional findings chapters, the three academic publications contain their own literature and methodology sections.

The publications that are an integral part of this thesis are as follows:

Callingham, M. (2013). Democratic youth participation: A strength-based approach to youth investigating educational engagement. *Youth Studies Australia, 32*(4), 48–56.

Callingham, M. (2016). Outside in: One school's endeavours to keep disadvantaged young people in school and engaged. In P. Towl & S. A. Hemphill (Eds.), *Locked out: Resolving school exclusion contexts in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand* (pp. 196–215). Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

Callingham, M. (2016). Engaging student input on student engagement in learning. *International Journal on School Disaffection, 12*(1), 3–22.

Callingham, M. (2017). From discrete intervention to engage marginalised students to whole-school initiative to engage all students. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 21*(2), 131–145.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACARA	Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
BCEC	Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre
BERA	British Educational Research Association
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DET	Department of Education and Training
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
HOL	Hands on Learning
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
LOTE	Languages Other Than English
MAP	McClelland Academy Program
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NRC&IM	National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PISA	Programme for International Assessment
YPAR	Youth Participatory Action Research

Part 1 – Overview

Part 1 of this three-part exegesis comprises four chapters that provide an overview of the investigation.

Chapter 1 includes an overall contextualisation of the research project and its questions as well as an overview of the structure of this thesis by publication.

Chapter 2 explores literature from the field.

Chapter 3 is *Democratic youth participation: A strength-based approach to youth investigating educational engagement* – which includes a synthesis of literature that framed the development of the research proposal.

Chapter 4 provides an account of the research methodology and methods.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Prologue: Contextualising the Research Project

Growing up on a housing commission estate in a country town in northern Victoria, Australia, from the late 1950s through to the mid-1970s, I had no comprehension of the profound influence that experience would have on my educational opportunities. In this town, segregation according to social class and faith was a way of life. Children attended either the Catholic or government primary school. When the time came to make the transition to secondary level, financially better-off families chose to bypass the public high school in the town. Middle-class families sent their children to the Catholic secondary school in the nearby regional city and wealthy families sent their children to private boarding schools in Melbourne, the capital city of Victoria. Private boarding schools provided country students with and important stepping stone to university. This opportunity, however, was only available to the children of economically elite families.

Upon my progression from the government primary school to the government secondary school, I came to accept the class-based myth that people from economically poor backgrounds were better with their hands than with their heads and that it was "normal" for students from working-class and poor families to leave school by age 15. The perceived message that young people from low socio-economic backgrounds did not have an academic orientation and were best guided into vocational pathways was tacitly reinforced by teachers, parents and other students. As a result, many young people from the housing commission estate left school to undertake vocational training at the technical school or to commence work locally doing farm work or factory labour in one of the two fruit-processing canneries or at the local dairy factory. I had planned to follow my older brother to the technical school to pursue a six-month secretarial course. The restricted educational opportunities I was exposed to in junior secondary school neither recognised my talents nor nurtured my potential, and it was much later, as an adult, that I came to the realisation that my local secondary school had fulfilled its function as a mechanism of social order (Tomlinson, 1981).

My plans to be a secretary changed the day I attended the technical school to enrol in the secretarial course. A teacher from that institution explained to me that during the

following year (1972), female students would be eligible to enrol in the two-year business studies certificate and he offered me that opportunity. At that critical stage in my life, no teacher from the high school had spoken to me about staying on at school, had questioned my proposed pathway or had suggested possible career choices. My graduation, two years later with a qualification in business studies, meant that I was able to fulfil my mother's dream for me of escaping that small country town and small country life. Just prior to my 18th birthday, my family drove me to the "big smoke" of Melbourne to commence a job in the central business district of the city.

In 1972, the election of the Whitlam Labor government in Australia also had a significant impact on my educational opportunities. In his campaign speech, Gough Whitlam announced that Labor would vastly expand federal budget expenditure on education as "the key to equality of opportunity" (Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House, n.d.). True to its campaign promise, the government introduced policies to abolish university fees and to introduce income support for students. It was through the equity imperative of these education policies that I realised my father's dream for me to go on to higher education when I enrolled in the expanded area of teacher education as a mature-age, working-class, female student.

When I reflect on my educational opportunities, I feel extremely grateful for the reforms of 1972 that addressed both gender and socio-economic inequities and led to my participation in senior secondary and higher education. However, the participation and engagement of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds continues to be marginalised in junior secondary education and many young people underachieve academically and leave school early as a result (Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (BCEC), 2017; Hampshire & Considine, 2015). My young friend, Bill, who I had taught in Year 3, is an example of a student whose participation and engagement has been marginalised.

Bill, who had a complex family history, was to commence secondary school in 2012. At primary school, Bill's social and emotional needs had been supported through the wellbeing team. Early into the 2012 school year, the Wellbeing Coordinator at Bill's secondary school commented to me that Bill had the worst family history in the school but that he was not the worst kid in the school. Despite the coordinator's assessment of Bill and the challenges he faced in his life, early in semester two he was "moved on" from the school. It was actually Bill's experience of being moved on that took my mind back to my junior secondary years and to how children from economically poor

backgrounds had been made to feel that they did not belong. This started me wondering about how junior secondary schools could better engage young people from economically poor backgrounds. A contemporary perspective on the experience of socio-economic marginalisation is articulated by Karan, a 15-year-old from New Zealand:

> People often look down onto poor children and don't think that they're going far in life and as a result they get less opportunities and that cycle of poverty keeps going because they are treated differently because of that socio-economic circumstance. (Save the Children NZ & UNICEF NZ, 2016, p. 28)

Karan's perspective resonates with the understandings I have of socio-economic inequity in educational domains that have informed the rationale of this study.

Introduction

This chapter provides an overall contextualisation of the research project that is the subject of this thesis. I outline my researcher positioning and indicate the research aim and questions, along with the methodological approach. I articulate how students from low socio-economic backgrounds tend to be positioned as the educational Other, and the equity imperative of student engagement, which is conceptualised within an overarching framework of democratic, socially just education.

I also introduce the theoretical framework of democratic justice and the importance of educational reforms that provide pockets of hope for more inclusive, non-marginalising, socially just education. I conclude Chapter 1 with an outline of the overall structure of this thesis by publication.

Researcher Positioning

In the Preface to *Schools and Social Justice*, Connell (1993) argues that academics "who have been well served by the education system … should never forget that there are many others who have been much worse served" (p. iii). My researcher positioning was formulated as a result of my own educational experiences in junior secondary education, as a student from a low socio-economic background, and later as a teacher with a passion to engage with students whose participation tended to be marginalised in education domains.

My professional experience, in paid and volunteer capacities, has been framed by working with young people from primary school age through to their mid-20s in a

variety of educational, community and custodial settings. This personal background and subsequent understandings of socio-economic inequity in educational domains has galvanised my desire to contribute to the discourse on student engagement within an overarching framework of democratic, socially just education.

Research Aim and Questions

Inequity in educational domains due to the intersectionality of social factors and identities is widespread (Gonski et al., 2011) and has been emphasised in schools in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 2006), the United Kingdom (Sammons, Toth, & Sylva, 2015), New Zealand (Becroft, 2016) and Australia (Department of Education and Training (DET), 2018). Inequity has a deleterious effect on the educational experiences, opportunities and outcomes of young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (L. Campbell, McGuire, & Stockley, 2012; Connell, 1994; Graham, Sweller, & Van Bergen, 2010; Raffo et al., 2010; Reay, 2017; Slee, 2011; Smyth & Wrigley, 2013). My focus in this study is on student engagement as an important equity issue. This strength-based focus on student engagement represents a conceptual flipping of the taken-for-granted connection between economically disadvantaged students and educational disengagement.

In line with Yazzie-Mintz and McCormick (2012), student engagement has been conceptualised as a complex issue of students' social and academic relationships with school and school learning. The aim of the investigation was to understand how a school, through its people, policies, pedagogy and opportunities for participation, operated to engage its junior secondary students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Student engagement in this study is contextualised in relation to the interconnections between students' everyday experiences of engagement within the school and learning community and the macro-level influences on those experiences. This is in contrast to the plethora of studies into student disengagement that link deficits in students and schools with socio-economic disadvantage without considering the complicity of wider sociological relations of power (McGregor, Mills, Te Riele, Baroutsis, & Hayes, 2017).

I share the view of C. Mills and Gale (2010) that schooling needs to "open up opportunities for *all* young people, especially those disadvantaged by poverty and marginalised by difference" (p. 2, emphasis in original). Further, I contend that educational inquiries themselves need to open up opportunities for the integral

participation of young people, especially those who tend to be marginalised in educational domains.

The study was operationalised through the following research questions:

- How does a school in a low socio-economic area engage its junior secondary students (years 7 to 10) in social and academic relationships with school and school learning?
- How does the notion of democratic justice play out in a school to shape student engagement?

I drew on Fraser's (2008) notion of "democratic justice" with its principles of equal cultural value and parity of participation to make sense of the findings and to develop theory.

Methodology

After considering the best way to answer the research questions, I employed a case study approach. The strength of case studies is the opportunity for close examination of a specific case utilising methodological eclecticism to obtain multiple perspectives (Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Stake, 2008; Walker, 1980). This was important because I chose to draw on an interpretivist and a critical paradigm and to include both an ethnographic and participatory action research component in the research design. The site for the case was a government secondary school in a low socio-economic outer south-eastern suburb of Melbourne. The focus of the case study was student engagement at junior secondary level (years 7 to 10).

Within the ethnographic component of the inquiry, my immersion in the school milieu (Zollers, Ramanathan, & Yu, 1999) over an 18-month period facilitated a critical interpretation of how the historical, social, economic and political context of the school operated to shape student engagement at junior secondary level. This component, which afforded me the opportunity to participate overtly in the daily life of the school as a volunteer teacher for three days a week, facilitated situated observations of students and staff in both formal and informal settings within the school. Additional data was generated through informal and formal interviews with students and staff, document collection, and the generation of artefacts with students in classes and with staff at meetings (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Within the participatory action research component of the inquiry, knowledge production moved into the control of those most affected by the social phenomenon of student engagement – the students themselves. Data collection included working with the principles of co-production in which students' own experiences were critical to understanding student engagement (Yazzie-Mintz & McCormick, 2012). A team of five student volunteers from years 7 to 10 devised and conducted investigations into student engagement with their peers across the junior school. After two research training sessions, the team of student-researchers was supported to: choose methods for data collection; develop and pilot data collection instruments; collect and analyse data; and disseminate findings and recommendations to the school community and beyond. The student-led dissemination included one-on-one meetings with year-level coordinators; PowerPoint presentations relayed via television screens to the student population at each year level; a video played to the school leadership team, school council and students' families at an evening exhibition; and a co-authored article in an online journal on student participation.

The Educational Other

Roger Slee (2011), in his thought-provoking book *The Irregular School: Exclusion, Schooling and Inclusive Education*, describes how, within mainstream education, a student with a disability is positioned as an "educational Other". The following section frames, from a historical perspective, the educational plight of young people from low socio-economic backgrounds, who also tend to be positioned as the educational Other within mainstream education.

When mass secondary education was established in Australia in the 1950s, it was compulsory and free up to the age of 15 (Cuervo & Wyn, 2011). At this time, and through to the early 1970s, only a minority of students (those from economically advantaged backgrounds) continued into senior secondary schooling. The majority of students left at age 15 to pursue full-time work and start earning a living (Cuervo & Wyn, 2011; Slee, 2013). Circumstances changed in the late 1970s when Australia's economic base shifted from a predominance of primary industries, manufacturing and manual work that supported youth labour markets to automation, computerisation and a service sector that provided part-time jobs that could not sustain livelihoods (Cuervo & Wyn, 2011).

This shift compelled many students from less economically advantaged backgrounds to complete senior secondary schooling to improve their employment prospects (Cuervo & Wyn, 2011; Slee, 2013). However, young people from economically poor backgrounds continued to leave school by Year 10 (Teese & Polesel, 2003; P. Thomson, 2002). Although economic necessity was a compelling reason for young people to look for work, there were often cumulative reasons for not completing secondary school, as noted by Teese and Polesel (2003) in their Australian study into mass secondary education:

> Nearly half of the group who did not finish Year 10 report that they did not get on with most of their teachers, over half could not engage with the schoolwork, and nearly 40 per cent say that they were not doing well enough to continue. A sizeable proportion had been asked by their schools to leave. (p. 143)

The reasons indicate that the overarching issue for the majority of students was marginalisation, both social (not getting on with teachers; asked to leave) and academic (could not engage with school work; not doing well). Such marginalisation positioned these young people from economically poor backgrounds as the educational Other and they underachieved and left school early as a result.

There is an equity problem in educational domains when early departures from secondary schools of students from low-income families do not raise questions. Unquestioning acceptance of this situation perpetuated the class-based myth that these students had characteristics not suited to secondary schooling rather than that they needed to be engaged in inclusive, non-marginalising education within secondary schools. Through to the end of the 20th century, with minimal employment available to youth, academic underachievement and leaving school early left young people from low socio-economic backgrounds with limited exchange value in the labour market and susceptible to long-term unemployment (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Wyn, 2009).

In the 21st century, youth unemployment in Australia has continued to rise (Wyn, 2015) and the Australian government, in line with other industrialised nations, has legislated to lift the secondary school retention and attainment rates (Council of Australian Governments (COAG), 2009a). While some aspects of education have changed, including new forms of social class inequities wrought through the competitive culture of marketisation (Connell, 2012; Hattie, 2016; Reay, 2016), one aspect that has not changed is the marginalisation of students from economically poor backgrounds and the inequities in their educational outcomes (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Graham, Van

Bergen, & Sweller, 2016; Raffo et al., 2010; Reay, 2017). However, unlike in the previous century, educational outcomes quantified by socio-economic background are now highly visible.

Inequities in academic and social outcomes of 15-year-olds are now quantified every three years through data from the *Programme for International Assessment* (PISA)[1]. This data emphasises how students from the lowest socio-economic quartile consistently underachieve academically compared to students from the highest socio-economic quartile. In 2015 in Australia, this included a gap of approximately three years of schooling in reading literacy, mathematical literacy and scientific literacy (S. Thomson, De Bortoli, & Underwood, 2016). In addition, the social outcomes of students from the lowest socio-economic quartile consistently indicated lower levels of student wellbeing (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2017) and a lower sense of belonging at school (Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), 2018).

Socio-economic inequity in school retention has also been documented in a comprehensive analysis of education across Australia that included a comparison of the percentage of young people who were not studying at age 16 (BCEC, 2017). On average, 7.3% of 16-year-olds across Australia were not studying, but across the 50 most educationally disadvantaged areas, the average quadrupled to 29.5%, which is almost 37 times higher than the mere 0.8% of 16-year-olds who were not in study across the 50 most educationally advantaged areas (p. 101). The consequences of not being engaged in education vary considerably, depending on a young person's socio-economic background. According to the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine (NRC&IM) (2004), students from advantaged backgrounds "get by or get second chances", whereas students from disadvantaged backgrounds "are less likely to graduate and consequently face severely limited opportunities" (p. 1).

Lower academic attainment and lower school retention have negative repercussions on the personal, lived experiences of young people. Yet, it has been reported that a large proportion of young people from low socio-economic backgrounds who felt unhappy about their educational experiences and about leaving school, received little encouragement to remain (Hampshire & Considine, 2015). Hampshire and Considine's (2015) Australian study documented the reasons young people gave for leaving school

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1. http://www.oecd.org/pisa/aboutpisa/

during Year 10 and many paralleled the social and academic marginalisation cited by the 20th-century young people. Reasons for leaving school that include feelings of not doing well enough to continue and of not fitting in, poor relations with teachers and other students, and coercion from teachers to leave, have persisted. These reasons suggest that marginalisation is still positioning young people from economically poor backgrounds as the educational Other, with academic underachievement and early school departures a consequence.

The difference for 21st-century young people who leave school early is that, according to Australian policy, they are required to "participate in schooling (meaning in school or an approved equivalent) until they complete Year 10" (COAG, 2009b, p. 6). Therefore, many young people are compelled to continue their education within a residual tier (Slee, 2011) of "approved equivalent" provision. In the Australian state of Victoria in 2015, 60 per cent of students surveyed who had left school in Year 10 or below had continued in education or training (Department of Education and Training (DET), 2015b, p. 3). Much of this educational provision utilised inclusive practices that were counter to the marginalisation the young people had experienced within their secondary schools (Plows & Baker, 2017).

However, when young people from low socio-economic backgrounds depart secondary schools in their mid-teens to continue their education in "approved equivalent" provision and questions are not raised about socio-economic inequities in educational domains, then class-based segregation continues. According to Smyth (2016), a shift from societal responsibility to individual responsibility has led to a policy approach to school "failure" in which "young people are constructed as self-inflicted casualties of an unproblematic system" (p. 134). This approach perpetuates the class-based myth that these young people need a different form of education within a marginalised sector rather than that they need to be engaged in inclusive, non-marginalising education within the school education sector.

Student engagement in this investigation, in line with other educational inquiries into engagement, is considered an important theoretical construct (Vallee, 2017), both from the perspective of "individual engagement and the equity objective of engaging all learners" (OECD, 2013, p. 158).

Student Engagement

Student engagement is a complex notion with no consensus about its definition, measurement, or how it is operationalised (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Lawson & Lawson, 2013). Engagement-related studies in the field of education are generally interested in factors that promote students' academic outcomes, yet it has been proposed that benefits to students go beyond the academic realm to promote students' health and wellbeing (Conner & Pope, 2014; NRC&IM, 2004). It has also been suggested that the social route to student engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004), such as through participation in extracurricular activities, can yield academic benefits (Abbott-Chapman et al., 2014). The theoretical rationale is that involvement in extracurricular activities "may garner social competencies and resources, which foster school connectedness and academic success" (Lawson & Lawson, 2013, p. 439). Levels of student engagement are also understood to vary, both within and between individuals at different times and in different situations, and this has emphasised the need for attention to the impact of contextual influences, including classroom, school and family contexts (Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012a).

The social phenomenon of student engagement is understood to be embedded within wide sociological relations of power and to involve a complex web of relations across multiple domains. For example, in a discussion of multilevel factors that affect students' academic engagement, the (NRC&IM, 2004) explained how some factors, such as the practices of an educator, have a direct effect on particular students at a particular high school, whereas other factors, such as educational and social policies, indirectly affect large numbers of students across a number of high schools. Taking into consideration wider relations of power, Teese and Polesel (2003) argue that some school-level findings "acquire meaning only once their implicit references to the broader culture and structures within which schools work are made explicit" (p. 187).

Even when educational research considers the complexity of student engagement across multiple levels, according to Vallee (2017), the political nature of engagement is often omitted. The political nature of student engagement in this investigation is presented in the equity ideal of engaging all students in social and academic relationships with school and school learning and, as such, student engagement is conceived of within an overarching framework of democratic, socially just education.

Democratic Justice

Democracy and social justice in education are exemplified in the educational theories and practices of John Dewey (1893, 1902, 1916, 1938, 1939), who promoted engagement in education as a means of liberation from life circumstances. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1916) emphasised that "the place of the individual in society should not be determined by birth or wealth or any conventional status, but by his own nature as discovered in the process of education" (p. 156). This equity imperative continues to be of importance to educators and researchers, as noted by Lamb, Jackson, Walstab, and Huo (2015):

> Universal access to early childhood, primary and secondary education, a robust system of apprenticeships and vocational education and an extensive public university sector should work to provide opportunities for all young Australians to do well, irrespective of who they are, where they live or what school they attend. (p. 1)

Political philosopher Nancy Fraser further theorised the co-implication of democracy and social justice in her notion of "democratic justice" (2008) with its principles of equal cultural value and parity of participation. Fraser's (2008) notion of democratic justice is enacted through parity of participation and its double quality: first, that social arrangements are just "only if they permit all the relevant social actors to participate as peers in social life" (p. 54) (that is, democratic participation); and, second, that democratic norms are legitimate "only if they can command the assent of all concerned in fair and open processes of deliberation, in which all can participate as peers" (p. 54) (that is, democratic representation).

Applying the notion of democratic justice in this study allows for a critical exploration of social arrangements and norms in education. By exposing inequity and identifying more democratically just modes of operation, a greater diversity of students may be engaged in and benefitting from their education, free from social divisions and hierarchies of worth (Gergen & Dixon-Román, 2014; Reay, 2011).

According to Fraser (2008), a strategy to overcome injustice involves dismantling institutionalised obstacles to parity of participation. In educational domains, this means clearing structural, relational and cultural obstacles to learning (McGregor et al., 2017). Therefore, democratic justice could be understood to be a two-part process with one part upholding the principles of equal cultural value and parity of participation and the second part dismantling obstacles that block or impede these principles. The two-part

process makes clear the co-implication of democracy and justice as well as the co-implication of democracy and the dismantling of injustice.

Fraser's (2008) notion of democratic justice provides a theoretical framework for a critical inquiry into how junior secondary schooling facilitates non-marginalising education that fosters each student's engagement and inclusion, and supports each student to participate and flourish, no matter what their family background or life circumstances (Francis, Mills, & Lupton, 2017; McGregor et al., 2017; M. Mills, McGregor, Hayes, & Te Riele, 2015; Reay, 2017). As concluded in a recent report, *Counting the Costs of Lost Opportunity in Australian Education* (Lamb & Huo, 2017), "it remains an important task to look at what strategies are needed to transform our schools and make our education system work well for all" (p. 53). This conclusion emphasises the importance of shining a light on educational initiatives that strive to provide pockets of hope for students whose engagement and participation are marginalised within the dominant culture of schooling.

Pockets of Hope

Educational researchers have been advocating for reforms in order to provide education that is non-marginalising (Te Riele, 2008), inclusive (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Slee, 2011; Wierenga & Taylor, 2015), equitable (Harris, Carrington, & Ainscow, 2017; Reay, 2017), and socially just (Keddie, 2012; McGregor et al., 2017; Smyth, Down, & McInerney, 2014). What these types of reforms tend to have in common is that they are not driven from the top down. Rather than be mandated from above, Udvari-Solner and Keyes (2000) contend that reflective dialogue and critical questioning from within schools and organisations prompt more naturally occurring reform towards inclusion. Socially just educational reforms that are non-marginalising, inclusive and equitable are less common within the "mainstream" education sector but they are increasingly being taken up in a sector of flexible learning provision (Wierenga & Taylor, 2015).

When socially just educational reform does occur within mainstream schools, as Smyth and Fasoli (2007) found in their case study of an Australian secondary school, it tends to be initiated within government schools in low socio-economic areas that work in-house to redress inequalities and enhance the educational capacity of the school. The importance of redressing inequalities was also found by Kannapel and Clements (2005) in the United States in high poverty schools that defied the odds of low expectations and low academic performance. For young people with a history of educational

marginalisation and underachievement, pockets of educational reform offer them hope of more inclusive, socially just educational experiences (McGregor & Mills, 2012; Plows & Baker, 2017; Te Riele, Plows, & Bottrell, 2016).

Te Riele (2014) contends that it is important to look at pockets of educational reform both for the understandings that can be derived from the actions and outcomes of these local initiatives and for the insights they offer to inform more systemic education reform. In the research study that is the subject of this thesis, I undertook an in-depth, close-up examination of one school in a low socio-economic area that was attempting to enhance student engagement and reduce student marginalisation through the implementation of a more socially just educational model.

Thesis Structure

My thesis by publication comprises a three-part exegesis with four publications incorporated within as chapters. The thesis structure includes:

Part 1 – Overview

- Chapter 1 – Contextualises the research project

- Chapter 2 – Literature Review

- Chapter 3 – *Democratic Youth Participation: A Strength-Based Approach to Youth Investigating Educational Engagement.* A synthesis of literature that framed the research proposal

- Chapter 4 – Methodology and methods

Part 2 – Findings

- Chapter 5 – *Outside in: One School's Endeavours to Keep Disadvantaged Young People in School and Engaged.* This chapter presents findings on the ways that one school kept young people from backgrounds of socio-economic disadvantage in school and engaged

- Chapter 6 – *Engaging Student Input on Student Engagement in Learning.* This chapter presents findings on student engagement gleaned from the Youth Participatory Action Research component of the study

- Chapter 7 – *From Discrete Intervention to Engage Marginalised Students to Whole-School Initiative to Engage All Students.* This chapter presents findings on student engagement in a whole-school innovation that was designed to engage all students

Part 3 – Conclusion

- Chapter 8 – Discussion of what was found in relation to the aim and research questions

- Chapter 9 – Conclusion and implications of the research

Chapter 2
Literature Review

Introduction – The Educational Other

Secondary schooling in Australia, it has been found, does not fully engage young people from low-income families in social and academic relationships with school and school learning (ACER, 2018; BCEC, 2017; Smyth & Fasoli, 2007). This means that young people who already face economic adversity in their lives are placed at a further disadvantage within an education system that fails to recognise or draw on their potential. Consequently, these young people, who are positioned as the 'educational Other', tend to be treated as a social and academic liability to a school's performance in the educational marketplace (Slee, 2011).

At an individual level, schools tend to disenfranchise and marginalise particular students through social divisions and hierarchies of worth (Gergen & Dixon-Román, 2014; Reay, 2011). At a systemic level, education systems tend to inscribe narrow conceptions of schooling and school success to ensure that the performativity of class advantage and disadvantage is reinforced.

Within hegemonic educational discourses, socio-economic disadvantage has tended to be linked with disengagement. In addition, educational interventions to address this disengagement have tended to be linked with changes that "disadvantaged" students need to make to conform to the dominant discourse of schooling (Graham et al., 2016; Te Riele, 2007). According to Udvari-Solner and Keyes (2000), funds are siphoned to special interventions "to 'fix' students and ignore the school itself" (p. 522). With such a narrow and deficit view of the social and academic potential of economically disadvantaged students, it is not surprising that little headway has been made in addressing the socio-economic inequity in educational experiences and outcomes (Reid, 2015; Victorian Auditor-General, 2012). As Munns (2007) explains:

> The challenge remains for those concerned about social justice and education to find ways through which educationally disadvantaged students might be encouraged to embrace classrooms and a school system that have worked against the majority of their people over long periods of time. (p. 301)

Insight into why classrooms and the school system have worked against students from economically poor backgrounds can be gleaned from Fraser's (2000) theorisation of recognition as it applies to cultural difference and economic inequality. In this

theorisation, misrecognition is a form of status subordination. When applied to an educational context, a student's social and academic relationships with school and school learning can be seen to be "regulated by institutionalized patterns of cultural value that constitute some categories of social actors as normative [such as students from advantaged backgrounds] and others as deficient or inferior [such as students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds]" (Fraser, 2000, p. 114). That is, "schooling functions to displace students who are deemed different" (Vadeboncoeur, 2009, p. 294), who are positioned as the educational Other.

The educational Other is an unacknowledged social position in Australia's education system (Slee, 2011) and yet it is experienced by more than 70,000 students per year who are educated in a residual tier of education that has become known as the flexible learning sector (Te Riele, 2014). Allowance for education outside of Australia's three acknowledged school sectors of government, Catholic, and independent has been formalised within Australia's youth participation policy as "approved equivalent" provision (COAG, 2009b, p. 6). This inclusion in national policy has been necessary due to the exclusion from school, through both formal and informal processes, of young people who nevertheless are subject to the full range of government policies that mandate their compulsory completion of Year 10 (plus other participation requirements until age 17). The result has been an increase in the size of the flexible learning sector in Australia into the 21st century, with over 900 educational programs documented across the nation in 2014 (Te Riele, 2014). The flexible learning sector predominantly exists because of the failure of the school education sectors to accommodate all learners, and its core mission is "to enable young people for whom schooling previously has not worked well to learn and to achieve valued credentials, improved wellbeing, and enhanced life opportunities" (Te Riele, 2014, p. 76). However, the status of the flexible learning sector remains unacknowledged as a legitimate sector within the education system.

Te Riele (2014) emphasises that the flexible learning sector predominantly provides education to students with high needs, yet because its role is not legitimated within the infrastructure of the education system, there is no formal process for Australia's needs-based funding model to apply "(i) a base amount of funding for every student; and (ii) additional loadings for students and schools who need extra support" (*The Australian Education Act 2013* (Cth)). The incongruity is that the so-called needs-based funding model does not encompass students who are the most in need of extra support; those

who have been failed by the "legitimate" school sectors. This means that schooling within the flexible learning sector is not provided with secure funding to facilitate long-term staffing, planning and resourcing relative to the educational needs of its students (Te Riele, 2014).

Sector and funding inequity is not unique to Australia, with Nairn and Higgins (2011) describing the situation in New Zealand, where "if the state is involved in addressing failure, it does so as cheaply as possible and away from the public gaze" (p. 182). The propensity for "approved equivalent schooling" to be "out of sight out of mind", drew M. Mills, Renshaw, and Zipin (2013) to conceptualise them as "rubbish" on the educational landscape that "is an inevitable by-product of a system that primarily focuses on academic outcomes, regards young people as human capital and valorises market competitiveness as a means of promoting excellence" (pp. 16–17). Away from public scrutiny, this "approved" by-product provides a convenient repository that enables the status quo of inequities and disparities in the education system to continue unchallenged and, according to Graham et al. (2016, p. 50), "forestall[s] the types of reforms that might otherwise lead to a more inclusive and effective system overall" (p. 50).

For students in the flexible learning sector, the incongruity in funding arrangements has imposed on them a further level of educational disadvantage. First, these students were placed at an educational disadvantage in the dominant culture of schooling. Then, when they found their way into the flexible learning sector, they were placed at a further educational disadvantage due to the sector being insecurely and inadequately funded to support their learning needs. For students within the flexible learning sector, the funding incongruity is yet another institutionalised obstacle, at the macro-political level, that consolidates their marginalisation and prevents them from participating on a par with other students as full partners in education. This is in contrast to social justice in education, which, according to Thousand, Nevin, and McNeil (2000), is "achieved by everyone getting what they need to experience success" (p. 142).

I will now examine the construct of student engagement both at the level of an individual student's learning experiences and outcomes and at the level of overall educational effectiveness (Shernoff & Schmidt, 2008).

Student Engagement

Student engagement has been conceptualised from simplistic, *procedural engagement* that "may represent only compliance to authority figures or 'going through the motions' " (Bempechat & Shernoff, 2012, p. 318) to "*substantive engagement* characterized by deep processing and intrinsic motivation*" (Bempechat & Shernoff, 2012, p. 318). At a deeper level, student engagement involves a complex web of relations that have influence across multiple sociological levels. At the micro-level of individuals:

> *Engagement* is about a connection with a social other or project. Engagement allows flows and exchanges of information and resources. It requires openness, even to the point of being able to be changed through the relationship. Individuals' different levels of engagement in projects and with social others are shown by their investments, most obviously by the willing investment of *time*. However, time on its own is a particularly unreliable indicator, especially for those who have limited power over time-commitments, as do young people in compulsory schooling. ... More reliable indicators relate to investment of *attention* and *energy*, and of *self* and *identity*. (Wierenga, 2009, p. 102, emphases in original)

As emphasised in this conceptualisation, engagement of *attention* and *energy* is shown when an individual invests thought into a relationship with others or a project. Conversely, minimal attention and energy invested into the relationship indicates a lack of engagement, such as when individuals "have not really thought about it, or when they are 'working to rule' (or less)" (Wierenga, 2009, p. 102). Engagement of *self* and *identity* is shown when an individual invests into being fully present in a role in relation to others or a project. Conversely, minimal engagement of self and identity "is revealed when individuals are present ... in body but not in mind" (Wierenga, 2009, p. 103), such as when individuals "do" school but there remains a disconnect "in their own stories of identity, and in their day-to-day practices" (p. 103).

In educational scholarship, policy, research and practice, student engagement has become established as an important theoretical construct (Christenson et al., 2012a; Lawson & Lawson, 2013; Vallee, 2017). This is due to student engagement's relationship to learning and specifically to academic achievement and student outcomes (Boekaerts, 2016; Butler-Kisber & Portelli, 2003; Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). Despite the lack of consensus about how student engagement is operationalised in the learning process (Azevedo, 2015; Boekaerts, 2016; Fredricks, Filsecker, & Lawson, 2016; Lawson & Lawson, 2013; Sinatra, Heddy, & Lombardi, 2015), Christenson et al. (2012a) suggest that student engagement is "the most promising means for

understanding students' school experiences and outcomes and, most importantly, that by understanding engagement, we can improve educational and life outcomes for youth" (p. 817).

Genealogy. Student engagement research has a relatively short history back to the mid-1980s (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008) and has been dominated by the field of psychology, including educational and developmental psychology (Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012b). Within the field of educational research into engagement, there has been "a proliferation of constructs, definitions, and measures of concepts" (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 60). This led Fredricks et al. (2004) to conclude that not only is engagement a "meta" construct – meaning that it has multiple, interrelated dimensions – but that it is also a "messy" construct – meaning that it has multiple labels, definitions, and conceptualisations.

Due to student engagement's conceptual and empirical complexity, Boekaerts (2016) stresses the "need to be able to fall back on a clear and consistent conceptual framework and validated measurement instruments" (p. 83). A less formulaic approach, however, is preferred by Lawson and Lawson (2013) who acknowledge that diversity within engagement research is unavoidable and not necessarily undesirable. This has been articulated by Shernoff and Bempechat (2014): "there is not, and likely will never be, one route to a single, well-contained conception of engagement in schools" (p. 11). In recognition of the inevitable diversity in student engagement research, there is general consensus that researchers need to be specific about the conception of student engagement that is operative in every investigation (Appleton et al., 2008; Christenson et al., 2012a; Eccles & Wang, 2012; Fredricks et al., 2004; Lawson & Lawson, 2013).

Conceptions of student engagement may be specified through critical questioning. For example, Vibert and Shields (2003) propose "*what do we mean by engagement? engagement in what? for what purposes? to what ends?*" (p. 226, emphasis in original). For Vallee (2017), the critical question is about the purpose that student engagement serves: "does engagement serve the inclusion of all individuals in public schooling … or does it serve to reproduce the exclusive policies and practices of schooling?" (p. 10). Student engagement in the service of inclusion is a social justice purpose, whereas student engagement in the service of reproduction is a hegemonic purpose. The twin focus of Vallee's question is important to help to emphasise student engagement's politicisation as represented in discourses of inclusion and exclusion.

Conceptualisations. Traditionally, educational studies into student engagement have been based on "an autonomous individual-oriented conceptualisation" (Vallee, 2017, p. 14). These social-psychological investigations have tended to favour conceptions with multiple, interrelated dimensions that are commonly comprised of behavioural, affective, and cognitive dimensions (Appleton et al., 2008; Christenson et al., 2012a; Fredricks et al., 2004; Lawson & Lawson, 2013). Such a tri-dimensional conception is claimed to have "the potential to link areas of research about antecedents and consequences of how students behave, how they feel, and how they think" (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 82). Yet, approaches are needed to understand qualitative differences in student engagement such as variances in degrees of engagement, both within and between individual students and subpopulations of students at different times and in different classes and situations. To accommodate this, constructivist-based approaches have favoured broader conceptions of student engagement that encompass the characteristics of learning environments (Shernoff, Tonks, & Anderson, 2014). These contextualised investigations have tended to include social aspects related to classroom instruction such as levels of teacher support (Fredricks et al., 2004; Klem & Connell, 2004); the extent and quality of classroom interactions (Shernoff et al., 2014); and measures of classroom and school climates (Shernoff et al., 2014; Willms et al., 2009).

With what Lawson and Lawson (2013) have described as a new generation of engagement-focused research, social-ecological approaches have expanded conceptions of student engagement. This new era is indicative of evolving understandings into the complexity of student engagement, which has broadened the research focus beyond the psychological traits of dis/engaged students to connect student engagement to the macro-level social, economic, cultural and political context within which the school and school community are embedded (Vibert & Shields, 2003). This evolution aligns with a shift in social theory "from accounts of society that focus on individual units [for example, the person, the institution] to visions of relational process [for example, systems, networks, confluences, aggregates, synergies]" (Gergen & Dixon-Román, 2014, p. 9). New generation research tends to conceptualise student engagement as a cultural issue that involves complex "webs of significance" (Yazzie-Mintz & McCormick, 2012); as an equity issue with a historical connection to exclusion "especially along lines of race/ethnicity and class" (Vallee, 2017, p. 13); as a relational issue (Smyth, 2006; Vallee, 2017; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007); and as a political issue "for the purpose of democratic reconstruction, through which personal transformation takes

place" (McMahon & Portelli, 2004, p. 70). The differing conceptualisations of student engagement lead to differing applications of student engagement research.

Applications. The connection between student engagement and learning has meant that research on student engagement has commonly been applied to enhance educational outputs such as academic achievement and graduation rates (Christenson et al., 2012a; Reschly & Christenson, 2012; Vallee, 2017). According to Vallee (2017), engagement is applied teleologically, and although academic achievement and graduation rates have remained important, the applications of student engagement research have evolved in line with understandings about the complexity of the concept, from an individual-level focus on school "dropouts", to a school-level focus on high school reform and, more recently, to a system-level focus on transformation of the education system.

School dropout. Much of the early research on student engagement was applied to policy and practice on school dropout prevention and interventions (Fredricks et al., 2004; Reschly & Christenson, 2012; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). An indication of the extensive empirical attention directed to the "dropout crisis" can be gleaned from Rumberger and Lim's (2008) review of 203 studies on school dropouts that were published from 1983 to 2007. As a result of their review, Rumberger and Lim (2008) identified predictors of dropping out based on factors that were similar across numbers of studies. Although the review contained the statement that it examined "*all* the factors that have been studied over the last 25 years" (Rumberger & Lim, 2008, p. 3, emphasis in original), this did not mean that the investigations themselves studied all of the factors related to the reasons students left school before graduation.

Vallee (2017) argues that within engagement discourses, omitted or "conveniently side-stepped are macrosocial causes of dropout" (p. 15). For example, from the 203 studies reviewed, Rumberger and Lim (2008) proposed preventions and interventions according to engagement-related predictors at individual, family, school and community levels, but not at the macrosocial level. Vallee (2017) posits the view that "Framed in such a way, social and economic inequality are no longer the responsibility of preventions and interventions; rather, we construct a pathologised disengaged student ... and generally tailor interventions narrowly and potentially harmfully" (p. 15).

This view from Vallee (2017) draws attention to how student engagement research can be applied in "politically neutral" ways (Vibert & Shields, 2003) such that "social issues

are construed as a personal pathology or dysfunction, when in reality their 'causation' lies deep in the way social structures play out oppressively for some groups" (Smyth, 2010, p. 114). As Lawson and Lawson (2013) emphasise, "when individuals and entire subpopulations conclude that school and educational pathways and privileges are not open to them … social exclusion is implicated" (p. 464). Yet this implication is less likely to be a factor that features in engagement literature associated with school dropout prevention and interventions, which prompted Lawson and Lawson (2013) to emphasise "the manifest need for engagement-focused systems interventions" (p. 464).

School reform. As student engagement became recognised as a desirable concept for all students, it began to be applied to inform comprehensive high school reform initiatives both in Australia (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), 2012) and overseas (Reschly & Christenson, 2012). Student engagement research has been criticised for being applied in normalising ways in which both educational research and school reform initiatives do not take into consideration socio-economic, political, and cultural factors that impact student engagement in school and school learning (McMahon & Portelli, 2004; Vibert & Shields, 2003). By failing to question substantive political orientations, school reform initiatives have risked reproducing dominant ideologies that promote compliance-related engagement and narrow orientations of academic engagement that conform to neoconservative, market-based agendas for education (McMahon & Portelli, 2004). According to Vallee (2017), such orientations subsume social inequality in a discourse of engagement that valorises economically and culturally advantaged students.

Over time, there has been a wider recognition in the school reform literature that students are reliable sources to report on their own engagement (Reschly & Christenson, 2012). This has predominantly been enacted through research that positions students as data sources in surveys and focus groups. The *High School Survey of Student Engagement* (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007, 2010; Yazzie-Mintz & McCormick, 2012), for example, "focuses on investigating and understanding, from the students' perspectives, the relationship between the student and the learning community and utilizing research and professional development to strengthen this relationship" (Yazzie-Mintz & McCormick, 2012, p. 747). Research perspectives that support student participation beyond data sources to include co-researcher relationships have predominantly been taken up by those with the ambitious goal of developing a more inclusive,

transformative education system (Ainscow, 2005; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2016).

System transformation. Recent attention on student engagement research has had a sense of urgency, with Hannon (2012) raising concerns about "the persistent and endemic problem of the *lack of engagement* which characterises many young people's experience of schooling, and undermines their learning" (p. 1, emphasis in original). According to Hannon (2012), this problem is of concern to governments and education systems in "developed" countries worldwide and goes beyond the "visibly disengaged" – students who have left school early – to include the large group of "disengaged achievers" – students "who are adept at achieving good grades, but are turned off learning by school" (Price, Jackson, Horne, Hannon, & Patton, 2012, p. 8). Recognition of the more widespread problem in engagement has led to student engagement research that has moved beyond individual-level interventions and school-level initiatives to encompass system-level transformation that has the goal of "innovating for an education that allows every child to flourish, no matter what happens in life" (Spencer-Keyse, Warren, & Galloway, 2018, p. 9).

Technology is facilitating the worldwide communication of transformative innovations, with Christensen, Horn, and Johnson (2011) contending that online facilitated networks have "the highest potential to circumvent the system" (p. 243). One not-for-profit network, HundrED, aims to "help improve education and inspire a grassroots movement through encouraging pedagogically sound, ambitious innovations to spread across the world".[2] The Innovation Unit[3] is a social enterprise network that identifies, creates and scales evidence-based solutions related to children and early years; learning and schools; and physical and mental health. With the emergence of digital technology and online networks, it has been noted that the debate about needed changes in education systems has become more democratised, most notably involving learners themselves (Christensen et al., 2011; Hannon, 2012). Yet schools themselves have tended to lag behind, with a recent *School and Learning Consultation* report indicating that the views of students "are an invaluable but underutilised resource that provides an opportunity to challenge our approaches and beliefs regarding education and continually improve our practice" (Commissioner of Children and Young People, 2018, p. 6).

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2. https://hundred.org/en/about#manifesto
3. https://www.innovationunit.org/

There are, however, pockets of democratic student participation that are showing signs of success in moving schools towards greater student engagement. The Teach the Teacher[4] program is an innovation that aims to "increase student ownership of and engagement with education" (Walsh, 2013). Teach the Teacher programs are conducted by teams of students who first gather data from the student cohort and then collaborate with teachers to resolve issues identified as significant. The program has been evaluated as demonstrating "improved student teacher relationships and positive whole school change" (HundrED, 2018a, p. 37). Although the Teach the Teacher model began as a pocket of democratic student participation in metropolitan Melbourne, due to technology-assisted networking it has been promoted internationally in *Connect*,[5] a bi-monthly online publication that showcases innovative student participation (Walsh, 2013) and by the HundrED network that showcases inspiring innovations (HundrED, 2018a, pp. 36-37; 2018b, p. 141). Worldwide promotion of such innovations, along with online practitioner networks such as Education Reimagined through Youth-Adult Partnerships[6] and Up for Learning – Unleashing the Power of Partnership in Learning[7] provide practitioners with the inspiration to undertake local-level initiatives towards a more democratised educational experience in order to overturn the endemic problem of lack of engagement.

The integral participation of students as key grassroots-level strategists and beneficiaries in education system transformation indicates an important political shift away from top-down, policy-driven, compliance-related engagement.

Political nature. Traditional, compliance-related engagement research has been criticised as misrepresenting the real problems of "educational inequality and unjust schooling arrangements" (McInerney, 2006, p. 23). This criticism points to the political nature of engagement, which, as Kajner and Shultz (2013) have pointed out, is fundamentally about "what or who we choose to engage with" (p. 3). Student engagement, therefore, cannot be separated from issues of social in(ex)clusion.

A critical/sociological perspective takes the ideological position that engagement is a political project that is raced, classed, gendered, and ableist (Kajner & Shultz, 2013; McMahon & Portelli, 2004; Vallee, 2017). Such a project has a transformative point

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4. http://teachtheteacher.org.au/
5. https://research.acer.edu.au/connect/
6. https://education-reimagined.org/youth-adult-partnership/
7. https://www.upforlearning.org/initiatives/national-youth-adult-partnership-advocacy/

that is aimed at ensuring "social and educational equity" (Vallee, 2017, p. 9). The political nature of student engagement in this investigation is the equity ideal of engaging all students and, as such, student engagement is conceived of within an overarching framework of democratic, socially just education.

I will now consider education from the perspective of democracy and social justice before I discuss student engagement in relation to Fraser's (2008) notion of "democratic justice".

Democratic Justice

Democracy is a multidimensional construct (Fielding & Moss, 2011) with many different conceptualisations (Beane & Apple, 1999; Fielding, 2007; Woods & Woods, 2009) and contested meanings (M. Mills & McGregor, 2014). A multidimensional understanding of democracy leads to a broader conceptualisation of democracy beyond its more traditional, political ideal of representative governance to embrace its more social, moral ideal of equality of human life (Dewey, 1939; Fielding & Moss, 2011; Skidmore & Bound, 2008). Dewey (1902) promoted a broad conception of "social democracy" and he contended that key to the achievement of social democracy was the abolition of divisive obstacles and practices within society such as those created politically between social classes and those created intellectually between theory and practice. For Dewey (1939), social democracy involved all relations of life:

> Democracy is a way of life controlled by ... faith in the potentialities of human nature as that nature is exhibited in every human being irrespective of race, color, sex, birth and family, of material or cultural wealth. This faith may be enacted in statutes, but it is only on paper unless it is put in force in the attitudes which human beings display to one another … fostering insincerity if, in our personal relations to other persons, … we are moved by racial, color or other class prejudice; indeed, by anything save a generous belief in their possibilities as human beings, a belief which brings with it the need for providing conditions which will enable these capacities to reach fulfillment. (p. 2)

Progress towards democracy as a way of life has been referred to as "the unending project of democratic social transformation" (Giroux, 2012, n.p.) and behind each instance of progress has been a prolonged, collective struggle for access to political, civil and social rights by those, and for those, who have been excluded. In education, for example, Fine (1990), Beane and Apple (1999), and Cumings Mansfield, Welton, and Halx (2012) have reminded us of the legacy of political activists, in both civil rights and student movements, whose efforts have worked to dismantle legally sanctioned racial segregation and the social exclusion of students based on (dis)ability and sexuality. This

struggle towards greater justice and inclusion remains unfinished business (Roche, 1999).

Education in many Western education systems such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia, has not progressed greatly towards democratic social transformation and, overall, powerful market-driven governance and competition dominate (Fielding & Moss, 2011; Giroux, 2012). In Australia, M. Mills and McGregor (2014) note how the neo-liberal discourses driving the government school system are a long way from the principles of social justice and democratic education. More than one hundred years ago, Dewey (1916) warned about the inherent contradiction between national and social aims of education, and he forecast that the execution of the democratic ideal of education would remain remote unless the social came to dominate.

According to Fielding and Moss (2011), the notion of social democracy rarely pervades either the structures of schools or the practices within them. For students who deviate from schooling's cultural norm, the misrecognition and status subordination (Fraser, 2000) they experience obstruct their social and academic relationships with school and school learning (for example, Graham & Harwood, 2011; McInerney, 2009; M. Mills & McGregor, 2014; Smyth, Down, & McInerney, 2010). This social injustice not only denies students with cultural differences their rightful access to educational opportunities, it also denies them essential opportunities to experience democracy as a way of life.

In contrast, Fraser (2008) theorises the co-implication of democracy and social justice in her notion of democratic justice, with its principles of equal cultural value and parity of participation. According to the first quality of parity of participation, social arrangements are just "only if they permit all the relevant social actors to participate as peers in social life" (p. 54). Applying this principle allows for a critical exploration of education's social arrangements in order to expose inequity and identify more democratically just modes of operation that are free from social divisions and hierarchies of worth so that all students may be engaged in and benefitting from their education (Gergen & Dixon-Román, 2014; Reay, 2011).

Social arrangements and engagement. An examination of social arrangements reveals that not all students are supported to engage in education, free from social divisions and hierarchies of worth. Rather, there is a persistent connection between socio-economic status and differential encouragement. The injustice of this connection is important to keep raising because, as Pearl (1997) notes, differential encouragement and deficit thinking are so ubiquitous in schools that it can be unrecognisable to the teachers, administrators and others working in them.

Research has indicated differences in levels of students' engagement with school and school learning based on socio-economic status (SES). For example, Willms et al. (2009) found that on "four measures of student engagement (participation, sense of belonging, attendance, and intellectual engagement), high-SES students have a significantly higher level of engagement than low-SES students" (p. 20). This finding indicates that the quality and extent of a student's relationship to the school and school learning are relative to a student's socio-economic background.

In other studies, findings have pointed to the disengagement of students from low-SES backgrounds who were more likely to be involved in behaviour incidents (Graham et al., 2010; Hemphill et al., 2010; McGregor, Mills, Te Riele, & Hayes, 2015), were more likely to skip classes and to truant (Birioukov, 2016; Fallis & Opotow, 2003), and were more likely to leave school before graduating (Lamb, Walstab, Teese, Vickers, & Rumberger, 2004; Teese & Polesel, 2003). Findings such as these have pointed to the fragile and often partial relationships between students from low socio-economic backgrounds and traditional modes of schooling (Smyth & Wrigley, 2013), which has led to the generalisation that "students from low SES backgrounds ... have historically not had the same emotional attachment and commitment to education as students from more privileged backgrounds" (Munns, 2007, p. 304).

This generalisation may seem to infer that students from low socio-economic backgrounds have a predisposition to lower levels of engagement, or it may even be accepted "in relatively simplistic terms ... as class-based rejections or acceptances of middle-class educational cultures" (A. Furlong, 2005, p. 380). However, a shift in the sociology of education has led to the expansion from micro-level individualistic interpretations (Laws & Davies, 2000) to a more complex analysis of students in relation to macro-level features such as social, cultural, and historical contexts, structures, and power (V. J. Furlong, 1991; Mehan, 1992; Smyth, 2017; Smyth & Wrigley, 2013). According to Fine (2006), "the task of social researchers is to theorize

across levels and resist the common sense explanations by which individuals are the site for analysis, blame, responsibility, and data collection" (p. 94).

Taking into consideration a relational conceptualisation of engagement (Yazzie-Mintz & McCormick, 2012), an argument can be made that for some students, cultural value or status, as defined by schools, may constitute an institutionalised obstacle that prevents them from participating on a par with other students, with full status in the social interaction that comprises education. Applying this line of argument, the higher levels of engagement reported by Willms et al. (2009) for students from high-SES backgrounds may have been due, in large part, to students' responses to the structures and processes of an education system in which their cultural status was constituted as normative. To emphasise the relational power of "class cultural affinity", V. J. Furlong (1991) drew on an example in which students who, despite their failure in both academic and sporting pursuits, retained a sense of inclusion. This feeling of being included was the result of these students and their teachers sharing a relationship that consisted of "a common value system that was both intangible and powerful, producing a bond which transcended the day-to-day conflicts of classroom life" (p. 302).

In contrast, the lower levels of engagement and disengagement reported for students from low-SES backgrounds (Birioukov, 2016; Graham et al., 2010; Hemphill et al., 2010; McGregor et al., 2015; Willms et al., 2009) may have been due to students' responses to the structures and processes of an education system that subjected them to "status subordination" (Fraser, 2000). From the status subordination perspective, behaviours that indicate low levels of engagement (for example, classroom disruption) and disengagement (for example, truancy), rather than being deemed as deficits in the students, may be understood in relation to the students' disenfranchisement through their years of schooling, and it may be analysed in relation to "the alienation that occurs over time in contexts that are unwelcoming" (Hirst & Vadeboncoeur, 2006, p. 223) and to the "feelings that arise from the complex experiences of being excluded and devalued" (V. J. Furlong, 1991, p. 304).

As was found in studies conducted in the United States, "schools substantially worsen already existent social inequities with psychological, academic, and ultimately economic consequences" (Fine & Weis, 2004, p. 73). This means that inequitable outcomes are not only associated with unequal starting positions of the least advantaged young people compared to their more advantaged peers upon commencement of school, they are also associated with unequal opportunities throughout the years of schooling

(Lamb et al., 2015). That is, social arrangements in education systems powerfully regulate students' access to education's "social structure of opportunity, the most important determinant of academic achievement" (Hyslop-Margison & Ramirez, 2016, p. 5).

Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are three significant structures within schools through which institutionalised patterns of cultural value regulate students' access to education's social structure of opportunity:

> [Through] what teachers teach (curriculum), how they teach (pedagogy) and the judgements made about student progress and ability (assessment) … some students begin to feel that school is a place for them. Others come to a realisation that they are not valued, they do not really belong and they are going nowhere. (Munns, Lawson, O'Brien, & Johnson, 2006, p. 10)

Educational research in Australia (Graham et al., 2016; P. Thomson, 2002) and overseas (Jackson, 1968/1990; Tomlinson, 1981) has described examples of within-school social arrangements related to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment that disadvantage students from low socio-economic families upon their commencement of school. The various ways that students are categorised in schools by those who have authority and power lead to differential educational opportunities being made available to the students (Mehan, 1992). Differentiation of the curriculum commonly occurs through the practice of "setting", "streaming" or "tracking" students according to their so-called "ability" (Reay, 2017; Rubin, 2008). For students at secondary school level, curriculum differentiation can occur between each level of ability group, between general education and "giftedness" programs, and between academic and vocational subject streams (McGregor et al., 2017). The allocation of students into different streams or tracks may begin through informal assessments, based on teachers' judgments regarding students' characters and abilities (Smyth & Wrigley, 2013), and extend to formal assessments based on educational or psychological testing.

Both informal and formal assessments are predominantly situated in, and biased towards, the dominant culture, which privileges students who conform to that culture and disadvantages – in Foucauldian terms, "punishes" (Foucault, 1975/1995) – students who deviate. Further, "assessment practices effectively establish a structure of power, with those who administer tests positioned to affect the outcomes of those under evaluation" (Gergen & Dixon-Román, 2014, p. 10). The power to "affect the outcomes" of students can be gleaned from studies where findings have revealed that

administrators had exercised their power to allocate students to different groups or categories, even when the students had obtained identical assessment scores.

A comprehensive investigation of students' experiences of ability grouping in the United Kingdom have found that "even after 'ability' was taken into account" (Boaler, William, & Brown, 2000, p. 633), the social class of students was an influencing factor in teachers' decisions about where students were placed, "resulting in disproportionate numbers of working-class students being allocated to low sets" (p. 633). This finding indicates that the association between working-class students and low sets was so natural to the "normalizing gaze" (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 184) of school staff that disproportionate allocations served to reinforce cultural stereotypes rather than raise questions about partiality or prompt a review of the allocation process. For the Year 9 students who were affected, the consequences of the low-level work in the low sets, the restricted curriculum, the less senior teachers and the limited pedagogy all combined to limit their opportunities to participate in intellectually advanced curriculum and pedagogy and, hence, restricted their future access to the social structure of opportunity.

Even with seemingly objective results on clinical assessments, those who have power over placements have been found to intervene, either to the advantage of students whose culture was valued, or to the detriment of students whose culture was not. Early studies have revealed a history within Western education systems of institutionalised arrangements that differentially regulate students' access to education's social structure of opportunity. A prime example is Mercer's (cited in Mehan, 1992) study in the United States at a time when a score of less than 80 on an IQ test meant that a student could be placed in special classrooms for the "mentally retarded" (MR). Mercer's findings reveal that:

> Students who had similar results on an objective test were treated differently by school personnel. White, female, middle-class students … were more likely to be retained in regular academic programs … The disproportionate number of poor, minority, and male students in the MR category, even when they tested as well as their counterparts, suggests that mental retardation, as defined by the schools, … was the consequence of the school turning on its sorting machine. (p. 12)

These findings indicate that the allocation of white, female, middle-class students to placement in special classrooms for the mentally retarded did not conform to school-based assumptions and so they were treated differently to students who did conform to race, gender and class assumptions. This finding aligns with the claim by Skeggs (2004) that not only were cultural privilege and power "seen as ascribed rather than achieved"

(p. 4) but "those at the opposite end of the social scale are also misrecognised as having ascribed and essential characteristics" (p. 4). The studies reported by Mehan (1992) and Boaler et al. (2000) indicate that questions regarding anomalies were not raised when the categorisation and allocation of students were disproportionate to the race, gender and class distributions in the school population.

Haylett (2003) notes how the problem of classism and deficit associations "is rarely reflected upon" (p. 70). This may be explained via the theory of moral exclusion (Fallis & Opotow, 2003; Opotow, 1990, 2002), which posits that "moral exclusion occurs when individuals or groups are perceived as *outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply*" (Opotow, 1990, p. 1, emphasis in original). According to this theory, any injustice perpetrated on particular students would not be reflected on because their needs and interests would not be "viewed as important or warranting consideration" (Opotow, 2002, p. 208). One of the outcomes of classism and deficit associations is that "economic disadvantage and cultural disrespect are practically intertwined" (Haylett, 2003, p. 59).

Tomlinson's (1981) research has emphasised how injustice was perpetrated on students who had been categorised into "special education" provision and how dominant interests took precedence over students' needs. Tomlinson's study investigated the beliefs and judgements that informed the decision-making processes by which potentially "troublesome" young people were categorised out of the mainstream educational system. The study concluded that the function of the "special education" categorisation and the removal of students may have been "more related to the social demands of established dominant interests at a macro-level, rather than the needs of individual children" (p. 342).

One dominant interest identified in the study was the education system and its demand for smooth running, orderly and controlled schools. Also identified was the dominant interest of professional groups and their involvement in power struggles over the diagnostic practices and selection procedures of special education categorisation. Such dominance was described by (Foucault, 1975/1995) as the "superimposition of the power relations and knowledge relations" (p. 185). Key concerns raised by Tomlinson (1981) relate to special education "as a powerful form of social control" (p. 344), the unjust use of power and authority, and the "legitimation of low social status by exclusion from normal school" (p. 344).

What has been emphasised in each of the studies discussed above is that social factors such as gender, race and class influenced decisions about students' classifications and educational placements, not ability. This has been shown to be the case at the opposite end of the "ability spectrum", where the placements of students into gifted and talented programs "have a transparent class meaning, reinforcing the advantages of the privileged and confirming the exclusion of the poor" (Connell, 1994, p. 136). The class-based associations in educational placements point to a powerful form of social control (Tomlinson, 1981), indicating that historically, "differences in ability are enshrined in and, indeed, produced by the organisation of schooling itself" (V. J. Furlong, 1991, p. 300).

Social arrangements that regulate the production of ability and access to education's social structure of opportunity are "historically present" (Haylett, 2003, p. 57). To locate this abiding issue in contemporary times, a study by Graham et al. (2016) in the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW) demonstrated the many ways that within-school social regulation affected students from low socio-economic families when they commenced their schooling. The experiences of these students confirmed the contention by Pearl (1997) that "exclusion begets exclusion. It is the exclusionary practices in the early years of school that logically lead to exclusion in the later years" (p. 227).

Graham et al. (2016) conducted interviews with young people who had been excluded from mainstream schools and were enrolled in schools for students with disruptive behaviour. The researchers noted that the proliferation of these special education settings in NSW was concentrated in areas of social and economic disadvantage. The research participants, aged between nine and 16, identified that they had first begun to dislike school between the commencement of school and Year 2. When asked why they had begun to dislike school, approximately one-third referred to "teachers", with many "describing how teachers would treat them because they weren't one of the 'smart kids', or because they had a 'family reputation', or because they didn't have the 'right' uniform" (Graham et al., 2016, p. 42). Almost half of the participants referred to "schoolwork", including, for many, "a generic sense of boredom", and for others, "an increase in curricular demand, which corresponded with a decrease in enjoyable activities" (p. 42).

Graham (cited in Vonow, 2015) claimed that one of the reasons that students found school activities less enjoyable in the first two years was because of the structured lessons that teachers presented them with to ensure they would be ready to perform on

the centralised National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) assessments when they reached Year 3. NAPLAN is an annual assessment for Australian students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in the areas of reading, writing, language conventions (spelling, punctuation and grammar) and numeracy (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2016, p. 27). In this regard, Australia is in line with other countries like Britain (Wrigley, 2014) where, in the push to prepare early primary students for high-stakes standardised testing, formal direct instruction and rote learning have replaced informal play learning and creative engagement.

Graham also outlined some of the classroom practices that indicated differential encouragement of students:

> [These] are the kids who are always at the bottom of the ladder, who are always under a sad face on the whiteboard who feel like they're not the good kids or the smart kids ... They quite often feel like their teachers don't like them. (cited in Vonow, 2015, n.p.)

According to Pearl (1997), "it is the *differential encouragements* maintained by statute, enacted by policy and informally practiced by classroom teachers and administrators that help to perpetuate deficit thinking" (p. 213, emphasis in original). Responsibility to provide both an optimal learning environment (Knight & Pearl, 2000) and enabling conditions for learning (S. Hart, Dixon, Drummond, & McIntyre, 2004) rests with the educators who set these up within their classrooms. For Dewey (1938), the provision of an optimal environment and enabling conditions includes "what is done by the educator and the way in which it is done, not only words spoken but the tone of voice in which they are spoken" (p. 45).

In the study by Graham et al. (2016), rather than enhancing the learning capacity of all students, the classrooms emphasised differential esteem (always at the bottom of the ladder) and unequal encouragement (always under a sad face on the whiteboard) that undermined both the young people's learner identities (feel like they're not the good kids or the smart kids) and their self-esteem (often feel like their teachers don't like them). From a critical perspective, these were examples of "the power of the educator to regulate ... to influence directly the experience of others and thereby the education they obtain" (Dewey, 1938, p. 45). They were also examples of "deficit thinking [as] a form of oppression – that is, the cruel and unjust use of authority and power to keep a group of people in their place" (Valencia, 1997, pp. 3-4).

This section has identified how power has operated at the level of within-school social arrangements to maintain structures and processes that perpetuate inequity. The four studies that were discussed (Boaler et al., 2000; Graham et al., 2016; Mercer 1974, cited in Mehan, 1992; Tomlinson, 1981) emphasised social arrangements that have regulated access to educational opportunities according to hierarchies of worth, based on taken-for-granted assumptions about cultural value within an education system that, according to Gillborn and Youdell (2000), "creates enormous disparities of experience, achievement and esteem between young people" (p. 220).

Unjust aspects of school social arrangements include the "production of ability" (V. J. Furlong, 1991) that have led to the labelling, segregation and exclusion of young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Overall, such arrangements have obstructed their access to education's social structure of opportunity because their cultural diversity has not been valued and, consequently, they have been relegated to the margins of educational provision. As Labaree (1997) explains, "we bring the entire array of social groups in a community together ... and then make sure that each group has a distinctly different educational experience" (p. 70).

In addition to social arrangements that regulate "differential *experiences* and *outcomes* once inside these communities" (Fine, 1990, p. 108, emphasis in original), social arrangements also regulate differential experiences and outcomes across schools and school sectors.

Across-school social arrangements and engagement. Democratic justice in education must also support across-school social arrangements that enable all students to participate in education, free from social divisions and hierarchies of worth. That is in contrast to stratification of school education and its "hierarchies of esteem" (Kenway, 2013, p. 296). This section focuses on historical changes in educational policies in the Australian state of Victoria that have had a substantial impact on across-school social arrangements (C. Campbell, 2014; Lamb, 2007). One early impact occurred as a result of a change in attitude towards stratification of secondary school provision.

In the 1970s, Victoria's hierarchy of government school provision reflected social stratification. Ranked at the top were selective-entry high schools in predominantly middle-class suburbs and city locations to provide for academically high-achieving students (P. Thomson, 2002). This was followed by general-entry government high schools that worked towards the university-oriented, senior school curriculum (Teese &

Polesel, 2003). At the bottom were government technical high schools situated in predominantly working-class suburbs and rural locations (P. Thomson, 2002) to provide vocational training in menial service industries for females and skilled trades for males.

Social critique at the time emphasised "the cultural, social class and democratic ill-effects of differentiated schooling"' (C. Campbell, 2014, p. 3), which was "criticised for trapping working class children in schools and courses that deterred access, not only to higher education, but better employment and lives" (p. 3). In order to move away from the inequity of a differentiated government school system, Australia followed the United Kingdom towards "a State system of comprehensive schools that would combine both technical and university-oriented curriculum" (P. Thomson, 2002, p. 12). The state of Victoria moved in this direction after the *Ministerial Review of Postcompulsory Schooling* (Blackburn, 1985) (known as the *Blackburn Report*) recommended an overhaul of the senior school curriculum to "take into account the increase in students staying on to Year 12" (n.p., Introduction). This overhaul included the abolition of the Year 12 university-oriented Higher School Certificate along with the technical school Year 12 certification to be replaced by the Year 11 and Year 12 Victorian Certificate of Education. The introduction of this certificate aimed to cater to the needs of all students, whether they aspired to enter the workforce, university or vocational training (Blackburn, 1985). This move was supported by a further recommendation that "all schools become comprehensive rather than being designated, equipped or staffed as technical or high schools" (n.p., Recommendation 32).

At the time of this overhaul, a system of school zoning was in place whereby government primary schools were designated as "feeder" schools into their neighbourhood government comprehensive schools (Keating, 2010), with "bureaucratic procedures to argue why a school 'out of zone' was preferred over their local one" (P. Thomson, 2002, p. 12). In essence, comprehensive schools were to represent "inclusive public spheres … reflecting the full diversity of the neighbourhoods they served" (Vickers, 2004, p. 3). Contrary to this socially inclusive orientation, some Victorian government schools clung to their "high school" designation, academically selective policies, gender segregation, and an exclusively university-oriented focus (C. Campbell, 2014). Also working against the equity orientation of comprehensive school provision through the 1980s have been neoliberal forces re-creating traditional school differentiations in Australia (C. Campbell, 2014) and overseas (Fielding, 2017).

A central argument for the neoliberal reorientation of government schooling has been that "school provision should operate in a framework of market demand and supply and become subject to the laws of open competition" (Lamb, 2007, p. 1). This line of argument is associated with an enterprise culture that sees "market mechanisms as a means of building greater efficiency and quality" (Keating, 2009, p. 5). The extension of this logic has been that if parents had increased choice within a competitive government school marketplace, this would drive improvements in schools, which would then lead to improved academic outcomes (Lamb, 2007). In the 1980s, in order to facilitate both parental choice and government school competition, school zone boundaries were eased (J. Jackson & Lamb, 2014; Keating, 2010; Lamb, 2007). However, some government schools "in high demand, retained zones and selective recruitment as a way of managing excess demand" (Lamb, 2007, p. 4). This has resulted in some parents with economic means being prepared to pay high prices to move into the zone of a high-performing government school rather than pay independent school fees (Slee, 2011). In Melbourne, parents use their economic means to buy into educational advantage for their children.[8]

The volatility of Victoria's competitive school choice marketplace has also been fuelled by government support of parents' right to choose not only which school, but the type of school they send their children to, and this right has been upheld by successive Commonwealth governments through the funding of non-government schools (C. Campbell, 2014; Keating, 2010; Lamb, 2007). Increases in the level of public funding to non-government schools has decreased its relative cost to parents (Lamb, 2007). This has seen a proliferation of lower-cost, often faith-based, non-government schools in Victoria (Keating, 2010), which, as noted by J. Jackson and Lamb (2014), has resulted in "a sustained drift of students from the government to private school sector"(p. 3).

Consequently, aspiring families of modest means, who were unable to afford expensive private school fees or to buy into expensive school zones, have, nevertheless, had the choice to move their children to schools that they perceived would gain them an educational advantage and, according to Vickers (2004), to "set themselves apart from those who are poor" (p. 1). Not only has this resulted in class segregation, but, as found in the Australian state of New South Wales, it has resulted in segregation by ethnicity and race (Patty, 2008). That is, Australia's school funding system has escalated inequity

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8. https://about.homely.com.au/blog/2016/9/22/the-best-melbourne-school-zones-to-buy-into-right-now

in the education system as government-funded, non-government schools compete with government schools for students (Watson & Ryan, 2010).

The 1990s, with a change of state government, brought even more changes to Victorian secondary school provision that impacted across-school social arrangements. The "pro-privatization Kennett Government" (Smyth, 2011, p. 100) immediately undertook structural and financial reforms in the name of school effectiveness that wrought the disposal and sale of hundreds of school sites, the cutting of thousands of administrative staff member positions and the reduction of thousands of teachers who were deemed "in excess of school entitlements" (Auditor-General of Victoria, 1997, p. 13; Lamb, 2007; Townsend, 1997). In addition, the Victorian government undertook a major educational reform with the adoption of the *Schools of the Future* program (Auditor-General of Victoria, 1997) that brought about an easing of the centralised bureaucracy of the government school sector, with schools given greater autonomy through the devolution of decision-making and school-based management (Lamb, 2007), otherwise known as the self-managed school (Smyth, 2001, 2011).

Part of the logic of this latter move was that "government schools need[ed] to become more like private schools" (Lamb, 2007, p. 1), freed "to promote their capabilities in the hope of attracting students and to seek sponsorship from community businesses to support them in their development" (Townsend, 1997, p. 211). The enterprise culture then reached a new level with the launch of the *My School* website on which profiles and annual data for all Australian schools became publicly available. According to the website:

> The publication of data on *My School* allows educators to share information about school achievements and characteristics with the aim of supporting and driving improvement across the nation. For parents, *My School* provides valuable information to help make informed decisions about their child's education.[9]

Although the platform of *My School* publicises that it supports and drives improvement, as an instrument of neoliberal marketisation it has promoted structures of inequality in education (M. Mills et al., 2013). The combination of school competition, parental choice and high-profile public platforms like *My School* has been shown, internationally, to lead to schools becoming increasingly selective and discriminatory with their student intakes (Apple, 2006; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000).

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9. https://www.myschool.edu.au/about/

One form of discrimination in student intakes is through school fees. In Australia, "the default status of the government owned schools [is] to provide the public guarantee of access to all and of serving the public mission of compensating for disadvantage" (Keating, 2010, p. 31). However, since the 1990s families have been required to contribute to the cost of government school education through the payment of fees (Cuervo & Wyn, 2011; Reid, 2015) and in some government schools the cost of fees is used as a market barrier to poorer families (Keating, 2010; Teese, 2011). In addition, competition between schools has motivated some government schools to enter into competitive "game playing" (Reay, 2014) practices to entice high-performing students with incentives such as scholarships (Lamb et al., 2015; Slee, 2014; Teese & Polesel, 2003), with inducements such as select-entry programs (J. Jackson & Lamb, 2014) and with mechanisms such as entrance exams (Bonnor & Shepherd, 2016; Teese & Polesel, 2003).

Practices such as these have been found to reproduce stereotypes of particularly valued students, such as students who were female, and students from some Asian backgrounds (Apple, 2006). At the other end of the spectrum, schools have been found to move on students rather than be encumbered with students who present a risk to the school's performance and rankings, and hence to their competitive edge (Bills, Cook, & Wexler, 2016; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Granite & Graham, 2012; Slee, 2013). At times, this "dumping" has been the result of school expulsions, which became the subject of an investigation in Victoria in 2016 after figures indicated a rise of over 25 per cent in formal expulsions in one year (Office of the Victorian Ombudsman, 2016).

In addition to formal expulsions, the investigation found anecdotal evidence of moving students on that was the result of informal expulsions "despite departmental policy prohibiting their use" (Victorian Ombudsman, 2017, p. 82). Informal expulsions are subtle forms of coercion "such as schools suggesting that a hard to teach student may be better suited to attending school elsewhere" (DET, 2015a, p. 60). An important point is that school expulsions disproportionately affected students who were male – almost 80 per cent of formal expulsions in 2016 were of males, yet males represented just under 52 per cent of the government school population – and from vulnerable groups including students from Indigenous, low socio-economic, and non–English speaking backgrounds (Victorian Ombudsman, 2017).

The increasing rate of school expulsions is not unique to Victoria or Australia (Hemphill et al., 2010), with Apple (2006) attributing "the alarming rate" of expulsions

in England to "the intense pressure to constantly demonstrate higher achievement rates" (p. 65). Educational expulsions in Australia have resulted in a situation that is rarely acknowledged: "the steady expansion of a residual tier of schooling" (Slee, 2011, p. 87) that comprises the educational Other, students who were "surplus to the capacity of the school to deliver its targets" (p. 87).

In the state of Victoria, the picture is of an increasing shift away from the *Blackburn Report* recommendations for social inclusion within comprehensive secondary school provision. This has resulted in social and academic segregation within an increasingly stratified system of school provision. The proposed improvement that was intended to accrue as a result of the enterprise culture, referred to in the *My School* website as "supporting and driving improvement across the nation", has not been experienced equitably across the nation nor across schools. For example, in an investigation of the effects of major government school policy reforms over three decades, Lamb (2007) found across-school differentiation based on social intake, as schools that served advantaged families "swelled in student numbers under the weight of unregulated demand" (p. 2), and schools that served disadvantaged families lost student numbers "at a vast rate" (p. 2).

This was in contrast to the 1980s when there was little variation in school size according to social intake. According to Lamb (2007), market reforms that promoted school competition and parental choice contributed to the residualisation of government schools in poorer areas of Melbourne as high-achieving students in these schools were lured to competitively advantaged schools, thus reducing the academic mix. In addition, economically advantaged students joined the drift to the non-government sector (Keating, 2010; Lamb, 2007; Patty, 2008; Watson & Ryan, 2010), thus reducing the social mix. As a result, government schools in poorer areas became depleted of students and resources (Lamb, 2007).

Size matters in schools because it impacts factors such as economies of scale related to funding and resourcing, and the ability to offer a comprehensive range of curricular, extracurricular and support programs (Lamb, 2007). In addition, the socio-economic profile of a school matters in terms of academic achievement (Perry & McConney, 2010) because it impacts factors such as the ability of a school to attract and keep experienced teachers, and its ability to attract and keep educationally advantaged families (DET, 2015a; Gonski et al., 2011; Lamb, 2007; Teese, 2011). Yet smaller schools with low social profiles are expected to obtain equivalent student outcomes,

even though they have a high percentage of students who have complex needs associated with disadvantage and they have less funding and resources to achieve this (Lamb, 2007). The injustice of the current education system means that students with the greatest needs are marginalised in residualised schools and exposed to conditions that lead to restricted educational opportunities and lower levels of achievement.

The clear relationship between school SES composition and achievement has been found in research that drew on secondary analysis of Australia's *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) data:

> all students – regardless of their personal SES – benefit strongly and relatively equally from schooling contexts in which the SES of the school-group is high. ... all students, regardless of their individual SES, perform considerably less well on measures of academic achievement in school contexts characterised, in the aggregate, as low on the SES continuum. Thus, the segregation of schools according to SES provides further benefits for students whose economic circumstances allow attendance at high SES schools, and also further handicaps students who lack this advantage. That is, schooling that is segregated by SES is most likely to benefit students who are already educationally privileged, but harm students who find themselves at educational disadvantage, associated with low SES backgrounds. (Perry & McConney, 2010, p. 81)

The inequity of the relationship between school SES composition and achievement in Australia can be described as a win-lose situation, in which "the advantage gained by one section of the school population has created a recognisable disadvantage to the remainder" (Bonnor & Shepherd, 2016, p. 33). This has created a social hierarchy in which top schools reach the top because other schools are pushed to the bottom (Callingham, 2014). Locally, the injustice that has exacerbated across-school social, academic and residential segregation in Melbourne, Victoria, can be attributed to "the 'enterprise culture' prevalent in the Melbourne policy context" (J. Jackson & Lamb, 2014, p. 21). Globally, the injustice has been attributed to neoliberal hegemony (McCarthy, Pitton, Kim, & Monje, 2009) as "needs have been replaced by privileges as a mark of those who deserve; the state has been displaced by the market; entitlement occluded by 'choice' " (Fine, 2008, p. 231).

A consistent finding in Australia since the early 1900s has been that these democratic injustices have led to "major differences in the total social investment in the education of rich children and poor children" (Connell, 1993, p. 25), which has intensified inequalities in educational opportunity and outcomes. In Chapter 4, the effects of the neoliberal appropriation of education (McCarthy et al., 2009) on across-school social

regulation in Victoria will be unpacked in relation to the macro- and micro-level contexts in which the case study school is embedded.

Literature regarding social arrangements and engagement has emphasised that the logic of marketisation in education has both legitimised social stratification and been an obstacle to students' parity of participation within and across schools. As a result, many young people from low socio-economic backgrounds have experienced the injustice of marginality and exclusion, and these have not only impacted their day-to-day engagement with school and school learning (Munns et al., 2006), but have had enduring personal consequences (Boaler et al., 2000; Fine & Weis, 2004).

For many young people who internalised the status subordination they were exposed to during their formal years of schooling (Graham et al., 2016), including from other students (Reay, 2006), the traces of their unjust experiences have resulted in low learner identity and negative self-concept (Hattam, Brennan, Zipin, & Comber, 2009). That is, many young people have learned to blame themselves for failing within social arrangements that denied them the status of full partners in the social interaction that comprises education. Te Riele (2012) drew on Bourdieu's 1984 notion of "symbolic violence" to explain how "young people who are in positions of structural disadvantage view themselves in ways which reflect the stigmatised social position they occupy" (p. 247).

This section on democratic justice in education has emphasised some of the ways that within-school and across-school social arrangements can compound, rather than liberate particular young people from, life circumstances.

The next section focuses on educational provision that works to engage students from low socio-economic backgrounds who, within the dominant culture of schooling, were likely to be classified as "deficient or inferior" (Fraser, 2008, p. 114) and to be relegated to the category of "without hope" (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000, p. 134). In contrast, a more democratic, socially just approach to education provides these young people with pockets of hope.

Pockets of Hope

Sitting outside the of conventional mainstream educational provision are localised "pockets" of provision that offer hope to students who have been marginalised and disenfranchised due to cultural difference and socio-economic disadvantage

(Lewthwaite, Babacan, Te Riele, Murray, & Thomas, 2018). Slee (1989), in collaboration with young people aged 13 to 15 years, discovered that the educational needs of those being educated outside of mainstream educational provision were "not essentially 'special' and in need of remediation" (p. 27) compared to those within mainstream education. The research emphasised that "all young people have needs" (p. 27). McGregor et al. (2017) also stress that the provision of personally meaningful education to all young people requires "a sustained commitment to prioritising the needs of students over the needs of schooling markets" (p. 172). These counter-narratives to both educational discourses of individualism and meritocracy and interventionist discourses of "disengaged" students are vital because, according to McGregor et al. (2017), when students' needs get addressed, this clears the path for learning. McGregor et al. (2017) point to an orientation of social justice that is outside of the traditional paradigm. These authors explain that "relationships, pedagogy and curriculum will all be irrelevant if students are not able to attend school because their schools are not flexible enough to cater to their diverse needs, including economic needs" (p. 91).

The adjectives "flexible" and "diverse" are pertinent because they present a challenge to bounded, standardised forms of conventional schooling. Tyack and Cuban (1995) allude to the tenacity and predictability of the organisational framework in schools that includes "the ways that schools divide time and space, classify students and allocate them to classrooms, splinter knowledge into 'subjects' and award grades and 'credits' as evidence of learning" (p. 85). An illustration of this boundedness and standardisation in the school timetable and curriculum has been provided by P. Thomson (2007):

> As timetable, the boxes [of the time-space grid] suggest lessons – the teacher and students can move within the confines of the lesson time – but not transgress the borders … because that will disrupt all the other teachers and students working within the little slots of time and in their own little separate spaces. … As curriculum … Each little box is bounded within a subject, strand, and level and each little box contains a little piece of knowledge that must be taught, measured, and recorded. (pp. 113-114)

This illustration indicates how, in conventional school settings, standardisation is associated with compliance and structures are bounded by technologies of efficiency. Within such boundedness, Kunc (2000) has observed that "uniformity is valued, and conformity is the criterion for belonging" (p. 85). Therefore, those who conform – behaviourally, socially and academically – are included, whereas those who cannot or do not conform are subject to displacement (Vadeboncoeur, 2009).

In contrast to the boundedness and uniformity associated with conventional schooling is the flexibility and diversity associated with what McGregor et al. (2017) refer to as "unconventional" schooling, and "those programmes and schools that attempt to operate in ways that provide new educational opportunities for young people, usually marginalised, who are no longer in the formal system and are usually at various levels of personal need" (p. 4). The Victorian Education Department (DEECD, 2010) has acknowledged the flexibility of unconventional forms of schooling by adopting the term "flexible learning options" to refer to the range of programs within school and community settings designed to support what it has described as "the small number of disengaged students, estimated to be up to 2%" (p. 14). Like McGregor et al. (2017), Te Riele (2006) prefers the concept of "marginalised" rather than "disengaged" or "at risk" students and she challenged the policy discourse of "a problematic minority and a 'normal' majority" (p. 141) as a false dichotomy because "not only are there problems in the 'majority' and strengths in the 'minority' – but … students share many of the same concerns and experiences" (p. 141). Te Riele (2006) draws on the notion of "complex hope" in the call for policy "to enable schools to respond creatively and flexibly to the variety and complexity of reasons which made schooling in one way or another unsuited to students' needs" (p. 142).

The shift in attention from disengaged students to a creative and flexible form of schooling has been taken up by some government schools as was showcased in *Connect*, an online magazine that promotes student participation. In a special issue titled "Passions for Learning",[10] one principal remarked that "students' passions and participation are best stimulated outside of traditional school structures" (Callingham, 2015, p. 25). Similarly, Smyth et al. (2010) refer to more relational possibilities in secondary schools as "doing" school differently. A more creative, unconventional approach has also been taken by the majority of flexible learning providers whose "programs and schools take as their starting point that 'mainstream' approaches to school have not worked well for these young people and therefore a different approach is needed" (Te Riele, Davies, & Baker, 2015, p. 10). When a "different approach" has been taken, the young people in these programs and schools, often for the first time, have formed social and academic relationships within their learning communities (McGregor et al., 2015; Plows & Baker, 2017). Further, McCluskey, Riddell, and Weedon (2015) found that the aspects young people praised about their educational

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10. https://research.acer.edu.au/connect/vol2015/iss212/

experiences within alternative provision aligned with the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*: "they felt valued (this resonates with Article 28); they had new opportunities for achievement (Article 29); they felt they were listened to (Article 12)" (p. 605). According to McGregor et al. (2017), these socially just alternatives draw attention to "elements of schooling that require change in order to provide opportunities for all young people to learn and to develop meaningful outcomes that are not determined by their social class or cultural backgrounds" (p. 172). In order for that change to occur, McGregor's (2017) contention is "that while we should support alternative educational provision, we must work to address the fundamentally socially unjust ideologies that are driving government policies – including those in education – towards greater social and economic inequalities" (pp. 556–557).

Into the second decade of the 21st century, calls to vastly redesign schools and learning systems to engage all learners have been made both internationally (Hannon, 2012, 2015; S. Hart & Drummond, 2014; Robinson, 2013; Sahlberg, 2011; Zhao, 2012, 2015) and nationally (M. Mills, McGregor, Baroutsis, Te Riele, & Hayes, 2016; Te Riele, 2014; Wierenga & Taylor, 2015). In light of successful educational change in Finland, Sahlberg (2011) emphasises that what is needed "is not yet another educational reform but renewal, a continuous systemic transformation of teaching and learning" (p. 143). However, unless the transformation is towards socially just educational models, improvements may be inequitably distributed (Bryk, Bender Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010).

Hope of achieving socially just educational models relies on transformation of teaching and learning at multiple levels. It includes an expanded conception of democracy and democratic citizenship that upholds every citizen's right to democratic participation, and that enhances the capacity for personal and collective flourishing (Fielding & Moss, 2011; S. Hart & Drummond, 2014). It also relies on an expanded notion of a community of learning that reaches out into the community and that energises the individual and collective strengths of young people and adults by pooling diverse perspectives, intellects, talents, and passions (Fielding & Moss, 2011; Hannon, 2015; Robinson, 2013; Sahlberg, 2011; Zhao, 2012). Underlying educational reform is the need to challenge both determinist beliefs about "fixed" ability (S. Hart et al., 2004; S. Hart & Drummond, 2014) and meritocratic, market-driven orientations of student potential as "academic ability". This would promote a more expansive appreciation of "ability as

multidimensional" (Fielding & Moss, 2011, p. 129) and learning capacity as subject to change (S. Hart et al., 2004; S. Hart & Drummond, 2014).

Another crucial element to transformation of teaching and learning is the challenge to expand students' habits of the mind beyond the limits of current norms as outlined by Lucas, Claxton, and Spencer (2013): "Do we prefer young people who are acquiescent or sceptical; compliant or critical; committed to 'beating' their peers or inclined to collaborate; eager to give answers or eager to explore?" (p. 8). The latter habits entail a shift to a growth mindset (Claxton & Lucas, 2015) and part of that shift includes an openness to diversity in order to "communicate across cultural boundaries, engage in critical reflection, and learn from differing traditions and viewpoints" (Woods & Woods, 2009, p. 6). According to Holdsworth (2005), with young people held in schools for longer they need to be taken seriously and they need to be engaged in serious learning with meaningful outcomes. Optimal learning environments, which have transformed beyond the compliance model of engagement to build learning experiences that engender young people's "deep engagement" in learning (Hannon, 2012; Price, 2010), exist within Australia and internationally, but only in pockets (Fielding & Moss, 2011; Lucas et al., 2013; M. Mills & McGregor, 2014; OECD, 2013; Te Riele, 2009, 2014; Woods & Woods, 2009).

If student engagement is to become more widespread within the mainstream education system, then, as Sahlberg (2011) has recommended, "engagement in productive learning in school should become an important criterion of judging the success or failure of schools" (p. 143). The research project of this thesis is based on the conviction that schools do not need to do something different, on the margins, to engage students from low socio-economic backgrounds in productive learning; rather, education systems need to ensure that all students get equitable access to opportunities to be engaged in productive learning.

Chapter 2 has explored the literature from the field. Chapter 3 is *Democratic youth participation: A strength-based approach to youth investigating educational engagement*, which is a synthesis of literature that framed the formulation of the original proposal of a multi-case study design. Details of the reason that this was amended to a single-case design are given in Chapter 4 – Methodology.

Democratic youth participation

A strength-based approach to youth investigating educational engagement

BY MAGGIE CALLINGHAM

Australia's policy imperatives for improved student performance have again put the spotlight on the pervasive disengagement of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Rather than finding more evidence about how schooling does not work for some young people, and how background impacts on that, this paper argues for contributions to a different kind of knowledge by turning to these same young people and investigating what does work to engage them in learning. Consequently, the view put forward here is for an approach that turns the focus from disengagement to engagement, and from youth as contributing to the problem to youth as contributing to the solution. This paper provides a synthesis of literature on educational engagement, strength-based research approaches, and democratic youth participation that framed the development of a democratic, strength-based approach to young people investigating educational engagement.

Australia's policy imperatives for improved student performance have once more put the spotlight on secondary school students' disengagement and the need for middle-school reform. This renewed focus is a reaction to Australia's latest performance measures which yet again indicate that, overall, students from low socioeconomic and Indigenous backgrounds achieved lower results and lower levels of achievement "through to Year 12 attainment and to later participation in work or further study" (Council of Australian Governments 2012, p.xvi).

What these results indicate is that, to date, Australia's history of social and educational policies has not resulted in more engaging or equitable educational outcomes. For example,

in 1993, in response to evidence that young adolescents were " 'switched off', 'tuned out' or otherwise disengaged from learning" (Cumming 1996, p.6), the Australian Government identified the middle years of schooling as a priority, and funded projects nationally to investigate and develop the kinds of learning experiences that would be responsive to the needs of adolescents (Free 1996). The focus on the middle years of schooling involved developing "a new philosophy or culture of schooling, which [would] fully engage young people" (Free 1996, p.vi). Twenty years on, the Victorian Government's response to the latest student performance figures mirrored the earlier federal response: an emphasis on "the need for major changes in the organisation and approach at the secondary level, particularly in the middle years" (State of Victoria, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2012, p.4).

In almost two decades, even though we have learned much about the kinds of educational experiences that engage students in their learning and are responsive to the needs of adolescents (Hayes et al. 2006; Lamb & Rice 2008; Smyth et al. 2008), major reforms in secondary schooling have not been realised. It seems that, over the years, bureaucratic, "top down" strategies for change have had very little influence, overall, in producing more engaging educational experiences in secondary schools, especially for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Victorian Auditor-General 2012, p.24). This indicates that educational engagement is a critical equity issue. Comprehensive Canadian research across 100 secondary schools, and 32,000 students in grades 6–12, found that "schools with higher levels of engagement are more successful with students from all kinds of backgrounds" (Levin 2010, p.89). Thus, educational engagement cannot be separated from issues of social in(ex) clusion and, as Kajner and Shultz (2013) contend,

"all engagement is inevitably political" (p.3). Over the years, the lack of policy success with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the consequent pervasiveness of disengagement within this subgroup of students, has been attributed to a complex combination of conditions including: broad political and social structures shaping society and schools (te Riele 2009); local and historical contexts of schools (te Riele 2006); increased framing of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in deficit, "at risk" discourses (Smyth & McInerney 2013; te Riele 2006; Wehlage et al. 1989); increasing dominance of medical and psychological discourses that portray young people who are marginalised in conventional schooling as a problem to be solved through diagnosis and treatment (Slee 1994); and a failure to consult these young people about the very things that affect them (Catone & LeBoeuf 2012). From such a problem-oriented position, the tenacity, pervasiveness and complexity of this phenomenon can seem insoluble, and these young people become "relegated to the role of 'object of concern' " (Cahill 2011, p.67).

An alternative model seeks to empower young people to "undertak[e] their own ... critical and collective inquiry, reflection and action" (Cammarota & Fine 2008, p.2). Consequently, while acknowledging the aforementioned complexities, the view put forward here is for a more optimistic orientation that turns the focus *from* disengagement *to* engagement, and *from* young people as contributing to the problem *to* young people as contributing to the solution (Cahill 2011). The choice of a strength-based stance that focuses on engagement does not preclude, or deny the need for, a critical stance. I concur with Freire (1968/1996) that "[t] here is no such thing as a *neutral* educational process" (p.16, emphasis in original), which means that there are sociological insights to be gained from a study into young people's

engagement with learning – just as there are from studies into their disengagement.

Accordingly, this paper provides a synthesis of literature on educational engagement, strength-based research approaches and democratic youth participation, which has contributed to the framing of a democratic, strength-based approach to young people investigating educational engagement. First, I discuss educational engagement and its capacity-building and life-enhancing potential. I then go on to consider strength-based approaches to research that draw out the insider knowledge, expertise, capacities, energy and creativity within school communities (Cammarota & Fine 2008). Third, I outline examples of democratic youth participation, including Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), in investigations that concern young people. Finally, I draw these sections together to discuss the implications – for young people, schools and educational equity – of a democratic, strength-based approach to young people investigating educational engagement.

Educational engagement

The construct of educational engagement put forward in this paper involves a complex interplay between school students and school contexts. Importantly, engagement is understood to be an alterable state (Christenson, Reschly & Wiley 2012; Wehlage et al. 1989). Contrary to the common institutional focus of disengaged students as the problem, research recognises that engagement "is not generated by students alone … engagement is highly dependent on the institution's contribution" (Wehlage et al. 1989, p.177). This is why engagement is strongly linked to school reform (Christenson, Reschly & Wiley 2012), as evidenced in middle school and school renewal initiatives that focus on transforming traditional school structures and pedagogies to promote engagement (Hayes et

al. 2006). Relevant Australian research (Hayes et al. 2006; Lamb & Rice 2008; Smyth et al. 2008) highlights institutional elements that are generally addressed in this transformation process to engender engagement:

Pedagogy and curriculum: Factors that promote intellectual challenge and active participation, including a mix of explicit teaching of key concepts and higher-order thinking skills; building relationships and supportive environments including collaborative learning, group problem-solving and peer tutoring; valuing difference; connecting to students' cultures and lives; promoting student choice and autonomy; and authentic learning and assessment tasks.

School organisation: School practices and structures that promote belonging, inclusion and equitable student outcomes; the school as a professional learning community where teachers work collaboratively to improve teaching and learning for all students; and students' participation in decision-making to enhance school improvement.

Culture and community: School–community partnerships, including those with parents, which promote meaningful connections and draw on local resources.

Research indicates that all of these elements, working together, will produce educational engagement "when the lives, knowledges, interests, bodies and energies of young people are at the center of the classroom and the school" (Thomson & Comber 2003, p.305).

Levin (2010, p.90) locates engagement thus:

> *Everything we say we want for students – from the desire to be lifelong learners to effective citizenship to academic skill development to completion of high school and participation in postsecondary education – is tied to*

high levels of student engagement.

This statement points to the high-stakes nature and life-enhancing potential of educational engagement. However, although adults may want the best for students, and political and educational policies may seek to engender engagement, when students are not consulted about their perspectives and their lived experiences of teaching, learning and schooling, the best of intentions are unlikely to meet their needs or improve their life trajectories (Smyth & Hattam 2001). In putting forward their case for the expertise of youth to shape school reform, Catone and LeBoeuf (2012) contend, "[s]tudents experience the strengths and weaknesses of our schools on a daily basis ... Yet seldom are they consulted when the big decisions are made about their schools – decisions that ultimately impact them the most" (p.16). In putting forward their own case, young people contend:

> *[It would help] if they [teachers] listened once in a while to our views instead of thinking they're always right. If teachers want respect they should give students respect too and they should also respect our ideas and our views. (Osler cited in Waheed 2012, p.16)*

> *It's crazy that the views of students barely figure ... Student engagement, isn't that key to motivating students? And who better to evaluate how much a school gets behind its students than the students themselves. (Ben cited in Cervone 2012)*

Both of these young people articulate the point that students' views are underutilised and undervalued within schools, and they call on adults to recognise the potential of students to contribute and to recognise their strengths.

A strength-based approach

From a strength-based perspective, engagement is focused on realising the capacity-building and life-enhancing potential within people, processes and organisations. This is in contrast to *dis*engagement, which is so often focused on the deficits and lack of life potential within particular young people (te Riele 2009; Smyth & Hattam 2001). The advantage of a strength-based approach, compared to a conventional problem-oriented approach, is that the focus is on realising potential rather than on remedying deficits. This is the approach taken by the Foundation for Young Australians in its initiative *Unlimited potential: A commitment to young Australians* (2013):

> *Our collective role is to be relentlessly optimistic about the young people of this country and about their capacity and capability to envision and create the nation and world in which they want to live and work. (p.1)*

Strength-based, collaborative approaches to teaching and learning, and research, have demonstrated that young people who have been labelled as lacking in motivation, ability and social skills *are* capable of concentrated effort, attainment of goals, high levels of achievement, and social cooperation (Cammarota & Fine 2008; Carrington, Bland & Brady 2010; Thomson & Comber 2003; Wehlage et al. 1989).

In the study 'Students and teachers achieving re-engagement' (Carrington, Bland & Brady 2010), young people were positioned as full research partners investigating the middle years of schooling in four government schools "with comparatively low progression to senior schooling" (Carrington, Bland & Brady 2010, p.451). This is an example of a collaborative research approach, commonly referred to as Participatory Action Research, that specifically highlights "[b]uilding the

strength and capacity of local participants [a]s an important feature" (Kirshner, O'Donoghue & McLaughlin 2005, p.135). Strength-based studies such as this demonstrate democratic and respectful co-participation.

Democratic youth participation

There is a substantial difference between youth participation on adult terms and democratic youth participation; it can be the difference between tokenism and active citizenship (Hart 1992):

> *Young people want to make change and be involved in the community. (Sam cited in Taylor 2010, p.6)*

The desire and capacity of young people to participate in shaping their communities and challenging the status quo (Black, Walsh & Taylor 2011) are showcased in a series of research reports that celebrate democratic youth participation:

> *[Three] reports profile ... 36 youth-led organisations working in community partnerships nationwide to tackle challenges ranging from disengagement from school, cross-cultural conflict, substance abuse, social exclusion, boredom and vandalism through to migrant settlement, racism and Australia's response to climate change. (Walsh 2010, p.5)*

In volume two of this series, Yassim (cited in Taylor 2010), dissatisfied with the lack of momentum of "older people" towards inequities in society, articulates young people's passion to be active change agents:

> *The biggest thing I think is the inequality ... Lots of things have always needed to change – poverty, malnutrition, lack of resources reaching people who really need it ... This needs to be the focus but it never is ... Older people ... think it's not so*

> *important or that ... it will just pass. Young people believe that it won't just pass and that we have to do something about it. (p.6)*

Active participation leads to active citizenship, which is predicated on the definition of democracy as "government by the people, meaning that people participate in the decisions that affect their lives" (Knight & Pearl 2000, p.213). Within democratic social relations in school reform initiatives, and educational research that privileges youth participation, students are positioned as equal partners in teaching and learning, valued members of school communities and active agents in the education system (Rudduck & Flutter 2000). Democratic school movements strive to achieve this ideal by seeking to dismantle unequal power structures and develop inclusive, socially just relations (Slee 2013). Similarly, democratised research, such as Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), moves beyond youth as subjects, and beyond tokenistic participation, to integral participation where youth are agents with a vested interest in the process and the outcomes. When they have agency in schools, young people have demonstrated maturity and depth of insight into teaching, learning and schooling that have far exceeded teachers' expectations (Rudduck & Flutter 2000). This is evidenced in Victoria where secondary school students have designed and conducted 'Teach the Teacher' professional development programs with teachers at their schools:

> *The program aims to improve learning outcomes for young people, develop stronger and more effective relationships between students and teachers, improve teaching and learning processes, and increase student ownership of and engagement with education. (Walsh 2013, p.26)*

After promising responses from the two secondary schools that conducted pilots in

2012, the Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC), with the support of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, assisted 10 additional secondary schools to conduct the program in 2013 (Seddon, K. 2013, pers. comm., 13 November).

The democratic integrity of this initiative is exemplified in the relational symmetry and reciprocity between students and teachers, who come "together to talk about classroom learning and teaching" (Walsh 2013, p.26). This youth-led initiative also demonstrates the "intergenerational transfer of leadership, trust and resources to enable ... young people to meet the challenges and take up the opportunities that lie ahead" (Foundation for Young Australians 2013, p.1). In other words, young people develop future-oriented skills and active citizenship in authentic ways.

A research methodology that creates space for intergenerational dialogue, trust and local knowledge production is Participatory Action Research (PAR), which:

> ... stems from the understanding that knowledge(s) are plural and that those who have been systematically excluded from knowledge generation need to be active participants in the research process, especially when it is about them. (Brydon-Miller et al. 2011, p.389)

Fine (2008) refers to this as PAR's "democratic commitment to break the monopoly on who holds knowledge" (p.215). In particular, YPAR is fundamentally committed to addressing inequity and, as such, it specifically promotes active participation of under-represented youth and those who are, or have been, marginalised or excluded. The variety and creativity within YPAR are testimony to its inclusive nature. To enable young people to engage with research in purposeful yet enjoyable ways, YPAR projects commonly provide opportunities for creative

expression through arts-based methods such as storytelling, Indigenous art, visual art and photography, fibre and media art, performance and state-of-the-art technologies (Brydon-Miller et al. 2011). This promotes unique styles of expression, and youth researchers who cannot, or do not wish to, communicate in standard written or spoken English can utilise youth (sub)culture and local vernacular without being limited, disadvantaged or demeaned. In this way, YPAR "challenges ... forms of knowledge generation that position non-dominant groups as outsiders" (Brydon-Miller et al. 2011, p.389). This is summed up in an insight gained through democratic youth participation:

> [T]he youth early on corrected our (not very) construct(ive) frame of "**the achievement gap**" and told us, "We're willing to work on this project, but you have to call it **the opportunity gap** project, and not **achievement gap**. Achievement puts the blame on us, and opportunity returns the blame to the system." (Fine 2008, p.225, emphasis in original)

The centrality of youth participation and the significance of youth perspectives were taken seriously in this democratic research partnership.

The literature on educational engagement, strength-based research approaches and democratic youth participation helped to frame a democratic, strength-based approach to young people investigating educational engagement. In the final section I discuss the formulation of this study and its potential implications – for young people, schools and educational equity.

Discussion and implications

This paper has argued the benefits of a strength-based research approach to contribute important understandings about young people's engagement with education, especially young

people from backgrounds of disadvantage. Just as important, it has called for a democratic, youth participatory methodology that values young people's knowledge, expertise, capacities, energy and creativity. A strength-based, YPAR approach is claimed to have the potential to empower young people as agents of change, including young people whose participation has generally not been sought, for the contribution they can make to understandings about teaching, learning and schooling.

A review of the literature led to the formulation of the study 'Insider expertise: Students and staff investigate educational engagement'. This research will be conducted in three government schools, in contexts of disadvantage, that have demonstrated a commitment to improving achievement and attainment levels of particular students by incorporating educational initiatives to engage them. The objectives of the study are to investigate the experience of educational engagement in Years 7–10, and how the expertise of students and staff in these initiatives and across the school can contribute to understandings of educational engagement. Hence, rather than finding even more evidence about how schooling *does not* work for some young people and how background impacts on that, this strength-based study seeks to contribute a different kind of knowledge by turning to these same young people and investigating what *does* work to engage them in their learning at school.

A democratic, strength-based approach to youth investigating educational engagement has potential benefits at a practical level for both young people and schools. For young people, it has the potential to overturn traditional power differentials in which they are positioned as mere recipients *of* education, by repositioning them as knowledgeable agents *in* their own education (Cammarota & Fine 2008). As Levin (2010) contends, "[i]f data from students could

be linked to changes known to be effective ... we might start to see some lasting and worthwhile changes in the way students experience our high schools" (p.90). For schools, such an approach has the potential to build understandings of educational engagement that centre on, and value, the investigations of students whose daily experiences provide them with powerful insider knowledge that can inform and drive reform in schools (Cammarota & Fine 2008).

A benefit of strength-based, democratic, participatory research is that it utilises the power of "internal" perspectives to instigate meaningful change at a local level. A limitation of such an approach is that it is not easily implemented in systematic ways, and at scale, because such initiatives would tend to overrule, and undermine, local ownership and contribution. This consequence has been evident when "top down", bureaucratic policies for change have been ineffective at improving the educational engagement of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

From an educational equity perspective, sociologists in Australia and overseas have been instrumental in confronting and dispelling many cultural myths surrounding education, such as the attribution of differences in students' abilities and intelligence to factors such as race and social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds (O'Hanlon 2003). Unfortunately, the association of inequities in educational engagement, achievement and attainment with such factors is still obvious in Australia. Democratic youth participation aims to contribute to a turnaround in this trend by seeking to find local answers to the perennial policy challenge of facilitating more engaging and equitable educational outcomes for young Australians.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 4
Methodology

In this chapter, I tease out and account for the methodological approach and the process undertaken that aligns with my commitment to research as a social justice praxis. Mueller, Tilleczek, Rummens, and Boydell (2008), in their inquiry into early school leaving, proposed an imperative that research in the field of social justice "should be guided by the principle and ultimate goal of improving the chances and opportunities of children and youth to be successful and to develop their full potential" (p. 69).

It has been argued that research questions are the starting point and driver of research decisions (Thomas, 2011; Tight, 2017). The questions that drove this inquiry: *How does a school in a low socio-economic area engage its junior secondary students (years 7 to 10) in social and academic relationships with school and school learning?* and *How does the notion of democratic justice play out in a school to shape student engagement?* have an intimate genealogy positioned. Both questions are positioned by the effects that my social class background had on my junior secondary school experiences. This positioning drove the inquiry's social justice imperative, with an aim to provide insight into better ways for schools to engage young people who, historically, have been ill-served by conventional forms of schooling (Allan & Slee, 2008).

Educational researchers who frame their inquiries through a social justice lens claim a methodological commitment that is informed by a professional, moral, and ethical responsibility to undertake inquiries that make a difference to the education of marginalised and disadvantaged learners (Boyask, 2012).

Methodological Possibilities

The trajectory of social justice in qualitative inquiries has been traced by Lincoln and Denzin (2018) across historical moments: from the *traditional moment* with positivist theorising through the *modernist* and *blurred genres moments* with the appearance of post-positivist theorising and the introduction of new interpretive perspectives such as hermeneutics, structuralism, semiotics, and phenomenology. The turn from interpretive work to critical stances has seen a rise in constructivist, feminist, critical race, Marxist, cultural studies, and queer theory inquiries (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Through these perspectives emerged the *crisis of representation* and *postmodern moments* with reflexive texts blurring the boundaries between researcher and researched, and in which

critical, localised theorising was advocated. This early trajectory in qualitative inquiries has led me towards the critical stance that "speaks for and with those who are on the margins" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. x).

Contemporary qualitative inquiries have increasingly demanded an expanded imaginary that moves beyond the individualistic to the systemic (Weis, Fine, & Dimitriadis, 2009). Such an imaginary interrogates the dominant cultural and structural forces that conceal the inequity and injustices that get inflicted on people marginalised by emblematic indicators (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Researchers have noted (Allan & Slee, 2008; Lincoln & Denzin, 2018) the criticisms from some advocates of the positivist tradition that qualitative inquiries can lack objectivity and are "advocacy", "biased", and "political". Yet, according to Kincheloe and McLaren (2005), an inquiry that aspires to be "critical" and confront injustice "thus becomes a transformative endeavor unembarrassed by the label 'political' and unafraid to consummate a relationship with emancipatory consciousness" (p. 305).

Such inquiries become methodological endeavours in which there are no neutral, positivist perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and they advance forms of inquiry "that validate and give voice to people who have often been silenced, misinterpreted, misrepresented and placed on the margins" (Milner IV, 2007, p. 397). In my methodological imagining of an inquiry with students who have been positioned as the educational Other, I have attempted to validate the students and to keep faith with a commitment to social justice in the process of answering the research questions. I believe, in line with the principles and praxis of critical theory and feminist methodologies, that it is not only the outcome of social inquiry (that is, what is discovered) that is important but the process (that is, how it is conducted) is also of utmost importance (Liamputtong, 2007; Milner IV, 2007).

It has been claimed that critical theory has the "ability to disrupt and challenge the status quo" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 279) because critical theorists scrutinise normalised notions and question "racism, sexism, heteronormativity, gender oppression, religious intolerance, and other systems of oppression" (Kincheloe, McLaren, Steinberg, & Monzó, 2018, p. 236). Critical theory's tradition of cultural criticism, which developed from the Frankfurt school in the early 1900s, was based on the view that "the world was in urgent need of reinterpretation" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 279). With ongoing reinterpretation required, due to changing social circumstances and technological innovations, and with theoretical advances and new methodological

insights to draw on, critical theory has continued to evolve and be reconceptualised (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005).

While it remains committed to issues of power and justice, and the abolition of oppression and inequality, critical theory has expanded its analysis beyond the human-made, state-enforced category of social class to include other manifestations of oppression and inequality based on factors such as gender, race and sexuality (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). This has resulted in a critical theory that "reconceptualized by poststructuralism and feminism promotes a politics of difference" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 314). According to Kincheloe and McLaren (2005), "poststructuralism frames power not simply as one aspect of a society but as the basis of society" (p. 313). Liamputtong (2007) notes that inquiry into a feminist framework questions social power; resists empirical oppression; commits to political action; gives voice to the marginalised; and "aims to construct knowledge which may benefit women and other minority groups" (p. 12).

Pivotal to the process of my inquiry was the recognition "that both researcher and participant are positioned and are being positioned by virtue of history and context" (Olesen, 2005, p. 248). This recognition generated my understanding of how sociological framing conceptualises an individual life, not in isolation as a disconnected, ahistorical, autonomous entity but as embedded within multiple sociological levels and influenced by multiple structural determinants (C. W. Mills, 1959/2000; Wacquant, 2008).

The sociological framing of this inquiry was a methodological choice to contextualise rather than pathologise the public issue of student engagement within a school in a low socio-economic area. This task was undertaken by exploring the interconnections between students' everyday experiences of engagement and the social, economic and political forces at multiple levels that shape those experiences.

The experience of social class was prominent in this inquiry through both my working-class origins and the social class of the students. According to feminist researcher Diane Reay (1996b), "there exists no paradigm for a working class stance" (p. 61). This may be because, as Haylett (2003) contends, "the inequality from which [social class] develops is inherent to neoliberal economic organisation, and for that reason it may seem inappropriate to embrace it" (p. 59). According to Reay (1996a), who reflects on her own working-class origins and middle-class trajectory in her research, she retains a

loyalty to her working-class roots through "a commitment to fighting inequalities of class, 'race', disability and sexuality, as well as those of gender" (p. 454). I identify with that commitment with regard to my working-class roots and this positionality has influenced my choice of research paradigms.

According to Ling (2017), the importance of researchers identifying their paradigmatic position is that it "reveals the premises on which the research is based" (p. 41). This inquiry is based on the premise that it is necessary to draw on students' experiences of the social phenomenon of student engagement while also investigating multilevel power dynamics and structural influences. To do this, I decided to work from a critical transformative paradigm (Ling, 2017), which positions participants as both "co-constructors of knowledge and co-actors in bringing about change and reform" (Ling, 2017, p. 35). Working transformatively requires moving beyond an interpretive aim of the researcher gaining a subjective understanding of the problem and towards a critical transformative aim of empowering students themselves to gain their own understandings in order to take action to tackle the problem (Ling, 2017).

The importance of moving beyond interpretive through critical to a transformative stance can be gleaned from Lynch and O'Neill's (1994) assessment of the classic study of the secondary school experiences and outcomes of working-class boys by Willis. Willis' ethnographic study was innovative for its time because it took a distinctly critical approach, but as Lynch and O'Neill (1994) explain, it fell short of any transformative agenda for the boys or for education:

> [The work was] written about working class "lads" rather than with them. Although highly influential at the time, it has not led to any formal recognition of a working class perspective in education, and this, in itself, shows how the structural problem of class-related knowledge stratification cannot be readily overcome. (p. 312)

Morrell (2008) notes how "for those interested in changing the current conditions in schools, it is imperative that young people play a central role" (p. 182). A precedent for working transformatively with young people is found in a study of equity-geared detracking reforms in the United States (Rubin, 2008). In Rubin's (2008) multiple case study research, the interpretivist and critical paradigms supported a merged exploration and analysis of "the varied meanings of detracking for its diverse participants, as situated within broader school and societal patterns of racial and socioeconomic inequality" (p. 653). In my research, working transformatively facilitated a merged exploration and analysis with a focus on student engagement as conceptualised within

an overarching framework of democratic, socially just education. Such an exploration aligns with the provocation "to explore a *wide unit of analysis* (which should include structures, policies and systems of power) even if we focus empirically upon a relatively *narrow unit of data collection*" (Fine, 2015, p. 8, emphases in original).

Casing the Joint

Any inquiry into the social phenomenon of student engagement within the everyday life of junior secondary schooling can be a challenging undertaking because student engagement is inherently embedded in the culture and context of a school, which is itself influenced by social, economic and political forces at multiple levels. A case study approach was, therefore, advantageous because "it can 'close in' on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice" (Flyvberg, 2011, p. 309). Although case study is employed in different ways (Schwandt & Gates, 2018), there are commonalities and in reviewing these, Tight (2017) states "that case study involves the study of a particular case, or a number of cases, that the case will be complex and bounded, that it will be studied in its context, and that the analysis undertaken will seek to be holistic" (p. 377).

Case study, which provides the versatility to work across methodologies (VanWynsberghe & Khan, 2007), is an often-used approach by both interpretive and critical educational researchers (Yazan, 2015). It has been suggested that case study is a choice of what is to be studied rather than a methodological choice (Flyvberg, 2011; Stake, 2008). This is because case study is not specific about what methods are used (Schwandt & Gates, 2018) but can draw on whatever methods seem appropriate to develop as thorough an understanding of the case as possible (Merriam, 2009; Punch, 2005). The bounding of this case study was junior secondary-level schooling (years 7 to 10) at a government secondary school in a low socio-economic suburb in outer south-eastern Melbourne and the focus of the case was student engagement.

My original research proposal was for a comparative, multiple-case study in three schools. However, while I was conducting fieldwork at the first case study school, the leadership team announced its intention to launch a whole-school engagement initiative inspired by an initiative that was successful in engaging "vulnerable" students and preventing early school leaving. This announcement was significant for my research because much of the literature I had read about programs that engaged vulnerable students had emphasised that the majority of these programs were positioned on the

margins or outside of conventional schooling. As a result, conventional schooling was not motivated to change to engage all students (Graham et al., 2016; Slee, 2011; Te Riele, 2014). I therefore applied to continue at the school in order to investigate the process of change as the school scaled up to a whole-school engagement initiative.

The single-case study allowed for an-depth, multilayered analysis of the specific case (Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Stark & Torrance, 2004). Depth was facilitated by the longer period of time (18 months) at the single-case school rather than six months at each of the multiple-case schools. Since this was a study into student engagement within an overarching framework of democratic, socially just education, I sought methods of social research that would be tools for democratic engagement (Fine, 2006). It was therefore important

- from an engagement perspective, to include the participation of students in the research design

- from a democratic perspective, to integrate democratic processes of co-researching and co-production of knowledge

- from a social justice perspective, to privilege the participation of students whose engagement had been put most at risk within the normative culture of schooling.

To accommodate this, the case study design included both youth participatory action research and ethnography.

Participatory action research/co-production. Participatory action research/co-production in schools is underpinned by respect for young people's human right to participate as research collaborators and knowledge generators (Baroutsis, McGregor, & Mills, 2016; Bradbury-Jones & Taylor, 2015; R. Hart, 1992; Holland, Renold, Ross, & Hillman, 2010; Lundy, McEvoy, & Byrne, 2011; P. Thomson & Gunter, 2007). For Kane and Chimwayange (2014), an action research/co-production project supported teachers' practices as teachers learned from the students themselves how their practices influenced the students' learning. Similarly, this action research/co-production project seeks to learn about student engagement from the unique perspectives of students.

In particular, participatory projects within the critical paradigm seek to redistribute access to participation (Appadurai, 2006; Brydon-Miller, Kral, Maguire, Noffke, & Sabhlok, 2011; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Fine, 2008; Freire, 1996; R. Hart, 1992; Morrell, 2008). This is what Appadurai (2006) refers to as "the right to research" and an

important consideration in the current study was to prioritise access to this right beyond students from dominant, privileged cultural groups to include students from under-represented groups whose voices tend to be disregarded and whose viewpoints in schools tend to be overlooked due to their marginalisation (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Participatory action research (PAR) has the potential to produce a transformative agenda and the inquiry process itself was a means through which to address the inequitable distribution of student engagement in schools (Ling, 2017).

A PAR approach was particularly suited to this research study because PAR aims to understand and take action on concrete issues, such as student engagement, "while deepening understanding of broader social, economic, and political forces that shape these issues" (Brydon-Miller et al., 2011, p. 387). Youth participatory action research (YPAR), which applies a youth development lens to PAR processes (Berg Powers & Allaman, 2012), has gained recognition in its own right as offering "a powerful model of youth engagement" (Morrell, 2008, p. 182). Overall, the choice of YPAR sought to demonstrate an equity-oriented, non-marginalising approach to working with young people who tended to be placed at a disadvantage within schools and society.

As I attempted to use YPAR to explore student engagement collaboratively with under-represented students, I realised that the students whose engagement was the most marginalised would be the least likely to volunteer to participate, precisely because of their marginalised status. After reflecting on this dilemma, I engaged the principles of ethnographic inquiry because it has been noted how ethnographic methods can provide researchers with both the scope to participate in the field in diverse ways and the time to build trusting relationships (Kirshner, O'Donoghue, & McLaughlin, 2005), including with harder-to-reach students.

Ethnography. In their assessment of gaps in engagement-related research, Fredricks et al. (2004) emphasise the need to know more about individual student differences and they recommend that "more multi-method, observational, and ethnographic studies would contribute to this effort" (p. 87). Ethnographic studies involving multiple methods and observation, however, are not straightforward endeavours.

From its 19th century anthropological genealogy, ethnography has extended into a diversity of fields including, but not limited to, cultural studies, women's studies,

sociology, psychology, criminology and education (Tedlock, 2000). Over time, ethnography's top-down, one-way observation of the "other", via fieldwork, has come under scrutiny for its tendency towards an imperialist stance. This was controversially exposed in an early field diary of Bronislaw Malinowski, the anthropologist who established fieldwork as central to ethnography (Tedlock, 2000). Further controversies, through the 1960s and '70s, have contributed to the questioning of ethnographic ethics and authorship and to the move towards a more self-conscious stance of co-participation (Tedlock, 2000). According to Tedlock (2000):

> Such transformations have spurred not only a democratization of knowledge but a new critical awareness, resulting in the suggestion that the class, race, culture, and gender beliefs and behaviors of the inquirer be placed within the same historical moment, or critical plane, as those of the subjects of inquiry. (p. 466)

This move to ethnography as a social interaction, rather than an imperialist act, has added to the complexity of the ethnographer's work of interpreting experience. Altheide and Johnson (2011) emphasise that even within one field setting, there are multiple perspectives, meanings and activities to be reflected upon. Hence, the necessity for participation in the field for extended periods of time (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Youdell, 2006), first, "to grasp the importance of the values, emotions, beliefs, and other meanings of cultural members" (Altheide & Johnson, 2011, p. 582); second, to participate in the meaning-making of actual experience (Altheide & Johnson, 2011; Flick, 2002); and, third, to integrate "both first-hand empirical investigation and the theoretical and comparative interpretation of social organization and culture" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 1).

Wacquant (2008), in his comparative sociology of urban marginality, explains this ethnographic process as involving constant revision and enrichment between three elements: field observations "of concrete situations" (p. 9); structural analysis of "macrostructural determinants that, although ostensibly absent from the neighbourhood, still govern the practices and representations of its residents" (p. 10); and the process of theoretical constructions, which "always gain from being solidly harnessed to a carnal grasp of the historical experience for which they purport to account" (p. 10).

My investigation into student engagement in years 7 to 10, framed within an overarching framework of democratic, socially just education, involved spending 18 months in the field. This time facilitated my participation in the social organisation and culture of the school, which included, but was not limited to, volunteer teaching,

involvement in meetings and attendance at school events. In order to formulate theoretical and comparative interpretations about the ways that democratic justice played out in the school to shape student engagement, analysis gained through first-hand experience was integrated with structural analysis of local and wider relations of power.

Context

The casing of this study was junior secondary-level schooling at a government secondary school situated in a low socio-economic suburb in the outer south-east of Melbourne, which is the capital of the state of Victoria and the second largest city in Australia. In social research in education, it is not sufficient to simply locate the school *as* the context; it is also necessary to locate the multilevel contexts within which the school is embedded (Raffo, 2011). With the school requesting that it be named in publications related to the research (see Appendix D) and with information about this and neighbouring schools in the public domain of Australia's *My School* website, the context is situated socially, economically and politically to depict "a historically pertinent understanding" (Raffo, 2011, p. 9). It is not uncommon for researchers to refer to large databases in order to contextualise their research (Ling, 2017), and I refer to the *My School* database in order to contextualise the effects that educational policy decisions, in the form of competition and schooling markets, have created across this local context.

McClelland Secondary College was the first school recommended to me for my research into student engagement because of its reputation for incorporating innovative programs to engage its students. Two programs in particular, Hands On Learning[11] and Connect, were designed to engage students whose needs were not met within the conventional structures of schooling. I was also interested in the school because of its history of student participatory research. During its time as Karingal Park Secondary College, the school had a history of involvement in student action teams that were funded in Victorian schools between the late 1990s and early 2000s (Holdsworth, Cahill, & Smith, 2003; Holdsworth, Stafford, Stokes, & Tyler, 2001). These student action teams included students from Year 7 through to Year 12 (Holdsworth et al., 2001).

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11. http://handsonlearning.org.au/

McClelland Secondary College is situated in the local government area of Frankston. The First Nations people of the Frankston area who are formally recognised as custodians of the land are the Boon Wurrung and Bunurong people of the Kulin nation.[12] European settlement in the 1800s severely encroached on the lifestyle of the Aboriginal people in this region and took a toll on their health, wellbeing, and population (Jones, 1989; Presland, 1985). In the 2016 census, 1274 people in the local government area of Frankston identified as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) descent.[12]

The historical, geographical and political embeddedness of schooling in the Frankston area conformed to other European settlements in Australia during the 1900s in which the earliest educational provision was through "private schools which the wealthy had established, often through the auspices of churches, to educate their own children" (P. Thomson, 2002, p. 10). The first school to open in Frankston was St. Paul's School (since renames Woodleigh), an independent, fee-paying, primary co-educational school that opened in the Anglican Church hall in 1856.[13] It was almost 20 years later, following a petition to the Victorian Education Department that the first state government school in Frankston opened in 1874.[14] This was two years after Victoria had introduced legislation "for the establishment of public schooling which was 'free, compulsory and secular' " (Meadmore, 2001, p. 114). The next school to open was Roman Catholic, established in 1928 as part of the St. Francis Xavier parish.[14] Thus, Australia's general pattern of segregated school provision along socio-economic and faith lines was evident in the settlement of Frankston from the very beginning, with demarcation into Australia's three school sectors of independent, government, and Catholic.[15]

The McClelland Secondary College is located within the Karingal housing development[16] which, when established in 1962,[17] was one of the earliest housing estates in Melbourne (Edwards & Jennings, 2013). The development was established around two existing government schools, one primary and the other secondary. To meet the educational needs of families within the housing development, three further

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12. https://www.frankston.vic.gov.au/Our_Community/Community_Development/Indigenous_Communities

13. https://www.woodleigh.vic.edu.au/independent-creative-resilient/our-history
14. https://www.town.com.au/town/frankston/
15. https://www.goodschools.com.au/start-here/choosing-a-school/school-sectors
16. https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/1220856 page 2
17. http://www.victorianplaces.com.au/karingal

government primary schools, a Catholic primary school, and a technical school were opened. These schools reflected Australia's segregated education system at the neighbourhood level: first, along faith lines, with the local offering of either a government or Catholic primary school; and second, along socio-economic lines with the establishment of a technical school in 1972 indicative of the working-class status of the residents who were expected to enter trades rather than university (P. Thomson, 2002). In addition, families in the estate who could afford the high fees and associated costs of a private school education had the choice to educate their children outside the locality at the Woodleigh School.

Substantial changes to the government education system in Victoria that occurred as a result of the *Ministerial Review of Postcompulsory Schooling* (Blackburn, 1985) represented a significant change of context for secondary school provision in Karingal. One of these changes was due to a policy shift away from the inequity of separate technical and high school provision to "a state system of comprehensive schools that would combine both technical and university-oriented curriculum" (P. Thomson, 2002, p. 12). As a result, in February 1990 Ballam Park Technical School was reinscribed as Ballam Park Secondary College and Karingal High School as Karingal Secondary College.[18] School rationalisation reforms then led to the merger, at the end of 1996, of Ballam Park and Karingal secondary colleges to commence in 1997 as one school, Karingal Park Secondary College.[19] Although the school opened with two campuses, the Karingal campus was closed at the end of 1998[18] and the site was sold and redeveloped for high-density housing (Field notes S: 13).

At the beginning of 1999, Karingal Park Secondary College had over 1700 students and was the largest single-campus, co-educational government secondary school in Victoria (Holdsworth et al., 2001). However, the merger was on the site of the original technical school and within Victoria's increasingly competitive school marketplace, it was difficult for the school to shake the "less than favourable" technical school reputation and underperformance.[20] This dilemma was experienced by other schools in similar situations as "former technical schools struggle[d] with their local reputations as educators of the 'dull, feral and manual' workforce" (P. Thomson, 2002, p. 12). After years of poor completion rates, poor student behaviour, declining Year 12 results,

18. SCHRECS Database used by Department of Education and Training archives and records staff
19. Department of Education and Training Entity database
[20] Printed notes from meeting 01/08/2013

enrolments in the low 900s[20] and, by 2008, the first teachers in excess (Field notes 1: 49), the decision was made to undertake a renewal process. In 2009, the school was rebranded as McClelland Secondary College in an attempt to move its association to the world-renowned McClelland Sculpture Park and Gallery, situated approximately 2½ kilometres from the school (Field notes 1: 5). McClelland Secondary College then "embarked on an improvement journey. ... to be a place where our students were proud to be":[21]

> The college was characterized by an expectation held by both staff and students that there was little to expect from "kids from that sort of background". It was obvious that the college had to challenge the status quo. While the focus ... was on "blaming" the students there could be no change until the effectiveness of the teachers changed and along with that, the mindset.[20]

The improvement journey, which included the transformation of teaching and learning as well as of school facilities, prioritised that "what was best for the students is what would be resourced".[20]

Notwithstanding that McClelland Secondary College's renewal process was necessary for the students' engagement in quality teaching and learning, overall, neoliberal policies that promoted school competition and parental choice often worked against the retention of its high-achieving and economically advantaged students and contributed to its residualisation. McClelland Secondary College has a history of having its top-end students in academics and sports "poached",[22] with incentives such as scholarships used to attract its talented students as well as to entice high-achieving Year 6 students from feeder schools (Field notes 1: 35). I align information about McClelland Secondary College alongside that of its two neighbouring government secondary schools in order to contextualises the social, academic and residential segregation that across-school social regulation has had on these schools, This contextualisation provides insight into the "winners and battlers" that inequality has created in this microcosm of Melbourne's education system (J. Jackson & Lamb, 2014).

Five and a half kilometres to the north of McClelland Secondary College is Monterey Secondary College, which is situated in Frankston North in a Victorian housing commission estate that was established in 1958. In 2014, Frankston North ranked in the top 5 per cent of Victoria's most disadvantaged postcodes (Vinson & Rawsthorne, 2015, p. 68). The history of secondary school provision on this estate runs almost parallel to

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21. https://www.myschool.edu.au/ McClelland Secondary College/2014/School Comments
22. Staff Newsletter 06/03/2015 10+ Club

that of McClelland Secondary College, with Monterey High School and Monterey Technical School merging in the 1990s on the site of the technical school to become Monterey Secondary College.[23] Like McClelland Secondary College, Monterey Secondary College has had to contend with the process of residualisation due to the combination of decreasing enrolments and increasing disadvantage of its remaining students.

In contrast, McClelland Secondary College's other neighbouring school, situated 4½ kilometres to its south, is Frankston High School which, against the policy move for comprehensive government secondary schools in Victoria to reinscribe as secondary colleges (C. Campbell, 2014), retained the "high school" in its name and the academic elitism associated with this designation. Frankston High School is so sought after in the area as the government secondary school of choice, that it has a designated neighbourhood zone.[14] As a consequence, homes within the school zone attract premium prices and in 2015, Frankston High School "topped the Real Estate Institute of Victoria's list of homes where the school zone increases home values"[24]. Other than elite performance students who are offered scholarships to attend Frankston High School, families with economic means buy into the school zone in order to offer their children an educational advantage.

To enable a comparison of the socio-economic and academic segregation that has occurred across these three schools that are geographically in close proximity, I have drawn on *My School* data from 2009 to 2014 because this time period includes the fieldwork phase of the inquiry from June 2013 to December 2014. Data for each school is presented in tables. The *My School* website contains the results of each school's annual NAPLAN results for students in years 7 and 9 in the domains of reading, writing, conventions of language (spelling, grammar and punctuation) and numeracy. This complex data includes results for each school compared to (a) the average results of a group of schools with similar students; and (b) the average results of all Australian schools.[25] Due to its complexity, NAPLAN data has not been included in the tables, but has been drawn on in the discussion of each school, which also includes a summary of the changes that each school has experienced in the five years from 2009 to 2014.

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23. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frankston_North,_Victoria
24. http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/families-paying-premium-to-live-in-frankston-high-school-zone/news-story/51a2c1d7f50dd273376ab82f1f67a412
25. https://myschool.edu.au/school/49035/naplan

Table 1

My School Data for Monterey Secondary College

| | | School ICSEA[*] | Student distribution[†] | | | | | | | |
| | | | Bottom ¼ | Middle | | Top ¼ | | | Indigenous | |
Year	Total enrolments	Average 1000		¼	¼		Girls	Boys	students	LOTE[‡]
2009	507	966	63	15	18	4	240	267	2%	12%
2014	312	922	61	27	10	2	131	181	5%	9%

Note:
* Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage.
http://docs.acara.edu.au/resources/ICSEA_2012_Generation_Report.pdf
† http://docs.acara.edu.au/resources/About_icsea_2014.pdf 'the distribution of students in a school across four socio-educational advantage quarters representing a scale of relative disadvantage ('bottom quarter') through to relative advantage ('top quarter')'
‡ LOTE – Students from language backgrounds other than English.

Table 1 indicates that Monterey Secondary College's enrolments decreased by 195 students between 2009 and 2014, which is drop of more than 38%. There was also movement in the student distribution of socio-educational advantage across the quartiles. In 2009, the bottom and lower-middle quartiles equalled 78% of students (63+15), and the upper-middle and top quartiles equalled 22 % of students (18+4). Yet in 2014, the bottom and lower-middle quartiles had increased to 88% of students (61+27), while the upper-middle and top quartiles decreased to 12 % of students (10+2). This led to a decrease in the School ICSEA value of 44 points. Over this time, the number of girls enrolled changed from 10% fewer girls than boys in 2009, to 28% fewer girls in 2014. There was also a 3% increase in the percentage of Indigenous students and a 3% decrease in LOTE students.

Academically, Monterey Secondary College's 2014 NAPLAN results for Year 7 indicated that the school was below all schools in spelling, and substantially below all schools in reading, writing, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy. The Year 9 NAPLAN results were substantially below all schools in all of the domains. In 2014, Monterey Secondary College described itself as catering to "students from a broad range of backgrounds".

Table 2

My School Data for McClelland Secondary College

Student distribution

| | | School ICSEA | Student distribution | | | | | | | |
| | | | Bottom ¼ | Middle | | Top ¼ | Girls | Boys | Indigenous students | LOTE |
Year	Total enrolments	Average 1000		¼	¼					
2009	910	1002	27	6	66	1	471	439	3%	10%
2014	856	956	48	31	18	4[*]	416	440	3%	11%

Note:
* http://docs.acara.edu.au/resources/About_icsea_2014.pdf. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100.

Table 2 indicates that McClelland Secondary College experienced a 6% decrease in enrolments between 2009 and 2014. There was also a major reversal in the student distribution of socio-educational advantage across the quartiles. In 2009, the bottom and lower-middle quartiles equalled 33% of students (27+6), and the upper-middle and top quartiles equalled 67% of students (66+1). Yet in 2014, the bottom and lower-middle quartiles had increased to 79% of students (48+31), while the upper-middle and top quartiles decreased to 22% of students (18+4). This reversal in student distribution resulted in the loss of 46 points in the School ICSEA value. McClelland Secondary College also experienced a reversal in the number of girls to boys during this time. In 2009, there were 7% more girls enrolled than boys, whereas in 2014 there were 5.8% more boys than girls. There was no significant change in the percentage of Indigenous or LOTE students.

Academically, McClelland Secondary College's 2014 NAPLAN results for Year 7 indicated that the school was below all schools in writing and spelling, and substantially below in the other domains. The Year 9 NAPLAN results were substantially below in writing and were below in all the other domains. In 2014, McClelland Secondary College described itself as a place "where students and teachers work together with respect and positive relationships and where students speak with pride about their place of learning".

Table 3

My School Data for Frankston High School

| | | School ICSEA | Student distribution | | | | | | | |
| | | | Bottom ¼ | Middle | | Top ¼ | Girls | Boys | Indigenous students | LOTE |
Year	Total enrolments	Average 1000		¼	¼					
2009	1653	1016	37	6	49	8	824	829	0%	15%
2014	1743	1042	16	30	31	23	885	858	0%	20%

Table 3 indicates that, in contrast to both Monterey and McClelland secondary colleges, Frankston High School attracted more than a 5% increase in enrolments between 2009 and 2014. The student distribution of socio-educational advantage also indicated that there had been a movement. In 2009, the greatest percentage of students were in the bottom quartile (37%) and the upper-middle quartile (49%), with few in the top quartile (8%). Yet in 2014, the bottom quartile had reduced to 16%, while the middle quartiles were even with 30% and 31%, and the top quartile had increased to 23%. This movement in student distribution was reflected in an increase of 26 points in the School ICSEA value. Another change in the distribution of students between 2009 and 2014 was in the ratio of girls to boys. In 2009, the ratio was virtually equal, with only five more boys than girls, whereas in 2014, there were just over 3% more girls than boys. This could be seen to conform to the stereotype of female students being more valued (Apple, 2006).

In contrast to Monterey Secondary College and McClelland Secondary College, Frankston High School does not attract Indigenous students, which conforms to the stereotype of the lesser value of students from marginalised groups in an academically competitive market (McGregor et al., 2017). The school's high, and increasing, percentage of LOTE students can be attributed to attracting additional income from overseas students in the school's international program.[26] Academically, Frankston High School's NAPLAN results also indicate a contrast to the other two schools. In 2014, the NAPLAN results for Year 7 indicated that the school was similar to all schools in writing and above all schools in each of the other domains. The Year 9 NAPLAN results were above all schools in writing and numeracy, and similar to all schools in each of the other domains. In 2014, Frankston High School described itself as "a high-performing academic school of excellence".

The social, academic and residential segregation described in this context was consistent with trends across Victoria (J. Jackson & Lamb, 2014; Teese & Polesel, 2003), Australia (Teese, 2011) and internationally (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). While McClelland Secondary College, which sits geographically, economically, socially and academically between its two neighbouring government secondary schools, loses high-achieving students to the south, while gaining students from the north.[27] As one staff member at McClelland Secondary College admitted, "nobody wants to be the bottom

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26. http://www.fhs.vic.edu.au/international-students-2/
27. XL sheet: Students from Frankston North

school" (Field notes 1: 49). Hence, rather than there being cooperation between government secondary schools that are in close physical proximity, the position of each within a hierarchical structure and marketised environment has compelled them to operate in a context of "autonomy, isolation and competition" (Lamb, 2007, p. 35), which works against across-school parity.

As Marginson (2006) concludes, "competition among schools stymies the potential for system-wide policies designed to equalize opportunities" (p. 219). From the perspective of this case study, consideration of the macro-level policy context within which junior secondary-level schooling at McClelland Secondary College was embedded was important because school-level findings could only be understood in light of the macrostructural determinants that governed the everyday experiences within the school (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Wacquant, 2008).

Ethics

Initial approval from Victoria University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) to conduct the research was granted in 2013 (see Appendix A). In order for the research to continue at the school beyond the original six months, subsequent amendments to the original ethics and McClelland Secondary College approvals were required. The research design was revised to a single-case study and the request for an amendment included a letter of endorsement from the school for the research to continue into 2014 (see Appendix B). The amendment was approved by the HREC (see Appendix C) and then, early in 2014, the leadership team at McClelland Secondary College requested that it be named in publications related to the research. The school's request (see Appendix D), which acknowledged that the research involved intellectual scrutiny and critique, was also forwarded to the HREC.

These ethical amendments arose as a result of engagement in the field and were unforeseen when I applied initially to Victoria University's Ethics Committee for approval to undertake the study, which draws attention to the situated nature of social research and the need to approach ethics as an ongoing process rather than an initial procedure. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) refer to this as "ethics in practice" and they contend that the reflexivity qualitative researchers already incorporate into their practice needs to be expanded as a key step leading to ethical research practice. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) have proposed that reflexivity "be considered and enacted as a way of ensuring not just rigorous research practice but also ethical research practice" (pp. 277-

278). My initial choices regarding methodology, research design, methods of data collection, analysis and dissemination, as outlined above, plus my ongoing choices regarding ethics in practice, as outlined below, are all constitutive of my reflexive approach to this inquiry.

Methods of Data Collection, Analysis and Dissemination

The case study approach that was employed provided the opportunity for immersion in the school milieu over a period of 18 months. This time period enabled close examination of the case and the employment of both youth participatory action research methods and ethnographic methods provided access to multiple perspectives across multiple levels. The dates and methods of data collection over the 18-month fieldwork phase of the case study are as follows:

- Youth participatory action research methods: July 2013 – December 2013.

- Ethnographic methods: July 2013 – December 2014. This included exploration of the whole-school innovation from November 2013 – October 2014.

Youth participatory action research (YPAR) methods. The semester-long YPAR inquiry involved a high degree of collaboration and, in line with other youth–adult partnerships in research, the young people and adults were encouraged "to bring their own perspectives, experiences, and networks into the partnership" (Zeldin, Christens, & Powers, 2013, p. 385).

Such democratic collaboration relied on the ongoing negotiation of power and agency to facilitate the young people's experiences as research collaborators and knowledge-generators (Brydon-Miller et al., 2011; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Mittenfelner Carl, Kuriloff, Ravitch, & Reichert, 2018; Morrell, 2008). Student-researchers were supported to conduct student-directed inquiries that included choice of area in the school to explore; choice of methods for collecting information; development and piloting of data collection instruments; collection and analysis of data; and dissemination of findings and recommendations.

The participatory component of the study sought to answer two research questions:

1. *What do students report as their experiences of engagement in learning in years 7 to 10?*

2. *In what ways does a YPAR design impact upon student-researchers and the school community?*

The research questions were formed on the basis of my agenda to understand student engagement from the perspectives of students and to analyse the impact of a YPAR design. For the formation of co-researcher relations and the co-production of knowledge, it was important that students appreciated the intent to privilege their insider expertise so that they could develop a shared sense of purpose in answering the questions.

Chapter 6 is an academic publication that reports on the YPAR inquiry and its findings, which are discussed as six themes:

- Practical and Hands-On

- Interesting and Fun

- Involves Real-Life Contexts

- Academic Learning Environments

- Social Learning Environments

- Physical Learning Environments

The first three themes refer to ways of learning that students found engaging and the last three themes cover aspects of each learning environment that were conducive to student engagement. There was evidence that, as a result of the YPAR design, the student-researchers developed a diversity of skills, had fun, met new friends and gained in confidence. There was also evidence that the research had an impact within the school community, with some teachers and year levels acting on the student-researchers' recommendations.

I focus now on how the YPAR methods were enacted to uphold democratic youth participation and the democratisation of knowledge (Mittenfelner Carl et al., 2018).

Recruitment. Two weeks were allocated for the recruitment of volunteer students and staff to make up a research team that would conduct research into student engagement with students across years 7 to 10. During this time, I discussed the research at various school forums, including a school council meeting that comprised two student representatives; a full staff meeting; a Student Leadership Council meeting with students from years 7 to 12; and presentations in classes across years 7 to 10.

The class presentations conveyed aspects of the project such as the topic of student engagement, the opportunity to have a say, the call for volunteers to participate as part of a research team, and details of a lunchtime session for those who wanted more information. "Having a say" was a significant aspect to be communicated because, as Fielding and Rudduck (2002) contend, "there are many silent or silenced voices – students who would like to say things about teaching and learning but who don't feel able to without a framework" (p. 2). Consequently, the point was stressed to all students that even if they chose not to participate in the research team, this inquiry provided a forum for them to have their say because the research was about their engagement.

The lunchtime information session was well attended and 18 students plus four staff took away information and consent forms. In addition, two staff who had been unable to attend the session asked for forms. I also placed an item in the weekly school newsletter with contact details so that parents/guardians could obtain more information.

Consent. An important aspect of participatory methodology with young people, especially when research is conducted in school time, is the process of consent, which includes the informed consent of both the student and a parent/guardian.

Regarding the informed consent of the student, I understood that institutions such as schools "represent both care and control in the lives of individuals" (Aaltonen, 2013, p. 13), so when it came to my attention that two students had been approached by teachers to participate, I was concerned about whether the teachers' interventions were construed by the young people as encouragement or coercion. Consequently, I sought to ensure that these two students understood that in this inquiry I was interested in their own informed consent (Te Riele, 2013), and that this meant they had the right to choose to participate or not, irrespective of what their teachers may think.

Regarding the informed consent of parents/guardians, I understood that a student's choice to become part of the research team could be curtailed by the need to gain signed consent from a parent/guardian. I had anticipated the need for flexibility in this process

because of the enormous power consent can have over who gets to participate (Billett, 2012; Bishop, 2009). I sought an ethic of inclusion (Billett, 2012; Cahill, 2007), which would allow for alternative means of obtaining consent so as not to exclude the participation of particular young people who may have found signed consent difficult to obtain (Te Riele, 2013). When this was the case for one student, I sought the advice of the year-level coordinator and, because this was not an unusual situation for the school, the coordinator simply rang the parent to obtain verbal consent.

Ethical participatory research, therefore, empowers individual agency while building collaboration to achieve common goals. In this inquiry, the common goal was to draw on the expertise of students and staff in the school to explore student engagement in years 7 to 10. Due to the participatory component occurring during class times, no staff member at the school was able to fully commit but, as became clear through the consent process, staff provided students with personalised support and encouragement to take up this opportunity. In the end, five students volunteered to participate in the YPAR team.

Participants. The YPAR participants represented diverse year levels and programs at junior secondary level, including involvement in the school's engagement initiatives, Connect and Hands On Learning, plus the Student Leadership Council and the Teach the Teacher team (see Table 4).

Table 4

Overview of YPAR Participants

Age	Gender	Year level	Additional programs
13	Female	Year 7	
13	Male	Year 8	Student Leadership Council and Teach the Teacher team
15	Male	Year 9	Hands On Learning
16	Female	Year 10 academic	
16	Female	Year 10 vocational	Previously Connect and Hands on Learning

The five students participated in all four YPAR stages.

YPAR stages. The YPAR inquiry followed a four-stage process that included workshops, fieldwork, analysis, and dissemination.

Stage 1: Workshops. Equipping young people with investigative tools is an important element of participatory methodology when students are brought in as

stakeholders (Morrell, 2008; Weiss, 2018). Two initial team-training workshops were conducted one week apart. As a fully registered teacher, I did not need to have another teacher present during team sessions, which meant that the project was not a burden on the school's teaching resources. I was guided in the conduct of the workshops by a participatory project with middle-school students conducted by Carrington, Bland, and Brady (2010). From an instrumental perspective, the workshops were designed to achieve two purposes, the first social and the second academic. The social purpose was focused on building a team spirit and developing a sense of shared purpose in the topic of student engagement. The academic purpose was focused on developing collaborative processes and research methods, while embedding a sense of research integrity and ethics.

Rather than workshop interactions reinforcing unequal power relations through adult-centred information dissemination – which would have been incompatible with both the participatory methodology and the engagement focus – I sought a youth-focused, co-learning stance (Lundy et al., 2011; Ozer, Ritterman, & Wanis, 2010; Wong, Zimmerman, & Parker, 2010). I did this by drawing on the students' diverse experiences in relation to the workshop content. This collaborative training process was consistent with the practice of engaged scholarship that goes beyond one-way dissemination to two-way knowledge exchange (Kajner, 2013; Rasool, 2017).

The choice of venue for the team sessions was an important consideration, and it has been recognised that although infrastructure issues are integral to research methodology, they "rarely receive sufficient attention" (Bell & Pahl, 2017, p. 111). I had planned to conduct the first workshop session in a conference room situated in the central administration building. This light-filled room had a substantial timber table around which to work, ample space for more vigorous activities, and access to audio-visual equipment. There was also an adjoining kitchen to prepare snacks. Although I was aware of "the politics of location" (Bell & Pahl, 2017, p. 111) and that the formal space of the conference room may have been inhibiting, my assessment was that this physical space could work very well and from a psychological perspective, this non-teaching location could work to advantage because it would possibly not exert the same levels of power differential between adults and young people that traditional classroom spaces can. I also felt that having our base in this prestigious venue added a level of validity to the team's work. Nevertheless, in line with a relational ethic that seeks to avoid imposition (Miles & Huberman, 1994), I met with individual team members after the

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first workshop to seek their advice about where to meet in the future. The unanimous decision was to stay where we were.

Stage 2: Fieldwork. This was the first stage that was student directed and my role was to support each novice researcher to design and carry out their research proposals (Kellett, 2010). I promoted the message that PAR presented an opportunity for them to engage in fieldwork in ways that expressed their own purpose and creativity so that the research was meaningful and enjoyable for them (Brydon-Miller et al., 2011). With the research proposals, it became clear that each young person was keen to pursue an individual exploration and then to combine their findings.

In order for the proposals to proceed, each student-researcher needed to negotiate access to their research participants with the relevant year-level coordinators. Although I considered the coordinators to be part of the collaborative network in the inquiries, for the student-researchers, negotiation with coordinators raised issues of power and agency. These issues may stem from the young people's roles as both students and researchers and, for some students, may stem from the cultural dissonance between institutions and their local communities and between the lives of middle-class adults and those of young people from low socio-economic backgrounds (Smyth et al., 2010; Stehlik & Patterson, 2011). My role at this point, as with many child- or youth-initiated research initiatives, was to "smooth the way with gatekeepers" (Kellett, 2010, p. 198). This included liaison in the background with coordinators to give them a preliminary appreciation of each proposal.

After the student-researchers had been granted access to their participants, their next step was to develop and pilot their data collection instruments. In each case, these were piloted with their peers. This presented yet another potential tension between adult–student power and agency because I could have raised questions that provoked the student-researchers to refine these instruments, but I did not want to thwart the authenticity of the peer experience. Instead, I observed the peer interactions and this process of refinement reinforced to me the power of collaborative participation and peer learning.

When it came to data collection, my primary role was to support each student-researcher in the collection of data from their participants. Four of the student-researchers chose to use interviews and when they sought signed permission to audio record the interviews, their participants were assured that what they said would remain anonymous because no

names would be documented. The student-researchers' agency in relation to the collection data is discussed in Chapter 6.

Overall, the student-researchers' fieldwork, which was complemented by their insider expertise and insider networks, enhanced both the depth and the diversity of data that was generated for analysis.

Stage 3: Analysis. The integral involvement of student-researchers in the analysis of findings was another way the inquiry sought to overturn traditional power differentials and reposition young people as knowledgeable agents in education (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). A key aspect of PAR is that "knowledge generation is a collaborative process in which each participant's diverse experiences and skills are critical to the outcome of the work" (Brydon-Miller et al., 2011, p. 387). There were several steps from initial interpretation to knowledge generation.

First, the raw data was recorded in a way that made it accessible for reflection and interpretation. My role was to provide practical support by typing a data record of each of the student-researcher's raw data – for example, by typing interview transcripts of audio recordings. Next, student-researchers were supported to explore and reflect on the data record in a systematic way, identifying likenesses, differences, data that surprised and data that seemed less central to the focus on student engagement (O'Hanlon, 2003). The next interpretive step was for student-researchers to decide what "story" their inquiries revealed (O'Hanlon, 2003) about student engagement in their particular area of the school. This interpretation was shared in a team session.

A half-day team session was organised for the next collaborative stage, which aimed to move beyond the interpretation of individual findings to the more challenging task of the co-production of knowledge (Allan, 2008; Bell & Pahl, 2017; Rasool, 2017). This task began with the technique of triangulation (Mathison, 1988; Patton, 1999), which draws on multiple methods, data sources and researchers to gain diverse insights. According to Mathison (1988), the value of triangulation as a technique is that it "provides more and better evidence from which researchers can *construct meaningful propositions* about the social world" (p. 15, emphasis in original). The half-day session was devoted to drawing out and drawing on the level of knowledge that the student-researchers had gleaned from the data and from holistic understandings they had gained of the inquiry, its context and the social world (Mathison, 1988). The propositions were

drawn together to form the basis of a script of recommendations about ways the school could enhance student engagement into the future (discussed in Chapter 6).

   Stage 4: Dissemination. Dissemination of both individual findings and team recommendations was yet another stage in the project that was student directed. The dissemination process sought to enhance, rather than exclude, the power and agency of young people. Student-led dissemination included one-on-one meetings with year-level coordinators; PowerPoint presentations relayed via television screens to the student population at each year level; a video played to the school leadership team, school council and students' families at an evening exhibition; and a co-authored article in an online publication.

With participatory methodology, dissemination beyond the immediate community has its own ethical implications regarding ownership and acknowledgement. When the research team was invited to submit an article about their research to *Connect*, an online journal that promotes student participation, anything less than co-authorship and co-acknowledgement would have exploited the students' ownership and been inconsistent with the project's aspiration of democratic participation and the democratisation of knowledge.

According to the *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (British Educational Research Association (BERA), 2011), although participants have a right to confidentiality and anonymity, "researchers must also recognize participants' rights to be identified with any publication of their original works or other inputs, if they so wish" (p. 7). Therefore, when students are exercising their agency by co-authoring an article about their research, they are unlikely to be in a vulnerable position that needs protection through the use of pseudonyms. Consequently, I sent a memorandum to the Human Research Ethics Committee regarding the article and the use of participants' names (see Appendix E). The school also went through its own process of obtaining permission from parents/guardians for the students to be named in the article. The democratic, co-authorship relationship of the *Connect* article was acknowledged through the alphabetical listing of the co-authors' names (see Anderson-Newton et al., 2014).

In multiple ways, from recruitment to dissemination, the YPAR methods were enacted to uphold democratic youth participation and the democratisation of knowledge. In addition to using YPAR methods, the inquiry used the tools of ethnographic methods.

Ethnographic methods.

Immersion in the field. Ethnographic methods are directly linked to immersion in the field, which has both "methodological and practical considerations surrounding ethnographers' relations in the field" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 63).

Over the 18 months, I spent three days per week in the field and I participated as a volunteer teacher for two of the days, volunteering one day in each of the school's targeted engagement initiatives, Connect and Hands On Learning. In this way, I was able to invest a substantial amount of time forming relations with students who were harder to engage from a research perspective because, as others such as Skattebol and Hayes (2016) have found, students in alternative programs "were wary of school and of outsiders" (p. 9). Due to my volunteer teaching, I was invited to participate in staff meetings and wellbeing team meetings. This was a mutually beneficial arrangement because while I was able to participate in the daily life of the school and build trusting relationships with students and staff, I was also able to contribute within the school.

Contributing within the school was an important ethical consideration rather than just taking from the school. It was also an important social justice consideration because, like other schools with residualised populations, this school was striving to achieve the best outcomes for its students with fewer resources at its disposal and more students with higher support needs (Lamb et al., 2015; Teese, 2011). Practical participation in the school also had the potential benefit of alleviating "the common resentment on the part of some occupational practitioners, and especially teachers, towards detached, often invisible, 'experts' " (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 72).

While the overt role I adopted in the field was that of participant/observer, my reflexive position was that of an insider-outsider (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This positioning included a degree of internal perspective into the circumstances of economically disadvantaged students, who often reminded me of my neighbours and myself during our teenage years, and a degree of internal perspective into the circumstances of the teachers who were dedicated to helping these students to achieve despite the hardships many faced in their lives. Simultaneously, I was an outsider because I had not been a teenager in these complex, globalised times, nor a teacher who had previously taught in a complex, residualised school context. In order to obtain as holistic a portrayal as possible, I sought to incorporate the perspectives of student and

staff insiders to gain an insider or *emic* perspective (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009) in conjunction with my own interpretations gained from immersion in the field.

I was conscious that an extensive period in the field can lead to the danger of over-rapport, which can include being "identified with particular groups or individuals so that … relationships with others become impaired" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 87), and of "identifying with such members' perspectives, and hence of failing to treat these as problematic" (p. 88). One strategy I used to minimise this danger was to not locate myself in any particular department in the school, even though I had several offers of desk spaces. I preferred to maintain flexible movement in and out of various locations, in order to maintain a holistic focus across years 7 to 10 and to interact with as many students and staff as possible.

Ethnographic stages. Although the ethnographic inquiry is discussed as the three stages of fieldwork, analysis and dissemination, they were not discrete stages. As Stake (2008) observes about many qualitative inquiries, "there are no clear stages: Issue development continues to the end of the study, and write-up begins with preliminary observations" (p. 132).

Stage 1: Fieldwork. Ethnographic observations were a main source of fieldwork data, and I gained an appreciation of the significance of these from Wacquant (2008):

> *Ethnographic observation emerges as an indispensable tool*, first to pierce the screen of discourses whirling around which lock inquiry within the biased perimeter of the pre-constructed object, and secondly to capture the lived relations and meanings that are constitutive of the everyday reality (p. 9, emphasis in original).

Discourses that whirl around student engagement and socio-economic inequity in educational domains include "the currently common framing of economically alienated and socially disenfranchised young people as 'disengaged' from education" (McGregor et al., 2017, p. 2), as well as the "sweeping rhetoric of public school failure" (Rose, 2014, p. 203). Wacquant's second point in relation to capturing the everyday reality is an important means to counter the pre-constructed bias of particular discourses.

Ethnographic observations were recorded as field notes. Like Zollers et al. (1999), who undertook a year-long ethnography of a school's inclusion program, observations were predominantly of students and staff during the course of regular school days as they conducted routine activities. I also endeavoured to observe special events such as staff development days, which provided insight into the focus of school-wide professional

development as well as open nights, which gave insight into the ways the school promoted itself and its programs to prospective students and families. Observation field notes were recorded in one of three books – either the small pocket-sized book that I carried at all times, or the first exercise book that I filled, or the second exercise book that I used. These field notes are referred to by a designation for the book – that is either S, 1 or 2 – followed by the page number where it was written – for example, (Field notes S: 13) refers to a field note in the small book on page 13.

Another main source of fieldwork data was informal interviews and these mainly comprised one-on-one conversations carried out in the course of the day (Zollers et al., 1999). Conversations provided opportunities for students and staff to share their own impressions of engagement at the school, and they opened up opportunities for me to gain clarification and to follow up queries. Informal interviews were documented as field notes as soon as possible after the conversations. In contrast, formal, semi-structured interviews, such as with students regarding the McClelland Academy Program (see Appendix F), were audio recorded and transcribed.

Document collection was a prolific source of data that included weekly newsletters; meeting minutes; staff professional development handouts; school brochures and publicity material; notices to families; and mass media items which, in themselves, were an abundant data source. The school maintained a high media profile in newspapers, radio and television to generate free advertising. Another source of documents was via the medium of the internet (Denscombe, 2014; Yin, 2014), which provided everyday modes of communication within the school community in the form of emails, Facebook posts and a school app for mobile devices. The internet included uploads to the school's official YouTube channel, pages on the school's website and the school's profile on the *My School* website. This diversity was indicative of the spaces and possibilities that information and communication technologies have opened to researchers (Moss, 2008).

Artefacts were also generated in the course of the inquiry, with students in the Connect program, in the research team workshops, and at a staff feedback session on the whole-school engagement program, as well as the photo artefacts that I captured.

Over the 18-month period, the ethnographic fieldwork resulted in an abundance of exploratory data – generated in a variety of ways at student, staff, program and whole-school levels – which had implications for analysis.

Stage 2: Analysis. Wacquant (2008) describes analysis in ethnography as involving an iterative process in which "field observation, structural analysis and theoretical construction advance in unison and mutually reinforce each other" (p. 10). To cope with the abundance and variety of data, I employed a reflective strategy of data triangulation (Mathison, 1988) that brings together data from varied sources to gain more comprehensive understandings. One common process I used was to juxtapose data sources so that, for example, official accounts, such as the documented aims of a school program, could be compared with everyday accounts, such as interviews with students participating in that program.

Like Zollers et al. (1999), I shared early interpretations and emergent theories with students and staff, often in the form of vignettes such as those in Chapter 5. Ericson (n.d., cited in Fielding & Rudduck, 2002) cautions that "even the most richly detailed vignette is a reduced count ... it does not represent the original event itself, for this is impossible ... (it) is an abstraction ... that highlights the author's interpretative perspective" (p. 4). This caution reinforces the importance of member checking (Groundwater-Smith, Dockett, & Bottrell, 2015; Heflich & Rice, 2001; Zollers et al., 1999), and I checked back with students and staff to gain their insights and internal perspectives and to test the plausibility of my emerging theories.

When I interpreted the data through the framework of democratic justice, I conceived the theory that student engagement was enhanced through a flexible, personalised learning approach that was responsive to students' wellbeing and learning needs and that prioritised students' participation in their learning, their school and their community

Stage 3: Dissemination. Vignettes provided one way of providing ongoing feedback to the school community. Some vignettes were shared immediately within the school community and some were shared through publications. The thesis-by-publication format provided an ongoing forum to share emerging theories, both within and beyond the school. For Hattam et al. (2009), who also shared their interim publications within their project schools, these "not only recorded emerging understandings but also built a language for shifting from deficit to *asset* perspectives" (p. 306, emphasis in original). A shift from a deficit to a strength-based focus was exemplified in the second publication (see Chapter 5) that flipped the focus from student exclusion to student engagement by drawing on three vignettes to examine three practical theories-in-action.

Three articles, Anderson-Newton et al. (2014) and Callingham (2014, 2015), were also disseminated via open access online publications that provided opportunities to democratise knowledge and share insights about student engagement beyond more conventional academic audiences.

In addition, dissemination occurred through five conference presentations (see Appendix G).

Trustworthiness

The extent to which a reader can trust the quality of the findings in research stems mainly from the quality of the research design as the "choice of 'best' methods for answering research questions" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011, p. 287). The design of this case study facilitated interpretive analysis using ethnographic methods, and critical analysis using YPAR methods to capture as complete a research account as possible through methods that provided access to multiple sources of data across multiple levels to obtain multiple interpretations and perspectives.

A key element of the design was the extensive involvement *in* the research, rather than outside of it looking in. This was achieved through my complex role as a participant/observer, both in the field and in the YPAR component of the research. Altheide and Johnson (2011) explain that "while social scientists operate with a theoretical orientation that guides data collection and interpretation, being close to the data, the actual experience, is critical for understanding" (p. 588). Overall, in my participant/observer role, I strove for a socially distributed researcher/researched relation with equal-status collaboration in line with Miles and Huberman's (1994) relational view of research. My relationships in the field exposed findings that may have remained invisible with a "fly-in-fly-out" research design as discussed in Chapter 7. In addition, both member checking and data triangulation worked to minimise misperceptions (Stake, 1995) and maximise levels of insight upon which to construct plausible theoretical explanations (Mathison, 1988).

Strengths and limitations. Specificity within case study research, particularly within a single-case study, is acknowledged as both its strength and its weakness: its strength, due to the detail and depth of insight gained through close examination of the specific case (Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Stake, 2008; Walker, 1980); and its weakness, because case studies are context specific and therefore what is learned from a specific case cannot be generalised to another case "because no two cases are identical" (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 92). Altheide and Johnson (2011) suggest that "the relevance might be limited, but the work matters because it is assumed to shed some light on a specific or related problem that goes beyond the particular case being illuminated" (p. 589). In this inquiry, the findings shed light on the bigger issue of student engagement as conceptualised within an overarching framework of democratic, socially just education, and this has relevance beyond the particular school.

Due to the small scale of this doctoral study and its orientation towards privileging the input and perspectives of local stakeholders, the findings related to student engagement hold most relevance and influence within this one school community. The YPAR component, for example, opened a collaborative space for student-researchers to inquire into, reflect on and report on student engagement at their school. As a consequence, the generalisability in this component of the study became what the individual teachers in years 7 to 10 at the school decided to include or discard in their teaching ideology and what they decided was applicable and generalisable to their own teaching. This meant that even though the YPAR inquiry had a democratic orientation, due to the power differential between students and adults in school contexts, it was adults who had the final say on which student recommendations were acted upon (York & Kirshner, 2015).

However, through its publications, the research did reach a wider audience than the one school. The second publication (Chapter 5), was a book chapter oriented to a practitioner audience with the purpose of contributing to critical debate about the ways that schools could increase the engagement and reduce the exclusion of students. The third publication (Chapter 6) and the research team's collaborative article (Anderson-Newton et al., 2014) and video (see Chapter 6) reached an international audience interested in student participation. In addition, the fourth publication (Chapter 7) was aimed at an audience with an interest in inclusive education. The findings in the fourth publication reinforced the need for all schools to be vigilant about removing obstacles to the participation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

From a scholarly perspective, the development of theoretical propositions on student engagement as conceived of within an overarching framework of democratic, socially just education became the main vehicle for generalising the findings from this case study (Yin, 2014). As is typical with the writing up of case studies, "the reader is empowered to make judgements about the applicability of the learnings" (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 92).

Part 1 – Conclusion

Part 1 of this exegesis has provided insight into the ideological, theoretical, methodological and ethical underpinnings of this inquiry that led to the findings that will be discussed in the three chapters that follow in Part 2. Although the findings are covered in separate chapters, they are by no means discrete, with all of the findings on student engagement contained within the overarching framework of democratic, socially just education.

Chapter 5 – Outside in: One School's Endeavours to Keep Disadvantaged Young
People in School and Engaged

Chapter 6 – Engaging Student Input on Student Engagement in Learning

Chapter 7 – From Discrete Intervention to Engage Marginalised Students to Whole-
School Initiative to Engage All Students

Part 2 – Findings

Part 2 of this three-part exegesis comprises three findings chapters, each of which is a publication.

Chapter 5 is *Outside in: One School's Endeavours to Keep Disadvantaged Young People in School and Engaged* – which was published as a book chapter aimed at a practitioner audience. For this audience, the chapter utilised a practical framework to present findings on the ways the case study school promoted engagement as opposed to exclusion.

Chapter 6 is *Engaging Student Input on Student Engagement in Learning* – which presents findings on engagement from the six-month participatory component of the study.

Chapter 7 is *From Discrete Intervention to Engage Marginalised Students to Whole-School Initiative to Engage All Students* – which presents findings on engagement from a 12-month ethnographic investigation of the implementation of a whole-school engagement initiative.

Chapter 5 removed due to copyright.

Details:
Callingham, Margaret (2016) Outside in: one school's endeavours to keep disadvantaged young people in school and engaged. In: Locked out: understanding and tackling school exclusion in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. Towl, P and Hemphill, S, eds. New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Wellington, NZ, pp. 196-215.

Chapter 6

Engaging student input on student engagement in learning

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Abstract

Student engagement, achievement, and participation are equity issues. Students' engagement in their learning is especially important in schools that cater to low-income communities where improved educational experiences can break the cycle of low achievement, school disaffection, and early school leaving. Moreover, for students who experience disadvantage in their lives, having input into their learning enables and supports a sense of connectedness, with learning and with school. This paper reports on a youth participatory action research project (YPAR) that took a rights-based approach to researching with students. The study was conducted in an Australian government secondary school situated in a context of disadvantage. The student-researchers, who faced socioeconomic disadvantage in their own lives, investigated students' experiences of engagement in learning in the first four years of secondary school. The findings demonstrated that students from a low socioeconomic community, including students who tended to be marginalized in conventional classroom contexts, had thoughtful and important contributions to make about their engagement in learning. The paper also reports on ways in which the participatory research design impacted upon the student-researchers and the school community. Importantly, the student-researchers valued the research opportunity and there was evidence of the impact of their investigations within and beyond the school.

Keywords: student engagement, equity, rights-based, YPAR, non-marginalizing education

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Equity and engagement

In Australia, an enduring political and educational challenge is that particular groups of students – Indigenous students, students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, students with disabilities, and students living in rural and remote areas – tend not to have their needs met in conventional schooling. This is evidenced in their overrepresentation as the lowest school achievers and as early school leavers (COAG Reform Council, 2012). The difference between the educational outcomes of students from more advantaged communities compared to the outcomes of students from disadvantaged communities is referred to as the 'educational equity gap' (Sammons *et al.*, 2015: 8). This phenomenon occurs in many educational systems internationally (OECD, 2012), and in Australia the gap is re-exposed every time the national (NAPLAN) and international (PISA) assessment results are released. Educational inequity in Australia not only adds to the disadvantages many students already contend with in their lives, it also puts pressure on government targets for their improved levels of school participation and achievement (COAG, 2009). This has led to a government focus on students 'at risk' of low achievement and early school leaving, and their engagement (DEECD, 2009; Lamb and Rice, 2008).

Te Riele (2006) has critiqued the policy discourse around the 'at risk' label and its attention on deficiencies in students and their families. As a result, she has proposed that the deficit label be replaced with the concept of 'marginalized students', which more readily 'leads to the question: marginalized by who or what?' (Te Riele, 2006: 140). Further, Te Riele (2008: 1) has concluded that 'policy needs to change its focus from "fixing wayward youth" to providing "non-marginalising" education'. This claim proved particularly relevant after government reports revealed that despite targeted funding since 2008, strategies to remove barriers to higher educational outcomes for 'at risk' students had not been successful (COAG Reform Council, 2012; Victorian Auditor-General, 2012). There are promising indications, however, that non-marginalizing education is possible. Kannapel and Clements undertook an investigation into high-performing, high-poverty schools in the US and found that:

> Faculty in the study schools did not make an issue of the fact that many of their students were "in poverty." … Individual learning needs were targeted for attention, rather than categorizing students as part of an at risk group held to different performance expectations.
>
> (2005: 29)

This kind of non-marginalizing education resulted in improved equity, achievement, and student engagement.

The focus of this paper is on the latter, with the definition of student engagement taken from the *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement*:

> Student engagement refers to the students' active participation in academic and co-curricular or school-related activities, and commitment to educational goals and learning. Engaged students find learning meaningful, and are invested in their learning and future. It is a multidimensional construct that consists of behavioral (including academic), cognitive, and affective subtypes. Student engagement drives learning; requires energy and effort; is affected by multiple contextual influences; and can be achieved for all learners.
>
> (Christenson *et al.*, 2012: 816–17)

The link with equity can be recognized in the final assertion that student engagement 'can be achieved for all learners'. The correlation between engagement and equity has been demonstrated in a Canadian study (Willms *et al.*, 2009) across 93 schools and including over 32,000 students from Grade 6 to Grade 12. It revealed that schools with higher levels of engagement had higher achievement irrespective of students' backgrounds. In addition, differences in levels of student engagement across schools were found to 'have less to do with students' family background than they do with school policies and practices' (Willms *et al.*, 2009: 31). This finding confirmed an earlier OECD study with 15-year-old students across 42 countries (Willms, 2003). A longitudinal study in Australia also established that students' school engagement had a long-term impact on educational and occupational outcomes into adulthood 'independent of socio-economic background' (Abbott-Chapman *et al.*, 2014: 114). In addition to greater educational and social equity, Hemphill and colleagues (2010) pointed to long-term benefits of school engagement as also leading to greater health equity. Taken together, these studies move beyond 'conservative or traditional' conceptions of student engagement and into 'critical–democratic' conceptions (McMahon and Portelli, 2004) that highlight how 'the rationale for student participation and engagement extends well beyond good educational practice and into social policy, social development, health, and well-being' (Willms *et al.*, 2009: 7). More democratic conceptualizations of student engagement have also seen student voice and participation increasingly recognized as a means of turning to the local level and towards those who have the most at stake in schools (McMahon and Portelli, 2004).

Student participation is itself an equity issue because the rights of all young people to participate in matters affecting their lives are legislated in the United

Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989). There is a vast literature, particularly related to school reform, that points to the need to promote citizenship by building democratic participation into the relationships, structures, teaching, learning, and assessments within schools (Fielding, 2007; Knight and Pearl, 2000; Rudduck and Flutter, 2000; Slee, 2011). Importantly, students' participation in decision-making fosters their sense of connection and engagement with their learning and school (Randall *et al.*, 2012). Such rights-based education was found to be associated with higher than expected exam results in disadvantaged areas of Scotland (Mannion *et al.*, 2015). However, it is often students who already have power, as evidenced in their use of social and cultural capital and their academic prowess, who participate in consultative roles in schools (Baker and Plows, 2015). Roger Slee, an active advocate of inclusive, democratic education, has argued that '[n]ew lines of interrogation need to be brought to the table, including a recognition that the experience of exclusion is a valuable planning tool' (2015: 43). Nevertheless, it is often difficult to gain participation from students who experience alienation within schools. Levinson (2012) referred to differential opportunities for civic participation as the 'civic empowerment gap', and he suggested that this gap was 'as large and as disturbing as the reading and math achievement gaps' (Levinson, 2012: 31).

In addition to more democratic practices in schools, research *with* students has increasingly been recognized as a form of external intervention that can confront 'barriers surrounding equity-oriented reform' (Kirshner and Pozzoboni, 2011: 1638). It does this by demonstrating to those within schools that marginalized students are interested in and have valuable insights to contribute to their education (Cammarota and Fine, 2008; Smyth, 2012). Research *with* marginalized communities is an equity imperative of youth participatory action research (YPAR) projects (Brydon-Miller *et al.*, 2011; Cammarota and Fine, 2008). However, when research is conducted in schools in contexts of disadvantage, adult researchers need to be aware of the unequal power relations within both the school and research contexts as well as unequal power relations 'that circulate around low income' (Skattebol *et al.*, 2012: 15). According to Cahill (2011: 78), democratic power relations are accomplished through dialogue in which 'the stakeholders are positioned as the agents who are best able to know and consider the specifics of their context, culture and values that shape their needs, constraints and opportunities'.

Disadvantage and equity are important issues that educators and policy makers need to address by facilitating non-marginalizing, rights-based education. The project that forms the basis of this paper sought to contribute to this discussion by

taking a rights-based approach to find out what could be learned *with* students from a low-income community about their experiences of engagement in learning. The student-researchers' findings were disseminated directly to the school community both to promote engagement and to address marginalization. Speaking to a wider audience, this paper will outline in detail the complex methods involved in this YPAR project. It will then go on to discuss both the doctoral researcher's and the student-researchers' findings in connection with student engagement in learning. In addition, the paper will discuss the students' participation in research in their school before pointing to future directions for both schools and research.

Methods

This paper focuses on one stage of a doctoral study using YPAR as the methodology. YPAR is a qualitative approach to research in which youth are positioned as research collaborators (Brydon-Miller *et al.*, 2011; Cammarota and Fine, 2008; Morrell, 2008). Morrell explains:

> If we are to truly understand how young people are affected by … social issues, and if we are to understand how to eradicate the social conditions that contribute to these issues, then we must listen to the young people who are most affected by them. Furthermore, we must equip young people with the investigative tools that allow them to collect, analyze, and distribute information about these issues from their unique perspectives as insiders.
>
> (Morrell, 2008: 158)

Studies adopting participatory approaches vary in the extent to which participation is enacted by the young people (Holland *et al.*, 2010). In this study, the topic of student engagement in learning was predetermined, but the student-researchers' specific investigations on that topic were student-driven and adult-supported (Lundy *et al.*, 2011). For example, the student-researchers chose the area of the school in which to conduct their investigations and they were supported to design and trial their own research instruments, to collect their own data, to interpret that data, and to disseminate the findings and recommendations. In addition, the student-researchers were supported to explore and reflect upon their experiences as researchers. The aim of the study was to answer two research questions:

1. What do students report as their experiences of engagement in learning in Years 7–10?
2. In what ways does a YPAR design impact upon student-researchers and the school community?

The research was conducted in a government secondary school in a socioeconomically disadvantaged outer suburb of Melbourne (Australia's second largest city). The suburb has been classified as 'most disadvantaged', and a neighbouring suburb adjoining the school has been designated as having persistent, entrenched, locational disadvantage (Vinson *et al.*, 2015). Some of the dominant factors of disadvantage highlighted in the report include unemployment, criminal convictions, disability, low education, child maltreatment, family violence, and psychiatric admissions. The school was chosen because it had demonstrated a commitment to student engagement by incorporating initiatives to meet the needs of its student population. It also had a history of student participation beyond just a select group of students on the student representative council. The research was focused on lower secondary education (Years 7–10), because this is where students' achievement and motivation levels have been shown to suffer the greatest decline (DEECD, 2012: 4) and where the risk of disengagement is greatest (MCEETYA, 2008: 12).

YPAR requires a commitment of time by the researcher both to engage with young people (Groundwater-Smith *et al.*, 2015) and to support them to develop the skills to participate, which is especially important for students who lack confidence and experience (MacLeod *et al.*, 2014). This study ran over one school semester – 19 school weeks from July to December 2013 – in which the author (a doctoral researcher) spent up to three days per week in the school. During this period I facilitated workshops and team meetings for the student-researchers. My fieldwork involved two data collection exercises, gathering:

- documents and artefacts, including school and staff newsletters and artefacts created by the student-researchers
- observations of the YPAR process (especially in the workshops and team meetings) and the school more generally, recorded in field notes.

As is common in qualitative research, data analysis was an integral aspect throughout the study (Stake, 2008) and the project utilized two approaches to data analysis. The first involved using the 'story' of each student-researcher's investigation experiences as shared in his or her own words during team meetings, and analysing them 'to understand the meaning of the experiences as revealed in the story' (Merriam, 2009: 23). The second approach was to use thematic analysis, which involved reading all data sources (documents, artefacts, and field notes) and giving them descriptive classifications. Through a continuous process of reflection and interpretation, classifications were allocated, revised, or amalgamated, until patterns emerged and key themes were discerned (Van Manen, 1990).

This research adhered to the ethical requirements of the university ethics committee with an emphasis on the ethical challenges of confidentiality, informed consent, and power when students research within their own community (Bradbury-Jones and Taylor, 2015; Te Riele and Brooks, 2013). One way in which confidentiality was negotiated while also facilitating student voice in the process was that student-researchers chose their own pseudonyms. In addition, some of the expectations for the participatory project were covered in workshops to help the novice researchers understand key principles and practices of research (Carrington *et al.*, 2010). Workshop One was designed as an important introduction to research in general and to develop a shared understanding of the research focus on student engagement. Workshop Two included training in research ethics and methods. In one activity the student-researchers revised the university information and consent forms into everyday language for use with their own participants.

The student-researchers' projects

Recruitment involved visits to every class group in Years 7–10 to introduce myself and the student engagement project and to call for volunteers who felt they did not often get to have a say in the school. Five students volunteered to take part: they represented a diversity of ages, year levels, and educational pathways (see Table 1). One thing all had in common, however, was that they all faced socioeconomic disadvantage. Some of the impacts of disadvantage on the student-researchers included arriving at school hungry or arriving tired from homes that lacked adequate heating or cooling, limited access to resources such as computers and internet, family responsibilities or part-time work that competed with schoolwork expectations, and inability to afford extracurricular activities such as excursions and camps.

In their fieldwork, student-researchers were supported by both the doctoral researcher and each other to design their own investigations. As shown in Table 1, student-researchers chose particular year levels to focus on, as well as specific instruments. They worked with peers (either other students in their year levels or other student-researchers) to develop and pilot their data collection instruments. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Table 1: Student-researchers' projects with methods and data sources

Pseudonym	Year level	Area of investigation	Methods	Sources
Melody	7	Year 9	• Student interviews x 22	• Interview transcripts
David	8	Year 8	• Student interviews x 12 • Online student surveys x 99	• Interview transcripts • Limited & open response questionnaire
Tim	9	Year 7	• Hard copy student surveys x 40	• Open response questionnaire
Heather	10	Year 10 academic pathway	• Student interviews x 5 • Hard copy student surveys x 22	• Interview transcripts • Limited & open response questionnaire
Kadee	10	Year 9–12 vocational pathway	• Student interviews x 3 • Hard copy student surveys x 45 • Hard copy teacher surveys x 5)	• Interview transcripts • Limited & open response questionnaire

Student-researchers met as a team, facilitated by the author, to share their investigation experiences (stories), collate their findings, and plan their dissemination activities. Their analysis of data included a two-stage process. First, the author supported individual student-researchers to interpret their own findings. This interpretation had a quantitative focus of 'look[ing] for the emergence of meaning from the repetition of phenomena' (Stake, 1995: 76). In this way both recurring themes and discrepant data emerged for further analysis and discussion (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010). This stage had a focus on reporting back to the year levels they investigated. The second stage involved the collation of group findings for critical analysis of what they meant in the larger context of student engagement in learning at the school. This stage had the focus of 'where to go from here', so that the school could continue to build on student engagement in learning across Years 7–10. Students prepared presentations that included reports of individual findings to year-level coordinators and feedback to the students at that year level. Consistent with participatory research methodology, student-researchers also showcased their findings (Wang, 2006) about student engagement in Years 7–10 at a school-level event with an audience that included families, interested staff, the school principal, and members of the school council.

The findings discussed in this paper are based on my analysis and are organized in two parts: an analysis of the student-researchers' findings about engagement, and

an exploration of the student-researchers' experiences of having input, including the impact of their research in the school and beyond.

Findings
Student voice about engagement in school

The first key issue under investigation was what students reported as their experiences of engagement in learning in Years 7–10. Since the student-researchers asked their peers about engagement, the 'voices' included here are also those of their participants. This data is identified with the student's year level, followed by 'I' for interview or 'S' for survey, followed by the question number. For example, (7 I 4) indicates the data was from a Year 7 student and was their response to interview question 4. When the student-researchers analysed their individual findings about student engagement in learning they found that, although there were dominant themes that they could relate to, the subject of student engagement was more complex than they had understood. Table 2 includes a brief summary prepared by each student-researcher presenting his or her findings.

Table 2: Summary of individual student-researchers' findings

Researcher	Student-researchers' key findings about student engagement in learning
Melody	Year 9 students like the Max [open plan] area but most students think it is too noisy for learning. Students said the Year 9 teachers cared and helped but some said they didn't get help or they needed more help with their learning. In particular, students didn't like being in the low-ability group because they felt they had more potential.
David	Year 8 students learn in different ways and what engages them in their learning is to be active. The majority of students think that ability groups and the matrix [literacy planning tool] could be improved and they have suggestions. Mainly Year 8s want more input and more choice in their learning.
Tim	Year 7 students are engaged in learning when they are active, have independent time, when they can choose what they learn, and when they can learn in different ways.
Heather	Year 10 students are engaged in learning when the work is interesting, when they are active, when choices aren't limited to what teachers have already decided, and when learning is related to the real world. Also important is communication between teachers and students.
Kadee	[Vocational] students and teachers want more hands-on learning and are prepared to help each other to do this.

Based on the doctoral researcher's analysis of the findings of this study, including documents, artefacts, and field notes, six inextricably linked themes were identified as contributing to student engagement. The first three refer to ways of learning:

- • Practical and hands-on
- • Interesting and fun
- • Real-life context and importance to the future

The next three refer to environments of learning:

- • Academic learning environment
- • Social learning environment
- • Physical learning environment

A summary of each theme is given below.

Practical and hands-on learning

This was a dominant theme across year levels and included the full range of applied learning subjects in the school: cooking, woodwork, sport, art, hands-on learning, applied mathematics, systems engineering, practical science experiments, drama, and music. The provision of diverse applied learning opportunities is considered a modifiable aspect of schools' learning environments that promotes students' active participation (Abbott-Chapman *et al.*, 2014). As one student explained: 'I like being active instead of angry teachers telling you this boring stuff you don't like' (9 I 3). In particular, applied forms of learning have been found to increase interest and engagement as well as interpersonal skills (Abbott-Chapman *et al.*, 2014; Istance and Dumont, 2010; Lamb and Rice, 2008).

Interesting and fun

This theme represented learning that was interactive, as opposed to 'just sitting down and doing the work' (9 I 4) – for example, playing games in science lessons to learn symbols rather than rote learning (9 I 4). Teachers were also noted as being engaging when they were fun, had a sense of humour, and related in ways that were not 'boring', such as having excitement in their voices. On the surface, the findings in this theme could appear to trivialize learning and teachers, yet research confirms the improvement in outcomes when students are engaged in learning that is enjoyable, interesting, and challenging, with teachers they can relate to (Abbott-Chapman *et al.*, 2014). Particularly pertinent to this theme is a contention by Abbott-Chapman *et al.* (2014: 116) that enjoyment, as an expression of engagement, 'appears to further influence subsequent education and career choices well into adulthood'.

Real-life context and importance to the future

Learning in this theme reflected the school's push from Year 7 to expose students to labour market opportunities and to keep their aspirations on track (Cummings *et*

al., 2012; Polvere and Lim, 2015). Learning experiences noted by students included excursions, camps, work experience placements, and community service projects. Learning related to the real world has been found to motivate all students and when it connects with possible futures it is an important educational driver (Galliott and Graham, 2015; Lamb and Rice, 2008). One student, for example, initially responded 'I hate every subject' (10 S 4) and yet later she listed experiences that engaged her, including working in a team, excursions/camps, and work placements (10 S 6). A risk for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, however, is that they are not recognized as having particular skills and talents, and consequently teachers can have low expectations for their future prospects. Teachers can then steer them towards relatively low-skilled vocational pathways that further disadvantage them both in education and the workforce (Smyth *et al.*, 2010). Bentley and Cazaly (2015: 68) recommended that a test to apply to all students is 'whether the system is engaging them and ensuring their progress along some valuable pathway'.

Academic learning environment

This environment is influenced by schools' and teachers' decisions about curriculum and pedagogy. Unsurprisingly, students viewed these decisions positively when they were perceived to promote learning, and negatively when they were not. Across year levels, students said they were engaged in learning when they had authentic choices that were not limited to teacher choices. Academic learning that was not meaningful was often described as 'boring', especially when associated with 'worksheets'. Ability grouping in the academic curriculum was also viewed negatively by students who were placed in the lowest groups and, at times, by other students. Despite evidence since the 1960s that ability grouping lacks educational and social value (Slee, 2011), the practice continues and one Year 8 student identified the way it reduced academic options for students relegated to low-ability groups: 'I think the groups are unnecessary. I've talked to some people [in the lowest group] and even though they feel they don't know a lot about literacy they feel babied in literacy and excluded from some of the stuff that's more interesting that other people are doing' (8 I 9). Students consistently articulated that getting help when it was needed was vital to their engagement, and negativity was expressed when students considered help was absent, especially in the context of perceived 'favouritism' for particular students. The overriding engagement message was for students to be at the centre of the learning and for teachers to play an important role in facilitating that learning (Istance and Dumont, 2010; Wang and Holcombe, 2010).

Social learning environment

This relational theme included peers and teachers. Overwhelmingly, friends were portrayed as an essential aspect of student engagement, although counter to this there were occasional findings citing friends as a distraction from learning. The importance of positive student–teacher relationships was also expressed, including a desire for teachers to interact with students about their lives outside the classroom, and the importance of teachers who cared. Other aspects were trust, respect, and personal safety, especially related to bullying. Research conducted by Smyth and Fasoli (2007: 291) captured the turnaround in student engagement within a school community that chose 'the development of respectful relations which afforded students the relational power that they require to persist with schooling, against the odds'.

Physical learning environment

The majority of students expressed the view that being engaged is easier when the environment is relaxed and not stressful. However, individual differences were evident. While some students preferred open learning spaces, others found they became distracted and therefore preferred conventional classrooms, and although some students found they needed quiet to concentrate on their learning, others liked to have music playing. Additional factors included atmospheric conditions such as temperature (both inside and outside), furniture, and facilities. This theme indicated that students did take into consideration how the physical learning environment related to their engagement (Carrington *et al.*, 2010).

Overall, student voice about engagement indicated that the students who participated in the various student-researcher investigations were committed to, and sought active participation in, their learning. In addition, they had constructive comments about their engagement in learning. The findings in this study were broadly consistent with previous studies and confirmed the claim by Randall *et al.* (2012: 3) 'that young people – regardless of their background – value similar things in a learning environment'. Nevertheless, the findings also revealed that students' experiences of what makes learning engaging can be diverse and complex and need to be taken into consideration if schools are to provide engaging, non-marginalizing education.

Student voice about having a voice

The second key point of the project was to investigate in what ways a YPAR design impacted student-researchers and the school community. It is not just

students' engagement with learning that is important, but also their experience of participating in and having input into their school. This is analyzed both in terms of the process of 'doing' participatory research and of 'being listened to' in the context of the project. Their input is then analysed in terms of its impact in the school and beyond. The aim of this YPAR project was to gain students' integral participation because the project was meaningful to them and its outcomes had the potential to make a difference to student engagement in learning at the school. Nevertheless, participation across the stages of research is rarely static. Holland *et al.* (2010: 373) have argued that 'it is more important to pay close attention to *how* participation is enacted … than to focus in on *how much* participation was achieved'. In line with this contention, selected moments across the stages of data collection, analysis, reporting, and dissemination are unpacked to give insight into how participation was enacted in this project.

In planning their fieldwork, each student-researcher used his or her agency to choose both the area of the school to investigate and the method of investigation. Feedback indicated that this made the project more accessible, because students researched an area of the school in which they were interested, using methods that were congruent with their level of competency (Bradbury-Jones and Taylor, 2015). Tim, for example, decided on a data collection method we had trialled in a workshop, adapting it to gain more information and 'to make it more fun by making it into a game' (field notes 1: 18). He did this by providing a target, similar to a goal ring, for his respondents to throw their survey responses into. Lundy *et al.* (2011: 733) have cautioned that although research with young people 'can and indeed should be fun and engaging, the findings and outputs must be serious'. Tim's data collection method demonstrated his engagement and agency in planning his project. It also made the gathering of Year 7 voices more effective because the fun he instilled into the method resonated with his participants and motivated them to think of multiple examples of when they were engaged in learning. In addition, as each group left the room their evident enthusiasm for the activity also motivated other Year 7 students to participate. Importantly, Tim's method did indeed deliver meaningful findings.

Student-researchers also formulated the content of their enquiries, and this enabled them to tailor their investigations to issues associated with student engagement that were important and relevant to them. In David's interviews, for example, he investigated his passion for greater student voice at Year 8: 'Would you be interested in helping teachers to plan units of work?' (Question 7). The responses included nine affirmative, two negative, and one undecided. David was

surprised to find peers who did not share his own desire for such involvement. For example, one negative response was: 'I do the work, I don't make the work'. This described a phenomenon that David found most boring and frustrating – 'teachers handing out work and students passively doing it' (field notes 1: 24). Kellett (2011) notes that young researchers can be surprised by findings that show their peers don't share their views. David was able to use the process of the participatory research to reflect on his surprise, and reflect on how to use material that went against his views.

The authenticity of student voice itself can be analysed around accuracy of reporting. David, for example, was forthright about reporting findings that confronted the status quo, whereas Melody was hesitant to do this. In authentically listening to her participants, Melody had uncovered some of 'the impediments, barriers and constraints that turn young people off school in droves' (Smyth, 2012: 154). At a team meeting, Melody felt safe to voice her concern about including some of the findings that she referred to as 'bad stuff' (field notes 1: 33) in relation to noisy learning spaces, some students not getting help, and students expressing dissatisfaction with being placed in low-ability groups. It is not unusual for 'insider' researchers to feel apprehensive about the inclusion of findings that are critical of particular practices (Maguire, 2014) and this is intensified within the power relations of students reporting to teachers. Melody's concern reinforced the importance, within participatory projects, of ongoing support that includes dialogue about the research, its purposes, and its processes (MacLeod *et al.*, 2014). Following a team discussion about the purpose of the research – to build on and improve student engagement in learning – and the importance of 'insider' research – to give students a voice, not to censor their voices – Melody expressed her relief and said that she felt more confident to include, analyse, and report on those findings in the same way as with her other findings (field notes 1: 33).

Communicating the results of findings through dissemination is an essential stage of participatory research and, again, there can be differing degrees of participation (Baker and Plows, 2015; Groundwater-Smith *et al.*, 2015). In the current project, the student-researchers' voices were central to how dissemination was conducted and this resulted in multiple forms of dissemination to suit the differing audiences and the student-researchers' comfort levels. All were prepared to present their findings to the respective year-level coordinators, and all chose to do this using PowerPoint presentations. In reflections following the presentations, although some admitted to being nervous beforehand, each young person considered that they had been listened to, that their findings had been well received, and that the quality of

their work had been acknowledged. For example, in her praise of the high quality of work carried out by Melody (who was then in Year 7), the Year 9 coordinator said she wanted Melody on the leadership team when she reached Year 9 (field notes S: 8). Another important consideration was how to disseminate the findings to the student population. With only David and Kadee keen to do this at year-level assemblies, the team collectively agreed that the PowerPoint presentations for each project would be relayed on the television screens that presented information at each year level (field notes 1: 33). A further level of dissemination took the form of a public exhibition to include the students' families, interested staff, the principal, and the school council. Although all expressed a desire to have their research listened to and acknowledged at the level of school council, they were also nervous about speaking in front of school officials. Again, technology provided the conduit, through Melody's suggestion to produce a video that would have pictures of teaching and learning areas around the school and their voices in the background (field notes 1: 33). The impact of this solution was that the authentic voices of the student-researchers were disseminated without exposing any of the young researchers to undue pressure, and yet they were physically present to receive due acknowledgement. While the process of dissemination must be sensitive to the needs and wishes of young people, Baker and Plows contend that young people's involvement 'has an ethical imperative – this is research about them and their experiences' (Baker and Plows, 2015: 206).

As a result of their work's dissemination within the school, the student-researchers were listened to by students, parents, teachers, and school officials. In the longer term, there is evidence that three of the young people had an enhanced voice beyond the research. As a direct result of her study in the vocational pathway, Kadee began collaborating with students and teachers to introduce more hands-on learning into the vocational curriculum (field notes 1: 51). Similarly, as a direct result of their participation in the project, Melody and David joined a student–teacher working party related to the implementation of a new whole-school programme (field notes 2: 8). For these student-researchers, their 'voice' was heard and valued and they had an opportunity to participate in the school beyond the research project.

Beyond the school, the invitation to co-author an article about the project in an online journal on student participation was an opportunity for the student-researchers to share their reflections about their roles in the YPAR project, and also to disseminate their findings about student engagement in learning. Although it is difficult to gauge the actual impact of this student participation opportunity,

it had the potential for students and teachers throughout Australia and overseas to read about student engagement and student participation from the perspectives of these young researchers. Moreover, it may serve as an example to other schools of how YPAR methodology can provide an engaging learning experience for student-researchers – especially students who can feel disenfranchised in schools – while at the same time helping schools to gather important data directly from students about their engagement in learning. Another way in which the student-researchers had a voice beyond the school was via their video. With the students' permission, an Australian advocate of student participation who was attending a student voice conference took a copy of the video to use as input in a panel session about students as researchers. While we may never know if exposure in that academic forum had any effect beyond the session, the 'voice' of these students was nevertheless represented to an audience of academics who were interested in student research.

The students' participation in having input into the school demonstrated that they did have an authentic voice in terms of doing the research, and they demonstrated their agency across all processes of the project. In addition, three of the student-researchers had a voice in the school beyond the project. In their feedback at the end, all of the participants assessed that their involvement had been beneficial. Heather, for example, had gone from an initial lack of confidence about her ability, because she was behind in her school work, to a reflection following her presentation to the coordinators that 'taking part made me feel good about myself' (field notes 1: 26).

Conclusion

In contrast to deficit perceptions of students 'at risk' and a general lack of opportunity for such students to be civically engaged, this paper has demonstrated that when young people who tend not to have their needs met in schools are given the opportunity, they make constructive contributions to thinking about student engagement. In addition, the paper contributes to findings on student engagement by adding support to existing recommendations but drawing directly from student-led data collection. One student-researcher explained that she had decided to participate in the research 'so I could help make a difference and keep not only me in school, but everyone in school' (field notes S: 7). This was an important motivation, and from an equity perspective it points to the ongoing need for educators and policy makers to prioritize research and action into engagement with young people who tend to be put at a disadvantage in schools. I concur with Smyth and Fasoli: 'If the conditions necessary to successfully engage students in schools are ignored,

then it could be argued that we are complicit in perpetuating educational policy failure' (Smyth and Fasoli, 2007: 277). Unfortunately, inequities in educational achievement, engagement, and civic participation are associated with factors such as race, (dis)ability, and social, cultural, and linguistic background (COAG Reform Council, 2012). However, democratic student participation in the form of YPAR may facilitate a reversal in this trend by empowering students to find local answers to the perennial education and policy challenge of facilitating more engaging and equitable educational outcomes for all.

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Chapter 7

From discrete intervention to engage marginalised students to whole-school initiative to engage all students

Maggie Callingham

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From discrete intervention to engage marginalised students to whole-school initiative to engage all students

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ABSTRACT

An enduring educational dilemma is that young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds do not have their needs met in conventional schooling. As a result, many have left school by Year 11. To counter this trend, some schools in disadvantaged areas introduce targeted in-school interventions before Year 11 to meet the needs of their students. Many of these interventions, which are highly successful in engaging students and supporting them to achieve, have insights to offer schools, but they remain on the margins as programmes for particular young people. However, a government secondary school in Victoria, Australia has been an exception. It was inspired to apply aspects of a successful intervention, Hands On Learning, to a whole-school initiative to enhance the engagement of all of its students. I used a case-study approach to investigate the initiative's first year of implementation. Findings revealed that the majority of students did report engagement. However, economically disadvantaged students faced barriers to full participation that negatively impacted their learning experiences. The inequitable distribution of educational benefits demonstrated that whole-school adaptation of an intervention is not straightforward and unless the needs of disadvantaged students are targeted in the whole-school initiative, they are likely to experience educational disadvantage.

Introduction

The social inequity of young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds being overre-presented as the lowest school achievers and as early school leavers is a political and educational challenge that is proving difficult to overcome (COAG Reform Council 2013; Gonski et al. 2011). Although many programmes that operate outside of mainstream education are highly successful in meeting the needs of disadvantaged students (Te Riele 2014; Wyn et al. 2014), successful aspects of these would need to be incorporated into mainstream schools before more equitable educational benefits would become system-wide. This paper focuses on a government secondary school that applied successful aspects of such a programme into a school-wide initiative. The study investigated whether this initiative resulted in an equitable distribution of educational benefits to students. To commence, I review the Australian political and educational context, with a focus on the state of Victoria. From there, I detail the research methodology and specific research context. I then outline the findings before moving into the discussion and conclusion.

Political context

Australia's national education goals have focused on improving outcomes for all young Australians, with Goal 1 that schooling promotes equity and excellence, and Goal 2 that schooling enables students to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens (MCEETYA 2008). These are basic human rights in a socially just education system. In line with this, Australia's 'National Education Agreement' has the equity imperative that 'schooling promotes the social inclusion and reduces the educational disadvantage of children' (COAG 2009).

Even with these government imperatives, large gaps in educational equity remain intractable (COAG Reform Council 2013; Gonski et al. 2011). In Victoria, for example, despite targeted interventions from 2008 to 2011, the gap between the proportions of students from low socio-economic backgrounds meeting minimum standards in reading compared to those from high socio-economic backgrounds, had not improved. In addition, the gap between the proportions of students from low socio-economic areas attaining a Year 12 or equivalent compared with students from high socio-economic areas had also remained largely unchanged (COAG Reform Council 2012). Inequities such as these indicate that in general, schools are not attuned to the needs of economically disadvantaged students, which diminishes their ability to reach their potential (Lamb et al. 2015). As a result, in Victoria, many have left school by Year 11 (Victorian Auditor-General 2012).

Complex social, economic and political forces are implicated in the impact of socio-economic background on the experience of education. For example, although the political rhetoric of improving educational outcomes for all young Australians has been around equity and social inclusion, one of the barriers to full participation of students from low-income households is cost of education (Bond and Horn 2009). The result is that students' socio-economic status has a direct impact on their learning opportunities and their participation in educational experiences (Baumann, Millard, and Hamdorf 2014; Furlong 2005). Yet, it is often not economic adversity as such that jeopardises students' opportunities and participation, rather it is their experiences of exclusion (Skattebol et al. 2012) within the 'class cultures and processes of schooling' (Furlong 2005, 380). This injustice is compounded when instances of exclusion 'blame the victim' or are rationalised as part of the natural order that justifies inequitable access to opportunities, experiences and resources (Fallis and Opotow 2003). This is why many of the economic and educational inequalities that decrease the life chances of those already affected by adverse life circumstances continue (Sammons, Toth, and Sylva 2015).

Equity and engagement

Despite the political rhetoric, equity is questionable when government policies compel young people to remain in schools that do not meet their current or future needs (Te Riele 2012). Galliott and Graham (2015) found that young people who were not well served by schooling 'struggle to see a future for themselves when they are forced to undertake subjects that do not interest them' (195–196). In contrast, engagement and motivation are enhanced when students perceive a purpose to their learning, especially a purpose linked to their future (Wylie and Hodgen 2012). To stress the influential role of schools in promoting opportunity despite students' backgrounds, the Victorian Auditor-General (2012, 1) stated:

> Students' educational outcomes, including their completion rates, are influenced by many factors including their social and economic background, their family situation, their engagement with education, and personal qualities such as resilience and self-confidence. While some of these factors sit outside the sphere of influence of schools, many are directly influenced by the school environment. The negative impacts of others can be offset by the use of appropriate strategies in schools.

One factor that is in the sphere of influence of schools is engagement (Lamb and Rice 2008). Thomson and Comber (2003) stressed that 'engaged learning occurs when the lives, knowledges, interests, bodies and energies of young people are at the center of the classroom and the school'

(305). My research drew on such a strength-based conception of engaged learning that recognises, values and draws upon the potential within young people. This is in contrast to the deficit-based mis-recognition associated with disengagement that undervalues what particular young people know and positions them as lacking (Wyn 2009).

Engagement has been conceptualised in a range of ways. Dominant social–psychological conceptions have recognised it as multidimensional, usually consisting of behavioural, cognitive and emotional subtypes (DEECD 2009; Lawson and Lawson 2013). Over time, understanding has extended to include social–ecological and social–cultural theories (Bundick et al. 2014), as captured by Lawson and Lawson (2013, 433):

> [W]e consider student engagement … as the conceptual glue that connects student agency (including students' prior knowledge, experience and interest at school, home, and in the community) and its ecological influences (peers, family, and community) to the organizational structures and cultures of school.

In this paper, I draw on such a systems-oriented conception of student engagement.

Engagement is recognised as key to enhancing student learning and improving student outcomes (Reschly and Christenson 2012), which is why it is considered 'of primary importance to succeeding in school' (Lamb et al. 2015, 53). Wang and Holcombe (2010) have claimed that '[e]ngaged students are more successful in school by many measures' (633). This is particularly important for economically disadvantaged students because school enjoyment and engagement have been found to diminish socio-economic disparities (Abbott-Chapman et al. 2014). Importantly, Christenson, Reschly, and Wylie (2012) have emphasised that a key reason for the interest in engagement is that it is 'relevant for *all* students' (vii, emphasis in original). One Australian study that included both young people who faced barriers to engagement with education and a general sample found 'that all young people – regardless of their level of educational engagement – want similar things from the learning environments' (Randall, Morstyn, and Walsh 2012, 29). These 'things' included: being valued, respected and supported; positive relationships with teachers and peers and work that was interesting and relevant. Wyn (2009) encapsulated the fundamentals of engaged learning as '[f]eeling that one belongs, can have a say and that the learning on offer is relevant to one's life' (55). Fundamentals such as these are clearly within the sphere of influence of schools, which is why they are prominent in school reform initiatives that focus on engagement (Hayes et al. 2006; Lamb and Rice 2008; Smyth et al. 2008). Research across countries and across schools concluded that levels of both student engagement and student outcomes 'have less to do with students' family background than they do with school policies and practices' (Willms, Friesen, and Milton 2009, 31).

Programmes that specifically cater to the needs of young people who have either rejected or been rejected within traditional schools have been the most receptive to educational reforms and inclusive approaches (Te Riele 2014; Wierenga and Taylor 2015). Most of these programmes have aimed to enhance engagement through authentic, meaningful learning, much of which involves student ownership and takes an interest-led, project-based approach (Baroutsis, McGregor, and Mills 2016; Hayes 2013; McGregor et al. 2015; Te Riele 2014). Many, such as the Hands on Learning (HOL) programme described in detail below, involve young people in practical learning in the community. While these approaches are acknowledged as intrinsically motivating, schools overall have been slow to take them up (Lucas, Claxton, and Spencer 2013). In fact, Lucas, Claxton, and Spencer (2013) questioned 'whether, for many students, such approaches might be motivating and engaging if they were part of their overall school experience, rather than a special intervention' (104). As if in response to this question, a government secondary school in Victoria, Australia was inspired to apply aspects of a successful intervention, HOL, to a whole-school initiative to enhance the engagement of all of its students. This paper, from an investigation of the school's first year of implementation, seeks to add to understandings of the role of interventions and whole-school initiatives in relation to equity and engagement.

Educational context

Typically in Victoria, the academic curriculum dominates in the first four years of secondary school (Years 7–10), with little choice in timetable or subjects until senior secondary level (Years 11–12). It is not surprising therefore that student opinion surveys in Victoria identified the sharpest decline in both stimulating learning opportunities and motivation within junior secondary school (DEECD 2012). In addition, performance figures indicated a decline in levels of achievement throughout the secondary years of schooling (DEECD 2012). These disturbing trends led to a call 'for major changes in the organisation and approach at the secondary level' (DEECD 2012, 4), especially for students from low socio-economic backgrounds (Victorian Auditor-General 2012). Some schools in disadvantaged areas have introduced initiatives before Year 11 in an attempt to meet the needs of their local students. Most of these take the form of in-school interventions that target particular students. One example is the HOL programme.[1]

HOL is a targeted in-school intervention 'to prevent early school leaving by creating opportunities at school for vulnerable young people to be more engaged, discover their talents and experience success' (HOLA 2014b, 11). The HOL programme works with multi-age teams of up to 10 students who come out of classes one day per week to engage in practical learning projects with two artisan-teachers (HOLA 2014b; Te Riele 2014). Due to its success both in keeping vulnerable young people engaged in school and in accessing philanthropic, community and school funding, HOL has scaled up into 53 schools (HOLA 2015).

Without denying or undervaluing the important difference that targeted interventions such as HOL make to their participants, as discrete interventions, they do not represent a comprehensive, system-wide educational solution. This is because they only reach a fraction of the students who could benefit (Deloitte AE 2012; HOLA 2015). In addition, their very existence can divert attention from, and deflect the urgency of, addressing the systemic and structural issues that underlie why the educational needs of particular students were not met in the first place. Using HOL as an example, students spend four days a week in traditional classrooms in which they 'don't thrive' (HOLA 2014b, 13), and they spend one day a week in HOL which they experience as an 'enabling space' (Wyn et al. 2014). However, the educational contexts which do not meet the needs of these students on the other four days of the week are usually not interrogated for their complicity in educational disadvantage, and their taken-for-granted pedagogy, curriculum, mechanisms and routines are not questioned for the roles they may play in students' marginalisation (Te Riele 2007). Consequently, educational contexts may continue to operate in ways that marginalise some young people so that educational interventions continue to be required (Smyth and Robinson 2015). I agree with the contention of Te Riele (2008) that 'policy needs to change its focus … to providing "non-marginalising" education' (1).

Although 'the impetus for HOL to commence was the need to give schools an alternative to exclusion' (Anderson and Curtin 2014, 54), the movement of students between programmes on the margins of institutions, and unchanging institutions, does not constitute inclusion (Slee 2011). From the perspectives of young people themselves, there is a tension between the educational benefit, and the educational stigma, of attending alternative education annexes (Skattebol and Hayes 2016). There is a potential solution, however, that could lead to a reduced need for discrete interventions. Schools could turn their gaze upon successful interventions for inspiration into whole-school change because these programmes are often highly successful in meeting the needs of educationally disadvantaged students, and in turning their experiences of marginalisation around into engagement and achievement (Deloitte AE 2012; Mills and McGregor 2014; Te Riele 2014; Wyn et al. 2014). Te Riele (2008, 2014) has referred to successful programmes that operate outside of the mainstream as showcases of innovation, and she has speculated that if mainstream schools tailored aspects of successful learning from these programmes to mainstream classes and the school, this could 'facilitate system-wide improvements to enhance the educational experiences and attainments for all young Australians' (Te Riele 2014, 84).

In line with this contention, the current paper focuses on a government secondary school that was inspired to apply aspects of the successful HOL intervention to a whole-school initiative to enhance the

engagement of all of its students. To ascertain whether the initiative produced an equitable distribution of the benefits of schooling (Thomson 2002), the research sought to answer two research questions:

(1) How does a school scale up from a targeted intervention aimed at the engagement of a distinct group of students, to a whole-school initiative aimed at the engagement of all students?
(2) In its first year, did the initiative achieve its aim to engage all students?

Research methodology and context

In this paper, I draw on data that were collected as part of an 18-month doctoral research project that used a case-study approach involving youth participatory action research and ethnographic methods to investigate student engagement. It was during the first six months of fieldwork, while I was undertaking the youth participatory action research component, that the school announced its intention to implement a whole-school initiative to enhance the engagement of all of its students. Due to the opportunity this presented to undertake an 'examination of an instance in action' (Walker 1980, 33), I applied to the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee and the Victorian Department of Education to continue at the school to investigate its movement from intention, to implementation of a whole-school initiative. The focus of this paper is the year-long study that used ethnographic methods. Towards the end of my first six months at the school, the executive team requested that it be named in publications and this was also approved by the University Ethics Committee. Individuals, however, have not been identified.

Consistent with qualitative case studies, multiple data collection methods contributed to an in-depth and multi-perspective understanding of the case (Denzin and Lincoln 2011; McMillan and Schumacher 2010). Specific data collection methods utilised and their data sources are outlined below.

Document collection:

- School and staff newsletters.
- Meeting minutes.
- Staff professional development handouts.
- School brochures and publicity material.
- Newspaper articles.
- Notices to families.
- Artefacts from a whole-staff Feedback Session.

Formal and informal interviews:

- Field notes.
- Transcribed audio records of formal interviews.

Ethnographic observation:

- Observation field notes.

Findings were identified through the reflective processes of data triangulation (Mathison 1988; Patton 1999) and thematic analysis (Stake 2008).

Fieldwork context

In 2013, McClelland College, a government 7–12 school, had approximately 870 students and 80 full-time equivalent teaching and non-teaching staff. The College is situated in an outer south-

eastern suburb of Melbourne, the capital city of Victoria. In a recent report, the suburb was classified as 'Most Disadvantaged' and the suburb adjoining the school was named among the small number of postcodes in the state of Victoria with persistent, entrenched, locational disadvantage (Vinson and Rawsthorne 2015). The report highlighted dominant factors of disadvantage as: unemployment; criminal convictions; disability; low education; child maltreatment; family violence and psychiatric admissions. Despite significant challenges in a low socio-economic environment, McClelland College 'made a commitment to respond to the learning needs of the students'[2] (Location Profile). This commitment was in line with the premise that:

> [S]chools and communities designated as 'disadvantaged' had within them the funds of knowledge and the capacity to both articulate the 'problems' confronting them as well as the wit to become a major part of the 'solution'. (Smyth et al. 2014, 77)

As part of its commitment to the needs of its students, the College introduced two interventions. The first, HOL, commenced in 2009. It used an applied learning approach to engage students whose needs were not being met in conventional classes. The second, Connect, was initiated in 2011 to cater to students who faced complex challenges in their lives that impacted their ability to engage in full-time, conventional forms of secondary schooling with a wide variety of teachers and among large cohorts of students. The Connect programme took a trauma-informed approach (Brunzell, Waters, and Stokes 2015) that aimed to give students the space and learning opportunities to build on their strengths. Both programmes had low adult-to-student ratios (up to 1:6) and the school's investment in such costly interventions was evidence of its commitment to respond to the diverse learning needs of its students. The necessity for such different initiatives highlights that educationally disadvantaged students, as indeed all students, do not comprise a homogenous group.

Findings

I outline the findings in two parts before moving into the discussion. Part 1 addresses the first research question 'How does a school scale up from a targeted intervention aimed at the engagement of a distinct group of students, to a whole-school initiative aimed at the engagement of all students?' Document collection and ethnographic observations led to an in-depth understanding and detailed description of this process. Part 2 is in answer to the second research question 'In its first year, did the initiative achieve its aim to engage all students?' Data sources included artefacts created by staff in a whole-staff Feedback Session and also transcriptions of semi-structured interviews of a sample of students from across year levels and programmes in the initiative. When I became aware that there were students who did not attend, or had stopped attending the initiative, I sought to also report on this 'discrepant data' (McMillan and Schumacher 2010, 330) by interviewing a sample of these students.

Part 1 – from targeted intervention to whole-school initiative

The College, like many schools, had students whose educational needs were not being met and who were marginalised in conventional classes. In part response, a HOL programme was contracted into the College. The first project for all HOL programmes is to build a hut to provide both a physical space in the school for HOL, and a 'physical sanctuary at school' (HOLA 2014b, 10) for marginalised young people. Work progressed on the hut as locally donated materials became available. Meanwhile, the HOL teams involved themselves in other projects in the school and local community (Te Riele 2014) and staff at the College began to see positive impacts on the students as they worked to achieve meaningful outcomes (Pinner 2013).

In 2013, the College held a dual celebration. In the first part, the Victorian Minister for Education formally opened the McClelland College HOL hut. At the opening, the Principal described the benefits of the HOL methodology:

> The power of HOL is not only the community engagement it fosters, but the life-long skills students develop like creativity, teamwork, and problem solving. As well as experiencing what it's like to achieve something successfully – which gives students a great sense of pride. (HOLA 2014a, Fabulous Facilities Opened)

The second part of the celebration was the launch of a new initiative, 'the McClelland Academy Program, an exciting whole-school program that has been heavily inspired by the huge success at Hands On Learning'[3]. At the launch, the Principal outlined the initiative's close ties to HOL, with both programmes emphasising: student engagement; community involvement; peer-to-peer learning; giving students a choice before Year 10 and students following their interests (Field notes 1: 52).

Just as the HOL hut had been several years in its construction, this new initiative had been several years in its development. In 2010, initial discussions were based on enabling senior students to undertake dual senior certification through participation in Vocational Education and Training (VET) programmes that would not conflict with their regular Victorian Certificate of Education classes.[4] Due to the school's career focus from Year 7, the proposal of 'an alternative program' (see note 4, Slide 2) extended to include all year levels and to give all students 'an opportunity to develop skills and experience in a particular pathway'[5].

Four characteristics of the McClelland Academy Program (MAP), when considered together, made it unique. First, unlike conventional elective programmes where teachers deliver a prescribed curriculum, the MAP was to be student-centred with 'a negotiated curriculum and a hands on' orientation.[6] Second, unlike contemporary academy programmes that select elite performers, the MAP was to be inclusive of every student with a passion for an academy, 'regardless of their ability'[7]. Third, the MAP promoted deep learning with students able to continue to develop deep understandings in their chosen passion year after year, potentially the entire six years of their secondary schooling (Field notes Staff PD 17 February 2014). Finally, the MAP was not to be theoretically or classroom based but was to provide students with opportunities to apply their passions in authentic ways through community- and school-based events (see note 5).

Considering the MAP was such an innovative initiative for the school, it was rolled out in a tight timeframe. It was first introduced to the whole McClelland College staff in April 2013 and staff were asked to submit proposals for MAP options in May (see note 4). Short amounts of staff development and planning time were then allocated leading to a four-week trial-run at the end of 2013.[8] The MAP was inclusive of student input through the Student Leadership Council gathering suggestions on possible programme options (see notes 4 and 5) and later, during the trial-run, through staff using student feedback to modify programmes (see note 6).

The 2014 MAP options (Academies) are outlined in Table 1 along with cost, enrolments and the number of classes that ran. The number of classes for each Academy was determined by the number of enrolments (see note 4), with the exception of the Baking Academy that had restricted enrolments due to the physical constraint of two cooking rooms.

Table 1 indicates the diversity of MAP Academies. Like HOL, they were intended to be based on multi-age groups of like-minded students and adults pursuing their passions and contributing to the community. Also like HOL, the Academy programmes aimed for students to be 'more engaged, discover their talents and experience success' (HOLA 2014b, 11). During the first year of implementation, I explored the MAP's achievement towards its aim to engage all students.

Part 2 – whole-school initiative to engage all students

The purpose here is not to compare individual Academy programmes but to analyse findings across the MAP. Although a feature of the initiative is that it is multi-aged, 2 of the 14 Academies, Study Skills and VET Courses, had restricted availability. Since this paper is interested in initiatives schools introduce before Year 11 in an attempt to meet the needs of their local students, the analysis will

Table 1. 2014 MAP.

2014 MAP academies	Cost per student	Enrolments	Number of classes
Baking	$100	47	2
Building	$100	26	1
Communications media	No cost	44	2
Computer programming	$50	50	2
Creative writing	$100	29	1
Global citizens	No cost	62	2
Japanese culture	$100	25	1
Maths and science	No cost	44	2
Design media	$100	50	2
Musical theatre production	$100	35	2
Sport	$100	202	8
Visual arts	$100	50	2
Study skills available to Years 11–12	No cost	122	5
VET courses available to Years10–12	$100 deposit	84	13

focus on data from the 49 interviews conducted with students from Years 7 to 10 across the 12 non-restricted Academies. The first two columns in Table 2 indicate students' engagement in the MAP bureaucratic mechanisms (Cost and Choice):

COST　　'Yes' students were in a Cost Academy, or
　　　　'No' students were in a No Cost Academy.
CHOICE　'Yes' students Did get an Academy of Choice, or
　　　　'No' students Did Not get an Academy of Choice.

The last two columns in Table 2 indicate students' engagement in the MAP academies (Passion and Experience):

PASSION　　　'Yes' students Did explore an area of Passion, or
　　　　　　'No' students Did Not explore an area of Passion.
EXPERIENCE　'+' students described a positive MAP Experience, or
　　　　　　'−' students described a negative MAP Experience

The first column of Table 2 refers to a critical aspect of the MAP bureaucracy, Cost. The cost attached to some academies directly impacted access because the cost had to be paid before a student was enrolled. Data in column one indicate that 71% of students accessed an academy with a cost. Cost also impacted educational provision because academies with a cost were invested with more

Table 2. MAP 2014 – data for Years 7–10 in non-restricted academies.

Cost	Choice	Passion	Experience
Yes = 35	Yes = 32	Yes = 32	+ = 31
			− = 1
		No = 0	+ = 0
			− = 0
	No = 3	Yes = 2	+ = 2
			− = 0
		No = 1	+ = 1
			− = 0
No = 14	Yes = 4	Yes = 2	+ = 2
			− = 0
		No = 2	+ = 2
			− = 0
	No = 10	Yes = 1	+ = 1
			− = 0
		No = 9	+ = 3
			− = 6
49	49	49	49

resources. For example, Cost Academies predominantly had staff allocated who had passion and expertise in the field, whereas No Cost Academies were likely to be allocated leftover staff. In addition, No Cost Academies had less consistency with staff, which one student noted as a weakness: 'there are always different teachers between 3rd and 4th periods … When you have different teachers they don't really know what's going on' (Interview 40, Question 13b).

The marginal status of No Cost Academies became evident when one staff group described them as 'dumping grounds for non-payers including Connect students and students kicked out of other MAPs' (Artefact 1, 2014). This description was verified by a non-paying student: 'I got put in this [No Cost Academy] because I got kicked out of Art that I needed to pay for' (Interview 31, Question 1). A student in a No Cost Academy made a proposal to the school to improve the MAP, 'The time limit you get to pay the cost' (Interview 30, Question 14). The implications of cost were deliberated at the whole-staff Feedback Session in September of the first year (Artefact 1, 2014). One group noted cost as an 'accessibility' issue, while another saw the problem as simply that there were 'not enough free academies'. Others argued that offering more No Cost options was not the answer because 'students in free academies were often not interested/disengaged'. One reason given for this was that students were 'removed from academies they were interested in because parents didn't pay, and were put into ones they weren't interested in'.

The second column of Table 2 refers to another key component of the MAP bureaucracy, Choice, because students, with their families, were to choose academies based on their passion (see note 5). Students in Years 7–10 whose families could pay the cost had 100% choice, all 12 academies. In contrast, students whose families could not pay the cost were limited to just four No Cost academies. All students in Cost Academies Did get Academies of Choice except for two who missed out on their first choice of the Baking Academy and one Year 7 student who is counted in No Choice because his mother chose (Interview 1, Question 1). In stark contrast, 71% of students in No Cost Academies did not get an Academy of Choice:

Did you get the Academy of your choice? Explain: (Interview Question 1)

- No, maybe the one I wanted was filled up. They put me in there. (Interview 5)
- No, I wanted to be in Cooking but I didn't really have time to put my note in. (Interview 15)
- No, they [the No Cost Academies] were all stupid. (Interview 29)
- No, I wanted to be in the Sports Academy but at the time we didn't have the money. (Interview 30)
- No, I got put in this because I got kicked out of Art that I needed to pay for. (Interview 31)
- Well I didn't pay so it was a free one I needed to do. (Interview 32)
- No, I wanted to go into Art but it was too late because of everything else that was happening all at once. (Interview 34)
- No I got moved into it. (Interview 40)
- No, I wanted to do the Sport MAP but in the end Mum chose Maths. (Interview 50)

One student, who did get his choice, identified lack of choice as a threat of the MAP: 'People who don't get their chosen MAP; they're stuck in something they don't want to do' (Interview 11, Question 13b).

Due to the MAP initiative being inspired by the HOL intervention, I compared their bureaucratic mechanisms and clear differences emerged:

- The HOL programme is voluntary, which means that students were not put into HOL in the way some students were put into No Cost Academies;
- The HOL programme is accessed at no cost to students and families because HOL operates on a combination of philanthropic and school funding and
- Staff at HOL support vulnerable students and their families to return the required paperwork so that students are not denied participation.

The third column of Table 2 refers to Passion because a defining feature of the MAP was that students gain 'authentic hands-on experience in their chosen area of passion' (see note 7). Consequently, interview Question 3 asked students whether they had explored an area of passion. Data in column three indicate that for the majority of students (76%), the MAP did provide an opportunity to explore an area of passion and unsurprisingly, this included all students who were in a Cost Academy and did get their Choice. However, nearly all students who were in a No Cost Academy and did not get an Academy of Choice indicated that they did not explore a passion. One student identified this as a threat of the MAP: 'If students don't get into a MAP they like then they're not motivated and it is a waste of time' (Interview 4, Question 13d). This was confirmed by a student who stopped attending, 'I really wasn't interested; it wasn't my passion. I had no intention of doing that in the future so I thought there's no point if it's not what I want to do' (Interview 30, Question 11).

The final column in Table 2 refers to Experience because the MAP aimed to engage all students and one indicator of engagement was the quality of a student's MAP experience: 'Overall, how would you describe your experience of MAP this year?' (Question 11). Almost 100% of students in Cost Academies reported positive experiences that were largely described as fantastic, great, enjoyable and fun, and included high-level positivity such as: 'There's really no way of explaining it, it was that great' (Interview 13); 'It's exceeded my expectations' (Interview 18); and 'I absolutely loved it' (Interview 52). With the No Cost Academies, almost 60% of students reported positive experiences. This included four students who were not in an Academy of Choice and three who had not explored an area of Passion. These students described their experiences as 'good', 'fun', 'really fun' (Interviews 22, 40 and 50), and even more positively, 'I find it very exciting and knowledgeable' (Interview 15). However, the other six students who were in No Cost Academies, were not in an Academy of Choice, and did not explore an area of Passion, described negative experiences.

The six students, two male and four female, ranged from Years 7 to 9 and five were participants in the school's Connect programme. An additional indicator of engagement was attendance. Of the two students who continued to attend, one, by virtue of being in Year 7 (Interview 5), was possibly less likely to withdraw attendance even though she described her MAP experience as 'boring' and judged a weakness of MAP to be that it was 'boring'. Her suggestion to keep improving the MAP (Question 14) was to 'Make it more fun, like with games, instead of doing the same thing technically over the weeks.' The second student who continued to attend was a Year 8 Connect student (Interview 32). Despite describing her experience as 'not fantastic', she did note that she worked as part of a team with one of her best friends. Another Year 8 Connect student explained the reason he stopped attending, 'I used to attend but then it got boring, it wasn't really what I was into so I just stopped going. I just went home or I went out with friends' (Interview 30). Yet another Year 8 Connect student (Interview 31) who described her experience of MAP as 'bad, boring' also stopped attending. A Year 9 Connect student explained why she stopped attending: 'I got changed and that really wasn't doing much for me because I didn't really enjoy my teacher and so instead of doing MAP I just go home' (Interview 34). The other Year 9 Connect student chose not to engage with the MAP at all: 'I just thought what's the point of doin' somethin' that I don't wanna do if you could just go home and chill and do whatever' (Interview 29).

Discussion

In the first year of implementation, the majority of students reported engagement in the MAP by describing positive experiences. However, analysis revealed that social stratification occurred through the MAP bureaucratic mechanisms and this whole-school initiative replicated the inequity in society in the amount of choices and quality of opportunities available to those who have more access to economic resources compared to those who have less. Just as Bond and Horn (2009) found, cost created a barrier to full participation of students from families that faced economic hardship. This resulted in the exclusion of some students from accessing an academy of their passion,

even though a defining feature of the MAP was that students gained experience in their chosen area of passion (see note 7).

Six students were put at the most disadvantage in the MAP and five were Connect students, the most educationally vulnerable students in the school. The marginal status of these students was indicated by their explanations for not getting an Academy of Choice. Explanations, however, can be more complex than words represent (Skattebol and Hayes 2016). For example, one student (Interview 5) was unsure why she did not get her choice and the explanation 'They put me in there' suggested that either she had chosen a Cost Academy and did not pay or that she did not return the paperwork. Non-return of paperwork by students in No Cost Academies may have indicated that they had not shown their families the paperwork, perhaps to protect them from further financial demands. Skattebol and Hayes (2016) found that students 'exercised their agency to refuse things that required additional fees … The consequence of this meant they not only had limited subject choice but also missed out on potentially enriching experiences' (12). Non-return of paperwork may also have indicated a lack of buy-in to apply for No Cost academies they were not interested in, as confirmed by one No Cost student, 'They were all stupid' (Interview 29). Skattebol et al. (2012) found that young people would 'rationalise their own exclusion from … activities by considering them not to be important' (9) and that would seem to be the case with this student, who actively chose not to engage with the MAP.

The predominant description of MAP experiences by the six students was 'boring'. This finding is in line with previous studies that revealed students from backgrounds of disadvantage lacked access to engaging and enriching activities both within and beyond the curriculum (Sammons, Toth, and Sylva 2015; Wylie and Hodgen 2012). The Year 7 student who recommended more fun and games rather than doing the same thing each week indicated that her No Cost Academy was prescriptive and boring rather than interactive and student-centred. Boring is understood as a shorthand term students use to describe alienating characteristics of school: 'for students, boring connotes something missing in their education, conveys a deep sense of disappointment, and casts class cutting as a coping mechanism for classes that fail to engage' (Fallis and Opotow 2003, 108). This description particularly resonates with the four students who 'cut' school at MAP times. For them, the No Cost Academies further reinforced their experiences of school learning as tedious and bearing little relevance to their interests, passions and future aspirations (Galliott and Graham 2015). Skattebol et al. (2012) recommended that resources were needed to enable young people experiencing economic adversity 'to pursue their aspirations' (5).

The Year 8 Connect student who did continue to attend (Interview 32) noted that she was in an Academy with a best friend. This finding confirmed other research that noted friends as an important incentive for students to continue to attend school because friends contribute to enjoyment, provide support and help build resilience (Randall, Morstyn, and Walsh 2012). In contrast, the four Connect students who went home on MAP afternoons became more disconnected from relationships and benefits at school. Bond and Horn (2009) have noted the psychological impact on students when families were unable to cover the costs of education expenses: 'many reported negative impacts on the children such as sadness and depression, anger, reduced social confidence and loss of friends' (24). There were indications of some of these in the words, tone of voice, body language, and actions of some No Cost students related to their MAP experiences. In addition, Lamb et al. (2015) cautioned that '[i]f education does not work well for young people, their access to society is impaired and their capacity to contribute is diminished' (2).

For the six students, rather than being immersed in academies based on multi-age groups of like-minded students and adults pursuing their passions and contributing to the community, due to family and life circumstances beyond their control, they were excluded from full participation. As a consequence, they missed out on the opportunity MAP provided for community engagement and the development of life skills such as creativity, teamwork and problem-solving. Their experiences of exclusion reinforced the contention by Baumann, Millard, and Hamdorf (2014, 1) that

despite 'knowledge of the importance of civic engagement and participation for academic achievement, students' opportunities as a part of school learning are largely determined by socioeconomic status'.

In the first year of implementation, the school became aware of the initiative's barriers to full participation and the inequities these created. Consequently, in 2015, the school established a working party so that the initiative could progress towards its aim to engage all students (Staff Newsletter 13 February 2015). The working party included two student representatives who had previous experience of research in the school and personal experience of disadvantage in their lives.

A limitation of this investigation into the implementation of a whole-school initiative to engage all students is that it concluded at the end of the first year and does not have data on the progress of the initiative or the working party. However, while the study was in-depth in only one school with a relatively small number of students and staff, its findings are likely to have broad relevance as schools look beyond conventional pedagogy in their quest to engage all students, and as more schools look to successful interventions for ways to meet the needs of educationally disadvantaged students.

Conclusion

The research indicated that the process of a school scaling up from an intervention targeted at the engagement of a distinct group of students, to a whole-school initiative aimed at the engagement of all students was not straightforward. In its first year, the initiative did not produce an equitable distribution of benefits and it conformed to schooling's predisposition to produce exclusion and exclusivity (Thomson 2002). Specifically, the research reinforced how easily school processes can benefit more advantaged students and how, without vigilance, barriers to the full participation of economically disadvantaged students can be overlooked or justified as part of the natural order. The inequities that resulted demonstrated that unless the needs of disadvantaged students are targeted in whole-school initiatives, as they are in interventions, they are likely to face barriers to full participation. Such educational disadvantage can result in estrangement from school, with the potential to lead students further along the pathway of low achievement and early school leaving. In contrast, a needs-based approach would be in line with the equity principle that students who face economic adversity must be targeted if their educational disadvantage is to be overcome and their educational outcomes improved (Gonski et al. 2011; Lamb et al. 2015):

> Educational disadvantage occurs when the benefits of education are not evenly distributed, where there are barriers to access and participation, and when expected outcomes from education differ for particular individuals or groups. (COAG Reform Council 2012, 38)

This investigation reinforced the ongoing need for vigilance in schools to remove mechanisms of educational disadvantage and to target educational needs in order to provide equitable educational experiences and outcomes that engage all students.

Notes

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Disclosure statement

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Notes on Contributor

Maggie Callingham has taught in primary, secondary, community, TAFE and university contexts, in both paid and volunteer capacities. She was principal of an independent primary school. Maggie's interest is in democratic forms of education that engage young people in authentic learning that meets their needs and provides meaningful learning opportunities and outcomes. Her particular passion is in ways schools can engage young people who tend to be marginalized in conventional schooling and this is the focus of her current Ph.D.

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Part 2 – Discussion

The three chapters in this section have presented findings on student engagement in order to answer the two research questions: *How does a school in a low socio-economic area engage its junior secondary students (years 7 to 10) in social and academic relationships with school and school learning?* and *How does the notion of democratic justice play out in a school to shape student engagement?*

These findings were the result of a case study design that included both YPAR and ethnographic methods to capture as complete a research account as possible. When I interpreted the ethnographic data through the theoretical framework of democratic justice (Fraser, 2008), I conceived the theory that student engagement was enhanced through a flexible, personalised learning approach. This theory was complemented by the findings from the student-directed YPAR inquiry. The first three themes that emerged from this inquiry related to ways of learning that students found engaging – when learning was practical and hands-on, interesting and fun, and involved real-life contexts. The next three themes covered aspects of the academic, social and physical learning environment that students found conducive to student engagement.

The ethnographic and YPAR methods also provided a more comprehensive understanding of obstacles to engagement. It was through the ethnographic component and the relationships I had formed with students from backgrounds of socio-economic disadvantage in the Connect program that the inequity in the McClelland Academy Program bureaucratic process, and the invisibility of these students who went home at McClelland Academy Program times, was exposed. The YPAR methods revealed that ability groups operated in years 8 and 9 and the student-researcher's summaries at both Year 8 and Year 9 referred to ability groups.

The data from both the ethnographic and YPAR methods indicated that the manner in which McClelland Secondary College implemented social justice influenced how it engaged its junior secondary students.

Part 2 – Conclusion

Part 2 of this exegesis has presented the findings of the inquiry that will be discussed in the two chapters that follow in Part 3. They are Chapter 8 – Discussion and Chapter 9 – Conclusion.

Part 3 – Conclusion

Part 3 of this three-part exegesis comprises two concluding chapters.

Chapter 8 provides a discussion, in light of what others have found, of the findings and analysis in relation to the research questions.

Chapter 9 draws the study to a close with the implications of the research and what these mean for various stakeholders and for other research that may build on this work.

Chapter 8
Discussion

This chapter draws together the literature and findings into a theoretical discussion to show how the research questions are being addressed. The research questions stemmed from a concern about socio-economic equity and how a school addresses socio-economic issues to engage its local students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

The chapter commences with the grounding of my research values and methodological stance in democratic justice. The research questions are then addressed. Next, I review the framework of democratic justice that underpinned the study. I then discuss the improvement journey at McClelland Secondary College in relation to socially just education. I also elaborate on three key aspects that the school invested in: students, pedagogy and teachers. The discussion of McClelland Secondary College draws on the ethnographic document collection that comprised the context section in Chapter 4. In the section on "How democratic justice played out", I discuss four key elements: flexible learning spaces; personalised learning; ability groups; and cost for the McClelland Academy Program. The first two sections – flexible learning spaces and personalised learning – draw on the ethnographic findings detailed in Chapter 5. The third section on ability groups draws on the YPAR findings detailed in Chapter 6. The fourth section on the bureaucratic process of costs for the McClelland Academy Program draws on the ethnographic findings detailed in Chapter 7. Finally, I bring the discussion together in an overall summary.

Research Values and Methodological Stance

The theoretical and methodological values and commitments of this inquiry sought to be grounded in an equitable, social justice-oriented approach. A case study provided an opportunity to undertake a close examination of the case while including knowledge production/co-participation with "insiders". Another methodological choice was to contextualise rather than pathologise the issue of student engagement within the school. My commitment to a critical investigation led me to combine these methodological considerations by collaborating with students in a YPAR project to garner students' experiences of engagement in learning while, at the same time, using ethnographic methods to investigate multilevel power dynamics and structural influences on that engagement. Methodologically, my choices sought to move beyond a subjective

understanding of the issue and towards a critical transformative aim of empowering students themselves to gain their own understandings of the issue in order to formulate their own recommendations for action (Ling, 2017).

Together, the YPAR and ethnographic methods facilitated a multi-perspectival examination of the social phenomenon of student engagement in a school in a low socio-economic area. The value of this approach was that the YPAR methods prioritised knowledge production with students about their engagement with school and school learning. As claimed by Morrell (2008), "although they are the population with the most at stake in schools, youth are rarely engaged in conversations about the conditions of schools or school reform" (p. 156). Another strength was that the ethnographic methods, in addition to facilitating understandings of contextual influences on student engagement, facilitated access to students who tended to be positioned as the educational Other. From a social justice perspective, the question was how to gain valuable insights from students who are harder to engage from a research perspective without stigmatising the students through the research process. The resolution was to incorporate the principles of ethnographic inquiry while I volunteered in each of the school's targeted engagement initiatives, Connect and Hands On Learning. Overall, the limitations of both the YPAR and ethnographic methods was that they did not include teachers or members of the school leadership team, which meant that the research was about student engagement and democratic justice in the school without the integral participation of all the key stakeholders.

Research Questions

In answering Question 1 – *How does a school in a low socio-economic area engage its junior secondary students in social and academic relationships with school and school learning?* – we will see that McClelland Secondary College engaged its students through flexible learning spaces and personalised learning that were responsive to students' learning strengths and needs. In this way, students' learning was supported in socially just, non-marginalising ways. Such a model was described by Kannapel and Clements (2005) in high-performing high-poverty schools in the United States where "disadvantaged students appeared to be treated in fundamentally similar ways as advantaged students. Individual learning needs were targeted for attention, rather than categorizing students as part of an at risk group held to different performance expectations" (p. 29).

In answering Question 2 – *How does the notion of democratic justice play out in a school to shape student engagement?* – we will see that student engagement was enhanced when democratic justice was prioritised at McClelland Secondary College through flexible learning spaces and personalised learning that were responsive to students' wellbeing and learning needs. In contrast, when bureaucratic processes that were not responsive to students' wellbeing and learning needs took priority over democratic justice, the engagement of students from low socio-economic backgrounds was marginalised.

Framework of Democratic Justice

Fraser's (2008) notion of democratic justice as enacted through the principles of equal cultural value and parity of participation emphasised that a responsibility towards democracy and justice entails the added responsibility of overcoming injustice. Fraser contends that a strategy to overcome injustice involves dismantling institutionalised obstacles to parity of participation, which, in educational domains, is obstacles to learning. Democratic justice will be discussed in relation to student engagement at McClelland Secondary College.

An Improvement Journey

In Chapter 4, I used ethnographic data to provide details of the context of McClelland Secondary College. The contextualisation included the challenges that McClelland Secondary College faced into the first decade of the new millennium due to historical, social, economic and political influences on the school. These influences included the macro-level policy context and its neoliberal reorientation of government schooling (McCarthy et al., 2009). In a move that reflected a refusal to accept its residualised position in the educational marketplace, in 2009 McClelland Secondary College undertook an improvement journey. Five years into the change process, which had seen the introduction of flexible learning spaces and personalised learning, McClelland Secondary College profiled itself on the *My School* website as a place where students and teachers worked together with respect and positive relationships, and where students spoke with pride about their place of learning.

According to the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), the public platform of the *My School* website "provides parents and students with information on each school – its view of itself and its mission, its staffing, its

resources and its students' characteristics and their performances".[28] The view that McClelland Secondary College portrayed of itself was an indication that it was not positioning itself in the public domain of Australia's education marketplace as a conventional secondary school. Competition in the education marketplace – to be a "school of choice" – has tended to favour a view focused on the high performance of students and the academic excellence of a school. McClelland Secondary College, in choosing to focus on student-teacher collaboration, relationships and pride in their place of learning, was communicating the epistemic position that central to the teaching and learning process was engagement with the knowledge of learners through relationships and collaboration with learners.

In the contextualisation of McClelland Secondary College in Chapter 4, I noted three key aspects of the school's improvement journey. One was the school's decision to prioritise that "what was best for the students is what would be resourced". This investment in students was to guide financial decisions regarding the application of school resources as well as decisions concerning the application of the resource of teachers' time. Another aspect involved an investment in pedagogy through the transformation of teaching and learning as well as of school facilities. A third key aspect was an investment in teachers to change teachers' effectiveness and their mindsets of low expectations. Together, these aspects pointed to changes in the school towards a socially just educational model that operated outside the traditional paradigm. Change necessarily involves risk because it is difficult to anticipate all the outcomes (Christensen et al., 2011), so there are insights to be gained from the change process that McClelland Secondary College undertook.

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28. http://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/my-school-website

Investment in students. McClelland Secondary College's decision to resource what was best for the students was a decision to invest in its students. The application of this decision was demonstrated in its investments in innovative initiatives to support the social and academic learning of students whose needs were not being met within conventional classroom provision. As outlined in Chapter 7, the first was Hands On Learning in 2009, and because this program was not government funded, the school had committed to raising additional funds each year to keep the Hands On Learning program running.

The second in-house initiative was Connect, which began in 2011 and which proved to be costly due to its high adult–student ratio and extensive support structures. In addition, McClelland Secondary College invested in the professional development of Connect staff members in a trauma-informed approach to teaching and learning. This was an investment in staff to better meet the wellbeing and learning needs of its most vulnerable students. Drawing on the title of Gilligan's (2006) publication, the school was "creating a warm place where all young people could blossom". Udvari-Solner and Keyes (2000) contend that a good indication of the overall quality of a given school, and I would emphasise a good indication of its equity, is from "the environments, experiences, and opportunities that are provided for the most vulnerable and least advantaged" (p. 572).

The vignettes described in Chapter 5 demonstrate that, in addition, the school invested in its students from economically poor backgrounds by having cupboards of spare uniform items available and a whole shelf of new school shoes. The availability of these items meant that all students could experience inclusion and belonging by meeting the school's uniform requirements rather than the school uniform become an exclusionary or disciplinary devise. Investment in students from economically poor and complex home environments extended to having food available in both the Connect and the Hands On Learning programs. The availability of food sent the message to students that they were cared for and being able to eat if they were hungry better prepared students to concentrate on their learning. McGregor et al. (2017), found that for some students, the provision of food was an important "drawcard for school" (p. 74).

The multiple ways that McClelland Secondary College invested in its least advantaged students is consistent with the equity principle that disadvantaged students must be targeted if their educational outcomes are to be improved (Gonski et al., 2011).

Investment in pedagogy. The second key aspect of the improvement journey was an investment in pedagogy that included the transformation of teaching and learning and of the school's facilities. The transformation aimed to break down the physical and psychological walls that kept teachers and students confined to individual classrooms with lock-step curriculum and teacher-directed pedagogy. The school invested in two initiatives that were intended to achieve this transformation, flexible learning spaces and personalised learning. Flexible learning spaces aimed to both expand the opportunities for students' learning beyond the bounds of traditional classrooms and promote a culture of whole-school responsibility for students' learning. Personalised learning aimed to make learning responsive to students' wellbeing and learning needs as well as to their strengths and passions. Personalised learning entailed the reframing of a teacher's task from one of delivery of education, to one of helping students to be successful every day (Christensen et al., 2011). The reframing requires teachers to move their focus from planning subjects to planning for individual student's learning. According to Hattie (2016), "the fundamental purpose of schooling is to ensure that every student gains at least a year's achievement growth for a year's input. This applies no matter where they start" (p. 14).

Investment in teachers. A third key aspect of McClelland Secondary College's whole-school improvement journey was to challenge teachers' effectiveness and their mindsets of low expectations of students. This dual focus is in line with the "learning without limits" pedagogical model that was first documented by S. Hart et al. (2004).

Explicit in this model is that the external purpose of teachers' work – their practice – must act to lift the limits on and expand the opportunities for students' learning, while the internal purpose – the subjectivity – must act to build on and not diminish students' states of mind about their learning capacity (S. Hart & Drummond, 2014). The learning without limits pedagogical model is in direct contrast to the fixed ability model that is associated with segregating students into ability groups (S. Hart et al., 2004; S. Hart & Drummond, 2014).

The investment in teachers included a reassessment of the application of teachers' time in order to encourage teachers to expand planning beyond the bounds of the classroom and school. As demonstrated through the vignettes in Chapter 5, time was needed for teacher-to-teacher collaboration to plan for students' wellbeing and learning needs and for teacher-to-student collaboration to plan and monitor students' personalised learning and individualised learning plans. Teachers also needed time to network with agencies

and to develop community contacts in order to support students' wellbeing and learning needs.

Such a transformation in the application of teachers' time extended the traditional parameters of pedagogy and was outside the norm of what teachers would traditionally do to support students' wellbeing and learning needs. It is, however, in line with the norm of inclusive learning systems, which, according to Wierenga and Taylor (2015), have a "dual focus on support and learning" (p. 29). Wierenga and Taylor confirm that, rather than an individual teacher responsibility, "ensuring that all young people are provided with support to overcome barriers and achieve involves a range of players and partnerships" (p. 29).

The changes to McClelland Secondary College's culture and operation were in line with inter-related aspects that Smyth et al. (2010) had discerned in the relational school: relationships that included respect, trust and care; school organisation that was flexible, student focused and supportive; pedagogy that incorporated the connectedness of teachers, students and subjects while maintaining challenge, rigour and fun; and inclusive school-community engagement in which the school was a valued asset in the community and the community was a valued asset in the school. According to M. Mills et al. (2015), unconventional schools "have lessons to offer all schools about important structural and process reforms to ensure that all young people can be engaged in schooling" (p. 164). The lessons that McClelland Secondary College offers will be discussed through the ways that democratic justice played out in the school to shape student engagement.

How Democratic Justice Played Out

Some of the ways that democratic justice was found to play out at McClelland Secondary College to shape student engagement was through: flexible learning spaces; personalised learning; ability groups; and cost for McClelland Academy Programs.

Flexible learning spaces. The flexible learning spaces at McClelland Secondary College were part of the school's transformation of teaching and learning and its facilities. These transformations resulted in learning spaces that were architecturally and pedagogically open to expand opportunities for students' learning beyond the confines of traditional classroom walls. According to Smyth et al. (2010), an essential step in bringing together aspects of the relational school involves reimagining "the possibilities of 'doing' high school differently" (p. 197). Such reimagining was found at McClelland Secondary College, with the principal stating, "McClelland College has found that students' passions and participation are best stimulated outside of traditional school structures" (Callingham, 2015, p. 25) with opportunities that "are generally cross-age, involve mixed abilities, have multiple entry and exit points, take learning beyond the confines of the formal curriculum and classroom, involve collaborative student–adult relationships and merged teaching–learning relationships and value student voice" (p. 25).

At McClelland Secondary College, doing school differently and more responsively began with the Hands On Learning program and then with the Connect program. Beginning with small endeavours such as these is not unusual (Price et al., 2012; Smyth et al., 2010). Yet, it is more democratic and less stigmatising when, rather than having pockets of more responsive provision, all students have equal access to it. Such expansion, according to Smyth et al. (2010), is essential if schools are seeking more enduring change. McClelland Secondary College had the opportunity to embed such change when it decided to scale up features of the Hands On Learning program into the whole-school McClelland Academy Program. Two of these features stood out. First, the McClelland Academy Program was not to be bound by traditional school structures such as age, ability, time, classrooms, pedagogy, curriculum and assessment; and second, it was to include community participation.

The school's flexible learning spaces, however, were not simply associated within programs or with open learning areas within buildings; they were associated with whole-school responsibility for students' learning. This was demonstrated in Chapter 5 with the vignette of Noel. Noel was a student in the Connect program who was implicated in a classroom behaviour incident that resulted in a modified learning arrangement. During this arrangement, Noel worked through self-paced mathematics modules and at times he received informal tutoring from one of the assistant principals. As a result, Noel gained enough confidence in his mathematical ability to change his

individualised learning plan to include joining a Year 9 mathematics class. Noel's experience indicates that at McClelland Secondary College, even the modified learning arrangement constituted a flexible learning space, and within that space, all staff members accepted responsibility for Noel's learning. Noel's experience provides insight into the notion of the whole school as a flexible learning space, with no mainstream–marginal divide between the Connect class and the Year 9 mathematics class. This is in contrast to alternative programs and schools that are marginalised spaces, used as a "convenient repository" (Te Riele, 2008) for students that mainstream schools cannot or do not want to deal with.

   Personalised learning. A key aspect of the transformation of teaching and learning at McClelland Secondary College involved instigating personalised learning to make learning responsive to students' wellbeing and learning needs as well as to their strengths and passions. In this discussion, I reintroduce Dawn and Colin from Chapter 5 who are actual students. Dawn and Colin are representative of students who may find themselves in the position of the educational Other rather than representative of students who may find themselves on the cover of an exclusive school's prospectus.

Dawn had gaps in her academic learning due to the fact that she had been changing schools regularly and attending irregularly over the years. The school did not try to fit Dawn into the age-based, lock-step curriculum of a conventional classroom structure or allocate her to a low ability group. Instead, Dawn's individualised learning plan responded to her need to fill the gaps in her learning through diagnostic testing and self-paced learning modules. Personalised learning at McClelland Secondary College prioritised students' participation in their learning and as reflected in Chapter 5, Dawn had choices and made decisions regarding the level and pace of her learning. In addition, Dawn's opportunity to participate in volunteer work revealed her strengths of empathy and compassion for people who tended to be marginalised in the community, and her enthusiasm for this aspect of her personalised learning was expressed in her end-of-year reflection: "I love volunteering down at City Life … I enjoy that very much".

Colin's wellbeing and learning needs stemmed from years of not having his aptitude for applied forms of learning acknowledged in schools that privileged print-based learning and assessment. Colin's learning differences had been historically pathologised as learning difficulties, and this had resulted in his low resilience in conventional classrooms, which manifested in his refusal to undertake print-based tasks and defiance

when challenged to do so. At McClelland Secondary College, the focus on personalised learning meant that a student's learning ability was recognised as multidimensional (Fielding & Moss, 2011) and students were afforded multiple opportunities to display and develop their diverse abilities.

Colin's individualised learning plan, which incorporated applied mathematics in the form of construction-based learning modules, was an acknowledgement of his right to learn in ways that made sense to him. In addition, as noted in Chapter 5, Colin's request for one-on-one reading support, due to his previous humiliation in class settings, was accommodated by the Year 9 coordinator. This learning arrangement was indicative of how flexible learning spaces and personalised learning worked together at McClelland Secondary College to challenge the conventional mainstream–marginal academic divide and to promote a culture of whole-school responsibility for students' learning.

In addition to the academic orientation of Colin's individualised learning plan, his personalised learning comprised authentic construction projects in the school and community within both the McClelland Academy Program and the Hands On Learning program. The construction projects within these multi-age programs provided further opportunities for Colin to develop his literacy and numeracy skills in real-life contexts while affording him opportunities to hone his practical and social skills with like-minded adults and peers.

Dawn's and Colin's experiences of personalised learning at McClelland Secondary College provide insight into the school's responsiveness to the strengths and the complex wellbeing and learning needs of these two students. From the perspective of socially just education, what comes through is a culture of inclusion in which McClelland Secondary College upheld the rights of these two students to a quality education regardless of their life circumstances and learning differences. Harris, Ainscow, and Carrington (2017) acknowledge that the challenge for schools is "how to improve the quality of education provided for all children, whatever their personal characteristics or circumstances" (p. 142).

Booth and Ainscow (2002), in the *Index for Inclusion*, capture the essence of this when they refer to participation as requiring "active engagement with learning and having a say in how education is experienced. More deeply, it is about being recognised, accepted and valued for oneself" (p. 3). Personalised learning and the development of individualised learning plans at McClelland Secondary College positioned students in a

democratic relationship with teachers in the planning for their learning. From a position such as this, according to Holdsworth (2005), students are recognised "as bringing skills, views, and experiences to their education" (p. 142). In this way, students are active agents in their education, not simply passive recipients of adult-focused education (Wyn, 2009).

The experiences outlined in the vignettes support the theoretical position that, rather than education being imposed on students, personalised learning and individualised learning plans build capacity around students' learning strengths and passions – such as construction for Colin – while building supports around their learning needs – such as Dawn's need to fill the gaps in her learning. This position is supported by McGregor et al. (2017) who similarly found that unconventional schools worked to address students' needs and undertook "to reconnect young people to personally satisfying ways of learning, and to address educational gaps" (p. 129). Students' participation in their learning has increasingly been acknowledged as integral to student engagement (Klem & Connell, 2004), and it has been claimed that when students are supported to have input, it "increases connectedness to learning, the school and education more broadly, and enables them to learn in ways that make sense to and suits them" (Commissioner of Children and Young People, 2018, p. 140).

The experiences of Dawn and Colin described in Chapter 5 emphasise that, through the concept of flexible learning spaces and the pedagogy of personalised learning at McClelland Secondary College, these students participated in a diversity of applied learning experiences within the school and its broader networked community. Students' participation in their community is considered an important aspect of their civic development because democracy is more than simply learning to be in community; it is about learning to participate in community action for the common good (Fielding & Moss, 2011). According to Holdsworth (2005), students must be enabled "to act upon their learning: to produce something of value, to be valued and to value one's self as someone who can 'make a difference' – a difference that goes beyond the teacher and classroom" (p. 142).

In order to gauge how the school's flexible arrangements and personalised learning shaped a student's engagement, I refer to Colin, whose learning differences, when marginalised at his previous school, led to broken relationships and disengagement. Yet, Colin engaged, socially and academically, at McClelland Secondary College because his learning differences, rather than being marginalised as problematic, were brought to

the forefront of his learning. As a result, Colin experienced a sense of agency through the school's personalised learning that built in opportunities for him to have authentic construction experiences and to make meaningful contributions within the school and community; the respect of having his learning strengths and needs accommodated through his individualised learning plan; and a high degree of peer mentoring and relational support.

Personalised and responsive provision worked to increase Colin's social and academic relationships with school and school learning. Evidence that responsive educational provision shapes student engagement is clear from research that has documented the differences between the disengagement of students within conventional forms of schooling where their diverse needs had not been met, compared to their subsequent engagement within unconventional forms of schooling that were responsive to their needs (McGregor et al., 2017; M. Mills et al., 2015). The literature also confirms that applied forms of learning provide meaningful learning experiences while increasing students' interest, engagement and interpersonal skills (Abbott-Chapman et al., 2014; Istance & Dumont, 2010).

What has remained unacknowledged in this discussion was the investment of teachers' time to support Dawn's and Colin's wellbeing and learning needs. Time was invested in teacher-to-teacher collaboration, with outcomes including the collaborative arrangement for Colin's one-on-one tutoring and his participation in the Hands On Learning program. Time was invested in teacher-to-student collaboration to plan and monitor Dawn's and Colin's personalised learning and individualised learning plans. In addition, time was invested to network with agencies and to develop community contacts in order to support Dawn's and Colin's social and wellbeing needs. This investment of teachers' time is in contrast to the time invested to plan subject-based class teaching, especially within ability groups in which students are taught as one homogenous group. These findings validate research that shows learning environments that include "high standards for academic learning and conduct, meaningful and engaging pedagogy and curriculum, professional learning communities among staff, and personalized learning environments. … are more likely to have students who are engaged in and connected to school" (Klem & Connell, 2004, p. 262).

The discussions about flexible learning spaces and personalised learning demonstrate how student engagement was enhanced when democratic justice was prioritised at

McClelland Secondary College through flexible learning spaces and personalised learning that were responsive to students' wellbeing and learning needs.

      Ability groups. This section on ability groups draws on the findings detailed in Chapter 6 that were the result of the student-researcher YPAR inquiry across years 7 to 10. Since the student-researchers asked their peers about engagement, the findings discussed here are the result of data from their participants. Interview data from the YPAR inquiry revealed that, despite the introduction of a socially just educational model at McClelland Secondary College, ability groups operated at years 8 and 9. The majority of student comments related to students' disappointment with their allocation to low groups and a Year 8 student even advocated on behalf of his peers in low ability groups:

> *I think the groups are unnecessary. I've talked to some people in [the low group] and even though they feel they don't know a lot about literacy they feel babied in literacy and excluded from some of the stuff that's more interesting that other people are doing.*

This young person's perceptive assessment of low ability groups aligned with critiques in the literature that found students' placements into low groups was associated with low-level work, restricted curriculum and less opportunities for intellectual stimulation (Boaler et al., 2000). The insight of this Year 8 student is also evident in his assessment of ability groups as "unnecessary", which parallels with the assessment of the NRC&IM (2004) that has advocated for the elimination of "classes that do not prepare but prevent students getting on to rigorous grade-level work" and for additional assistance to be "provided in the context of a regular course with more skilled peers" (p. 7). The literature confirms the Year 8 student's assessment that, rather than supporting students' academic needs, the marginalisation of low ability groups isolates students and limits academic and social interactions that are conducive to student engagement and positive learner identities.

The YPAR findings on ability groups exposed the power that operated at the level of within-school social arrangements to maintain structures and processes that perpetuated inequity, despite the whole-school move towards a socially just education model. Studies such as those by Boaler et al. (2000) and Gillborn and Youdell (2000) found that it was often on the basis of teachers' decisions, rather than students' abilities, that students were allocated to groups, and that the social class of students was an influencing factor. Other main findings related to ability groups in the YPAR inquiry

were in relation to the process of allocating groups, with the Year 8 summary stating that Year 8 students think that ability groups could be improved and that they have suggestions. As Slee (2011) asserts, the students are watching. Although recognisable to the students, the differential arrangements and fixed-ability thinking that is ubiquitous to the process and practice of ability groups are, according to Pearl (1997), often unrecognisable to teachers and administrators. Harris, Ainscow, et al. (2017) emphasise that "what is often left unspoken is that ability-based grouping has been associated with a substantial negative effect on those students with low levels of previous achievement, who tend to perform better in mixed attainment groupings" (p. 153). Yet, despite such evidence, teachers persist in the practice (Slee, 2011).

Some reasons for that persistence are that ability groups are more manageable for teachers, and the school can justify different investments in, and expectations on, each group. Gillborn and Youdell (2000) refer to the practice of rationalising resources according to expected returns on investment as "educational triage" (p. 133). According to Gillborn and Youdell, educational triage is a process by which schools "seek to maximize the effectiveness of scarce resources but their effect, in practice, is to privilege particular groups of pupils marked especially by social class and race" (p. 134). What remains unspoken and unscrutinised with the process of ability groups is the part that the process itself plays in the creation of inequity. S. Hart et al. (2004) call attention to the injustice of "how ability-based thinking systematically screens out the part played by school-based influences when it represents the resultant disparities in achievement as a natural and inevitable reflection of measureable differences of inherent ability" (p. 31).

Gillborn and Youdell (2000) found that, rather than supporting students' academic needs, academic segregation into ability groups denies equal opportunity. In addition, the marginality of low-ability groups has been found to limit academic and social interactions that are conducive to student engagement and positive learner identities (Beane & Apple, 1999). From the perspective of social justice and democratic participation, the ability groups at years 8 and 9 could be described as interfering with students' rights to full membership in the classroom; obstructing students' full participation in quality learning; implicating students in a process that "does violence to the opportunities afforded different groups" (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000, p. 229); and promoting the differential esteem of students.

In McClelland Secondary College's attempt to move from a traditional educational model to a socially just model, it has experienced what Tyack and Cuban (1995) describe as the tenacity within schools to maintain traditional organisational structures and processes. Five years into the college's change process, the interview data from the YPAR inquiries conducted in years 8 and 9 revealed an incongruity. The ideology of the social justice educational model was in tension with the ideology of the traditional educational model. The process of ability groups is in direct contrast to the school's move to planning that was to be personalised and responsive to students' learning needs and to the school's move to put students' wellbeing and learning needs at the forefront of planning. The process of ability groups is also in contrast to the school's goal to disrupt entrenched mindsets of low expectations of students. How these tensions co-exist is worth further investigation. If a socially just educational model is to prevail, as researchers such as Skattebol and Hayes (2016) warn, teachers need to be vigilant regarding schooling processes and sensitive to the overt and covert messages they communicate, especially negative assumptions based on factors such as class, gender, race and sexuality.

Cost for McClelland Academy Program. In contrast to social arrangements that regulated students according to hierarchies of ability, the McClelland Academy Program was designed to be inclusive of students from Year 7 through to Year 12 who shared a passion, regardless of their level of ability. In addition, academies were not to be classroom based and teacher directed but were to provide students with opportunities to drive their learning and apply their passions in authentic ways through community involvement. According to an assistant principal, the McClelland Academy Program had the potential for students to develop deep understandings in a chosen pathway for the entire six years of their secondary schooling. This potential, however, was not available to students whose families did not have the economic means to pay for the academy that matched their passion.

Nine of the 12 academy options at years 7 to 10 had a cost, with eight options costing $100 and one option costing $50. The school's response to the economic obstacle was to offer three no-cost academies: communications media; global citizens; and maths and science. For students from economically poor families, the McClelland Academy Program options were reduced to these three no-cost academies, two that were print oriented and a third that was mathematics oriented. All three no-cost academies, therefore, were oriented towards conventional classroom learning that, as noted in

research (Munns, 2007; Smyth & Wrigley, 2013), had historically tended to marginalise the learning strengths and needs of students from backgrounds of socio-economic disadvantage. The very options that were offered as academies for students who did not have the economic means to pay were, therefore, the least likely options to provide them with a positive McClelland Academy Program experience. Of the six students who had been in a no-cost academy that was not of their passion and who had had a negative McClelland Academy Program experience, five were students in the Connect program, and another student, who had chosen not to engage with the McClelland Academy Program at all, was also a student in the Connect program. The school's most vulnerable students, who were confronting complex challenges in their lives at the time, were the ones most disadvantaged by the economic obstacle of cost.

The McClelland Academy Program was not an elective program or an optional extra. It was a whole-school initiative with the defining feature that all students and teachers, from Year 7 through to Year 12, would cease conventional classes at recess one day a week to gain hands-on experience in their chosen area of passion. The marginalisation of students who faced economic adversity was, therefore, a denial of their right to equal access. According to Reay (2016), when radical spaces in education continue to be the preserve of students from economically advantaged backgrounds, while students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds continue to have "the least opportunities for fulfilling learning that realises their potential" (p. 326), then this cannot be equated with socially just education.

McClelland Secondary College's scaling up of features from the Hands On Learning program into the McClelland Academy Program was not straightforward. The school raised the annual cost of funding Hands On Learning and that decision reconciled with its commitment to resource what was best for the students. However, one challenge with the school's scaling up to a whole-school model was how to reconcile the ideal that financial decision-making would prioritise what was best for the students with the reality of financial constraints. As the McClelland Academy Program was a costly initiative that could not be accommodated within the school's budget, particular academies needed to charge a cost for participation. This cost then created an obstacle to the engagement and participation of students from economically poor backgrounds, which meant that the school had not prioritised what was best for these students. This tension between the ideology of the social justice educational model and the economic

reality of limited budget is one example of the challenges a school may face in seeking to implement a socially just educational model.

The discussions regarding ability groups and the cost of the McClelland Academy Program explore how, when bureaucratic processes have priority over democratic justice, the engagement of students from low socio-economic backgrounds tends to be marginalised.

Summary

The experiences at McClelland Secondary College offered insight into the structural and pedagogical possibilities when a school, despite its residualised position, implemented a socially just educational model.

McClelland Secondary College had demonstrated that a socially just educational model both extended the parameters of what schools and teachers are able to do and expanded the notion of what it means to be a teacher who can teach in ways that include every student.

When McClelland Secondary College had successfully dismantled obstacles to students' engagement and participation, it had demonstrated the flexibility to accommodate the purposeful movement of students throughout the day and week as they undertook personalised learning opportunities across flexible learning spaces in the school and community. That is, student engagement had been enhanced when democratic justice had been prioritised at McClelland Secondary College through flexible learning spaces and personalised learning that had been responsive to students' wellbeing and learning needs.

In contrast, the engagement of students from low socio-economic backgrounds had been at risk of marginalisation when bureaucratic processes that had not been responsive to students' wellbeing and learning needs had taken priority over democratic justice.

The experiences of McClelland Secondary College indicate that change towards a socially just educational model is complex, takes time and is resource intensive.

However, McClelland Secondary College had demonstrated the benefits of such a model for all schools, where teachers collaborate extensively and network widely, and schools invest justly in order to support the diverse needs and multiple abilities of their student populations.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

This research project found that junior secondary students from low socio-economic backgrounds were interested in their engagement with school and school learning and that a socially just educational model had the potential to enhance that engagement. Furthermore, the study found that when social justice was not prioritised, the engagement and participation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds was more likely to be marginalised than that of their more advantaged peers.

The complex case study design of this research project was found to have been strengthened through the combination of time spent in the field using the methods of ethnographic inquiry and the collaboration with student-researchers using YPAR methods.

The significance of this inquiry for educational research and practice is its contribution to exposing yet again what Reay (2017) refers to as a "troubling continuity" (p. 176) of young people from economically poor backgrounds experiencing education as failure. This is not to detract from the overall movement within the school towards a more socially just educational model, but, as Bryk et al. (2010) discovered with their research into school improvement, "this result could easily have remained hidden in a more casual accounting of the overall positive … trends" (p. 222).

Both the ethnographic and YPAR inquiries of this thesis found evidence of processes that marginalised the engagement and participation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The injustice of this troubling continuity needs to be emphasised each time it is exposed. In line with Fraser's (2008) strategy to overcome injustice, this exposure may help to dismantle structural, relational and cultural obstacles to students' engagement in learning.

The further significance of this inquiry for educational research and practice is its contribution to providing an example of a school's implementation of a socially just educational model. The lessons to be learned from this one school may provide guidance to other schools wishing to move from a traditional educational model to a socially just model. In this way, the inquiry contributes to both exposing inequity and promoting equity.

Overall, the findings of this inquiry have reinforced the need for schools to be both vigilant in relation to removing obstacles to the engagement of students from low socio-economic backgrounds and to be visionary with regard to instigating initiatives that promote a socially just educational model that engages all students.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

There are implications of this research for policy, for schools and for teachers:

- *For policy* – school funding needs to include programs such as Hands On Learning and Connect so that they can be embedded as flexible learning spaces in schools that have students from low socio-economic backgrounds with complex learning needs. Research indicates (Deloitte Access Economics, 2012) that investments into programs such as Hands On Learning, although costly due to their adult–student ratios, are, nevertheless, cost effective over the long term when the young people remain engaged in education.
- *For schools* – Although change to a socially just educational model is challenging and a long-term commitment, it does promote the engagement of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. However, there are inherent tensions involved when orientations of change challenge ingrained orientations.
- *For teachers* – Youth participatory action research is a collaborative method for students to investigate student engagement, and students have insights to offer teachers into school practices and processes.

On the basis of the findings of this research, I have located five recommendations for practice:

Recommendation 1: That schools invest resources justly with a view to applying unequal investment in order to create equal access for students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Recommendation 2: That schools maintain vigilant scrutiny of processes and practices to expose inequities in educational access and outcomes and to emphasise educational initiatives that prioritise social justice and democratic participation.

Recommendation 3: That schools replace the practice of ability groups with best practice principles of teaching and learning and pay close attention to the persistence of segregated teaching practices and hierarchical mindsets.

Recommendation 4: That schools and teachers network widely so that students have access to a diverse range of positive role models to support social and academic learning.

Recommendation 5: That teachers collaborate extensively – teacher to teacher, teacher to student, and teacher with parents and the broader community – in planning for learning that is responsive to students' wellbeing and learning needs as well as their strengths and passions.

These five recommendations, which promote a socially just educational model to engage all students, point to schools' responsibilities to practice democracy and justice as well as to overcome injustice by dismantling obstacles to learning.

Limitations and Implications for Further Research

A key implication for further research is to investigate the tensions between a school's overt intentions to instigate change towards a socially just educational model, and the complications, compromises and covert limitations to full implementation.

The YPAR inquiry, which provided valuable insights into students' unique perspectives on student engagement, was limited by the small number of student-researchers. One reason for the limited recruitment was that the inquiry was conducted during class times and students needed to ensure that they caught up on the classwork that they would miss. In future, if the YPAR inquiry were to be incorporated into students' personalised learning, then the skills developed through the process of researching could be formally credited towards students' individualised learning goals. In this way, future YPAR inquiries could be strengthened by more students being willing and able to train as student-researchers within their respective schools.

The YPAR inquiry was limited by no teachers or school leaders able to commit the time to participate as co-researchers alongside the students. If the YPAR inquiry was embedded as a curriculum approach within the school, this would provide the time and the process to facilitate teachers' co-enquiry with students into important issues that affect both students and teachers. Alternatively, the YPAR inquiry could be incorporated into a teacher's professional development – as with teacher action research projects (Kane & Chimwayange, 2014). In the future, YPAR inquiries in schools would be strengthened by more knowledge co-production between teachers and students.

The inquiry that was the subject of this thesis was conducted within a limited time frame, and in future, a longitudinal study would be beneficial because it would facilitate important revisits to a school in order to understand whether the change was enduring, and if changes were embedded, how they became embedded. This would provide long-term insights into the cultural change required to embed an enduring socially just educational model, which is intrinsically a challenging long-term project.

This inquiry was a single-case study and further research to investigate the implementation of socially just educational models across a number of schools and in a diversity of contexts would provide helpful guidance to other schools wishing to undertake such reform.

Afterword

After Bill was moved on from his local secondary school that was walking distance from his home and where his older sister and primary school peers attended, he found it difficult to adjust to his new secondary school. The new school was unfamiliar, was a distance from his home and was away from his support networks. Bill's educational and social marginalisation continued at this school and before the end of the year, he was moved again, although officially he remained enrolled at the second school. This third move was into a setting for students with disruptive behaviours, a setting that Granite and Graham (2012) refer to as "behaviour" schools.

Bill's experience of marginalisation in junior secondary school was so disturbing to him that he never returned and his trajectory has conformed to that of the literature on young people who have left school without a qualification (Granite & Graham, 2012). At 16 years of age, Bill was sentenced to a period of youth detention. While he was in detention, he found out that he and his younger girlfriend were expecting a baby. At the time of submitting this exegesis, Bill and his girlfriend are now a family with a three-year-old son. At their son's third birthday party, Bill told me that he wants to provide for his family, but he has been unable to obtain employment.

I cannot help thinking that, like Dawn, Colin and Noel, Bill may have had more positive educational outcomes with better employment prospects if he had attended a school like McClelland Secondary College that sought to implement a socially just educational model.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee Approval

Quest.Noreply@vu.edu.au

Tue 28/05/2013 1:24 PM

Kitty.Teriele@vu.edu.au

Dear ASPR KITTY TE RIELE,

Your ethics application has been formally reviewed.

» Application ID: HRE13-057
» Chief Investigator: ASPR KITTY TE RIELE
» Other Investigators: MRS MARGARET CALLINGHAM

» Application Title: Insider expertise: Students and staff investigate educational engagement

The application has been accepted and deemed to meet the requirements of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)' by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval has been granted for two (2) years from the approval date; 27/05/2013.

Continued approval of this research project by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC) is conditional upon the provision of a report within 12 months of the above approval date or upon the completion of the project (if earlier). A report proforma may be downloaded from the Office for Research website at: http://research.vu.edu.au/hrec.php.

Please note that the Human Research Ethics Committee must be informed of the following: any changes to the approved research protocol, project timelines, any serious events or adverse and/or unforeseen events that may affect continued ethical acceptability of the project. In these unlikely events, researchers must immediately cease all data collection until the Committee has approved the changes. Researchers are also reminded of the need to notify the approving HREC of changes to personnel in

research projects via a request for a minor amendment. It should also be noted that it is the Chief Investigators' responsibility to ensure the research project is conducted in line with the recommendations outlined in the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)'.

On behalf of the Committee, I wish you all the best for the conduct of the project.

Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee
Office for Research
Email: researchethics@vu.edu.au

Appendix B – McClelland College Research Extension Approval

MCCLELLAND COLLEGE

Wednesday, 4th December, 2013,

Re: Research 'Insider Expertise – students and staff investigate educational engagement'

To Whom It May Concern,

This letter is to certify that the leadership team at McClelland College is very happy for the above research through Victoria University to extend into 2014.

We are delighted that Maggie Callingham is able to continue at the school because this has proved to be a most effective and productive partnership involving trust, mutuality, and reciprocity.

Yours sincerely

Tristan Lanarus
Assistant Principal

Appendix C – Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee Research Amendment Approval

Quest.Noreply@vu.edu.au
Mon 11/08/2014 11:35 AM
Kitty.Teriele@vu.edu.au

Dear ASPR KITTY TE RIELE,

Your amendment request for the following ethics application has been formally reviewed and finalised.

» Application ID: HRE13-057
» Chief Investigator: ASPR KITTY TE RIELE
» Other Investigators: MRS MARGARET CALLINGHAM
» Application Title: Insider expertise: Students and staff investigate educational engagement

 Form Version: 12-10

The amendment request for this ethics application has been accepted and deemed to meet the requirements of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)' by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval has been granted for two (2) years from the original approval date; 27/05/2013.

Continued approval of this research project by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC) is conditional upon the provision of a report within 12 months of the above approval date or upon the completion of the project (if earlier). A report proforma may be downloaded from the Office for Research website at http://research.vu.edu.au/hrec.php.

Please note that the Human Research Ethics Committee must be informed of the following: any changes to the approved research protocol, project timelines, any serious events or adverse and/or unforeseen events that may affect continued ethical acceptability of the project. In these unlikely events, researchers must immediately cease all data collection until the Committee has approved the changes. Researchers are also reminded of the need to notify the approving HREC of changes to personnel in research projects via a request for a minor amendment. It should also be noted that it is

the Chief Investigators' responsibility to ensure the research project is conducted in line with the recommendations outlined in the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)'.

On behalf of the Committee, I wish you all the best for the conduct of the project.

Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee
Phone: 9919 4781 or 9919 4461
Email: researchethics@vu.edu.au

Appendix D – McClelland College Request to Be Named in Publications

McCLELLAND COLLEGE

21st May, 2014

Re: Research 'Insider Expertise - students and staff investigate educational engagement'

This letter is to certify that the leadership team at McClelland College would prefer that the school be named in publications in relation to the above research, especially because the research investigates the many programs that the school has invested in to promote engagement of students from backgrounds of disadvantage.

We acknowledge that some of these publications may include critique of, and recommendations for, our school and this suits our commitment to continuous improvement.

Yours sincerely,

Amadeo Ferra

Principal

Appendix E – Advice of Student Co-Authorship

MEMO

TO: ASPR Deborah Zion

DATE: 7 April, 2014

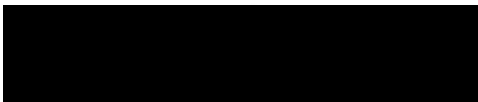FROM: Maggie Callingham
HRE 13-057

CC: Secretary for the HREC

SUBJECT: Connect article

As agreed, I am sending through for your information, the April 2014 issue of Connect that has the article co-authored by students at McClelland College.

At our meeting on 19 December, 2013 I mentioned that Roger Holdsworth, the editor of Connect, invited the students to submit an article after he participated in an Action Research Team session at McClelland College in October, 2013. Connect is a small, bi-monthly on-line journal that promotes student voice and participation in schools. It is in its 33rd year of publication.

The students are named as co-authors in the index on page 2 and at the end of the article on page 19. McClelland College went through its own process of obtaining permission from parents/carers for the students to be named as co-authors.

Kind regards,

Maggie Callingham

PhD candidate

T: 0420 972 672

E: margaret.callingham@live.edu.au

Appendix F – McClelland Academy Program (MAP) Interview Questions 2014

Q.1.   Did you get the MAP of your choice? Explain

Q.2.   Do you attend MAP? Explain

Q.3.   Have you explored an area of passion in MAP? Explain

Q.4.   How have your MAP teachers handed control over to you to develop as an independent enquirer and self-manager?

Q.5.   How have your MAP teachers supported you to develop as an effective participant and team worker in MAP?

Q.6.   How have the strategies and ideas in MAP supported you to develop as a creative thinker and reflective learner?

Q.7.   In what ways has your MAP involved you in meaningful, real-world learning?

Q.8.   Explain if you think your MAP has helped you in your core or elective subjects or in other ways outside of MAP times.

Q.9.   Explain if you think that by teachers being involved in MAP, it has changed the way they teach in core or elective subjects or in other ways outside of MAP times.

Q.10.   If you were involved in a community event, tell us about the event and your level of involvement in the planning and on the day.

Q.11.   Overall, how would you describe your experience of MAP this year?

Q.12.   With your MAP for next year, what would you like to get from it?

Q.13a. What do you think are MAP's strengths?

Q.13b. What do you think are MAP's weaknesses?

Q.13c. What do you think are MAP's opportunities?

Q.13d. What do you think are MAP's threats?

Q.14.   What ideas do you have to keep improving MAP?

Appendix G – Conference Presentations

Callingham, M. (2013, November 3). *Visual research method: Ethical challenges and challenges to ethics guidelines*. Co-presentation at the Australian Qualitative Research Conference, Melbourne, Victoria.

Callingham, M. (2013, November 27). *Democratic youth participation: A strength-based approach to youth investigating educational engagement*. Oral presentation at the Australian Sociological Association Conference, Melbourne, Victoria.

Callingham, M. (2015, April). *Youth participation, power, and ownership in an action research doctoral project*. Oral presentation at the International Institute for Qualitative Methodology Conference, Melbourne, Victoria.

Callingham, M. (2015, June). *Student engagement, redesigned pedagogy: From intervention to innovation.* Oral presentation at the Redesigning Pedagogy International Conference, Singapore.

Callingham, M. (2015, August). *'Whakarongo mai, nganggak' Listen to me: Fostering the voices of excluded children.* Symposium co-presentation at the Inclusive Education Summit, Melbourne, Victoria.