

Towards authentic family-school relationships: Engaging families through early years transition-to-school programs

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Towards authentic family-school relationships: Engaging families through early years transition-to-school programs

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Abstract

How early years transition-to-school programs have been used to engage families and foster family-school relationships is the focus of this study. Understanding how family-school relationships are created can inform future school engagement practices and ensure that all families are empowered to support their child's educational outcomes.

A review of literature suggests that families in low socio-economic and diverse communities are often perceived by schools as lacking interest or ability to play the role schools expect. Further, the cultural values, beliefs, and economic circumstances of these families are identified as affecting the ways they engage with schools, which may impact on the educational outcomes for children. A paucity of information was evident on how schools go about engaging families from different cultural, linguistic, and economic backgrounds.

Early years programs have been shown to provide support for families as children transition to school, but how all families in a community can be engaged through such programs has not been clarified. An aim of the current study is to provide a rich description of how two Australian schools situated in diverse communities set about engaging all families in authentic relationships.

A qualitative approach, using a multiple case study design, was used to examine how schools engaged parents through early years transition-to-school programs. Participants included school personnel and mothers of children who attended the programs – a playgroup and a pre-Prep program at one school, and a pre-Prep program at the other. Volunteer sampling was used to select parents for the study. Data were collected in focus group discussions and interviews, supplemented by researcher observations and publicly available school documents. Social capital theory provided a theoretical frame for the examination of findings and discussion.

Findings suggest the cultural and linguistic diversity of the communities was not represented by the families who attended the early years programs. Both schools were seen to hold deficit perceptions in relation to community families and family resources. The purpose of engaging families in the transition-to-school period became one of addressing the inadequacies perceived in parents' capacity and children's development in terms of preparedness for school.

As school leadership has an important influence on the development of family-school relationships, including more in-depth interviews with school leaders may have provided further insight.

This research makes a useful contribution to the area. It provides a rich description of how schools in culturally and linguistically diverse communities go about engaging families in relationships and by framing thinking using social capital theory, shows how a school could shift deficit thinking to acknowledge the skills and resources families possess, and potentially engage all families. The study suggests that working in a collaborative manner with community stakeholders could enhance educational outcomes. Additionally, the adoption of a strengths-based approach is suggested as essential if schools are to develop authentic family-school relationships through early years transition-to-school programs.

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Glossary

ABS Australian Bureau of Statistics

AEDC Australian Early Development Census

ARACY Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth

CALD Cultural and linguistic diversity

The term “culturally and linguistically diverse” (CALD) is commonly used to describe people who have a cultural heritage different from that of the majority of people from the dominant Anglo-Australian culture, replacing the previously used term of people from a “non-English speaking background” (NESB) (Queensland Government, 2010). In the local area where the study was undertaken, this included families with a refugee background, migrants from Pacific Nations, Asia and the Middle East, and First Nations Peoples.

Government/state primary school

A state primary school in Queensland that is wholly funded by the Queensland Government.

Nongovernment/Independent school

An independent or nongovernment school that offers a choice to families, and can be religiously based. Accredited non-state schools implement national and state curricula and fulfil all government accountability requirements. Tuition fees are paid by parents. Governments also fund the schools to ensure all students have access to the education of their choice, with more funding to schools in low-SES communities.

ICSEA Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage

SEIFA Socio-Economic Index for Areas

SES Socio-economic status

Statement of original authorship

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signed

J. L. Girdwood

January 2018

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the context and rationale for the study which was undertaken in South East Queensland, Australia. The study examines the nature of family-school relationships in culturally and linguistically diverse areas of low socio-economic status (SES), in order to understand how family-school relationships are formed through early years transition-to-school programs. To gain a deeper understanding of participant viewpoints, social capital theory (Perkins, Hughey, & Speer, 2002) which emerged from Bourdieu's (1985) concepts of habitus, and field are used to consider how two schools engaged families through early years transition-to-school programs. It is hoped that findings will inform further research and assist schools to refine family-school engagement practices in areas where low-SES and cultural and linguistic diversity (CALD) may impact on the ways in which families and schools engage.

Internationally and nationally, there has been long-term acknowledgement that establishing relationships with families and engaging them in children's education are of long-term benefit to all involved, particularly when these relationships are built in the early years of a child's life. Research and policy presented in the following section reinforce the need to engage families in education and the ensuing benefits it brings.

1.2 International context

In the 1960s, education internationally was focussed narrowly on improving learning conditions in schools, particularly where, in disadvantaged areas, many of the children were migrants. In the United Kingdom (UK), the Plowden Report (Plowden, 1967) acknowledged that for families of poorer communities, there was a need to ensure children were supported in their education and the relationship between home and school was strengthened. In the United States of America (USA) the Coleman Report (1966) was seen as ground-breaking in its support of education for disadvantaged students of colour.

At this time, schools that made concerted efforts to involve parents in their child's education experienced benefits in learning outcomes for children, for example, in academic

areas such as reading and in improved links between schools and their communities. By the 1990s there was no discernible change in the ways schools and families interacted. Relationships between home and school remained focussed on learning outcomes, with parents working to support teachers to improve literacy and numeracy (Bynner & Steedman, 1995). The Edwards and Warin (1999) study on the role of parent engagement in UK schools found that schools were giving parents tasks to supplement what could not be managed in the classroom because of a crowded curriculum. The relationship reflected one in which schools were using parents to meet their needs, rather than building relationships with them.

During this time, Epstein (1995) developed a framework defining six types of family, school, and community cooperation. The types of involvement she recommended related to parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaboration between the school and its community. A benchmark for critiquing home-school engagement was also provided.

In contrast, a different approach was seen in America where Dr James Comer introduced a School Development Plan in 1968 with the main aim of forming more positive relationships with black minority parents of lower SES (Comer, Haynes, & Joyner, 1996). This holistic approach to engaging parents was about much more than school learning, encompassing community-wide support for the whole family to enable both academic and social success. This broader approach taken in schools across differing SES proved the claims that by engaging with parents in positive home-school relationships, student outcomes could be improved (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 1997; Henderson & Berla, 1994).

These studies highlight the international importance placed on the need to build relationships with families that acknowledge the influence of cultural and socio-economic diversity within schools. However, the cultural beliefs of both Asian and non-Asian parents in Hong Kong schools, reported in a study by Katyal and Evers (2007), suggest that parents did not consider a partner relationship with the school a necessary component of their child's education. Their belief was that teachers were the educators; the relationship parents desired was more of a professional-client one, with the parental role important, but separate to that of the school.

More recent research on the types of home-school relationships experienced in European and other countries revealed similarities to those already noted. A study of schools

in the European Union (Flecha & Soler, 2013) indicated that strategies which included family and community members in decision-making processes influenced children's school success. In the Netherlands, Denessen, Bakker, and Gierveld (2007) found that cultural differences between home and school caused barriers to parent-school relationships and children's learning. The failure to acknowledge such differences may have resulted in the school judging families as disinterested in their child's education. In contrast, when cultural and ethnic differences were addressed in South African schools by schools creating an environment that welcomed all parents and acknowledged the contributions they made, Lemmer and van Wyk (2004) suggested that efforts to accommodate the diversity resulted in parents becoming more involved and positive outcomes for children.

Dor (2012) provided another perspective on the relationship between parents and schools from teachers and counsellors in Israeli schools. While there was agreement on the important roles parents played in the education of the child, Dor found teachers perceived the role of parents as one of supporting teachers; counsellors placed more value on building parents' trust and belonging in the school so that they became more involved in the education of the child.

Examples such as these show that while approaches to home-school relationships vary across the world, the central concern is for a child's learning. In Australia, the idea of the parental role in the education of children can be seen as rather slow to develop.

1.3 Australian context

The Hobart Declaration of 1989 set important educational goals which focussed mainly on improving educational outcomes across all sectors of the population (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 1989). The Hobart Declaration was followed 10 years later by the Adelaide Declaration (MCEEDYA, 1999). In the Preamble to that document, national goals for schooling stated that "just schooling" would ensure that student outcomes were "free from the effects of negative forms of discrimination based on ... culture and ethnicity ... and of differences arising from students' socio-economic background or geographic location" (3.1). There was also acknowledgement within the Adelaide Declaration that parents are the first educators of

their children and the recommendation was made that relationships and partnerships between families, schools, and other parts of the community should be strengthened.

Subsequent to the Adelaide Declaration, there was a stronger emphasis on engaging parents in education. There was also an increased focus on supporting the learning of English for families in culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. The term “culturally and linguistically diverse” (CALD) is commonly used to describe people who have a cultural heritage different from that of the majority of people from the dominant Anglo-Australian culture, replacing the previously used term of people from a “non-English speaking background” (NESB) (Queensland Government, 2010). In the local area where the study was undertaken, this included families with a refugee background, migrants from Pacific Nations, Asia and the Middle East, and First Nations Peoples.

In many Australian schools, programs such as “Flying Start” in Queensland which aimed at training parents as volunteers to read with children in schools (Department of Education & Training, 2010), were introduced to ensure parents were familiar with how the educational system worked and to encourage them to support the work in the schools. However, as there was no link made between the cultural beliefs families held about education and the expectations schools had of families, parents engagement in such programs was limited (Cairney, 2000). Research discussed in the following chapter shows that engaging families in schools, particularly in low-SES, CALD communities, continues to be an area of focus.

By the time of the Melbourne Declaration of 2008, there was some change in references to the relationships between families and schools (MCEECDYA, 2008). At this time, there was joint state and federal government commitment to ensuring schools engaged their parents, families, and communities in ongoing support of children to ensure best outcomes for all. It espoused an education for children based on respect for ethnicity and cultural diversity and free from discrimination. A four-year plan was developed which outlined strategies for working with families and communities as set down in a national partnership agreements (MCEETYA, 2009). In recent years, government policies on a national and state level have continued to recommend schools engage with parents in CALD and low-SES communities.

Australian government initiatives in early childhood education and care have resulted in the development of a National Quality Framework (Emerson, Fear, Fox, & Sanders, 2012) which incorporates a National Quality Standard; *Belonging, Being and Becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009); and *My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care in Australia* (Australian Government, 2011). Dockett, Perry, and Davies (2017) describe the Early Years Learning Framework as encompassing the five broad learning areas for children across the early childhood years. The areas range from children being able to develop a sense of identity, being connected with and so contributing to their world, having a sense of personal well-being, and being confident and involved learners, so becoming effective communicators (DEEWR, 2009). The framework outlines recommended approaches to supporting families in disadvantaged areas, describing relationships with families as respectful and supportive, with collaborative partnerships between families and communities.

A further Australian Government initiative, the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) (AEDC, 2012), aims to support communities to bring long-term benefits to children and their families. The AEDC is conducted every 3 years, with children tested in their first year of full-time school. It is a measure of their development in the domains of physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills, communication skills, and general knowledge. The census provides information for early childhood educators and its findings can support communities and schools to improve outcomes for children in the local area. The Moore and McDonald (2013) report for the Benevolent Society on the disadvantage that families suffer through poverty and other adverse experiences stressed that support for families was best when offered in the form of programs in conjunction with other wider community services. The message is that while the changes needed are not drastic, they are important, and “that the risks of not doing anything will impact upon all Australians both in the present and well into the future” (p. 2). Response to the identified need for holistic, community-wide support is carried out by not-for-profit organisations like the Scanlon Foundation. The National Community Hub is part of the national program funded by the Australian Government in partnership with the Scanlon Foundation, the Migration Council Australia, and Refuge of Hope (Scanlon Foundation, 2015). It operates in communities Australia wide to support families in low-SES

communities. In South East Queensland, in areas where there is an ethnically and culturally diverse population, National Community Hubs are operating currently.

The important role parents play in their children's education and the need for strong partnerships (Department of Education, Training & Employment, 2014) are also emphasised by Education Queensland. More recently, a report by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) (2016) on a study of parent engagement raised concerns about the barriers to parent engagement with schools. Within the report, it was suggested that in low-SES, culturally and ethnically diverse communities, time constraints related to work, unfamiliarity with the school system or negative experiences in it, and low levels of education are all factors that impact the ways in which parents engage with schools. Additionally, families of diverse cultural heritages who possess different forms of cultural capital and language skills often perceived their roles in their child's education differently from mainstream educational expectations. The report urged schools to engage with all parents and their community and include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in this engagement. Governments at state level also moved to address ways in which education could involve families and schools working together to ensure all children were better prepared for the commencement of school.

1.3.1 Queensland context

In Queensland, studies advocating the importance of supporting families in disadvantaged communities to promote positive early childhood development stressed the value of support in the transition-to-school period (Freiberg et al., 2005; Freiberg, Homel, & Branch, 2010; Freiberg, Homel, & Lamb, 2007). The implementation of federal government agendas related to the support of young children's learning and development was a strong priority and was further supported by the introduction of local initiatives. In a move to ensure children have the foundation they need for successful learning in Year 1, the Queensland Government introduced a preparatory year, a non-compulsory Prep year in 2007 (Department of Education and Training, 2010). This Prep year became compulsory in 2017 (Queensland Government, 2017).

To ensure that young children in Queensland were off to a good start and have the best chance of success, the Education Green Paper *A Flying Start for Queensland Children* produced by the Bligh Government aimed at encouraging all parents to read to their children

and suggested more volunteers be trained to assist with literacy development (Queensland Government Department of Education, Training & Employment, 2010). The later Newman Government's "Step up into Education" initiative was focussed on children's transition to school. It built on policy initiatives to better prepare and support children in making the transition to school a positive experience, and to support parents to become involved in their child's education (Department of Education & Training, 2013). Further, in its Cultural Diversity Policy, the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and Multicultural Affairs (DATSIMA, 2014) stated that for schools in CALD areas, families were to receive the support needed to ensure access to quality education, including early childhood programs. The recent government *Advancing Partnerships – Parent and Community Engagement Framework* (Queensland Government, 2018) provides some guidance to schools in order to improve family-school relationships.

The policy initiatives presented so far highlight the importance placed on engaging families across the diverse cultural, linguistic and socio-economic strata of society in the education of children and the changing perceptions of effective support for families and children. Research studies of family-school relationships are presented in the following chapter. First, however, conceptions of family-school relationships, how they are described in the literature, and how they relate to the overall aim of this study are considered.

1.4 Conceptions of family-school relationships

Home-school relationships have been described variously in the literature as *involvement, engagement, participation, or a partnership* between parents and schools. Use of these terms appears to characterise the varying perceptions of what constitutes family-school relationships. They are examined more closely in this section.

In acknowledging parents as children's first educators and vital to the whole educational process, involvement is a term often used. However, this term does not provide any indication of how the parental role is perceived in the schooling system. In research studies, involvement has been described in terms of parental behaviours in the education of a child (Berthelsen & Walker, 2008; Rodriguez-Brown, 2009). Others (Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, & Gordon, 2009) have gone beyond the notion of parent involvement to embrace the co-construction of a relationship between parents and schools. They posit an expectation

for schools to reach out to families to form such relationships and to share the responsibility with parents of educating their children. These interpretations come closer to the focus of this study, but Pushor's (2012) suggestion further extrapolated that while concepts such as involvement, partnership, and participation all reflect positive aspects, the term engagement encompassed a "mutual desire by educators and parents to be in a relationship with one another and with children," sharing which she saw gave a "sense of reciprocity" (p. 469). The idea of an exchange that brings benefits to both parties was seen by Ferlazzo (2011) in schools' attempts to engage parents and so become partners in the education of the child. He differentiated between the terms by saying that "involvement implies doing to; in contrast, engagement implies doing with" (p. 11).

The above studies indicated that it is the motives behind the attempts schools make to reach out to parents which shape how the relationship develops: as a relationship where parents support the school's agenda, or one where both parties are focussed on the education of the child. It was the central place of the child in the relationship which was stressed in the following work.

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) suggested that the process of parent engagement ideally develops and changes across the years of the child's education. Engagement in the child's learning is the key, with the relationship which they argued should afford parents agency, described as "the capacity of parents to act (in a beneficial manner) in relation to the child's learning" (p. 401). The relationship should evolve as if on a continuum to one in which the agency of the school and parent was equitable, "each recognised as valuable in its own right, rather than as solely an adjunct to the other" (p. 407). A similar view of the relationship was given by Kim and Sheridan (2015) who argued that the term involvement could be seen as restricting the parental role to particular contexts or times to be part of their child's learning, rather than involvement that continued throughout the whole of the educational journey. Instead, they proposed the term partnership be used to describe a relationship that afforded complementary roles to parents and schools, a two-way relationship that was supportive of parents in extending all aspects of their child's learning.

Edwards and Kutaka (2015) suggested that "engagement" and "partnership" (p. 37) were the newer and inclusive terms used in literature to describe the home-school relationship. They considered that engagement covered a wider range of parent interactions

with schools and they used it as a more inclusive term to cover the many forms of contribution parents made in a home-school relationship.

However, another important consideration was raised in Crosnoe's (2012) study that addressed inequalities amongst disadvantaged populations. He stressed that in the family-school relationship, reciprocity was the important quality to ensure both parties were actively involved in the learning facilitated. A caution about the possibility of uneven distribution of power in the educational context was also given by Petriwskyj (2014) who proposed that the school usually held the dominant position in the relationship. She argued that such a relationship could result in an unequal role for parents if aspects of social class or cultural and linguistic heritage, and the beliefs and attitudes encompassed, were not a consideration when schools sought to engage families.

While the connotations of the terms used are important, both engagement and partnership can be seen to reflect the ideal relationship in which families and schools work together to support a child's education. As the study's focus is on how schools engage families, the terms "engage" and "engagement" are seen to best describe the practice of both family and school in developing a relationship centred on the child and developing over time. To Auerbach (2012), distribution of power in family-school relationships was a concern. She stressed that school leadership was important in ensuring that parents were afforded an equitable role in relationships. She desired family-school relationships that were "respectful alliances that value relationship building, dialogue, and sharing power as part of social just schools" (p. 34). Auerbach (2012) described such a relationship as "authentic" (p. 34) as it afforded respect and shared power between educators and parents. In the context of how such relationships were initiated, Kuttner's (2016) delineation of equity and equality of opportunity is relevant. While all families can be given equal opportunity to become involved with educators in such relationships, Kuttner stressed the importance of ensuring that the situation that prevailed was one that gave families and educators the opportunity to begin the process of forming that relationship at the same point.

In the context of the present study, the terms "engage", "engagement" or "partnership" are used to refer to the authentic family-school relationship, in which school engagement practices focus on the support of families and the educational outcomes for

children. The term involvement is used when engagement is referred to in this way in other research studies.

The impetus for undertaking the current study came from my awareness of the unequal role that parents played in family-school relationships and the powerlessness experienced by some families in the communities in which I taught. I realised that it was the nature of family-school relationships that matters; in particular, the extent to which the relationships between home and school were more than a perception of a partnership, and how the power in that relationship was balanced. In the context of the present study, I hoped the relationship developed through the programs offered by each of the schools would be one which reflected an equitable balance of power, where the focus was the education of the child. An outline of how my interest developed in family-school relationships that support the education of children in their early years is now presented.

1.5 The researcher

Before commencing this research, I taught for many years in a large, culturally and linguistically diverse secondary school in a low-SES suburb. I became interested in the learning styles of students whose first or home language was not English and, in talking with their parents, learnt that many were not confident of the role they could play in their children's education. With a colleague I conducted classes in English language skills for parents of the school where, as they requested, we were able to familiarise them with the schooling system so they could participate more confidently within the school community. Many of these mothers confessed that it was the first time they had felt comfortable in the school environment and saw us as their teachers or mentors assisting them. My involvement with these families made me aware that, like all parents, they wanted a role in the education of their child; however, if parents' own educational experiences were not in the Australian system, they first needed to be cognisant of how the system functioned so they could access all aspects of it, and thus gain the sense of empowerment which would enable them to fulfil the role they desired in their child's education.

Through these experiences, I became aware that parents of my students may have benefitted if policies had translated into practice and if the support described was available in all schools in the area. Whilst policy suggesting the importance of support for families in the

years prior to school commencement or the early years of schooling was in place, I was encountering families in this culturally diverse, low-SES area who were not experiencing this support in practice. When the situation was considered, it prompted questions around whether policy is running ahead of practice (Daniel, 2005), the extent to which current practices are research informed, and whether there are fundamental theoretical considerations in relation to policy and practice that still need to be addressed.

It was concerns such as these that motivated me to undertake a study that focussed on the nature of family-school relationships in a low-SES community, where many families were also culturally and linguistically diverse. My interest was in how parents perceived their role in the education of their child and how parents could be empowered to form relationships with school personnel. I chose to focus on the years prior to school commencement as I considered it a time when families whose children were transitioning to school would be seeking to learn how they could support their children and form relationships with schools that centred on children's learning outcomes. If school engagement practices were refined at this time, family-school relationships should continue to develop as children progressed through their primary school years. By examining the transition-to-school programs schools implemented, I expected to learn how the programs supported the development of the family-school relationship.

I felt this research could make an important contribution to the field, as through an examination of school engagement practices, both successful outcomes and areas of shortfall could be revealed. Findings could inform future practices and families and schools could learn how to work together. My long-term goal is that when children enter high school, their parents will have developed confidence and can exercise the capacity that Goodall and Montgomery (2014) describe as giving parents the ability they needed to support their child's learning, so that the family-school relationship supports the well-being of the child and enables parents to be cognisant of relevant aspects of the educational system.

1.6 Context of the present study

The present research was undertaken in neighbouring suburbs close to where I taught and examines programs schools enact to support families in the transition to school period. The area surrounding the two schools where this study was conducted was a low-SES and

culturally diverse urban area of South East Queensland. Data reveal schools of the area as disadvantaged (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2013; AEDC, 2012).

Both schools shared a desire to support families in the low-SES, CALD community. One school attended an Early Years Summit, which brought together educators, community organisations, and government agencies to devise ways to address concerns for the well-being of children and families, particularly where children were transitioning to school or in the early years of their education. The second school linked with the National Community Hub program (Scanlon Foundation, 2015) to increase their outreach to the community and continue to support families. The contrast revealed between the philosophy espoused by each school to support and guide families through the transition-to-school period and the philosophy evidenced through actions is noted and discussed in final chapters of this study.

1.7 Contemporary issues in the educational field

In education today there remains a concern that inequalities continue to exist. Perkins et al. (2002) developed social capital theory from the Bourdieuan concepts of habitus, capital and field (Bourdieu, 1985) to consider the inequalities that occur in today's society.

Because of the complexities of modern society, many of the issues Bourdieu identified are still discernible. Contemporary issues recognised internationally include how to engage with all families and to accommodate socio-economic, linguistic and cultural variance (Denessen et al., 2007; Lemmer & van Wyk, 2004). Within Australia, ongoing concerns are raised about establishing family school relationships in the early years prior to children commencing school (Dockett & Perry, 2001; Freiberg et al., 2005; Freiberg et al., 2010; Freiberg et al., 2007; Kirk-Downey & Perry, 2006). This is of particular note for families in low-SES and culturally and linguistically diverse communities (Dockett et al., 2011; Margetts, 2009) where social class and cultural and linguistic heritage can impact the power balance within the relationships formed between families and educators (Petriwskyj, 2014). At the core is the need to support families to ensure the transition to school is a positive experience (Department of Education, Training & Employment, 2014). How that core need can be fulfilled is the focus of the present study.

1.8 Conceptual framework

This section begins with an explanation of the social capital theory (Perkins et al., 2002) on which the framework is centred. The Bourdieuan concepts of habitus, capital, and field (1985) from which the theory emerged are also introduced. Approaches such as that of strengths-based education practice (SBEP) (Lopez & Louis, 2009) are outlined. Mapp and Kuttner's (2013) framework to develop relationship building between families and schools, and Kania and Kramer's (2013) collective impact model, both draw on a strengths-based approach. The following section explains how the conceptual framework is utilised in this study, and the significance of this study in the research field is then outlined.

1.9 Social capital theory

Social capital theory, developed by Perkins et al. (2002) from Bourdieuan concepts, provides a frame for consideration of the complexities of modern society and a way of understanding why inequalities occur. The theory evolved from the sociology of education (Bourdieu, 1985; Coleman, 1988) and its use spread to other areas across social science and community development fields. Pena-López and Sánchez-Santos (2017) defined individual social capital as “the set of personal attributes and access to networks that make it easier for individuals to achieve market and non-market objectives because of the interaction with other individuals” (p. 8). These personal qualities enable the individual to form links within the various networks and achieve the types of connections needed to function there.

The concepts within the theory are seen in the dimensions of social capital as outlined by Perkins and Long (2002). The theory has been applied at the individual, community, institutional, or societal level to define and measure the types of social connections that occur. The inter-related concepts illustrate how connections formed may be at the individual level, between individuals and community organisations, as well as between organisations. Social connections, or relationships, are seen in terms of formal or informal, bridging or bonding.

At an individual, informal level, bonding relationships are built on trust. The relationship connects individuals and creates a sense of support between individuals. Within the bonding relationship, there can be cognitive aspects through the sense of confidence and assurance the individual feels, so increasing the sense of self-efficacy and giving the

individual a sense of empowerment. That empowerment dynamic can impact the group, organisation or community in which the person operates. When relationship building takes place at a formal or organised level, bridging relationships are formed. Based on a need to connect with others, the bridging relationship connects individuals at different levels or in different positions in an organisational structure. Again, a sense of empowerment is gained, individually or collectively within the particular setting. Through the bonding and bridging behaviours and the associated cognitive experiences, Perkins and colleagues (2002) described how the individual gained a sense of “collective efficacy, or control over the institutions that affect one’s life” (p. 37).

The sense of collective empowerment gained through the development of relationships was also stressed by Warren, Hong, Rubin, and Uy (2009). They used social capital theory in their collaboration with community-based organisations to consider how parents in communities could be encouraged into forming relationships with each other, which in turn enabled them to share concerns as a group and present to the school authorities collectively. The process can be compared to the Perkins et al. (2002) dimensions of social capital; at the personal or informal level, relationships, or bonding, between parents were encouraged, and then at a group or organisational level, when parents joined together, they formed bridging relationships as they dealt with their concerns.

Social capital theory is focussed on the collective or collaborative empowerment across wider society. While Bourdieu recognised the place of that collective empowerment, he also focussed on the individual, driven by his concerns for equality in society. Bourdieu’s theory was based around his concern for the inequality he perceived in society, which he claimed was perpetuated through education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). His concerns were for the social and economic inequities across society but he worked extensively in the field of education. His concepts of the individual habitus, capital and field are applicable when the state of the individual in society is considered.

1.9.1 Bourdieu’s concepts

The concepts of habitus, capital, and field were described by Wacquant (1989) as the “three main thinking tools” (p. 40) of the Bourdieuan approach, and seen by Bourdieu (1985) as the core of his work.

According to Bourdieu, it is through the habitus that behaviour patterns and ideas develop. Habitus originates and is formed by family background or life conditions. It can be understood as the integration of past and present, not consciously created, but developed gradually through a subconscious absorption of elements of everyday experiences, a socialisation process of family and everyday life from the society in which one is reared (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). From all that is embedded through the habitus, the individual can incorporate and adapt the learned values and beliefs into their everyday actions in the field. Bourdieu refuted criticism of the habitus concept as deterministic in his assertion of ways the habitus incorporated and adapted in these ways, to be both transformed by influences in the field, as well as to transform what is encountered, continually changing and adapting (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992b, p. 9).

To Bourdieu, the field is an area in which the individual exists in everyday life (Bourdieu, 2011). Individual actions in a field were referred to by Wacquant (2011) as knowing how to play the game, not by a defined set of regulations but in Bourdieuan terms, conforming to “the tacit rules of the game” (p. 99). The Wacquant analogy of knowing the rules relates to the idea of knowing how to act and manage everyday occurrences, to adapting to what was required in the context or field.

The concepts of field and capital are linked and the two considered together ensure understanding of individual actions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992b). In all areas of life, or fields, people draw on different personal resources acquired through the habitus, from their background, upbringing, and education. It is according to the capital the individual possesses that entry to or membership of the field is gained (Bourdieu, 1993). Bourdieu used the economic terms of *cultural and social capital* for the individual resources possessed (Bourdieu, 1984), adopting the economic concept of value to stress how these personal resources can be exchanged or built on for use in the different areas of everyday life encountered (Bourdieu, 2011). For Bourdieu, social capital encompasses the resources a person possesses, in terms of the types of network, or connections, formed (Bourdieu, 1986). It is through these connections that people are able to access the collective capital of others in a network or group of people and gain the sense of connection to, or belonging in, the field.

Bourdieu’s approach as both method and theory offers a means to understand the behaviour of the individual in a place or field, and the ways in which the personal resources

or capital influence behaviour as they seek to operate there (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992). Social capital theory (Perkins et al., 2002) and Bourdieuan theory (1985) share a basic tenet for the need of a strengths-based, rather than deficit view of problems encountered. The contrast between those views is now outlined.

1.10 A strengths-based versus deficit approach

SBEP (Lopez & Louis, 2009) adopts a philosophy that focuses on identifying personal strengths, assumes potential within an individual, and the task is to find ways to utilise that potential so the person flourishes. The concepts used by Lopez and Louis focus on teaching and how teachers can adopt such an approach to show students how to draw on their own strengths to succeed. They outline a set of principles, two of which are the importance of individualisation and the value of linking with like-minded others. They first acknowledge that each person has different skills, so the aim is to work towards that personal goal using those skills; the second stresses the value of linking with people who share strengths so that there is mutual support.

The impact of a deficit perception in an educational context was stressed by Gorski (2012). He stated that when educators attribute unequal outcomes to deficiencies in parents and the community, rather than acknowledging the resources and skills families possess which could enrich their role in their child's education, relationship building between families and schools is impeded and inequitable relationships result. The deficit perception is negated through a strengths-based approach in contexts where support is the focus.

1.11 A strengths-based perspective

Mapp and Kuttner (2013) devised a framework that utilised a strengths-based approach to offer guidelines for schools that can help them in addressing deficit perceptions. Through working in a collaborative way, school personnel and parents are able to develop the knowledge and skills needed to form family-school relationships based on mutual respect and equitable role sharing. As schools seek to support families and engage them in family-school relationships, the collective impact model also presents a framework to bring together a range of schools, community individuals and organisations. Schools and families together can learn how concerns perceived might be addressed and support for individuals, families and communities can then draw on their own resources to rise above the adversity encountered.

Kania and Kramer (2013) asserted that the collective impact model is a framework that assists a range of community members to work together “under conditions of complexity” (p. 2). The conditions they outlined for its successful implementation include sharing a common agenda where “all participants have a shared vision for change” (p. 1) and the organisational support that underpins the work undertaken. They also stressed that while common goals are needed, that the operation is one of “emergent solutions” which work towards “intentional outcomes” (p. 2). They stress that the collective model is “not about creating solutions” but is to achieve “a common understanding of the problem” (p. 15) so that all involved can work toward the shared goals.

Relationships between different community services to alleviate the effects of adversity in disadvantaged communities were advocated in the Moore and McDonald (2013) Benevolent Society report. The National Community Hubs established by the Scanlon Foundation (Scanlon Foundation, 2015) also acknowledges the advantages gained through a community wide approach to supporting families in low-SES communities. To achieve such aims, Kania and Kramer (2013) identified the need for ongoing inquiry, using the growing understanding of the problem gained to work towards a solution. The holistic approach to early years and transition support for families is in accord with research findings (Petriwskyj, 2014; Petriwskyj, Thorpe, & Tayler, 2005), particularly for families in low-SES, CALD communities (Dockett et. al., 2011; Margetts, 2009). Ways in which these concepts are utilised in the current research are now outlined.

1.12 Utilising the framework

In the context of the present study, the aim was to consider how schools engaged families through early years transition-to-school programs to develop authentic family-school relationships. To gain further insight into how engagement practices influenced the ways in which early years and transition-to-school programs operate in schools and how relationships are formed, social capital theory is utilised to examine relationships between participants, and between participants and schools, through the concepts of bridging and bonding relationships, at informal and formal levels. The Bourdieuan concepts of habitus, field and capital also give understanding to the ways in which individuals participated in and were influenced by the programs.

Through an examination of contemporary issues in education, the impact of strengths-based practice is considered. A comparison of the strengths-based and deficit approaches in the low-SES and CALD communities of the schools in this study reveals ways in which schools seek to support families and engage with them in endeavours to develop an authentic family-school relationship.

Using the framework outlined, the study addresses the following research question:

- How can schools engage families in authentic family-school relationships through early years transition-to-school programs?

The supporting questions are:

- How are early years transition-to-school programs enacted?
- How do schools engage families in early years programs?
- What is the nature of relationships created through early years transition-to-school programs?

1.13 Significance of this study

The present study examines how schools attempt to reach out and support families in the community through transition-to-school programs and how relationships are developed through early years programs in the transition phase. Daniel (2005) asserted that “research on the effectiveness of different forms of involvement is essential” (p. 142) for the development of sound theory. Through the examination of the schools’ practices in these programs an understanding of the specific strategies utilised emerges, an understanding that can inform future support measures schools implement.

Governments have long encouraged the development of family-school relationships, for example in the Melbourne Declaration of 2008 (MCEECDYA, 2008). The National Quality Framework (Australian Government, 2011) outlines a range of initiatives within its suite of documents (National Quality Standard; Belonging, Being and Becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia [Australian Government, 2009]; and My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care in Australia [Australian Government, 2011]). More recent policies acknowledge the parental role, a need for partnerships (Department of

Education, Training & Employment, 2014) and the inclusion of all families in low-SES, CALD communities (ARACY, 2016). In the present national context, the idea of engaging families encompasses the need to build strong links between families and schools. This may enable parents to become part of a relationship that acknowledges family strengths, supports families, and affords parents agency in a relationship centred on the education of their child. The relationship would allow them to act in ways that were beneficial to the child's learning (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014) and suited to their own cultural values and beliefs.

The study provides an in-depth examination of programs in two schools. Dockett and Perry (2013) stated that smaller-scale studies make an important contribution to the "understanding of the experiences and expectations of those involved in transition and serve to remind us all that individuals, communities and contexts make a difference in all human endeavours" (p. 170). Following the Dockett and Perry suggestion of pursuing such knowledge, theoretical concepts as outlined were utilised, and through the views of parents and school personnel, a broad range of perspectives was gained. It is anticipated that findings from this study will contribute to understanding of how schools can better support families as children transition to school and develop authentic family-school relationships.

1.14 Chapter summary

This chapter has set an historical context for the study. To begin, it gave a brief outline of international and national research that revealed how concerns of developing working relationships between families and schools have been addressed. The chapter showed how government policy has been used to initiate the engagement of families of cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity through to the present era when the early years of child development and the transition to school have become the key areas of support for families. The range of terms used to describe and define the family-school relationship was also discussed. The background of the researcher, the research undertaken, and the research sites was outlined. The conceptual framework used to analyse and discuss findings was presented, and the contribution the study makes to the research area was presented. An overview of the thesis concludes this chapter.

1.15 Overview of the chapters of the thesis

Chapter 2 provides a review and discussion of the literature relevant to this research area. Conceptions of family-school relationships from the late 20th century to the present time are considered. Ways in which school personnel have sought to overcome barriers to the establishment of family-school relationships in low-SES and CALD communities are outlined. Research on the role of early years programs in the development of these relationships for families with children in the transition-to-school phase is considered. The chapter concludes with acknowledgement that there remains a need to gain an understanding of how school engagement practices are affected by deficit perceptions of families within low-SES and CALD communities.

Chapter 3 details the methodology of the study. The ontological and epistemological perspectives that guided the study are presented and the resulting methodology is described. The chapter outlines methods used to gather data and the process of data analysis. The ethical approval details are also given. Chapter 4 outlines how findings revealed that, while there were similarities between the early years programs introduced at each school, differences were seen in their reasons for offering support for families, stemming from the philosophical beliefs of the schools. Both schools identified the need to support families in the community and build relationships with them to improve learning outcomes for children. However, this research found that for a number of reasons, there was minimal representation of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the community amongst families attending the early years programs the schools provided.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings using a social capital lens. It explores how the deficit mindset revealed affected engagement practices evidenced in the support programs each school offered. The discussion introduces interrelated concepts based on strengths-based approaches to consider how transition-to-school programs could provide avenues for the schools to form the family-school relationships espoused. Chapter 6 offers detail of how such approaches could begin to address the prevalent deficit perceptions identified. It shows how this research contributes to the research field by outlining how such approaches could be applied in these or other schools in similar socio-economic CALD communities to move towards engagement practices that include all families of the community in the programs provided.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature relevant to the study. It commences with a section on the themes emerging in the literature on family-school relationships of the 20th century. The second section focusses on family-school relationships in the 21st century, looking at the impact of socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic diversity on the types of engagement in which families support their children.

The literature reviewed in the third section relates to more recent work about family-school relationships, and how socio-economic status (low SES; high SES) or the beliefs and customs from CALD heritage influence the ways relationships are formed and families engage with schools. It outlines the three interrelated concepts of a strengths-based versus deficit approach to education, the effects of a collective impact model in supporting vulnerable areas of society, and the key factor of economic and social investment in addressing needs and ensuring equal access to quality education for all children.

In the fourth section of the chapter, the literature review is summarised. The chapter concludes by identifying the contribution this study makes to the body of research in this area, and the questions that guided the research.

2.2 Family-school relationships in the late 20th century

In the latter years of the 20th century, research studies in the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA), and Australia revealed that schools sought to form relationships with families in order to improve the learning outcomes of students. The focus of these relationships was on support of the school agenda and how that could be achieved, but with little recognition of the resources and skills of families and how these might impact the relationship.

In UK primary schools, a need was identified for parents and teachers to work on areas of literacy and numeracy to prevent children falling behind (Bynner & Steedman, 1995). The Edwards and Warin (1999) examination of data from a wide study on the role of parent engagement programs in schools revealed that these programs were aimed at

supporting teachers to provide the individualised attention to students needed in a demanding curriculum and at a time when there was high accountability to league tables.

Crozier (1998) argued that the enactment of programs encouraged the support of the school agenda as an important part of the relationship in the UK between families and schools. When the idea of family-school partnerships was introduced it was seen as a way for parents to have a greater knowledge of what went on in schools, thus helping them to hold schools more accountable for outcomes. However, in research conducted in two UK schools, Crozier asserted that the relationships gave schools the opportunity to exert a measure of control over families. Results of these studies indicated that teachers controlled the family-school relationship in a number of ways. Relationships with middle-class parents with whom teachers were more likely to share a common class background were mostly mutually supportive of school policies and desires for educational outcomes for the child. However, teachers identified a need to remind working-class parents of their responsibilities, such as to ensure their child's attendance, adherence to uniform and behaviour policy, and completion of homework. All were factors in maintaining the good image of the school; ways which, Crozier argued, meant the school managed parents in ways that brought them into line with school expectations.

In the USA, Miramontes, Nadeau, and Commins (1997) examined ways in which immigrant families were assisted to engage with schools by reviewing programs which involved the wider community. They found that when parents belonged to any or several cultural or linguistic groups which varied from those dominant in the school community, "differences in ethnicity, schooling and class between teachers and the communities in which they work can create barriers and misunderstandings" (p. 204). Miramontes and colleagues suggested that in communities where differences in cultural and linguistic diversity, educational standard, and socio-economic status were present, the reticence of families to engage with schools was interpreted as disinterest, rather than as a lack of familiarity with the expectations of the school setting. Miramontes et al. argued that by acknowledging that difference and reaching out to their community members, schools could link families and children to mainstream society and begin to overcome the barriers.

Earlier research in the USA by Cochran and Henderson (1986) identified ways in which schools sought to align family thinking more closely with school ideas. They examined

programs in low-SES neighbourhoods for families in the two years prior to school entry. The programs espoused the aim of empowering parents; however, part of the content delivered information on child rearing as well as strategies parents could use as learning activities with their children. Cochrane and Henderson concluded that empowerment would only be achieved when the role parents already held was validated as important and support commenced at that point. In later years, Espinosa (1995) considered programs designed for Hispanic families to improve student achievement. She also noted the need for acknowledging family values, arguing that the attitude of respect parents held for educators was not fully appreciated and this would inhibit family involvement if it were ignored. Similarly, Espinosa argued that family involvement would only become a reality through an attitude change by the school to one which adopted a positive approach in its welcome to all families.

Joyce Epstein's work in the USA had a major influence in changing the way that family-school relationships were viewed. In a study of parents' perspectives on family-school relationships, Epstein (1986) found that parents responded positively when there was a shared focus on helping the child to succeed in school. In a later study, Epstein and Dauber (1991) explored the perspective of families on teacher practices in programs across eight schools over a 3-year period and again found that teacher efforts to involve parents were met positively with that shared focus and there was more understanding of the importance of their relationship than either party had previously realised.

The aim of Epstein's work was to create an understanding from a school perspective of how parents could be engaged with educators in the learning process. Epstein's (1995) framework identified six dimensions of a family-school relationship: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaboration between the school and its community. The outline given of the key aspects of the relationship were revised (Epstein, 2001) to place the child at the centre of the relationships, illustrating how home and are important contexts within which children developed. Epstein's work provided a point of reference for subsequent planning of family-school relationships both in the USA and other parts of the world. However, as Goodall (2017) noted, the focus could still be seen as reflecting a school perspective, with the notion of involving parents with the school rather than engaging them in children's learning.

When Auerbach (1995) considered a range of US literacy programs, she could not identify the aims of Epstein's framework (1995, 2001) in them. Several programs were based on intervention strategies to prevent under-education and illiteracy, and purported to take a non-deficit approach, one that called on the strengths and resources of families. However, Auerbach found that the solution offered was to change family literacy practices as they were considered inadequate, with a focus on teaching parents, for example, how to read with their children. Auerbach asserted that such an approach was a deficit model, as parents were introducing school-based literacy at the expense of literacy practices already present in the family. In other programs, the aim was to empower families so they could change aspects of the social order encountered in schools from which they felt excluded. Auerbach's conclusion was that programs should not use either of the extreme approaches but that family literacy practices had to be understood. It was through that knowledge, she asserted, that education and social change would be achieved and that relationships formed would ensure the inclusion of all families.

In an effort to understand family school relationships, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) devised a model of the ways parents involved themselves in their child's education. The model comprised five levels: two levels considered parents' decision-making processes in relation to how and where they would become involved in their child's education; the other three levels represented perceived links between parental involvement and student outcomes. The model was presented as a tool through which researchers could gain an understanding of parent motivations to be involved at home or school and identify ways parents could assist their child and cooperate with educators. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler use the term involvement widely to include both home and school based activities, incorporating general contact and activities directly supporting children's learning.

Epstein (1995) devised a framework to outline for schools how a child centred relationship could be developed so that family and school could work together. The work of Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues (1995, 1997, 2005) sought an understanding of how parent involvement was motivated. The research was school focussed, and the knowledge sought could assist schools to better understand that parental motivation; however, it offered nothing on how to support parents not already involved with the school or engaged in their child's learning.

In the Australian context in the late 20th century, the nature of family-school relationships was similar to those described in the UK and the USA. Relationships were fostered through programs that were meant to ensure school literacy practices were supported and utilised at home. In a review of programs across Australia, Cairney and Munsie (1992) identified two types of barriers to family-school relationships. For some parents, previous negative school experiences impacted on their willingness to engage with schools; additionally, teachers sometimes viewed parents as a threat to their position, even though they saw the benefits for both families and schools that could be drawn from relationships between them. Cairney and Munsie suggested that literacy programs such as the “Talk to a Literacy Learner” (TTALL) and “Parents and Literacy Learning” (PAL), conducted in many schools during this period, promoted better attitudes about supporting student learning. However, they indicated that too many programs were school initiated and that more consultation with parents would achieve more comprehensive results, helping schools as well as families to understand each other’s roles and work towards common goals. Cairney and Munsie’s assessment of family-school relationships indicated that “parent involvement is important not just to allow parents and their children to be changed, but also to facilitate changes in schools and teachers that will enable them to be more responsive to community needs” (p. 87). That response was reported in a later study (Cairney, 1997), where partnerships were attempting to extend literacy work with adults in the communities as a way to address literacy needs and parents were involved in setting agendas for such initiatives so that programs reflected community needs. Cairney and Ruge (1999) called for further acknowledgement of the literacy practices of families, advocating for a change in the “student-teacher-parent-teacher relationship” (p. 26) that accounted for the resources of families in the community.

This Australian work reflected the need identified by Cairney (2000) who suggested that while there had been an effort to create more effective family-school relationships, there was a need for school personnel to come to a better “understanding of the type of relationship possible with their communities” (p. 171). It illustrates the need for an understanding of how parents can be involved with schools and engaged in their children’s learning. The work of Epstein (1995; 2001), Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997) and Hoover-Dempsey et al (2005) also reflects the need for schools and parents to work together, rather than an expectation that families aligned with school practices (Auerbach, 1995). Research showed

there was a recognition for adaption on both sides to ensure effective relationships eventuated (Cairney & Munsey, 1992).

2.2.1 Barriers to successful family-school relationships

As evident above, family-school relationships in the UK, USA, and Australia were seen as important in improving student academic outcomes at the end of the 20th century. However, several barriers affecting successful family-school relationships were identified in the literature. The first of these barriers was centred on perceptions that the school alone was the authority on children's education. This meant that the contribution families made to the education of their children was largely unrecognised and undervalued. The personal experience of Canadian researcher Pushor (2012) accentuated that situation when, as a mother, she was interacting with her child's school. She found no value was placed on the parent's knowledge of the child and her views were not sought about development she observed in her child. A second barrier was that educators controlled the ways in which families involved themselves in the education of their children at school by affording them limited and specific opportunities for participation and involvement. This often had the unintended result of marginalising low socio-economic families, working families, and families of culturally and linguistically diverse communities who were not able to take up the opportunities afforded them due to constraints related to (for example) time, transport, language, confidence, and self-esteem, and in some cases the required knowledge and skills privileged by schools. To give parents the perceived knowledge and skills required to support their children's learning, schools devised and implemented programs for parents to teach them about school literacy and numeracy practices with the expectation that parents would support and utilise these practices at home. This practice of educating parents in school ways of teaching and learning presented another barrier as families utilised these practices at home at the expense of rich traditional and cultural ways of doing things.

Researchers (Auerbach, 1995; Cairney, 2000; Cairney & Munsie, 1992; Cairney & Ruge, 1999; Cochran & Henderson, 1986; Espinosa, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) were calling for schools to acknowledge and take account of the resources of families, to overcome the practices Pushor (2012) identified so parents' contribution to the education of their children would be valued.

2.3 Family-school relationships in the 21st century

As the new century began, the family-school relationship continued to be central to the ways in which school leaders engaged families to support school efforts to increase student achievement. The forms of parental involvement were at schools' discretion, with little sign of a relationship that acknowledged the efforts and contributions of parents in supporting their children. The outcome in low-SES and CALD communities was that some families continued to be marginalised because their perceptions of involvement in education and supporting their children were different from those of school personnel and other families of the school community.

Lemmer and van Wyk (2004) identified a continuation of a controlling relationship by school leaders in South African schools. In the wider social changes experienced in South Africa during the post-apartheid period, governments compelled schools to make parents part of their governing bodies. School leaders adopted the government changes; however, the relationships did not acknowledge the importance of the role parents played in education. The proposed relationships were constrained, with little consideration given to involving parents further, particularly in curriculum matters over which schools maintained control; the parent role remained one that supported teachers. Researchers concluded that while principals welcomed parent involvement within the school and in school committee roles, it was still a matter of how the roles were interpreted by school authorities. That control posed a barrier to any closer relationships developing between family and school.

When schools view the practices of families as different, it can position them in the school community as different (Piller, 2016), a situation described by UDAH (2017) as "othering" (p. 4). UDAH argued that separating individuals or families from the wider community because their values and beliefs differed affected ways in which they could become valued members of the community. The concept of othering was explained by UDAH as "a tendency to position immigrants, especially non-white migrants and refugees, as others" (p. 386). The result for such groups produced a feeling of being on the fringe, excluded because of difference (Henry-Waring (2008). The sense of separation produced negative views of any in society who were deemed as different from the dominant group (Ang, 2001). Such different ideas and expectations could prevent the formation of workable family-school relationships.

Epstein's (1995) model had provided a basis for the establishment of effective family-school relationships, with the later (2001) model stressing the importance of the contexts of home, community, and school in which children developed. Epstein (2011, p. 4) described the ideal relationship between family and school as one in which the child was central, an essential element in a partnership which recognised "the shared responsibilities of home, school and community for children's learning and development". For relationships to be workable for both families and schools, the different views of each party were important factors to be acknowledged, so that there was success in supporting families and children in the educational environment. The difference in schools' approaches to working with parents are indicative of the different interpretation of the terms of involvement and engagement, as Lemmer and van Wyk (2004) illustrated in their work in South African schools. Uda's (2017) notion of "othering" further clarifies the difficulties some parents experience in engaging in their children's learning. The research outlined in this section shows how acknowledgement of such differences would lessen the impact for families in low-SES and CALD communities and allow all families to engage meaningfully in the education of their children.

2.3.1 The impact of SES and CALD on how families engage with schools

Research that followed identified the impact on families when school leaders and teachers did not acknowledge the differences within a low-SES and CALD school community, and where low SES further complicated the efforts of some families to engage in the ways they saw as fitting. In the Australian context, Mills and Gale (2004) asserted that schools assumed that all families in the community shared the same types of values and resources, a concern encountered in an economically disadvantaged regional community with a large Indigenous population. Mills and Gale examined the perception held by schools that parents were not interested in their child's education. In seeking parent views, they learned that for some, a lack of education gave them feelings of inadequacy when interacting in the school community; for others, there were considerations of economic and time constraints. Many staff considered parents indifferent to the education of their child, while parents felt their input was not valued, seeing teachers as the experts in education. The contention the researchers raised was that while schools initiated relationships as a way to support student learning and parents were given opportunities to become involved, the terms of such involvement were determined by the school, with the result that parents felt "constrained"

(p. 271) rather than enabled to become involved. Mills and Gale argued that if educators were to overcome the barriers created, there needed to be acknowledgement of family circumstances, and how they were already involved in education. Their ideas had to be incorporated for effective support of children of the community, as only then would the marginalisation of families and students be avoided.

How families from a range of different cultural, linguistic, and economic backgrounds engaged in American schools was the focus of Lee and Bowen's (2006) research, which examined the different types of parent involvement and their links to student achievement. For families of the non-dominant sectors of society within the school, whose actions were not always visible to educators, their in-school activities were inhibited by such factors as linguistic and financial concerns. While Lee and Bowen's (2006) study was undertaken in contrasting circumstances to Mills and Gale's (2004) work with Australian Indigenous families, they also called for recognition of all types of family involvement. They too suggested there was a need to ensure the common goals of school personnel and parents were acknowledged, to overcome perceptions that only certain forms of involvement were acceptable in schools.

The result of acceptance of a different form of family involvement was shown in the Pelletier and Brent (2002) study in a Canadian school, where the school-set agenda for improving student outcomes was addressed through the establishment of a pre-school program. However, as approximately half the families were new immigrants to the country, families and school personnel had different ideas about how a working relationship could be formed to support the students. Researchers stressed the need to respect culturally different perceptions of the parent role in support of students in family-school relationships. As teachers and parents worked together in the program, they realised their efforts were more effective in supporting the child, both academically and socially, if they were familiar with what each brought to the relationship. A shared understanding evolved, with an appreciation that by drawing on each other's strengths, they could fulfil a commonly held goal to ensure children were able to achieve to their academic potential and overcome any perceived barriers to families engaging in the education of their children.

Different perceptions of family engagement style were also evidenced in UK studies. An example was identified when Crozier and Davies (2007) examined the beliefs of Pakistani

and Bangladeshi families in schools in north-eastern England, where they found that parents considered the family and school roles were separate. Parents did not see their support of their child's education as an in-school activity. They believed that teachers were the experts; however, schools interpreted parent ideas about their role as indifference. Researchers found that the impediment in that context was school leaders' refusal to acknowledge culturally based beliefs, and concluded it was the schools, not the families, that were "hard to reach" (p. 296). Similarly, in Harris and Goodall's (2008) work in UK schools, a barrier to the family-school relationship was the difference between parent "involvement in school activities and engagement in learning" (p. 282), as the expectation was for visible involvement, regardless of the engagement in learning that occurred outside the school environment.

The influence of cultural and linguistic background for many Asian families guided their involvement with schools. A study of three schools in Hong Kong (Katyal & Evers, 2007) involved families of mixed to high SES, of Chinese and other ethnicities, none of whom was English. Katyal and Evers found that the families and school personnel held different views about how parents supported their children's education. Families held the teacher in high esteem as the expert in education and considered the role of the teacher was separate from that of the parent. The expectation of teachers was that parent involvement was visible at the school, supporting the teacher role; however, as parents saw the teacher as the professional educator, their support was one which offered extended opportunity to the child such as after-hours tutoring. The different perception held by school personnel gave no acknowledgement of parental engagement with their children's education and was an impediment to how families perceived their role in supporting their children.

In a longitudinal study of Australian children, Berthelsen and Walker (2008) argued that low SES also influenced parental involvement in Australian schools. They found that parents from higher SES were more involved visibly at schools, while lower SES parents were more likely to be not engaged or not visible at the school. For those parents, lower educational standards or previous negative experiences also influenced their involvement. Researchers found that families whose cultural and linguistic background differed from the mainstream culture experienced difficulty in engaging with the schools or with their child's learning (Chen & Harris, 2009; Saulwick Muller Social Research [SMSR], 2006).

Chen and Harris (2009) highlighted the same difficulty in an Australian school with a large number of families with English as a second language (ESL). The impact for a Chinese mother centred on her need to increase her English literacy skills in order to support her children's academic learning. Researchers found that by accessing the ESL support the school provided for parents, the mother was able to increase her language skills, enabling her to support her child's education.

To address issues in family-school relationships in Australia, the Australian Family-School Partnership project was conducted across 61 Australian schools, many in severely disadvantaged areas, with the aim of establishing effective partnership programs between parents and schools, and to identify and evaluate what made the programs effective (SMSR, 2006). The project focussed on how to improve engagement practices by overcoming the barriers present in low-SES and CALD school populations. The researchers stated that for such a relationship to become a reality, a new way of thinking was needed, as school leader perceptions of the parental role had to change from not just "first educators" but also "continuing educators" (p. 15). The proposed relationship also addressed the power balance, bringing it to one that empowered parents, an important aspect when educators were working in Indigenous communities where the inclusion of community input would shape the success of school initiatives.

The centrality of the partnership relationship between families, schools, and communities was highlighted by the Melbourne Declaration (MCEECDYA, 2008) and the four-year plan which followed (MCEETYA, 2009). Research continued to focus on how these relationships between families and schools would work. The documents called for an awareness of the community context when schools were forming reciprocal relationships with families in CALD and low-SES communities, to enable both parties to focus on the education of the child, the central focus of the relationship.

The common theme emerging in research noted is the different perceptions held by school personnel and parents of involvement in schools and engagement in the child's learning, emanating from the underlying cultural attitudes held. However, while there was a growing awareness of the values and beliefs within communities, the different perceptions of educators and families about how parents were involved in their children's education continued to form a barrier to the family-school relationship.

2.3.2 The role of school personnel in overcoming barriers

A family-school relationship in which the expectations of school personnel and family members were understood and accommodated has been reported as achievable. The research that follows illustrates the impact of school leadership on school ethos and values and indicates that the actions of school leaders guided the ways in which family-school relationships were developed in schools. Relationships in which schools continued to control parental involvement were shown in the Lemmer and van Wyk (2004) South African context; in contrast, Pelletier and Brent's (2002) Canadian work described relationships that moved to embrace the skills and resources across the diversity of the school community. Studies in American schools by Mapp (2003) and Colombo (2006), and a study in the Netherlands by Denessen et al. (2007), also concluded that the leadership in the school was needed to fully engage with all community members to form effective working relationships.

In an American school in a low-SES, CALD community, Mapp noted the role of the principal as the key to relationship building between teachers and families. Positive leadership styles were noted by Mapp (2003) who identified how, through the principal's guidance, effective family-school relationships were realised. The principal's initiative to engage with all families modelled how the family-school relationship could be developed. Changes began by welcoming families into the school and acknowledging the importance of the role they played, which encouraged parents to be involved in the education of their child. Similarly, Denessen et al. (2007) revealed the impact of school leadership in Netherlands' schools, stressing the important role the principal played in influencing how staff connected with families to form a working relationship with them.

Evidence of how such changed attitudes overcame barriers to family engagement was also revealed by Colombo (2006). In this study, a school principal initiated a literacy program to improve academic outcomes for students in the CALD school community and to bridge the gap between families and the school. It drew on teachers and bilingual parents to share literacy knowledge to conduct workshops for whole families, in which teachers taught parents about school literacy practices; at the same time, they guided families on how to capitalise on their existing family literacy practices. Findings indicated that when the school drew on the strengths of parents and used local bilingual parents to work with them on the literacy development of students, the barriers were removed, parents became involved, and

outcomes improved. The program provided parents of the community with the vital opportunity to use their skills and student results showed the desired improvements. It also made teachers more aware of the depth of knowledge families were able to contribute. As Colombo (2006) revealed, actions of a school principal enabled the barriers to the family-school relationship to be overcome and change the perceptions of the teacher and parent roles in education.

Such changed perceptions by teachers of the ways families engaged in their child's education was seen by researchers as another vital aspect of family-school relationships. The role of the teacher in American schools was examined by Anderson and Minke (2007). They identified the key role teachers played in how families formed relationships and supported their child's learning in a low-SES urban school. Researchers found that for parents representative of minority societal groups within the school, involvement was mainly home based and it was specific invitations from teachers that encouraged them to increase their involvement both at home and in the school, particularly when their role was acknowledged and it was beneficial to their child.

In an examination of how families in low-SES and CALD communities were perceived in Australian schools, Mills (2008) utilised Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital. Bourdieu defined cultural capital as the types of knowledge and skills the individual possessed that were relevant in a particular context. Mills suggested that educators needed a broader acceptance of the types of capital valued in schools in order to change ways in which teachers approached families and parents. She asserted that for the cultural values and beliefs of all families to be accepted in schools, pre-service teacher education should begin to guide teachers in identifying their own beliefs and values. She argued that teacher beliefs and values would align with those of mainstream society, which would therefore impact on the types of relationships they formed with families in low-SES and CALD communities. In educating incoming teachers in these areas, Mills is advocating the training of future school leaders, thus ensuring the positive impact they could have on school ethos and values.

Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) observed a problem when educators continued to operate in a paradigm that excluded many families "of rich and complex sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds" (p. 190), resulting in discrimination against parents and children. They suggested that for effective parent involvement at the school which would benefit all

students and families, an approach that encompassed the many cultural and linguistic skills the families had to offer was appropriate. Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) purport that in changing the perspective of teachers in this way, respect and trust could be developed between families and the school that would bring about a relationship in which parents had input about their educational expectations for their children and the school benefitted from the richness families brought.

The impact of leadership style is evidenced in teacher actions. To assist teachers in making the paradigm shifts required to establish family-school relationships, a Canadian action research project (Schechter & Sherri, 2009) worked with teachers and parents to illustrate the benefits to be gained by a collaborative approach and how the strengths of each could enrich such a relationship. Teachers learned the benefits of working with the families and felt the knowledge they gained about the families enabled them to appreciate the role parents already played in the children's academic learning. For parents, working with teachers meant they learned about the schooling system, in areas pertaining to the curriculum or the school's reporting process, which gave them increased confidence in their ability to become involved. Teachers reported the development of a "positive orientation" toward families and felt "less threatened by difference" (p. 82) as a result of working with them. Eberly, Joshi, and Konzal (2007) also suggested that overcoming differences was possible when discrepancies between the beliefs and practices each party held were recognised. They found that when families were approached in culturally responsive ways, schools were able to move towards relationships built on a mutual trust and respect and adherence to such basic concepts enhanced opportunities for schools to build family-school relationships.

Lemmer and van Wyke (2004) concluded that when school leaders managed how families engaged with schools and student learning, the relationship was one controlled by them. Daniel (2005) suggested that understanding was needed of the different forms of involvement parents exercised in their child's education. He said that building the family-school relationships on "a degree of mutuality that begins with the process of listening to each other and that incorporates responsive dialogue and 'give and take' on both sides" (p. 143) would remove the common barriers misunderstanding created. Other researchers supported the view that school leadership impacted ways in which educators and parents worked together, the shared goals of supporting student learning were achieved (Colombo, 2006; Denessen et al., 2007; Mapp, 2003; Pelletier & Brent, 2002).

Teachers also played a key role in connecting families and schools. Mills (2008) argued that acknowledgement of all forms of cultural capital would encourage the acceptance of the diversity of values and beliefs in a school community. Researchers suggested a change in teachers' perspective would assist in forming relationships with families (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Mills, 2008; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). In acknowledging the different values and beliefs of families (Eberly et al., 2007), the collaborative approach advocated by Schecter and Sheri (2009) could be realised.

While the key element was the role of the principal, it in turn influenced the role taken by teachers in their relationship with parents. Research findings were in accord with the strengths-based approach advocated by Lopez and Louis (2009) that assumed all individuals possessed personal resources on which they could draw. Research showed that when school leaders opened the school to all families and drew on the strengths of families, this created a true learning environment, where teachers could confidently form relationships with all families.

2.3.3 Successful transition to school for families and children

When schools begin the process of building relationships as children transition to school, the support families are given enables them to confidently enter into a relationship with the school that affords parents the opportunities to exercise agency to support their child's education and learning. As Daniel (2015) identified, the role of the school was critical in "understanding and responding to the diverse needs and interests of families" (p. 125). Australian research has highlighted the importance of building relationships early in children's educational journey as they progress towards school, particularly for families in disadvantaged communities. The Pathways to Prevention project that worked with families in a low-SES, multicultural urban area of South East Queensland (Freiberg et al., 2005) was a partnership which included local schools and community groups. One aim of the project was to link the families, programs, and schools to support the formation of relationships between families and schools early in a child's life, in the period when the child was moving from home to school. It was during this transition phase the project aimed at promoting the welfare of families with young children and reported positive outcomes for participating families. The researchers noted the number of families who accessed programs and services, as well as

the socialisation that children gained through the pre-school programs, as the types of benefits gained by participants.

Researchers Dockett and Perry worked extensively in the area of transition to school, with a focus on the challenges families and children faced in adapting to new learning environments. Dockett and Perry (2007b) emphasised the transitional phase as one during which the relationship formed between parents and schools is an important precursor to the child's future education. The aim of the Starting School Research Project (Dockett & Perry, 2001) was to ascertain what was important to parents and children at the time of transition, and to early childhood educators in prior-to-school and school settings. Dockett and Perry (2007a) emphasised the experiences of children and their families throughout the process of transition, stressing that the difference between orientation and transition programs was time related, with the latter taking place over a period of time, while orientation was more likely to be a session taking part of one day. Dockett and Perry (2007b) again stressed the importance on the building of relationships for all family members which gave the support needed in the new context of the school environment which all were entering.

Dockett and Perry's (2001) project developed guidelines for effective transition-to-school programs that responded to the community and family context. The guidelines stressed the need for relationships between and amongst each of the parties involved and the mutual trust and respect on which they were based. A transition program based on these guidelines was implemented by Kirk-Downey and Perry (2006). From the experiences of all involved, which included educational and community organisations, families, and children, it was concluded that building relationships between all participants, and particularly between parents and schools to ensure parents were valued as partners in their child's learning as they commenced school, was important.

The Sanagavarapu and Perry (2005) study also built on Dockett and Perry's (2001) project. It was based in CALD communities where researchers found that a problem often encountered by parents when they tried to communicate with the school was that they were not confident in their English language skills and schools did not always account for such problems for families. Sanagavarapu and Perry highlighted parents' concerns, both of their own difficulty in communicating with the school and for their children's language abilities as

they commenced school. Researchers recommended such concerns were taken into account when transition programs were developed.

A study by Dockett and Sumsion (2004) also showed that such concerns for the child's family and community context were called for, revealing "a greater awareness of the broader contexts in which children exist and the influence of culture and context on children and those who interact with them" (p. 11). Further studies by Dockett and Perry considered the perspectives of teachers, parents, and children on the idea of a successful transition to school. With recognition of the range of people involved in the child's transition to school, Dockett and Perry (2004a) interviewed educators, parents, and children for their perceptions of a successful transition. From an adult perspective, teachers identified a settling process, where children displayed a personal level of independence and behaved as part of a group. Parents acknowledged that becoming part of the group was important for their child, but also admitted they wanted teachers to be aware of their child's individuality. Children spoke of becoming familiar with new environments and the expectations of teachers, which included routines such as where to sit or put their belongings. A survey of parents and teachers (Dockett & Perry, 2004b) led researchers to conclude that an effective transition had "base cooperative and collaborative relationships between and among all involved" (p. 228) even though each of the parties involved had different ideas and expectations of a transition program.

Margetts (2007) suggested the need for collaboration between schools and families to ensure that transition programs had continuity of cultural values and expectations between families and schools. From her examination of activities in transition programs for children and parents across a range of socio-economic circumstances, she concluded such continuity across settings encouraged family participation; it also needed to encompass a continuity of cultural values and expectations, giving children the opportunity to develop the independence they needed as they progressed into school. She argued that transition programs were not about teaching children to conform, but to empower them so that they had a sense of belonging in the new environment they were entering.

Different programs offered support for families and specific transition programs conducted in schools allowed children and families to become familiar with the school environment, and enabled schools to be ready to receive children as they commenced their

education. The notion of the transition-to-school period as a time of change for children and parents is stressed in research. UNICEF (2012) also noted the need for families to learn about how schools function and that schools needed to be prepared to meet individual student needs. Margetts (2007) saw the need to ensure continuity, hence schools needed to acknowledge the cultural values and economic circumstances of families (Dockett & Sumsion, 2004; Sanagavarapu & Perry, 2005). The importance of setting the basis of the relationship between the school and all family members was acknowledged; however, that relationship needed to reflect the values and beliefs of families within the context of community. It was a relationship that supported the child's adaption to the new environment of school, not one that followed preconceived ideas.

2.3.4 Family experiences in supportive engagement programs

To Dockett and Perry (2009), an important part of readiness for both families and schools was the building of relationships that acknowledged the contribution the family could make to the child's education. In considering whether a child was ready for school, they argued that more than age was needed as a "predictor of school success" (p. 22). They defined readiness as a "relational concept" (p. 25), with the child part of a larger whole – of family, community, and school – with interactions between and amongst each part contributing to the child's successful entry to school. Within their definition of readiness, they described a collaborative approach, one that "identifies strengths and seeks to build on these" (p. 25) while offering support in areas where needed. Dockett and Perry (2009) stated that schools that provided transition programs for children were more likely to be ready for them, as collaboration between families and early education providers gave educators knowledge about incoming families, and children the continuity between contexts. The Fabian and Dunlop (2007) examination of literature on transition strategies worldwide concluded with similar ideas. Successful transition programs were seen as those that involved the child and family in activities to "create links between, and actively involve, children, parents, families, teachers, early childhood services, schools and the local community" (p. 22) which allowed them to become familiar with the school and the learning environment and ready for their entry to school. Schools should also be "sensitive to the needs" of incoming students and have "strategies in place to support them" (p. 24). The OECD (2006) stressed this transition phase prepared both child and family, with the development of the child considered in this wider context.

According to Harris and Goodall (2008), a successful program was one that connected parents, families, and schools in disadvantaged communities and was not to be seen as a “bolt-on extra” by the school, but a “central priority” (p. 286). They stated that the program had to be central to the school’s functioning and that parents needed “to be seen as an integral part of the learning process” (p. 286). While their study was at secondary school level, the basis of it was applicable in any schooling context: programs that empowered parents were those that enabled them to develop their own sense of self-worth through the acknowledgement of the roles they played that engaged them in their child’s education.

As part of the longitudinal study on children’s adjustment across the first six years of school, Margetts (2009) suggested that a range of influences in communities, such as SES and CALD, impacted ways in which children developed. Therefore, the experiences of families in programs within these communities that enabled them to become familiar with many aspects of the school environment and encouraged the development of social behaviours were of particular importance in supporting parents and enhancing the child’s school commencement. The empowerment of parents was also stressed in an action research project by Chodkiewicz, Widin, and Yasukawa (2008). In the context of an urban Aboriginal community in Australia’s Northern Territory, researchers identified a need for a partnership approach by educators that was more culturally relevant to the families, and was based on trust and respect, so acknowledging the role parents played in education of their children as they prepared for school.

For some families, another form of socialisation within their community and a context within which to make those important connections was through the experiences of a playgroup. Such a group offered social contact for children, and provided the opportunity for parents to build supportive relationships through the early years of their children’s lives. Community and supported playgroups were the two types of groups identified by researchers. Gibson, Harman, and Guilfoyle (2015) confirmed the general aims of community playgroups: for families with children in the birth to pre-school age group, a community playgroup was formed by parents to provide both adults and children with a place to meet and feel a sense of connection and support. In a supported playgroup, the aim was the creation of an environment to support the well-being of parents and children (Jackson, 2011).

Researchers found that through playgroups, parents were able to support each other in practical and emotional ways. As Kirk-Downey and Perry (2006) illustrated, the opportunities offered in such a context to socialise and build relationships across the community were important factors for all family members in their experiences as the children transitioned to school. Monkman, Ronald, and Theramene (2005) used Bourdieu's (1986) concept of social capital to argue that the supportive network and connections made in the playgroup context offered parents an advantage as they entered the school community. In Bourdieuan terms, the experiences in the group were a means by which the capital that Bourdieu suggested was needed in the school context was increased.

Dockett and Perry (2007a) suggested that a range of experiences and services was needed to cater for families as support in the early years of a child's life, as part of the long-term process of the child's transition to school and in the years after school commenced. When the needs of the family were addressed in the community context, entry into school was considered more likely to be a successful transition for the child. They drew on their previous work, the Starting School Project (Dockett & Perry, 2001), to emphasise the importance of building relationships and drawing on the strengths families possessed to support them through the transition phase.

School engagement programs were considered as integral to the school. They were a way to connect families and strengthen relationships between all those involved in the education of children through an awareness of the strengths families brought. In low-SES and CALD communities, the experiences empowered parents to play their role and children's development was enhanced. Playgroups also offered a supportive environment for families with young children, providing opportunity to socialise and form connections with others of the community. Transition to school was a time when the support families received enabled children to develop socially and emotionally and when the relationships built were a part of the process which prepared families and schools, enabling children to be ready to commence their education in schools that were ready to support both child and parents.

2.3.5 Summary

As outlined, building relationships between families and schools continued as a theme in the opening years of the 21st century. Research from the UK, USA, and Australia in the 21st century revealed the need to overcome barriers to relationships between families and

schools. The underlying cause of many of the barriers created was the failure of school leaders to acknowledge the different values, beliefs, and circumstances for families of CALD and low-SES communities.

Different perceptions held by educators and families about the supportive parental role in the education of children remained an impediment to overcoming such barriers. However, when principals adopted an approach that welcomed all families into the school and acknowledged the valued contribution they made to the educational process, researchers found that teacher perceptions were changed and they worked collaboratively with parents towards the common goal of supporting children's achievement. The early years transition-to-school programs offered by schools, some of which illustrated how the diversity of the community could be catered for and the skills and resources of families utilised, further addressed the different perceptions of how many styles of family support were acceptable by educators. Research revealed the centrality of relationship building during the transition to school in enabling both child and parents to be school ready and schools ready to support them.

At this time, there remained a need for awareness of educators' motivations when family-school relationships were sought to ensure no deficit view was taken, and that school and family expectations were more closely aligned.

2.4 Family-school relationships in today's schools

When attention is turned to contemporary times, themes that emerged at the end of the last decade are still current. These themes are addressed in the following sections.

Recent research on the impact that low SES and CALD have on the ways families engage with schools is reviewed. The deficit view that is often adopted by school personnel when families engage differently is then addressed, with the following section outlining research that shows how schools can move beyond a deficit perception when a strengths-based approach is adopted. The fourth section stresses the role played by school leaders in progressing the development of family-school relationships, followed by the relevance of the community context in how such relationships are formed.

The sixth section addresses research on the importance of access to quality transition-to-school programs, with the following sections covering how children are prepared for

school, the place of early intervention in supporting families in disadvantaged communities, the interrelated concepts relevant to these areas, and a summary of research on family-school relationships.

2.4.1 The impact of SES and CALD on how families engage with schools

Since the turn of the decade and to the present time, factors that impact on families in low-SES and CALD communities in the support of their children's education are still commonly not acknowledged by educators, as school personnel have particular expectations of how and where families engage in the education of their children. For example, in the USA, Walker, Ice, Hoover-Dempsey, and Sandler (2011) found that when families involved themselves at home rather than school, their engagement style was not recognised by educators; they cautioned against interpreting the lack of visibility of parents in the school as indicating a lack of interest on their part. Walker et al. used the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model (1995, 1997) and revealed that cultural background and beliefs were influential on the way parents involved themselves in the education of their children; parents were not always visible at school, as was the expectation. Walker and colleagues suggested that as SES also influenced families, school personnel needed to be aware that families would involve themselves in different ways.

The impact of different engagement styles was also identified by Doucet (2011) and Vera et al. (2012). Doucet found that for African-American families the parental support role was more home based, which they considered was the appropriate form of supporting their children. However, as there were "highly ritualised" (p. 2) expectations in schools about the family-school relationships, Doucet suggested it was more likely that white, middle-class mothers, visible in the school and with a strong voice, displayed the involvement style that schools expected. The Vera et al (2012) research in a number of elementary schools across four school districts in mid-western USA focussed on the barriers encountered by immigrant families from a range of culturally, linguistically and socio-economically diverse backgrounds as they dealt with the school. The main barrier identified by the researchers was a lack of English language proficiency, commonly felt by the parents as an inhibitor to their communication with schools, particularly when there were no interpreters available. When Dearing, Sibley, and Nguyen (2015) examined how immigrant families in disadvantaged areas and high-poverty American schools engaged in their children's learning, their findings

also indicated that for the immigrant families, parent abilities to become engaged at schools was impacted by their own level of education and their English language proficiency.

In the Australian context, Mills and Gale (2010) found from their work in a low-SES Indigenous community that the cultural values and beliefs families held, or the economic constraints they experienced, affected the ways in which they engaged with their children's learning. They argued that while it was presumptuous of educators to assume all parents had the skills required to support their children, they also saw "skilling parents in how to participate in school" was itself presumptuous (p. 119): care was needed, or it could be presumed "schools know best, and it doesn't move beyond the notion that it is parents who need to change, not schools" (p. 119). Researchers (for example, Mills, 2008; Saltmarsh, Barr, & Chapman, 2015) suggested that knowledge and understanding of cultural values and beliefs could be addressed in pre-service teacher education, a move that would lessen the actions that created a barrier between educators and parents.

The types of barriers that families continued to encounter in low-SES and CALD communities when they sought to be involved in their children's education were revealed in the ARACY (2016) report on parent engagement in Australian schools. A recommendation was made for educators to become familiar with "community strengths, needs, cultural knowledge, values and priorities in relation to parent engagement" (p. 8) and it was suggested that a welcoming environment of "inclusion, acceptance, compassion, sensitivity, high positive regard for all" (p. 6) would assist in eradicating barriers to effective family-school relationships.

However, as the current decade has progressed, there continues to be evidence of a failure by educators to consider the complex needs of families in CALD and low-SES communities. Factors such as cultural values and beliefs and family socio-economic circumstance have impacted on engagement in schools and, as seen in the above examples, families are viewed in a deficit light by school personnel because their support role varies from that expected. Establishing relationships with families to accommodate cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic differences is vital. The lack of understanding by educators about what is expected of families and how each role is fulfilled can perpetuate a deficit view, thus maintaining a model of relationships not conducive to accommodating family beliefs and circumstances.

2.4.2 A deficit perception by educators of families in CALD and low-SES communities

The concept of a “deficit view” was explained by Gorski (2012) as a view that ascribed deficiencies to individuals or communities, to interpret or justify the unequal outcomes achieved. Such a view ignored constraints experienced by families in low-SES and CALD communities and he suggested schools needed to ensure programs enacted to redress inequities were not based in this mindset, as it could contribute to inequities even when the intention was the opposite. Gorski defined the problem as a perception by school personnel of an inability within the family to play the role expected by the school in their child’s education.

A deficit perception of American Latino families was identified by Rodriguez-Brown (2009) in a program designed to teach parents how to support the school literacy model. The initiative did not draw on existing literacy practices, but rather defined parents as lacking in skills. To address that perception, Rodriguez-Brown suggested that an approach that drew on the cultural and linguistic practices parents possessed would enrich their engagement with teachers as they supported their children and provide a positive basis from which the parents could be meaningfully involved in the education process.

A different style of family involvement with schools was observed by Weir (2013) in New Zealand schools between Maori parents and educators, where the Maori belief in a separation of home-school roles in education guided their involvement. Educators were regarded as experts by parents; they would not interfere in the teacher’s role and a partnership relationship was not in accord with family beliefs. The separation of family-school roles was also noted in Australian research where similar practices were revealed amongst Samoan families. In the Samoan culture, the separation of the roles of home and school was a firmly held belief (Kearney, Fletcher, & Dobrenov-Major, 2011) and families did not accept “working in partnership with teachers and schools” (p. 151) as part of their educational philosophy. For Samoan parents in Australia, the teacher role promoted academic learning and the parent role was not involved in academic aspects. While parents encouraged their children in their educational goals, parent contact with teachers was also influenced by a lack of confidence in their English language skills and lack of knowledge of the education system.

Research in both Australian and American schools also revealed how, in CALD communities, the ways in which families engaged were further impacted by economic status.

In a study in American schools that considered the effects of both low and high SES on family-school relationships, Crosnoe (2015) observed that lower SES and more affluent parents viewed schools, and were viewed by schools, differently. As noted previously (Doucet, 2011), the more affluent families were confident in the school setting, while those of lower SES had lower expectations of how schools involved them or what they expected of the school, and “tended to be more deferential to school personnel” (p. 73). Crosnoe also suggested that school personnel viewed lower SES families differently because they did not engage in the ways expected, so were seen as “uncaring or disengaged” (p. 73). The different attitude to education and educators of higher SES families was also reported by Landeros (2011), where the middle-class “entitled minded mothers” (p. 248) in an affluent elementary school made constant demands for attention to the needs of their child, adopting a competitive attitude which gave little respect to teachers.

Establishing relationships with all families to ensure cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic differences are accommodated is vital for schools wanting to engage with families of the non-dominant culture. When Millar (2011) worked with Korean families whose mothers and children were in Australia for primary school, she was aware of the high educational expectations they held, but that cultural adjustments to the Australian schooling system were challenging for them. Millar suggested that school personnel needed more awareness of the families’ cultural beliefs, which espoused high respect for teachers and formal communicative styles between families and schools, greatly influencing the ways families responded to school-initiated contacts and how teachers interpreted their response, or lack of response.

Research revealed that while families supported their children’s education in ways that varied according to their cultural values and beliefs, or their economic circumstances, a perception by school personnel was that parents were either disinterested or incapable of fulfilling the supportive role expected. A common response was for schools to skill parents in school practices to increase engagement. Research that follows reveals how moving beyond that perception was the way to increase family-school engagement.

2.4.3 Beyond a deficit perception – to a strengths-based approach

In considering issues related to the deficit view taken of families because of the different ways they engaged with educators, researchers have utilised Bourdieuan concepts of social and cultural capital to examine how and why parental involvement was impacted by socio-economic status, cultural and linguistic background. The terms were used by Bourdieu (1984) to identify the resources and skills a person possessed, which guided the ways they interacted and were able to increase their personal attributes in everyday life. Papapolydorou (2016) used Bourdieu's (1986) concept of social capital to examine the support networks parents had to draw on as they endeavoured to be involved and supportive of their children in four UK schools. Through the use of the Bourdieuan concept of social capital, Papapolydorou explored social inequalities related to class and cultural background and examined the ways in which they influenced parents' use of their social capital. She found as Bourdieu (1986) asserted that the cumulative nature and complexity of social capital contributed to the ways in which parents advocated for their children's education.

Blackmore and Hutchison (2010) also used the Bourdieuan concepts to examine the impact of both CALD and low SES on family engagement practices in an Australian school. They utilised a Bourdieuan framework to examine the challenges faced by parents, particularly mothers, in culturally diverse, low-SES communities. In considering "the power of the various and interconnected forms of capital – economic, social, cultural and symbolic" (p. 500), they found the types of linguistic and social capital parents possessed were not always transferable as usable capital within the educational context. They concluded that for low-SES families, the middle-class environment of the school did not draw on the types of capital they possessed. As a result, the involvement of low-SES families was constrained by the middle-class expectations schools held of all families.

To move beyond the constraints placed on families in low-SES and CALD communities by the deficit perception taken by many school personnel of the contribution families made to their child's education, the strengths-based education and practice (SBEP) advocated by Lopez and Louis (2009) challenged the deficit approach identified in research studies (Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010; Doucet, 2011; Mills & Gale, 2010; Papapolydorou, 2016; Rodriguez-Brown, 2009; Vera et al., 2012). SBEP was an educational model that emphasised "the positive aspects of student effort and achievement, as well as human

strengths” (Lopez & Louis, 2009, p.1). It is underpinned by the assumption that all people have inner strengths and resources which they avail themselves of across many areas of life, just as Perkins et al. (2002) argued that all individuals possessed skills and resources on which they could draw.

In utilising SBEP, the aim of educators was to raise awareness of these strengths, which fostered an appreciation of individually held resources, so cultivating an environment which valued what each person offered in any given context. In the context of family-school relationships, the approach prioritised supporting families through the acknowledgement of the resources families had, enabling them to support their children. The negation of the deficit perception which Gorski (2012) cautioned against was also seen in the Pelletier and Brent (2002) work previously mentioned, and is illustrated in the following research.

An American study (Weiss & Lopez, 2010) focussed on how, in the low-SES community context, family support could improve children’s school success. They observed that schools had high expectations of engaging families but no appreciation of the difficulties they faced. When parents did not fulfil school expectations of engagement styles, a deficit view was adopted, seeing the community, or individuals of the community, as incapable or unwilling to engage with schools to ensure positive educational outcomes for their children (Gorski, 2012). Weiss and Lopez developed community-based “bridging strategies” (p. 33) to enable families to draw on a wider range of resources, suggesting strategies to provide families with opportunities to improve their links with the school. The relationships that developed reduced the likelihood of negative perceptions of families, and enabled parents to support their children.

As it was often educator perceptions of family involvement that caused families to feel inadequate, Grant and Ray (2013) suggested that to address such ideas, there was a need “to develop a variety of family engagement strategies that fit today’s diverse families’ lifestyles, issues, and beliefs about their role in their child’s education” (p. 4). An example of such a strategy is seen in the Naqvi, Carey, Cummins, and Altidor-Brooks (2015) work with low-SES immigrant families in a Canadian school. Through a narrative gathering project, parents and children had the opportunity to share culturally relevant stories and practices with other families and school staff. Naqvi and colleagues described the experiences as a model of two-way engagement that provided a positive way to affirm the value of family contributions

to the school community and their child's education. The work illustrated how the partnership relationships framed in Canadian state legislation, for example the Parents in Partnership document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010), operated in the school context. In a study in UK pre-schools, Warin (2016) considered how the interactions in a group context gave families the opportunity to access the types of capital that enabled them to form networks within the school community, which assisted them in supporting their child's education.

A six-point model proposed by Goodall (2013) offers an approach to parental engagement in their child's learning. It is underpinned by authoritative parenting, which Goodall describes as a parenting style that offers the guidelines the child needs in order to develop independence within appropriate limits, responding accordingly as the child matures. Goodall outlines the model as a long term approach to parenting, from learning in the home and early engagement with the child, staying engaged throughout school, holding and passing on high educational aspirations and taking an active interest in children's learning and education. She stressed that interaction with the school is only part of the parent's engagement with their child's learning. The emphasis is support of children's academic achievement and the "actions and attitudes schools should seek to support such efforts" (p. 146). Goodall argues the model is a beginning that schools can adapt to suit local circumstance so that work with parents to support children is sustained. In further work, Goodall (2017) introduced a departure from aspects of that model which she noted were school centred, to stress the need for the relationship between schools and parents to be centred around the child's learning. She asserted that the basis would encourage schools and families to work together but remain separate entities in fulfilling the different roles in the child's life. In describing education as the formalised part of the child's learning, Goodall commended the approach as allowing the development of a relationship that ensured "a more equitable distribution of power", thus facilitating "a much greater chance of real partnership between schools and families" (p. 90). Goodall further asserted that such a relationship would allow schools "to support parents more effectively as they engage with their children's learning" (p. 90).

The essential qualities of the family-school relationship were described by Grolnick and Raftery-Helmer (2015) as a student focus, active involvement, and cooperation. They considered it a relationship that would support the student to become an autonomous learner. When the researchers considered the ways in which families became involved at school level,

they found that the roles parents undertook in their children's education were more involved at the school when parents felt that their circumstances were acknowledged and there was a supportive relationship in place. In drawing on the strengths of families, school personnel and parents were able to form a relationship that all deemed effective.

Research revealed the awareness of the importance of how schools encouraged staff to build relationships with families and of the need to acknowledge the importance of learning that took place outside the formal realms of education in schools. Recent work by Goodall (2017) drew attention to the need to focus on children's learning as a move towards establishing relationships that acknowledged equally the roles of school staff and parents, thus ensuring a more equitable distribution of power between the parties. The connection with school personnel and others of the school community gave parents the confidence they sought in the support they offered their children, which in turn helped the child achieve.

2.4.4 The influence of school leadership in overcoming deficit perceptions

To create workable partnerships between families and schools, a need for a positive response from the leadership of the school in the local community was a recurring theme in research, as shown in the following study. Auerbach (2010) maintained the influence of school leadership in Latino schools was vital to forming strong home-school relationships with families. She examined the types of relationships principals proposed in schools and how those compared to the reality of the relationships observed. Findings revealed that when the expectations schools held of parental support were not fulfilled, families remained marginalised and unable to establish meaningful relationships with schools. When principals drew on the strengths parents brought to the school and worked with them according to the types of educational goals they wanted to pursue, the relationship became a more equitable partnership with common goals between both parties.

Earlier studies reflected findings that indicated that in forming such relationships, the role of the principal in initiating changes in schools was seen as a key factor in their success (Denessen et al., 2007; Mapp, 2003). The influence of the principal on teachers' interactions with families (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Colombo, 2006; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006) was also noted. Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) agreed with the notion of the guiding influence of the school leader. They sought the perspective of parents from different cultural, linguistic and socio-economic groups across a range of schools, where parents commonly attributed the

principal's influence to their feeling of acceptance in the school environment. A feeling of connection influenced the parents' desire to be part of the educational process and therefore assisted families to form effective relationships with the school.

Auerbach (2012) argued that when considering what was involved in forming family-school relationships that centred on the education of the child and gave both parties equitable roles, examining the leadership in schools was vital. Auerbach stressed that the essential role of school leaders was to address their own beliefs to ensure they were not adopting a mindset that could set a deficit tone within the school. In that way, all school personnel could be encouraged towards respect for the different values and beliefs within families of the school community. The "authentic" relationships (p. 42) Auerbach described could result, empowering families as partners with, not supporters of, the school. The important role played by school leaders was revealed in the Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) review of school practices in engaging with parents. They found that accepting individual family circumstances and the ways in which parents were already involved in their children's learning was vital. Strong leadership was seen as key to ensuring there was a "clear vision embedded in the culture of the school" (p. 21) to collaborate with all families in supporting children's learning.

Grolnick and Raftery-Helmer (2015) asserted that when educators sought to engage with families, an understanding of possible language barriers, limited financial resources, or the time constraints of parents' nonflexible work hours were all worthy of consideration. They highlighted the centrality of the teacher's role because it was often the classroom teacher who initiated contact with families and disseminated school information. Awareness of the different cultural elements and economic status that impacted family engagement would ensure their communications accommodated all aspects of family circumstances and avoided a deficit perception. Cheatham and Ro (2011) examined communication between teachers and parents with a focus on linguistic elements and cited parents' lack of confidence in English language skills as a problem when the first language was not English. To address such difficulties, they offered teachers strategies to enhance teacher-parent conversation, suggesting that if parents experienced difficulty in understanding native-English-speaking teachers, low comprehension could result in them not being able to involve themselves in their child's education in ways recommended. To avoid teachers adopting a deficit view when their suggestions were not acted upon by parents, researchers suggested basic strategies

for teachers in face-to-face meetings. These strategies included alerting parents to the content of their discussions and ensuring they could also have input in those areas throughout the discussion and as they sought to implement teacher suggestions.

As previously mentioned, Daniel (2015) stated that the differences experienced by families of low-SES and CALD backgrounds presented a need for schools to ensure that opportunities were in keeping with the family rather than school perception of how family-school relationships were enacted to ensure parental agency was enabled. The six-point model proposed by Goodall (2013) offers a guide for parents and schools for parental engagement with children's learning over the course of the child's schooling. It provides a basis that centres on the child. For the type of family-school relationship that would serve the best interests of all in supporting children's learning, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) proposed a relationship that acknowledged the important roles of both parents and school personnel. It was not one fixed in its type; rather, they too envisaged a continuum to explain how that relationship would develop, gradually defining the role of the parent as involved in the child's learning, rather than in a relationship with the school. As parents became more confident and their role evolved, they acquired the agency needed, already noted as "the capacity of parents to act (in a beneficial manner) in relation to the child's learning" (p. 401). As a result, the relationship was not described as one of equal partners, but as one that apportioned an equitable role to parents, in accord with Goodall's (2017) work in which she asserted it would result in more effectively supporting parents engaging with their children's learning.

The work of Auerbach (2012), Goodall (2013, 2017), Goodall and Montgomery (2014), and Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) serves as a reminder that the family-school relationship is the culmination of a process that depends not only on the leadership of the school, but also on the types of relationship that are developed over time between all school personnel and families of the community. The roles of school personnel were not discounted, but the emphasis was that for the parents, the relationship afforded them agency; additionally, it was ongoing and in all contexts of life, one of which was the educational achievement of their child.

To change the deficit perspective school personnel often adopted toward families in low-SES and CALD communities, and to establish family-school relationships such as

Auerbach (2012) and Goodall and Montgomery (2014) proposed, the SBEP framework as previously outlined (Lopez & Louis, 2009) provides a useful model. When the values and beliefs of the families are acknowledged and economic circumstance accounted for, educators draw on the strengths and resources families possess, family-school relationships are enriched, and educators and parents work collaboratively to enhance the educational outcomes of children. The result is that the partnership realised is based on the assumption that “all families have something to contribute and that parents and educators should be equal partners in education” (Auerbach, 2012, p. 31).

Research showed that the influence of school leaders was central to ensuring that families of the school were not perceived in a deficit light (Cheatham & Ro, 2011; Denessen et al., 2007; Grolnick & Raftery-Melmer, 2015; Mapp, 2003). The call by Daniel (2015) highlighted the need for schools to understand the needs of community in order to change a deficit mindset so that proposals to address this (Auerbach, 2012; Goodall, 2013; 2017; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Lopez & Louis, 2009) could be implemented successfully.

2.4.5 The community context

In building supportive family-school relationships with members of the community, the Flückiger, Diamond, and Jones (2012) study in a remote Aboriginal community of far north Queensland stressed that success in engaging parents as partners in the early learning programs in the community was attributed to the knowledge gained by educators about community members and the trust and respect that therefore developed between teachers and parents in the local pre-school. The collaborative approach taken provided a basis that enabled parents to gain the confidence they needed to speak up for what they perceived was needed in their community.

Working with community members in ways that accepted their knowledge of the needs of their community and engaged them in a supportive process to address such needs reflects elements of the SBEP framework which acknowledges the contribution individuals can make (Lopez & Louis, 2009) an approach also evident in the strengths-based approach exercised in the health and human services context advocated by Heyne and Anderson (2012). In that field, the model recommended was one that focussed on the strengths and aspirations people had, and what they identified as supportive in their environment. The approach was one where the specialist “identifies and assesses internal strengths and builds

upon them to help the participant reach his or her goals and aspirations” (p. 109); it is an approach that “assumes the participant is, or has the potential to be, the expert on his or her own life” (p. 112). In both strengths-based models, individual or community strengths and resources were the starting point for achievement and the possibilities for application of them in the community context.

To successfully support all families of a community, Kania and Kramer (2013) introduced a model of collective impact. The aim of the model was to ensure that support was available to all families across all areas. Such a model went beyond the idea of independent organisations and service agencies working independently in a community to capitalise on what can be achieved when agencies and organisations work together. A notable difference in the use of the model was that implementation ensured a common agenda, measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a separate organisation that formed a backbone for the whole concept.

The approach of working collectively with community agencies to bridge the gap between families, schools, and communities was recommended by American researchers, Warren et al. (2009). They examined the collaboration of community-based organisations and schools as a way to address barriers that families in low-SES areas encountered to bring a “better understanding of the culture and assets of families” (p. 2214) into the school context. They found that the relationship building between families helped to develop a sense of community, which in turn gave families the strength of a group approach when sharing concerns and ideas with school authorities. The researchers asserted that the idea of parent engagement with schools changed from an individual parent dealing with school authorities, to a collective group of parents, which resulted in parents viewing themselves “as a community bounded by similar interests and desires” (p. 2239). It brought a more even distribution of power between families and schools in which both parties were focussed on supporting the child’s education. While acknowledging the important role of school leadership in relationship building with families of the community, Warren et al. suggested that the strengths found in the relationships formed also afforded parents opportunities to develop leadership skills as they voiced their concerns, which resulted in more equitable relationships between families and schools.

At the time of this research, in the Queensland context, the Logan Together initiative (Logan Together, 2015) used a collective impact approach. The Logan Child Friendly Community Consortium worked within the community to support the “Logan Together collective impact campaign” (p. 5). The consortium worked through a series of Industry Chapters, for example the Child and Family Chapter, within which Project Action groups focussed on relevant areas of concern. The report (Logan Together, 2015) highlighted benefits to community members, from improvement in health and well-being, to the development of early childhood programs, reported by teachers as assisting children as they transitioned to school.

A range of factors, including knowledge of the local community, impacts on the relationships between school leaders and teachers and families. The deficit perception held by school personnel can be overcome through the use of the SBEP framework, as evidenced in studies that reveal how family-school relationships are enriched and parents have agency in their roles in supporting their children’s education (Naqvi et al., 2015; Warren et al., 2009; Weiss & Lopez, 2010). The example of the implementation of a collective impact model by the Logan Together consortium (Logan Together, 2015) illustrated how that support was sensitive to local community contexts, and drew on the collective agencies and resources to address the wide-ranging needs that were present.

2.4.6 The importance of access to quality transition-to-school programs

The concept of transition to school was interpreted by Petriwskyj, Thorpe, and Tayler (2005) as a range of practices or programs schools implemented to give children a sense of continuity of support during the period prior to the beginning of school. The place of community in the transition-to-school phase is considered vital to the success of supporting families as children approach school commencement. The Circles of Care program (Freiberg et al., 2010) that emerged from the Pathways to Prevention Project (Freiberg et al., 2007; Freiberg et al., 2005) established links and built relationships between families and schools in disadvantaged communities. The aim of the Circle’s program was to coordinate the services of community providers in order to increase effectiveness and contextualise the support families were given. The researchers argued that a shift in the way in which support is offered was needed, so that organisations were working “with” rather than “for” families (Freiberg et al., 2010, p. 10) in order to bring about the sense of empowerment families need to overcome

the challenges they face. They suggested the greatest positive impact is through the establishment of working partnerships between schools, families, and the community, seeing this type of relationship as enabling all families in disadvantaged areas to succeed in their educational aims for their children. Initiatives to assist families coping with the impact of poverty mean children enter school and achieve closer to or at their age-related levels.

The idea of quality in the context of programs to support families and children in early childhood was accounted for in the abovementioned Circles of Care program (Freiberg et al., 2010) and the Pathways to Prevention Project (Freiberg et al., 2005; Freiberg et al., 2007) as where it was shown how the particular needs of the members of the low-SES and CALD community were addressed. The quality of such programs enhanced opportunity for participants to overcome perceived barriers by addressing issues; such programs worked with other community agencies to support children's development. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), quality in early childhood settings referred to the quality of staff delivering programs, which in turn influenced the quality of the educational service offered to enhance outcomes for children (OECD, 2015). Quality in transition-to-school programs would enable families to have access according to their specific needs in the context of the community in which they lived so that support offered enhanced opportunities for children's educational outcomes.

A report by Dockett et al. (2011) reinforced the importance of enabling families with complex needs to build on their strengths as they availed themselves of the support offered across the community. When working with families in disadvantaged areas, Dockett et al. (2011) stressed the care needed in the terminology used when discussing families. In a project report on the facilitation of children's transition to school in Australia, Dockett et al. described families as having "complex support needs" to avoid the deficit perception that could be associated with descriptors such as "vulnerable, disadvantaged or at risk" (p. 1).

Links can be established in different ways to offer continuity and support for families with young children, with the role of the playgroup seen as a supportive strategy, allowing families with young children to link with others in their community (Jackson, 2011). Jackson studied the place of supported playgroups which employ trained staff as facilitators and noted the vital support they offered families, at risk through disadvantage, to access these and other services of support (Playgroup Australia Inc., 2016). Gibson et al. (2015) considered the

experiences of parents and families in community playgroups – groups run by parents – and the strong relationships formed between group members. Researchers noted, however, that the presence of a short-term facilitator could resolve issues that arise in some group contexts, ensuring that the experiences of the group assisted families as they progress through the years before school commenced.

The positive environment of a playgroup was noted by Jackson (2011) as offering valuable support to parents; the well-being they gained also influenced outcomes for their children. As a way to form connections between the family, school, and community and draw on those important influences in a child's development, Regan (2015) reported advantages in the ways playgroups engage families in early learning contexts. She argued that family experiences in a playgroup help children develop their sense of identity, which helped them make sense of the world, particularly the world of school which they soon will enter. Hancock et al. (2012) supported the activities of a playgroup as important in the laying of a foundation for future schooling, stating that those who had consistently attended such a group through the “critical developmental period” (p. 4) of early childhood were better prepared for school, particularly for those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. Their findings revealed beneficial experiences for parents as they were able to mix with other parents, share parenting ideas, and build social networks.

The concept of establishing links to offer continuity between prior-to-school settings and school was favoured by early years teachers in Barblett, Barratt-Pugh, Kilgallon, and Maloney's (2011) study. These Australian teachers viewed such connections as important in supporting children's transition to school, but these researchers suggested a more proactive approach by teachers to further enhance the process for children as they prepared to enter school. The importance of support for families through the transition to school is stressed in research, with both parents and children shown to benefit. Quality was essential in whatever form support was offered to ensure children and parents were ready for entry to school.

2.4.7 Preparation for school

Noel (2010) noted a broad range of perceptions of how children were seen as prepared for school in a Queensland study that sought the views of Prep teachers and administrators. The educators identified social-emotional skills as indications of readiness, which also included the ability to take direction and cooperate, and an overall enthusiasm for learning.

Noel considered such a view as more comprehensive than one of a child being ready at a point prior to school commencement, or that placed the responsibility on parents and child to achieve particular “characteristics” (p. 28). In the ARACY (2012) report, the recommendation was for an “environment and experiences that support holistic development of toddlers and pre-school children” (p. 5). During the transition-to-school phase, young children were seen to develop a whole range of life skills that would ready them for the social and academic challenges that school would give them.

In contrast to such ideas about how children were prepared for school, concern was raised in Brown’s (2013) study of reform in schools in Texas, USA that focussed on improving children’s readiness for school commencement. He stated that the focus of preparing the child for school had shifted from the holistic family and community context of support for the child, to the academic skills the child needed in order to enter school and succeed academically. Brown attributed this shift to introduced reform measures; however, he noted in conclusion to the study that there was still scope to widen the notion of readiness at a point in time to one that considered a more complex picture of the child’s development. Falchi and Friedman (2015) also suggested that readiness in American schools was too heavily focussed on testing children and recommended a shift from the focus on a future level a child might attain to the opportunities offered in “living and learning in the now” (p. 119).

There was an acknowledged need for supporting families in the transition to school, and the stress placed on preparation for school was shown internationally. Bloch and Kim (2015) framed this in terms of whether a child was ready and in ideas of the child, family, and community as “lacking, at risk, deficient” rather than through a perception of “the competent, knowledgeable, and rich child, family and community” (p. 15). Parnell and Iorio (2015) also suggested that in the USA, the discourse surrounding readiness showed children as incapable, needing to be filled with knowledge so they could succeed, rather than focussing on the possibilities and potential of the child.

To support all children as families prepared for school, Britto, Yoshikawa, and Boller (2011) asserted that access to transition programs would only be of advantage when the programs offered the quality of resources needed to address the complex needs presented. To provide such resources, Heckman (2011) posited that economic policy to support the introduction and sustainability of such programs was the means to address disadvantage. He

argued that it was only through the provision of quality programs in such community contexts that all children could enjoy equitable educational outcomes. However, as Peters, Ortiz, and Swadener (2015) suggested, identifying whether a child was ready or prepared for school can be influenced by a deficit perspective. They cautioned there was a need to provide resources in ways that acknowledged the individual attributes of families and children, rather than framing support as addressing a need in terms of long-term benefit to all of society through preparing children for educational achievement. That approach would help to counter the deficit view implicit in some of the concepts of readiness shown. A similar caution was voiced by Urban (2015) who found that in the European early childhood context, there was also a focus on addressing the poverty in marginalised communities and closing the economic gap through educating children. Urban's challenge to the early childhood sector, that argued it failed to "recognise, respect or value" (pp. 296-297) the values and beliefs held in marginalised communities that differed from those dominant in Western society was also a counter to a deficit approach. The suggestion by Brown (2013) to incorporate a more complex picture of a child's development and the notion that emphasised the present, rather than a future course of that development (Falchi & Friedman, 2015; Parnell and Iorio, 2015) would also negate the stress placed on a test for how school-ready a child might be. The inclusion of a consideration of the child as part of a family and community (Bloch and Kim, 2015) would further remove the deficit perspective from the discourse of the child's readiness.

Quality transition programs provide an avenue for parents and children to build relationships with other families in the school and wider community. The programs that work with families to ensure that the strengths and skills they possess are utilised are considered to provide the most effective support. Families and children experience a range of support through playgroups and early years transition-to-school programs, and the relationships formed through such programs assist them in preparing for school. Intervention in the early years of a child's development is a strategy to lessen the effects of poverty and address the complex needs in disadvantaged communities as further support of families with complex needs.

2.4.8 Early intervention in the years prior to school

The early years of a child's life, from birth to five years of age, is the period in human life where the child learns and develops, and forms the foundation for the life that follows (Moore & McDonald, 2013). In Australia, addressing the effects of poverty within those early years through a range of strategies is seen to change the trajectory of life for a child and family in areas of severe disadvantage (Freiberg et al., 2005). The importance of contextualising such early intervention strategies was highlighted in a Northern Territory study with Australian Aboriginal families (Robinson, Tyler, Jones, Silburn, & Zubeick, 2012). Findings of that project indicated a need to recognise the culture and family in the Indigenous community setting.

Early interventions are defined by Moore and McDonald (2013) as “interventions that occur during the early years of an individual's life (0-5 years of age) in order to prevent a negative outcome or to address an existing problem” (p. 3). Programs such as home visits for parental support or providing pre-school activities often form part of such intervention. In the Benevolent Society Report, Moore and McDonald argued for early intervention as a collaborative approach “between services, parents, families, communities and multiple levels of government” (p. 5) to ensure best chances for children's well-being in the long-term outcomes for children, families, and communities.

To shape future social and economic improvement in the lives of children of low-SES families and to address the imbalance between socio-economic levels in society, previously mentioned American economist James Heckman (2011) argued that “investing in the early years of disadvantaged children's lives” was the type of government policy needed as it promoted “both equity and economic efficiency” (p. 31). Heckman based his advocacy for early intervention on longitudinal data from the Perry Preschool Program of the 1960s. Early intervention in that program included parental support to improve the chances for children and families, and long-term benefits for participants have been shown over a number of decades.

In contrast, European-based research by Urban (2015) suggested that rather than improving conditions for those already marginalised in society, the initiatives he identified, while comparable to those of Heckman, may perpetuate the problems for marginalised community families. Heckman (2011) continued to advocate for educational equity, arguing that intervention studies like the Perry Preschool Program mentioned above showed the value

of a free pre-school program as part of an initiative that will have long-term advantages, such as boosting the ability of adults to earn and support themselves. Heckman and Raut (2013) stated that in the USA, there remains a gap between rich and poor; they advocate a free pre-school program to give society the boost needed for long-term individual and society benefit. Again, the contrast with Urban's (2015) argument is significant. Urban says that the approach taken to education and early childhood education in particular is failing those marginalised in society, which he blames on an educational system grounded in "white middle class understanding of education, and educational institutions" (p. 301). He argues that because of the complexity of today's society, there is need for an acknowledgement that the system is not working and more in society are suffering marginalisation. He suggested that learning "from and with the margins – and the marginalised" is needed for "sustainable, more equitable and just early childhood practices that make a difference for *all* children" (p. 302, emphasis in original).

In a report on quality early childhood education, O'Connell, Fox, Hinz, and Cole (2016) argued that current policy in Australia is not providing all children with equal educational opportunity. They also stated that "unequal access to early education and difficult transition into primary school" (p. v) contribute to long-term disadvantage across many areas of life. In the Australian context, the benefits brought by economic and social support are illustrated in the Logan Child-Friendly Community Consortium (Logan Together, 2015). The consortium report explains how support needs are addressed for adult family members and children across a range of areas, from physical well-being to language development and to early childhood education. The consortium is overseen by a coordinator across the community and operates in a collective impact style, details of which are outlined below. According to the assertion of O'Connell and colleagues (2016), in the current Australian context, there remains a need to support families and children in disadvantaged areas.

Current research reveals that families in low-SES and CALD communities continue to encounter difficulty in the years prior to, and after, school commencement as they seek to support their children at school. A lack of knowledge by educators of cultural values and beliefs or the constraints of low SES continues to create barriers to the ways in which parents are able to involve themselves in their children's education. The deficit perceptions that may be held by educators further impact engagement opportunities. A contrast was evidenced in Heckman's (2011) call for financial commitment to early childhood education as a means of

addressing economic and achievement gaps for members of marginalised communities, which Urban (2015) suggested may perpetuate problems if changes were not made in educational systems.

2.4.9 Interrelated concepts relevant to recent research

Constraints were placed on families in low-SES and CALD communities by the deficit perception taken by many school personnel of the contribution families made to their child's education. The SBEP advocated by Lopez and Louis (2009) challenged the deficit approach identified in research studies as a way to move beyond such constraint (Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010; Doucet, 2011; Mills & Gale, 2010; Papapolydorou, 2016; Rodriguez-Brown, 2009; Vera et al., 2012). Just as Perkins et al. (2002) argued that all individuals possessed skills and resources on which they could draw, the SBEP assumed that each person had acquired these across many areas of life.

A collective impact model (Kania & Kramer, 2013) brought organisations together to work across a community and to offer support in the local context, drawing on the resources already identified in a community to improve and build mechanisms. The Mapp and Kuttner (2013) framework for building the capacity of school personnel and parents addressed deficit perceptions held by schools by ensuring that school personnel and parents worked together to learn how relationships were developed and sustained. It also outlined the importance of working from individual strengths and knowledge, addressing the Kuttner (2016) notion of providing opportunity that afforded equitable outcomes for all participants.

In utilising the SBEP, the aim of educators was to raise awareness of these strengths, which fostered an appreciation of individually held resources, so cultivating an environment which valued what each person offered in any given context. In the context of family-school relationships, such an approach prioritised supporting families so they could draw on such resources and so progress and help their family. An approach which negated the deficit perception which Gorski (2012) cautioned against was seen in the Pelletier and Brent (2002) study. The use of these interrelated concepts of a strengths-based approach and social capital theory (Perkins et al., 2002) was also advocated in the area of health care, where Heyne and Anderson (2012) reported the move in a medical therapeutic context where practitioners focussed on the "strengths, capabilities, and aspirations" (p. 107) of clients in ascertaining how to assist recovery and rehabilitation, bringing effective results.

An approach that moved beyond the constraints experienced by families in low-SES and CALD communities was Kania and Kramer's (2011) collective impact model. The Kania and Kramer model outlined a process by which a number of organisations, including schools and individuals, considered a problem from a range of perspectives. They described the process as exploring a number of avenues that allowed ideas to "emerge" (p. 15) because a multiple lens was used. In this way, deficit assumptions were avoided, and the strengths and resources of the community became available.

The interrelated concepts of Mapp and Kuttner's (2013) guidelines for family-school relationships, Kania and Kramer's (2011) collective impact, the SBEP framework (Lopez & Louis, 2009), and social capital theory (Perkins et al., 2002) all contribute to ways in which researchers can examine family engagement practices of schools in low-SES, CALD communities.

2.4.10 Summary

As the second decade of the 21st century progresses, the different values and beliefs, or the economic constraints of families in CALD communities continue to impact how educators view families' engagement in their children's education. There is a need to offer support that acknowledges the differences between families and initiates support that works from individual strengths, avoiding the notion of a lack of capacity in resources possessed by families.

The positive influence of school leaders on all personnel was shown to encourage the development of equitable roles between school personnel and parents. Adoption of SBEP through the interrelated concepts outlined illustrated how drawing on the strengths and resources of the whole community can yield outcomes that benefit community members across social, emotional, and educational areas of life.

Many schools provide transition programs to support families and children as they move from pre-school settings (day-care, kindergarten, and home) to school. While access to quality pre-school programs ensures that children, particularly those in disadvantaged areas, attain educational outcomes equitable to others in society, researchers suggest a need to look beyond notions of readiness. Instead, they stressed the importance of recognising the child's strengths and resources and assisting them to have a positive transition to school that builds

on these resources. Research indicated that up to the present time, cultural values, beliefs, and economic circumstances of families continue to impact on the educational outcomes of children living in disadvantaged communities.

2.5 Summary of literature reviewed

The literature reviewed in this chapter spanned the later years of the 20th century to the present day. It drew on research from the Netherlands, South Africa, Hong Kong, the UK, USA, Canada, and Australia and revealed the ongoing importance of supporting families in low-SES and CALD communities in the years prior to and after children commenced school. Research referred to the relationship between parents and schools as involvement with the school or the child's education, or engagement with schools and the child's education.

In the closing years of the last century, educators acknowledged that a relationship between families and schools would support children's education, particularly for families in low-SES and CALD communities (Cochrane & Henderson, 1986; Crozier, 1998; Espinosa, 1995; Miramontes et al., 1997). The central role school personnel played in how family-school relationships were conceived was seen as inhibiting the development of them. However, schools defined how that involvement took place but no account was given to the role parents were already playing in support of their children. Through the limited and specific opportunities for in-school involvement, schools controlled how parents participated (Crozier, 1997). In low-SES and CALD communities, the result was often further impact on families who were already constrained by employment commitments, feelings of inadequacy in their language skills, or knowledge about the schooling system.

The different perceptions of how the parental supportive role was fulfilled continued to create an impediment to the development of family-school relationships. Families whose cultural values and beliefs, or whose economic circumstances influenced their involvement, continued to be marginalised, seen as others or different in a school community because they differed from the mainstream. Research suggested that with acknowledgement by educators of the valued contributions parents already made, family-school relationships could then empower parents and draw on their combined resources necessary to support children's education.

As the 21st century began, research from the UK, USA, Canada, and Australia continued to focus on the building of relationships between families and schools. The ongoing failure of school leaders to acknowledge the impact of low-SES and CALD constrained the ways families engaged with schools. The failure of educators to acknowledge the dominance of the mainstream, middle-class values in schools also affected the response of families not familiar with the schooling system and barriers to family-school relationships remained (Doucet, 2011; Mills & Gale, 2010; Vera et al., 2012; Walker et al., 2011).

The roles of school personnel, from the principals to the classroom teacher, were shown in different contexts as key to forming effective relationships which worked to support student learning (Denessen et al., 2007; Mapp, 2003). Researchers found that when the contributions of both parties were valued in the family-school relationship, the agency parents were given enabled them to engage with educators and the support of the child's education became the focus. When educators acknowledged the different values, beliefs, and circumstances within communities, common barriers could be surmounted (Auerbach, 2010). Mutual understanding between parents and teachers made possible a collaborative effort that addressed the common goal of supporting children's educational outcomes (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Colombo, 2006; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006).

While it was shown that effective relationships were achievable, research noted that school leadership influenced the school ethos and values, and thus the ways teachers interacted with families. A deficit view by educators that families of the community were not capable or willing to form equitable family-school relationships could then continue to affect family involvement. There was a call for a broader understanding of communities in establishing effective strategies in the period prior to school entry. When quality programs were introduced, they could enhance the transition experiences as they reflected community needs, both in content and delivery of it. In this way, the deficit view that often framed the notion of a child's readiness for school could be avoided and continuity between family and home, schools, and the wider context in which families lived could be achieved. In the current decade, research revealed that educators continue to lack understanding of families in CALD and low-SES communities, of their different involvement practices and the expectations they have of the educational system.

A strengths-based approach was shown to raise awareness of the different resources possessed by families and children and that when these are valued by schools, families are able to progress their educational aims for their children (Lopez & Louis, 2009). By utilising a strengths-based approach, school personnel and parents could gain knowledge of how to create and maintain family-school relationships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Schools could also work with organisations across their communities (Kania & Kramer, 2013) to ensure support for families recognised that the social capital, the richness of the resources present in communities and families, was drawn upon to ensure support for families began with the skills and resources already present.

The ongoing issues for families in low-SES and CALD communities continue and research suggests that partnering families with community groups and schools enabled families to be supported in the early years of a child's life and as they progressed to pre-school programs (Freiberg et al., 2005; 2007; 2010). Breaking the cycle of disadvantage requires intentional investment to provide educational opportunity. Economists argue that such opportunity can only be guaranteed through economic and social investment which will break the cycle of disadvantage and close the gap between educational outcomes for children of these communities (Heckman, 2011). Calls for quality programs (Heckman, 2011; Heckman & Raut, 2013) were accompanied by the call for assurance that programs across SES sectors would be equally resourced to ensure equity in outcome. Research suggested that support needed to be framed according to the local context (Urban, 2015), acknowledge and build on the resources that communities and families possessed, rather than it being framed as a means of addressing economic concerns as a way of benefitting wider society in the longer term. In this way, the support would not be aligned to the values and beliefs of mainstream society, but to the values and beliefs of the community in which it was given, which research argued was more likely to alleviate the long-term disadvantage in the community.

A recent Australian report (O'Connell et al., 2016) revealed that the cultural values, beliefs, and economic circumstances of families continue to impact on the expectations they have for their children's education. The present study examines how early years transition-to-school programs provided by two schools in disadvantaged communities can address these recurring issues. The aim was to discern how authentic family-school relationships could be developed through the programs.

2.6 The new knowledge offered by the present study

As the literature reveals, there remains a need to clarify issues surrounding how relationships are formed between families and schools, particularly in low-SES areas, where there may also be the influence of cultural and linguistic diversity. Different values and beliefs set families apart, often resulting in a family being viewed as different from others in the community, creating a barrier perceived by both sides. In such cases, families are alienated, school personnel interpret a different approach as a family's indifference to their child's education, and the outcome is a deficit view that prevents the development of workable relationships.

The challenge for school leaders is to know the local context, draw on the strengths within the community, and work together with families to achieve common goals. This will avoid a response that perceives difference as something that needs to be changed, thus offering solutions in paternalistic ways that marginalise families.

The present study sets out to offer further insight into the complex issues involved in building relationships between families and schools in low-SES communities where cultural and linguistic diversity is also present. The experiences examined are of parents who participated with their children in programs, as well as of school personnel who introduced and implemented the programs. The views presented considered the ways in which two schools provided different programs as strategies to support and build relationships with families and ease children's entry to school.

Social capital theory (Perkins et al., 2002) which emerged from Bourdieu's (1985) concepts of capital is utilised to examine the underlying reasons for perceptions, behaviours, and responses to the programs and to consider why opinions of school personnel and parents may align or differ. New Zealand research (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011) suggested that addressing the different perceptions of parents and educators will provide insight into the types of goals embedded in programs offered by schools, and how participants interpret their role in the family-school relationship. The study considers how early years transition-to-school programs provide a context within which authentic family-school relationships can develop.

The study addresses needs highlighted in both international and national contexts. It meets a need identified in American research (Crosnoe, 2015) to examine “the mechanisms underlying links between sociodemographic factors and family-school congruence” (p. 72). It considers ways in which such factors impact on how family-school relationships developed and the influence of school leadership styles on these relationships (Auerbach, 2012), particularly in the years prior to the commencement of school.

In the Australian context, Daniel (2015) argued that the potential disadvantage experienced by families from “diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds” also added “further urgency to the need to identify effective ways of building early family-school partnership relationships” (p. 126). Through considering the underlying philosophies operating within these contexts and the programs provided, the research explores how early years transition-to-school programs offer a context for developing the agency of parents in the family-school relationship.

Using the framework outlined, the study addresses the following research question:

- How can schools engage families in authentic family-school relationships through early years transition-to-school programs?

The supporting questions that guide the analysis and discussion are:

- How are early years transition-to-school programs enacted?
- How do schools engage families in early years programs?
- What is the nature of relationships created through early years transition-to-school programs?

The present study examines the recurring issues arising in low-SES and CALD communities. Through revealing how the schools deal with these issues, it will provide the depth and detail identified as lacking in the research area. It will prove useful for future practice in Queensland schools. The study focusses on programs at two schools: one school offers both a playgroup and a pre-Prep program, the second a pre-Prep program only. As the schools serve neighbouring communities, practices highlighted will inform future planning for the support of families and children in low-SES, CALD communities to ascertain how

early years transition-to-school programs can provide the opportunity for the development of authentic family-school relationships.

2.7 Chapter summary

This chapter reviewed literature about the ways schools have sought to engage parents in the years prior to and following the commencement of school. Literature spanned the years from the late 20th century through to the present time. It revealed an ongoing need to explore the establishment of more effective family-school relationships. The chapter concluded with an outline of how the present study adds to the research as well as the questions used to guide the study.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the choice of a qualitative methodology as an appropriate way to understand the experiences of the participants and facilitate the gathering of rich data. It begins by explaining the ontological and epistemological perspectives that guided the choice of the qualitative methodology. The case study design used and the geographical context of the schools are then described. Procedures followed in selecting participants, the methods of data gathering, the reliability of the research, and the coding of data are outlined. The process of data analysis and the utilisation of social capital theory (Perkins et al., 2002) are then described. The final section presents the ethics approval obtained for the research.

3.2 Ontology and epistemology

In this research study, the overall aim was to ascertain how families were engaged through transition-to-school programs. By examining how programs were enacted and by considering the perceptions of both school personnel and parents about how families were engaged through them, the nature of relationships created could be revealed. The aim was to understand the many meanings that could be attributed to experiences with school engagement practices.

The process or phenomenon under consideration in this study was how the range of participants perceived the experiences of parents and their relationships with the school. Therefore, the nature of that reality, the “truth” in data gained, would be subjective, as it was about how each of the participants interpreted their own experiences. The first consideration I had was how my general world view would determine the research paradigm I adopted to gain an understanding about possible effects of socio-economic status, cultural and linguistic diversity on the family-school relationships formed through the transition-to-school programs. From my previous teaching experiences working in a low-SES, CALD community, I knew that families wanted to play a role in their child’s education but were not always sure how they could work with schools to achieve their aims.

The general ontological orientation from which I began was one that did not acknowledge the possibility of one true version of experiences emerging about the school

engagement process, an approach described by Creswell (2014b) as “social constructivist” (p. 6). The question the study posed concerned engagement practices, the experiences of the parents and school personnel involved. The range of interpretations would reveal a truth that yielded a wide impression of experiences in the programs (Hays & Singh, 2012).

This orientation therefore guided my epistemological approach, the way in which I would acquire the knowledge, as the knowledge gained through the study would be limited only by ‘the interactions of those involved in the research process’ (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 35). Interviews and discussion groups with participants were considered the most effective techniques for gaining the knowledge sought.

The epistemology inherent in the perspective adopted was one that would draw from the participants the meaning that they constructed as they recalled their experiences (Crotty, 1998). The use of researcher observations and supplementary information from publicly available school documents added further understanding to participants’ reported experiences, and allowed triangulation of data (Silverman, 2013). A qualitative research design would allow interaction with a range of participants through the techniques chosen as an effective way to address the question posed.

3.3 Research design

Silverman (2011) stated an important characteristic of qualitative research was that it could be used to study “phenomena in the contexts in which they arise through observation and/or recording or the analysis of printed and Internet material” (p. 5). The choice of a qualitative approach in this study enabled the use of focus group discussions and individual interviews, to gain a range of views, from parents and school personnel, about how experiences in the transition-to-school programs might enhance the creation of family-school relationships. Merriam (2014) described qualitative researchers as interested in understanding how people “interpret their experiences, how they construct their world” (p. 5) and Creswell (2008) asserted that in educational research, the qualitative approach gave participants’ views, not those of the researcher, a voice.

Another recognised characteristic of qualitative research noted by Silverman (2011) and Merriam (2014) was that the research occurred in a natural context such as school communities and not in a setting controlled or manipulated by the researcher. A qualitative

approach was adopted in this study to gain an interpretation from participants of school engagement practices experienced in the transition-to-school programs. It enabled a wide range of participant input to be supplemented by researcher observations and information from school materials.

The study was conducted within two schools, both of which provided early years transition-to-school programs. A case study approach enabled the programs to be examined within the context of each of the schools, and to highlight the similarities and differences in their engagement practices. As the over-arching question was about authentic family-school relationships, the use of case study as a methodological tool was considered an effective means of gaining knowledge that could inform future school engagement practices.

3.3.1 Case study

A case study is a bounded system in which data are gathered to offer an in-depth exploration (Creswell, 2007). Common methods of data gathering in case-study research are observations and interviews, from which the data can be analysed and interpreted (Stake, 2006). This method was chosen as it would incorporate the “real-life scenario” of the schools and their communities (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010, p. 240). The choice of two schools provided a multiple-case-study design (Yin, 2009) with the schools as the framework (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Within each framework, the programs and participants completed the multiple-case-study design utilised (Yin, 2009). The contexts and participants represented in the design are shown in Figure 3.1.

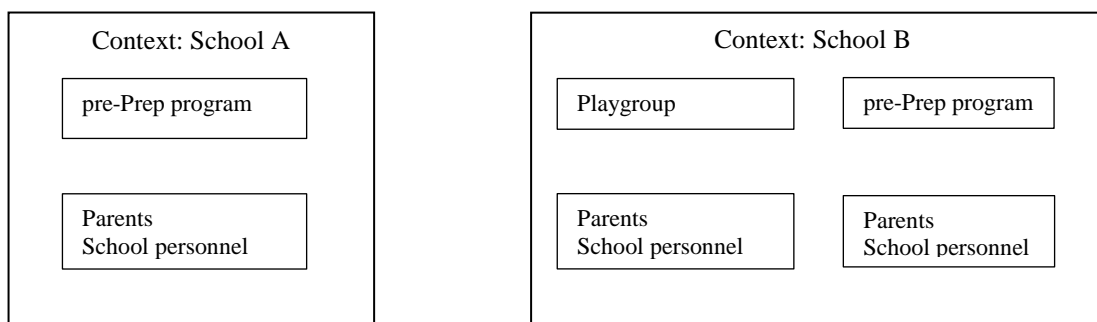


Figure 3.1. The contexts and participants in each of the schools.

The aim of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of how schools engaged families through the early years programs offered – a pre-Prep program at School A (Williamstown) and a playgroup and a pre-Prep program at School B (Pleasantville).

Each program was conducted within the school campus and seen as part of the school's overall educational provision, that of a pre-Prep program, contributing to the prior-to-school experience for children. Within each school context, the embedded units of analysis were the pre-Prep programs offered, as perceived by participants who were families of the school community, as well as by school personnel (Silverman, 2010; Yin, 2009). As Merriam (2014) recommended, an important element of the research design is that it provides an avenue through which a range of participants can share their ideas and offer their perspectives through focus groups and individual interviews. As outlined below, I considered the setting of interviews and discussion groups as ideal to gain the range of participant responses that would offer the various versions of the experiences parents shared about the school engagement practices. The research was conducted within two distinct sites, set within a defined geographical and socio-economic area, as now described.

3.4 Research sites

The geographical setting for the present study was a low-SES, culturally diverse city in South East Queensland. At the time when the study was conducted, the city's population numbered around 300,000, including over 200 different ethnic groups, with a quarter of the population born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2013a & b). The ABS uses a scoring system which grades the Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA). The index is developed by the ABS to rank areas in Australia according to relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage, based on information from the five-yearly census. The index indicates that the lower the score, the higher the level of possible disadvantage for the area's occupants (ABS, 2013c).

Two schools were chosen for the study based on their proximity and similarity. Both schools had a representation of the city's cultural and linguistic diversity within their school communities, and offered support to their families through a pre-Prep program (School A) and a playgroup and a pre-Prep program (School B). Case study methodology enabled the two school contexts, the programs and the participants of the studies to be considered as a multiple case study design (Yin, 2009). To maintain privacy and confidentiality, pseudonyms were allocated to the schools. School A, Williamstown, with a total school population of 1,100, was a state government school for students in Years Prep to 6 (Prep is a preparatory year for children prior to school commencement and became compulsory in 2017; primary

schooling in Queensland finishes in Year 6). School B, Pleasantville, was a smaller, non-government P-12 Christian school with an enrolment of 575 students in the Prep to Year 6 grades (school types are outlined in the Glossary.) The suburbs in which the schools are located fell below the average score of 1000 (ABS, 2013c), indicating that the populations of both schools could experience a higher level of disadvantage than those in a higher scoring SEIFA area.

According to ABS (2011) census data, the area within which Williamstown is located had a population of around 10,000 people; the area surrounding Pleasantville had a population of 11,200. The population breakdown is shown in Table 3.1. Data for the city area, together with state and national figures, provide a comparative context.

Table 3.1. *Demographic and Employment Information for the Research Site Areas*

	Williamstown	Pleasantville	XX Region	Queensland	Australia
Population	10,000	11,200	278,050	4,332,739	21,507,717
	% of suburb's population		% of total population		
Under 5 years of age	9.0	11.4	8.2	6.9	6.6
Single parents	16.0	16.0	19.4	16.1	15.9
Trade/labourer occupations	41.0	51.0	29.7	25.5	23.6
Sales/professional occupations	16.0	16.0	22.3	28.7	30.7
English only spoken in home	80.0	81.0	82.2	84.8	76.8
Two/ more languages besides English spoken in home	18.5	17.0	15.2	11.9	20.4
Unemployment	6.0	8.4	6.2	6.1	5.6

Note. Information derived from ABS, 2013a & b.

Table 3.1 illustrates how the suburbs of Williamstown and Pleasantville schools compared with the wider city area, as well as with the state of Queensland and Australia as a nation. Data show that within both suburbs, around 10% of the population were younger than 5 years of age – a figure higher than the local, state, or national government average. Single parents made up 16% of families, fewer than in the area as a whole, but comparable to both

state and national averages. Occupations were mainly in the areas of trade (higher than regional, state, and national levels), while those in sales and professional positions were lower in number than the average local, state, or national levels. Data suggest that for some families in the study, factors relating to low-SES and/or values and beliefs formed by their cultural and linguistic heritage could influence ways in which parents engage with schools in supporting their children's education.

In the suburbs around the schools, languages other than English spoken included Samoan, Spanish, Mandarin, Hindi, and Croatian. The percentage of homes where English was the main language spoken (80%) reflected similar proportions in both the local area and the state, but was higher than the 76.8% recorded for the nation. However, 18.5% (Williamstown) and 17% (Pleasantville) of the homes recorded that two or more languages besides English were spoken, more than across the city (15.2%) or the state (11.95%), but lower than that overall in Australia (20.4%). The English language skills of all parent participants were considered when planning focus group discussions and individual interviews. Additional information about language background from *My School* revealed a more detailed picture of each school's student population, showing that Williamstown had approximately 15% of its cohort from a language background other than English (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, [ACARA], 2014), while approximately 30% of the Pleasantville students fell into that category (ACARA, 2014).

The *My School* website also provides information about Australian schools for parents and educators, with data drawn from the ICSEA to enable comparisons to be made between like schools (ACARA, 2014). ICSEA is a scale of socio-educational advantage that is computed for each school and enables visitors to *My School* to make comparisons between schools based on the level of educational advantage that students bring to their academic studies. The latest available data from the *My School* site identified both schools with an ICSEA value between 930 and 950, indicating they were below the average of 1000 (ACARA, 2014). The SEIFA index and ICSEI rankings were examined to gain an understanding of the schools and the relative positioning of the area in which they were located. These factors are relevant to the support programs enacted at each of the schools and possible influences that may be evidenced in ensuing engagement practices. The ethos of each school and the support structures implemented to cater for its culturally diverse community are now described.

3.4.1 Details of school and support offered – Williamstown

Williamstown was established in 1986 and at the time of this research, had an enrolment of 1,100 students between Prep and Year 6. It professed a prominent focus on literacy and numeracy, and provided “proactive social skills, values education and anti-bullying programs”. The school also endeavours to “provide a warm, caring environment with strong links between school and the local community” and parents were encouraged to play a role in the school, for example through the Parents and Citizens Association (Department of Education, Training & Employment 2015a). In the year prior to the commencement of this study, the school appointed a community liaison officer (CLO) to assist parents in accessing the information and services provided by the school. Part of that role was to “build relationships with families prior to commencing formal education and to assist families with the transition of their student entering their first year of school” (Department of Education, Training & Employment, 2015a). The CLO commenced Preppy Time, a pre-Prep program to support children and their families six months prior to commencement of the study.

Preppy Time offered four sessions per week, each of two hours, across the semester; families could choose one of the time slots, at which both child and parent attended. Classroom activities ranged from story reading to practice exercises to prepare for letter formation, while physical development focussed on activities such as catching balls, skipping, and running. Visits were made to Prep classrooms, music lessons, and physical education (PE) lessons. A Prep teacher and a specialist teacher visited the pre-Prep sessions to work with the children and talk with parents. Several workshops were planned and presented by the school to parents, on topics such as nutrition for children. Parents were also able to access specialist teachers during the course of the semester to discuss any concerns identified by themselves, or by the Convenor and support staff who had worked with the children.

The Convenor liaised with childcare facilities in the area, a link which enabled the school to learn about their intake for the following year and also encouraged collaboration in preparing the children for Prep. The school also invited staff from the local childcare centres to bring children who were likely to attend the school to participate in sessions conducted by the Convenor as an introduction to the school and the pre-Prep program.

By building such links, the Convenor was able to access the transition statements prepared by the childcare educators (Queensland Curriculum & Assessment Authority, 2014). These statements are submitted to schools as a record of the learning and development of children to assist preparation for supporting the children's transition to their Prep schooling.

Williamstown's pre-Prep program focussed on preparing families for school; however, support in transition to school can be offered in different ways for the birth-to-school-age cohort. Playgroups for younger children normally cater for parents and children and can serve an educational and social purpose for both, which was an additional approach taken at Pleasantville, the second school in this study.

3.4.2 Details of school and support offered – Pleasantville

Pleasantville described itself as "Small enough to be personal, big enough to make a difference" (Department of Education, Training & Employment, 2015b). As a Christian school, the Christian ethos was the foundation of the values and beliefs espoused at Pleasantville (Catholic Education, 2017) and the main mission of the school was to act on those values and beliefs. According to the school's vision statement, Christian values of simplicity and harmony underpinned all its activities; the school acknowledged "the importance of relationships through active development of positive partnerships with families" (Department of Education, Training & Employment, 2015b). It encouraged parent involvement, and opportunities for parents to be part of the school had increased in 2015 with a series of community engagement events, introduced "to encourage positive relationships, enhance how we connect with each other and promote the shared responsibility of learning" which is recognised as continuing "beyond the school gates" (Department of Education, Training & Employment, 2015b). Because of the diverse cultural heritage of the student body, the school employed three liaison officers who worked with families: one officer supported Aboriginal families; another linked with the Pacific Islander families; a third supported children's literacy development and promoted cultural events for the school.

Pleasantville provided a Community Centre as a usable space for parents and the school community to participate in activities such as parenting programs and a breakfast program. For the previous 2 years, the school had employed a Convenor to conduct a National Community Hub Program through the centre, as described in Chapter 1.

Families in the school and local community had access to all Community Centre programs and services offered. Playtime was a playgroup conducted in the centre and offered to the community for parents and their children, some of whom would attend the school in the following year or two. The Convenor of Playtime was employed by the school and worked in accordance with the guiding principles of both the school and the Community Hub organisation. The program offered was a semi-structured, two-hour session twice a week, with the goal of enabling parents to build relationships within the school and wider community, while children were offered a range of educational activities and games and given access to free play and craft times. As the Convenor also ran the pre-Prep program recently introduced by the school, I was also able to learn of the support it provided.

The programs offered by Williamstown and Pleasantville were aimed at supporting families and building relationships as children approached the beginning of Prep in the belief that these avenues of support would provide positive outcomes for all involved. The staff interviewed at both sites displayed genuine concern for the families involved and worked to ensure that they could achieve a smooth transition for children soon to commence their schooling. In both schools, parents and school personnel volunteered to participate in the study, after they were informed of its purpose and their potential involvement in it. Procedures followed in recruiting participants, a description of who was involved, and the data-gathering process are now given.

3.5 Research procedures

For permission to work in Williamstown, a government school, I approached the Principal and, on his advice, visited the school where I spoke with the Deputy Principal. The school forwarded a written letter of permission to conduct research at that site (see Appendix A). To obtain permission to conduct research at Pleasantville, I contacted the relevant education authority and received a letter of permission to commence research at that school also (see Appendix B).

My familiarity with the area and its people was an advantage when I embarked on this research but prior to beginning, I had to consider possible influences that my background and past experiences might have on my perception of how the schools supported families, or on my interaction with family and school personnel. I spent time at each site, forming

connections and building relationships with parents and staff, a process seen by Eide (2005) as important in a community where families attending the programs could be from cultural and linguistic backgrounds that differed from my own or that of the dominant population of the school; hence, the investment of time was essential in trust building. Additionally, as I was not part of either school community and because of the cultural differences, I was aware that I would not be seen as an “insider” or group member. I realised this may create problems when seeking opinions from participants about their experiences in the programs. Parents were attending the playgroup to access a supportive social environment for their child and themselves, or pre-Prep program as a context within they could learn more about the transition-to-school process and their future role as the parent of a school-aged child. Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) highlighted the need for such awareness but stressed the importance of the “ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experiences of one’s research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience” (p. 59). Their study also cited the earlier research of Fay (1996) who asserted that both the insider and outsider perspective had negative and positive aspects. As an outsider, I was aware of how I might be perceived and therefore the possible impact that perception might have on participant response to me.

At each site, I attended programs and talked with prospective participants to explain how research would proceed. The first task was to organise information sessions about the study for prospective participants. Parents who attended Preppy Time at Williamstown and Playtime at Pleasantville were invited to an information session which was scheduled within the respective program times. The sessions outlined information about the study in both written and oral form. I chose to accept parents who volunteered, aware that I could not ensure representation of all sectors of the low-SES, CALD community.

The voluntary nature of participation and reasons for collecting certain demographic or personal information were explained and questions were addressed. Information given by participants included age, current employment status and if not born in Australia, when they had arrived here and languages additional to English spoken. Neither parents nor school personnel raised any questions about the information requested, or the university ethics committee approval, indicating their acceptance of the confidentiality of the details. The term “informed consent” was explained before participants were asked to be part of the study and the procedures for ensuring confidentiality of all data through coding were also outlined

(Huer & Saenz, 2003). After being fully informed, and as no language differences were encountered, those who were willing to proceed then signed consent forms. The same steps were followed when engaging school personnel at both schools, for focus group discussions and individual interviews (see Appendix C for information and consent forms from both schools for adult family members, focus groups for staff, and individual interviews for staff).

Data collection occurred in the second half of the school year, through individual and focus group interviews with parents who attended the programs and staff who were responsible for the setting up and running of them. There was one parent focus group for each of the four sessions at Williamstown, and one for the Pleasantville Playgroup. During the first weeks of the following school year, ten parents from Williamstown volunteered to provide follow-up information about the beginning of the school term; four Prep teachers took part in a focus group discussion. Included in data were researcher observations at both schools and information from the school's websites, which provided a balance to participant responses.

3.5.1 Study participants

Participants at each school included parents with children who attended the playgroup or pre-Prep program. As this research was motivated by concern with how parents could be empowered to form relationships with school personnel, the focus of the study was how authentic family-school relationships were created from the perspective of parents and school personnel, and input from children was not sought. School personnel who implemented or conducted the program and early year teachers were also involved in focus group discussions or individual interviews. At each site, one or two grandparents also attended some of the sessions, bringing their grandchild or accompanying a parent and child, but none indicated interest in being involved in the study.

At both research sites, school personnel involved with the programs agreed to be interviewed. At Williamstown, these included a Deputy Principal, the Convenor of Preppy Time, and the teacher aide who worked with her. The Deputy Principal, a teacher for 34 years, had been a deputy at the school for 24 of these years. The Convenor of Preppy Time had been at the school for eight years, working as school chaplain prior to becoming the Community Liaison Officer (CLO) and coordinating the program. She had previously worked as an early learning educator in childcare for a number of years prior to coming to the school. The teacher aide had worked in childcare programs and as an aide in some of them. I also

was able to conduct a focus group discussion with the Prep class teachers after school commenced. This group ranged from teachers with 30 years of teaching experience to two who were in their second year of teaching.

At Pleasantville, the Assistant Principal, a teacher for 27 years and an administrator for 7 of those years at that school, was interviewed. The Pleasantville Convenor who was also interviewed was qualified in human resource management and had worked as a teacher aide and in childcare for many years before taking the role nearly two years previously. Prep class teachers also participated in a focus group discussion. One teacher had 7 years of teaching experience in Prep; another had been teaching for 6 years but was new to the school; the third had taught for 4 years, teaching Year 1 at the school prior to taking a Prep class.

3.5.1.1 Williamstown family participants

Approximately 70 families came to the weekly sessions of Preppy Time, most attending each week. Five fathers were amongst the parents, two of whom came regularly; another attended alternate days, sharing attendance with his wife. After information sessions, 22 parents agreed to participate in the study. When interviews were conducted, 18 were available; while the father who volunteered was unable to participate on the day, his wife took his place.

Parent participants represented Brazilian, Indonesian, and New Zealand Maori heritage (one mother of each), together with two mothers of Croatian heritage and none were recent arrivals to Australia. While each of them spoke at least one language additional to English, only one participant who was Croatian experienced some difficulty with her English skills and chose to sit with her sister-in-law and share the interview. Other participants were Australian-born, monolingual English speakers. The participants reflect some of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the school and wider community; however, they are not representative of the breadth and depth of this diversity. Some families already had children at the school; for others, they were enrolling their first child. Work commitments varied, from stay-at-home parents to part-time employment; changed work hours or alternating with the other parent ensured the child attended each session. The Deputy Principal said that while they might have been able to offer another Preppy Time session if they had more resources, over half of the children enrolled for the following year's Prep class were attending the

program. She felt the uptake in the program reflected the cultural diversity of the school's population, although as noted, it was not reflected in the study participants.

3.5.1.2 Pleasantville family participants

The Pleasantville parents who attended Playtime were all mothers, one of whom had been involved with the program in previous years with a child who was now at school. She joined in all aspects of the group and was a source of encouragement and support to younger mothers and those new to the school; she also became a study participant. Between 12 and 18 families attended Pleasantville's Playtime, and eight of the mothers came twice each week, the others varying from once a week to once a month or less. On the day when an information session was held, 10 parents were present. Six agreed to be part of the study: one was of New Zealand Maori heritage, another of Irish heritage. None were recent arrivals to Australia and while the mother from New Zealand spoke her native Maori language together with English and Samoan, there were not language issues within the group. The cultural and linguistic diversity of the school and wider community as shown in Table 3.1 and on the *My School* website (ACARA, 2014) was not reflected in the playgroup or amongst the parent participants at Pleasantville. Work commitments for the mothers who participated varied from part-time to those who had chosen to be at home with their children.

Following the information sessions at both research sites, data gathering proceeded with focus group discussions and individual interviews, with supplementary information obtained from researcher observations and school information from websites and at Williamstown, from the Convenor's report. The first step in data gathering with parent participants was focus group discussions, followed by individual interviews with those who indicated willingness. Times and possible locations for focus groups and interviews were discussed to ensure that they were seen as comfortable and non-threatening for all concerned (Halcomb, Gholizadeh, DiGiacomo, Phillips, & Davidson, 2007). Discussion groups and interviews with staff were conducted at mutually agreed times.

3.5.2 Focus groups

Focus groups have been described by Holosko and Thyer (2011) as an opportunity for preliminary discussion on a given topic. Data gathering began at each site with parents joining together in focus group discussions. The focus groups were a deliberate choice to

begin working with parents as they provided an informal group setting, as Holosko and Thyer described. Following Barbour's (2014) suggestions, the setting was a comfortable one which fostered but did not demand the sharing of ideas, with the result that contributions were evenly spread. The parent groups were conducted during the allocated program times at both locations for convenience, as requested by those involved. At Williamstown, discussions were held in the classroom at a time when the children were taken by the Convenor to a school-based activity. A discussion group was held for each session offered during the week and usually numbered around a dozen mothers; only one father who attended with his child participated. At Pleasantville, a space adjoining the playgroup, where mothers could still observe and be observed by the children, was utilised. There was no requirement of English language assistance needed in the focus groups at either of the schools.

Discussions began with general questions about time of residence in the local area or at the school to set participants at ease, followed by more specific topic areas about experiences in early years transition-to-school programs offered by schools. The questions varied in style, both closed and open-ended, garnering opinions and also eliciting facts or clarifying what was said (Hays & Singh, 2012). The circumstances allowed meaning to be found within the group itself, with my role as moderator to keep the discussion on task, or add further detail when asked (Barbour, 2014). All focus group discussions were recorded, with participants' permission (see Appendix E and Appendix F for examples from Williamstown and Pleasantville).

In additional focus group discussions, teaching personnel from both schools were able to offer their insights on what they perceived were the prospective gains of offering the programs and the influence they saw on the families involved. They agreed to have these discussions audio-recorded. A focus group was conducted at Williamstown with the six Prep class teachers. At Pleasantville, three of the four Prep teachers were available to take part in a focus group (see Appendix G for an example from Pleasantville of a teacher focus group discussion).

3.5.3 Interviews

Parent interviews commenced with those who indicated willingness to participate after completion of focus groups. These interviews were conducted at convenient times within the program sessions. As I had, by this time, established a rapport with parents, I chose

a semi-structured format for the interview, as Harding (2013) asserted that the relationship between the researcher and respondent was an important one. Stake (2010) recommended that the qualitative researcher choose activities that provide an opportunity to understand how things worked, something the individual interviews offered participants as they gave their perspectives on the process of how parents engaged within the school community.

When considering the framing of questions about relationships between schools and families, several aspects were of note (see Appendix D). Research about the ways schools and families formed links acknowledged that a working relationship was needed, and a range of terms used to describe the relationship, such as involvement, engagement, or partnership, was discussed. Studies like that of Ferlazzo (2011) defined parents' involvement as implying a "doing to" whereas engagement was "doing with" (p. 12). Edwards and Kutaka (2015) suggested that "engagement and partnership" were the newer terms (p. 37) and they favoured engagement as covering a range of related parent activity. Also considered was work by Pushor (2012) and Crosnoe (2012) who stated that in any relationship formed, reciprocity was important, an idea which linked to the Berthelsen and Walker (2008) finding that in a low-SES area, where families were often reluctant to engage, the need was for a strong working relationship. Another important element about the relationship was that it needed to be child focussed (Kim & Sheridan, 2015).

These examples show the different attributes of the school-family relationship that have been examined in research, seeking to understand the forms the relationship should take. To extend knowledge in the research area of parent perceptions of family-school relationships, and to provoke a thoughtful response from participants, this study introduced the terms of customer/client or partner when interviewing parents. This was done to ascertain how they envisaged their relationship between family and school: whether it was a relationship that saw the school providing an education for the child – with parent as a customer or client – or a relationship which involved the school and family working together in educating the child – a partnership. Responses would show the willingness of parents and schools to be involved together and how the roles were perceived by each party in the educational process. Bourdieu (2011) indicated that in this context, it was those in charge who held the power through their possession of a habitus consistent with that of the society. Responses would help to reveal whether the relationships formed were perceived as

partnerships between equals or if the role of the school was dominant, as Mills and Gale (2010) found in their work in a low-SES community.

The semi-structured style enabled me to respond to what was said by the participant while still asking some common and specific questions (Merriam, 2014). It allowed me to hear individual ideas without the possible constraint of a focus group situation which may find some not as willing to voice ideas (Yin, 2009). At both sites, parents chose a space which offered sufficient separation to enable the frank sharing of ideas but which was also within view of other parents and children involved in the program. I considered the settings in which discussion groups and interviews were conducted as ideal to gain a range of participant responses to the experiences parents and school personnel shared about school engagement practices.

In the group discussions I introduced specific topics, giving the participants some insight to what would be addressed in the interviews to follow (Holosko & Thyer, 2011). Each participant was not required to contribute to discussion (Barbour, 2014); however, a benefit of follow up individual interviews with parents provided them an opportunity to share their own ideas and voice any concerns (Yin, 2009). Parent interviews were held adjacent to the children's program location. The rapport I had established with participants made the interview context a comfortable one (Harding, 2013). Staff focus groups and interviews were held at a time and place that was mutually convenient.

Transcription of all interviews and discussions shortly after they occurred gave me the opportunity to revisit the content and maintain some familiarity with it as the research progressed (Creswell, 2014a). Closely following the interview, all interviewees were given a transcript to confirm accuracy. Data gathered from focus groups and interviews with both parent participants and school personnel were supplemented by researcher observations.

3.5.4 Observations

Observation is a process of gathering data by observing people as they are involved at the site (Creswell, 2014a). The process allows the researcher to observe but can also offer the opportunity to be involved as a participant in aspects of the activities conducted, moving closer to what Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) described as an insider role. I was rewarded by time spent at each site as, by the time for focus groups and interviews approached, I was

becoming more accepted as part of the programs. I was able to meet and greet participants as they arrived at Preppy Time, sit and watch as the session progressed, set out “snack time”, or take photographs as requested by the Convenor. At Playtime, I moved around talking to parents, watched activities the Convenor undertook with the children, and joined the parents for morning tea. I was able to obtain a broader idea of how the group worked, which added another dimension to understanding parent responses (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002) (see Appendices J (Williamstown) & K (Pleasantville) for Researcher Observations). Observation was an important context from which I obtained information about how the playgroup and per-Prep programs worked and some understanding of the participants’ experiences (Doucet, 2011).

As an observer, I did not follow any schedule or checklist but tried to become absorbed in the activities of the day. Stake (2010) described such a process as looking at “activities and contexts that provide opportunity to understand an interesting part of how the things work” (p. 57). The approach taken meant that at Williamstown I worked with the teacher aide to set out tables and activities, cleaned up at the end, and helped out where I could during the session. At Pleasantville, I talked with the Convenor and parents before and after the playgroup and with the mothers during the morning as we observed activities.

Observations contextualised discussion, in both focus groups and interviews, and allowed me to record events as they occurred (Creswell, 2014a). They afforded me the opportunity, for example, to discuss the different Preppy Time activities the parents were doing with their children and hear how being part of the group helped them learn more about the schools’ expectations. The notes made during and immediately following the sessions provided another source of data and complemented the participants’ first-hand understanding of the world and their experiences (Stake, 2010).

3.5.5 School materials

Access to publicly available website data was described by Creswell (2014b) as a legitimate source of information for the qualitative researcher and added another dimension of knowledge about Williamstown (See Appendix L for Convenor’s Report and School materials) and Pleasantville (see Appendix M for school materials). The sites provided information about the philosophy underpinning the schools’ goals, shown clearly in both mission statements and the visions held for the future. Websites revealed information about

the schools, particularly regarding opportunities the schools offered to current and prospective students and details such as enrolment requirements. For parents, the websites provided details on a range of activities available to them and opportunities for families to become involved in the school. Principals' reports detailed the prior year's activities and achievements as well as plans held for the future. A report from the Williamstown Convenor also reflected the goals the school had for Preppy Time. The materials offered another perspective to that of the participants and were useful as a means of comparing or supporting that perspective.

Use of qualitative methods assisted in the understanding of how each area of data contributed to more understanding of the school community as a whole (Merriam, 2014). In focus groups and interviews, interaction between participants, or between participants and interviewer, allowed a meaningful exchange of ideas. Topics addressed dealt with relatively distinct areas, ranging from how parents perceived their relationship with their school and how teachers saw that relationship, to the ways in which the schools catered particularly for their culturally diverse community. An examination of the supplementary material enlarged on ideas expressed as it showed how each of the schools' mission statements positioned the school in relation to the educational needs of the community and how parents could be involved in the life of the school. The range of information contained in the data provided a broad view of what was involved in the programs (Strauss & Corbin, 2006; Yin, 2009) and how well the programs met the expectations of the families (Creswell, 2008; Yin, 2009). As the overall aim of all research is to produce reliable data and show "the quality of the inquiry" (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 103), several forms of checking were used to ensure such outcomes.

3.6 Reliability of research

The reliability and validity of research was enhanced through the establishment and use of a systematic process of data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which enabled the corroboration of evidence from a variety of individuals and data sources (Creswell, 2008). Data were systematically collected through the use of focus group discussions, as well as in individual interviews, with parents and school personnel. Researcher observations were conducted during attendance at each of the programs. Supplementary information from school websites and reports broadened the scope of data and provided another viewpoint to topics discussed in focus groups and interviews.

At each site, parent participants included those whose first child was beginning school, to some who were sending their second or third child into Prep. School personnel included administrators, teachers, and the program Convenors. The range of participants and the different perspectives offered provided another form of triangulation (Shenton, 2004). Identical or similar questions were used with parent participants and similar topics were addressed with staff members, which also helped to confirm the responses given (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Shenton (2004) highlighted the shortcomings of using these two forms of interviews but conceded that “their distinct characteristics also result in individual strengths” (p. 65). Additionally, after each interview, a copy of the transcript was forwarded to participants. Member checking by the interviewee established the credibility of interview content (Shenton, 2004). The systematic collection of data and the methods of triangulation used enabled the corroboration of information gained and established the credibility of data (Lincoln & Guba, 2013).

To ensure the impact of researcher bias was minimised, Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) stressed the need for the researcher to be open with participants about the purpose of the research and the research processes to be undertaken to gather information from the site. The triangulation of data and acknowledgement of the possible impact of my position as researcher helped to ensure a more transparent data-collection and examination process (Shenton, 2004). Transferability was not an aim in the study but Lincoln and Guba (2013) stated that details of the research process and description of the sites allowed the reader “to determine whether the findings [applied] to his or her context” (p. 105). When research was completed at each site, data gathered from focus groups, interviews, observations, and school materials were coded to de-identify the sites and participants to prepare data for analysis.

3.7 Coding of data sources

Codes were assigned to identify the school, the type of participation, and if an individual interview or discussion; in the case of parent interviews, the details of session as well as a date were included. Supplementary sources were similarly identified, with no date added. Table 3.2 shows the assigned codes.

Table 3.2. *Identifying and Labelling Data Sources at School Sites*

Participant	Williamstown	Pleasantville
Parents – focus group	WFg:M; WFg:T; WFg:FA; WFg:FP	PvFg
Parents – interviews	WM3:10; WM1:3; WM1:17; WM2:3; WT1:4; WT2:11; WT3:11; WT1:18; WT2:18; WFA1:14; WFA1:21; WFA2:14; WFA2:21; WFA3:14; WFA3:21; WFP1:21; WFP1:14; WFP2:23	Pv1; Pv2; Pv3; Pv4; Pv5; Pv6
Staff – focus group	WPs	PvPsFg
Staff – interviews	WAd; WCon; WTA	PvAd; PvCon
Researcher observations	WRO	PvRO
School Materials	WSDs	PvSDs

An explanation of the codes used to identify participants and sources, first at Williamstown, then Pleasantville, is as follows. At Williamstown, the school identifier of W begins each. There were two types of parent participation: a focus group and the individual interview. A focus group was conducted in each of the four sessions, two of which were held on Friday, one in the morning, one in the afternoon. Code for focus groups shows school (W), F (focus group), and day of week: WF:M; WFT; WF:FA (AM); WF:FP (PM). Interview coding begins with the school identifier, indicates the day of the session (and time for the Friday session), followed by the number of the interview done in that session (1-3) and the date: for example, WM1 3 signifies W (school) M (Monday session) 1 (first interview that session) 3 (date).

Staff participation is shown as focus group for Prep teachers (WPs); individual interviews with staff members WAd (administration – deputy principal), WCon (program convenor) and WTA (teacher aide of program). Notes from researcher observations (WRO) and school materials (WSDs) are the remaining categories.

For data from the Pleasantville site, the same process of coding was applied, with the beginning school identifier code of Pv. Parent participation in a focus group was coded PvFg, and the six individual interviews as Pv1 to Pv6. The staff focus group conducted with the Prep

teachers is shown as PvPsFg; individual staff interviews as PvAd (administration – assistant principal), and PvCon (program convenor). Notes from researcher observations (PvRO) and school materials (PvSDs) are the final categories allocated.

The next step was the transcription of interviews and discussions. All were transcribed within a day or two of completion and sources were labelled as described. A copy was sent to the interviewee for comments on accuracy or to clarify or add any detail. Responses from interviewees varied, from email responses stating agreement or offering minor corrections on names recorded, to verbal responses that acknowledged the transcript as “fine”, but there were a number who gave no response at all. In some cases, this was because of inconsistent attendance at sessions or as Stake (2010) suggested, it could have indicated the participant had no interest once the interview was completed.

Observation notes taken throughout the research were compiled and diary entries were checked to add further detail to the notes. Relevant information taken from school websites was noted and set aside until data from participants were considered, then used as a check to confirm detail, to consider if differences were noted, or to supplement ideas shared, adding a further perspective.

3.8 Data analysis

Braun and Clarke (2013) reminded the researcher that “qualitative analysis is an interpretative process driven by what the analyst sees in, and makes sense of, the data” (p. 220). Through the phases of reading, examining and sorting, I gained a thorough knowledge of data content. As Gibson and Brown (2009) stated, it is always the researcher undertaking the analysis of qualitative data, with the assistance of a computer program. Immersion in the data gained through reading and sorting gave me the familiarity that resulted in the choice to adapt the Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis process, rather than utilise a computer program.

3.8.1 Thematic analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) described thematic analysis as a process that enables immersion in the data, allowing ideas to be considered and interpreted, leading to the identification of themes and finally to the overarching themes; they outlined six phases in

their approach to thematic analysis. The thematic analysis conducted in this study is adapted from Braun and Clarke using a similar process. A table format was used as themes were searched for and reviewed. Themes were related to social capital and Bourdieuan concepts, clarifying the significance of findings. The process used is explained below.

3.8.1.1 Familiarisation with the data

The approach to analysis was one that relied on immersing myself in the data, revisiting the material from the range of sources numerous times, to read, sort and identify key ideas across the participant responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Such a process was described by Creswell (2014a) as one that “means that the researchers read the data, mark it by hand and divide it in to parts” (p. 263).

3.8.1.2 Generating initial codes

Once familiarisation was gained, ideas and meanings were given initial codes. Braun and Clarke (2006) stressed that the researcher played an active role in the process of identifying themes, rather than the idea of themes emerging from data. I chose to first consider data from Pleasantville as the site had fewer participants and therefore less data. I then applied the same process of analysis to Williamstown data. Working with Pleasantville parent responses, after transcribing and coding participants, I began with Creswell’s (2014a) system of dealing with a transcript by using wide margins in which to make notes, and then adapted it to a table format to be used in a similar way. An example of the process is shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3. *Process of Initial Coding*

Transcript interview	Initial Code	Interpretation	Ideas / meanings
First time parents: What do you want your relationship with the school to be – as a client / customer OR as a partner in educating your child? Parent: I want to be a partner; I want to be up at the school helping once or twice a week, volunteering in class and anything else. I figure if I am as involved as I can be, then the teacher will know for sure that I’m a caring parent. I think that they will care more	Partner	Being involved/helping ↓ Teacher perceives as caring parent	Parent is helping, being involved; parent sees her involvement will benefit her child
	Help / volunteer	↓ Perceptions of teacher beliefs; teacher will care more	Forming a relationship
	Being involved	↓	
	Seen as caring parent	Child benefits	

Table 3.3 shows the initial coding emerged from the use of a word or an idea in the transcript, which Saldana (2016) described as “essence-capturing” (p. 4). As Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested, an interpretation was then possible and subsequently, meaning deduced.

3.8.1.3 Searching for themes; reviewing themes

To identify and review themes, ideas and meanings were again examined against the transcripts, and were related to concepts of social capital and Bourdieuan theory. Table 3.4 illustrates this step.

Table 3.4. *Inductive Process of Data Analysis from Initial Idea to Culminating Concept*

Word / idea from question / response	Transcript interview	Themes	Over-arching theme	Social capital / Bourdieuan concepts
Partner: Parent is helping, being involved; parent sees involvement benefitting child	What do you want your relationship with the school to be – client /customer OR as a partner in educating your child? I want to be a partner; I want to be up at the school helping once or twice a week, volunteering in class and anything else. I figure if I am as involved as I can be, then the teacher will know for sure that I’m a caring parent. I think that will mean they will care more for xxx	Parent role in school Perception of teacher beliefs ‘Good’ parenting	Family-school relationship	Cultural capital – while not using Bourdieuan terms, parent is identifying the need for certain types of knowledge / skills – & for these to be seen & acknowledged Social capital – relationships formed – bridging relationships with school personnel – leading to the family/school relationship

Table 3.4 illustrates how analysis progressed from the first stage of assigning a descriptive code. It was an inductive process, working from the initial raw data, and led to meaning being assigned, from identifying themes such as those relating to parent roles and ideas about parenting, to reviewing and finding key or over-arching themes such as the family-school relationship. The table shows that the first column was used for key words from questions or responses; the script was placed in the second column. In the third column, themes were assigned, and in the fourth, an overarching theme was identified. Thematic

analysis enabled links to be shown between social capital and Bourdieuan concepts, as identified in the right-hand column, adding further meaning to the script. Clarke and Braune (2013) described thematic analysis as an “analytic method” (p. 120) rather than a methodology. The use of the table format shows how the analytical method worked within the theoretical framework utilised. Responses from all interviews and focus group discussions were handled in this manner.

The table format assisted in clarifying ideas that emerged, for example the identification of family-school relationships. It enabled a wider view of how that idea or theme was present across a range of responses, and how responses of parents and school personnel and parents aligned or differed. The inclusion of a column to identify aspects of social capital and Bourdieuan concepts within the responses showed how utilising the theoretical framework could extend the understanding that participants had of experiences in the programs provided.

Analysis of data from the second site (Williamstown) followed an identical approach using the same table formats, first three, then five columns. After transcription and reading, responses from focus group discussions and parent interviews were entered. At Williamstown, ten of the 18 parents whose children attended Preppy Time also gave me further information after the commencement of the school year. Further analysis of data from both schools extended the Creswell (2014a) approach, shown in the example below (Table 3.5), to consider how initial ideas linked with themes and social capital (SC) and Bourdieuan (B) theoretical concepts, to illustrate significance of findings (see Appendices E & F for example).

Table 3.5. *Exploring Data – Finding Significance*

Transcript interview	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance of findings
She is only in Prep, my only expectation for Prep is she is happy, wants to come to school – and she does, so definitely meeting expectations.	Expectations of prep	Preparing children for school	SC – building relationships – forming bonding relationships	Prep seen as providing context or relationship building – and educational activities for child
I don't think it seems too demanding, I'm always checking in with her teacher, seeing what we should be doing with her, extra things? She always says where we're at is fine. I don't think they put too much pressure on them which I'm relieved about. I know they need to start reading	Interacting with teacher Parent/teacher roles	Parent – teacher relationship Ready for school - building academic skills	B concept – building capital for context of school SC – child needs academic skills – no worth in what child already has	Parent perception of value of aspects of Prep curriculum

As illustrated in Table 3.5, the process of inserting the transcripts into tables enabled a comprehensive view of the data and aided subsequent analysis. As themes were identified and reviewed and related to theoretical concepts, the significance of the findings was considered. Working through the data from both sites in this way, I had a thorough idea of the content. The adaption of approaches shown by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Creswell (2014a) enabled me to progress from the raw data to finding significance within the content. The following section explains how social capital theory and Bourdieuan concepts were utilised in the study to frame the approach taken in order to explain the findings.

3.9 Utilising theory – social capital

Social capital theory (Perkins et al., 2002) can be utilised at both the individual and organisational level. Theoretical concepts were extended to incorporate dimensions of individual, organisational, formal, and informal behaviours (Perkins & Long, 2002). In the context of the programs introduced at each school, the interrelationships of the concepts of social capital theory were useful, to examine how relationships were formed by individual participants in the programs. These inter-related concepts were useful to examine how relationships were formed by individual participants in the pre-Prep programs at each school. For example, the relationships formed between children and amongst adults were compared

with the Perkins and Long (2002) concepts of bonding relationships, while the links formed between children, their parents and the Convenor or other school personnel were examined in the light of the bridging relationships incorporated in Perkins and Long's (2002) social capital theory.

To consider the influences that may impact these relationships, findings were further interrogated by juxtaposing responses about participants' experiences with the aims that were outlined when the programs were established. This revealed whether the aims of engaging parents and building family-school relationships as preparation for entry to the school environment were realised. A key factor was that an awareness of the Mills and Gale (2004) assertion that relationships initiated by schools often maintained a more powerful role for school personnel. That would aid in identifying the influence of school leaders and all school personnel on how relationships formed gave agency to parents or retained a dominant role for the school. While the intentions of the school were clear, use of social capital theory and Perkins and Long's (2002) concepts of building relationships (Perkins & Long, 2002) enhanced understanding of the types of relationships that could develop.

3.9.1 Bourdieuan concepts

As the study was conducted in a low-SES area, Bourdieu's assertion that middle-class values are perpetuated in education was relevant (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992a). Participants in the study were parents from the low-SES, CALD community and school personnel. Bourdieuan concepts assisted examination of data to reveal possible contrast between the habitus and capital of these two participant groups in the context of the school, where Bourdieu (2011) argued that it was school personnel in charge who held power in the educational field. Goodall (2013) asserted that there was a need for schools to be mindful of how parents engaged in their child's learning, whether at home or in the school context. Use of Bourdieu's (1986) concept of habitus would enable any differences between families and the schools to highlight where that difference may impact on ways in which the family-school relationships developed.

While Bourdieuan concepts were drawn on in analysis of findings, utilisation of the Perkins and Long (2002) social capital theory that emerged from Bourdieu's work was the main focus in the analysis, to reveal how the programs at both Williamstown and Pleasantville provided a context in which family-school relationships were developed.

3.10 Ethics approval

Ethics approval from Griffith University was gained to conduct this research in two schools (GU Reference No. EDN/62/14/HREC – Appendix N). As I was to work in only one government school, Education Queensland required that I obtain the written approval of the Principal (see Appendix A). Before I commenced research in that school, I spoke with the Deputy Principal and Program Convenor to explain my research and organise times for research to commence. The independent school required approval from the relevant education office (see Appendix B). After approval was given, I spoke with the Principal, Assistant Principal and Convenor about the research before commencing work in that school.

Having gained the necessary permission from each school, I discussed with school personnel the process I would follow. I consulted with Convenors at each of the sites about how I would work in ways that would not disrupt their planning for the programs. As already outlined, all participants were adults and information on the research process and the use of findings was given to them both verbally and in written form (Litoselliti, 2003). An explanation of how the confidentiality of participants would be maintained was also explained (Burns, 2000). With this understanding in place, I was able to proceed with my research.

As the study progressed, the underpinning motivations for the implementation of the schools' early years programs became apparent. The focus of the research shifted from how schools engaged families in the programs to how those engagement practices helped to create the family-school relationships. A change of title for the research was subsequently approved (see Appendix O).

3.11 Chapter summary

This chapter has given the ontological and epistemological beliefs that underpin the study. It detailed the rationale for adopting qualitative methods and showed how the approach facilitated the gathering of rich data. The geographical context of the study, the choice of the two school sites, and the case study method were described. The procedures for selecting participants and obtaining informed consent for their involvement in focus group and individual interviews were outlined. The process of data gathering from a range of sources,

the processes of sorting and analysing data, and how the theoretical framework was utilised in analysis of data was described. The final section presented the details of the ethics process obtained. The next chapter provides the results from both sites, with a discussion of findings in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 Findings Williamstown and Pleasantville

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines findings from the two school sites of Williamstown and Pleasantville, showing school contexts and the philosophical underpinning of how early years programs were enacted at each school. Ways in which parents and staff perceived that the programs prepared parents in the transition-to-school period are revealed, as well as the types of relationships they perceived were built in the playgroup and pre-Prep programs. The chapter concludes with a summary of the similarities and differences identified in the ways in which the two schools engaged with families through the programs.

4.2 Context of each school

The Williamstown and Pleasantville schools are situated in the same area in neighbouring low-SES suburbs where there is also a presence of cultural and linguistic diversity within the population. On the ABS (2013c) SEIFA index, the suburbs fell below the average score of 1,000, indicating that the populations of both schools experienced a higher level of socio-economic disadvantage than those in a higher scoring SEIFA area.

As is the case in many areas of socio-economic disadvantage, the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC, 2012a) revealed that children in these communities were considered vulnerable in many developmental domains. In the language and cognitive skills domain, the census suggested that children with language backgrounds that included languages other than English were shown as likely to be “developmentally vulnerable” (AEDC, 2012b, p. 14). ABS (2013a) data showed that in the suburb in which Williamstown is situated, in 18.5% of homes two or more languages besides English were spoken, while around Pleasantville, two or more languages besides English were spoken in 17% of homes, higher than that in the wider area (15.2%) but lower than the 20.4% national average (ABS 2013b).

The two schools responded to these features of their community context, guided by the desire to assist the families in the area. The Williamstown school is described on its website as a school that “celebrates a diverse mix of students who bring a rich tapestry of prior learning experiences to our school ... 4% of our students identify as Indigenous, 85%

were born in Australia, with 10% identified as ESL (English as a second language)” (WSDs). The Deputy Principal of Williamstown affirmed that children in the area were “vulnerable” in many of the AEDC (2012) developmental domains (WAd). To begin to address the perceived needs in the school community such as the “readiness” of the incoming children, their lack of independence and ability to meet behavioural expectations, as well as the perception noted, in the Deputy’s words, of “under-parenting” (WAd), a Community Liaison Officer (CLO) was appointed by the school to introduce a pre-Prep program to cater for children and families in the time period prior to the child’s entry to Prep (WCon).

The CLO attended the Early Years Summit held by the community to plan ways to support families. Community stakeholders at the summit included educational and local council representatives, together with health and community service organisation representatives such as the Benevolent Society and the Police Citizens’ Youth Club. The aim of gathering together community representatives was to design and plan initiatives to support families across the community (WSD). School personnel acknowledged the need for a community effort in these terms: “We can’t do it on our own, we’ve got to collaborate with the community, work on it together” (WAd). After the initial meeting of local area representatives, further meetings were held, once each school term. A smaller group was established as a working party to coordinate the various initiatives and collaborators involved in the implementation of ideas from the meetings (WCon). The response of those at the initial meeting was for each organisation to take an active role in providing support for families and children, thereby lessening the perceived disadvantage.

The Pleasantville website indicates that 30% of its students experienced two or more languages spoken in their homes (PvSD) and that the school also celebrated the “rich cultural and linguistic backgrounds” (PvSD) of its families. One of the school’s stated aims was to develop positive partnerships with its families and local community (PvSD). As a way to develop these connections, the school had introduced a playgroup in the years prior to the present study. Playtime, as I have called this playgroup, provided an opportunity for parents (mostly mothers), children, and babies to meet together in a relaxed environment. A range of activities was provided to meet the needs of the children attending. The Assistant Principal described the playgroup as a way of connecting families of the community with the school:

It's the connectedness it makes ... for whatever reason, they may never come here, it's always good to have a person who's going to be positive about the facilities and the people who work here in the community. (PvAd)

Both schools were driven by a need to support the families in their community and implemented early years programs to address the level of disadvantage identified. As preparation for school, a pre-Prep program was offered at both schools to support parents and children the period prior to children's commencement at school. Pleasantville's Playtime had a particular focus on providing a social space for community members during those pre-school years. Because of Playtime's location on the school campus and the fact that the Convenor also took pre-Prep, many school families and other families from the community saw the playgroup as part of the transition to school at Pleasantville. Some parents enrolled their child at the school after their experiences in Playtime.

4.3 Informing philosophies

Each school was guided by an underlying philosophy that informed the ways in which it perceived the role it played in supporting families of the community. Williamstown's philosophy is now presented, followed by the philosophy of Pleasantville.

4.3.1 The Williamstown philosophy

As a government school, Williamstown's aim was to provide an educational facility that served the needs of its community. The school's mission statement outlined the aim "to provide quality education in a safe and supportive learning environment", achieved through "a supportive environment which encompasses the total school community" (WSD).

The values that sustained that community included "positive attitudes, collaborative / participative / consultative decision making, early intervention and support, and a safe, caring and supportive environment" which in turn encouraged "positive behaviours of students in their interactions with each other" (WSD).

The website stated that the school staff and parents worked in partnership, and outlined ways in which parents could be involved in the school. Volunteers were reminded, "True partnership is present when caring adults in the home, community and the school support each other in the interest of the child". Suggestions for family involvement at school

included reading and tuckshop. It was also noted that teachers “encourage a high level of involvement of parents both with the school and their child’s education” (WSD).

Williamstown clearly stated a belief that support for children’s education and learning was drawn from the combined efforts of the school together with the wider community, with the family and child at the core of that support. The school considered its implementation of the pre-Prep program as embodying the importance of forming relationships between family, school, and community, with the aim of enhancing learning outcomes (WSD). In preparing families for their children’s commencement in Prep, support for parents and children were key components of the pre-Prep program.

4.3.2 The Christian philosophy of Pleasantville

The philosophy of Pleasantville, an independent Christian school, was espoused in the Principal’s words: “Our teaching and learning and pastoral frameworks endeavour to create a climate where we value each individual in the spirit of hope, care and compassion. We work for justice and sustainability” (PvSD). The school’s website stated that education at the school “involves a close partnership between students, families and staff” (PvSD).

The Assistant Principal explained the basis of how the school operated according to that philosophy:

I do believe in the charisma of this school, in the way that we treat people, the way everyone is included and that’s a given before the family is accepted into the school. We don’t tolerate any form of racism here, or inequality. We believe everyone is a gift of God, and the Holy Spirit, or whatever you want to call it, and we do embrace things a little bit outside the box of what people might say is mainstream religion. But, its essence is probably what Jesus taught in the beginning, to love one another, and to accept people’s differences. (PvAd)

To extend its outreach to the community and offer programs at the Community Centre, the school linked with The National Community Hub Program, part of a national program funded by the Australian Government in partnership with the Scanlon Foundation, The Migration Council Australia, and Refuge of Hope (Scanlon Foundation, 2015). The Hub programs work collaboratively so that schools, community organisations and businesses, and local government authorities can support community members and alleviate disadvantage suffered. The collaboration for Pleasantville involved the sharing of the Community Centre and the Hub facilitator who convened Playtime and the pre-Prep program that the school

provided. In both programs, support for parents was integral: while Playtime was established as a social space for both parents and children to enjoy, the pre-Prep program was introduced to prepare children for their entry to school.

Similarly, at Williamstown, the pre-Prep program was seen as preparation for the children's entry to school. While each incorporated support for parents in the programs, as planning was implemented, a different philosophical approach was apparent.

4.4 Early years philosophies and practices

The philosophies underpinning the implementation of the programs in each school, and ways in which family support was provided, are now outlined.

4.4.1 Philosophy motivates the practices introduced

As the Deputy Principal at Williamstown outlined, the school established the pre-Prep program and worked with local child care centres and early childhood educators. Their aim was to ascertain “where the children are at developmentally”, so that through that awareness, the school knew “what ... we as a school need[ed] to do to meet those needs” (WAd) as the children entered Prep.

The Deputy Principal indicated that as part of the support of the pre-Prep initiative, school expectations were that the program would encourage parents “to do their bit in getting their child school-ready” (WAd). She said that through their experiences in the program and the support activities offered, she hoped that “we're upskilling the parents in some areas of need as well” (WAd). The Convenor said, “If we can see an improvement in the data, in the participation rate and in the engagement rate from parents, then we'd be happy with that” (WCon). One of the aims of pre-Prep was to show parents what their child could expect from Prep and help both child and parent become more comfortable in the school environment (WAd). As the Williamstown Convenor explained,

We're trying to make it a more supportive, alongside of, empower them to go and do what needs to be done to help their child succeed rather than spoon-feed them with everything. It's very much ... well that's why I like them to participate in the activities, it's to model to them what they need to do, so they can go away and do that at home.
(WCon)

At Pleasantville, the approach to providing support and forming relationships in the transition to school began with the introduction of a playgroup as a way of connecting the school with the local community (PvAd), in accord with the school philosophy of outreach and developing relationships with the community (PvSD).

Playtime welcomed families whose children were of pre-Prep ages, and offered children the opportunity to interact with others across the age range, with activities and free play time. In the Assistant Principal's words, it was a place where "the mums can have a cup of tea and [Convenor] can run around after their little ones, it's a bit of respite" (PvAd). A defined aim of the school leaders for Playtime was to provide a supportive family environment in which both parents and children were able to use the group according to their individual needs at this stage of the transition-to-school process.

Like Williamstown, Pleasantville also offered a pre-Prep program as preparation for children's entry to Prep. The Assistant Principal differentiated between the playgroup and pre-Prep, explaining that while Playtime was planned to reach out to families of the community as a place to connect with each other, the pre-Prep program was part of preparing the children for their entry to Prep (PvAD). He said that the pre-Prep program was commenced the previous year in response to a directive from the education authority under which the school worked – "We've been directed to build our numbers up" – and agreed with the basic premise of creating the pre-Prep program, as he saw the need for children entering Prep to have some independence in personal and emotional areas which he had not seen in previous years (PvAd).

Prior to the introduction of the pre-Prep program, Pleasantville had supported families of children entering Prep in a less structured form of orientation. Children from the playgroup commencing Prep the following year were taken into the Prep area of the school and introduced to the teachers, and spent some time in the classrooms (PvAd).

While the purposes behind the introduction of transition-to-school programs at each school differed in some ways, the implementation of them was comparable.

4.4.2 Implementation at Williamstown

The Williamstown response to the concerns expressed in the community meeting was the introduction of Preppy Time, a pre-Prep program that would support families with children who would be commencing Prep the following year. The deputy explained the school’s involvement in the community initiative:

The continuing concern of the readiness of our cohorts as they come to Prep and that’s backed up by the AEDC data. So, they, in most areas in the suburbs our children come from, are vulnerable in most areas, so ... I guess the realisation that it’s got to be community effort, we can’t do it on our own, we’ve got to collaborate with the community, work on it together. (WAd)

Each school took a different approach in its establishment of the early years programs. The Principal of Williamstown chose to use available funds to employ a full-time CLO. That role included planning and convening a pre-Prep initiative to support families whose child would begin Prep the following year (WCon). As parents enrolled their children for Prep they were invited to an information session about Preppy Time.

The Convenor reported that she planned the pre-Prep program to offer children “a variety of developmentally appropriate activities” (WCon). Williamstown’s pre-Prep program ran for a six-month period in the latter half of the year and offered a weekly two-hour session for both parent and child to attend. The elements of the program for Preppy Time are summarised in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. *Elements of a Typical Preppy Time Program at Williamstown*

Activity	Aim	AEDC (2012) domains
Writing activities – forming letter shapes; identifying writing procedures	Developing curriculum-based skills	Language and cognitive skills
Shared reading – descriptions of places, people; specific word meanings in context; linking life to story	Developing elements of literacy	Language and cognitive skills; General knowledge
Show and Tell	Developing oral language	Communication skills; General knowledge
Bumble Bee Song	Developing phonological and phonemic awareness	Language and cognitive skills
Games – skipping; running; ball games	Developing balance and coordination	Physical health and well-being
Team work – working with others and sharing	Developing social competence and emotional maturity	Social competence; Emotional maturity

As part of the rationale for the program was to improve educational outcomes, there was a focus on different aspects of the Prep year Foundation curriculum. For example, a writing activity referred to as “long stick / short stick” involved the drawing of straight lines and an introduction to letter formation, showing children how the strokes were made as a precursor to learning to write the letters in the Prep year. Another activity involved a story about an ant, which guided children in writing from the left-hand side of the page to the right (WCon).

Storytime was an interactive learning experience in which children sat together with the Convenor to read a story. It usually began with predicting activities, in which the Convenor encouraged children to predict what would happen in the story from the cover and the title, and subsequent pages of the book. This shared reading strategy encouraged the children to work out word or unfamiliar expressions in the context of the story (WRO). They participated in story-time sessions by listening, answering questions, and relating their own experiences where they could with the stories as language skills developed.

Another activity in which children engaged enthusiastically was the singing of the “Bumble Bee” song. This song developed phonological and phonemic awareness by encouraging children to identify syllables. It required them to sing the chorus together, and then one-by-one clap a child’s name to show the syllables it contained; parents were often included. For some children, the “show and tell” activity was popular. In this activity, children brought something special from home to share with their peers. All were encouraged to describe the object and its significance, with most children participating, some requiring additional encouragement from the Convenor or parent (WRO).

Other aspects of the program gave children the opportunity to develop their social skills, learn about the expected behaviours in the school context, and join in a range of physical activities in the school hall. Games included those requiring hand-eye coordination and ball skills such as catching and throwing. Skipping up and down the hall or in circles was popular, while running was usually done as a game of relay that depended on cooperation amongst the children. Such games provided a context in which to develop social skills as they required cooperation, sharing, listening, and interaction with their peers, the Convenor, and teacher aide. There was also a focus on the expected behaviours of children in the school context and the location on campus accustomed the children to the school environment. For

example, when leaving the designated Preppy Time classroom to visit other areas of the school, children were often in the care of the Convenor and teacher aide, and were expected to walk with a partner, follow the leader, and move quietly through the school.

School personnel perceived participation in the program as preparation for children to enter Prep in the following year. The Convenor acknowledged that for some parents, attendance would not be possible due to work commitments (WCon). Some parents arranged changes with employers to allow them to attend, while one mother also accommodated shared custody of her child to attend the program (WRO). The Convenor reported that the school had taken a “long-term transition approach” which “allows children and families to develop genuine partnerships and relationships with the school community” (WSD). She perceived that through the activities and visits to different areas of the school, the children would meet and mix with other children as well as adults, with the experiences offering a basis from which they could confidently begin their Prep year (WCon). The teacher aide in the program also observed the development of the children as they progressed through the program, in “the way they do things, from the beginning to towards the end, if you could say, to maturity” (WTA).

4.4.3 Implementation at Pleasantville

The Pleasantville Convenor was appointed as part of the school’s link with The Community Hub Program. She was paid by the school to facilitate a playgroup that involved school families and other community members. Playtime operated throughout the year on three mornings of the week; families with children of pre-school age were welcome to attend any or all of the sessions.

In planning the Playtime program, the Convenor said she began with ideas from the previous playgroup that the Assistant Principal had introduced in the school: “It was a program that had already been operating here so I was growing on that ... it was really my starting point for making those relationships and having those conversations with parents” (PvCon). The Convenor designed a structured program in keeping with her previous experiences. However, parents stated their desire was for an informal, non-structured approach, a social space where the children could interact with their peers under the care of themselves and the Convenor. As a result, the program was planned in consultation with the parents to provide “a space that’s welcoming and safe and I guess trusting as well, that the

parents trust in me to go outside and have some time with their kids while they have some interactions themselves” (PvCon). Each Playtime session was planned with time to allow the parents to chat over a cup of tea, to give children unstructured play, and to have activities that gave all the children the opportunity to work with the Convenor and sometimes one or two parents (PvRO).

Children’s participation in the activities provided by the Convenor accustomed them to a group learning environment in which they were accepting the authority of another adult, yet were still in close proximity to their parents (PvRO). In Playtime sessions, unstructured play afforded opportunities for children to interact and develop social skills, while the mothers sat together chatting and observing the children. During each session, activities varied from colouring, drawing, or craft activities, and one or two mothers joined the children and Convenor at times, encouraging or helping, depending on the task (PvRO). The Convenor set up activities that provided options for play such as “cars, imagination play and creative play, but also ... activity or outdoor play” (PvCon), reflecting the aims of the playgroup where children experienced positive interactions with peers as well as other adults. There were some moments when the children disagreed and had to be reminded to share (PvRO), but as one parent noted, part of the experience was “so they learn turn-taking, more life skills I think” (Pv4).

Parents did not see Playtime at Pleasantville to have the purpose of preparing children for school (Pv4). However, for children who were to commence Prep the following year, it was the first stage of their transition to school, as they progressed from Playtime into the pre-Prep program (PvCon). The Convenor also conducted this program, held in the Community Centre, and it operated in the final term of the school year. She planned the pre-Prep program in consultation with Prep teachers, considering the expectations they had of the children when they started Prep. The aim of preparing the children for Prep is reflected in the range of activities within the program shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. *Elements of a Typical Pre-Prep Session at Pleasantville*

Activity	Aim	AEDC (2012) domains
Tasks requiring fine motor skills – writing drawing, painting, sensory activities	Developing elements of literacy	Communication skills; General knowledge
Tasks requiring gross motor skills – skipping, running, ball games	Developing balance and coordination	Physical health and well-being
Tasks demanding cognitive skills – story time	Developing oral language; listening skills	Language and cognitive skills; General knowledge
Group activities: sharing morning / afternoon tea	Developing social competence and emotional maturity	Social competence; Emotional maturity

The pre-Prep program incorporated a variety of learning experiences which were all part of the preparation of children for Prep. In the words of the Convenor:

They had time in the Prep rooms, they had structured activities down here for about an hour. That would include fine motor, gross motor, cognitive skills, sensory things as well. So we had four stations of different activities that they moved around themselves freely to do that. They also then sat down to have morning tea or afternoon tea together. Just that whole notion of sitting down together, sitting in a group eating and putting your rubbish in a bin and things like that. (PvCon)

In each school, there was a clear focus in the programs on supporting children’s development prior to commencing school. Pleasantville’s Playtime focussed on play and the development of social skills in its small group context. The pre-Prep programs at both Williamstown and Pleasantville incorporated a range of activities related to the AEDC (2012) developmental domains as preparation for the children’s entry to Prep. While Playtime at Pleasantville served as an introduction to a group environment, for some children it was also a precursor to the school’s pre-Prep program. At both schools, then, the pre-Prep programs were implemented to prepare children for school, as the following sections elaborate.

4.4.4 Preparation for school at Williamstown

Preppy Time sessions offered parents and their children a range of preparation activities as children approached the beginning of Prep. During the sessions, children participated in activities that gave them an idea about what they could expect when they commenced Prep. As previously outlined, children joined in group activities, interacting with the Convenor and their peers (WRO). Parents considered the purpose of the program was for

the children to gain familiarity with a range of curriculum content that they identified as preparing them for Prep. Different ideas were expressed, varying in one discussion from, “The play base is good as I think learning social skills is important”, to another who thought more was needed of “reading and numbers and stuff” (WF:M).

As parents reflected on their children’s attendance at Preppy Time, a common element mentioned was the opportunity for them to build relationships as they met and mixed with peers, not just their friends in the group. As the pre-Prep program had more children in it than daycare, parents described it as “more like a class for the following year” (WFg:M). There was agreement that the program helped with “social skills, how to mix with kids they do not know and how to deal with kids who may not be as nice to them as others” (WFg:FP).

These ideas are further reflected in comments such as, “This program is good for him, he will know some kids next year” (WF:FA). For the parent of an only child, the opportunity to mix with others was even more important, “Because he’s an only child ... to get him gradually go into society, so he can interact with other kids, other people” (WF2:14). One parent suggested, “The fact that he’s met other kids and made friends” (WFA3:21) would help her child as he began his Prep year. Another parent commented that she felt her daughter’s participation in the program would ensure there would not be “any issues with her class next year” (WT1:18). Parental responses to the program could be summed up by a statement from a mother who said: “I felt the program was good for her meeting other kids so when she went in she knew a lot of kids which I am sure made things a lot easier” (WT3:11). One mother described Preppy Time activities as providing helpful experiences for her daughter, as “It helps them identify with the other kids. Now when we go shopping and she sees someone from Prep she is very excited” and another said of her son, “We have stories now of best friends, so it is really helpful for him” (WFg:FP).

Parents saw the social aspects pre-Prep offered children as important, as were the activities that introduced them to elements of the curriculum. Such activities were considered as the more academic side of learning in the program: “It shows them writing, counting, also alphabet; it all comes together” (WF:FA). The board-game activities were also very popular, to the point where one parent reported buying the “caterpillar game” (WFA1:21). According to the parents, the children enjoyed learning about letter shapes and the writing process during Preppy Time, particularly through the ant story. They recalled their children’s

enthusiasm for their new writing knowledge: “The long stick/short stick – we practise that at home” (WFA1:21), and, “She didn’t know to start on the left, go across, that sort of thing” (WT2:11). As one mother recounted,

It’s been really good for him because we all teach in different ways. For example, at home I teach him the alphabet, here he learns the cups, tunnels for writing and at child care, they do tracing around letters. (WFA2:21)

Another parent said of her daughter’s experiences:

She has a huge advantage, like doing the short stick / long stick writing stuff, the ant story, we’re doing all that at home; she’s really sucking that in. Then we had to go and buy the caterpillar game ... it’s good so she’s learning all that. (WFA3:21)

As Preppy Time was held in the hall near the oval (playing field), children became familiar with the school and its routines. They saw older children playing and participating in sport lessons, and generally were accustomed to the routines and atmosphere of the school environment. At those times, the Convenor also introduced children to the need to walk quietly, stay in their lines, and take care as they moved around the areas where older children were playing (WRO). She viewed the sessions as assisting both children and parents to “become familiar with some of the school procedures, and I’m assuming that when they start next year, it won’t be so scary and overwhelming” (WCon). There was agreement amongst parents in discussion groups that the familiarity children gained with the physical surroundings would be helpful as they started school the following year (WF:M; WF:T; WF:FA; WT1:4).

Perceived advantages of the program being on campus with activities taking them throughout the school were evident in individual responses, such as, “Now she knows where everything is. It’s not like she’s going to turn up on the first day and be surprised” (WFA1:21); “Going to music lessons and the PE classes. Even having a walk around the school, going to the playground ... going to the Prep classes as well, just to get an idea of how it all works, all that” (WT2:11). Other comments reflected similar ideas: “She is becoming familiar with school environment” (WF:FP); “It will accustom kids to school surroundings” (WF:T), or “It shows what they need to know, what they will be expected to do” (WF:T). Another parent said:

When [older sibling] started Prep, it took him 6 months just to settle into the routine, what needs to be done at a certain time, and being told by someone else what to do. He was completely lost and frustrated. (WT1:18)

Preppy Time was described by one parent as “a good warm up for school” (WF:FP), similar to thoughts expressed by Prep teachers who felt that the program advantaged children and helped to “bridge the gap between day care and school” (WPs).

The familiarity parents noted extended to other aspects of school life such as the overall structure of the day. For example, at snack time the children were required to sit together and eat and wait until permission was given to move (WRO). The routine was similar to the practice at lunchtime in Prep. There were other expectations the parents noted, like the need to “wear shoes, also a hat” (WFg:FA) and that the children needed “to be lining up” (WM1:17) before they went to different locations around the school.

Parents felt that the group environment of Preppy Time enabled children to enjoy the activities offered. One parent described the experiences for her son in these terms: “What he needs to know to have an upper hand when he starts, at everything” (WFA3:21). Another type of learning actively encouraged by the Convenor and many mothers was for their child to “learn independence” (WFg:T). Such learning was observable at each snack time, when the Convenor reminded the children, “Mum won’t be at school. It’s not Mum’s lunch”, so encouraging them to take responsibility for finding what they needed. However, several parents were slow to heed this message, continuing to find their child’s bag, open the lunch and, at the end of the break, put the lunchbox and hat back in their child’s bag. When this occurred, the Convenor made a quiet comment to the parent about expectations of the children (WRO).

In describing what Preppy Time did for her child, one parent explained, “The program gives her extras ... she’ll know what to expect” (WM1:3). Particular aspects of learning were noted in the story-time activities, such as “helping them with their speech” (WFP:14). In one parent’s words, Preppy Time gave the child “the academic side, also the emotional and mental side of it all. I think it’s a big step for them to be going from kindy into school” (WT2:11). As some of the children attended day care on days when not at Preppy Time, the parents had an idea of the activities offered to the children (WRO). They distinguished the activities in Preppy Time as, “Big changes from kindy; has to wear shoes, does not have to at kindy – they say take them off, for example, in the sandpit” (WF:FA). A parent’s statement of the support that she felt the group gave the children encompasses much of what many parents reported:

Just knowing that they're going to be coming here every single day, and this is the sort of stuff they'll be doing. They're looking forward to it, rather than being concerned about being away from me, which is good. (WT1:18)

One mother said, "It's going to be exciting ... the first couple of weeks are going to be different" (WF2:14); another summed up the experience, "My only expectation for Prep is she is happy" (WM1:3). A parent reflected: "I think it's helped [my child] a lot. When she's told something, she knows what to do" (WFP1:21). Another mother took reassurance from how her son performed in the group context: "I was quite concerned with him starting school. He really hasn't had the lead up. So, doing something like this has been great, just to get him a bit more aware of what's expected" (WM1:17). Parent responses revealed ways they felt that the program fulfilled a supportive role in how children were familiarised, which would assist their entry to Prep, to help them "to settle in and know what's expected" (WT1:4). One parent considered that the familiarity the children gained about the school would also be of benefit to the teachers as Prep classes began, offering a wider perspective on school readiness for both child and teachers:

So, when they start next year, they already know this, and they won't have their little crying fits. It makes it good for the teachers as well, they get to know the child and they can take them on further. (WFP2:23)

At the beginning of the following year after children had commenced Prep, 10 parents were again interviewed to reflect on how they felt the pre-Prep group supported the children through the transition period. They shared ideas of first day experiences, including parting on the first morning and how the child adjusted during the ensuing weeks.

When parents gave their ideas of how they perceived Preppy Time influenced their child's commencement at Prep, there was some agreement that it had helped. Parents said the child was "already familiar with the school and the classroom" (WFA2:14), "the children knew the campus and the expectations for behaviour" (WFA3:14), "It was a great idea to help children get ready" (WFP1:21), and "I believe it was a good start, for some kids it might help a lot depending of their daily routines" (WM2:3).

One parent revealed how the school was prepared through contact in the pre-Prep group and had already raised concern about her son:

The school asked to do an assessment of [my child] as they feel he isn't quite ready in some aspects of school life, so we are working closely with the school on this to try and get him up to speed and to be where he should be. (WM1:17)

Prep teachers also noted the advantage that they perceived the program gave by enabling teachers to initiate the process of gaining early support for children: “Normally we’d be half way through the year before we could even say ‘I suspect that something is going on’” (WPs). They felt it was an advantage because the school could gain an awareness of any needs children might present:

The biggest thing is that children with problems have already been flagged. That’s been massive ... that’s been huge. They may not have been diagnosed yet but they’re going down the track, so that’s huge. (WPs)

Parent perceptions of ways in which their children had developed through attendance at pre-Prep were evident in their reports of the first day of Prep classes. In recollecting first day experiences, parent comments reflected the ease with which the children started Prep. “The first day was great” (WFA2:21; WT2:18:18); “remarkably smooth” (WFA2:14); “went well” (WM1:17); “surprisingly well” (WT2:11); “pretty easy” (WFA3:14); “was very good” (WM2:3); or was “no problem” (WM1:3). Parting on the first morning also brought positive reports: “The good-byes were easy” (WFA3:14); “surprisingly easy” (WFA2:14); “okay, no tears – for either” (WMA:3); “[Child] told us it was time to leave” (WFA2:21) or “was very excited and didn’t shed a tear” (WT2:11); “although a little hesitant, [child] didn’t get upset when we left” (WT2:11).

Teachers described the Prep class timetable in the first week as “a staggered start” (WPs), with children doing half days. It was the first year the school had started Prep that way and the feeling was positive amongst the teachers. They felt a difference in having the smaller numbers was that “you could establish those relationships as well, whereas if you have 25, that doesn’t happen” (WPs). It was the Thursday of the first week before the children had a full day in class, then in the second week they attended full-time. When teachers recalled their experiences about the beginning of Prep, they agreed that the staggered start to the year “was fantastic” (WPs), explaining:

Each of us had a half class for half a day. They were calm, they weren’t feeling threatened, and the day was short ... it was a lot more manageable ... you could settle any who were a bit worried. (WPs)

The teachers’ conclusion for Week 1 was, “It worked well, very well” (WPs). Their responses illustrate the impact they suggested that the staggered timetable had in the classrooms in that first week of Prep and their comments indicated that both the children’s

experiences in pre-Prep and the structured start contributed to their ease of entry to the Prep classroom.

When parents considered the ease with which their child began their first day, different reasons for the child's actions were given. Many related the first day experiences to what the children had gained through Preppy Time. One child was said to have been "a little apprehensive but when the time came to say good bye and sit down on the mat she had no problems" (WT2:18). Another parent expected some difficulty but was pleased with how the morning went: "[My child] has always been fairly difficult at drop off when at day care so I was surprised how well she handled the new situation" (WT2:18). For the experienced mother, "Saying good bye was easy for [my child], there were no tears just all smiles. This is third time around for me and so I was fine but we also knew [my child] has been ready for school for a long time" (WT3:11). The social benefits of the program were also considered relevant:

I felt the program was good for her meeting other kids so when she went in she knew a lot of kids which I am sure made things a lot easier. Plus she knew what it meant when the bell went and places around the school. (WT3:11)

For some who had older siblings, other factors contributed:

She had also spent a great deal of time in the classroom last year as I dropped off her sister for Prep and helped in the classroom. I requested the same teacher, so [my child] was already familiar with the teacher and classroom which was an added benefit. It is hard to say which was more beneficial, and probably don't need to decide, but the time in the actual classroom was definitely very valuable. (WM1:3)

In the first weeks of term, parents continued to report positively about how their children adjusted to the new Prep routines:

[My child] is really enjoying Prep and, although still hesitant in the mornings, she is very excited at pick up time in the afternoon. She loves to share her experiences from the day and loves to play "teachers" with her little brothers. (WT2:11)

[My child] loves school, she loves being there every day, to the point that she was sick and was very upset that she could not go to school for a day. (WT3:11)

Yes, she is doing very well. The weeks are going well. She is enjoying and we don't have to make any changes. (WM1:3)

As children began the new Prep year, teachers' perceptions were that the children had an enhanced level of confidence. Prep teachers spoke about some of the differences they discerned in the children compared to experiences of previous years, in the ways in which they settled in and adjusted to teacher expectations. The signs of preparedness teachers were

expecting included a degree of independence in the children in areas like toileting, handling their own lunches, and working as part of a larger group (WPs). While the teachers' perceptions of their present cohort were based on a comparison of children from previous years, their comments reflected the achievement of an important aim of the pre-Prep program, to accustom children to the behavioural expectations in that new field.

Following their own child's successful entry to Prep, parents recommended the program to other parents for different reasons: "It helped in that the children knew the campus and the expectations for behaviour" (WFA3:14), a thought affirmed by another parent also: "I would recommend that parents have their child attend the pre-Prep program if they have the time as it is well worth it" (WFA2:14). An overall piece of advice was, "Don't stress and be really upbeat about them going to school not sad" (WT3:11). Another parent advised, "I just try to impress upon my son that school is a fun learning environment where they get to learn and play" (WFA2:14). As one mother stated, she would

... highly recommend the program to all parents that can attend. I feel the program has made [my child's] start to schooling a fantastic experience. I believe the pre-Prep program has made the start of her schooling experience better than we could have imagined. Over the 6 months that she attended pre-Prep she was able to adapt in her own time and become familiar and comfortable with the surroundings, teachers and other children. It has also helped me prepare for schooling as a parent. (WT2:18)

Parents at Williamstown described positive outcomes for their children from their experiences in Preppy Time, from the familiarity gained with the school's environment and expectations, to the growth in independence and confidence they saw in them as they commenced in their Prep class. Prep teachers commented on the confidence and ease with which the children commenced Prep, attributing the calm start to the year not only to the pre-Prep program but also to the way in which the timetabling had allowed a staggered start to the year which encouraged the settling process.

At Pleasantville, there was also a focus on preparing children for school in the pre-Prep program but while Playtime offered a supportive environment for children, transition to Prep was not its focus.

4.4.5 Preparation for school at Pleasantville

Families of the school and wider community accessed early years programs at Pleasantville first through a playgroup. Children who attended ranged in age from toddlers to

those who would soon commence school. If starting school in the following year, children were also able to attend the pre-Prep program that ran in the latter part of the year. Playtime's location in the Community Centre was in close proximity to the Prep classrooms in the school which added to the children's experiences in the playgroup and for some as they continued to pre-Prep, leading to their schooling at Pleasantville. Playtime's focus was on providing a social setting within which children could mix with peers; parent responses showed how they considered the children gained from experiences in the program. A mother commented on the changes she perceived in her daughter: "It's so good for her socially; she's gone from shy to out there, it has really helped her. She is more patient and understanding, which is really good. She loves playgroup" (Pv5). Another suggested:

I think he has more initiative to do crafts or do something like a game. He gets involved with things like painting, so then he might want to do that at home, whereas he perhaps might not if he wasn't attending playgroup. (Pv4)

They also commented on the familiarity children were gaining with the school environment when talking about how the children became accustomed to the physical location of the playgroup in the Community Centre. One parent described the advantage of the experiences offered to the children through the early years programs:

One of the biggest hurdles for the kids is the new environment, whereas if they're used to that, see a few kids' faces they recognise, it takes a lot of the anxiety away for them I believe. (Pv4)

While attendance at Playtime was not necessarily linked to the children's continuing into pre-Prep and school, Prep teachers considered the location in the Community Centre on the school campus was an advantage for the children, giving them "that familiarity, the structure of the place" (PvFg). They also spoke of the ways that Playtime assisted children, seeing the relationships formed across the group especially helpful when they continued to pre-Prep and school, as knowing each other and the Convenor would be helpful when they commenced in Prep (PvPsFg).

When the children entered the pre-Prep program, those who had attended Playtime were already familiar with the Convenor and the setting on the school campus. Through its location there, parents felt it also offered children familiarity with the school routines, and "the structure of the place" (PvFg).

Parents spoke of the support their children received in the pre-Prep program, recalling their child's experiences in the previous program, described by one parent as "brilliant, really helps the kids" (Pv4), while another added, when considering the introduction of the new program, "The school is different now ... they're a lot more organised, got more structure" (Pv6). Parent comments contrast to the concern expressed by school personnel that they felt children were not adequately prepared for school through that earlier process (PvAd).

Parents whose children were to commence Prep in the following year expected the support given in the newly formed pre-Prep program would familiarise the children with the "educational side of things" (Pv6). They expected it would give children an insight to school in several ways: "She will see the classrooms, know where things are. She will also learn about the structure of the day and begin to understand teacher expectations" (Pv1). Comments made in the focus group discussion explained parent perceptions of the types of support a pre-Prep program offered children: "They'll be more socialised; they are going into the same school, they'll know people" (PvFg).

The Convenor conducted both Playtime and the pre-Prep program which she felt was of benefit to the children. She also said that for the children who had attended the group and commenced school, "They really owned their space, they were so comfortable within the environment because they'd already had such a transitional lead up of coming into the school ... there wasn't any anxiety in that either, it was wonderful" (PvCon).

The newly introduced pre-Prep program was seen by teachers as providing those practical outcomes for children in the initial weeks of school: "They're getting used to not only the learning, but the routine also and being independent" (PvPsFg). They believed that playgroup would "ease the transition into Prep, to get enrolments, to bring families to the school and for the children to be eased into starting school" (PvPsFg). Parents also described the program as supportive and preparing the children for Prep, saying the children would be amongst people they knew, "more socialised ... [and] know people" (PvFg). It was seen as giving children "insight to school" (Pv1) and helping them "adapt to school" (Pv5). Such attributes were also considered essential for parents.

4.5 Preparing parents for school

At both Pleasantville and Williamstown, parent descriptions of how they felt the early years programs supported children as they transitioned to school were in accord with the aims espoused by each school regarding the support the programs would also afford to parents.

4.5.1 Supporting parents at Williamstown

At Williamstown, part of the support offered to families in the early years setting enabled parents to learn about family-school relationships and their role as the parent of a school-aged child. One reason for the introduction of the pre-Prep program was the perceived need to “build parenting capacity” (WAd). The Convenor described the support offered to parents as “more supportive, alongside of, empower them to go and do what needs to be done to help their child succeed rather than spoon-feed them with everything”. Her idea was for the parents to observe during the activities: “It’s to model to them what they need to do, so they can go away and do that at home” (WCon). The deputy explained the support that school personnel envisaged the pre-Prep program would offer parents:

I hope it models to them, ways of working with their kids, as I am concerned at times, a lot of children are under parented and I hope the modelling they get there and the discussions with the Guidance Officer and the other professionals that we have had during the program, that helps with some of that (WAd).

Explaining the meaning of under-parenting, the deputy continued:

I think that parents today often see their obligations in parenting as not including many things but instead seeing the school/childcare or someone else needing to do that part; things like taking the kid to the park, letting them play and take risks and learn about that; reading to kids, story books, and talking about the stories and the characters. (WAd)

The Convenor planned the program with the idea of parent observation and participation in the activities with their children. To her, it was a way of:

getting the parents excited about being involved in their child’s education and being involved in the school’s activities, programs and resources that are made available to them, trying to educate or inform them that those things are there because we feel that they’re to assist them, to help their kids achieve their educational milestones. (WCon)

Parent responses to the opportunity to observe while the Convenor worked with the children showed that overall, they availed themselves of the chance to sit back and observe their children’s interactions with other children of similar age, while some were distracted by

other activities such as phone calls (WRO). As one parent said, “Watching for mums is good, shows us what we can do” (WF:T). It also showed them how their child worked in the group environment, as others commented, “I’m amazed at what she does not know” (WF:FP), “This gives me a chance to see where he’s at, so he’s not struggling” (WFA: 21), and “If we hadn’t have done this, I wouldn’t have known anything about that and she’d be left behind” (WT:2). Parents saw it as an opportunity to learn more about their child and gain insight into how their child acted in a group of children or followed the directions of another adult. They were able to be involved in the group’s activities and could assist or encourage the child’s efforts (WRO).

Staff agreed that it was important for parents to become aware of their child’s development as they observed the sessions. They saw it as a chance for parents to “see where their child sits [developmentally]... in a relaxed way”, for example, where they might be struggling “behaviourally or with certain skills” (WAd). The teacher aide for the program was aware of the learning that parents experienced: “Well, some parents thought their children knew things already, certain things, like counting, or cutting, things like that, then they’re really blown away that their child doesn’t know how to do these things” (WTA).

As further support offered for parents at Williamstown, the school also ran sessions for the parents during Preppy Time across a variety of areas, including nutrition for children and road safety. An example of the workshops was a presentation by the school’s Guidance Officer to parents during one session of Preppy Time, where he discussed ideas about school lunches, general nutritional requirements for children, and bedtime and sleep routines. There was little interaction between the parents and the presenter during this session and only three took the leaflets about nutrition at the end (WRO). While other activities were noted by parents as supportive, presentations such as these brought no comments from them. Parents were more attentive to another presentation on road safety. Prep teachers reported that in previous years, workshops about reading with children or other literacy-based work were not well patronised by parents (WPS). Notably, none were offered during the time the pre-Prep program was running.

An aspect of the program that parents found helpful was the opportunity to move around the school with the children, and as the school buildings were spread across the campus, they were able to familiarise themselves with the different locations of buildings

(WRO). They met office and ancillary staff and teachers from different areas in the school, from the Prep classes, the learning support area, and the library. Parents new to the role of parenting a child at school, or new to the Australian education system, anticipated that attendance at Preppy Time would give them some knowledge about the school. For families whose first child was to commence school, parent responses indicated that they felt better informed through their attendance at the pre-Prep program: “I really didn’t know a lot about what I expected” (WFP1:21). For one mother, it was about the milestone of her daughter beginning school: “I’m getting used to the idea that my little girl’s going to school; because this is our first we don’t know what to expect” (WFA1:21). The knowledge gave them confidence to enter that new field: “It helps parents to know what to do, to know what to expect” (WM1:3); “It’s very overwhelming to come into this massive school, so to be here for half the year to get used to it yourself is helpful” (WT3:11). Another comment was similar:

It’s given me a good idea of exactly what happens, because I was coming in blind, as a first time, this is my first child at school so it’s given me a lot of education, even the parent information day, the introduction to Prep. It’s helped [my child] become more familiar with what’s going to happen at school and where everything is, road safety, all those sorts of things. I’ve only been here the last semester. (WFA2:21)

A parent who already had a child at school also reported the experiences as beneficial, saying, “When my first girl started, I didn’t know what you’re supposed to know” (WFA3:21). Those new to the system were able to learn “how the school works” (WFA2:14). For a family newly arrived from New Zealand, concerns about starting their child at Prep in the Australian schooling system the following year were lessened through the pre-Prep group. “I’m going on their lead to guide me as well. It’s been able to give me a little peep into what’s expected of my son” (WFA1:14).

An Indonesian mother also new to the schooling system in this country valued the experiences pre-Prep offered: “It’s so different here from Indonesia, I think it’s good for me to get an introduction to how the school works, how the teacher interacts with the kids” (WFA2:14). For the young mother from Indonesia, her experience of Australian schools was tempered by the knowledge she already possessed of the schooling system in her home country. Learning about the Australian system gave her the knowledge needed as her child entered it.

Williamstown offered support through Preppy Time to prepare families for their children's entry to Prep. In concurrence with the children's program, parents were provided with workshops and information that the school aimed at building parenting skills of families attending the program. Pleasantville also intended its programs to support parents, but exercised that intention in a different way.

4.5.2 Supporting parents at Pleasantville

At Pleasantville, support for parents was one of the main reasons for the introduction of Playtime: its aim was to support and nurture parents, in keeping with the school's original intentions, and not conceived as preparing them for their child's entry to school.

However, Playtime parents were supported in various ways through their attendance there and responses illustrate that the information shared about practical aspects of the school was valued, giving them a sense of belonging: "You're already part of things" (Pv4) and, as one parent said, it put "a mother's mind at ease" (Pv6) as their children transitioned to school. For a mother who was told about the school uniform shop and the availability of second hand uniforms, the welcoming atmosphere of the playgroup and the advice she received from the experienced parents enabled her to "feel like I've made the right decision about the school" (Pv1).

The Convenor spoke of the benefits parents gained at Playtime. She noted that many who initially came were from the community and it was only after their participation in Playtime that some decided to enrol children at the school, which she felt was due in part to the influence of the relationships formed in the program. Planning for Playtime was in response to parents' wishes and she was pleased with the way it had developed, saying,

It's really turned more into a mothers' club than a playgroup. As long as I'm providing that safe space for the kids to be in and the mums can be interacting and making their support networks with each other, it's working. (PvCon)

Observing the children during Playtime sessions allowed parents to take account of their child's social skills as they interacted with others. Various responses indicated that they thought the opportunity was helpful: "I know more now about what she is capable of. Also I know there are no problems socially for them they can form relationships and play with other children" (Pv1). Another suggested, "For some parents, they might not actually do anything with their child, so that's kind of new to them" (Pv4). One parent described the experience as

“a bit of an eye opener, to see the kids interacting ... because even in a childcare setting, you don’t get to see that” (Pv6). They were able to compare their own child with others and discuss any concerns they may have noted.

For parents whose children continued into the pre-Prep program, support was particularly aimed at preparation for the beginning of their child’s educational journey at school and, as part of the program, the Convenor ran sessions for the parents. In planning these sessions the Convenor adopted a consultative approach, seeking ideas about what would be of interest and relevant to all participants. As a result, sessions included advice about nutritious lunches, information about the school, introductions to school staff, and notification of services available, such as how to access the dental services provided, all to ensure parents were “feeling comfortable about coming into the school” (PvCon).

Responses from the parents at Pleasantville are similar to those of Williamstown’s parents, with positive recollections of the advantages they perceived that they were able to gain as their children were in either Playtime or the pre-Prep program. Parents in both schools observed their children in a group context and reported learning about them through that experience. As watching the children was part of the playgroup experience for those parents, their attention was more focussed than in Williamstown’s pre-Prep program where children were more directly under the care of the Convenor. When parent responses to workshop presentations are considered, the fact that Pleasantville sought parental input to the topics covered brought a response different from Williamstown parents who were expected to show interest in areas over which they had not been consulted, so the school’s agenda to skill parents may have impeded their participation in activities offered.

Pleasantville supported parents through both its playgroup and pre-Prep program as a way to help prepare them as their children entered their Prep year. Both schools had a clear intention, motivated by a desire to support families and improve outcomes for children. The difference evidenced in the support implemented was in Pleasantville’s continuation of its philosophical approach of providing for parents in ways parents nominated as helpful to them. The school adopted a consultative approach about those aspects despite the fact they had identified a lack of readiness in children’s social and independent behaviour at entry to Prep, much the same as Williamstown had noted. However, the Williamstown approach was

one that adopted a stance of knowing how to remedy the problem identified and the program was implemented according to that purpose.

At each school, another important aim of the early years programs introduced was for families to build relationships, in the wider community as well as within the school, with other families as well as with school personnel. The next section elaborates how this relationship building occurred at the two research sites.

4.6 Building relationships

In the programs provided at Williamstown and Pleasantville, parents perceived the opportunity to meet and mix with other parents, including those whose children were already attending the school, was helpful to them as their children transitioned to Prep. Through their attendance at the playgroup and / or the pre-Prep programs, they also met school personnel and became familiar with the positions they held and their roles in the school. As they participated and talked with others, parents were able to learn about how the relationships between families and the school operated and the roles of each party within that relationship.

Staff also perceived benefits to parents in the opportunities afforded to build relationships both with other parents and school personnel. However, at both schools, parents and school staff identified some barriers to the ways in which family-school relationships were perceived.

4.6.1 Relationship building at Williamstown

Williamstown's Preppy Time program was introduced to support the whole family in the transition to Prep and to provide a context within which parents could interact with other families as well as with school personnel.

The Convenor commented on the importance of the relationship building that occurred within the pre-Prep program, saying, "The relationships the parents are forming with other parents, and the staff that they're interacting with, are beneficial"; these relationships were seen as a way to increase parent participation in the educational process (WCon). Aims espoused on the school's website were about the school forming relationships with families of the community, so that staff and parents could work in partnership to enhance the educational outcomes for all children (WSD).

While the parents' focus was on their child's preparation for Prep, most availed themselves of the opportunity to mix with and meet other families of the Williamstown community (WRO) and to meet staff members of the school. Parents acknowledged that the chance to meet other parents was something they appreciated in the time prior to school commencement. As one mother stated, "I've got to know the parents as well, because I'm quite a shy person. I would have just dropped him off but I've really got to know the ladies here" (WFA3:21); another said, "We can talk to each other at drop-off and pick-up times and this is so good for kids too" (WF:FA). Overall the pre-Prep program enabled parents to meet other parents whose children were to commence school in the following year, making connections, considered "Good for parents; we get to know each other, which shows the kids we are all part of the community" (WFg:FA).

Part of the knowledge parents gained through their participation in the programs was about the roles that parents and school personnel played in the education and well-being of the child. Parents learnt how such relationships were perceived by parents of children already attending the school; for parents whose children would soon commence school, the contact enabled them to learn about family-school relationships within the school.

To provoke thought about how parents perceived their position in their child's education, the terms of customer and partner were introduced to parents: would they see themselves as looking for a service from the school, in this instance, an education? Or, would they see themselves as working with the school as partners in the child's education?

When parents were asked to describe their relationship as either customer or partner, they explained or interpreted the terms in different ways. To them, the idea of a customer was someone not directly involved in the educational process; they felt that "an effort was needed if you wanted more" (WFP2: 23). A partner was seen as taking the extra step of working with the teacher and being part of the education process (WFA1:14). Parents with children in the school described the relationship in terms of contact with the teacher who "is willing to discuss my child" (WT1). One parent responded that her relationship was

probably more a partner, the school does tend to involve you; you're trusting them with your child and you feel comfortable with that and you know they're going that little bit extra to help them, so it's great. (WM1:17)

The responses of other parents were similar: “I do feel that I’m a partner, I feel comfortable speaking with the teacher. I speak to my son’s teacher every afternoon, see how he’s going, if there’s any issues” (WT1:18). Another stated, “Yes, [my child’s] teacher is really good, she very much lets you know what’s going on, what’s coming up” (WFP1:21). One parent described the relationship she desired as “a partner ... so I want to basically be there for him, and the school, so it’s not separate ... so that it’s a shared thing” (WM3:10).

Parents had different ways of judging how the family-school relationship worked. One mother described the relationship as a partnership but qualified her answer as “definitely more a partnership, but they probably do a lot more – maybe not a 50/50 partnership” (WM1:3); similarly, another response was, “Not customer ... or partner ... somewhere between ... I pretty much rely on them to tell me” (WFP2:23). When parents considered how they would develop a relationship as their child started school, they agreed that communication with the teacher would help them to perform a supportive role in their child’s education (WM1:3). Parents already involved at the school reported that the family-school relationship depended on how they connected with the classroom teacher, stressed by one parent as enabling parents to support their child (WT2:11).

In the Preppy Time context, the contacts made with school personnel familiarised parents with who worked in the different areas of the school, knowledge that would give them the confidence when advocating for their child in the educational environment they were entering. Staff considered that the pre-Prep program would be an initial opportunity for families and educators to form relationships to support children’s education (WAd). This was in accord with aims espoused on the school’s website to form relationships with families of the community, so that staff and parents could work in partnership to enhance the educational outcomes for all children (WSD). However, only the specialist teachers with input to the day’s program visited the program; no other staff or members of the school’s administration team came (WRO). As part of relationship building, the Convenor noted this aim: “If we can see an improvement in the data, in the participation rate and in the engagement rate from parents, then we’d be happy with that” (WCon).

Prep teachers were asked how they felt parents viewed their role in the educational process. They recalled:

I don't think they see themselves as partners, no not at all. Even the fact that we open up the door in the morning at 8.40 and they should stay here until 8.50, I still have a lot of parents leaving. (WPs)

When they considered their previous attempts to work more closely with parents, teachers reported parent comments of “too busy ... it's too hard ... and there's shift work ... and there's sport” (WPs). When teachers spoke about relationship building, they recollected their experiences from previous years about how family-school relationships operated within the school and were unsure about the roles parents played in supporting their children (WPs). Reasons for the barrier that staff perceived are evident in parent responses that indicated their employment might create a barrier in relation to how they engaged with the school. For many parents, the idea of how they engaged in their child's education was tempered with a consideration of employment or family commitments.

For some parents, there was a reticence to describe the family-school relationship and how they could fulfil their role when their child started school. They felt their situation was complicated because of constraints caused by their employment. For one mother who did not take her child to school or pick him up, there was the concern that she could not “interact with his teacher more” (WFA2:21). Another who worked could only manage the drop off/pick up on two days and felt “disconnected”. She mentioned a blog, the weekly newsletter, and the teacher's email address but described her situation as “a little in the dark” and “struggling” to keep up (WT2:18). For one parent, there was a perceived effort made by teachers, whom she saw as “very up front with everything, you get the information you need” (WM1:17).

Comments such as “I'd like it to be [a] partner” (WFA2:21), “it would be nice to be involved with the school” (WFA1:21), or “I want to be involved ... it's the first time out, just got to see how things go and that sort of thing” (WT2:11) revealed that while some parents planned to be involved, for others, employment demands would impact on how that happened. Family commitments were an influence for a mother of several young children when she considered how she would be involved in her child's education: “Maybe next year, when the twins are older ... I might be able to do one day a week or something” (WFP1:21).

While a contrast is evident between teacher and parent perceptions of how the family-school relationship operated within the school, it must be noted that teachers made general observations about past experiences. Preppy Time parent comments represented a section of

the community that intended to support their children's education and learning, demonstrated by their engagement in that program and their reports of doing some of the activities at home with their children.

Meeting with and learning from other parents was an experience that the Williamstown parents considered enabled them to access the types of information about the school that would assist them as their child commenced Prep. For parents new to the school there was insight into the ways in which the family-school relationship assisted in the education of children and the role which parents could assume in the relationship, although some struggled with how work and family commitments would impact on how they fulfilled that role.

School personnel considered that pre-Prep offered important opportunities for parents to mix with other families, learn about the school, and meet staff members with whom they would work as their child attended Williamstown. Preppy Time parents indicated they also valued the opportunities they experienced in forming such relationships and spoke of their intentions to build on them as their children commenced school. The contrasting perceptions of staff were based on previous experiences, from which they identified a lack of interest or willingness by parents to take on a role in their child's education.

4.6.2 Relationship building at Pleasantville

Both Playtime and the pre-Prep program at Pleasantville offered parents a context in which to build relationships with other parents as well as with members of the school staff. For those whose children continued into pre-Prep, the relationships formed were an important source from which parents learned about the school and the family-school relationships that supported families through the education of their children.

Responses from parents who participated indicated that they felt that the playgroup provided a supportive environment where they could interact with other parents (mothers), increasing their own parenting skills as they also learnt about the school, while their children were mixing with other children and learning to become part of a group. They enjoyed the socialising that occurred at Playtime and related experiences that showed how they valued opportunities that enabled them to meet and connect with other parents and members of school staff. One parent reflected on the role this socialising fulfilled in the transition phase:

“There’s a chance in things like this for them to meet new parents, and then at Prep, they will know others, so good for all the family” (Pv5). One of the mothers commented, “I come to playgroup more for myself almost” (PvFg).

Staff perceived the relationships formed in the playgroup and pre-prep program were valuable to parents, especially for those new to the school: “Some of the ones who go to playgroup have [children] in Grade 1 or 2 and know the ropes and those new mums get to talk to them” (PvPsFg). Teachers considered that through the relationships formed in Playtime, parents new to the school could have their concerns eased, an important aspect as the children started Prep; they described the relationship as a “mentoring” process (PvPsFg).

A parent already involved at the school described the connections formed in Playtime as a form of support for the future, as the newer parents met others familiar with the school: “Then at Prep, they will know others, so good for all of family” (Pv5). Responses reflect how the program was perceived by parents, as one mother described her participation at Playtime thus: “I think it’s more to get to know other parents as well” (Pv4), while another commented, “I think they have helped bring new families to the school, I have made friends with some of the parents already” (Pv1). The words of one parent show the importance parents placed in the program:

It’s a good start for school, for the parents who are going to the school that are going to feel more comfortable leaving their babies at a place. If they get a good feel for the playgroup, and realise it’s attached to the school and the people here are at the school, that’s good. (Pv6)

Through Playtime, the school “created a comfortable place for families to integrate into the school environment” (Pv1). Parents were encouraged by those already involved there to send their children to the school (PvFg). The relationships between the parents were relaxed and friendly and the new parents (mothers) seemed eager to discuss a range of topics, from parenting to learning about the school (PvRO), indicative of the school’s vision for the playgroup.

Playtime was quite informal and the mothers seemed to be friends, as was illustrated by an incident during a focus group discussion (PvRO). As the mothers chatted and the children played, there was a disagreement between two of the children. A little boy hit one of the girls, and the child identified the culprit by pointing and saying “that brown boy” did it. The child’s mother disciplined her daughter, then talked about what her daughter had said.

Their reply was “that’s just her way of showing you who did it” (PvFg); her concerns were allayed and the discussion continued.

As both Playtime and pre-Prep were located on the school campus, and some of the families had children already attending the school, there was opportunity for parents to think about how the school supported families as children continued into Prep and beyond. Parents whose children attended pre-Prep at the school valued the opportunities to meet parents and school personnel, a feeling encapsulated in one parent’s comment about beginning school:

It could be intimidating for some people meeting a whole new set of people like teachers, principals, other parents, so it’s nice to have that familiarity, know how the school works and that, listen to feedback. (Pv4)

The notion of how family-school relationships worked at Pleasantville was relevant to those parents who planned to educate their child at the school, and parents were eager to learn about the school and how that relationship could enable them to play a supportive role in the education of their child. Parents already at the school talked of how they felt about their role in their child’s education and the relationships they had formed with school personnel and their child’s teachers. Their words were in keeping with those in a school newsletter: “The parent-teacher partnership takes work from both sides to become a reality” (PvSD).

Comments showed that parents preferred the notion of being a partner, as they interpreted the idea of partner as someone who was in regular contact with teachers, involved and interested, working with the teacher and being kept up to date with their child’s progress. Parents discussed how they worked with teachers in their child’s education: “I just want the best for them ... I don’t expect them to be doctors and lawyers and all the rest of it I just want them to be able to perform to the best of their ability and I expect the school to do the same – to push them when I’m not around. I think that’s we all expect” (PvFg).

Experienced parents spoke of the key role of their communication with school staff, saying, “You just want to be kept in the loop because your kids aren’t going to tell you” (Pv4). Those parents with children already at the school elaborated on the idea: “If you are making the effort and they [teachers] see you are ... then they [children] will be fine”; or we “work together to resolve things rather than to see the child fail” (PvFg).

Speaking individually, a mother stated she felt “definitely a partner ... it’s just being part of the community, involved in reading in their classroom Yes, that’s what it’s like, I’m

so impressed with this school, I'm very happy so far, which is good" (Pv2). Another parent suggested a similar idea, saying the relationship was part of a team: "You work as a team and see what works best for your child" (Pv4). The mother continued, describing how she saw the parent and teacher roles working together for her children:

I need to check they're doing their homework, they're attending classes, they're working to the best of their ability. I can't expect the teacher to be doing all of that. But sometimes, it's needed for the teacher to say "I want that homework done" and it's more effective than the parent. (Pv4)

Another parent with children already at the school conveyed a strong sentiment of partnership, of working with the teachers: "They are very good with the kids, allowing them to be individuals, just letting them do things in their own time" (Pv6). A parent new to the concept of the family-school relationship accepted the ideas presented by other parents (mothers), and interpreted the relationship she wanted with her child's teachers as, "I want to be involved ... volunteering help" (Pv3). Another adopted a similar stance:

I want to be a partner; I want to be up at the school helping once or twice a week, volunteering in class and anything else. I want to be as involved as I can be. I figure if I am as involved as I can be, then the teacher will know for sure that I'm a caring parent. I think that will mean they will care more for [my child]. (Pv1)

When the topic of relationships within the school was discussed, parents agreed there was a community feeling in the school: "The school's more of a community than anything and I mean they say that a lot, that we're all part of the same community" and they commented on the feeling of acceptance within the school (PvFg). Parents described the cultural and linguistic diversity represented in the school as a unifying influence between members of the school community, reflecting a statement in a school newsletter that "positive relationships between school and families provide support and a solid base for young people" (PvSD).

Individually, parents commented on the influence of the "New Zealand, Samoan, and Tongan population in the school" who were described as "all very family oriented" (Pv6). Another parent described the school community in this way: "It's just made that everyone is equal, everything is even - there are no differences between people. It's just welcoming" (Pv5). The Assistant Principal described the welcoming and inclusive attitude of the school community as enhanced by its many Pacific Island families who he felt gave the school "a family focus". In describing the sense of community that pervaded, he said, "Our community

meet together, they feast together, there isn't that barrier of antagonism or, I guess, secularism" (PvAd). He attributed the sense of community to the Christian ethos of the school, reflected in his words, noted above, that all were accepted according to their Christian teachings.

We don't tolerate any form of racism here, or inequality. We believe everyone is a gift of God, and the Holy Spirit, or whatever you want to call it, and we do embrace things a little bit outside the box of what people might say is mainstream religion. But, its essence is probably what Jesus taught in the beginning, to love one another, and to accept people's differences. (PvAd)

The sense of community was shown in a different way on two occasions when two African mothers came to the playgroup. The mothers were welcomed by all present and responded in a friendly manner, but chose to move to the other side of the hall and had little conversation with the other mothers present (PvRO). The Convenor said that in keeping with the philosophy of the group's establishment, all were welcomed to access the playgroup as they wished, and she would not force them to sit at the table if that was not their desire. While she chatted with them, and the children played with the other children, she made no attempt to involve with the other parents at the table, whose conversations continued after the initial interaction (PvCon).

The contrasting experiences of how families accessed the support given at Pleasantville were highlighted when Prep teachers discussed ways in which the school supported parents as they entered the school community. They raised the concern that in the cultural and linguistic diversity of the school, there was reluctance by some parents when enrolling the children to record that a language other than English was spoken in the home. The teachers' concern was, "They obviously don't realise putting that in is a positive, because they give us extra knowledge and they get extra support" (PvPsFg). The reluctance that staff discerned in parents to identify the languages spoken was also noted by the Assistant Principal, who suggested that not including the information when enrolling may have been because parents did not understand, or "They don't want to feel dumb or stupid or things like that. And of course, it doesn't really help you support them at all". He added that English language knowledge seemed to present a barrier for some parents to volunteer in the classrooms (PvAd).

When teachers shared ideas about family-school relationships and how the relationships worked within the culturally, and linguistically diverse school population, they

spoke of the differences in how the cultural heritage of families influenced parent-teacher interactions. They said African mothers would often say, “You tell him, you do it” and that one mother explained this stance as: “When he’s at school, you are his mother, and when he’s home, I’m his mother” (PvPsFg). When discussing previous experiences about how relationships worked for parents, one teacher said: “I find that with the Samoan families, it’s pretty much a lot of respect... and they indicate ... you need to tell us if he/she is not behaving” (PvPsFg).

Pleasantville began forming relationships with families by welcoming them into Playtime at the Community Centre. The realisation of the school’s attempt to connect with families in that program is illustrated in parent responses about the community environment it created. Parents also reported that a feeling of acceptance pervaded, seen by the Assistant Principal as part of the school’s Christian philosophy to welcome and nurture all members of the community. However, a concern was raised by school personnel that even though these families were credited with creating much of that sense of community, they were not showing they were comfortable in accessing the support the school was willing to provide for them.

In summary, both Pleasantville and Williamstown introduced early years programs as support for families as children approached entry to Prep. Responses from families and school personnel were on a positive note about the experiences of parents and children as they participated in Playtime or the pre-Prep program at Pleasantville, or Preppy Time at Williamstown. In both Pleasantville and Williamstown, there were signs that as children progressed through the school, the relationships formed between families and the school in this low-SES, CALD area were not always enacted in the ways the schools envisaged; however, staff and parents alike acknowledged a need for the relationships in supporting children’s education.

The following section outlines ways in which the introduction of the early years and transition-to-school programs at each school share both similarities and differences.

4.7 Summary of similarities and differences

The Williamstown and Pleasantville schools were situated within the same low-SES, CALD area. Each school sought to address disadvantage, particularly the vulnerability of children in developmental domains as identified (AEDC, 2012) but the motives to do so

differed. Williamstown was a state government primary school with the aim of improving educational outcomes for children. By providing early years support for families through a pre-Prep program, the school anticipated that children could be prepared for school and parents educated in ways to assist their children.

At Pleasantville, influenced by their Christian philosophy, the school sought to reach out to families of the area, to provide support and nurture children and their parents in the years prior to children beginning school. A playgroup for families with children in the birth to pre-school age group and a pre-Prep program for those whose children were soon to enter school were seen by Pleasantville personnel as fulfilling their role as supporting families in the community.

However, whilst both schools sought to address disadvantage by providing support to parents and children, the motives of each school differed as both were responding to systemic directives for the introduction of a pre-Prep program. Williamstown was driven by a need to improve its academic results; Pleasantville by a need to increase enrolments at the school.

In both Williamstown and Pleasantville, leaders positioned their school as part of the local community, recognising that working with the community would produce the most comprehensive results. Williamstown participated in an Early Years Summit which included a range of educators, community organisations, and government agencies. An outcome of the summit was that Williamstown introduced a pre-Prep program as their contribution in addressing some of the concerns expressed. While Pleasantville had offered a playgroup for a number of years, they linked with the Scanlon Foundation and the National Community Hub (2015) to provide a playgroup that welcomed members of the wider community as well as school families; later, the school also introduced a pre-Prep program. Both schools similarly acknowledged the value of collaborating within the community, but acted independently. No appreciation of a collective impact approach was evident. Each school maintained links with community organisations but worked individually, implementing programs according to how school personnel considered the perceived needs within the school could be addressed.

In the introduction of their early years programs, both Williamstown and Pleasantville identified the importance of investing in support for families in the years prior to children's school commencement. At Williamstown the investment in the pre-Prep program was openly linked to ensuring children were better prepared for entry to Prep. Pleasantville's Playtime

was not introduced for that purpose, but the pre-Prep program did have that expressed aim. The school had previously operated a less-structured approach to Prep entry, but as noted by school personnel, children displayed signs of immaturity such as lack of toilet training or independence (PvAd) which the school considered the newly introduced program would address. When considered in this light, despite the different philosophical motives for introducing early years support, both schools made a judgement about parenting practices through a description of children as not showing the independence expected for Prep, or as being emotionally immature. Pre-Prep was expected to correct this lack, hence Pleasantville and Williamstown were also preparing parents for school in addressing parenting practices.

For each school to fulfil the aims of the early years programs introduced, Convenors devised programs to provide support for children and their families in the period prior to children beginning school. The pre-Prep program at Williamstown included academic and other activities that introduced children to elements of the curriculum they would encounter in their Prep class (WCon). Pleasantville's Playtime followed an unstructured program that gave children individual and group activities, and parents a setting where they could socialise with other adults. The Pleasantville pre-Prep program, like Williamstown's, focussed on elements of the foundation levels of the Australian curriculum. In both schools, parents and school personnel indicated that they felt children were supported according to their perceptions of what the programs could offer. At Pleasantville, Playtime provided an opportunity for children to develop social skills, and the pre-Prep programs at both schools were seen to prepare children for a confident entry to Prep. Another common comment made by parents and staff at both schools was that the programs' location on the school campus gave children and parents the added advantage of familiarity with the school environment.

Differences in planning are evident when the underpinning approach of each school is considered. Each school stated that an aim of its programs was to support children and parents. At each school, the pre-Prep children's program was planned by program Convenors in consultation with Prep teachers. At Williamstown, school personnel also planned the workshops and information sessions for parents but with no consultation with parents about the content. At Pleasantville, Playtime was planned by the Convenor according to parental wishes and the parents' sessions during the pre-Prep program were also planned in consultation with them. However, use of parent knowledge did not extend to the pre-Prep program planned for children and, at both schools, these programs were planned without

parental input. The intention at Williamstown and Pleasantville was to deliver the best possible support to families, with pre-Prep at each school including an aspect of preparing parents for school. However, the approaches taken show that as programs were planned, neither school adopted a strengths-based approach (Lopez & Louis, 2009) to utilise the social capital of parents. A need perceived for such an approach is important when another aim at each school was building the family-school relationship.

Each school espoused an aim to build relationships with parents as part of their educational philosophy; the building of these relationships began in the early years programs. Williamstown saw a need for the pre-Prep program to encourage parents to interact with their children and to take an active role in their education. The deficit views held by school personnel were evident as they recalled previous experiences in which parents were not taking up an active role. Parents participating in Preppy Time, with children already at the school, considered themselves to be partners in the educational process; those whose children were to commence Prep stated their intention to take on such a role. The only reticence noted in parent responses was their ability to do so in accordance with employment and family commitments. Parents at Pleasantville voiced similar comments: those already at the school considered themselves partnering with teachers in their child's education; those with children about to enter Prep also had that intention. No Pleasantville parents mentioned employment or family matters as deterrents to their involvement.

Again, the deficit perceptions held by Williamstown staff about parents could affect the ways in which parents interacted with them. At Pleasantville, educators' comments about their experiences with parents could also affect how family-school relationships developed. Observations about the welcoming and community environment at the school contrasted with the reluctance of some parents to acknowledge languages additional to English in their family background. In each context, differences in perspectives between parents and the deficit perceptions held by school personnel may inhibit the establishment of authentic family-school relationships that support the education of children.

School personnel and parents from Williamstown and Pleasantville saw that the early years programs gave the parents attending them the opportunity to meet other families of the school and wider community and begin to form relationships with each other that would offer

mutual support as children commenced school. Parents were also able to meet some of the school personnel and have some knowledge about the roles each played within the school.

At both Williamstown and Pleasantville, parents commended the opportunity parents had in the playgroup and / or pre-Prep program to form relationships with each other and to meet school personnel, considered important elements of support as children entered Prep. There were perceptions that the programs had a positive impact for families in the years prior to children's school commencement, with similar ideas mentioned at both schools.

Parent comments on the support that the pre-Prep program at Williamstown provided for children were in accord with the perceptions staff held of the advantages they discerned as children commenced Prep and in the settling process over the following weeks. Prep teachers attributed how quickly the children settled in the first few weeks of Prep to the pre-Prep program, but also to the adjusted timetable that gave both staff and children a gradual lead-in to the year.

At Pleasantville, Prep teachers and the Convenor also considered that the pre-Prep program had prepared the children for a confident entry to Prep, and the Assistant Principal noted a difference in the children coming through the newly introduced program as compared to previous years. A comment common to both schools was that as the playgroup and pre-Prep programs were located on campus, children gained familiarity with the school environment.

At Williamstown, staff were pleased about the opportunity Preppy Time gave the school for assessment of any needs the children might have, which could be carried out in conjunction with support teachers or the Guidance Officer during the pre-Prep period, a feeling also reflected by a parent whose son was identified in this way and was able to access support early in the Prep year. The same benefit was highlighted at Pleasantville, where school personnel and parents noted that through contact in pre-Prep, the school was able to adapt ways in which the child was supported into their Prep class during the early part of the school year.

Overall, there were a number of similarities in the ways Williamstown and Pleasantville approached the support of families in the surrounding area as children transitioned to Prep. The differences that ensued from the contrast in philosophical beliefs were also apparent. The main findings can be identified as follows.

4.8 Key findings

A key finding to consider about the programs at both Williamstown and Pleasantville was that each school was situated in a CALD area, and both schools considered that they catered for the needs of families of the area. However, there was minimal representation of that diversity apparent amongst the parents attending the programs at either school. While participants at Williamstown reflected some aspects of that diversity, it was not represented in the participants at Pleasantville.

Other important findings were that although the importance of working with the community was evident in each school, neither participated in a collective impact approach (Kania & Kramer, 2011), but instead planned and implemented programs according to needs perceived by the schools. Additionally, planning of programs did not take a strengths-based approach that utilised the social capital parents possessed; instead, programs were planned by school personnel. In this way, at each school, a difference was shown between the philosophy espoused and that underpinning ways in which enactment of programs occurred. As a result, another key finding was that the deficit perceptions held by school personnel impacted on the ways in which the programs were able to provide opportunity for the development of the family-school relationships desired by each school.

The following chapter discusses the findings from Williamstown and Pleasantville, considering the apparent similarities and differences between schools. It considers the engagement practices evidenced and the ways in which each school sought to build family-school relationships through the playgroup and pre-Prep programs. The discussion is framed around social capital theory, a theory that emerged from Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and field, to reflect contemporary issues in education and society. In doing so, a strengths-based approach will be compared and contrasted with a deficit approach in order to consider how schools might support families to reach the expectations that dominate in the educational context. Findings will be discussed in the light of the complexity of modern society and the diverse range of ideas and beliefs that abound. The discussion will conclude by addressing the overarching question of the study of how the playgroup and pre-Prep programs can create authentic family-school relationships.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of research carried out at the sites of Williamstown and Pleasantville to answer the research question “How can early years transition-to-school programs engage families in authentic family-school relationships?” In doing so, it draws on a conceptual framework based on social capital theory, which offers insight into issues arising in the communities in which the schools are located. The relevant concepts are used to describe how relationships are formed and developed by the schools in this study. A collective impact model provides a basis from which to consider how schools and community organisations can work together to engage families. A framework that offers guidance for school personnel and parents about how family-school relationships could be developed is outlined. Elements of Lopez and Louis’s (2009) SBEP (strengths-based educational practice) are contrasted with a deficit approach to further extrapolate findings about the relationships developed. The SBEP acknowledged that all people possessed skills and resources which could be drawn upon, whereas the deficit view (Gorski, 2012) ascribed deficiencies within individuals, assuming there was nothing on which they could draw, thus explaining unequal outcomes within a community.

The chapter is structured in three parts according to the supporting questions that guide the analysis and discussion in each part. These supporting questions are:

- How are early years transition-to-school programs enacted?
- How do early years programs engage families?
- Do early years transition-to-school programs create authentic family-school relationships?

The first part addresses the enactment of programs at each school and how the underlying school philosophies influenced the implementation of them. The second of the supporting questions is addressed in the next part of the chapter where there are four sections. First, parents’ engagement in the playgroup at Pleasantville and in the pre-Prep programs at both schools is discussed. The following section addresses findings that all families represented in the community were not accessing the support programs the schools provided.

Next, children's engagement in the programs is outlined. The final section discusses the ways in which the transition-to-school programs prepared children for school.

To consider the final supporting question, the third part of this chapter discusses the nature of relationships formed in the programs and how relationships are perceived by staff and parents at each of the schools. It comprises three sections. First, the types of relationships formed in the playgroup and pre-Prep programs are considered using a social capital framework. The social capital dimensions of bonding and bridging are outlined before the relationships are discussed. In the next section, parent and staff perceptions of family-school relationships are considered. In the final section, factors that affect the nature of relationships in the low-SES and CALD community, and what they look like in Williamstown and Pleasantville, are discussed, revealing the different expectations of families that are noted by teachers.

In the concluding part of the chapter, the overarching research question of how early years transition-to-school programs engage families in authentic family-school relationships is addressed, and whether the potential of the programs is realised is discussed.

5.2 Enacting programs

The first of the three supporting questions concerns schools' enactment of transition-to-school programs to engage families of the community. Both schools sought to address needs perceived in their communities through the introduction of early years support programs – a pre-Prep program at each school, and a playgroup at Pleasantville.

5.2.1 A collaborative approach

Initially, both schools saw the benefit of a collaborative approach to addressing the concerns perceived in the community. School leaders at both schools participated in community-arranged meetings to identify the best means of addressing these concerns and to plan initiatives to improve outcomes for children in the community. Both schools acknowledged there was a need for the combined efforts of schools and the wider community to engage families in relationships that would support them in the education of their children. Notably, representatives of community agencies and local services attended these meetings but no parents were involved. The absence of parent voice in the community consultative

process indicated a lack of recognition of the social capital present in the community (Perkins et al., 2002) and little opportunity for parents to exercise their capacity to play a meaningful role in their child's learning (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). The result was that the knowledge of community resources was not utilised. The potential to support families and to develop the role of the parent as "equal partners in education" (Auerbach, 2012, p. 31) was not realised.

While the initial actions of both schools showed an awareness of the power of working collaboratively with parents, the processes undertaken were not those of a collective impact approach as proposed by Kania and Kramer (2013). The collective impact model Kania and Kramer proposed foregrounds the importance of working as a group to understand the needs of the community. In the model, procedures involve a process through which an understanding of the local issues is gained, ideas are jointly considered, actions are taken and all are then held "accountable in making progress" (p. 12). Williamstown participated in the Early Learning Summit and, while participants at this Summit did form an organisational group, there was no coordination of the actions of individual organisations within the group. As a result, organisations such as Williamstown acted independently, introducing their own initiatives. Williamstown reported on their transition-to-school pre-Prep program at regular meetings but were not accountable to the organisational group and the school continued working towards its own aim of supporting families as children transitioned to school. At Pleasantville, work continued in the community and the school worked with the Hub program (part of a national program funded by the Australian government in partnership with the Scanlon Foundation, the Migration Council Australia, and Refuge of Hope [Scanlon Foundation, 2015] which helps alleviate disadvantage in communities) as they supported families in the community. Playtime offered a supportive environment for families, and it sought to continue that support through its pre-Prep program as a transition to school.

Researchers in other disadvantaged communities have shown the benefit of a collaborative approach. These include Freiberg et al. (2005) and Freiberg et al. (2010) who involved local schools and community groups in the Pathways to Prevention project to develop supportive family-school relationships as children transitioned to school. These authors argued that cooperation between schools, families, and the community could help empower families to overcome the challenges they faced. Similarly, American researchers Warren et al. (2009) found that a collaborative approach between community-based

organisations and schools gave schools a better understanding of “the culture and assets of families” (p. 2214). They found an additional benefit was that in the process, families gained a sense that by working together, they were empowered and could then present concerns to the school from a group perspective.

In both schools approaches took different forms, but neither aligned with the model proposed by Kania and Kramer (2013). While each school espoused collaboration, Williamstown acted individually to address the perceived needs of school families. Pleasantville also acted to meet the perceived needs of school families; however, at the same time, it remained focussed on its wider commitment to care for community members. Possible impacts from the actions taken at each of the schools can be appreciated when findings from research mentioned previously are considered (Freiberg et al., 2005; Freiberg et al., 2010; Warren et al., 2009). In each of these cases, the acknowledgement of strengths within the community formed part of the actions taken to improve circumstances for families, and outcomes illustrated that parents were empowered as a result.

The implementation of the pre-Prep program at Williamstown made no recognition of the community’s strengths, but assumed that the school knew what was needed for support of families. While Pleasantville consulted parents about Playtime, it also assumed the school knew best in how to prepare children for school through its pre-Prep program. Perceptions of the approaches taken at each school are now examined more closely.

5.2.2 Informing perceptions

Both Williamstown and Pleasantville established early years programs in an endeavour to support families and meet needs perceived in the surrounding community and among school families. Mills and Gale (2010), reflecting on findings in a low-SES Indigenous community, argued that care was needed when schools adopted a “school knows best” (p. 119) approach, which is how the actions of schools in this study could be viewed. An earlier study (Cairney & Munsie, 1992) also identified the importance of the parental input to which Mills and Gale alluded and noted the necessity of including parental voice in planning actions that respond to community needs. In doing so, that approach avoided a deficit view, which Gorski (2012) described as an assumption that parents and families are in some way unable to fulfil the expected role in their child’s education.

5.2.2.1 Parents' knowledge and skills - Williamstown

At Williamstown, an aspect of the pre-Prep program related to the provision of support for parents. This support consisted of workshops for parents and the opportunity for them to observe the pre-Prep sessions. There was no parental consultation about the content of the workshops and a stated purpose of the observation opportunities was to model for parents how to “work” with their children. In Bourdieuan (1985) terms, this amounted to skilling parents in ways acceptable to school expectations and increased the capital required and recognised in the field, thus giving parents the skills and resources they needed to operate in that context and fulfil their expected role.

However, Piller (2016) found that in dismissing different styles of family interactions with children that did not fit with school expectations, and therefore not acknowledging the contribution parents might make to the educational environment, the parents' position as members of the school community was devalued. In that sense, they were separated in the eyes of the school, seen as different or “other” (Udah, 2017, p. 4), which according to Uдах created barriers within a community, so inhibiting the development of relationships. Williamstown advocated the development of relationships through their pre-Prep program; however, the types of capital developed through the program might not prove useful to parents unless school perceptions of them changed, and they may therefore continue to lack the agency that Goodall and Montgomery (2014) noted as an essential element of the family-school relationship.

5.2.2.2 Parents' knowledge and skills - Pleasantville

At Pleasantville, as Playtime was introduced, the Convenor initially planned the program; however, when parents indicated the preferences they had for the group's structure, planning changed in accord with parents' ideas. By acknowledging these, the school was responding to parents as capable of knowing how a playgroup could provide a supportive environment for both children and parents. Such a response acknowledged the social capital parents possessed (Perkins et al., 2002) and also recognised the parent as the child's “first educator” (SMSR, 2006, p. 15), conceding that a parent knows best about the learning, development, and well-being of their child. Research by Pushor (2012) in Canadian schools made a valid point about the parental role that aligns with the descriptor of parents as educators. She suggested that parents had knowledge about their child because of their role of

“nurturing and guiding the growth and development of a child” (p. 471). Therefore, utilising the knowledge parents bring to the educational context is vitally important and the need to see them as continuing in the educative role is essential. Parent input was utilised at Pleasantville when workshops associated with the pre-Prep program were planned in consultation with parents, again acknowledging the skills and resources parents already possessed, as social capital theory suggests is worthwhile (Perkins et al., 2002). However, Williamstown introduced workshops in accord with their perceptions of what parents needed to fulfil their role as their child entered Prep. Whilst the intention of each school in the current study was to support families as children transitioned to school, neither school consulted with parents about the pre-Prep programs that were to prepare children for school entry, thus giving no recognition to parents as educators.

5.2.2.3 A prevailing deficit view

In the implementation of programs at each school, the notion of a deficit influence became apparent when the introduction of the pre-Prep programs was considered. A concern raised in the present study is that, as Williamstown referred to AEDC (2012) data, references to the disadvantage of the area and vulnerability of families introduced deficit descriptors to their discourse. The difficulty the school faced then was that discussion of the enactment of support measures may have been vitiated by a deficit view.

Pleasantville’s pre-Prep program, like that at Williamstown, also aimed to prepare children for their entry to school. The Convenor planned the program in consultation with Prep teachers to focus on the practical aspects of promoting children’s independence. There were signs at Pleasantville of a deficit perception of children entering Prep, as previous Prep cohorts were described by staff as not sufficiently prepared emotionally and physically for school and academic success.

Considering the implementation of the pre-Prep programs at Williamstown and Pleasantville in this light, there is indication of a deficit perception by school personnel who were strongly focussed on their intent to provide support. At Williamstown, the Convenor stated that through the program, the school would provide the resources needed to enable children to reach the milestones considered necessary for entry to school. The presumption that the school would provide the resources to assist families in its efforts to support both parents and children discounted the personal skills and resources, or social capital, available

within families or the wider community (Perkins et al., 2002). A similar approach was taken at Pleasantville to prepare children for school, where the perception of children as lacking is comparable to the reports of “under-parenting” noted by staff at Williamstown.

At both schools, enactment of support in pre-Prep was to address needs perceived in the child. In Bourdieuan (1985) terms, the pre-Prep programs could be viewed as attempting to develop in children the cultural and social skills perceived as required in the educational environment. Concerns raised by this study of the perceived need to “fix” children were similarly noted by Parnell and Iorio (2015), who cautioned against assuming that “children are empty and we, as the adults, must fill them up with numbers and letters to develop their brains, so they know how to please teachers” (p. 210).

Such a mindset undermined an aim of the programs to support families. The resources families possessed were not recognised, and a deficit mindset was evident in the implementation of support. As Auerbach (2012) argued, such an approach gave none of the power needed by parents for them to assume a meaningful role in the education of their child.

5.2.2.4 Parent self-efficacy

In contrast to that deficit perspective, parent responses at both schools indicated there was a sense of self-efficacy achieved. This was reflected in their reports of learning about how the school operated and the roles of different school personnel, which gave them a sense of control as they entered the school environment.

Parents at Williamstown considered participation in Preppy Time as an opportunity to support and extend their interactions with their children. Their perception of what could be learnt through observations of the pre-Prep sessions reflected a sense that their parenting practices were affirmed; their responses contrasted with the negative perception held by staff that parents needed to learn how to interact with their children. On the other hand, feedback from parents about workshop presentations was not sought, but was observed by the researcher where parents’ lack of interest was noted. At Pleasantville, parents were consulted about such workshops and chose the topics that were presented. Parents who attended the playgroup that they had helped to plan also noted the learning opportunities that Playtime presented to observe their child in the group context and to both affirm and learn about their parenting practices. Parent perceptions such as these can be related to Goodall and

Montgomery's (2014) continuum of parental engagement with their children's learning. They show that they considered themselves competent as parents, seeing themselves as beginning the process of forming a relationship with the school, and expecting to grow into that relationship as they continued to develop the role they would assume as a parent of a school-aged child.

5.2.3 Summary

Findings revealed that a deficit mindset influenced the enactment of the pre-Prep program at each school. Pleasantville's Playtime acknowledged the social capital of the families attending, an attitude which it continued into its planning of parental support during its pre-Prep program. However, a deficit perspective was revealed in the implementation of the pre-Prep programs, ignoring the social capital that families possessed (Perkins et al., 2002). When such a view was taken about parenting styles and children's developmental levels, as Bloch and Kim (2015) asserted, there was indication of a view of the community as "lacking, at risk, deficient" (p. 15).

Such perceptions could affect ways in which family-school relationships developed. For the schools to realise the potential that early years support in transition-to-school programs afforded in building relationships with families, Kuttner's (2016) notion of availing all of equal opportunity in the context of the present study is relevant. Support in the transition programs would acknowledge the individual circumstances of all families of the community and ensure they received the support they identified as meeting their individually different needs.

Working from that perspective, the schools could then be on a pathway towards the type of authentic family-school relationship that Auerbach (2012) suggested was possible when schools accommodated the diversity of its community. The following section examines how families were engaged in the programs provided.

5.3 Engaging families

The second supporting research question – "How do early years programs engage families?" – is now discussed. The aim of Playtime at Pleasantville was to engage families and build relationships with them. At both schools, the pre-Prep programs were enacted to

build relationships, but this was couched in terms of supporting families in the transition-to-school period. In reality, relationship building in those programs meant the schools brought the parents to the point where a relationship with the school meant the power was balanced in favour of the school and the parent role was one that accommodated school expectations, with no agency afforded to parents.

5.3.1 Engaging parents in early years programs

Both schools sought to engage families through programs introduced and saw these programs as a first step towards establishing family-school relationships. At Pleasantville, parents supported each other as they mixed in the playgroup and they revealed confidence about being a parent in the ways they affirmed each other as they responded to their children and discussed how they could fulfil their parental role in their child's educational journey.

At each school, part of the aim of the pre-Prep programs was to address what the schools perceived as a lack of parenting skills, by planning and providing support for parents. At Williamstown, the school's intention in Preppy Time was to model ways in which parents could work with (in other words, teach) their children, thus encouraging them to become involved in their children's education. Findings revealed that ways in which support was introduced in the pre-Prep program at Williamstown tended toward addressing the under-parenting perceived, whereas a consultative approach at Pleasantville meant support to parents was given through pre-Prep in terms of what parents themselves considered was needed.

In contrast to school perceptions that parents at Williamstown needed such guidance, parent responses suggested otherwise, indicating they were interested and engaged in their child's development. The differences in these perceptions are reminiscent of the situation Pushor (2012) described of personal interactions with her child's school. She felt her role as a parent who knew her child was ignored in favour of school perceptions of the role parents played in education. However, the perceptions that school personnel at Williamstown had of parents of previous years at that school cannot be applied to parents who attended Preppy Time, as they revealed involvement and competence in their parenting role.

At both schools, parents reported positive experiences in the pre-Prep programs. The comparison of parent and staff responses highlights the deficit perception that underpinned

the enactment of the pre-Prep program at Williamstown. This contrast was also part of the mindset at Pleasantville, as part of the pre-Prep program's purpose was to address the deficiencies observed in children's independence and maturity, showing that a changed staff perception was also needed to ensure that a family-school relationship respected the parent role in it. The comparison of the schools' practices suggests that a relationship that foregrounds the place of the child, as described in Epstein's revised (2001) framework, may not be achievable until perceptions of parent practices are problematised and parents' social capital acknowledged.

At Pleasantville, findings revealed that the school involved parents in some aspects of planning. However, for change to be realised in engaging parents, those practices need to extend to all aspects of school engagement practices. The attitude that parenting practices were inadequate was evident at both schools in the need shown to prepare children for school through the pre-Prep programs. It was an attitude of the school knowing what parents needed (Mills & Gale, 2010) or, as Auerbach (2012) suggested, schools wanting to "fix parenting practices" (p. 34). In both schools, it was apparent that the idea of developing a family-school relationship could not eventuate as long as that deficit mindset prevailed. The type of relationship Epstein's (1995) framework identified as ideal was one that assisted parents, unlike the attitude that sought to somehow "fix" them. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) likened the developing relationship between parents and school as movement along a continuum. They described it as a relationship that saw roles change as parent agency gradually developed and it became more equitable, but the idea of developing such a family-school relationship could not eventuate until school personnel changed their perception of parents.

Epstein (1995) found that when schools offered programs to assist parents to support their children's learning, relationships developed because parents felt supported and understood their ongoing role as their child progressed through school. In the present context, both schools saw themselves as providing the setting in which such relationships could occur. However, the underlying deficit perceptions discussed were not conducive to building the relationship Epstein envisaged. Instead, as Mills and Gale (2010) suggested, to change the approaches taken at the schools, teachers need understanding of the values and beliefs of families so that respectful relationships develop.

The self-efficacy of parents in Williamstown and Pleasantville can increase when their role is acknowledged as making a difference in their child's life. When that occurs, the suggestion by Harris and Goodall (2008) that parents "need to know they matter" (p. 286) can become a reality for parents in both schools. To achieve such understanding, practices at the schools need to change, and such changes need to be initiated by school leaders.

5.3.1.1 The influence of leadership

The pre-Prep programs were introduced at each school in response to systemic directives or concern for children in that community. At Pleasantville, the school was directed to increase enrolments, and with that in mind, a pre-Prep program was planned and implemented. It replaced the informality of previous practices that saw children in playgroups participate in visits to Prep classrooms and other areas of the school. At Williamstown, educators held continuing concerns about the readiness of local children as they came into Prep, concerns that they stated were "backed up by the AEDC data". Reports on findings from AEDC (2012) data show that children in low-SES communities are identified as vulnerable in areas that may affect their learning and so make them at risk of failure as they enter school. The schools' response was the introduction of the pre-Prep programs.

Previous research found that in schools in low-SES and CALD areas, differences in socio-economic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds of families often changed ways in which parents engaged with schools (Denessen et al., 2007; Lemmer & van Wyk, 2004). Mapp (2003) found that changes initiated by the principal that acknowledged the important role parents played resulted in positive interactions between school personnel and parents that encouraged the development of family-school relationships.

In the schools in this study, the support of school leaders for the development of family-school relationships was seen in the intentions that underpinned the implementation of the early years and pre-Prep programs. Although a deficit perception is noted in aspects of that implementation, the intention to make a difference in the community and for families was also evident. To realise that potential, a more in-depth understanding of the community is necessary, as suggested by Daniel (2015), who stressed that the opportunities schools provided to engage with families needed to be in accord with family values and beliefs, not with the expectations schools had of how the family-school relationship was developed.

5.3.2 Engaging all families of the community

At Williamstown and Pleasantville, participation in the pre-Prep programs was voluntary and provided early years transition-to-school support for families whose children were to commence school in the following year. Both schools were aware of the low-SES and cultural and linguistic diversity present in the communities surrounding them; Williamstown noted also that not all children starting Prep the following year were attending Preppy Time. As this program was provided as afternoon sessions during the school day, schools assumed that the absence of families was due to parents' work or other commitments.

The schools introduced the playgroup (at Pleasantville) and pre-Prep programs (at Pleasantville and Williamstown) to address needs perceived in their communities. The expectation when embarking on this study was that, when census data (ABS, 2011) for the area were considered, representation of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the community would be present in the programs. Within these communities, 18.5% of households at Williamstown and 17% at Pleasantville spoke a language other than English. On the *My School* website (ACARA, 2016), it was noted that at Williamstown, 15% of families spoke another language additional to English and at Pleasantville, 30% of families spoke an additional language. However, as noted, the breadth and depth of that representation was not present in the programs, raising the question of reasons for such under-representation.

Data suggest that within any community, families may hold a range of values and beliefs about the type of relationships they have with the school as they fulfil their role in their child's education. Goodall (2013) asserted that schools needed to be aware that parenting takes many forms and engagement in children's learning is ongoing and not necessarily known to the school, as it can occur in the home or family environment. In Bourdieuan terms, there is a contrast between the habitus of home and school. When a difference in habitus is encountered in a field -- in this context, the schools -- the individual is influenced by the field, and has to adapt if they are to operate successfully. However, Bourdieu (1986) stressed that influencing was a two-way process, in which the individual can also influence those in the field. Within each of the schools, the two-way influence occurs when the social capital of families is acknowledged in the school environment, which begins a process of adaption or change. If schools are to engage all families in their diverse

communities, then Goodall's assertion supports the notion of changes in schools that may help to eradicate a deficit view and promote positive family-school relationships.

Research suggests that in the context of the present study, the aspired goal of engaging with all families in areas of disadvantage is achievable. A study in a remote Aboriginal community (Flückiger et al., 2012) stressed the need for mutual respect and knowledge as a beginning to a meaningful engagement process. Such respect and knowledge acknowledge the social capital possessed in the community (Perkins et al., 2002) and could change the engagement practices in Williamstown and Pleasantville.

Both schools stated that their aim was to build relationships with families and the programs introduced at each site provided a context within which this was achievable. For the potential of programs such as pre-Prep to be realised, Epstein (1995) argued for the participation of parents in school decision-making and for parents to be developed as leaders in the school community. At the schools in this study, there was no evidence of this in either staff or parental responses; however, American research by Weiss and Lopez (2010) showed that such potential could be successfully developed by assisting families to increase their coping capacities both in the wider community and in the educational environment. Weiss and Lopez found that in a low-SES community, deficit perceptions could be lessened when families were assisted in drawing on a wide range of community-based resources, including business and faith-based institutions. The strategy utilised the social capital present within the individual and community (Perkins et al., 2002), strengthening the individual and family which, in turn, changed their dealings with school personnel, thus reducing the likelihood of negative perceptions impacting on relationships formed.

A similar approach by the schools in this study may give families not presently engaging with the schools the confidence to do so. A change from a deficit mindset within the schools to an attitude that recognises the social capital parents possess could result in a school environment that welcomes all families, so encouraging them to engage with school personnel and utilise their skills. In Pleasantville, the potential created by the acknowledgement of the social capital possessed in some aspects of planning (Perkins et al., 2002) could be replicated if parents' skills were recognised and they were also included in the planning of the pre-Prep program. In that way, the skills and resources brought into the school environment could enrich the family-school relationships developed. In any such

relationship, Epstein (2001) stressed the central notion of supporting children. How the schools engaged children in early years programs, and the focus of preparing children for school that drove the transition-to-school programs, is now discussed.

5.3.3 Engaging children in an early years program

In each school, parents and school personnel reported positively on the ways children engaged in the playgroup and the pre-Prep transition-to-school programs. Responses also reflected findings in previous research that the role of a playgroup is to give families with children in the pre-school age group a place to meet in a supportive environment and feel some sense of connection to each other and adults, including the Convenor and other parents (Gibson et al., 2015). It also expands their world beyond their own family to the group and the wider community, attributes identified as beneficial by Playgroup Queensland (2016). These concepts are relevant in the present study as they engender a supportive environment that is also conducive to establishing family-school relationships.

Children at Pleasantville were engaged in a number of ways in Playtime, and it provided the environment in which early childhood developmental areas of social competence and emotional maturity flourished. In this context, that development was nurtured through unstructured play as well as activities organised by the Convenor. The activities engaged the children in ways the Convenor and parents saw as beneficial for the range of ages present and helped the children develop their individual identity within the group context, which in turn helped them to make sense of the world of school which they would enter subsequently (Regan, 2015). The advantages noted by parents and school personnel were identified in research (Hancock et al., 2012) as advantageous in similar communities to that surrounding Pleasantville.

Playtime offered an excellent example of how outcomes can be realised because the social capital of the parents involved was utilised in the program's planning and implementation (Perkins et al., 2002). Such involvement shows what is achievable when a school takes a strengths-based approach in working with its families.

5.3.4 Readiness for school

Parents and staff viewed the pre-Prep programs as giving children the opportunity to meet and interact with peers. Findings in this study support those of previous research in low-SES areas of South-East Queensland (Freiberg et al., 2005) that noted similar advantage. In the context of the present research, the social contacts made in the pre-Prep programs were seen to benefit children. At both Williamstown and Pleasantville, familiarisation gained through the children's presence on the school campus was another advantage noted in this study's findings. Again, Margetts (2007) noted that familiarity was important to children in similar communities where she had found a heightened risk of adjustment for children. The benefit of familiarity of environment was also noted for children in Pleasantville's Playtime, as those who progressed to the pre-Prep program knew the venue and the playgroup Convenor who also facilitated pre-Prep.

As expected, there was a marked contrast between the focus of the pre-Prep programs and that of the playgroup. Pre-Prep focussed on the expectations of school and the classroom. Elements of the Prep curriculum were introduced at both schools so that children had already acquired some of the requisite knowledge and skills usually learned in Prep. This was particularly noticeable at Pleasantville as the newly introduced pre-Prep program differed from the informality of Playtime. The pre-Prep program, like that at Williamstown, was a structured program designed to increase children's competencies across a range of developmental areas. It was in keeping with the underlying deficit perception of the program's enactment and with the Parnell and Iorio's (2015) suggestion that there was a need to give children academic work in order to ensure their readiness for school, rather than to encourage the development of their emergent language and literacy skills.

At each school, parents and staff viewed the pre-Prep programs as preparation for the children's entry to Prep in the following year. Researchers have noted a range of factors that contribute to a child's preparation for school, with no prescriptive measure available. Margetts (2014) suggested that for children, the parental role was significant; additionally, the wider influences of school and the community in which they lived their daily lives (Brown, 2013; Dockett & Perry, 2009) were all factors that influenced transition to school. The complexity represented in the transition period is obvious; hence the reason for Dockett and Perry's (2007) advice to view transition as a process over a period that also extends into

the beginning of school. In that sense, the pre-Prep programs at both schools were short term, preparing children for what they would do at school rather than supporting them to develop as they progressed towards it. Notions of readiness held by parents were evident at Williamstown in parent reports on their child's beginning Prep. They noted children were confident, and identified the types of benefits similar to Noel's (2010) description of the social-emotional readiness of children as they prepared to move into the school environment. Familiarity with school routines and the school campus added to that confidence.

Prep teachers suggested that as well as the pre-Prep experiences, timetabling adjustments also helped the settling-in process. Staggered starting times resulted in shorter days and smaller classes for the new Prep students, which gave the children a gradual introduction to their Prep class and enhanced the opportunity to utilise the new personal skills they had developed. At Pleasantville, school personnel and parents also acknowledged the influence of the pre-Prep program on the children's positive entry to Prep. When considered in terms of social capital theory (Perkins et al., 2002), the bonding relationships (individual, informal relationships) formed in the pre-Prep program gave children a sense of belonging in their new environment, and increased the individual sense of empowerment that would assist them to cope there. Along with their peers they were able to begin to establish the bridging relationships with teachers and other school personnel. As the children commenced the Prep year, these were the relationships that linked them with school staff members and gave them a sense of personal empowerment.

Staff at both schools considered that the pre-Prep programs also enabled them to ensure the school was ready for the incoming children, an advantage also identified as one important aspect of school readiness in previous research (for example, Dockett & Perry, 2009; Fabian & Dunlop, 2007). A parent at Williamstown whose child was identified as needing particular support agreed that it eased her mind that her child was so quickly assisted. Staff at both schools indicated that specific support for individual children could be introduced in the first few weeks because of the early identification of possible concerns that the program enabled.

While a successful entry to school for children is seen as the desired outcome of transition-to-school programs, a cautionary note about the idea of readiness for school was made by Peters et al. (2015) which is pertinent in this study because of the deficit

assumptions displayed about the community. These researchers asserted that a focus on how ready a child is for school could be a “devaluation” of the view that many aspects of the child’s family and community context influence their development. They cautioned that factors of readiness are “usually defined from a deficit perspective” (p. 37), and suggested that there is too much emphasis on considering what made the child ready. The emphasis on academic elements must also be considered through Urban’s (2015) words, that “schoolified” learning (p. 296) changes the focus of early childhood programs, not necessarily with the child’s long-term benefit in mind.

In both Williamstown and Pleasantville, the ideas reflected in research need heeding. The emphasis on preparing for school and ensuring that children are ready did not, in either context, account for the social capital each child possessed; instead, it was driven by a deficit mindset (Perkins et al., 2002). Until that deficit view is ameliorated, there is a risk that the skills and knowledge a child already possesses as school begins might be overlooked in favour of a need to meet a measured outcome in the mind of the educators.

5.3.5 Summary

In their endeavours to engage families in the early years programs, the two schools’ practices did not reflect the aim of forming relationships and supporting parents to assume the role they would have in their child’s education. Only in Playtime was such an attitude to parents evident. The deficit mindset underlying the implementation of the pre-Prep programs was not in accord with the espoused aim of establishing family-school relationships, as the focus became on fixing parents and readying children for school.

The influence of school leaders on school engagement practices is therefore central in providing impetus for change in all school personnel to ensure all parents are respected and welcomed into the school community. Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) found that strong leadership played a key role in schools to ensure parent engagement strategies were effective and the goals shared across all staff. They suggested that to successfully engage with parents, schools needed to be “sensitive to the circumstances of all families, recognise the contributions parents can make, and aim to empower parents” (p. 9).

In accounting for such factors, the early years programs attract all families of the CALD community and thus offer the context in which relationships can develop. Then,

families and schools together can plan support as suited to the local context. These changes can put schools in a position to form family-school relationships in which both school and family are focussed on supporting children's education.

5.4 The nature of relationships created in early years transition-to-school programs

The early years transition-to-school programs may have been first intended to support families and create relationships with families but the focus became one of preparing families for school. The result was that the school focus moved to ensuring parents were ready to form the relationship with them that the schools expected, in which parents had no agency and the power was closely held by the school. That attitude is apparent when the early years transition-to-school programs at Williamstown and Pleasantville are examined.

5.4.1 Relationships formed in the early years programs

Both Playtime and the pre-Prep programs offered a group environment in which children and their parents could meet and socialise. Pre-Prep at each school offered similar opportunities for relationship building. However, findings revealed that this opportunity was not always taken up. Different types of parent and family engagement were observed at each of the schools. To examine types of relationships, Perkins and colleagues (2002) drew on the dimensions of bridging (formal) and bonding (informal) functions of social capital theory (Perkins & Long, 2002) at both behavioural and cognitive levels.

In the context of this study, in the informal setting of the Pleasantville playgroup, or in the pre-Prep programs, bonding relationships are considered as those achieved between those who attended (Perkins & Long, 2002). They were formed between the children, and were important especially for those who continued on to the pre-Prep program. Similarly, parents who formed bonding relationships in Playtime benefitted as they attended the parent activities in the pre-Prep program. Bridging or formal relationships can be seen as those formed by children and parents with the Convenor or other school personnel. In the playgroup context, they offered an important link through the Convenor between Playtime and pre-Prep.

At cognitive levels, social capital theory considers the sense of trust that develops through informal or formal settings between individuals, or between the individual and organisation. It is the sense of self-efficacy needed by parents that will empower them as they assume their role as part of the family-school relationship in the education of their child. Because of the nature of Playtime, parents did not expect that they would meet school personnel, thus the concept of bridging relationships was not an expected part of that program. Staff and parents considered the playgroup as fulfilling its aim through the relationships fostered. The relationships formed gave both children and parents the supportive links anticipated, and for some, the relationships would continue as children moved to pre-Prep and into the Prep year ahead.

Similar opportunities for engaging families were available in the pre-Prep programs. Parents at both schools described the bonding relationships and the supportive nature of friendships established with other parents, and of becoming acquainted with some school personnel. The bonding behaviours of linking with others were an important aspect of the building of social capital for parents and children as they moved into the school environment. Parent experiences showed that the bonding relationships formed through their attendance at either Playtime or the pre-Prep programs were in accord with Perkins and Long's (2002) behavioural dimension and empowered them in terms of knowledge about school processes as their children transitioned to school. While the behaviours associated with forming the bonding relationships are important, Perkins and Long also consider a cognitive dimension is involved, as they give the individual a sense of support and confidence, thus increasing the self-efficacy of children and parents as they enter the school environment.

The strength of relationships formed between parents and school personnel are equated to Perkins and Long's (2002) bridging dimension of social capital. However, Williamstown's pre-Prep program was not viewed by school personnel as an opportunity to meet parents, so interaction between parents and teachers was limited, although several specialist teachers visited to work with children. When the children visited the Prep classes, teachers were seen, but no contact between them and parents was possible at that point. At each school, the opportunity to establish the more formal, bridging relationships (Perkins & Long, 2002) with school personnel was not a focus, and in both contexts, bridging relationships with staff did not eventuate past relationships formed with Convenors of the programs. The opportunity for the schools to realise the potential of the programs and build

relationships with families in a welcoming and supportive environment, as suggested by Mapp (2003), was not taken.

When the aim of the programs to build relationships is aligned with the lack of opportunity for parents to meet and form relationships with school personnel, the gap between that espoused intention and the reality of the implementation of the programs is exposed. The aim of the pre-Prep programs became focussed on preparing children and parents for school, part of which involved addressing what the school perceived as the need to give parents the skills to relate to their children and assist them to be ready for school.

Findings revealed that the social capital of families remains unrecognised. Benefits gained by parents or children are appreciated through Bourdieu's (1985) concepts, seeing the schools as building the types of capital needed in the new field of education. In Bourdieu's terms, the school was ensuring that the "rules of the game" were known (Wacquant, 2011, p. 99) so that both parents and children could fulfil the school's expectations. When viewed through social capital theory, what was evident in both schools was that while the social capital of families was not acknowledged, their presence in the pre-Prep programs was an opportunity wasted by the schools. Through wider parent input into Williamstown's pre-Prep program, knowledge of families, and how they envisage the school might offer support, could be gained. Such knowledge could inform future planning of the transition-to-school programs at the school.

While parents and staff indicated that the pre-Prep programs were an opportunity for relationship building in the transition-to-school context, findings of this research show that there was a shortfall in the types of relationships built that could set parents on a pathway to a role in a family-school relationship that afforded them an equitable role. The following section highlights how an ongoing deficit view affected relationship building not only in the period prior to school commencement, but also as parents and teachers interact as children progress through school.

5.4.2 Perceptions of the family-school relationship

This study was initiated as a means of examining how authentic family-school relationships were created. Parents were eager to learn about how family-school relationships worked and they indicated their intention to enter a relationship with the school that

supported their child. The interest of parents in such relationships at both schools is in contrast to staff perceptions of how relationships were formed and the roles of the parties involved. This is significant, given that the schools set a goal of developing family-school relationships; yet, findings revealed a deficit mindset formed by experiences prevailed amongst school personnel, limiting the scope of these relationships.

At both schools, parents who already had children attending the schools mixed with others who were new to the situation of parenting a child at school. The Playtime and pre-Prep programs provided a context in which family-school relationships were discussed. Experienced parents shared with those new to the school or parenting a child at school and all learnt from each other how they as parents considered the family-school relationship would be developed and maintained.

For many Williamstown parents, the idea of collaborating with the school was interpreted as involving themselves in their child's education and liaising with teachers so they could support their child. For some parents, the opportunity to do so was constrained due to family or work commitments. At Pleasantville, parents differed in how they interpreted their role in the family-school relationship but they considered that parties who were in close communication and worked together would influence outcomes for the child. Parents also related the idea of partnership to their role as one of instigating regular contact with teachers, working with them in supporting their child. The community atmosphere of the school was seen as influential in the way these relationships worked, and some parents described the relationship in terms of parents and teachers working as a team. The notion of connection that parents perceived with staff was an important quality of a supportive environment, which Mills and Gale (2010) suggested was not always present in a low-SES area. The connections reflect the Perkins and Long (2002) dimension of the bridging relationship that forms between the individual and an organisation – in this context, the school – and is evidence that parents' feelings of self-efficacy were reinforced in that relationship.

At Pleasantville, parents new to the concept of the family-school relationship accepted the ideas presented by those with children already at the school. One mother stated that her plan was to be involved and volunteer in class, while a second described her intention to be visible at the school, volunteering in class and other areas of the school. She felt this would prove she was “a caring parent” and would bring respect and attention to her child. The

words of the second parent revealed a motivation to have the teacher acknowledge the depth and strength of her role as a parent.

This mother's words reflect the deficit mindset Gorski (2012) identified in schools, and seem to anticipate and address the assumption about which he cautioned educators, that families in low-SES communities are perceived as unable or unwilling to play a meaningful and supportive role in the educational field. In contrast to that perception, this mother shows a strong desire to forge a bridging relationship with the teacher as the basis of supporting her child. Her desire resonates with Bourdieu's (1985) notion of the particular types of capital needed when entering a field. She shows an awareness that in the field of education, there are specific types of knowledge and skills, or capital, needed to ensure equitable treatment for her child. She assumed that if she acted in a particular way it would demonstrate that she possessed the expected capital, and acknowledgement of that capital would enable her to participate in the education of her child, and so lessen any negativity that might arise.

The negative views that the parent assumed her child's teacher held are also evidenced in previous research in similar communities, where researchers found schools were reluctant to acknowledge that families may engage in different ways in their child's education. Harris and Goodall (2008) found that school expectations of how parents fulfilled that role inhibited ways in which some families engaged. In an Australian study, Berthelsen and Walker (2008) argued that parents in low-SES communities may engage differently because they may have different educational levels from educators or because of negative experiences with schools. For whatever reason, the attitude of the Pleasantville parent referred to here reflects the need stressed by Weiss and Lopez (2010) for schools in low-SES communities to become familiar with the difficulties families may face. Grant and Ray (2013) also identified difficulties in such communities and, like Weiss and Lopez, saw the need for specific strategies to ensure that any difficulty that families might experience did not prevent their intentions of supporting their child.

For Williamstown and Pleasantville, the collective impact model (Kania & Kramer, 2013) may offer strategies that the schools could adopt. As discussed previously, each school, for different reasons, diverged from a collaborative approach. However, this research reinforces the importance for the schools to work in the collaborative manner advocated by Kania and Kramer. Such an approach acknowledges and draws on the social capital within

the school community (Perkins et al., 2002); by utilising the collective vision of a range of community stakeholders in this way, support could be identified as needed. For both schools, the relationships may then more closely align with the aims that were set for their early years transition-to-school programs.

5.4.3 Factors that impact the nature of relationships

The concern posed by this study is that while each of the schools implemented early years or pre-Prep programs to reach out to and support families of the communities and form relationships with them, many families whose heritage represented the cultural and linguistic diversity of the community did not access the programs offered. The aim stated by both schools to form family-school relationships with all families is therefore thwarted because a sector of the community was not represented. The choice of these families not to attend could indicate that, to them, the programs provided were not about forming relationships centred on the education of their child. Rather, they may have seen the program as the school providing a type of support they do not see as needed. For any range of reasons, the fact families are not attending is indicative of a lack of in-depth knowledge of the community by school personnel, stemming from an ongoing deficit perception of community families. Harris and Goodall's (2008) suggestion was that for schools in such communities, "differential strategies are needed to secure the engagement of a diverse range of parents" (p. 286). Through an examination of the forms of relationships already operating in the schools, this research offers a perspective that may inform how the schools could utilise different strategies in the programs of future years and so provide more opportunity for the potential offered in them to be realised.

At Williamstown, Prep teachers shared their views that parents did not see themselves as partners with teachers in their child's education. They based their perception on the reasons parents offered for not fulfilling their role in ways the teachers had anticipated. Teachers cited reasons parents gave of their busy lives of work, family sporting commitments, and shift work, but made no mention that the reality of the low-SES, CALD community might be relevant. Previous research by Mills and Gale (2004) found that in such communities, schools assumed the form that parent involvement should take and considered parents as disinterested when they did not engage as expected. The suggested knowledge of the community was needed to ensure parent contribution was acknowledged and family

circumstances considered in ways opportunities were offered. At Williamstown, the opportunity to join in morning classroom activities was not an option for some parents. Factors such as the lack of knowledge of the local community may be an influence on how, and if, families accessed the programs offered at Williamstown and Pleasantville.

Some similarity can be drawn to an early UK study (Miramontes et al., 1997) which also highlighted a perception by school personnel of parental disinterest in the education of their child. The researchers concluded that in communities where differences of class, and cultural and linguistic diversity existed between families and the school, family awareness of lowered school expectations of their role affected ways they engaged with teachers. At Williamstown and Pleasantville, no such awareness by parents was indicated; however, when considering that many families did not access programs, the idea may have some bearing on some family engagement practices with the schools.

Several examples cited at Pleasantville illustrated how difference in cultural and linguistic heritage can affect the parent-teacher relationships. When Prep teachers at Pleasantville recalled the ways parents related to them, they revealed awareness that all families had different expectations and they recalled ways in which the cultural heritage of families influenced parent-teacher interactions. They cited an example of an African mother who explained that at school, the teacher took on the role of mother, and so could insist on appropriate behaviour from her son. They also perceived that Samoan families were more concerned about the behaviour and respect their children gave teachers than the children's academic performance.

Research in a similar Australian community (Kearney et al., 2011) found that the belief among Samoan families was that school and home played separate roles in children's education but that respect and obedience were encouraged to ensure children did achieve in their academic studies. Internationally, UK researchers Crozier and Davies (2007) identified similar belief amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi families. Auerbach (2012) also reminded that the notion of partnership could be problematic as it was an idea associated with the dominant culture and may not suit some cultural practices. At Pleasantville, therefore, the family-school relationship needed to be expressed in different terms as well as considering how the roles of each party were fulfilled. This was the type of knowledge the school could

acquire before implementing ways to reach families; through such knowledge, attempts to form relationships could be couched in ways that respected the values and beliefs held.

At both Williamstown and Pleasantville, a deeper knowledge of the community may change the way programs to engage families are provided, thus encouraging the types of family-school relationships each school espoused through the early years programs enacted. As relationships within the transition-to-school programs and parent-teacher relationships across the schools are considered, there remains a sense that families may be marginalised until that deeper knowledge is gained. When that is achieved, the social capital Perkins and colleagues (2002) suggested all families in all communities possess can be drawn upon to make those relationships achievable.

5.4.4 Summary

The nature of the relationships examined reveals there is potential within the programs for relationship building. However, opportunities were not realised to form the types of bonding and bridging relationships needed as a basis to give parents an equitable role in the family-school relationship. As long as a deficit mindset continues, the focus will remain on offering support to remedy perceived inadequacies in both parents and children.

The question this study sought to answer was how the early years and transition-to-school programs can create authentic family-school relationships. In social capital terms, authentic relationships can be realised when the schools recognise and accept the values and beliefs of families of the community, and when families are welcomed into the school so that the skills and resources possessed are drawn on to enrich the community and help create the family-school relationships that benefit both families and schools.

5.5 Creating authentic relationships

The overarching question posed by this research was “How can early years transition-to-school programs engage families in authentic family-school relationships?” Auerbach (2012) argued that when considering what was involved in forming family-school relationships that centred on the education of the child and gave both parties equitable roles, examining the leadership styles in schools was vital to understanding how leadership influences the dynamics of the school environment. Following Auerbach’s argument, this

research considered the influence of school leaders at the schools and revealed that changes are needed to achieve the authentic family-school relationship she recommended.

In the context of the present study, the idea of opportunity and the differentiation made by Kuttner (2016) between equity and equality is important. All parents and families had the same or equal opportunity to engage in relationships with school personnel. To Kuttner, the basis of difference is about the opportunities to engage that are afforded to families: equality gives the same opportunity to all, as all start from the same point. The contrast Kuttner drew was that for equitable outcomes, the opportunities have to vary according to individual circumstance: opportunities to engage need to vary because people start at different points, and have differing resources, so need different types of opportunities. Kuttner's differentiation is relevant when a deficit mindset, one that Gorski (2012) argued apportioned blame on a person or community for something perceived lacking, seemed to be present in the schools studied.

5.5.1 Changing families

Schools in this study each espoused the aim of forming family-school relationships that supported children's educational outcomes. However, as findings revealed, early years transition-to-school programs that were to support families and build such relationships became focussed on changing families and children to meet the expectations schools held for readiness for the child's entry to school.

At each school, school personnel perceived only what families lacked according to their own expectations, giving no acknowledgement to the richness of resources each possessed and so positioning families as outsiders in the school community. The barrier formed to the types of family-school relationships desired by parents and espoused by school personnel could be, as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992a) asserted, attributed to the middle-class values that dominate within schools. Epstein (2011) suggested that a main contributor to the presence of such barriers was the lack of knowledge school personnel had of their school communities, inhibiting communication and affecting the way in which interaction between schools and families was perceived by both parties. Previous research by Crosnoe (2015) found that low-SES families took a different approach to engaging with schools from that taken by high-SES parents seeking family-school relationships, where the latter group were found to be more confident in the school setting and less deferential towards school

personnel. That finding may offer some explanation to why engaging families in each of the schools across the whole spectrum of the diverse community was not achieved.

A recommendation in ARACY's (2016) report is also relevant in this context, where there is a call for educators to be aware of the families in their community. Further recommendation for the acknowledgement of "community strengths, needs, cultural knowledge, values and priorities in relation to parent engagement" (p. 8) reflects the value of the social capital that Perkins and colleagues (2002) stressed was present in communities. Recognition of that value is needed in communities such as where Pleasantville and Williamstown were situated. When considering each of the schools, engagement practices reflected a need for further development so that, in Auerbach's (2012) terms, they could progress toward the family-school relationship espoused. The question is how the potential for this outcome can be realised.

5.6 Realising the potential

In addressing the question of how early years transition-to-school programs engaged families in authentic family-school relationships, the present study found that programs were implemented from a deficit perspective and, therefore, authentic family-school relationships were not achieved in either school. Failure to recognise that families in the low-SES and CALD communities engaged with schools in ways not expected or acknowledged by them can offer possible explanations as to why some families are not attending the early years and transition-to-school programs. Epstein (2011) stressed the importance of acknowledging the different views of the parties involved in family-school relationships, a step toward addressing that mindset.

This study suggests there are ways in which both Williamstown Pleasantville can realise the potential of the early years and transition-to-school programs. The application of guidelines such as those provided in Mapp and Kuttner's (2013) framework are relevant in the schools as the guidelines are about school personnel and families working together and establishing mutual respect so that relationships can develop in schools. The guidelines work from the perspective that neither school personnel nor parents have the knowledge about how such relationships are realised. There is recognition in the guidelines that an equitable

outcome is possible when schools and families engage according to where each party is situated (Kuttner, 2016).

Social capital theory (Perkins et al., 2002) highlights the need for the schools to draw on the skills and resources present in the community. An approach based on Kania and Kramer's (2013) collective impact model that takes the strengths-based perspective revealed that schools in low-SES and CALD communities can form authentic family-school relationships.

The following chapter outlines how implementation of such suggestions could see schools like Williamstown and Pleasantville achieve the authentic relationships they seek.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to establish how early years transition-to-school programs engage families in authentic family-school relationships. The study was conducted in two schools in low-SES communities, where there was a wide presence of cultural and linguistic diversity. I intentionally chose only two research sites, which were different types of schools: one a government primary school (Williamstown) and another an independent Christian school (Pleasantville) to enable an in-depth study of the different early years programs each school provided. Each school had a pre-Prep program and Pleasantville also offered a playgroup. The chapter is structured as follows.

The first part of the chapter outlines the present situation of what engagement practices look like in the researched schools, and reveals areas of shortfall in how these schools engage families. In the section that follows, approaches that Williamstown and Pleasantville might apply to realise change in school engagement practices are presented. These include a strengths-based approach of SBEP (Lopez & Louis, 2009) incorporated in the Mapp and Kuttner (2013) framework as a guide for schools to assist both families and school personnel to form the family-school relationships envisaged by both parties. The application of Kania and Kramer's (2013) collective impact model is then outlined to illustrate ways for both schools to work as part of the community and strengthen family engagement.

The changes that can be realised through these initiatives are then presented to show a new picture of how Auerbach's (2012) authentic family-school relationships are achievable. In the final part of the chapter, the contribution this study makes to the field is outlined. Limitations are discussed and suggestions of areas for future research are given. The chapter concludes with some researcher reflections.

6.2 Family-school engagement practices

Each of the two schools in this study had distinctive philosophies guiding how they engaged families. Williamstown described itself as a state school with a warm and caring approach that encouraged the development of relationships between itself and families of the

community. The Christian philosophy that underpinned Pleasantville's engagement practices was evident in its outreach to the community through the establishment of Playtime and in its links with the Community Hub program. Playtime offered a supportive environment for families of the community with children from birth to school age.

Both schools had sincere intentions to build relationships with families. A major finding of this study, however, is that good intentions are not sufficient. The establishment of pre-Prep programs at both locations responded to a number of school agendas and, in doing so, the good intentions of forming relationships was subsumed by a range of needs perceived in families. First, there was an identified need to provide parents with knowledge and skills perceived as lacking, and that shortfall was addressed through the guise of workshop activities. Second, there was a need to ascertain the depth and breadth of children's "needs" and perceived deficits in their knowledge and skills. The pre-Prep programs were seen as a means of identifying and addressing these perceived deficits. Third, the introduction of pre-Prep programs was seen as a way to give children an early start on some aspects of the Prep curriculum, including language, literacy, and numeracy skills. The change of focus from the good intention to build relationships may also have contributed to the under-representation of many families of the CALD community in the playgroup and the transition-to-school programs.

The study revealed that the intention Williamstown espoused of forming family-school relationships in the transition-to-school program was overpowered by a deficit perception of community families, and so the focus changed to up-skilling parents and preparing children for school. When programs were planned at Williamstown the parent voice was absent, reflecting, as Mills and Gale (2010) found, an attitude that "the school knows best" (p. 199). The school addressed needs as they perceived them, rather than seeking parent ideas about support in the period prior to children commencing Prep. In this way, school personnel controlled what occurred and parents became aware of school expectations of them. When viewed through a social capital lens, areas of shortfall in school practices were revealed. There was little or no acknowledgement of individual or collective family resources. Instead, the purpose of engaging families in the transition-to-school period was overridden by a need to address the inadequacy the school perceived in parents' capacity. The approach subsequently taken provided no opportunity for parents to contribute; instead, the school planned the types of up-skilling they would offer parents through the program. Some

difference was seen in aspects of planning at Pleasantville, where the school acknowledged the social capital parents possessed (Perkins et al., 2002) and included their ideas in the planning of the playgroup as well as in planning of the parent support offered in the pre-Prep program. However, planning of pre-Prep programs at both schools sought no parental input and planning for those programs was undertaken by school personnel.

There has long been government acknowledgement of the importance for schools to work with families; an early example is the Adelaide Declaration (MCEEDYA, 1999). More recently, the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (DEEWR, 2009) and My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care in Australia (Australian Government, 2011) both stressed a need for respectful and supportive family, school, and community relationships to be developed. More recently, a framework for guiding further improvement in family-school relationships has been implemented (*Advancing Partnerships – Parent and Community Engagement Framework*, Queensland Government, 2018). However, there remains today a need to clarify how authentic family-school relationships can be created in early years transition-to-school programs. The challenge to be faced is how both Pleasantville and Williamstown can adopt an approach in their family-school engagement practices that encourages the development of such relationships.

In this concluding chapter, I provide a way forward for schools so that their good intentions to engage families in authentic family-school relationships can be realised. Opportunities for new approaches in the ways schools are led in establishing these relationships are seen as integral to how the relationships are formed.

6.2.1 The way forward

Research suggests that leadership styles may affect ways in which families of low-SES, CALD communities engage with schools (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014) and that families in these communities may engage differently with schools because of particular cultural values and beliefs (Doucet, 2011; Vera et al., 2012). Berthelson and Walker (2008) also suggested that the parents' educational standard or previous negative experiences in schools could affect family engagement practices. In the context of the present study, therefore, changes in leadership styles may prove helpful in overcoming barriers to the development of equitable family-school relationships. While the way forward in Williamstown and Pleasantville is to bring about such change, as family engagement involves all school personnel the changes are

about a collective change needed across the school in the ways in which families are welcomed into the school and how family-school relationships operate on a daily basis.

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) suggested that the development of a relationship between family and school is about positioning parents and all school personnel in that relationship. They describe a form of that relationship as one of parent involvement with the school, in which activities are often devised by schools and the relationship is one that is supportive of school practice. In such a relationship, the child's learning is the responsibility of the school and parents have no agency. Such a relationship is apparent in the context of the schools in this study, where parents are encouraged to participate in support activities provided for them through the pre-Prep programs. However, the underlying deficit mindset evidenced in the implementation of the programs suggests the schools are familiarising parents with school expectations of them. While both parties have expressed the idea of the child's educational achievement as central, there is nothing in the engagement practices of the schools that suggests an increase in parent agency in the relationship. As Goodall and Montgomery (2014) suggested, change can only eventuate when school personnel acknowledge the role already taken by parents in their children's ongoing development and learning. Parental agency may then increase and the school-family relationship develop into a partnership with more equitable roles.

To achieve changes in how families are engaged, schools must work towards developing the family-school relationships they originally aimed to establish. Mapp and Kuttner's (2013) framework provides guidelines which lead both school personnel and families through a process to develop such family-school relationships. The framework outlines the challenges as well as the importance of creating the conditions in which to form and sustain the relationship, ensuring the process used is applicable. In the local context, Kuttner's (2016) notion of providing engagement opportunities for all families was key to successfully addressing the deficit mindset described by Gorski (2012) that previously inhibited the development of family-school relationships. Kuttner stressed that as individual circumstances varied, such opportunity must also vary. In low-SES and CALD communities, the Mapp and Kuttner (2013) framework suggested that acknowledging the situation and resources of each family when planning how schools and families could work together was an important step towards achieving agreed outcomes and developing the type of relationship Goodall and Montgomery (2014) envisaged. Mapp and Kuttner argue that through use of the

guidelines, engaging families can utilise a strengths-based approach that acknowledges and draws on the social capital of the community and its families and results in authentic family-school relationships.

6.3 Changing schools from the inside

Findings reveal that the schools in this study were willing to engage with families but attempts were influenced by previous experiences, or by a need to address perceived inadequacies in both parents and children. School personnel desired a family-school relationship that supports the learning of the child and, while participants in this study represent only a portion of school families, there is indication that families also expect such a relationship. Mapp and Kuttner (2013) suggest that both school personnel and families may wrongly assume that each party should know how family-school relationships could be established and maintained. To address what they perceived as an absence of the sort of understanding that underpinned how such relationships are developed, Mapp and Kuttner devised a framework that provided a guide for schools and families of how to work together to achieve that goal. Their guidelines offer ways to address the knowledge shortfall in schools and increase capacity in all stakeholders in a supportive environment so that such relationships can eventuate. The steps involved in the process are outlined next and how that process might be applicable at Williamstown and Pleasantville is then discussed.

To begin the process of increasing stakeholder capacity, several points are addressed. As a first step, the need is to build the skills teachers require to work with families. For that to happen, the local context must be considered. As school personnel and parents in each of the schools share the desire to improve educational outcomes for children, clear goals can be set that relate to children's learning and development, aligned with school and possibly community goals. When a sense of purpose is set, the process can begin. The next step is to create conditions where parents and school personnel can work in a collaborative way towards the goals. As both schools invite parents into the schools already, an initial exercise might therefore be to establish trust both ways, between school personnel and parents, to ensure the intent behind the invitation is not one of the school offering solutions to perceived problems, but rather an opportunity for all stakeholders to work towards commonly held goals. This is the beginning of a process that is underpinned by an attitude that learning by all parties will help to achieve goals that are in the best interests of children. The underlying aim

is to build knowledge and capacity in both school personnel and parents to develop and maintain a family-school relationship.

When the framework is considered in the context of Williamstown and Pleasantville, it offers guidance for each school. Primarily, awareness by school personnel of the values and beliefs of all families could be heightened as they work with parents, and together they learn how to develop ways in which the common goals can be achieved. At both schools, the strengths-based approach embedded in Mapp and Kuttner's (2013) framework may challenge the deficit views prevalent in both schools and facilitate the development of such relationships. Through the processes followed, school personnel could develop a deeper understanding of the families of the school and of reasons why they are not engaging through playgroups like Pleasantville's Playtime or the pre-Prep programs. Additionally, because of the mutual respect and knowledge gained by school personnel and families, effective modes of support can be devised and planned by both schools and families.

The guidelines offered by Mapp and Kuttner (2013) provide a way forward in terms of developing individual capacity so that both school personnel and parents can fulfil their role in the family-school relationship. The SBEP (Lopez & Louis, 2009) draws on the skills and resources of the individual, hence such an approach acknowledges the social capital community families possess (Perkins et al., 2002). Mapp and Kuttner stress that the guidelines are about implementing and working through a process. The collaborative and cooperative approach is the catalyst in the process, which they argue, from practical experience, produces the change. In both Williamstown and Pleasantville, as school leaders work with all school personnel, the strengths-based approach may provide a basis for early years and transition-to-school programs that can effectively engage parents.

In both Williamstown and Pleasantville, such change may dispel the deficit mindset as knowledge and respect are gained by all stakeholders. As the findings revealed, parents already felt some confidence in their ability as a parent to their school-aged child and they reported that experiences gained in the programs helped them to learn more about the role they hoped to fulfil in their child's education. The process recommended in Mapp and Kuttner's (2013) guidelines may further assist parents in achieving that role and the processes may also encourage the achievement of the espoused aims of the schools in forming family-school relationships. As mutual respect and knowledge are developed, the likelihood of

families experiencing the marginalisation that can occur in low-SES and CALD school communities (Mills & Gale, 2008) may also be reduced. School leaders are influential in the changes in engagement practices as they encourage and support all school personnel in ways to strengthen school engagement practices.

At the present research sites, the framework guidelines provide an opportunity to build the skills of both school personnel and parents, as they begin at the level of knowledge and skills each possesses. By beginning at that point, the process followed should create a school environment in which all families from the community can have the confidence that equitable outcomes are achievable (Kuttner, 2016). Such an outcome is in accord with Goodall and Montgomery's (2014) description of a family-school relationship as one that acknowledges the important roles of both parties: not a relationship focussed on equal partner roles, but giving an equitable role to parents. With the knowledge and skills attained through the recommended processes of Mapp and Kuttner's (2013) guidelines, there is opportunity for schools to work towards a relationship that ensures parents have a role that affords them agency in the family-school relationship.

School leaders should prepare schools and families for such a process that establishes the family-school relationship as proposed by Goodall and Montgomery (2014), one in which parents were given an equitable role as schools recognised the important and ongoing nature of their contribution to their children's learning. While change is needed across the schools, at the core is the pivotal role of school leaders in that change. The strengths-based approach embedded in Mapp and Kuttner's (2013) guidelines may assist both Williamstown and Pleasantville in the development of the effective family-school relationship that Goodall and Montgomery advocate.

In Auerbach's (2012) assessment of the influence of leaders on engagement practices, these processes suggest that schools can begin to move towards more inclusive practices when seeking to support families. As the schools take a confident stance in ways they engage with families, engagement practices can extend across the wider community.

6.4 Community collaboration

Prior to the beginning of the current study, both schools worked within the community in a collaborative manner, but approaches were not based on a collective impact

model (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Kania and Kramer assert that implementation of the model encourages recognition of strengths and resources already present in the community, which strengthens the links between all participants involved and leads to social change.

Williamstown and Pleasantville schools became focussed on addressing the needs as they perceived them within their schools. As each school developed engagement practices within the school and family-school relationships began to develop, their focus might again extend to the wider community. Kania and Kramer's model suggests the establishment of a network in which schools, other community organisations, and families can work together, using structures already in place in the community to support families of the community.

The implementation of a collective impact model would see the Williamstown school join with the other participants of the Early Years Summit. With the inclusion of parent representation in the Summit, parents and school personnel could work within the community and begin to draw on the resources and services already present there. With that recognition, a strengths-based approach could shift the focus at a community level away from a deficit or problem-based view. Similarly, the capacities developed at Pleasantville within families and school personnel could provide further incentive to continue and expand the community-minded approach that the school's Christian philosophy drives. Again, the presence of parent voice in that outreach could ensure that the families of the community help create the opportunities that could assist them to achieve the goals they share with the school for their children's educational outcomes.

6.5 Building authentic family-school relationships

Approaches drawn from the research literature and proposed as a way forward for the schools show that although circumstances varied between the schools, each could benefit if engaging families began from a stance that acknowledges and draws on the strengths and resources of the community and its families. The knowledge gained through the processes outlined in Mapp and Kuttner's (2013) guidelines may move the schools towards a strengths-based approach. As schools become part of a collective community approach as outlined in Kania and Kramer's (2001) model, drawing on the social and cultural resources within families and the community, engagement practices could incorporate ways for the schools and families to engage across the community in relationships that afford parents an equitable role and centre on the education of their children. School leaders would have an enhanced

knowledge of the community and its families and so could support the actions needed to ensure that all school personnel were part of the changes in a welcoming school environment.

At Williamstown, an approach that involved both school personnel and families working together could begin the building of authentic family-school relationships. The inclusion of the parent voice must be part of the way forward so that a family-school relationship based on mutual trust and respect is achievable. The central question to address at Pleasantville is how to extend the style of parent engagement exercised as playgroup and parent activities in the pre-Prep program were planned. When the school acknowledges the parent voice in all engagement practices, it could affect ways in which family-school relationships develop.

When Warren et al. (2009) examined collaboration between schools and community organisations, they found it brought a level of understanding that helped reduce barriers often encountered in low-SES communities and gave schools a deeper appreciation of the “culture and assets of families” (p. 2214). As Pleasantville illustrated, it is through the recognition of the value of the skills, the social capital of families (Perkins et al., 2002), that changes the power balance between parties involved. The suggestion is that if school personnel could gain a wider knowledge of families and the community, both schools could establish the family-school relationships to which families and school aspire.

This study describes the family engagement practices of the schools in their transition-to-school programs. These practices revealed that schools can have the best of intentions to meet the needs they perceive in their community, but that failure to acknowledge the richness of personal skills and resources families possess perpetuates a deficit mindset. Such a mindset influences the implementation of programs and determines how families are engaged through them. For schools in this study, the potential to develop authentic family-school relationships was not realised in the pre-Prep programs as the focus was turned instead to remedying perceived inadequacies the schools identified in parents and children.

The approaches suggested illustrate how schools can draw on the social capital of the community (Perkins et al., 2002) and, through a strengths-based approach, can enhance the development of family-school relationships (Lopez & Louis, 2009). The practical guideline in Mapp and Kuttner’s (2013) framework offers schools a process to follow, through which

family-school engagement practices based on mutual trust and respect can influence the whole environment of the school. The collective impact model (Kania & Kramer, 2013) outlines how schools can work as part of a collaborative community body in improving relationships with families and supporting educational achievement for all children.

To progress school engagement practices towards achieving authentic family-school relationships, these approaches can help schools identify shortfalls in those practices and begin the process of change needed. Through the influence of the strengths base incorporated in the approaches outlined, new ways of engaging with families can emerge and authentic family-school relationships can be achieved.

6.6 Contribution to the field

This study contributes to the development of understanding of why families engage with schools as they do through a rich description and examination of school engagement practices as evidenced in the early years programs. Urban (2015) suggested that educational practices are based on “white middle class understanding of education” (p. 301) and so the support offered could continue to marginalise families rather than providing a means for them to become part of the educational community. He also suggested that there was a need to learn from these families, so that more equitable practices could be initiated. His suggestions resonate with the need identified by Perkins and colleagues (2002) for the recognition of the social capital of all families and communities, recognition which could lessen or prevent further marginalising practices as evidenced through Bourdieu’s (1985) concepts. Such a perspective is further enhanced by Urban’s (2015) argument that attempting to “close the gap” between children from marginalised and dominant groups in society is grounded in a logic of integration and assimilation into an assumed normality that no longer exists. Instead, he suggests that “marginalisation, hyper-diversity, inequality and fragmentation have become the defining feature of all societies” (p. 293) and suggests that efforts should be focussed on developing “competent systems for all children, families and communities that are based on democratic practices, recognition and affirmation” (p. 293).

One of the constraining factors to building relationships identified by this study is the deficit mindset in the schools that may have influenced the enactment of programs and the ways in which the schools subsequently engaged families through the programs. The study

makes an important contribution through the use of social capital theory, which adds a new dimension to current ways of thinking about school engagement practices and overcoming a deficit mindset. When social capital theory is used to frame thinking, the focus changes from one that perceives a deficit in parents and children, a view that perceives that they lack the capital required in the school environment; in contrast, it turns the focus to the resources that families possess that could enrich the relationships formed, and which could contribute to the educational experiences for all children, making opportunities for learning more equitable. The application of social capital theory is helpful in understanding what could be happening in schools and shows further research is needed to gain more understanding of how family-school relationships are developed with all families of the community.

The study also contributes to the research field by showing how schools embark on the process of forming family-school relationships when they are not abreast with what theory and policy espouse. The research confirms Daniel's (2005) suggestion: "When studies do investigate particular forms of involvement, a deeper understanding of the impact of specific involvement strategies emerges" (p. 142). It also reinforces the need Urban (2015) highlighted: that practices have to be aligned with the community context in which schools are located. Urban argued that, when engagement practices are based on in-depth knowledge of the community, families can be supported in ways that are suited to their values and beliefs, and not focussed on aligning them with school expectations. This research highlights possible impacts when schools continue to engage with families through practices developed in previous years. Use of social capital concepts of bonding and bridging relationships offered an example to other researchers of how understanding the development of such relationships can inform school engagement practices.

In the complexity of modern society, the study acknowledges the "urgency" that Daniel (2005, p. 126) suggested is needed to find how successful family-school relationships can be developed. The study illustrates that when policy, theory, and practice do not align, schools are unable to engage families through practices that can support parents, children, and school personnel. There is a need for further understanding in these areas; the interrelated concepts discussed provide a web of ideas from which schools can draw and so overcome the complacency that limits the creation of authentic family-school relationships.

6.7 Limitations

Three limitations of this study need to be acknowledged. First, the use of volunteer sampling resulted in participants who were not representative of the wider population of families in the two schools. There was a limited representation of families from the CALD sector of the community within the early years transition-to-school programs. Whilst this represents a key finding in itself, it is acknowledged that input from these families may have provided additional insight that would have extended the scope of the study.

A second limitation is that school leadership was not an element included in the study's design. However, findings suggest that the influence of school leadership is pivotal in the development of authentic family-school relationships. While a member of each school's administration team was interviewed, findings suggest that more targeted interviews with school leaders may have elicited further insight into the schools' approaches to the development of authentic family-school relationships.

A third limitation may have been the participants' perceptions of the researcher as an outsider in the schools in which the programs were conducted. The power relationship between the respondents and me may have influenced my interactions with both staff and parents. Whilst I spent time with all participants at the sites as suggested by Eide (2005), the earlier assertion of Fay (1996) could be perceived as attracting both positive and negative effects from the insider and outsider perspective when the relationship between participants and me is considered.

These limitations need to be considered in future research so that a deeper understanding of school practices is revealed, which in turn could inform suggested ways forward for schools.

6.8 Future research

Further research is needed to extend knowledge of why families representative of the cultural and linguistic diversity of communities are not engaging in early years transition-to-school programs, and of how schools can initiate engagement practices that are inclusive of all community members. The perceptions of families not accessing the programs offered by the schools in this study could provide valuable insight for future planning. Research to

establish whether similar trends are present in different community contexts could consolidate such knowledge.

Research into the influence of school leaders will further extend knowledge of how such engagement practices can be implemented. An invitation to community liaison officers to participate in research would provide a wider perspective on the implementation of engagement practices. Knowledge could be gained through research to consider how the adoption of a collective impact approach may assist schools as they work in CALD communities. Further research is also called for about how the incorporation of a strengths-based approach may address the prevalence of a deficit mindset in schools. These suggested research areas would provide important contributions to the understanding of how authentic family-school relationships could be developed and what parent-school engagement means.

6.9 Reflections of the researcher

Through the process of this research, I have learnt a great deal about how schools seek to engage families and parents in low-SES and CALD communities. I have realised how a strongly deficit perspective influences how schools implement their engagement programs. When I look back to my position as a teacher in a large, CALD high school in a low-SES area, I too shared a view like many of my colleagues that families of the school somehow needed fixing so that we could see our students achieving better academic results.

Through the course of this research, I have observed how schools embark on the process of engaging with families with the very best of intentions, but then a deficit mindset undermines the original intent. I have also learnt that families want to engage with teachers and all school personnel and become part of a relationship that brings improvement to their children's educational outcomes. I am grateful to those many wonderful parents I met who inspired me to embark on this research and led me to these conclusions.

I am hopeful that this study will contribute in ways that help to address the complex issues intrinsic to engagement practices. I also remain hopeful that schools will acknowledge the richness of resources that families of their school communities possess. It is through such recognition that authentic family-school relationships can become a reality.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Permission to research at Williamstown



Monday, 14 July 2014

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to confirm that the [redacted] State School Administration Team authorise Jill Girwood to conduct research for her PhD at [redacted] School.

Thanking you,

[redacted signature]

Appendix B: Permission to research at Pleasantville



Catholic Education Archdiocese of Brisbane

teaching • challenging • transforming

A11 096 W3 of ref:146

29 October 2014

Ms Jill Girdwood
HQR Hub
School of Education & Professional Studies
Mt Gravatt Campus – Griffith University
170 Mossinos Hinge Road
Mt Gravatt, QLD 4122

Dear Ms Girdwood

The Brisbane Catholic Education Research Committee has met and considered your request to conduct the research project, "Engaging cultural diverse families through programs linking home and school". Approval was granted by the committee to contact the principal of [REDACTED] seeking their involvement in the project.

ALL CORRESPONDENCE

Brisbane Office: Education
GPO Box 1501
Brisbane QLD 4001
Phone: (07) 9388 7000
Fax: (07) 3944 5101
www.bca.catholic.edu.au
ASN 49 551 006 257

You will need to provide [REDACTED] a copy of the approval letter as evidence that your research request has been approved.

Please note that participation in your project is at the discretion of the principal. Should [REDACTED] not wish to participate please advise this office the names of any replacement schools that you wish to approach before contacting them.



OFFICE LOCATIONS:

Dutton Park
245 Gladstone Road
Phone: (07) 3718 7900

West End
159 Markham Road
Phone: (07) 3032 7000

North Lakes
17 Endeavour Blvd
Phone: (07) 3490 1760

Springwood
47 Laurinda Crescent
Phone: (07) 3440 7900

**Fr Bernard O'Shea
Livesey Centre, Yfatara**
16 Livesey St
Phone: (07) 2332 7116

**Ngarana-Lal Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Cultural
Medley Centre, Inala**
300 Inala St
Phone: (07) 3032 7200

It is a requirement of all researchers to provide a full report to Brisbane Catholic Education when finalised. Reference number 146 has been allocated to your project please quote this when making contact with this office.

If you have any further queries, please contact me on 30337 7427.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research project.

Yours sincerely

Warren Bath
Executive Officer
Catholic Education
Archdiocese of Brisbane

Copy: Associate Professor Sue Thomas
Dr Judith Keamey

Appendix C: Information and consent for all participants

C1 Information Sheet: Family Members



Information Sheet: Family Members

Engaging culturally diverse families through programs linking home and school
(GU Ref No. EDN/62/14/HREC)

Principal Researcher: Jill Girdwood PhD Research student

Supervisors: A/Prof Sue Thomas; Dr Judith Kearney

The purpose of this study

Schools offer a range of programs today to cater for the diverse needs of their communities. The aim of this study is to examine the experiences and expectations of culturally and linguistically (CALD) families in the programs offered to all families at a Queensland primary school. It will consider how the expectations and experiences that these families have of the programs align with those of the program designers by conducting group discussions, interviews and case studies.

A request is made for your participation in the study, which will involve:

Group discussions - possibly two - that will provide discussion opportunities for adult family members to share their ideas about what they expected and experienced in the school programs.

1. Individual interviews - one - where you share your own ideas with the researcher;
2. You may volunteer to participate further in case study research, which would involve a further interview;
3. Observations of the program activities – several over a number of weeks - will be made by the principal researcher.

To ensure confidentiality and privacy throughout the study, please note that:

The contents of all discussion in groups and interviews will be confidential. You will not be identified in the research by name or school. Quotes or specific references made to any response will be used in a way that would prevent identification of the participant or school. You will not be asked to disclose sensitive / personal information; however, we ask that what is discussed in the group is not disclosed to others so as to protect everyone's privacy.

1. Recordings and transcripts of focus groups and interviews are for research purposes only and access will be restricted to the researcher and supervisors. Transcripts will be coded for confidentiality, the code stored separately to the data. All data will be securely stored for a set time after completion of the study and then destroyed.
2. All participation is voluntary and you are in no way obliged to participate in this study. You have the right to withdraw at any stage during the study.

Privacy statement:

The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and / or use of your identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded. For further information consult the University's Privacy Plan at <http://www.griffith.edu.au/about-griffith/plans-publications/griffith-university-privacy-plan> or telephone (07) 3735 4375.

C2 Participant Consent Form: Family Members



Participant Consent Form: Family Members

Engaging culturally diverse families through programs linking home and school
(GU Ref No. EDN/62/14/HREC)

Principal Researcher: Jill Girdwood PhD Research student
Supervisors: A/Prof Sue Thomas; Dr Judith Kearney

By signing below, I confirm that I have been informed about the research study 'Engaging culturally diverse families through programs linking home and school'. If I consent to participate in the research, I understand that my involvement will include

- participating in group discussions,
- individual interviews and
- program activities.

I give my permission for a researcher to audio-record the group discussions and interviews and transcribe, analyse and report on the data. I understand that I will in no way be individually identified in the research, by name or school.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study and further questions will be possible at any stage as the study progresses. I also understand that

- my participation is voluntary and I am in no way under any obligation to consent to participate in this research;
- I may withdraw my consent at any time during the study and my decision to participate (or not) will in no way impact on my relationship with the school.
- While I gain no individual benefit from this research, outcomes could result in greater satisfaction for both CALD families and the school community in the programs offered.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Preferred means of contact: Email: _____

Phone: (H) _____ Mobile: _____

Other means of contact: _____

Griffith University conducts research in accordance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of this research, you should contact the Manager, Research Ethics on (07) 3735 4375 or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au.

Contact details for the researchers are as follows:

Associate Professor Sue Thomas – (07) 373 55743; Fax (07) 37355991; Email s.thomas@griffith.edu.au

Dr Judith Kearney - (07) 338 21344; Fax (07) 338 21104; Email j.kearney@griffith.edu.au

Jill Girdwood - 041 771 2318; email j.girdwood@griffith.edu.au

C3 Information Sheet: School Personnel



Information Sheet: School Personnel
Engaging culturally diverse families through programs linking home and school
(GU Ref No. EDN/62/14/HREC)

Principal Researcher: Jill Girdwood PhD Candidate
Supervisors: A/Prof Sue Thomas; Dr Judith Kearney

The purpose of this study: Schools offer a range of programs today to cater for the diverse needs of their communities. The aim of this study is to examine the experiences and expectations of culturally and linguistically (CALD) families in the programs offered to all families *at Queensland primary schools*. CALD families can include families of migrant and refugee backgrounds, those of Pasifika, Maori origins, whether permanent or temporary residents, and First Nation peoples.

Participant Involvement: The study consider how the expectations and experiences that CALD families have of the programs align with those of the program designers, by conducting group discussions, interviews, case studies, and observations of program activities. It will also conduct an interview with particular school personnel – an administration member whose focus is community outreach, one or two early years’ teachers and the Convenor of the program - on these topics. Examination of publically available school materials such as annual reports and newsletters will add to the data gathered.

Questions to guide this research are:

- What are the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse families in school engagement programs?
- How do the school engagement programs address needs identified by the family to achieve effective schooling outcomes for their children?
- How do the experiences and needs of the parents align with school perceptions of the programs?

A request is made for your participation in the study, which will involve an individual interview (one, of approximately 30 minutes) where you share your own ideas about the program offered by the school.

To ensure confidentiality and privacy throughout the study, please note that:

- The contents of interviews will be confidential. You will not be identified in the research by name or school. Quotes or specific references made to any response will be used in a way that would prevent identification of the participant.
- Recordings and transcripts of interviews are for research purposes only and access will be restricted to the researcher and supervisors. Transcripts will be coded for confidentiality, the code stored separately to the data. All data will be securely stored for a set time after completion of the study and then destroyed.
- All participation is voluntary and you are in no way obliged to participate in this study. You have the right to withdraw at any stage during the study.

Privacy statement: The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and / or use of your identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded. For further information consult the University’s Privacy Plan at <http://www.griffith.edu.au/about-griffith/plans-publications/griffith-university-privacy-plan> or telephone (07) 3735 4375.

C4 Consent Form: School Personnel

Consent Form: School Personnel

Engaging culturally diverse families through programs linking home and school



(GU Ref No. EDN/62/14/HREC)

Principal Researcher: Jill Girdwood PhD Research student

Supervisors: A/Prof Sue Thomas; Dr Judith Kearney

By signing below, I confirm that I have been informed about the research study 'Engaging culturally diverse families through programs linking home and school'. If I consent to participate in the research, I understand that my involvement will include

- One individual interview, about experiences in the school's program for families, particularly CALD families

I give my permission for the researcher to audio-record the interview and transcribe, analyse and report on the data. I understand that I will in no way be individually identified in the research, by name or school. While I will gain no individual benefit from this research, I understand outcomes could result in greater satisfaction for both CALD families and the school community in the programs offered.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study and further questions will be possible at any stage as the study progresses. I also understand that

- my participation is voluntary and I am in no way under any obligation to consent to participate in this research;
- I may withdraw my consent at any time during the study and my decision to participate (or not) will in no way impact on my position in the school.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Preferred means of contact: Email: _____

Phone: (School) _____ Mobile: _____

Other means of contact: _____

Griffith University conducts research in accordance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of this research, you should contact the Manager, Research Ethics on (07) 3735 4375 or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au.

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Jill Girdwood - 041 771 2318; email j.girdwood@griffith.edu.au

Appendix D: Interview questions - Parents and school personnel; parent group discussion starters/questions

D1 : Parent Interview Question Ideas

- What do you want your relationship with the school to be – as a client / customer OR as a partner in educating your child?
- How do you expect the school will support you in educating your child?
- What are some of the ways the school could help parents / families as children begin / progress into the early years of their schooling?
- What are some of the ways you have seen / would like to see the school show understanding of different cultural or religious beliefs and practices within the diverse range of families that make up the school community?
- What ideas did you get from attending this program that might make you feel better able to handle the ‘starting school experience’ - for you and your child?
- Are you noticing differences already, just with what you’ve seen here?
- Other comments you would like to add ... about your experiences / your hopes for next year?

(Williamstown only) After beginning of school year:

- How was the morning of Day 1 - getting to school, to your room, meeting your teacher, catching up with ‘friends’ made through the program, as well as other friends.
- How did the ‘goodbyes’ go? (for the preppy? Mum/dad?)
- Afternoon Day 1 - what was reported about the day?
- How did the actual events compare with how you imagined it would be? How do you feel the experiences of *the program* were helpful through this?
- How was going back for the following weeks? What have you / your family done to make this transition as smooth and enjoyable as you want it to be?
- What other thoughts / suggestions do you have for other families about this exciting time of transition into school?

D2 Key ideas for interviews with school personnel – both schools

- Tell me about how the school came to offer the early years program.
- How do you think the program helping parents and children in the transition to school?
- How do you see the expectations that parents have for their children – in the programs, at the school – aligning with those the school has for the students?
- How do you think the school expresses understanding of the different cultural or religious beliefs found within the diversity of the school community?

D3 Parent Group Discussion starters / questions - both schools

- Tell me about your experiences in the program.
- What ideas about beginning school / managing the early years of your child's schooling have you found helpful from the program?
- Describe how you feel the school meets the expectations that you have for your child's education.
- What are some of the ways you have seen the school show understanding of different cultural or religious beliefs and practices within the diverse range of families that make up the school community?
- What other comments would like to add to our discussion?

Appendix E: Transcript from focus group discussion Williamstown parents

Transcript interview Code: WFg:FA	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
<p>It gets the kids into the school environment. My child is only child, is different here, a bit quiet, changes at home Gives them a structure, It's not always about play Has to wear shoes, also hats – so this is good teaching for next year</p> <p>Big changes from kindy, has to wear shoes, does not have to at kindy – they say take them off eg in sandpit etc</p> <p>This program is good for him, he will know some kids next year.</p> <p>Shows them writing, counting – more formal side – also alphabet; it all comes together They learn writing names, how to hold pencils Age differences can be a lot – but all do the same stuff Childcare also does assessment of them, sends to school. I don't know how it all works (first time at school mum); not sure what standards are expected It's good for parents, we get to know each other, shows kids we are all part of the community. We can talk to each other at drop-off & pick-up times and this is so good for kids too.</p>	<p>For children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Familiarity with school environment - Expectations - Routines - Meeting other children - Academic learning <p>For parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge of school system <p>All also are benefits for children</p>	<p>Preparing the children for school</p> <p>Learning expectations of school</p> <p>Building relationships</p> <p>Preparing children for school</p> <p>Prepares parent to become parent of school-aged child</p>	<p>Bourdieu – building the types of capital needed in the school environment – for children and parents</p> <p>Bonding relationships for children</p> <p>Bonding relationships for parents</p>	<p>Familiarity with school expectations / environment; gives familiarity with all of these aspects</p> <p>Group offers different experiences for children</p> <p>Relationship building for both children and parents are helpful as they move into the school environment</p> <p>Parent perceptions of value of pre-Prep group for children and parents</p>

Transcript interview Code: WFg:FA	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
<p>I have a yr 9 and also a yr 6 & 7 here – I do not know of anything they do which is particularly about different cultures</p> <p>They do have RE here</p> <p>Multicultural activities like NAIDOC, also Chinese NY, and days for NZ</p> <p>My year 3 boy does Australian history and it is also about Aboriginal culture</p>	<p>Awareness of how cultural diversity influences school / curriculum</p> <p>School caters for different aspects of cultures for students</p>			<p>Parent perception of influence of cultural diversity in school</p>

Appendix F: Transcript from focus group discussion Pleasantville parents

Transcript interview Code: PvFg	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
<p>There's always arts and craft, some construction work to play with always toys out to play with, including some noisy ones – which they don't get at home! There's sections for the little children, and they cater for boys and girls and their interests.</p> <p>The socialising, learning to share, yes</p> <p>Yes, different age groups, different cultures and they don't care at all (no, no one's told them!)</p> <p>[daughter] is at that point where she notices everything and comments but it doesn't mean anything ... but it doesn't mean anything to them, it just is.</p>	<p>Activities at playgroup for children</p> <p>Variety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Craft - Toys - Socialising - Sharing <p>Mixing with others</p>	<p>Relationship building</p>	<p>Bonding relationships for children</p>	<p>Parent perception of value of playgroup for children</p>
<p>Just when (we had that incident just a few minutes ago when a little boy hit one of the girls with the end of the toy) she said to me ...'that brown boy'. I said 'but that's not how we speak' But it doesn't mean anything from the kids</p> <p>xxx relates tale:</p> <p>'When (my husband) had gone down to xxx's class the other day to talk to the kids, and the following day a little boy came up to him at the shops and said 'hello xxx's dad'. He told xxx, "I met one of the boys from your class' and her reply was, 'oh, what colour was he?'</p> <p>Then the mums said well that's just her way of finding out who / which boy</p> <p>And you know what, I think that's just how she worked out who he saw / who spoke to him</p> <p>Xxx - perhaps if you looked at the class you would see the distinct groups she was referring to?</p> <p>Yes, the majority of classes here have lots of different kids, we have lots of Islanders for example. The majority of the classes are made up of all different cultures / kids, many islanders for example.</p>	<p>Children's perception of racial differences</p> <p>Parental concerns shared</p>	<p>Community of school – cultural diversity</p>	<p>SC – shows depth of resources from which parents in this group can draw – in supporting each other</p>	<p>Value of playgroup environment for parents; affirming for parents in how they 'handle things'</p> <p>Parent perception of CALD school community</p>
<p>37% of your school population was</p>				

Transcript interview Code: PvFg	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
<p><i>from a variety of different cultures</i> But that's what I love about this place, they just accept everything. Like last year, there was a young man who decided he may not have been a young man when he was born so he began to dress as a young lady. He did it well. If you saw him you probably wouldn't even know. Now, back in my day, he would have got bashed – who knows what else – but these kids just accepted him. He was just, whatever, he was great, they all just accepted it. He's finished school now, and lives down the road from us. He always says hello, they all just accept him. That wouldn't have happened when I went to school ... says a lot for the school</p> <p>Yes I applaud it, it takes a lot to come out like that, not knowing what to expect.</p> <p>xxx: A lot of people who feel like that don't acknowledge it until they are more mature.</p> <p>Yes and there are still a lot of people who are very ignorant etc ... you don't have to like it but ...</p>	<p>Diversity of school community</p> <p>Acceptance /</p> <p>Non-judgement in school community</p>	<p>Christian philosophy underpins</p> <p>Christian philosophy underpins</p>	<p>SC – acknowledge ment of each individual of community</p>	<p>Parent perception of inclusivity as part of school philosophy</p> <p>Parents who have been at the school for a number of years are giving their views of types of relationships possible</p>
<p>They'll be more socialised, they are going into the same school, they'll know people and have that familiarity, the structure of the place</p> <p>The friends they make will help them to fit in</p> <p>I come /came to playgroup more for myself almost,.</p> <p>Did you all know each other?</p> <p>No, we met here. xxx- at the library (xxx and friend) – she asked her friend to playgroup</p> <p>Yes, you need adult conversation – I've done it all before, yes, you're a mother, wife, sister , daughter – everything, but you are still 'me' and you forget that</p>	<p>Experiences in Playgroup for children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Socialise - Make friends - Familiarity with place - & structures <p>For parents</p> <p>Mix with adults</p>	<p>Preparing children – for world outside of family</p> <p>Relationship building for parents</p>	<p>Bonding relationships for parents</p>	<p>Parent perception of value of playgroup for children and parents</p> <p>Context for building relationships</p> <p>Playgroup fulfils its aim when these comments are considered</p>
<p>Discussion on previous pre-Prep program</p> <p>Xxx does – the prep program, at the end of the year, I think it's ten weeks</p>	<p>School providing support in transition</p> <p>Groups for support</p> <p>Was informal in style</p>	<p>Preparing children for school</p>	<p>SC – need to 'educate' children, meet a deficit identified in</p>	<p>Perceptions of pre-Prep support provided by school</p>

Transcript interview Code: PvFg	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
<p>The pre prep, they go up to classes etc. Xxx who was here used to take them up to classes Fridays and Tuesdays and let them sit in the room so they could get used to it all [Convenor] came along and put in the proper pre-prep program My niece did it last year, my sister swears by it</p>	<p>Structured program introduced Parent's positive response</p>		<p>children entering Prep – a 'proper' program</p>	
<p>Discussion on the new pre-prep program I can really see the benefits, I've put her into one at day care as well, so she can get used to being away from me ... she's got really bad 'last child syndrome', really bad! It's like an only child thing, she's seven years younger than my next one, it's like she's the only child and it's a big difference at this stage of your life Think about when you had [this child] to your son, seven years. We've got interactive whiteboards up there now, all that stuff. When our kids were first starting school, they didn't have that. When you think even in that short time how it's changed, I hate to think what it's going to be like when she's leaving school It's just changed so much, even when I refer to myself, and I don't think I'm old or anything, yesterday, when my son's computer was broken, I said ... 'well now you're going to have to write everything like we did in the old days!' referring to myself as being in the old days! I don't feel that way ... discussion continues about typewriters then electric typewriters ... technology. xxx I remember teaching my mum how to use a computer, I'd have to turn it on and off for her for the first two years. But now, she taught me how to use <i>Facebook!</i> How to upload photos and stuff – that's how it's changed. I was resistant to it, she was like no, have to!</p>	<p>Changes school has made over time in providing education School is seen as up to date in methods / teaching</p>			<p>Parents' perceptions of school adopting latest educational tools</p>

Transcript interview Code: PvFg	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
<p>and I expect the school to do the same – to push them when I’m not around</p> <p>I suppose I want them to teach them those kind of life skills – like I said, I’m doing the best I can at home, I want the school to be doing that too, teaching them manners and those sorts of things, not just teaching them maths science and stuff. I want them to be properly functioning adults who can go out into the world – and not be an xx! (I had a great English teacher!)</p> <p>It’s not just academia ... And I think it is like that – when xxx’s sister met me and knew I was going to be a new mum at the school, she took me into the corner and said this is a great school, you have to come here – and that’s what I want to hear</p> <p>All jokes aside, no matter where you go, the school is great and it has a lot of added extras – they had the Broncos visit last year. They have the breakfast club everyday – like today they have sausages for breakfast. And they have that apprenticeships and so the kids have something when they leave school. And the services all come out and they have a day and they walk you through all the possibilities.</p>	<p>Parent recommends the school</p> <p>Wide ranging approach</p>	<p>Family-school relationship</p>	<p>the SC children already have – from parent viewpoint</p>	<p>Parent perceptions of role school plays in educating children</p> <p>Parent perceptions of school’s holistic approach to education</p>
<p>A lot to do with awareness of different cultures, teaching students about it and helping them to learn about and be proud of their culture. They teach acceptance, there is no other way here.</p> <p>It’s almost as though it doesn’t exist ... difference. This is the only place I’ve been [playgroup]. It’s just about accepting and love, this is it</p>	<p>Cultural awareness in school</p>		<p>Recognising that all have social capital – much to offer the school community</p>	<p>Parent perception of school values and beliefs in CALD school community</p>

Appendix G: Transcript from Prep teachers focus group discussion

Pleasantville

Interview PvPs Group – 3 Prep teachers (of the 4) present

1. **Why do you think the school came to offer the Pre-Prep Program?**

I think it's to ease the transition into prep, to get enrolments, to bring families to the school and for the children to be eased into starting school ... **agreement here**

2. **How did the program help families to prepare their child for school through that program?**

First time parents, definitely this is a great help; keep their mind at ease about what they're going into.

And, they get the opportunity to talk with families that are already familiar. Some of the ones who go to Playgroup have ones in grade one or two and know the ropes and those new mums get to talk to them ... like mentoring

Yes, I've seen a bit of that happening. A couple of the ladies who go to playgroup have kids well into the school and they talk with the new mums - yes, it's so good.

3. **How many prep classes?** 4

4. **How many students in each?** 25

5. **How many children in your class attended the program? Are they spread across all classes? (particularly thinking xxx, but other programs also are run in the area I know)**

Seems to have the bulk of them. I think if Mum goes to playgroup every time, I think with the next one down, they obviously were there last year. I think probably about 4 or 5 have come through the pre-prep.

Maybe only 1 or 2 from this program, but have gone to others. Pretty much all of mine have gone to some sort of day care or kindy

6. **What advantages do you as teachers feel you have with the kids who attend such a program?**

They're used to a routine, or it's not as big a shock to them. It also depends on where they've been and how in-depth their kindy program is but a lot of them are a bit more ready I guess. They've been immersed in letters and numbers and actual formal learning at the kindy programs before they come to school, which is what you need now because of the curriculum.

So you're 'straight in' in terms of curriculum, as they arrive? You as teachers can't ease them in so much because you've got to start teaching?

We do ease them in but yes, we do have to start. The stuff we start with is quite simple but obviously you are starting. You've also got to think that some of them are only four and a half when they do start.

There's a lot of socialising still – doing the 'we are a group, we work together, all of that, we are part of the group, and the group's part of the bigger prep group, hence playing together, before we move into the big school playing together. There's a lot of still orientating to the environment.

They come up here a lot during the pre-prep program?

At the end of the year they will come for visits and mornings. It does help I think in those initial weeks of school. And of course, other children are coming from other kindies and they are equally as ready I'd say.

Do you have any who come into your classroom who haven't done anything, that school is the first time / place?

Yes, a few.

How do they go? It varies depending on the child, how old they are, (**agreement**) if they are a second child for example rather than a first. Some just pick it up and run with it, others it takes a little bit longer because it is their first formal setting. They're getting used to not only the learning but the routine and being independent. And ... we do this now, we can't just go off and do whatever, wherever we want to.

That's a big thing, that I've found, the teaching of independence. Parents are still doing so much for them and when they come to prep, that is the goal for first term. (and both B & C say I've still got that). It's 'you unpack your bag, you get your things out. Even now parents are still carrying their bags into the room and I say, 'Where's your bag? You go and get it'. Mummy doesn't carry it. So that separation of 'who's responsible?', and teaching them that these are your belongings, you need to do this – it takes some all year ... ongoing. But it's very intense at the start.

7. Besides that, are there other areas that you now also can see that could also be covered in pre-prep to further assist kids / parents / teachers?

It's a lot of social skills, being a member of a group, being independent, the taking of turns ... **agreement here.**

8. What feedback / comments have you had from parents who attended the program?

I did have a couple ... one of the mums, and the other mum agreed with her. She said, 'This has been a lot easier than I expected.' I remember her saying that because I think she was quite anxious, because she has one in grade 5 and then this one. This one didn't go anywhere else except to xxxs playgroup, and she was just really relieved. She said, 'This has been so much easier than expected'. So that's just one comment I've heard.

9. I know you have a very culturally diverse school population here. What sort of range of cultural backgrounds are you aware of in your present Prep classes?

Agreement – definitely.

I'd say I have at least half my class.

But of that half, 3 or 4 might register as ESL.

I've even had that this week where the ESL teacher asked me again to approach mum because on their enrolment they'd said no, they only speak English, but I'm sure I've heard mum speak another language. I've asked the child and the child said, yes, they do. Then I asked mum and I got a very terse 'no', a very abrupt reply.

I've got 7 who say they speak another language. I don't know what it is.

There's some barrier there. When the parents are filling out that enrolment form, they're not acknowledging that they do. It's almost like no, we're not allowed to put that, we might not get enrolled. There's something there that prevents them.

They obviously don't realise that putting that in ... is a positive, because they give us extra knowledge, and they get extra support. It gives us more time with them through other things, like having someone else come into the room with them and things like that.

Yes, but that's been going on for a while

I think it's like a pride thing. A lot of them are quite proud – we don't need help, we don't take support.

It's a denial of their language, so I think they're frightened of exclusion because of their language.

Do you think they are using their first language in the home, teaching the kids their first language?

Yes, some of them are, but I don't think they understand / get that message! And that it's ok to proclaim that.

I haven't had any this year and I've got 7 who have said they're ESL and a couple of others who are from different backgrounds, but they've said they only speak English and from what I can tell, it seems they only do speak English. So this year I don't have any that it's unacknowledged, that said they only speak English and won't acknowledge they do speak anything else. Mine have all said yes, they do speak something else, which is good.

10. When you think about the expectations that the parents have for their children, do you see that they are aligned with what the school expects of its students?

Well ... it depends on the family.

I would probably say, and it's generalising, but certain cultures have more of the 'are they behaving' and other cultures have more of the 'what's their grades like?', and it seems to be one or the other focus.

Yes, I've got that, like in interviews I've had with them, they haven't even asked me what their grade is. It's just like, 'what's their behaviour like, what are their manners like? Are they doing the right thing? Are they being polite? Then when I told them about their grades, they say, okay, great, that's good. But, their main concern was ... what's their behaviour like?

Then you get the flip side, where you want to talk about their behaviour, and it's like, no, I don't want to know.

Do you get a good turn up when you have the parents up to talk about the kids?

Mostly you do in prep, because it's their first.

In grade 1 I haven't and this year, I didn't really, not in first term I didn't.

What do you put that down to? Are they 'experienced' parents? This wasn't their first child / first child here?

No, I got a mixture. I sometimes feel like with the other cultures here, they hand the child over ... it's like 'we entrust them to you, we just step away (agreement from Jodie). They don't interfere.

I've had that, I've had a mother say, 'when he's at school, you are his mother, and when he's at home, I'm his mother'.

The African mums often say that to me – you tell him, you do it.

I was at a different school last year, I had parents in my room until the end of year, every morning they'd be there in my room for 15 or 20 minutes. I'd be saying, 'ok, you've got to say goodbye now,' whereas here, it's drop, see you later, gone. It's like 'they're yours, that's it!' You're like their mother I guess now.

And it's a kind of trust and respect thing too for the teacher. I find that with the Samoan families, it's pretty much a lot of respect for you and you need to tell us if he / she's not behaving – otherwise that shame, they don't want that. So, yes, they're kind of just handed over.

Homework's a big thing too. That's another issue when you think about the expectations. You expect a book to be read ...

Mine have done pretty well. I expected that I wouldn't get many back and that not many would do it and I've actually had 24 out of my 25 every single week bringing their books in, their folders in, every single day. Obviously one or two here or there who haven't but then they will bring it in. But I've only had one that has consistently not brought it back but other than that I've had them all and I've seen even my ESL kids ... one of my ESL parents came in and said, 'I don't understand this, what do I have to do? And then, once I'd explained it to her, I've noticed with that little girl she now has made a big jump because she's obviously doing it at home. I was sort of expecting ... not a lot, you know, especially in prep. They sort of go, 'you're only in prep, it doesn't sort of matter,' but I noticed that it was really quite high, which I found surprising. I thought there wouldn't be that many.

That might be your approach to it that's enabled that to happen, it might be how you've dealt with it.

Most of mine bring theirs back. They only have to bring it in once a week and they've generally got a reading book in there

I have a reading book and sight words, (agreement). So, they don't have to do a work sheet so I don't know if that's being read, I guess, there's no evidence, but ...

Well mine tell me , they're like 'I've read my book. They're excited to get it as well. Every Monday, they're really excited to change their books. They're like 'are we changing them, are we changing them?'

11. Do you think the parents see themselves as 'partners' in the education of the child?

Agreement: Some do, quite a few don't I feel.

It's extreme from my experience. They're either partner and they're on your case, or they're not at all ... I find it hard to find those that are well balanced.

12. Do you think that the playgroup ... I know it's a step back from the pre-prep program ... but do you think that it is also a helpful avenue for getting them ready for school?

Well, it's on the same campus, so they're coming to this place, so that's all familiar.

And they'd be with ... like, the younger kids would be with older kids ... as they come up. Say those children have gone to prep, and then the year they come to prep, those kids they've been to playgroup with, and then the pre-prep, they would see in the older years as well. They have familiar people as well. I even notice kids in my class know quite a few of the year 1 kids

already, and that was in the first term. They said, we went to day care with them or we did kindy and stuff with them.

Most of them feel comfortable.

I guess that's what it's all about? (Agreement)

13. Can you think of other ways the school supports parents / families during that time ... pre coming to school, and in those early years in the school?

I think they're invited to everything.

And the prep open day ... mornings ... and we have the xxx and those families are invited and come along to that and we have our under 8s day

I've noticed you guys have parents / invite parents to a lot of things, like everything , quite a lot more stuff than other places I've been ... like assembly.

So they're invited to assembly?

Special ones of course ... and if it's your class presenting, you usually send home a note to say they're on. They have lots of opportunities to take or leave.

Do you have parents coming into your classroom?

You can

I haven't yet.

I haven't but that's only because I haven't had any ... like I was saying before, last year I had people lining up, saying when can I come in. This year, I've had nothing.

Very rarely do they ask. I think here, you have to extend the invitation to them and you need to be choosy about who you extend that invitation to, just because of that 'extremeness'. Like, some just want to run the show ... as a teacher, you just be mindful of that .

Would you do that in first semester anyway? Or would you wait?

Agreement: I wouldn't in the first term, because you need that time to separate and ... but in second term, yes ... like I have a mum coming tomorrow morning to help us cook. But, there's not too many ... I think here, you have to extend the invitation. You don't have many jumping up and down saying 'can I, can I',

And in the past, when I've had year 1, and I've extended the invitation, you don't get much ... I've had maybe one person ... no one seems keen.

So what do you do when it's the one you don't want to come in?

I think I just extended it, and luckily the one I had was quite good and in the end, it ended up being once a week for the entire year. She came for a whole morning session and it worked well.

It's finding that right one.

14. Any other comments you would like to add? Anything else that's relevant to this conversation?

About linking families to the school? Are we talking in terms of what the school can do to support families?

Yes, and the way you can see as teachers, that you can involve your parents, or not ... with the kids or going through the sight words, those sorts of things? Agreement

We have a celebration of our learning each term and you usually in prep get a very big roll up to that. So, they are interested, and I think it's a bit of respect that they leave you to it, and then want to come and see what's happened. So I like that aspect of it that they're not ... bashing on the door, saying what's happening. And we do weekly or fortnightly communication with them. And you

I do daily ... you've got a book system. I don't write in them daily, only if I need to). There are communication books set up if you need to, and I think if you just keep a level of communication happening and the door's open and we all come together on this date to celebrate learning, they come.

I think if you keep raising or keep the expectation the same, then as they go through, a lot of them are going to have younger kids or whatever, then they're going to start to realise, 'okay, well the expectation is that we have to have those things, we have to do that' so then they're going to start to do it.

So I think, so for my kids, they're expected to bring their message folder in every day and ... so hopefully in year 1, their parents will still be used to having to do something like that so that then that might help them if you want to do that. I don't know if they do ... but they've got that expectation already, starting to go through.

Okay, thank you very much for your time ... excellent!

Appendix H: Parent interviews Williamstown and Pleasantville

H1 Parent Interviews: Williamstown

Transcript interview Code:WFA2:14	Ideas / initial code	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
First child to school				
This is just helping us get used to what prep is.	Program as introduction to Prep Perception of value of program	Preparing parent and child for school	Bourdieu – intro to field – child and parent	Perception of value of program
A partner, yes, that's why I try to get involved as much as I can Yes, like this, the pre-prep, I try to get engaged more with the school, the communication. I just hope they try to communicate just like I try to communicate more, it has to be a two-way communication.	Type of relationship Parent perception of parent role in the family school relationship	Family-school relationship – how does it work for parent; Roles of each party	SC – building bridging relationships Bourdieu - Power in relationships – staff / parents	Learning about family school relationship, roles of each party
I think to get him more prepared because he's the only child, he's by himself and playing. To get him gradually go into society, so he can interact with other kids, other people.	Group offers child <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation for school - Socialisation - Interaction with other children 	Preparing child for school – social & emotional skills	Bourdieu – for child - entry to field; survival in the field due to building social / cultural capital	Parent perception of how child is familiarised through pre-Prep
I think it's going to be exciting, he's in kindergarten now. But I think the first couple of weeks are going to be different. The kindy is a bit similar, but there it's smaller groups, here it's a bigger group. I wish I could become a fly on the wall just to see him.	Group offers child <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - school like experience - learn group behaviour 	Preparing child for school	Bourdieu – for child building cultural capital; Learning behaviours – gaining social capital of the field / survival in the field	Perception of value of experiences of pre-Prep for child
Because this is going to be my first time, it's so different here from Indonesia I think it's good for me to get an introduction to how the school works – how the teacher interacts with the kids, how they can make friends as well. Differences? Here I think the teacher has a better relationship with the students. Where I come from, the teacher is	Program provides parent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunity to learn about schooling system - Ideas gained about schooling system 	Family-school relationships Working out roles of each in relationship through comparison with system of own country	Bourdieu – for parents - gaining cultural capital of field / knowledge - seen as needed in the field of school / education	Group provides opportunity for parent new to system to learn rules. Will be able to advocate for child Parent perceptions of differences

Transcript interview Code:WFA2:14	Ideas / initial code	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
at the front of the class, the kids are just sitting and listening to the teacher, unless they ask something. Here they encourage the kids to speak their opinion, things like that.				in school system; value of program as enabling gaining of such knowledge
<p>Maybe because Australia is becoming multicultural now, especially around here, you can see so many different people. It's nice maybe, they don't have to do it for a big time, just add a little, an introduction, because when you're in a multicultural country, it's important for the kids to be able to recognise that difference is alright. So long as you're together. I'm from Indonesia. .Normally we take xxx ... like we have Indonesia Independence day ... to introduce him to different culture, different people, different skin colours, all the same.</p>	Difference is acceptable part of diverse community	Importance of acceptance of difference as normal today	<p>Bourdieu – difference / equality in the field;</p> <p>Recognition 7 valuing of social capital in all families</p>	Reflects complexity of society & how parent guides child through this parent perception of influence of cultural diversity in community;
<p><i>After beginning of school year, the following via email:</i></p> <p>Day 1 experiences The first day was remarkably smooth, which was helped by the fact that the School gave us a lot of information regarding the first day and finding the classroom. Because the prep starting dates were divided into 2 groups, it made it easier to talk to the teachers and the children weren't overwhelmed. Because the first couple of days were shorter and there were smaller groups, it was easier for the children to get to know their teacher and vice-versa. The 'goodbyes' were surprisingly easy maybe</p>	<p>Beginning of Prep:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Timetabling benefits for children and teachers - Familiarity with school 	<p>Preparing child for school – and then school for child ... at beginning of Prep</p> <p>Building relationships – students and teachers</p>	<p>Bourdieu – entry to field</p> <p>Child and teacher benefits - bridging and bonding relationships</p>	<p>Parent perception of value of timetabling to Prep children and teachers</p> <p>Value placed on support of child & the relationship established between teacher - child</p>

Transcript interview Code:WFA2:14	Ideas / initial code	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
because my son had already been through the pre-prep program so he was already familiar with the school and the classroom. He was happy so we were happy too..				
The pre-prep program was very useful both for the children and the parents because we got a clearer understanding of what the school expects from us and what we can expect from the school. The main thing is that the children feel comfortable in their new environment.	Group eased parent concerns Children were comfortable in new environment	Roles of parent and child in family-school relationships	Relationships formed	Parent perception of valuable experiences in pre-Prep group – parents and children
The following weeks have been a smooth transition. I just try to impress upon my son that school is a fun learning environment where they get to learn and play.	Parent role in easing child into Prep	View of education – adds to her child but does not make him as a person	SC – value of child for what he already has within	Parent perception of role of education
I was a bit worried about how my son would cope during the first week but it went better than expected. I would recommend that parents have their child attend the pre-prep program if they have the time as it is well worth it.	Pre-prep seen as assisting child into Prep year	Growth of child – confidence and competence in entry to Prep	Building of capital through program – seen as helpful by parent	Parent perception of value of program

H2 Parent Interviews Pleasantville

Transcript interview Code: PV4	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
<i>4 years involvement at school</i>				
1child in playgroup; children yr1 & 5				
<p><u>On previous pre-Pre program:</u> – the year before last. It was with xx, not here now. Brilliant, really helps the Kids also the parents as well, because you’re getting to know each other, the teachers. Even though I already knew what the school was like because my son was here, it’s nice. Yes, he went into prep. He went to day care, I don’t know if that made any difference. I think having the pre-prep here definitely makes a difference.</p> <p>The familiarity they had, I know day care helps them to become more social. It’s the familiarity about where they go. One of the biggest hurdles for the kids is the new environment, whereas if they’re used to that, see a few kids’ faces they recognise, it takes a lot of the anxiety away for them I believe.</p>	<p>Pre-Prep helpful for child Pre-Prep helpful for parent</p> <p>Pre-Prep – builds familiarity with school – people and places</p> <p>Benefits for child</p> <p>Knowing place, knowing people eases anxiety for children</p>	<p>Preparing children for school</p> <p>Familiarity with environment identified in other research also</p>	<p>Bourdieu – building cultural and social capital for children</p> <p>SC – benefits from bonding relationships</p>	<p>Parent perception of (previous) pre-Prep - is being compared to ‘new’ program</p> <p>Parent perception of value of pre-Prep for child</p>
Partner - basically my involvement with my children, I need to check they’re doing their homework, they’re attending classes, they’re working to the best of their ability. I can’t expect the teacher to be doing all of that. But sometimes, it’s needed for the teacher	<p>Partnering -involvement with child</p> <p>Teacher role</p>	<p>Building family-school relationship</p> <p>Shows agency of parent in relationship</p>	<p>SC – bridging relationships- parent / teacher</p>	<p>Relationships with teacher – seen as part of team – shows feeling of agency parent experiences ... also respect for teacher role in the relationship</p>

Transcript interview Code: PV4	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
to say 'I want that homework done' and it's more effective than the parent. You work as a team and see what works best for your child.. It is definitely a partnership.	Teacher & parent a team Relationship – roles of each are as part of team with child at centre	Child centred relationship		
Playgroup - I'd say primarily it's more to do with the socialising, then having the familiarity. I don't think it's geared in any way to be educational as such, like there's no reading or that. But there are sometimes things like story-telling and activities where they can work and share things like paints. So they learn turn-taking, more life skills I think	Socialising for child Activities give life skills	Building relationships - children	SC - bonding relationships for children at playgroup Bourdieu – building social and cultural capital for children – required in pre-Prep & school	Parent perception of value of playgroup for child; learning of basic 'life skills' for child Wide ranging benefits from playgroup for child
I think he has more initiative to do crafts or do something like a game. He gets involved with things like painting, so then he might want to do that at home, whereas he perhaps might not if he wasn't attending playgroup. For some parents, they might not actually do anything with their child, so that's kind of new to them	Playgroup as helpful for child Increasing child initiative Guides parents in working with child Helpful for parents	Development of child as per age level Not skilling but supporting	SC – parents see the skills they have already	Parent perception of value of playgroup - for child - for parent learn how to support child Parent sees opportunity – not a devaluation of the skills they already possess
I think it's more to get to know other parents as well. Could be intimidating for some people meeting a whole new set of people like teachers, principals, other parents, so it's nice to have that familiarity, know how the school works and that, listen to	Forming relationships with other parents Becoming familiar with school, the system Knowing gives confidence	Building relationships for parents Increasing self-efficacy Familiarity with school environment	Bourdieu – building social and cultural capital for parents – as	Increase familiarity with place and schooling system Feeling of being part of school community

Transcript interview Code: PV4	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
feedback. You're already part of things.			needed in school environment	
It's just very accepting of all cultures, they don't identify everyone – like these are islanders ... etc... everyone is treated the same. That's your traditions, your way of life, we welcome it.	School is a community Acceptance of differences Acceptance of cultural practices	Family-school relationships School as community	Bonding relationships	Parent perception of school community Difference is accepted – all are equal

Appendix I: Staff interviews Williamstown and Pleasantville

I1 Staff interviews at Williamstown

<i>Transcript interview Code: WCon</i>	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
<p>[Community]Meeting was good, good variety of people around, good response, we had about 40 turn up so combination of Ed Qld Regional staff – xx– community development type people; xxx Council Community person development person, Qld Health had someone, Benevolent Society, C & K a representative for their Kindy and Day Care, YMCA Day Care was there, PCYC had a representative there. Then you had quite a few directors and educators from the centres. Every school had a representative except for xx SS & xxx; also the Access Qld Area Manager. Cannot think of who else, basically it was a good day spent on how we can better work together to get better results.</p> <p>Is this for when they are starting school? No, this from the time they're born, because data shows early intervention is actually cheaper than waiting until there is a problem. So, this is the partnership from zero through, and how all these transitions can work – basically zero through to the end of primary school. All the studies are showing early interventions are the key.</p> <p>So what's the next step? Once a term the aim is to have a meeting, all those same people. There are a few who were not present who were invited who will probably be there next time and then from that, they'll make like a 'backbone' group, like a smaller group, that go away from those bigger meetings and work out what came out of that and what we have to do to implement stuff.</p>	<p>community meeting</p> <p>community wide initiative to support families</p> <p>improve academic results</p> <p>improve results</p>	<p>Whole region perception of value of intervention to address problems</p>	<p>Whole region perception of value of intervention to address problems</p> <p>Collective impact model</p>	<p>Shows awareness by school of value of a collaborative approach</p> <p>Solution is 'known' – just have to get to it</p>
<p>Because the government has given out all this funding and [Principal] has chosen to implement it by employing a Community Liaison Officer (me) and utilising that officer to instigate some pre-prep initiatives.</p> <p>When will he give you the word that it will continue next year? It will. It is going next year; the commitment is that I'll be here until the end of next year at least.</p> <p>In terms of your experience in what you've done with this program, how would you describe it? I think it's good to watch the parents engage with their kids and being able to model to them some strategies that I guess they can go away with and put into practice at home. It gives them the confidence I guess to help their kids prepare for school. The relationships that the parents are forming with other parents are positive and the relationships forming with other students and the staff that they're interacting with are beneficial. Those kids that are involved in the program become familiar with some of the school procedures and I'm assuming that when they start next year, it won't be so scary and overwhelming. Then next year, for those first couple of weeks, we'll probably have - I'll probably set up my room in the mornings for those parents who</p>	<p>Funding use for convenor of pre-Prep; CLO</p> <p>planning for program</p>	<p>Building of relationships – opportunity for parent & child – building of bonding & bridging relationships</p> <p>Preparing children for school</p>	<p>SC – no acknowledgment of what family has</p> <p>Building relationships</p> <p>Bourdieu – Building social & cultural capital for parents – and for children; prepares both educational</p>	<p>A judgement that 'parenting style' needs improvement</p> <p>Staff perception of value of program for parents and children – from a deficit perspective – will 'fix'</p>

<i>Transcript interview</i> <i>Code: WCon</i>	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
aren't coping really well with the separation anxiety so they can leave the kids in class and vent to me rather than vent to teachers and make it hard for the kids, help them to separate happily.			environment	
Not in the program as such, more probably admin things, there's a couple of things to do differently, but the program as such works relatively well. I'll probably stick to the same structure. The only thing is, next year, we won't run over three days, we'll do it over two – two morning sessions, two afternoon sessions, because we're running playgroup as well. I'll do play group in the morning on one of the other days. Fairly similar routine because it seems to be working and so similar things and workshops. I'll probably just repeat the same program and maybe tweak some things that I thought could have worked better because it will be a different set of kids.	planning of program	Staff perception of planning of program		No input from parents for any aspect of this
How do you think families are helped through the program? Well in some cases, you have families that didn't really have positive experiences in school, so the aim is in this program to show them that the school environment is an environment that wants them to succeed and wants to work alongside them and we're not here to point fingers. You won't be sent down the headmaster's office if you haven't got all the answers for your kids. We're trying to make it a more supportive, alongside of, empower them to go and do what needs to be done to help their child succeed rather than spoon-feed them with everything. It's very much ... well that's why I like them to participate in the activities, <u>it's to model to them what they need to do, so they can go away and do that at home</u> . It's about getting the parents excited about being involved in their child's education and being involved in the school's activities, programs and resources that are made available to them, trying to educate or inform them that those things are there because we feel that they're to assist them, to help their kids achieve their educational milestones	program for parents: relationship is one that supports & is upskilling Is this empowering educating involving preparing children for school	Staff perception of parents' ability how pre-Prep will enable parents to fulfil role expected by school	SC of parents not seen as adequate – but school intention is to help them / support them Bourdieu – building the types of capital needed in the school environment	Improvement desired is for school data – is it also for families? Parenting practices will improve-> children will be ready for school -> achieve educational outcomes -> school data improvement
I think there'll be parents that still won't take up those things. I've got some parents that come to pre-prep that still don't think it's really their responsibility to do those things. It's their job to bring them and it's our job to do it. But I am trying to change that attitude, and being that only 2/3rds come to pre-prep, there's still one third through possibly work <u>commitments or don't see the need. So I don't think it's realistic to say we're going to change the attitude of every parent</u> , but if we can see an improvement in the data, in the participation rate and in the engagement rate from parents, then we'd be happy with that. The DP talked about some of the children being “under parented” – how do you see that statement? Too many parents use TV or tablets / electronic devices as 'babysitters' so kids do not develop a vocabulary or	parent role aim is to improve data view of 'parenting style'	On-going deficit perception of parents / families	SC – perception that parents do not have personal resources Bourdieu – again about m/class values & wanting all to conform	The aim of pre-Prep is to involve parents, so as to improve outcomes for children ... and improve parenting

<i>Transcript interview</i> <i>Code: WCon</i>	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
interacting skills. Families don't do things like eat together so kids are not used to talking / sharing about their day /other things. It shows when we get the kids in a group like this.				
<p>Yes, I enrolled the students and told them it was happening and they had the option then to come to an information session about it and from there they could sign up. Ever since then I tell them at enrolment that it's on.</p> <p>Prep enrolment ...t 150 – 160 enrolled for next year? So far, 130</p> <p>So you have 2/3 coming to the program – 80. Could you accommodate any more, could you accommodate all of them?</p> <p>If [Principal] wanted me to, then we'd have to negotiate things like we'd have to be here more hours and possibly some of those other things they want me to do as a Liaison Officer would have to be negotiated. And there's always the fact the sessions are on in the afternoon so some parents cannot change work commitments. So at the moment, I couldn't really answer that question, that's more [Principal's] department.</p>	<p>uptake of pre-Prep</p> <p>how program was received - as per enrolment for following year</p> <p>work prevents some attending</p>			
<p>We employ a chaplain, we have RE program, not sure if it's up and running this year as I haven't worked as a chaplain this year, but up until at least year, we've had RE. That's supported by the local churches?</p> <p>Yes, all the local churches head that up</p> <p>We've got indigenous support staff member; we have a teacher that works with English as second language</p> <p>We'd cover some of that stuff in SOSE I would imagine, but again, those sorts of things are not my department. Then you've got your guidance officer that offers support in that area, and myself as liaison.</p>	Support for whole of school community	School has intention to support & sees it does		School espouses that it supports its whole community as shown here
<p>So what the parents think we should do and what we actually do? Well going off my – are we talking about just pre-prep – going off my survey I did as to whether they felt the program was relevant, most of them were happy with it and there was probably 10% that weren't particularly thinking it met their needs. So that's pretty much on par with a school this size – 90% of people are happy, 10% are probably not really.</p>	Parent satisfaction with program	Parents /children are prepared for school		Would parents offer negative comment?
<p>Every lesson we do literacy and numeracy. We're working on syllables and when we're doing how many they can here. They're pulling apart their books, they're working out what the pictures are telling them and doing retelling and using their prior knowledge to tell me what they know about the book before we even read it. That's numeracy and literacy pretty much – I don't know what else they'd be expecting.</p> <p>They're not ready to do their times tables. We have to educate that if you get a kid to write, if you haven't done all the foundational stuff that comes before writing, if they don't understand the purpose of why they're putting pen to paper, then you've missed a really important chunk of literacy and that's going to catch up</p>	<p>content of pre-Prep program</p> <p>Staff perception of value of pre-prep for children and parents</p>	Preparing children for school		<p>pre-Prep program aims</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - for children - for parents

<i>Transcript interview</i> <i>Code: WCon</i>	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
<p>with them. They're actually going to find it harder to grasp those concepts if you just want to throw a pen in their hand and you want them to start writing and you haven't done all the ground work about why words work the way they do and how we form letters and the purpose of that is ...</p> <p>We're trying to educate and inform [parents] through workshops about those things, but I often get from parents 'those things are boring' and they don't really get what we're trying to say. We've had comments that the workshops we've had are boring and stuff like that</p>	educating parents	Prepare parents for school – no consultation with parents about content		School perceives overall need is to change parents – different to empowering parents?

I2 Staff interviews at Pleasantville

Transcript interview Code: PvCon	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
<p>There are five of [Hubs] placed within in the xxx area, 4 of them within the immediate xxx area and I'm the only one out here in the xxx area. My needs are very different to what that is in the xxx area. So, my focus is more I guess in assessing the needs and putting things in place for that rather than for refugees which is what happens at [other hub]. They have a lot of different things, ESL classes, sewing classes, social connect classes, which in the xxx area is needed. I find in xxx we don't have a large number of refugees as they do. They get placed in xxx, then after they've settled and stuff, that's when they start moving out to other places.</p> <p>I guess my needs have really come to mothers being socially isolated so that's why in the playgroups, they've probably turned into a mothers' club as opposed to a playgroup. I've seen that turnover. Just that interacting with the kids and letting the mothers have that time because I'm really starting to understand it's the only social outlet they have. So, doing things like that and implementing things like the cooking classes so that they can be having that more social interaction with each other rather than, I guess, being isolated. A massive need that I've found in this school is families with the ASD kids, the Autism spectrum. I'm starting to develop a lot of things around that. So we've got the parent support group going at the moment which is working really well. That's where I'm getting outside facilitators to come in (that's what you had your camp for?). Yes. So, being able to take some of our families away like that on a camp at Easter, giving them experiences that they don't get an everyday chance to do I guess. I guess it's in the thought processes at the moment of, you know, of a parent coming to me in the support group and saying, 'Is there anything like a playgroup style for primary school for kids with ASD?' so, I've done my research and there's nothing around so that's one of the things I'd like to implement now.</p> <p>How would that work? Would it be after school?) It will be a Saturday, so I'm having to do a lot of research and pre-work to be able to write a proposal to our principal, for her to allow that type of thing to happen. It's the education and training. At the moment we have a Cert 3 in Educational Support going because there were a lot of parents that came to me saying, 'I've been a mum for ten years, now I need to start working or studying and I don't know what to do, but I want it to be revolving around my children.' And taking from my own personal experience, being a teacher aide, you got to work school hours, you got to have holidays off. So I started having a look, having a few conversations with parents, and they really wanted that, so now we've got 25 people in that class. So, they're half way through and being able to link</p>	<p>Community focus</p> <p>Convenor as voice for community needs</p> <p>Staff perception of value of playgroup - for parents for children</p> <p>Socialisation for mothers</p> <p>staff perception of how school listening to parents about needs of community</p> <p>supporting special area of family need</p> <p>School links with community</p>	<p>Building relationships</p> <p>Supporting families</p> <p>Recognising parent voice</p>	<p>Resembles Collective impact Community focus of HUB / convenor</p> <p>SC - Bonding for parents and children</p> <p>Bourdieu – building social capital for mothers</p> <p>SC - Working with family – recognising social capital</p>	<p>Playgroup formed as social space</p> <p>Shows where it fits as part of community support</p> <p>Convenor role as linking school and community – reflects aspects then of collective impact – working collaboratively</p>

Transcript interview Code: PvCon	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
<p>up with the school then and send some of those people up into the school to do practical hours. You know, it's helping the school out as well, and as well as being able to provide something for these adult students as well. We've got another one ready to come in in August. So, it's obviously a need, and I think that's where it is. Mine really starts from conversations with people and then obviously then I'm in the position to have the power and the resources to be able to implement something for them. So, that's, I guess, as I said, it's very different to what's in the xxx area and I don't have ... but at the same time, my networking is massive ... like I really count on my networking because you need to have an understanding of services out there to be able to refer people to it after having a conversation about a need of some sort as well. So, I really make sure that I uphold my networking and I have a very good and very big circle of networks around, that's connected to early childhood, professionals but also health professionals and training professionals and things like that just so that I've got that understanding of what's in the local area to be telling them about. So, it's good.</p>	<p>Meeting parent-identified needs</p> <p>Meeting parent-identified needs</p> <p>Linking parents with community support</p>	<p>Knowledge of local community</p>	<p>Strengths based – working with parents from where they identify needs</p>	<p>Staff perception of meeting community identified needs</p>
<p>I guess playgroup was one, it was a program that had already been operating here so was growing on that, and coming in as a whole new member to a community and a school environment, it was really my starting point for making those relationships and having those conversations with parents. And, I personally think it's a fantastic thing to offer. I guess I've come from ten years of child care, so I have an understanding of child development and the milestones they should be reaching. But it's also a necessity of our funding as well that we need to be providing for 0 – 5 activities and what better way than a playgroup. And once again, compared to the xxx area, they have a lot of other people come in to run their playgroups. I run my playgroup myself because coming from that background I have that knowledge and awareness. But, it's also a really good point at which to be having conversations with the parents to see what they want to start with. It's being able to provide a space that's welcoming and safe and I guess trusting as well, that the parents trust in me to go outside and have some time with their kids while they come have some interactions themselves.</p>	<p>staff perception of value of playgroup for parents</p> <p>Providing playgroup as support to community</p>	<p>Consulting parents – meeting needs</p> <p>Building family-school relationships</p>	<p>Forming relationships</p> <p>School community links – collective impact model</p> <p>Bourdieu – building social capital for parents</p>	<p>Staff perception of value of playgroup for parents for children</p> <p>School as part of wider community</p>
<p>I made a comment to my mum last week, I said 'it's really turned more into a mothers' club rather than a playgroup. Obviously too that's what they're needing and it's just</p>	<p>Playgroup as social space for parents</p>	<p>Forming</p>	<p>Bourdieu – building social capital</p>	<p>Staff perceptions of value of relationships</p>

Transcript interview Code: PvCon	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
<p>evolved like that on its own. As long as I'm providing that safe space for the kids to be in and the mums can be interacting and making their support networks with each other. I've found how that has been a massive turnover too, how <u>they're now connecting with each other outside of here, coming to rely on each other</u>, so that's really good.</p>		relationships	for children and parents - individual habitus adapting as learning new behaviours and knowledge	formed – in playgroup by parents
<p>Numbers have definitely dropped, we were doing 20 – 30 with parents and children on a daily basis (that would be a bit hectic!). Yes, it was, but at the same time I feel that 10 isn't enough either so ... it definitely has to be promoted a little bit more, I think that a lot of people think that because it's connected to the school, like it's on the school grounds, that only school people can come - not just for school families?</p> <p>No, because it's community, it has to be open to all, everybody's welcome to come through the door, I think they just have that pre-thought – it's in a school ground, it must be connected to the school. I guess that's where I need to maybe even do a flyer drop around the actual area to promote it a little bit more</p>	<p>Connecting school to community</p> <p>school opens facility to all community</p>	<p>Staff perception of value of links with community</p> <p>school links with community</p>		Place of school in community – offers playgroup for all families
<p>There are also the two African ladies, but everyone is sort of semi-regular. I guess you have your core parents that you see every time turn up and then you have the ones that come here and there, that drop off, then come back. Like, you know ...XX's mum probably hasn't been since before Easter, but she's like that. She'll come once, then won't come for 4 – 6 weeks, then she'll come back again. I guess that's the joy too that it's a 'drop in', it's not like you have to book in to come,; you can come whenever you choose to come. I found that too with our African mums, that they come for a good month or two, then all of a sudden they won't come for a month to six weeks again. Even on Friday, with all that rain, one of the ladies said, do you really have to get all that out – I said' well it's a service, so yes' . You still need to provide, even if there's only one family turn up or if there's twelve families that turn up, you still need to be ready and have that space to provide that program in.</p>	Using the playgroup as social space	Building relationships	SC – acknowledging all have resources; respect of them builds further for parents – introducing acceptance within school community	Staff perception of providing for community needs
<p>Playgroup planning? I guess talking to them, what was previously running, <u>they said</u> they didn't want a structured playgroup. Apparently that had been tried before I came into my position and they weren't happy with that at all. So it was more providing that space where there are free- play items for the children but then there is also structured activity, but not actually making it in a playgroup structure in a sense. So it's all providing there's options of construction, cars, imagination play and creative play, but also having like an art activity or outdoor play is kind of what I do, it's getting those different things and making sure it's different every time, not just the same old thing, because the kids get bored. I think it was just understanding they didn't like structure and coming from 10 years child care, I have an</p>	<p>Planning playgroup program</p> <p>Program suggested - rejected – replanned according to parent wishes</p>	Building relationships for mothers in playgroup	<p>Recognising the social capital – drawing on the skills - Using parent ideas to create the group they wanted / identified as needed</p> <p>Bonding relationships</p>	<p>Shows how school worked with parents; Hub convenor as part of school + Hub gives voice to parents</p> <p>Staff perception of value of playgroup parents children</p>

Transcript interview Code: PvCon	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
<p>understanding of what's needed.</p> <p>I think it was really quite easy coming from my background – our job was programming, every day, different activities, so it comes a bit as a second nature, I guess it's the same thing but a different environment really. I guess I had experience from the babies' room to the toddlers' room to the kindy room, I kind of understand too what is age appropriate and what isn't, things like that. You have to wrack your brains some days, what are we going to do – I guess I don't plan for playgroup, it's really spontaneous. I get up on Tuesday morning and think 'we'll put this out today'! Yes, and I think that's why some of the other leaders choose to have people in to do their playgroup because they don't come from a childcare background to start with, so they question themselves, could I actually do this – without a doubt, it's just not putting it down on paper or using two hours every week to do the planning. It's just come in and decide, what have we got today ...</p> <p>The playgroup in particular: I'd like more numbers, it would be lovely to have more numbers, it's definitely something I do need to work out and I guess also having the opportunity to be able to go and buy more stuff ... funding ... and as funding revolves around a lot of things.</p>	Listening to parents		– important for mothers	
<p>I think some days having a second person to help me out would be lovely, there are times when I feel I am completely stretched in being able to provide services – but at the same time, I love my job. I think it's amazing.</p>				
<p>Yes, absolutely, and finding those things that are <u>suitable for the community</u>. I've tried implementing a few programs, people say, oh yes, this would be great- and it's completely flopped. Then, the things that have come from them talking ... so it really does come down to that grass roots approach and if you don't have that, I'm not sure you're successful in getting the numbers because they're not wanting it to start with. It took me a couple of times of implementing a few things and going – ah, this hasn't worked because it's come from the top-down approach rather than the down-up approach. I guess that's been really good, doing my Bachelor of Human Services and having an understanding of that community perspective, working in communities, understanding the whole grass-roots thinking ... coming from what are the community wanting.</p> <p>There was a fantastic program that ran, called 'good start', it was particularly aimed at our Maori and Islander families, it was a nutrition and exercise program. I looked around here, you know there's 70% of the population Maori and Islander people, for sure it will be fantastic! And you came and did it as a family, it wasn't just a single approach, it was the whole family approach – and we had maybe two people turn up and I had to tell them sorry, I can't waste your time anymore. That's because I thought it was a great idea, they didn't particularly think it was a great idea. But these things</p>	<p>Planning for community Listening to community – implementing their ideas</p>	<p>Building relationships with wider community</p> <p>Staff perceptions</p>	<p>SC – respect shown for community</p> <p>Not approaching as school knows best – the opposite!</p>	<p>Accepting community ideas for needs they identified – in contrast to imposing group to 'fix' their needs</p> <p>School illustrates response by community is greater when community ideas are accounted for and incorporated in group provided</p>

Transcript interview Code: PvCon	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
<p>that have come from parents talking and making the decision themselves have taken off like there's no tomorrow, especially our ASD support parent group – and the camp, I got such great feedback from that, they were able to be in an environment</p> <p>It was great because they all wanted to actively participate in the program. I just wrote up my success report yesterday and that was one of the things I wrote – because there was no technology offered, the children were more willing to actively participate in the activities because there was nothing else for them to do. So it made them get out of that whole 'I've got to sit in front of a tv / screen' – because there was canoeing, low ropes, archery, high swings and they all gave it a go too. There were none who had anxiety about doing it, they didn't even question it, they just got in and did it - it was great, and the parents gave such wonderful feedback, it was great. I'd love more funding to be doing things like that, that would be fantastic, because that's the need.</p>	<p>Comparing implementation as meeting perceived needs – to meeting community identified needs</p>	<p>of building on resources & strengths of community</p>		
<p>Most of the families starting at playgroup coming from outside the school decided to come to the school. there's a bonus that goes with that as well I guess, the kids are so comfortable here, within their environment, and I lead on to doing a pre-prep transition program in that last term. Most of them were playgroup that went onto the pre-prep program and then on the first day of school ... I was only saying this last night at a seminar ... they really owned their space, they were so comfortable within the environment because they'd already had such a transitional lead up-coming into the school that there wasn't any anxiety in that either, it was wonderful.</p>	<p>Connecting school to community</p> <p>Staff perceptions of value of playgroup in linking school to community</p> <p>Supporting children in playgroup & pre prep</p>	<p>Support in transition to school</p>	<p>Bourdieu – habitus of child adapts to new field; individual can operate in new field</p>	<p>Children are prepared socially and emotionally – are confident</p>
<p>I think this school is very open to different cultures, I think they strive in being a multicultural society and even some events that are put in place around our culture, even for our Australian people. We celebrate our Maoris with their traditional dance, we celebrate our Aboriginal culture with their traditional dance, their art. There's a lot of stuff that goes on around here and it specially comes up around the xxx Festival which is at the end of every year and that's a time where the whole school comes together and celebrates what xxx is all about and you have all the different cultural groups putting on performances. I was actually really shocked when I came here, I guess my first experience was Harmony Day and how they celebrated culture around Harmony Day was just magnificent. I really went wow, this is great. They provide a lot of things for culture in the school. we have our Pacific Islander liaison people, we have our Diversity worker, we have our church minister - and they're all willing to really get in and everybody's accepted for who they are, there's no stigma or being bullied around what culture you come from because they celebrate being a</p>	<p>Catering for all cultural groups in school</p>	<p>Staff perceptions of how school accepts different cultural groups in school</p>	<p>acceptance of difference – changing habitus of school – community members influencing habitus of school</p> <p>Acknowledging difference – and</p>	<p>Observing range of cultures</p>

Transcript interview Code: PvCon	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
multicultural school.			accepting difference	
<p>(liaisons) The Diversity Officer will be starting next term I think... there was one last year, now they've realised they really need that position so he's coming back. We have a Pacifica liaison officer ... xxx ... she goes out to do home visits with our islanders, and work with our kids. She puts together the cultural performances in the school – she's Samoan herself. The diversity officer does things like a literacy and self-worth program, really making them understand they're a 'somebody' and they can go somewhere no matter what colour or culture they are. Then we have our people, our teacher aides, who work with our aboriginal students. Then we have our ESL teacher who works with our kids with English being their second language. There are quite a few positions within the school that cover the cultural diversity.</p>	Reaching out to range of families	Staff perceptions of school acceptance of all cultures	SC – drawing on family resources – has a strengths based approach that accepts and builds on what each student brings	Liaisons are working with families – building links for them into the school
<p>I think a lot of our parents are stay at home parents and spend a lot of time with their kids and they're doing all that sort of pre-tasks for school themselves, it's not that I think they're shocked when they do something, but it does bring joy to them. They're definitely not bubble-coated, they're allowed to be children and experience things, which is really great as well. I try to put that in my work with them too – simple things of colours and numbers. If you're running over that all the time and they're also running over it at home you're bound to be at the milestones that they should be at when they're reaching the school system.</p>	<p>Valuing parents for what they do</p> <p>Developing children across a range of areas</p>	Staff perception of value of playgroup in supporting parenting	SC - positively acknowledging parents as working with their children	Parents at group are already doing much with their child
<p>That's another thing about the pre-prep program, going and having conversations with the prep teachers – when I said, “What are your expectations of these children coming into your class?” It wasn't actually numbers and letters and colours, it was more of being able to do their own lunchbox, tying their own shoe laces, going to a toilet that wasn't their home toilet – those things, practical things, so they can then get on with teaching them rather than them doing all that stuff. So it wasn't a need of them wanting them to know their name, spell their name, it was actually the practical stuff – open your own food packages, open your own lunch box.</p>	Developing independent behaviours	Preparing children for school	pre-Prep as preparing children for learning – social / emotional aspects ok	Staff perception of value of re-Prep program
<p>This year they had 100 students come in this year for prep; I think 35 of those did the pre-prep transition program. As I said, you really notice the difference in that first week, who did the transition program, and who was hanging on to mum's leg and wouldn't let her go – and they weren't the people who attended the program. I think they're looking at the same numbers for next year. They actually had to do another class for this year – so that's four classes, 25 in each.</p> <p>So they've said to you that they can see the difference in the students who attended pre-prep? Without a doubt, some of the prep teachers who were in the prep last year were just like, wow, this is great, fantastic –</p>	<p>Pre-Prep – in school / classrooms</p> <p>Learning</p>	Preparing children for school	Bourdieu –	Perceptions of value for children of pre-Prep program

Transcript interview Code: PvCon	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
<p>make sure you run it again. It's just them feeling comfortable in their environment, something as simple and little as that, like understanding where the path goes to the prep rooms, understanding what happens in the prep rooms, because they had a bit every day. They would actually go into the prep rooms, be with the preppies and experience what it's like for activity time in the classroom.</p>	<p>about the school environment and expectations</p> <p>Benefits for children</p>		<p>building cultural capital for child - as needed in school</p>	
<p>What sort of program do you offer in the Pre-Prep group? We split it into two classes as we'd rather the small class to be able to do that one-on-one attention. We ran it once a week, two different days and we ran it for the 11 weeks of term 4 last year. So it was the whole term, and yes, they went and had 6 weeks holiday, but they really understood where they were.</p> <p>So you had them going up into the prep rooms, every week? There were only three rooms last year, so we did a rotation as to which prep room we went to. I also had a student come in from Griffith, xxx, she was fantastic. I'm really trying to get another one for this year. That person can concentrate on the children and the structured learning, especially coming from the teacher's perspective, rather than childcare or playgroup. I have the chance to do the family / parent information sessions, which were really important as well.</p> <p>The <u>actual pre-prep involved</u> – they had time in the prep rooms, they had structured activities down here for about an hour. That would include fine motor, gross motor, cognitive skills, sensory things as well. So we had four stations of different activities that they moved around themselves freely to do that. They also then sat down to have morning tea or afternoon tea together. Just that whole notion of sitting down together, sitting in a group eating and putting your rubbish in a bin and things like that.</p> <p>Our parent information sessions included me getting the dental people out because we no longer have the dental van come out to the school, that funding has all been cut. So they have to now be going to a dentist, they still are funded and it's all paid for, just that the dental van doesn't come to the school; letting them know about that, letting them know what xxx libraries do, if they're wanting to do homework club or something like that after school; introducing them to our principal and our deputy principals and our admin staff, the receptionist – here is at least a face to the name so when you walk into the school you feel completely comfortable as well. Because, I think it can be sometimes quite overwhelming for the children but can be god-dam overwhelming for the parents too. So, while the kids went off to the prep room, that's when I ran the parent information sessions, and we had a different one every week. For example, nude food ideas, what we should be packing in their lunch boxes, because there were quite a few parents asking about that. It was just giving them their</p>	<p>Duration of pre-Prep program</p> <p>Pre-Prep providing for range of learning areas for children</p> <p>For parents - information on basic aspects of school – responding to what they wanted</p> <p>Providing information for parents</p>	<p>Benefits in pre-Prep – for children Academic and other learning</p> <p>meeting child development needs</p> <p>Perceptions of value of pre-Prep for children and parents</p>	<p>Preparing children for school</p>	<p>Staff perceptions of children coming into Prep</p>

Transcript interview Code: PvCon	Initial ideas	Theme	Theoretical concepts	Significance
information, giving the kids their time so they're both feeling comfortable about coming into the school.				
<p>I will probably get a teacher aide, which is sad because it's such a beneficial program. So these are some conversations I need to start having, but you really do need that second person so that they can be concentrated on the child and the other one can be concentrated on the parents.</p> <p>I guess too with our pre-prep program we were able to do a few assessments on some of the children and as I told the parents, I'm no person who can completely verify what I think but I do suggest you might be going and getting assessed maybe before coming into the school and linking them in with xxx our support teacher, xxx our guidance counsellor, so that all those things were already underway. That was really beneficial as well. Just not having to wait that whole term for things to be picked up on, then it's all havoc when it all comes to light. This way it's already done when they come into this environment.</p>	Identifying early possible areas of support needed	School ready – child supported		Staff perception of value of pre-Prep

Appendix J: Researcher observations at Williamstown

Researcher Observation Williamstown pre-Prep Code WRO

1. First visit: Tuesday 26 August – 12.15 – 2.15PM

Number: 18 mums and their children;

- Kids – did activities – play dough; cutting up;
- reading time on carpet, questions / answers to get kids to participate – many did;
- they had to predict from the cover, relate story ideas given to real life experiences, take turns in listening to convenor, peers;
- then to a music lesson with school music teacher – convenor + aide took them up;
- parents to GO talk re nutrition – in hall – classroom is at end of hall;
- some wanted to stay in room and chat;
- all came to talk on nutrition; GO was very informal, has been at school for good while, not sure how long, but did not get much interaction with parents, they listened politely;
- only three took leaflets he offered on nutrition when the session concluded.

Tuesday September 2 - 12.15 – 2.15PM

Number: 11 mums; 12 children

- Day started with singing on carpet; some talking with kids, explaining what day will be;
- activity was to walk across oval to 'rain forest' area and gather 'treasures' like leaves etc to be used in later activities;
- mums went along; some watched kids / helped, some sort of 'do it' for them, rather than guide or assist;
- convenor has them sit outside for snack, they have to eat 'brain food' (fruit) before sandwich; have to stay until all are done; encouraged to talk together;
- interesting at snack time – some mums will let child sit and do themselves, while others open box, get out food etc;
- convenor has been 'encouraging' kids – come on, it's not mum's lunch, try yourself, mum won't be at school next year; some of them willing and able to try, but some of the mums just come in and do it, seemingly ignoring 'cue' from convenor for child to do things;
- same at end of break: kids have to put up bag and take off hat – some do it, some have mum do it – this is obviously how the mother / child relationship works for them - despite convenor 'reminding'!
Can see the convenor is encouraging / trying to develop independence but not having a lot of success.
- –some do it, some have mum do it – this is obviously how the mother / child relationship works for them - despite convenor 'reminding'!
can see the convenor is encouraging / trying to develop independence but not having a lot of success.

Friday 12 September: 9.30 – 11.30

Number: 15 – 20 parents – 1 father, 1 couple; 12 children

- Cultural makeup of the group – this is pure observation based on previous experience: two Maori parents, 1 Pacific Islander, 2 Indonesian. I do know Maori mum having spoken with her, also one lady is Indonesian as have spoken with her a few times;
- they are a friendly group – to each other, to me;

- Some willing to talk (to me or other parents) but others keep to themselves. Some sit at back, play with phone or take a call, but do not mix;
- activities: visit to prep class, play in prep p/ground;
- today's group starts out: Story reading – bumble bee song for syllables;
- today – will visit prep class and play in prep p/ground;
- activities: include doing a collage & drawing house +threading; play dough; they have snacks after returning from prep visit.

•
 Convenor says - has put a survey on-line for parents "let's know how you're travelling";

This was all for term 3 – last week was sports day – activities on oval - I did not go; Term 4 will commence in Week 2 of term

- I have been to all the groups a few times now, some only twice, but some up to four times; all have stopped 'noticing' me – good! Can chat, or greet and help kids get name tags on etc, help with setting up of activities & snack time, clearing up at end – all good;
- have done info sessions with all groups this week; did a session at each -and response was fairly positive; some 'not interested' but happy to simply sit at back and chat;
- when I asked who would like to do 'focus group' and / or interviews, again positive response;
- talked about *when* will do focus groups & interviews – will be during group times, all happy!
- 36 across all groups – Mon - 9; Tues - 4; Fri AM - 12; Fri PM - 11.
- was able to simply observe throughout sessions this week – notice things like what the parents did when convenor was working with kids; some were totally watching & tuned in, a few on phone / iPad. I asked convenor what she thought of that – was not too pleased as she said wanted them to take up some of the ideas to do with their own kids;
- also can see that some of the mums 'watch' and 'encourage' when activities are happening, some almost 'do it' for their child; again, something I asked convenor about and again, said it's something she's working on. I do notice she says something like 'Come on, don't let mum do things, she won't be at school next year' - no real impression on some mums.

Convenor asked when I would talk with her – will set that up in next week or so.

Appendix K: Researcher observations at Pleasantville

Play Time Observations

Monday 9 March Meeting: Assistant Principal; Convenor

I had arranged a meeting with xxx for 11.30, xxx for 12.30 (this one first) but they re-arranged it between them for both of them to meet me at 11.30. This was done for convenience of all, very amicable; both very willing to talk and help me!

AP talked about school, around 37% EALD, every teacher had 'ESL' class. Around 70 indigenous students; specialist teachers work with some of these students to teach them some aboriginal language, not necessarily their own. Xxx said very few came with any language, perhaps those from Stradbroke Island may have some. Also included other students in learning of these languages. As for 'separate' programs therefore, there are none, everything is embedded. They do have learning support. He said they had offered programs in the past, but these were very poorly attended, and he saw that as a matter of 'pride' – eg if they offered an English language program, they would be admitting their English was not good. He saw that the school community had a rich cultural and religious depth on which to draw and he saw this as a big plus.

School runs a breakfast club - 5 days a week. Formerly teachers / school donated food for kids, one day a week program; now the YMCA donates the food, program runs through PCYC. It is well patronised.

They have 2 'participation officers' who are culturally and religiously focussed. Think these must be like liaison officers. One is a Pacific Islander – as many of their families are – they are very pleased with this arrangement as he (?) worked well with these families, seen as an important link with their families.

Convenor: The Play Group runs – Tuesday and Friday 9-11AM. There is a cross-section of parents (all mums) – African, Maori, Australian. She does not run it as a heavily structured program, but does give kids activities for the skills they need towards school. It is for all kids 0 – 5 (ie to school age). She does it this way to allow the mums to socialise, which she sees as very important as most have no contact otherwise. This is in response to what they wanted, as she tried a more 'structured' approach. It is also catering for the community.

In xxxx, xxx ran cooking group (will do again next term). This was to cater for need of socially isolated. xxx as school chef ran this, but whereas he wanted them to cook and partake of the meal, xxx insisted they cooked a whole meal which could be taken home to the family and therefore provoke discussion around the table.

In xxxx, a pre-prep program was offered for first time. Of the 107 enrolled for Prep, 35 came, as they had no experience with any day care and felt kids were not 'school ready'. It was on this program that she had a GU student xxx working with her developing a ready for prep program – xxx was impressed with how this all went and hopes to repeat such an arrangement for 2015.

Xxx also ran information sessions for parents – dentist, food, what library offered. Parents were also taken around the school and met everyone from reception, principal, assistant principal. GO, support staff etc. Pre-prep planned for 2015 also.

This year, running a tennis program in afternoon for primary kids. Also starting this Thursday, a Cert 3 Educational Support Certificate – this is a T/A course. Xxx is involved so as to help participants find placement experience which is part of their course.

Questions to follow up with DP

- Are all teachers ESL qualified?
- Tell me more about liaison officers and their role – with whom?

Convenor:

- How was playgroup planned – consultation with parents? Why?
- Has she had feedback from prep teachers re group – what?
- What will be planned for pre-Prep this year?

Playgroup: Friday 13 March

Attendance – 6 adults, 6 children

This is a very informal and unstructured playgroup. xxx's emphasis is all on socialising for the parents and she provides some meaningful activities for the children, plus play things out for them. The parents bring morning tea. They are very friendly and accepting. On this day I talked with convenor and them together but did not specify why I was there, just chatted along with them and xxx. This is the structure xxx had explained to me, shows that socialising aspect all important.

Tuesday 17 March

Attendance: 4 adults, 4 children.

As the group was smaller than expected, even more informal. Xxx did some painting activities with the kids, also they had colouring easter pictures. Other than that, they played; also as it was xxx's 3rd birthday, there was singing happy birthday and cake. Very informal, they just chatted and kids played, xxx had them colouring and talking.

I was able to tell ladies about what I was doing - fairly informal information giving. Will do again / more thoroughly next week prior to a 'discussion' group. They were more than happy to be part of my research. I'm not sure if xxx took it in, she was just sitting with group, so will have to see, think language might be an issue. She does not 'mix' as much with the other mums, but is friendly and they are also to her.

xxx will not be there on Friday, as big party for child, so getting ready. I might go ahead, see who is actually there. Otherwise, will just be here. Then after that, I could maybe do interviews with each in the following week. Will see if discussion can be done first session of next week.

Friday 20th March

Attendance: 5 adults, plus 1 'gran'; 5 children.

There were another couple of mums who came in but they did not join in with the mums, just had their children playing. When one little boy 'hit' one of the kids and there were a few tears, still did not join in, even though there were no negative comments at all. Mums were not too concerned, one went over to check and talk with ladies, the kids settled extremely quickly, nothing else changed.

I was able to do group discussion this session. I gave out information sheets and talked through that, directed them to the consent and they all happily signed.

We did discussions through a very noisy play session but all went well. I had planned to tackle the questions even in 2 – 3 sittings, but was able to do them all in the one go, which was good. They were happy and made some interesting comments – about the group, its history, what they thought of it - and it probably took about 25 minutes.

They will all be willing to take part in interviews, not sure when they will be, but during group time and can use other end of hall or kitchen space – as suggested by Mums.

Tuesday 24 March

Attendance: 6 adults, 6 kids.

This was really just a talk fest and I was unable to do any interviewing. Hardly seemed to notice I was there! That felt pretty good actually! It's an amazing group, the parents seem to really be friends, the relationships seem quite strong! However, time was not wasted. I did talk with them a little.

Chatted with convenor at beginning. She told me about her function last Friday (she had asked me if I wanted to go with her, but I had other plans). She managed to corner xxx the minister for health – and told him she wanted meeting about her HUB, particularly about how the parents could be assisted in getting kids assessed with no cost or at least greatly reduced cost. She also wants to talk with him about getting an immunisation clinic to work out of the hall here, something she has been chasing for a good while, but they will not return her calls. Now she has an appointment with him – well the PA will get back to her but she is confident.

She also told me about someone doing PhD at Griffith Logan and forwarded me his email. There is a do at XX campus on Wednesday April 1 which I will hopefully attend.

The mums are very friendly and when xxx (African lady) came in they were friendly in their greetings and also to little one, but she seems reluctant to join in chatter, think it is language. I had a chat with her in the kitchen later, is very hesitant / unsure. Another lady plus child also came – I think the unwritten ‘rule’ is – sit at table if you want to chat, or not, just say ‘hi’ and then do your own thing. No one concerned – reflects what xxx said re ‘space for community / mums’ as safe place. All very accepting of doing your own thing.

One lady – husband away, no children in group, but always comes to ‘socialise’ – her words – talked away the morning. Did not dare interrupt, just listened / chatted with them – plenty of time to do interviews next week. Have to check – will it be on next Tuesday (last week of school before Easter break)

Overall I can see the group gives the children the chance to interact and play. There are a few moments where sharing has to be encouraged, but all works well. The mums are very comfortable with chatting and observing.

Last week of term: Did not go last week of term – did not go first week of term either – advice of xxx – said attendance always down and Friday was Anzac day, would be school something on. First day in third term Tuesday 29 April

Tuesday 29 April: only 5 adults plus children – plus 2 other mums who stayed at other end of hall, near nurse space. Xxx speaking with them. Xxx told me after session, that these ladies came on an irregular basis, sometimes not for a month or two, and they always did the same. She said they were happy with that and she would never try to ‘force’ them to come up to table etc.

Friday 1st May: a very wet day – 6 adults, 5 children

They just accept I’m there now, just talk and include me - all quite friendly with each other, so xxx planning working in that sense – they seem happy with arrangements. One made the statement that ‘it’s almost a community this playgroup’. xxx sat talking for a while with them also, had brought morning tea from the previous day’s afternoon tea.

Today’s story with mums was from one about bullying situation at school with eldest daughter. Many opinions, but overall happy that school would deal with it.

Tuesday 5 May: adults, 10 children

None of them did anything with the kids in particular, just saw them settled then chatted together. Xxx did craft stuff, mums just watched, which is pretty normal. Got up a couple of times, but mostly they just chatted. (This is what xxx said they wanted and she was happy with that).

They told me that the previous playgroup convenor (a man, he visited the group one of the days I was there) also ran some pre-Prep activities for those off to school the following year. It was all fairly informal, but he did work in conjunction with the Prep teachers as he took them up to Prep classes so the children did get some familiarity there and with the school layout.

By today, the bullying situation was not addressed, now the feeling seems to be ‘something should be done’ - but they are not really complaining, still seem to think school is / will deal with it, happy to let things take their course. Says something for their feelings re school! Says something for the whole family-school relationship!

At the end of session, when all left, two talked in the carpark – well over 45 minutes later when I’d done talking with xxx, they were still there, certainly a ‘social space’ for them!

Friday 8 May

8 adults, 6 children.

Smaller group; was shorter as morning tea by school for mothers’ day. xxx organising M/T + p/group – very busy today!!

Overall I cannot help but be impressed with the general ‘tone’ of the group – seem very caring about each other and have lots of laughs together.

Will talk with Assistant Principal next week, and also arrange to talk with preppy teachers.

Friday 22 May – talk Assistant Principal

He was very good, very passionate about the school and what is happening with their community. Can talk with preppy teachers after school Wednesday last week of term (17 June). He is pleased with how playgroup running, wanted it to be as playgroup, structured only as mums wanted for them and children.

Wednesday 17 June – prep teachers

Three of the four (one at other meeting) – committed to their kids, so good to talk with them and hear their ideas. They were very interested in playgroup, also spoke about the pre-prep group that has happened & will be more formalised this year. All good.

Appendix L: School materials Williamstown

L1 Convenor Report

XXX Prep Program xxxx

XXX Early Intervention & Pre-Prep Outcomes ... report by XXX

Report Extracts

Motivation: 2009 and 2013 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) reflected the importance of our school developing a link between family, community and school, for the purpose of enhancing early year's developing and ensuring later learning success.

XXX has responded to the Australian and Queensland Governments' commitment to improving educational outcomes, for all Queensland children by making central to our core business, the importance of early intervention.

XXX a Pre-Prep initiative which establishes a positive relationship between our school and the community we serve. It aims to build parenting capacity and children's participation in learning, through weekly 0-5 Pre-Prep Programs, and Parent Workshops.

Our focus on early intervention sets strong foundations in personal identity, early language, numeracy skills and social emotional well-being. Our long term transition approach, allows children and families to develop genuine partnerships and relationships with the school community. We are also able to more effectively provide families and children with the resources that assist with a successful transition to Prep, and a demonstrating of greater school readiness skills in our students.

Community Liaison Officer (CLO) also states that they want to improve transition approach to 'develop genuine partnerships & relationships with the school community'. They are looking at providing 'families and children with the resources that assist with a successful transition to Prep, and a demonstrating of greater school readiness skills in our students. Feedback from parents and verbal was 'overwhelmingly positive' (Convenor report).

Report closes: This school working with others – networking – 'early learning summit' xxxx – with goal to maintaining and improving community engagement in local community

XXX appointed first CLO on fulltime basis in term 2, xxxx. Duties include:

- Work alongside staff, parents, volunteers and community services to provide students with the necessary resources to achieve their academic and personal goals
- Help parents access information and services both in and outside of school, which will assist them and their child as they prepare for their first year of school
- Relevant programs and opportunities such as pre-prep programs, numeracy & literacy workshops, parenting workshops, information sessions from local health and social services and other 0-5 initiatives
- Building relationships with families prior to commencing formal education, and assisting families with the transition of their student, entering their first year of schooling, from time of enrolment
- Connecting with local Early Learning and Kindergarten providers. This is because they have spent a lot of time working with you and your child and therefore have valuable insight into what works best for your child.

General information:

- The enrolment process - early term 2 – offered every family – opportunity to participate – the prepped for success – what was offered ‘developmentally appropriate activities such as’
- Pre-literacy and numeracy support from intervention teachers
- Indoor – outdoor – experiences – fine & gross motor experiences, art / craft; excursions
- Music, library, visit to prep classrooms (1 per term)
- Parent workshops
- Parent feedback – written & verbal – overwhelmingly positive – strong enquiries for xxxx program.
- Workshops offered included reading, nutrition & sleep info, hear ties, a parenting program, road safety (kids & parents) & protective behaviours & keeping kids safe (kids & parents)

- Says ‘100% of parents who participate in workshops said all or most of the info helpful and could confidently implement all or most of the ideas/strategies given
- Program participation results: 71% of enrolling families chose to participate, 60% remained in program long term – the other 11% - discontinued due to enrolment cancellation eg moved away, or because of work / family commitments; ‘1% discontinued because the program did not meet their expectations’
- Where-to-from-here - says ‘15% of our kids to not attend any form of child care at all, and 5% of those not attending these have chosen not to attend pre-prep program’

L2 Information from Web Sites

Information from Web Sites – My School & From MySchool site – ‘managed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). *My School* enables you to search the profiles of almost 9,500 Australian Schools.

From www.myschool.edu.au/SchoolProfile/Index/88670/XXX/47364/2014

School sector	Government
School type	Primary
Year range	Prep-7
Total enrolments	1162
Location	Metropolitan
Teaching staff	78
Full-time equivalent teaching staff	69.4
Non-teaching staff	34
Full-time equivalent non-teaching staff	22.9

School Website XXXState School/Department of Education, Training & Employment Queensland

All schools are required to report on parent, teacher and student satisfaction in their annual reports. In xxxx, nationally consistent school opinion survey items were agreed by education ministers for parents and students (known as the National School Opinion Survey). A survey and data collection tool that can collect responses to the National School Opinion Survey was made available for all schools to use in August xxxx. Schools can use the national parent and student survey items to report on school satisfaction in their annual reports. See the school annual report for information on parent, teacher and student satisfaction.

For further information about the National School Opinion Survey, see [School opinion information](#) on the ACARA website.

Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA)

School ICSEA value 949

Average ICSEA value 1000

Distribution of students

	Bottom quarter	Middle quarters		Top quarter
School Distribution	47%	32%	17%	4%
Australian Distribution	25%	25%	25%	25%

This table reports student background information that is available for the reported year

Students	
Boys	595
Girls	567
Total	1,162
% Indigenous	5%
% language background other than English	15%

This table is from My School 2014 data

Characteristics of the student body: XXX State School celebrates a diverse mix of students who bring a rich tapestry of prior learning experiences to our school. Classes at XXX are organised around traditional year level groups. Approximately 4% of our students identify as Indigenous whilst 85% of our students were born in Australia. We have 10% identified as ESL (English as a Second Language). As we have an Enrolment Management Plan most of our students are drawn mainly from the suburbs of XXX. Our staff includes 73 classroom teachers and 32 Non-teaching staff. Of our teaching staff; 88% are female and 12 % are male and range from 24 to 60 years of age with the average age of our permanent staff being 44. Most of our teachers have 4 years of tertiary training with three currently undertaking further study at a master's level. Our teachers range from graduate teachers to teachers with up to 40 years of teaching experience

Involving parents in their child's education: The staff and parent community work in partnership to enhance the school climate for all children. Teachers encourage parents to communicate openly and contribute to the positive tone that pervades our school. Teachers are more than willing to discuss any concerns parents may have but a suitable time needs to be arranged. We encourage a high level of involvement of parents both with the school and

their child's education. This may take the form of help with reading groups, art afternoons, group activity rotations, and upon invitation, participation in class excursions. Each year begins with a Parent- teacher evening where information regarding classroom organisation, behaviour management and the curriculum pertaining to that year level is discussed. Parents are given the opportunity to ask questions regarding these general issues. Parent-teacher interviews are held towards the end term 1 and term 3 to discuss their children's progress. An interim behaviour report is sent to parents at the end of term 1. Student progress reports are sent home at the end of Semester 1 and 2. Our school website also offers helpful information to parents regarding tips on how to help students with homework, reading, and maths.

Information to volunteers: Parent help is always welcomed. This may take the form of hearing children read in the classroom, involvement in P & C activities, helping out in the tuckshop or even attendance at school events such as sports day and music evenings. "True partnership is present when caring adults in the home, community and the school support each other in the interest of the child".

Principal's Report xxxx: Our core business is to provide the best possible education for your child and do so in a personalised, warm, supportive, inclusive learning environment. Our school culture is inclusive and recognises and values the rights of every individual to learn in a safe and supportive environment. Our relentless focus on school improvement has produced growth and improvement in many dimensions of the school, including student outcomes, curriculum design, school climate, parent and community involvement and staff development. An effort to raise school NAPLAN results was just a small portion of this broader commitment to improving educational outcomes for our students.

Partnerships True partnership is present when caring adults in the home, community and the school support each other in the interest of the child '.

The principal's report also states they offer 'a personalised, warm, supportive, inclusive learning environment'.

Site has such sayings as: 'We value, 'Positive attitudes, open lines of communication, and collaborative/participative/consultative decision making'

Additional information from the school Website - XXX State School

- Began 1986
- **Mission and values** - XXX strives to provide students with a quality education in a safe and supportive learning environment.

We aim to achieve this by:

- Producing a supportive environment which encompasses the total school community
- Developing caring, understanding, cooperative and responsible attitudes
- Catering for each child's academic social development

We value:

- Positive attitudes
- Open lines of communication
- Collaborative/participative/consultative decision making
- Mutual support within our school community
- Early intervention and support
- A safe, caring and supportive environment
- Each student achieving to their potential

In achieving outcomes consistent with our values, we focus on:

- Students accepting responsibility for their actions
- Students developing independent/self-directional learning behaviours
- Positive behaviours
- Positive student interactions

Appendix M: School materials Pleasantville

M1 Web sites

From School Site: <http://www.XXXqld.edu.au/Pages/default.aspx>

XXX is a XXX, run by XXX Education. It enrolls students from Prep to Year 12, currently has an enrolment of around 750 and is expected to grow in size steadily over the next few years. The school is situated in XXX adjacent to XXX. Our vision is to be a contemporary XXX school that is inspired by the XXX values of simplicity and harmony. We are a school where everyone works together so that our students can grow and learn, be supported and loved, be informed and empowered, practice forgiveness and cooperation, and become lifelong learners. As a school we acknowledge the importance of relationships through the active development of positive partnerships with our families, our XXX, and our local community. We promote excellence in sport and the creative arts. Our rugby union, touch and Futsal teams have won significant competitions over the two decades of the school's existence. The performance in 2009 of XXX' by XXX students was hailed by our community. Our curriculum offerings provided a balance of core and elective subjects with a significant number of VET subjects in the senior school.

THE PRINCIPAL'S WELCOME: Welcome to the website of XXXX.

Our College family is rich in diversity – we celebrate our rich cultural and linguistic backgrounds but we are united in our commitment to a XXX education and way of life.

Our xxx spirituality and values are important to us. Our teaching and learning and pastoral frameworks endeavour to create a climate where we value each individual in the spirit of hope, care and compassion. We work for justice and sustainability.

At the heart of xxx is a recognition that faith and education must be in harmony to ensure that our students can take their place in society as citizens with values, skills and an understanding of the complex issues that they will confront in their journey of life. This journey at the xxx involves a close partnership between students, families and staff.

We hope our actions reflect our beliefs. XXX challenged us to "*Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words.*"

Vision statement: A school where everyone works together, so that our students can grow and learn, be supported and loved, be informed and empowered, practice forgiveness and cooperation, and become lifelong learners.

My School website:

<http://www.myschool.edu.au/SchoolProfile/Index/89076/XXX/47772/2014>

School sector	Non-government
School type	Combined
Year range	Prep-12
Total enrolments	933
Location	Metropolitan
Teaching staff	70
Full-time equivalent teaching staff	67.2
Non-teaching staff	55
Full-time equivalent non-teaching staff	39.6

All schools are required to report on parent, teacher and student satisfaction in their annual reports. In 2012, nationally consistent school opinion survey items were agreed by education ministers for parents and students (known as the National School Opinion Survey). A survey and data collection tool that can collect responses to the National School Opinion Survey was made available for all schools to use in August 2013. Schools can use the national parent and student survey items to report on school satisfaction in their annual reports. See the school annual report for information on parent, teacher and student satisfaction.

For further information about the National School Opinion Survey, see [School opinion information](#) on the ACARA website.

Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA)

School ICSEA value 945
Average ICSEA value 1000

Distribution of students

2014	Bottom quarter	Middle quarters		Top quarter
School Distribution	47%	32%	17%	4%
Australian Distribution	25%	25%	25%	25%

This table report students background information that is available for the reported year

Students	
Boys	468
Girls	465
Total	933
% Indigenous	7 %
% language background other than English	30 %

Appendix N: Ethics

GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

01-Oct-2014

Dear Mrs Girdwood

I write further to the additional information provided in relation to the provisional approval granted to your application for ethical clearance for your project "NR: Engaging culturally diverse families in school engagement programs" (GU Ref No: EDN/62/14/HREC).

The additional information was considered by Office for Research.

This is to confirm that this response has addressed the comments and concerns of the HREC.

Consequently, you are authorised to immediately commence this research on this basis.

The standard conditions of approval attached to our previous correspondence about this protocol continue to apply.

Regards

Rick Williams
Manager, Research Ethics
Office for Research
Bray Centre, N54 Room 0.15 Nathan Campus
Griffith University
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Cc:

Researchers are reminded that the Griffith University Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research provides guidance to researchers in areas such as conflict of interest, authorship, storage of data, & the training of research students.

You can find further information, resources and a link to the University's Code by visiting <http://policies.griffith.edu.au/pdf/Code%20for%20the%20Responsible%20Conduct%20of%20Research.pdf>

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Appendix O: Change of thesis title

hdr-enquiry@griffith.edu.au

11/30/17

to: j.girdwood@griffith.edu.au

This is an automatically generated email, DO NOT USE REPLY. If you have any questions, contact GGRS.

Dear Mrs Jill Girdwood,

Your Application of Change of Thesis Title / Topic is approved with the following comments:

Please click on the link below and go to My Service Requests to view further details of your request.

<https://my.griffith.edu.au/my-research>

Regards

Griffith Graduate Research School

<https://www.griffith.edu.au/higher-degrees-research/contact-us>