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Statement of Sources

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Abstract

This qualitative research study aimed to investigate, through focus group action research, teachers’ experience of applying Community Action Projects (hereafter, CAP) in the discipline of Humanities in a Victorian Catholic secondary school. In the context of this study, emanating from the philosophies of a social reconstructionist curriculum framework, teachers facilitated CAP with students born between the years 1995 and 2002. In this study, this group of students are referred to as the ‘current learners’ while much of the recent discourse on generations most commonly refer to them as Generation Z.

Located within the constructivist epistemology, and taking its theoretical perspective from interpretivism, this qualitative study took its theoretical impetus from symbolic interactionism as a way of examining and reflecting upon the interview transcripts from the focus group of five secondary school teachers in the discipline of Humanities. This perspective also aided the ability of the researcher to gain insight into the strengths and weakness’ of CAP and to understand the teachers’ perspective and experience of applying CAP into the Humanities curriculum. The researcher met with the focus group on three major occasions.

The reflection upon the texts of this present study identified five key themes - experience and engagement for the learners; reflections of curriculum leading to action; perceptions about the current learners; challenges integrating CAP into the current school; and integrating CAP into the current curriculum. In addition, three issues were found that appeared to encroach on the integration of CAP: the current learners are not socially active; the structure of the curriculum; and the structure of secondary schools. First, the key issues were analysed against the existing theories about the current learners, and four key themes were discussed: the current learners as digitally literate; socially active; enjoy excitement and entertainment; and appear to have power
and dynamism. Second, the issues were analysed against contemporary Catholic Church documents in relation to education and the responsibilities of teachers and the current learners. Third, the issues were analysed against the literature about the current curriculum ideologies, primarily based on Schiro’s (2008) four visions of education, more specifically, the social reconstruction curriculum ideology. Based on this ideology, the researcher put forward a curriculum construct in an attempt to represent the process of the social reconstructionist ideology. This process was employed by the focus group participants in their Humanities classroom with the current learners.

The key issues were found to inhibit the successful integration of CAP in secondary schools. As a result of this investigation, the researcher put forward some recommendations to create positive experiences and practice for teachers responsible for integrating the project. These included compulsory community outreach for all students from Years 7 to 10 within the curriculum and across several subject areas. A further recommendation was that a substantial budget be set aside for the integration of CAP in secondary schools. It was also highly recommended that a leadership position be created to oversee the integration of CAP across several year levels. Finally, continued opportunities for professional development in social reconstructionist education, social justice, and community outreach were recommended in order to preserve the momentum of CAP.
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This thesis is dedicated to my two children: Samara and Rhishav Bagh. The message in this thesis is for you.
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Abbreviations

General

CAP                Community Action Project
VELS               Victorian Essential Learning Standards
VCAA               Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority

Documents

CS (The Catholic School, 1977)
CSTM (The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, 1998)
GE (Declaration on Christian Education, Gravissimum Educationis, 1965)
VCAA (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2013)
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Chapter One

Introduction and Context


Here is a short vignette describing the researcher’s perception of the suburban environment surrounding the school in which the current research took place. It personifies the urban community, and represents a small group of the current youngest generation in Australia currently being taught in Australian secondary schools, born between 1995 and 2002.

During the weekday of this Melbourne northern suburb the roads are empty after the school drop off, except for one or two mothers pushing their prams. The postman rides his motorbike on the footpath not needing to avoid pedestrians. One retired person might be seen walking his dog. Occasionally a bus pulls up at the bus station to pick up only one passenger. On weekends, the odd child is seen riding her bicycle, or occasionally the neighbor might wave at you from across the road, but words are rarely exchanged. Even the public parks remain eerily deserted on weekends, except sometimes for the intimidating skating teenagers. Rarely children are seen playing cricket in the street or climbing trees on the nature strip.

But, the shopping centers are buzzing with life. Teenagers mill about in large groups looking like twins in their urban fashion and urban haircuts, and using similar technologies. This is their public space. Here they can act like adults - meet at coffee shops, learn about and purchase new technologies, make large purchases of clothes, shoes and accessories with their own money that they have earned working in one of the retail outlets. The shopping center is
their culture. This is what they identify with, and this is where they will be found if they are not in school. The shopping centers are perhaps the reason why the community in this Northern suburb of Melbourne seems so silent.

This image of teenagers represents a culture of young people preoccupied with materialism, technology, vanity and sub-cultures - growing up in suburban areas where there appears to be a demise of communities and a ripening of individualism. In recent years there has been a growing interest in this new generation. They are referred to as the “Homeland Generation” (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 50), in popular culture as “Generation Z” (Matthews, Walliker, Hawkins, Schmidt, Robinson, 2008; Whitby, 2009) and among particular social demographers as 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001, p. 1). There has been much theory generated about the current learners based on their display of similar patterns of behaviour and characteristics, and also based on the patterns of previous generations. It is predicted that when the current learners reach adulthood, they will be greatly impacted by the values of individualism and less likely to observe the values of community (Howe and Strauss, 2000, p. 40).

The Congregation for Catholic Education (1997) document, The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, asserted that highly developed countries are currently undergoing a “crisis of values”. Attitudes of subjectivism, moral relativism and nihilism appear to be manifest. The document stated that the media and “rapid structural changes, profound technical innovations and the globalization of the economy” have exalted this “crisis of values”. Moreover, the document remarks that society is seeing these behavior patterns as undermining any idea of community identity (CCE, 1997, n. 1). It calls for “courageous renewal” and “prudent innovation” in Catholic education (CCE, 1997, n.3).
Furthermore, in the last decade there has been much literature about infusing explicit social justice, peace and environmental preservation in education. This is based on the evidence that humanity and the environment is experiencing on a large scale urgent and devastating social and ecological problems (Andrzejewski, Baltodano, Symox, 2009, p. 1 -3).

The current curriculum in Victorian secondary schools uphold a typically academic approach which is utilitarian in perspective. It is designed to create competitiveness in the work force and bring about development of the economy, production and consumption (Andrzejewski, Baltodano, Symox, 2009, p. 3). It unwittingly promotes “personal wealth, consumption, entertainment, comfort, and status” (Andrzejewski, Baltodano, Symox, 2009, p. 2).

Education powerfully constructs the lives of people. In many ways the current curriculum falls short of addressing the need to involve students in engaging in explicit social justice action and community outreach, and bring into their view the values of community and global citizenship. If education is to lead and teach the current learners to be active leaders in social justice action and community outreach, then this must be placed in the educational mainstream. If these programs remain as part of the extracurricular offerings, with little attempt to move them into the mainstream curriculum, then this is an artificial response to the local and global crisis. It is within this context that this research was carried out. This is discussed in detail below.

**Educational context of this research**

**Introduction**

To investigate teachers’ experience of integrating Community Action Projects in the discipline of Humanities in a secondary school involves an examination of the current curriculum that exists in Victoria.
Of the four curriculum visions articulated by Schiro (2008): the scholar academic ideology, the social efficiency ideology; the learner centered ideology; and the social reconstruction ideology, the review of the current curriculum argues that the social reconstruction ideology should be more prominent in Victorian Catholic secondary schools.

This section is organised into several parts: a) an overview of what the term “curriculum ideology” represents; b) current curriculum definitions; c) an outline and an analysis of the current curriculum presented in Victorian secondary schools; d) a much longer discussion of the social reconstruction ideology (Schiro, 2008); e) and a discussion of the significance for integrating CAP into the current curriculum ideologies.

**Meaning of the term ‘curriculum ideologies’**

Schiro (2008) articulated the four visions of education when teaching in American public schools during the 1960’s. He continued to develop these four visions, which have been debated in schools throughout the last forty years (p. xv). Each of Schiro’s four visions has a long history and are known by a variety of names (p. 2). Some of these ideologies are reflected in the curriculum visions of Australian schooling.

Schiro (2008) refers to each of these visions as ‘curriculum ideologies’, meaning, the “philosophies, doctrines, opinions, conceptual frameworks, and the belief systems of educators” (p. 8). Lye (1997) describes ideologies as a socialisation process which shapes our cognitive and affective perception of the social world. He explains that ideologies are transmitted through the dominant institutions in society (hegemony), namely, Churches, Education, Government, and through cultural forms. Ideologies are also developed and presented by influential groups, who
mask their self-interests and shape the perceptions and actions of much larger groups (p. 1). Schiro (2008) claims that these groups contest with each other in an attempt to gain control over the education system (p. 9).

Ideologies can hold such wide-ranging power that they can influence the socialisation, indoctrination and inculturation of large cultural groups (Lye, 1997, p. 1; Schiro, 2008, p. 9). Ideologies in education do not give learners the opportunities to think critically about what is presented in the curriculum, for they are oriented to think and act within the framework of the ideology (Kemmis, 1986, pp. 96-100). A further consequence of ideological hegemonies in education is that the essential values of competing educational ideologies are dismissed and squeezed out, creating an “ideological war” (Schiro, 2008, p. 9).

At the time of conducting this research the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, (hereafter, VELS) was the current curriculum framework. Although presently moving to a National curriculum in place of VELS, the principles underlying VELS still stand and therefore this research still has currency. The ideological position of VELS promotes knowledge, skills and behaviors which are deemed important by Australian society and which will benefit the common good. Victorian schools are sharing in a collective ideological position, mutually maintaining the educational practices and enhancing the overall efforts and results of its members (Kemmis, 1986, p. 103).

**Current Curriculum Definitions**

Like educational ideologies, curriculum theory and curriculum practice evolve and change shape due to social, cultural, historical and educational movements (Kemmis, 1986, p.
23). Given the scope of curriculum descriptions, it is not possible to provide all of these here. Instead, this review will draw from the curriculum theories of Kemmis (1986), Null (2011), Schiro (2008), Oliva (2009), Print (1993), Smith & Lovat (2003), and Ross (2000). While these curriculum theorists are not all situated in Australia, they nonetheless are deeply involved in the curriculum ideologies of the western world.

Curriculum is commonly described as “a course of study” or “a course design” (Smith & Lovat, 2003, p. xi), a document describing “what is to be learned” (Ross, 2000, p. 8), what is intentionally done in schools (Print, 1993, p. v), and a “structured series of intended learning outcomes” (Johnson, 1967 cited in Kemmis, 1986, p. 20). Kemmis (1986) discusses curriculum in terms of the experience gained for the learners (p. 21). In these definitions is the assumption that where curriculum exists, learning takes place, outcomes are achieved and structured study occur (Smith & Lovat, 2003, p. 14-16).

Curriculum material consists of activities designed for the purpose of “promot[ing] the intellectual, personal, social and physical development of its pupils” (Ross, 2000, p. 9). It develops by means of the ideological positions of curriculum developers, namely, governments, school administrators, teachers and textbook writers (Schiro, 2008, p. 8) as they endeavor to impregnate their “beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, and biases…[and] make meaning of the teaching reality” (Smith & Lovat, 2003, p. 2). Curriculum is selected and developed from the culture of the society from which it comes (Ross, 2000, p. 8) and from the culture of the educational institution, the resources available, and the nature of the learners. Print (1993) states that curriculum is “a construct of society” and reflects what a society values” (p. v). Curriculum is strongly influenced by “enculturation and socialisation” (Smith & Lovat, 2003, p. 3). It is one of the major ways in which society can influence a great deal of people (Ross, 2000, p. 6, &
Kemmis, 1986, p. 32). The current VELS curriculum is an example of this. It is a compulsory, standards-based curriculum across all of Victoria. Schools have procedures in place to report according to VELS.

An Analysis of the current curriculum in Victorian secondary schools

VELS curriculum “identifies] what is important for students to achieve at different stages of their schooling. It sets standards for those achievements and provides a clear basis for reporting to parents and for planning programs” (VCAA, 2007, p. 1). It reflects the importance of knowledge, behavior and skills to

prepare [learners] for success in a world which is complex, rapidly changing, rich in information and communications technology, demanding high-order knowledge and understanding and increasingly global in its outlook and influences (VCAA, 2007, p. 4).

Embedded in VELS are three core, interrelated strands: Physical, Personal and Social Learning; Discipline-based Learning; and Interdisciplinary Learning. Each strand includes traditional subjects, such as Science, Maths, English, Languages other than English (LOTE) and interrelated subjects such as Health and Physical Education, Personal Learning, Civics and Citizenship, and the Arts. The interdisciplinary learning strand refers to knowledge, skills and behaviors in, for example, communication, creativity, and Information Technology (VCAA, 2007, p. 6).
The knowledge, skills and behaviors are assessed through ‘standards’. The standards describe what is essential for students to achieve during years Prep to Year 10 (from ages 5 – 16 years of age). Learners are assessed according to the standard they have reached in each dimension. The teachers and parents/guardians gauge what level the student’s learning has reached, depending on the number they are given for assessment and reporting in each domain. In the English domain, for example, students are assessed through three dimensions of Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening. In Year 10 they could be given a number anywhere between 5.0 – 6.25 for reporting. If a student is given 5.0 for an assessment in Writing at the end of the second semester in year 10, this means that the student is a year and a half behind the expected standard of that year level (VCAA, 2007, p. 7).

VELS is primarily standards-based and outcomes-based (or performance based) with a curriculum driven by content and skills. A state or national standards-based education is a prescriptive approach to curriculum, encouraging state uniformity (Null, 2011, p. 186). Supporters of standards argue that it is a movement to make schools and teachers accountable in assessing students, and because it is assessment-driven, it reinforces teacher practices (Oliva, 2009, p. 533). Supporters advocate that standards, especially where there are benchmarks, enable educators to engage in evaluative activities resulting in curriculum rigor and quality (Null, 2011, p. 43). It can also encourage the use of the same textbooks to be used in schools, bringing at least a uniformity of content (Oliva, 2009, p. 534 - 535). Standards-based education also firmly establishes what “students should know and be able to do” within the various disciplines (Null, 2011, p. 43) and further “shapes the work of classroom teachers” (Null, 2011, p. 45).

On the other hand, opponents of standards-based education argue that it reflects and attempts to preserve a business-oriented, efficiency model of traditional education. It favours
traditional teaching, treating learners as though they were “inert objects” (Oliva, 2009, p. 533; Sharan & Tan, 2008, p. 78). Opponents argue that VELS limits the creativity and flexibility of schools, believing that standards are not effective where there exists diversity in schools and within a country. Further, opponents claim that standards are deemed more successful in those schools that are well-funded, while poorly funded schools are limited to core disciplines (Oliva, 2009, p. 535) and that cultural biases in the tests and measurement of school performance will be apparent. Opponents of standards argue that standards curriculum also creates problems for assessing the progress of special needs students, and those who are not competent in the English language (Oliva, 2009, p. 535; Blackmore, 1999, p. 16). Furthermore, opponents allege that “excessive emphasis on standardised teaching forces teachers into teaching to the tests, excluding other content and use of procedures that evaluate other types of learning and behaviours” (Oliva, 2009, p. 537 - 538). Standards education can also make it more challenging for teachers and schools to integrate additional curriculum programmes into the current curriculum because of the pressure some schools may experience to teach to the prescribed content and skills. This could be of consequence for integrating CAP, and will be discussed in proceeding chapters.

**VELS as an ‘academic’ curriculum ideology**

As well as reflecting a business-oriented approach to education, VELS also reflects an academic curriculum ideology which has been likened to a Baroque garden (Ross, 2000, p. 3). This form of curriculum is heavy on content, sets up boundaries, and reduces options for teachers and students (Ross, 2000, p. 99). It is hoped that by learning the accumulated knowledge of the
culture, the learners’ intellectual abilities will be enhanced. Thus, they will be able to more effectively contribute in adult society (Print, 1993, p.47 & Schiro, 2008, p. 4). Like the Baroque garden, the academic curriculum “must be cultivated in certain ways and trained into special shapes” (Ross, 2000, p. 3). In an academic curriculum ideology, there appears to be a need to control what is transmitted and received.

The consequence of an academic approach to curriculum leaves insufficient opportunities for affective processes to be developed. A purely cognitive, intellectual, academic curriculum could overlook the time needed for students to develop deep understanding (Biggs 2003, p. 14 & Ramsden, 1992, p. 38). Since academic curriculum relies heavily on performance, affective learning that relates to student interests, attitudes, beliefs, values and personality characteristics, is considered less important because it cannot be easily assessed (Krathwohl, Bloom & Masia, 1964, pp. 15-20). Therefore, by presenting a curriculum like VELS to learners, the affective dimension is given less priority in the classroom. Teachers are more likely to prioritise delivery of content towards preparation for assessments. This could possibly overshadow curriculum intent and “underemphasise processes at the expense of content” (Print, 1993, p. 196 & p. 49). This approach further undermines the need for learners to develop in the affective domain and can prevent social justice projects, such as CAP, from being successfully integrated.

**VELS as a ‘social efficiency’ curriculum ideology**

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1“Affective learning is demonstrated by behaviors indicating attitudes of awareness, interest, attention, concern, and responsibility, ability to listen and respond in interactions with others, and ability to demonstrate those attitudinal characteristics or values which are appropriate to the test situation and the field of study” cf: [http://www.indiana.edu/~global/icab/notebook/LearningTaxonomy_Affective.pdf](http://www.indiana.edu/~global/icab/notebook/LearningTaxonomy_Affective.pdf)
VELS reflects Schiro’s (2008) description of the social efficiency curriculum ideology (p. 4) and is similar to Ross’ (2000) description of the “dig-for-victory” curriculum (p. 5). Supporters of this ideology believe that schooling should prepare learners for the skills and procedures needed in the workplace and at home, to live productive lives and maintain the functioning of society (Schiro, 2008, p. 5). In its curriculum, students are required to achieve a series of behavioural objectives, and practise these many times to master the skills (Schiro, 2008, p. 5). VELS is a reflection of this ideology. Students are assessed on certain behaviours in each interrelated strand. These behaviours mirror the expectation of society and the workforce (Kemmis, 1986, p. 99), thus serving society’s needs (Ross, 2000, p. 2) and the needs of young people who aim to obtain training qualifications (Ross, 2000, p. 6). Ross (2000) argues that this type of curriculum ideology is “socially constructed” (p. 7) for it serves to develop human need, construct human behavior, and serve the common good. In this way it is considered purely instrumental (Ross, 2000, p. 6). This type of curriculum ideology adequately prepares students for making a living, but does not adequately prepare them for making a life within a community (Andrzejewski, Baltadano, & Symcox, 2009, p. 18).

In summary, VELS is representative of a standards-based academic and social efficiency model of education. It is strong on content and assessment, and emphasises mastery of certain behaviors and skills (VCAA, 2007, p. 4). On the whole, it does not provide overt platforms for teachers to teach learners how they can take part in social change. A curriculum model overtly concerned with the social injustices in society is the social reconstructionist ideology (Schiro, 2008, p. 6). The model, as will be demonstrated, is of significance for the aims of CAP.
The social reconstruction ideology

Social reconstructionists “assume that the purpose of education is to facilitate the construction of a new and more just society that offers maximum satisfaction to all of its members” (Schiro, 2008, p. 6). They view curriculum from a social perspective and assume that our society is unhealthy and threatened by many problems such as racism, war, poverty, pollution, and illiteracy. Social reconstructionists consider the school as the most suitable environment for students to learn how to take action to improve and ‘save’ society (Schiro, 2008, p. 133). They therefore advocate the use of education to create young visionaries who will bring about more improved and humane civilizations (Schiro, 2008, p. 134). A social reconstruction ideology is designed around, for instance, the oppression of poverty, the destructive nature of war, the social injustices of slavery, or political corruption (Schiro, 2008, p. 13). A History curriculum which discusses war, for example, would focus on the problems and destructive nature of war, rather than historiography and data (an approach which would otherwise reflect a ‘scholar academic’ curriculum).

During the Great Depression, George Counts (1932) wrote:

the present situation is full of promise, as well as menace….There lies within our grasp the most humane and majestic civilization ever fashioned by any people….We hold within our hands the power to usher in an age of plenty, to make secure the lives of all and banish poverty forever from the land (p. 260-261).
Counts was one of the major theorists during this period to criticise child-centered, progressive education, and to place teachers, not subjects or students, at the forefront of his philosophy (Null, 2011, p.100). He proclaimed that education should provide the means for society to be reconstructed (Schiro, 2008, p. 134), taking “students in a social direction, one that imbues them with a sense of purpose, vision, and service to the common good” (Null, 2011, p. 101).

Counts was concerned with social welfare. He wished for teachers to “use their influence to create a society in line with a radical curriculum vision” and to fashion the curriculum and school procedures to “influence the social attitudes, ideals and behavior of the coming generation (Null, 2011, p. 101). These were radically new ideas of the time, for teachers were not regarded as social revolutionaries (Null, 2011, 101-102). Counts’ educational ideologies, also known as Radical Education, parallels with the ideologies of social reconstructionism.

Social reconstructionists position the greater good of the community above individual interests, thus, through its curriculum, a social and political vision is integrated (Null, 2011, p. 102). They assume that if students “analyse and understand social problems, envision a world in which those problems do not exist, and act so as to bring that vision into existence….then schools can lead to social transformation” (Schiro, 2008, p. 134). Henry Giroux (1992), also considered a Radical Educationalist, asserts that education has a “public mission of making society more democratic” (p. 10). This imposes demands on teachers to become “moral and intellectual ‘change agents’ both in the classroom and in their communities” (Null, 2011, p. 107). Learners are also seen as both “potential converts to a social vision” (Null, 2011, p. 108) and products of a culture that teachers create within a school (Null, 2011, p. 107-109).

A social reconstructionist curriculum involves:
understanding a problem, examining options for improvement, clarifying values, taking a value stance, making a commitment, forming a group vision (or several visions, if differing opinions existed) of what a more just world might look like, and deciding what social action or actions should be taken to correct the problem (Schiro, 2008, p. 141)

This approach can be seen in the cyclical diagram below (Figure A). It presents a construct as one attempt to represent the process of the social reconstruction ideology, based on Schiro’s (2008) social reconstruction curriculum design.
The social reconstruction ideology reflects the vision of contributing to the overall health and well-being of the community by attempting to eradicate injustices. The ideology is explicitly about action and practice.
Schiro (2008) provided an example of a successful social reconstruction model used in a middle school Mathematics classroom in an urban public school in America. Mathematics was taught in a way that allowed the learners (many of whom were poor) opportunities to notice, analyse and understand the social injustices in their world, plan ways to right the injustice, and take action to bring about a just world (p. 137). Students worked on many projects: for example, the issue of ‘World Wealth Distribution’, which involved a comparison of world wealth distribution with continental population; and the ‘Cost of the Iraq War’, involving comparing war costs to the costs of providing shelter for everyone, removing land mines, eliminating illiteracy, and providing safe drinking water worldwide (Schiro, 2008, p. 138).

The process used by the Mathematics teacher was as follows. Students first chose the issues with which they were concerned. The teacher introduced the mathematics that would help the students collect and examine the data for investigation, and the students analysed the data based on the mathematical learning. A good deal of discussion took place - facilitated by the teacher - using both affective and cognitive questions, to clarify their understandings, their value stance, and the role they could play in working toward change. The students then devised plans to construct a collective vision to improve the situation and where possible, they took social action to their communities to promote awareness and gain support (Schiro, 2008, p. 138).

The community project examples provided by Schiro (2008) were successful because issues were chosen that intellectually and emotionally involved the students and, at the same time, mathematical learning took place. Group discussions also played a pivotal role in the success of the projects. Mediums such as drama, music, painting and dance were used to assist
students to express their thoughts and feelings on the issues. Follow-up activities examined related problems, deepened student understanding of both the social issue and the mathematical skills. The methodology (as seen in the cyclical diagram of Figure 1) was followed and the students successfully took action. They convinced their families and communities to support their projects and to take action to stop further problems (Schiro, 2008, p. 138-141).

**Reflections on the social reconstruction ideology**

The examples Schiro (2008) provided of the community projects undertaken in an American school were developed from the academic disciplines, but involved a reconstruction of the curriculum. The projects were interdisciplinary (Schiro, 2008, p. 142-143). This reflects Counts’ vision to ensure the teaching of traditional subjects, but with a different orientation and with a focus on social and political injustices in all disciplines (Counts, 1934, pp. 544-546). This orientation involved cognitive and affective behaviors happening almost simultaneously. Among educational researchers, there is an explicit belief that if “cognitive objectives are developed, there will be corresponding development of appropriate affective behaviours…The evidence suggests that affective behaviors develop when appropriate learning experiences are provided for students” (Krathwohl, Bloom & Masia, 1964, p. 20). Compared to the social reconstruction ideology, VELS appears to inadequately promote the affective outcomes because of its academic and cognitive approach to learning. If the current learners are to grow to maturity meeting societal expectations, informing change, and being socially active (Howe and Strauss, 2000, p. 327), then a different orientation of the current curriculum may be necessary and processes may
need to be established in the current Victorian schools to allow for the integration of the social reconstruction ideology.

By integrating the ideologies of social reconstructionists into the current VELS curriculum, the current learners have a greater chance to develop as culturally literate and social and environmental advocators, while still preparing for academic success and success in the work force. While Victorian Catholic secondary schools do pursue the goal of social justice, it has been shown that the social reconstructionist approach has been successful in battling injustices. Some examples of such injustices are women’s rights, school desegregation, and the visibility of minority groups in subjects such as history and literature (Null, 2011, p. 111). A social reconstructionist curriculum, therefore, reflects a moral and ethical philosophy and holds intellectual and moral content (Null, 2011, p. 112) which resonates with the principles and aims of the Church documents analysed in Part B of the Literature Review, Chapter Two.

The social reconstruction curriculum has been criticised for its emphasis on condemning the institutions that caused a particular social injustice. This can leave less time to put in place action to change the injustices (Null, 2011, p. 112). The ideology can also place high demands on teachers to have politically progressive views and espouse revolutionary visions, which adds the further problem of discerning those political views that are relevant to address in a classroom setting. The concern is that teachers may present one view, while excluding all others (Null, 2011, p. 114).

While opponents of the social reconstruction ideology oppose the use of social and political acculturation, social reconstructionists themselves condone this attitude, believing that “social acculturation is unavoidable and that education cannot avoid being biased” (Schiro, 2008, p. 153). They believe that the process of socialisation is the traditional process of the school, a
stance that echoes Counts’ argument that socialisation and acculturation in education are inevitable, for they are inherent in the very nature of education (Counts, 1932, p. 12).

Social reconstructionists further argue that if they submit to conservative groups, then social crises will continue to threaten society (Schiro, 2008, p. 154). Instead, social reconstructionists uphold the view that through traditional disciplines, education must introduce learners to social problems, provide engaging methods for students to understand them, and enhance the students’ problem solving skills in order to respond to the problems of the world. This is based on the assumption that as new issues arise, learners are empowered to continue reconstructing themselves and society (Schiro, 2001, p. 155-157; Biggs, 2003, p. 16; Quinnan, 1997, p. 42, in Mezirow and Taylor, 2009, p. 3). In this process, the teacher’s main role is to facilitate learning, and together, teachers and pupils work in partnership, actively engaging in the process of understanding and taking a stance on issues (Schiro, 2008, p. 166).

The ideology reflected in CAP is the social reconstruction ideology. The present research investigated the teachers’ experience of integrating CAP in their current VELS Humanities curriculum. The educational context of this research will now conclude by considering the implications or significance of the current curriculum ideologies that could impact on the application of CAP.

**Significance for integrating CAP into the current curriculum ideologies**

Based on the literature about VELS it appears that in Victorian Catholic secondary schools a social reconstruction ideology ought to be more pronounced in the current curriculum. This is imperative if the learners are going to be successful contributors to the creation of a just
society, if they are to form civic identities, and if the Catholic school is going to wholeheartedly fulfill the expectations of the Catholic Church.

As has been demonstrated earlier, there has been many successful community projects derived from a social reconstruction curriculum ideology. If a social reconstruction model is implemented in secondary schools, it is still possible for the curriculum to remain academic, vocational, and objective-driven, continue to value Australia's cultural identity, and teach skills and behaviors for the current learners effective contribution to society. However, through the curriculum topics, the emphasis must be placed on linking academic learning with contemporary social justice issues, and allow space in the curriculum for the characteristics of the social reconstruction ideology by way of community action. Thus, by complementing the current curriculum ideologies with a social reconstructionist vision, the current learners will have richer opportunities to develop knowledge and skills which enable them to be socially progressive. They will also continue to develop their ability to make decisions with an ethical conscience and enhance their leadership skills to better the lives of the communities who are suffering under immense social injustice. The very nature of education, in its ability to influence a great number of people, has the power to be successful in this endeavour.

The research problem and aims of the present study

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers’ experience of applying CAP in the discipline of Humanities in a northern suburban Victorian Catholic secondary school. The orientation of the research was action research, however, in view of the researcher as a member
of the organisation in which the research took place, the present study names the research approach as ‘insider action research,’ based on the study by Cochlan & Brannick (2005, p. xii).

Drawing on the school’s current curriculum frameworks, the intention of this research was to employ a focus group of teachers to facilitate the development of CAP within one of their Humanities classes. The research involved a focus group of one Year 8 History teacher, one Year 9 Geography teacher, one Year 10 Philosophy teacher and one year 10 Asian Studies teacher. The Faculty Coordinator of Humanities was also included in the focus group, although she was not required to facilitate CAP in a classroom. The members of the focus group were asked to trial a theoretical procedure with the current learners and reflect on the implementation of the procedure. Interviews were conducted and analysed to discern the successes and weaknesses of the project, based on the reflections and perspectives of both the focus group members and the researcher.

The researcher of the present study was a teacher in the Catholic school in which this study took place, and also lived in the same geographical area in which the school was situated. At the time this research began, the researcher was dissatisfied with many factors within the education system. These concerns can be broadly outlined in the following way: a) the structure of the current curriculum appeared to restrict innovative pedagogy; b) the structures of the current school often impinged on the administration of compulsory community outreach; c) the sense of apathy toward ideas of community and social justice action among staff and students was concerning; d) there seemed to be a strong flavour of materialistic values amongst the current learners; and e) there were grave concerns about the average literacy, numeracy, and VCE (Victorian Curriculum Education) results in the current school compared to the state average.
In 2009 this researcher attended a professional development workshop facilitated by the Catholic Education Office. It was during this workshop that the working draft of ‘Contemporary learning within the context of the Catholic School Schema’ was presented. It was through this document and the succeeding discussion of the schema that the researcher’s idea for CAP emerged. This idea was based on the schema’s philosophy to “engage the learner in the contemporary world….by contributing to community…through taking action that matters” (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne [CEOM], 2009).

The current curriculum in Victorian secondary schools is ambitious in the sense that it provides a plethora of academic disciplines (Schiro, 2008, p. 5) but this form of curriculum emphasises knowledge for self, so that the learner is then able to contribute successfully in society. This very individualistic view indicates a subjective approach to curriculum, which could mean that the current learners may not see the importance of knowledge for others. This form of curriculum also focuses heavily on assessment and reporting, barely allowing opportunities to educate the learners about social justice action and community outreach. Therefore, if the current learners are not provided with adequate opportunities to develop skills and deep understandings in this area, then the current crises in the world have the potential to expand, and the current learners will be contributing to these crises simply because they do not have the necessary understanding or skills in this area.

In an attempt to begin to overcome this problem, the researcher considered a theoretical procedure to integrate social justice action and community outreach into the current curriculum disciplines. The social reconstructionist curriculum philosophy offers a process that can be implemented in the current curriculum. If facilitated correctly, it can provide opportunities for
the current learners to develop in skills, deep understanding and values to improve the happiness of others and ultimately benefit society (Schiro, 2008, p. 6).

The aim of the present study, therefore, is to identify a social justice problem to be addressed and apply the social reconstructionist curriculum framework to create a CAP framework (or procedure) that can be integrated into the current curriculum units across various disciplines. Therefore, by way of a focus group of teachers the research offers an alternative means to foster in the current learners, a deep learning about a social justice issue and a sense of responsibility to undertake corresponding action in the community. At the same time, the current learners undertake academic learning that should not affect the current school priorities for assessment and reporting. If CAP is ongoing, the evidence suggests that the benefit for the current learners and communities could be profound. This claim is based on the already existing social reconstructionist curriculum philosophies operating in some schools in America (Schiro, 2000, p. 6).

**Key research questions**

- To identify the common characteristics and behaviour patterns of the current learners in order to determine the significance and relevance of CAP. *What can education do for the current learners to motivate them towards desiring active leadership in social justice action and community outreach?*

- To explore how teachers in a Catholic secondary school regard the integration of CAP in their classrooms with the current learners. *What were the teacher’s*
experiences of CAP? What challenges and strengths did they encounter?

What factors assisted and hindered the integration of CAP?

- To analyse the research findings against the current literature about the current learners, the Church documents, and the current curriculum philosophies. How is CAP significant and beneficial to the current learners and Victorian Catholic education?

- What future directions and practices can be put in place to integrate CAP into the mainstream curriculum in Victorian Catholic secondary schools?

The Significance of this Study

There has been a significant amount of research conducted in the area of generational theory, most notably, the research of Neil Howe and William Strauss (2000) and Australian social researchers, Hugh Mackay, Mark McCrindle and Karen Brooks (2008). While Ross (2010), Gasser (2008) and Prensky’s (2011) generational theory is comprehensive, their findings are primarily American-centric. There is also a large amount of literature about the impact that technology could wield on the lives of the youngest generations. Much of the theories are speculative. There are a small number of Australian studies that included in their research of young people findings about their social justice action: Hughes (2007), Mason, Singleton & Webber (2007) and, more recently, Daw (2013). The evidence available suggests there are but a small percentage of Australian current learners contributing to social justice outreach (Hughes, 2007, p. 100). Based on the focus group interviews, the present research generated a perception
of the current learners in the present school as young people who are doing very little in terms of social justice outreach. Therefore, this researcher is of the opinion that CAP would be of great benefit to them, and this is supported in the research findings. In the findings and the discussion of this research, the researcher is by no means claiming that what is found can be said to be true for all young people in all Australian communities; however, the findings and analysis can be used as a sample theory for future educational directions and educational research.

There is also an enormous amount of academic literature and public debate about what schools should do for students and our society. The researcher acknowledges that the present study contributes to this debate by proposing an alternative way to improve the current Victorian curriculum and improve the social justice and community outreach skills and understanding of the current learners. However, as far as the researcher is aware, at the time of this research, the present study was one of a few that discussed curriculum in terms of presenting a discourse on integrating a social reconstructionist curriculum framework through the application of CAP in the current Humanities curriculum.

The Organisation of this Thesis

The introduction to this thesis presented the background and purpose of this study. It also presented a detailed description and analysis of the current curriculum philosophies and curriculum debates operating within a secondary school context, and examined the current Victorian curriculum philosophies (VELS) and compared it to some key curriculum philosophies, but namely, the social reconstructionist curriculum philosophy as presented by

The introduction has also outlined the problem to be investigated and explained the significance of this research in the Australian context. Exact definitions of terms and assumptions of this study are not set forth separately, but rather are made clear as the research unfolds. The limitations and delimitations of this study are made clear in the final chapter.

Chapter Two presents the Literature Review in two parts. Part A begins with an overview of the discourse about the current learners (those born between 1995 to 2002) by presenting the shared similar perceptions about this school group, namely, they are regarded as digitally literate; socially active; are increasingly addicted to excitement and entertainment; and exhibit power and dynamism. The review presented each theme and reflected on their significance for CAP.

Succeeding, Part B of the Literature Review examined three Church documents to understand the context in which the Catholic schools are operating out of. These documents highlighted important Catholic philosophies about the responsibilities of Catholic schools to fulfill its mission of evangelization, social justice and community outreach.

Following the Literature Review, Chapter Three presented the Research Design. The chapter justified the proposed research design pertinent to the present study. Beginning with a brief definition of the qualitative paradigm, the chapter subsequently outlined the epistemology, theoretical perspective, as well as the research methodology and methods relevant to the study. The research design was generated primarily from Crotty’s (1998) social research framework (p. 2).

Chapter Four presented the findings in relation to the Humanity teachers’ experience of integrating a social reconstructionist curriculum approach to one of their curriculum units and
linked to a contemporary social justice or community issue. Using qualitative research methods, the researcher aimed to examine and interpret the perceptions and experiences of the focus group to recognise the successes, problems or limitations of the action research.

A discussion of the major findings was then presented in Chapter Five of the Discussion. Three key issues were presented that encroached on the integration of CAP. Lastly, Chapter Six provided a brief summary of the major findings of the present research and proposed some major recommendations for the future direction of CAP in the Victorian curriculum for Catholic secondary schools.
Chapter Two

Review of the Current Literature

Introduction

To investigate teachers’ experience of applying CAP in the discipline of Humanities in a Victorian Catholic secondary school, it is necessary to provide a range of literature relevant to the study. This chapter is divided into two sections: Part A) a review of the current literature for the current learners presently being taught in Australian secondary schools; Part B) a critique of three Catholic Church documents: Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965; The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education: *The Catholic School*, Published 1977; and *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, published by the Congregation for Catholic Education in 1997.

Part A: The Current Learners

The subject of the literature in this review – the current learners – are a small group of the youngest generation in Australia, students born between the years 1993 to 2002. This review engages with some of the academic research of sociologists, psychologists and educators, as well as popular culture reports from Australian and American tabloids and marketing companies, to identify some of the common characteristics and behaviors of the current learners. This will provide the basis upon which a discussion of the educational benefits of CAP can take place.
In western countries, the current learners are among the most widely studied generational groups by social researchers, educators and the popular press. There are a small number of Australian studies that have included in their study of young people findings about their social justice action: Hughes (2007), Mason, Singleton & Webber (2007), and more recently, Daw (2013). Within Hughes’ (2007) extensive study of how young people (aged between 13 – 24 years) relate to religion and spirituality, he identified their level of interest in social and political issues, their interest in the wider society, the importance they placed on social justice, and their contribution to social action (pp. 89 – 104). Mason, Singleton & Webber (2007) also completed an investigation into the spirituality of young Australians within a similar age group to those of the present study. A portion of their study investigated the young people’s civic orientation, civic knowledge, civic participation and social concern (p. 273). Daw’s (2013) research on young people, social justice and spirituality has also targeted this age group. The study interviews teachers from schools where social justice programs are held to be exemplary. Her findings will also be examined in this chapter.

While Hughes (2007), Mason, Singleton & Webber’s (2007), and Daw’s (2013) findings are significant to the present study, as far as the researcher is aware, there is limited research on the effectiveness of integrating similar projects like CAP into the Victorian secondary school curriculum. Further, there is inadequate research investigating secondary school teachers’ perceptions of integrating CAP into the current curriculum, especially from a Humanities and social reconstructionist point of view.

In the literature about the current learners, and in this review, there are broad, generalised descriptions of this age group, describing their general patterns and trends of the majority. The development of a broad sense of the collective identity of the current learners will be beneficial
in order to connect the philosophies of CAP with significant elements of their identity and characteristics. However, it is important to note that the generalisations are not necessarily typical of the whole group, rather, they merely define the current learners and describe what most of them are like, or how most of them represent themselves (McQueen, 2010, p. 14).

Through western popular culture and academic literature various labels have been given to the current learners. Mason, Singleton & Webber (2007) describe them as the youngest of the Generation Y cohort (p. 19), but they are most commonly known as the eldest in the ‘Generation Z’ group (Matthews, Walliker, Hawkins, Schmidt, Robinson, 2008; Whitby, 2009). Prensky (2001) coined the term ‘digital natives’ to describe the current learners (p. 1). They have also been identified as ‘Children of the tech Revolution’ by the writers of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Peter Hawkins and Lucinda Schmidt (2008), who drew from the work of Australian social researchers, Hugh Mackay, Mark McCrindle, Richard Watson, and the partner and head of America's KPMG's property and demographic advisory group, Bernard Salt. Karen Brooks (2008) an Australian author, journalist and educational speaker, referred to the current learners as 'computeens' (p. 6). The term ‘iGeneration’ is popular, as is the phrase, ‘the connected class' (Rosen, 2010, p. 9). Futurist and anthropologist, Mike Walsh, refers to them as, ‘The Naturals’ (Ross, 2010, p. 6) while historians and well known generational theorists, Neil Howe and William Strauss (2000) maintain that they are part of the ‘Millennials’, also known as Generation Y, children born between 1985 – 2004 (p. 50), although, they may name those born after 2002 as the ‘Homeland Generation’ (Horovitz, 2012, para 11-13). Nevertheless, according to Howe and Straus’ (2000) generational predictions, the group we are referring to in this current research are typically children of Generation X (born between early 1960’s to early 1980’s) or the children of the oldest ‘Millennials’, also known as the eldest of Generation Y (p. 50).
Although the group of young people born in the mid to late 1990’s (and the first decade of the 21st century) have been given a variety of labels, McQueen (2010) emphasises that “the labels themselves are not important – their significance lies in what they represent” (p. 15). Therefore, rather than labeling this group, the present study refers to those currently being taught in Australian secondary schools, as the ‘current learners’. It highlights a number of key themes that have emerged from the literature that generally describe the current learners’ social norms, common behaviors and emerging characteristics. Although there are many, for the purpose of this study, these have been grouped together under four key themes:

- Digitally literate
- Socially active
- Excitement and entertainment
- Power and dynamism

Based on evidence from the literature, this review deals with each theme separately, followed by a reflection of the significance and benefits of CAP for the current learners.

**Digitally literate**

The current learners are the first generation in history to have lived from “cradle to grave in the digital era” (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008, p. 3). This group are not just technology users, but technology simply is for this generation (Olsson, 2007, p. 1). They will spend their entire life with multiple technologies and will consume a large variety of media, using the World Wide
Web, instant messaging, MP3 players, mobile phones, online videos, video games, ipads, iphones, tablets and much more (Rosen, 2010, p. 28). Further, the prolific use of the internet means that as the current learners grow to maturity, they will lead the way as the “largest storehouse of information in history” (Rosen, 2010, p. 26).

The media to which the current learners have access is limitless (Rosen, 2010, p. 27) and while they continue to show interest in technology, the technology continues to expand, and marketing companies continue to find innovative ways to connect to their interests. In October 2010, for instance, it was reported by CNN Tech news that Macy’s (American Department Store) had developed a technology where customers could check their look in a "magic mirror" in a fitting room. A touchscreen tablet computer is linked to a large mirror in the fitting room and this allows visitors to digitally "try on" clothes in the mirror. They are then able to digitally share the “tried on” clothes with friends to get quick feedback (Gross, 2010, para 1-4).

This is but a small example of the way in which technology is blurring physical and digital boundaries. Jordan (2009) explains: “a growing number of people now live in a hybrid world where the boundaries between what is physical (or actual) and what is digital (or electronic) continue to fade. This hybrid world is one where a person's identity, experiences, and life possibilities begin to integrate physical and virtual facets of existence so that consciousness is to some extent shared between an offline physical and an online virtual self” (para. 3). Palfrey and Gasser (2008) observed that within the ‘hybrid spaces’ (Jordan, 2009, para 3) the current learners have an “ability to express themselves and relate to others mediated by digital technologies” (p.4). They “perceive information to be malleable; it is something they can control and reshape in new and interesting ways” (p. 6). They have readily available access to unregulated online websites, blogs and networks, and many are “authors of their own websites
and….contributors to weblogs” (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008, p. 6). Palfrey and Gasser (2008) suggest that these communication technologies blend the human with the technical and this is transforming human relationships in fundamental ways (p. 4). The social relationships of the current learners, for instance, go beyond local realities and into larger global networks Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004, p. 2). The current smartphones in the market are designed for those who do a great deal of communication through social networking and global searching, and appeal to people who want permanent online ‘connection’. It is a sophisticated device allowing the current learners to enhance their online social networking while at the same time engaging with global ideas, knowledge, and creativity, crossing over national boundaries and entering cultural streams at incredible speeds (Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004, p. 2). Considered by society to be completely technologically confident, it can be predicted that the current learners will continue to embrace new technologies and take advantage of the opportunities these technologies provide.

Although it is apparent from everyday experience and from the literature that the current learners are digitally capable and confident, it must be taken into consideration that they exist in a very complex virtual space. Perhaps because digital technologies are too recent, there is insufficient evidence revealing the effects of technologies on the current learners, however, there is “solid evidence regarding the positive effects of technology on cognitive skills development, particularly in areas related to visual-spatial skills and nonverbal forms of intelligence” (Pedro, 2007, p. 7). Further, the phenomenon of multitasking is expected to become widely discussed. Neurological research suggests that “attention to one task diminishes as another is introduced (Pedro, 2007, p. 9 & Just et.al 2001). This begs the question of the emotional attachment (or detachment) of the current learners when virtually socializing, especially when they are
switching quickly between many thoughts, ideas and identities simultaneously without a deep focus on one item and one person. Little is known of the psychological impact this could have on their thought processes and identity in the future.

On the other hand, it has been identified that “time devoted to digital technologies adds to time devoted to other media and thus reduces time spent on family interaction or face to face peer interaction….but gives rise to other forms of [virtual] socialisation” (Pedro, 2007, p. 7). Their virtual spaces can be private and secretive, detaching from the physical social environment. In the absence of adult supervision there is no counseling about their technological activities (Pedro, 2007, p. 7). Being exposed to many variant ideas simultaneously through technology may prove to be confusing or harmful to the young minds of the current learners (Holmes, 2003, para. 2 -3 & Wyn & Cuervo, 2005, p. 5). Yet, in the current technological environment this is unavoidable. Suarez-Orozco and Qin-Hilliard (2004) recognise that “youth who are players in a global stage must cultivate the multiple identities that are required to function in diverse, often incommensurable cultural realities” (p. 22). Thus, digital proficiency could either prove a threat to the current learners or provide significant advancements for them in society and the global world.

In summary, it has been shown in the research that the current learners are digitally literate. The current learners understand technology as natural and are adept at it (Prensky, 2011, p. 17). It can be suggested that as digital enhancements develop so too will their digital literacies and their practice of digital wisdom (Prensky, 2011, p. 19). Education, therefore, needs to play a pivotal role to ensure that their experience of technology has long term positive effects on their identity, the community, and the globalised world. This review will now examine how, in this context, CAP can provide significant benefits to the current learners.
**Significance and benefits for CAP**

Through their superior digital spaces, the current learners are constructing meaning and making sense of their world by way of enhancing their online 'connections' to online communities. McCrindle (2012) found that Generation Y and Z had more than double the number of friends on Facebook compared to older generations. This means that “the network that influences them greatly is greater numerically, geographically and being technology based, is connected 24/7….and this helps to facilitate their relational world” (para 12.)

This suggests that the current learners are showing a great need to be connected to community, and therefore may desire to be involved in local and global dialogue. This is evidenced by the fact that they appear to be globally focused due to the number of their technologies (McCrindle, 2012, para. 7). Especially enticing for the current learners is that there are no limitations or boundaries in their online social networks. Therefore, they have vast opportunities to expand their link to national and global communities, which would otherwise be impossible. If provided with the right opportunities, the current learners should be able to promote the community action they take part in, and share their learning to a wide audience - in interesting and creative ways - using social networking, personal publishing and blogging.

Further, as it does appear that the current learners want to feel connected to community, they may also want to share responsibility for community. CAP can be used as a gateway to enhance the current learners’ desire and sense of communal responsibility. The technology landscape bathes the current learners in a consumer culture (Wyn & Cuervo, 2005, pp. 17-19). The media and marketing companies encourage the current learners to be self-indulgent
consumers because they present the message that these commodities will satisfy their identity. However restraining consumption is challenging for this group because this is what they are accustomed to. “It permeates almost all areas of their lifestyle and relationships” (McCrindle, 2012, para. 4). The benefit of CAP is that it does not endorse materialism. Rather, it indulges the possibility of forming an identity of active citizenship. Thus, it may contradict the principles of consumer culture and encourage and challenge the current learners to adapt their identities for the good of the community. Ongoing participation in CAP may be influential in shaping a generation with a ‘civic identity’.

While many of the current learners may say that they find happiness and fulfillment in the digital environment, such fulfillment is necessarily limited by the fact that we also live in a tangible, material world, a world that requires and calls for their engagement (Hughes, 2007, p. 12). Therefore, trialing a project that brings to life physical communities has the potential to challenge some of the values held by the current learners. The CAP model encourages participants to harness their self-indulgent tendencies, not through materialism, but by working towards community outreach. Thus, CAP encourages young people to consider the value of necessity over consumption, the physical over the digital, and allows for the possibility for the 'civic identity' to overpower the 'online identities'. This review now examines the themes of the literature in regard to the current learners’ civic identities, social awareness and efforts for social justice.

**Socially active**
Due to their accessibility to information, and their creativity in digital literacy, there is an expectation that the current learners will take on a “hero” persona (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 327) and use their strength in numbers to inform change and be socially active. To imply that the current learners are socially aware and socially active suggests that they are aware and sensitive to the problems and hardships that different communities face on a day to day basis, and understand what is needed in these communities. Socially aware people are also aware of the impact their actions have on others, and find ways to take action to work towards changing the problems of communities (cf: Hughes, 2007, pp. 89–95; and Mason, Singleton & Webber, 2007, p. 274). Although the current learners have access to large amounts of information (through technologies) questions are being asked about the degree to which the current learners are using media information, their social networking and virtual communities to be socially active.

There is an assumption among many social demographers that the current learners are digitally literate and media competent, therefore they must also have deep understanding of local and global affairs pertinent to being able to make conscious decisions about their planet and be involved in active social justice. McCrindle (2013) for instance, noted that this group is expected to be more educated than previous generations and more socially aware. He asserts that terminologies such as terrorism and climate change have always been part of their lives. They are therefore familiar with the challenges the world faces, and this has bestowed upon them a social conscience (McCrindle, cited in Schmidt & Hawkins, 2008, para. 8-10). Accordingly, they use technologies, their social networks and creativity to make a social difference (Walliker, 2008, para. 29). David Chalke, one of Australia’s leading social analysts, has formulated similar conclusions (Walliker, 2008, para. 17). Marketing companies are also presenting this group as young people who want to have an impact on the world (Williams & Page, 2010, p. 9).
The evidence suggests that the current learners are perhaps better informed on social issues than previous generations. A box office success documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) on the issue of global warming, has been widely studied in schools and is an example of the type of information to which the current learners have access. Further, in the last decade there has been full media coverage of national and international natural disasters, including hurricanes, cyclones, tsunamis and flooding. Environment campaigns, such as, ‘Step it up’ received worldwide media coverage, due to their use of email and social networking sites to advertise their campaign. Similarly, in Australia the ‘Clean up Australia day’ campaign in 2010 reported the “highest level of participation to date: 800 from 124 countries mobilized an estimated 35 million volunteers worldwide” and 15% of those were educational providers. Also worthy of note is the Australian program, ‘Kids teaching Kids’. This program involves schools from all over Australia (and internationally) to provide a unique education model to encourage the current learners to take action on global issues. On environmental issues alone, the current learners are receiving high exposure and as such, this is expected to influence their social consciousness and social action (McCrindle, 2012, para. 6-10).

Social and environmental issues in the world are being transmitted to the current learners at incredible speed. The digital technologies have given them opportunities to enhance their civic participation. However, according to a 2008 American study young people are not likely to use email to contact government officials about a civic or political issue. Instead, online campaigning, for example, collecting signatures, or voting online, is more common. Due to the

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digital behavior of the current learners, traditional campaigning almost does not take place. Instead, the current learners present opinions on issues via their social networking sites (Smith, 2009, pp. 3-10). Even responding to world issues through social networking is evidence that the current learners are at least showing some interest in social justice and community issues. On the other hand, it is easy to take thirty seconds to add your name to an online petition, but without physical action, social change can be limited.

While being aware and having a social conscience could be a distinguishing characteristic of the current learners, being socially active is more critical. While the current learners are navigating their lives through a digital online territory, this space offers many opportunities to be creative in taking social action. Palfrey and Gasser (2008) note that “when a lot of people care passionately about something, the Internet can become an extraordinarily powerful tool of organisation, recruitment, and participation in the telling of the narratives of our society….and new technologies inject energy and excitement into civic affairs” (p. 267 & 270). Despite this, there is little empirical evidence to suggest that the current learners are involved in online activism. Referring to American youth of a similar age to the Australian current learners, Palfrey and Gasser (2008) commented that although they have the

opportunity to participate actively in the news, information, and entertainment creation and dissemination process this does not mean that they will avail themselves of it….Not everyone will be taking advantage of these opportunities - indeed, the data suggests that most of them are not at present” (p. 266).
Reflecting Palfrey and Gasser’s (2008) findings was a report suggesting that there is a limited cross-section of young people using the Internet as a site for civic engagement (Wyn & Cuervo, 2005, p. 5 & p. 32).

As part of the Australian ‘Spirituality of Generation Y’ project, Mason, Singleton & Webber (2007) found that while “some young people are heavily involved in their community and are extremely socially aware” (p. 298) there is still a large portion of them who are not inclined to become actively and positively involved in the society around them. Those who were active Christians were much more likely to be actively involved in community service (p. 298 & 304). Hughes’ (2007) study reported that most young people said that social justice was ‘important’ or ‘very important’ and the older people ranked it higher than younger people. Hughes explains that “as young people become more aware of the world around them and of the impact that the society can have on the wellbeing of the individual, so they become more aware of the importance of social justice” (p. 95). It was found that there was a “widespread agreement among young people that you should ‘help others out’ through volunteering, but “approximately 70 percent of young people [aged 13 – 18] said they did not participate in voluntary work in a typical month” (Hughes, 2007, p. 99-100). In Australia, Hughes (2007) found that overall young Australians appeared to show very little interest or sense of responsibility in relation to the wider society (p. 11). Hughes explains that they may not have the capacity to serve a voluntary group or have the money to contribute to a charity. He suggested that this finding could be “more a product of life-stage than a product of generations” (Hughes, 2007, p. 100).

Similarly, Daw’s (2013) Australian investigation of the “faith-based social justice activities of youth” found that the interviewees observed young people have a desire to make a difference (p. 39) and believed it was important for schools to provide well-structured and visible
voluntary social justice groups and activities that young people could get involved in (p. 39). It was also noted that in some schools the social justice content of the Religious Education curriculum was also expressed in practical ways (p. 26).

Daw’s findings revealed that the “integration of social justice into the culture of the [school] community was also seen to give young people accessible role models and a base for social justice action (p. 76-77). Similar to Hughes (2007) findings, Daw’s research highlighted that the “connection between parish and social justice involvement increased when there was a…strong sense of community and connectedness” (between family, secondary school, parish and social justice organisations) in the lives of young people (p. 107).

**Significance and benefits for CAP**

The evidence indicates that there are many opportunities for the current learners to be socially active both within their secondary schools and wider community organisations. CAP is able to reconstruct the existing curriculum to foster in the current learners the value of sustainable, socially just communities, and cultivate learners’ skills in being able to act on social injustices. CAP allows participants to follow a pedagogical model where they are asked to clarify the values involved in a particular issue, make a commitment to do something towards change, envision the outcome of the action, and implement the action. In this way, participants are informing change at local, national and global levels on important social issues, and this can be encouraged through their most comfortable ‘accessory’ – their technologies.

A reconstruction of the current curriculum may need to take place if society expects social action from the current learners. Providing opportunities for explicit dialogue about local,
national and global issues, providing learners with rich opportunities to exchange views, and assisting learners to develop profound insights on issues in local, physical, and real space (Palfrey and Gasser’s, 2008, p. 246) is the philosophy of CAP. This was demonstrated in Chapter One. Of necessity now is to analyse the third theme derived from the literature in regard to the current learners: their perceived need for constant excitement and entertainment, attributed to their access to a range of technological media.

*Excitement and Entertainment*

McCrindle (2010) discovered that the current learners were spending an average of seven hours and six minutes using entertainment media everyday – that means time spent connected to the internet, iPods and mobile phones (para. 6). The current learners are 'wired' with almost every technological entertainment tool available. According to McCrindle (2010) the type of toys (appliances) Australian children have are power/electronic, and for children over eight, parents are purchasing electronics, such as iPods, digital cameras, mobile phones, computers, and electronic game technologies (para. 6). According to Rosen (2010) the current learners often have three or four game systems. Each year more exciting game systems are introduced in the market which appeals directly to this age group (p. 26).

Scientists suggest that the high volume of visual information and content emanating from the game consoles and other media tools are undermining the ability of the human mind to focus and shut out irrelevant information. They claim that this could cause stress because people are asking their brains to do things they have not necessarily evolved to do (Richtel, 2010, para. 11-18). Low academic achievement has also been found in a German study of the current learners
partaking in long playing times of computer and video games (Pedro, 2007, p. 9). CAP could be of significance to create alternative ways for the current learners to find entertainment and excitement.

It appears the current learners are content to move between online entertainment and physical entertainment. From the outside, they appear content being constantly stimulated and accept it as natural. This raises concerns for psychologists, who say that stimulation leads to excitement and the feeling of being “alive”, and excitement can also lead to addiction (Richtel, 2010, para. 8-16). In the absence of the entertainment, there are obvious concerns that the current learners will be bored and not know how to find stimulation elsewhere (Richtel, 2010, para. 9). A further concern is that the excitement and entertainment the current learners are experiencing through technology is changeable and transient. It may inhibit their ability to enjoy life wholeheartedly especially that there is less emphasis on face to face interactions when using technology (Simpson, 2012, para. 10-16). Further, entertainment technology does not comprehensively build skills in resilience and coping strategies for real life issues. Young people, not having matured in their ability to deal with challenges, may experience overstimulation, resulting in the possibility of depressive and destructive behaviors, and may be more likely to have attention problems at school (Price-Mitchell, 2013, para. 3).

**Significance and benefits for CAP**

The CAP model provides opportunities for the current learners to reflect on themselves and others, and on issues to which they will not be able to find answers in search engines or virtual games. In addition, digital technologies are limiting to some degree. Once a technology
skill is mastered there is no further way to advance that skill. CAP, on the other hand, provides many opportunities for the current learners to make use of and develop skills to be strengthened outside of the school environment, for example, in the work place, to inform social change. The specific skills to be developed and mastered with ongoing participation in CAP are team work, decision-making, leadership, innovation and initiative (Schiro, 2008, p. 150). In turn, participants are empowered, experience other forms of entertainment, may see long term improvements to their own self-esteem, and hopefully may feel energised to continue to work for, and in, community. Further, CAP has the opportunity to enhance the participants’ quality of life in the long term (through work and relationship opportunities), and offer alternative views about the world. This leads this review to an analysis of the fourth and final theme: the current learners have more power and dynamism than previous generations.

Power and Dynamism

The current learners appear to be already exercising and displaying the skillful power to be creative by being able to control and reshape information and their social worlds. Their relationship with technology requires skills in manipulation in order to apply the tools to their full capacity. Palfrey & Gasser (2008) state that they are “engaged in creating information, knowledge and entertainment in online environments” (p. 112) and that they are “offering up contributions that fall somewhere on the spectrum between the mundane and the magnificent” (p. 112). Called “user created content”, the current learners are involved in making television shows, remixing music or simply loading photographs on Facebook (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008, p. 112). This creative ability has awarded the current learners the power to use information
technology and accords them a degree of power and privilege to control the information environment, the media and their social worlds. These skills can be directed towards nurturing their potential leadership skills.

Society has contributed to the current learners’ degree of power. McCrindle (2012) has observed that there has been a major shift in how companies undertake market research with the current learners. He claims that products and services are being developed in collaboration with the current learners (para. 5). They want to be heard and it seems that marketing companies are obliging (Ross, 2010, para. 22). This has awarded them a degree of privilege and power in society.

A position of privilege can also be seen in the home environment. In the western world the current learners have only known a world that is consumed by materialism, and are bombarded by technological advances. Therefore, they are confident in becoming familiar with new domestic technologies. They are good at finding value in a product, therefore, they are in a privileged position to advise the older generations of the best product to purchase, whether it be a computer, mobile phone, an iphone, or laptop, and are in a position to set up the technology and show the older generations how to use it. This privilege has not been seen in previous generations. Again, this affords the current learners a degree of power.

The Australian social researcher, Michael McQueen (2010), had similar ideas about the “empowered” current youth. He noted that this group have been empowered from a very young age and have been “expected to have the same level of discernment, self-control and capacity for reasoning that was previously not expected until an individual’s late teens or early twenties” (McQueen, 2010, p. 53). Drawing on the research of Professor Jean Twenge, McQueen (2010) is concerned that as young people are being asked to make decisions when they are not cognitively
mature enough, this may result in children believing that their wants are the most important (p. 53). He provides an example of a mother asking her child to pick up toys. Rather than simply instructing him/her to do so, she provides alternative courses of action for the child to choose one if s/he does not comply. McQueen (2010) believes that the more power and choices society gives young people the greater the impact on their “approach to notions of responsibility, deference and submission as they move into adolescence and beyond” (p. 54). With such a degree of power and privilege within the home and society the current learners have the potential to provide significant benefits for the implementation of CAP.

**Significance and benefit for CAP**

Whether or not they realise it, the current learners have an unprecedented degree of control over their cultural environment (Palfrey & Gasser, 2010, p. 6). Their dynamic ability to be able to interact with the world is affording them a sense of confidence and control. They contribute and create online interactions. They want to share their opinions, ideas and knowledge to wide audiences. They are being listened to, and responded to, both in the physical and virtual environments. With the right guidance, through CAP, their voice and actions may exert a great deal of influence. Through CAP, the current learners may be given opportunities for broad experiences, to aid in the understanding of community - both physical and online - and find further ways to blur the two communities together for powerful and influential effect. Through CAP, the current learners have opportunities to form relationships in the physical environment and take part in community action that can precipitate a positive impact on the lives of many. In turn, the projects have the potential to strengthen their self-esteem and empower the current
learners. It is plausible to suggest, then, that successful participation in the projects could encourage the participants to be more actively involved in the physical communities and discover unique experiences that are unable to be reproduced in the digital communities.

**Conclusion to Part A**

The students currently being taught in Victorian secondary schools who were born between 1993 and 2002 were the subject of this section of the review. The review of the literature about the current learners has shed light on some of their common characteristics and has identified some of their general patterns of behavior and common social norms. Through the literature, a number of key themes emerged. That is, the current learners are ‘digitally literate’; appear to be ‘socially active’; appear to want constant ‘excitement and entertainment’; and have a degree of ‘power and dynamism’ not seen in previous generations. Each of these themes is significant and beneficial for CAP.

The belief by sociologists that the current learners are digitally literate means that they have access to (and the skills) to navigate their way around a very large information resource, known as the World Wide Web (Rosen, 2010, p. 26). Consequently, the current learners are able to find out anything they need to about local and global community concerns and social injustices. Further, they are also able to communicate through social networking to people in community organisations involved in social justice initiatives. The evidence infers that the current learners would not be reluctant to do this, because they not only appear to want to be part of community, but they also feel comfortable operating and functioning in digital spaces and social networks. Through these realities the current learners are continuously engaging with new
ideas, new knowledge and creativity. However, they are engaging in so many diverse cultural realities (often simultaneously) that it is uncertain if the current learners are emotionally affected and attached to these digital realities. CAP capitalises on the learners’ digital literacy skills in order to situate them firmly within the material community. The perceived benefits of CAP are listed below:

- Through digital technologies, the current learners are able to promote the social justice issue of CAP.
- CAP can be used to enhance their desire for and provide a gateway to participate in community.
- Through CAP, the current learners are able to deepen their awareness of social injustices by way of the information on the World Wide Web.
- Through CAP the current learners are encouraged to form an identity of active citizenship to enhance the lives of others, and use their technologies to do so.
- The philosophy underpinning CAP helps to counter the messages of the consumer culture often reflected in digital technologies.

It was discovered in the literature that there is uncertainty over the extent to which the current learners are socially active, and just how socially aware they really are. There is very little empirical evidence on this in both Australia and the United States. While society presents the current learners as one of the most socially informed and socially active generations in history, this is based on assumptions rather than empirical data. Hence, this is another reason
why the researcher is of the belief that CAP needs to be integrated into the current curriculum in secondary schools. It is of great benefit to the current learners because:

- CAP fosters the value of sustainable, socially just communities. It also aims at developing participants’ skills in being able to act on social injustices by utilising the available technologies and other resources.
- There is an expectation that given their population, accessibility to information and their creativity in digital literacy they need to be socially active. The ideology underpinning CAP encourages this.

Much of the technologies the current learners are using are affiliated with high levels of excitement and entertainment. The technologies encourage multi-tasking. The entertainment resources are also changeable and transient. Through these tools there is less emphasis on face to face relationships, less emphasis on building skills in resilience and decision-making for real life issues, and more emphasis on stimulation and excitement. The research suggests that high levels of constant entertainment and excitement has the tendency to lead to symptoms of stress, including reduced attention spans and low academic achievement. Thus, the researcher is of the belief that CAP can be used as an alternative form of excitement and entertainment. The benefits of this are outlined below:

- The model used for CAP provides opportunities for the current learners to reflect on themselves and others in a way that they are unable to do in online search engines or virtual games.
• With ongoing participation in CAP, current learners have opportunities to master specific skills in team work, decision-making, leadership, innovation and initiative. These skills cannot be mastered in digital technologies.

• CAP provides opportunities for the current learners to be empowered, and thus experience other forms of entertainment.

Finally, the research indicates that the current learners have been given a degree of privilege in society. They have superiority over information technology and this in itself affords them a degree of power to control the information environment, the media and their social worlds. Thus, at a young age, the current learners are demonstrating characteristics of initiative, dynamism and leadership. The degree of power and privilege bestowed upon the current learners is therefore of significance and benefit for CAP. These are presented below:

• Given their perceived power and privilege in society and in their homes, the current learners’ participation in CAP could exert a great deal of influence.

• Because they are considered creative in using their technologies to their full potential the current learners will be given opportunities, through CAP, to blur the physical and online communities together for powerful and influential effects.

In summary, the four themes represented in the literature about the current learners is of great significance and benefit to the effective implementation of CAP in schools, for it sheds light upon the need for the current learners to be involved in community action. The present study further explores in the sections which follow. Part B of the Literature Review analyses the
relevant Catholic Church documents used in Catholic schools to guide Catholic educational philosophies. The review will also examine the significance of the Church documents and their relevance to the themes represented for the current learners.

**Part B: Catholic Church documents**

Inspired by a Christian Spirit, the aim of the Catholic school is to provide learners with an effective education (European Committee for Catholic Education, 2011, p. 3). As society changes through cultural contexts, technological advances, socio-political variants, and cultural pluralism, the Catholic school endeavors to meet these new challenges and rethink its educational goals (Congregation for Catholic Education [hereafter CCE] 1997, n. 1). This research aims to investigate the integration of CAP in the discipline of Humanities in a Victorian Catholic secondary school, therefore, it must reflect the principles, aims and responsibilities of Catholic Education, as informed through Church documents.

An understanding of the Catholic school has been developed in the authoritative documentation of the Roman Catholic Church, from the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) until the present. The primary source documents chosen for analysis in this study outline the Church’s official understanding about the role of Religious Education in Catholic schools, the distinctiveness of Catholic Education, its principles and responsibilities, guidance for Catholic Schools to respond to a developing pluralistic society, and reasons for judiciously advocating Catholic Education. The present research aimed to investigate teachers’ experiences of applying CAP in the discipline of humanities in a Catholic secondary school. Thus, three Church documents have been selected and interpreted because they are specifically concerned with the
role of Catholic Education. In this study, these documents are viewed in light of how they resonate with CAP and how CAP observes the mission of the Church and the philosophies of Catholic Education. The three Church documents to be analysed in light of the present study are:


The Church document, Gravissimum Educationis (hereafter GE), meaning ‘the importance of Education’ is a detailed statement about the importance of ‘Christian’ education in the life of the person for social, political and economic progress. Since the document was published in 1965, education has advanced significantly with a sizeable increase in students and established schools worldwide. Changes to educational methodologies and pedagogies continue to develop and advance in the new millennium (GE, 1965, n. 3). While this research acknowledges that the principles of Catholic education are presented in GE, for the purposes of this review, the researcher has chosen to discuss only those concepts that are relevant to the integration of CAP in a Catholic School.
Of particular importance for the progress of education is to foster “true unity and peace on earth” to improve the human person and the good of society (GE, 1965, n. 5). The Church believes that if each person in society commits to a social responsibility through active involvement in community and a willingness to promote the common good (n. 6), that its mission will be fulfilled. GE states that this could happen if “young people [are] educated and inspired to appraise moral values with a right conscience” (n. 7) so that they develop “to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ” (n. 8) and be “imbued with the spirit of Christ….the good of earthly society and the building of a world that is more human” (n. 11).

Further, GE expects that the Catholic school must have an “atmosphere animated by the Gospel Spirit of….charity….to help youth prepare for….service” (GE, 1965, n. 20). Through this service, it is hoped that young people will live an apostolic life and become a “saving leaven” in the human community (n. 20). Further, GE expects that the Catholic school depend entirely on the abilities of its teachers to impart knowledge and skills, values and attitudes in the learners, and to accomplish the goals and programs of the school (n. 22). GE implies that all teaching staff should ‘witness’ to the Catholic faith and share their faith and experience with the learners (n. 8-9).

The view presented above is an optimistic philosophy and vision, reflecting an appeal for Catholic schools to take full responsibility to create a pure humanity, and a humanity which actively lives out a Christian faith. This idea is simply theoretical and idealistic, rather than pragmatic. Catholic schools have been noted as the primary place for the new evangelization (Martin & Williamson, 2006, p 5) as students spend over half of their waking hours there. However, Catholic schools cannot be entirely responsible for imparting moral values to its young
people, as this is also the responsibility of families and other external communities influential in the life of the young person.

GE also assumes that all teachers in a Catholic school have a strong Christian foundation and are willing to share their faith journey and their knowledge of the Tradition with the learners (n. 8). This view does not reflect the current climate within Australian Catholic Schools. While many great teachers have the ability to impart values and morals to their students, many would not feel comfortable presenting their personal faith journey to young people, nor would they have a strong enough knowledge-base in order to do so. Not all teachers working in a Catholic school are Catholic, and of those who are, only a small number would be trained in theological studies. If only those teachers employed in the Catholic school were Catholic, and had theological understanding, then this would greatly limit the employment of skilled teachers. The Catholic school offers many opportunities for its staff to experience the Catholic faith, by means of, religious practices, staff spirituality/reflection days, and professional learning in theological studies. The school in which the present research took place has many such activities.

In the current climate, for a staff member to ‘witness’ to the Catholic faith they do not have to be Catholic. However, they are asked to uphold Catholic values and role-model these to the students. This goes to the heart of what differentiates Catholic Schools from State Schools – witnessing unapologetically to the Catholic tradition. The Catholic tradition is about service to community, and if a school does this well, it cannot but influence the students to work for the common good. CAP fits very well into this context. GE’s considerable focus on its Catholic educational endeavor to lead young people to a strong sense of social justice responsibility,

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inspired by their faith, is of great significance to the aims and philosophical underpinnings of CAP. The project contributes significantly to advancing educational methodologies and reflects the mission of the Church. Based on the social reconstruction ideology, CAP is centered on the assumption that society is threatened by many moral, social, political and environmental problems (Schiro, 2008, p. 6). One of the key aims of CAP is to contribute to improving the social conscience of learners, improve their knowledge of society and communities, instill in them a willing responsibility for the common good and inspire them to be part of social action. Therefore, it is hoped that CAP acts as a transformative learning experience (Quinnan, 1997, p. 42, in Mezirow and Taylor, 2009, p. 3) and enriches curriculum pedagogy. In this way, it supports the principles of GE.

To execute CAP successfully requires of the educator a comprehensive understanding of the aims and method of the project, an enthusiastic commitment to the project, the skill to motivate and inspire the learners to desire change where an injustice is prevalent, and the competence and dexterity to facilitate the project to see that it thrives in the hands of the learners. The success of CAP in a school does not require a Catholic educator, rather teachers with social justice integrity. Indirectly, when CAP is integrated into the Catholic school it affords many opportunities to support and enhance the spiritual lives of young people and strengthen or encourage their faith in the Catholic tradition.

In summary, GE describes the distinctive nature of Catholic education as an atmosphere of a Gospel spirit and responsibility towards social justice (GE, 1965, n. 8). Through CAP the learners will be contributing to the building of a peaceful, more just world, and thus imparting Christian values into the community. CAP encourages learners to grow in maturity through a Christian service and make significant contributions to the human community.

In *The Catholic School*, the Congregation for Catholic Education, (CCE, 1977) is primarily concerned with clarifying the distinctive nature and characteristic of Catholic schools (CCE, 1977, n. 2). The document discloses some similar themes to *GE*, specifically of the importance of emphasising the Catholic educational value of the school, but with an overriding focus on encouraging a Christian way of life within a secular culture. CCE asks that the education institution use the document to support their creation of effective education which provides service that is “truly civic and apostolic” and which corresponds to the educational needs of young people (CCE, 1977, n. 4). The following review only views sections of the 1977 CCE document that are significant in some way to the philosophical underpinnings of CAP or where CAP may contradict the Church documents.

One of the primary objectives of the Catholic school, and the reason why Catholic schools were established in the first place, was as a means to carry out and form part of the Church’s salvific mission (CCE, 1977, n. 8-9). The mission of the Church is to evangelize (n. 7). However, throughout its mission, the CCE states that the Church has had to be, and needs to continue to be, advantageous and courageous in responding to the changing conditions of society and the needs of humankind (n. 4). Of particular concern for the Church at the time of this CCE publication was the challenge of cultural pluralism and attitudes of relativism which were seen to be undermining the Church’s salvific mission (n. 11). The challenge of cultural pluralism has led the Church to “reaffirm her mission of education (n. 12). The Church anticipates that educating young people in the Catholic faith will help to counter the influences of relativism and
pluralism, and foster a positive contribution to a secular society (n. 12). The CCE asks that Catholic Education strive to help young people live up to the expectation of their Baptism (n. 12) assuming this could discourage the rapid spread of cultural pluralism. CCE expects that teachers of Catholic schools will need to “adapt their work to the needs of the contemporary world” (n. 17) and be responsible for protecting the Church’s educational objectives (n. 16).

Similar to the assumptions presented in the Vatican II document, GE, the 1977 document of the CCE also assumes that all members of the Catholic school, including its teachers, are baptised into the Christian community and want to impart only messages that influence Christian secularism. What is different however, is that the document also presents a pluralistic culture as the only means by which to redirect young people from being influenced by the messages presented in societies technological advances, mass production and materialism (CCE, 1977, n. 31). The document assumes that if young people are educated within a secular cultural philosophy then this will lead them to be “responsible and inner-directed” (n. 31) towards living out the expectation of their Baptism.

Further, in the Catholic school the spirit and message of Jesus Christ permeates its culture. The CCE states that through living the values of Christ, the Catholic School will bring about positive change and goodness in the contemporary world (CCE, 1977, n. 36). One of the aims of Catholic education, therefore, is to lead the students on a “personal integration of faith and life” (n. 44) calling them to live responsibly in community with others and requiring them to overcome their attitudes of individualism (n. 45). This Christian vision alone contradicts the statements presented by CCE about secularism verses pluralism; in order for a young person to live in harmony with community and have a strong sense of social justice in the world, they are required to have a pluralistic and community mindset, and, indeed, teachers are required to teach
for diversity, tolerance, understanding and social justice. As a place of promoting and acting on social justice, the Catholic School, is also obliged to present a message of nondiscrimination toward diverse religions, cultures and communities. It must be noted here that this CCE document was published over 35 years ago and society’s understanding of cultural pluralism has changed significantly since then.

Nevertheless, the CCE document is still relevant and significant for understanding how a Catholic secondary school in Australia may continue to offer a Catholic education distinctive from other secondary schools. The document is also significant for the present research, for CAP adheres to some of its messages, and resonates with Gospel values. By working with the community and working towards social justice, the current learners will be moving closer to being like Christ, and therefore fulfilling one of the Church’s visions (CCE, 1977, p. 36). If the current learners are to be leaders in managing some of the world’s most challenging problems, and if they are to be agents in social change, they need innovative and challenging approaches to assist them to learn about the problems of the world. While the CCE document, The Catholic School, does not advise as to how this may happen, CAP provides one way by which the current learners can be provided with the skills and knowledge to face some of these challenges with action. The teachers in the Catholic school are important agents who will be able to provide these opportunities for learners and direct the educational programs towards a focus on the mission of the Church (n. 29).

In summary, in the contemporary world, an always changing cultural landscape, the Church fears that the community will lose sight of the fundamental good. CAP provides opportunities for learners to develop their community values and aims to teach the current learners how to use their values to make a stand on important contemporary issues. It is student
centered, and requires the learners to achieve something new and beneficial for others. It does not impart a message of secularisation, rather, it implies a message of tolerance, understanding, social justice and community action, regardless of culture and religion. It is through CAP that the current learners will be given opportunities to “adapt their work to the needs of the contemporary world” (CCE, 1977, n. 17). CAP does not claim to be catechetical or evangelising but does claim to support the needs of the Church in its social justice endeavors.


Twenty years after *The Catholic School* was published, the CCE published *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997). This is the most recent of the Church primary documents that describe the principles of the Catholic school and it is a direct response to the CCE’s 1977 document. It begins by announcing that “on the threshold of the third millennium education faces new challenges which are the result of a new socio-political and cultural context” (CCE, 1997, n. 1). It points out its belief that, in developed nations particularly, there is a “crisis of values….often exalted by the media, of subjectivism, moral relativism and nihilism” (n. 1). The CCE attributes this to “extreme pluralism pervading contemporary society” leading to behavior that “undermines any idea of community identity” (n. 1). The CCE further attributes these social attitudes to “rapid structural changes, profound technical innovations and the globalisation of the economy” (n. 1). In addition, it recognises that multiculturalism, multi-ethnicity and an increasing multi-religious society (whilst acknowledging it brings many benefits) are also sources of problems (n. 1). The message presented in the CCE’s 1997
document, assumes that Catholic education is one of the avenues to begin correcting these challenges.

The message also presents the learners as people ‘suffering’ from demise in Christian values and a total withdrawal from community mindedness (n. 1). Recent research in Australia contradicts this. Hughes’ (2007) research on the spirituality of young people in Australia, found that although there is a greater number of young people approaching spirituality and religion “predominantly in a way that is strongly influenced by a consumerist culture - they take what they want when they want it” (p. 129), for the majority of young people their approach to religion is not passive but actively creative in putting together a view of faith and spiritual practices that make sense to them and help them in life (p. 129). Likewise, as discussed previously in the review of the current learners, it was found that in Australia young people have a very strong sense of values when it comes to the big issues in the world - for example, terrorism, war, poverty - and are well informed about individual cases of injustices (Hughes, 2007, p. 95). Most young people spoke about the achievability and accessibility of helping people in small ways. They understood the reciprocal effect this could have on society if everyone did a little bit towards social justice and community outreach (p. 97). This is of significance for integrating CAP into the current curriculum, for whilst many of the young people in Australia may not be presenting themselves as secular, and have taken possession of their own spirituality (Mason, Singleton, & Webber, 2007, p. 38) they certainly appear to possess values that resonate with Christian ideals. Therefore, it can be assumed that the current learners will more likely want to be involved in a learning project that contributes to the benefit of others.

Although they do not appear to want to be influenced by religious institutions, as implied in the CCE’s (1997) document, the findings of Mason, Singleton, & Webber’s (2007) research
suggest that while young people are still sometimes influenced by the beliefs, values and practices of religious institutions, they claim to stand independently from religious institutions and generally do not claim their spirituality as being connected to any one religion (p. 38). This finding could also be of importance for the integration of CAP in a Catholic school. CAP will be more inviting to the young person if it does not claim to be affiliated with any one religious tradition. Rather, through the project, teachers are able to impart to the young people the knowledge that there are similar discourses about social justice and community outreach in all of the major world religions and some of the well-recognised minor world religions. At the same time, however, as CAP is being presented in a Catholic school, teachers can present a Christian vision of the world, of life, of culture and of history (CCE, 1997, n. 14) with the hope that young people will be encouraged to come to a trusting relationship with, and embrace, the Catholic community of which they are part.

Based on the findings of Hughes (2007), and Mason, Singleton & Webber (2007) it appears that CCE’s (1997) presentation about the attitude of the current learners is not quite a true representation, certainly when it is positioned within an Australian context. Nevertheless, the CCE offers some solutions as to how Catholic schools might respond to the “new challenges” in society (CCE, 1997, n. 1) especially referring to pluralism, relativism and nihilism. They suggest that new initiatives and new pedagogies are necessary to cater for the demands of young people. There is an increasing demand for “new contents, new capabilities and new educational models besides those followed traditionally” (n. 2) and a great need for “prudent innovation” (n. 3). The social reconstruction ideology reflected in CAP is one way that curriculum can provide

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6 Here the researcher is referring to the major world religions as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism and Buddhism and refers to some of the minor world religions as Zoroastrianism, Taoism, Confucianism.
an avenue for integrating an innovative project, and therefore supporting the aims and principles of the Catholic school. Implied in the message of the CCE (1997) is the Church’s expectation that the Catholic school teach the major issues in the world to the current learners and teach them the skills and knowledge to undertake some of these challenges to begin working towards societal and worldly change. CCE (1997) presents this great challenge to teachers and the current learners, and CAP is one way in which Catholic schools can begin this process.

**Conclusion to Part B**

The current research was conducted in a Catholic secondary school. An aim of Catholic schooling is to provide learners with an education which aims for social, political and economic progress, while witnessing unapologetically to the mission of the Catholic Church. The Vatican II document, *Gravissimum Educationis*, indeed asserts that if each member of society contributes to a community organisation, then there would be peace on earth (GE, 1965, n. 6). Although this very optimistic expectation of humanity may appear idealistic, its philosophy typifies the curriculum vision of a social reconstruction ideology. For Catholics, the aspiration of the Church and education is to contribute to a world that is socially just. Such an education prepares learners for this mission.

Social reconstructionists endeavor to prepare learners for social service and foster social justice in the community. By developing CAP in secondary schools, which emanates from a social reconstructionist ideology, and by embedding it in the formal curriculum, education will be responding to the needs of the current learners (as discussed in the Literature Review Part A)
and the needs of the Catholic Church. In this way, both a Christian vision and a community vision can be realised.

The following chapter presents the research design and the research process of the present study.
Chapter Three

The Research Design

Introduction

This chapter discusses and justifies the research design that was used. Beginning with a brief definition of the qualitative paradigm, the chapter subsequently outlines the epistemology, theoretical perspective, and research methodology of the present study. The research design was based on Crotty’s (1998) social research framework (p. 2). Within a qualitative paradigm, the epistemology grounding this research was constructivism. This was chosen because it enabled the participants to construct responses based on their social and cultural realities. It also enabled the researcher to interpret the perceptions and opinions of the participants through a process of interpreting and reinterpreting their perspectives (Crotty, 1998, p. 56).

The chapter also details the research process. This includes: a) explaining and justifying the selection of the school used for the present study; b) the selection of the participants and c) the selection of the interview and conversation techniques. In addition, the various phases of the focus group meetings are outlined, followed by a description of the school in which the present study was conducted. A rationale describing the importance of the semi-structured interviews is of further relevance to the research, as is an account of how CAP was generated through the meetings with participants. The way in which the transcripts were collected and reflected upon is discussed, along with the criteria used for evaluating the transcripts and a justification of the trustworthy nature of the evaluation process. The chapter concludes with a summary of the research design and the significance for the present study.
As has been discussed, there appears to be limited published Australian research that details specifically teachers’ perceptions of applying CAP within a Humanities discipline in a secondary school. Michael Schiro (2008), an American scholar, presented examples of a social reconstructionist curriculum model (p. 137) that can be used as a model for CAP. However, although Schiro (2008) provided a comprehensive summary of the process of the model, his consideration favoured the experience of the students, and the teachers’ instructional methods in facilitating the model. He did not specifically comment on the teachers’ perceptions of managing CAP, nor did he consider the teachers’ reflections on the learners’ ongoing commitment to the projects, or on the teacher’s deliberations of the strengths and weaknesses of the projects. The present study, in contrast, addresses each of these areas. Thus, as far as the researcher is aware, the present research is unique in its representation and interpretation of teacher perceptions of developing CAP in a Catholic secondary school setting, and is equally unique in that it deals specifically with the significance of the CAP for the benefit of the current learners. Therefore, this research makes a valuable contribution to the body of research in Australian education.

**Qualitative Paradigm**

The present study was situated within a qualitative paradigm. Qualitative research is a complex field, with clear definitional issues (cf. Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 3). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) offer a generic definition, claiming that qualitative research is the study of a collection of a variety of empirical materials, for example, case studies, personal experiences, introspection, interviews and observations (p. 3). Further, "Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the
meanings people bring to them” (p. 5). According to Flick, Kardorff & Steinke (2004) "Qualitative research claims to describe life-worlds 'from the inside out', from the point of view of the people who participate” (p. 4). Qualitative research is undertaken when a researcher aims to confront, examine and gain a better understanding of a particular issue, theme or subject matter. In this paradigm, researchers will use a range of interpretative and methodological practices to arrive at their research conclusions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 5).

Consistent with a qualitative paradigm the research approach for the present study was generated from Crotty’s (1998) social research framework. This consists of four elements: epistemology, theoretical perspective, research methodology, and methods (p. 2). The use of a research framework guides and directs the researcher in the research process (p. 1-2). Based on Crotty’s framework, a research design was forged that provided an appropriate framework for this particular research.

Table 1 presents an overview of the research path taken. This is discussed in more detail in the following sections. Such a research design is valuable in discerning how the interview transcripts, collected from the focus group, can be understood.
Table 1: Overview of the Research Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EPISTEMOLOGY</th>
<th>THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE</th>
<th>METHODOLOGY</th>
<th>METHOD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constructivism</td>
<td>“Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8).</td>
<td>Action Research</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“All knowledge is tied to action, and knowing an object or event is to use it by assimilating it to an action scheme (Piaget, 1967, pp. 14-15).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Meaning is not discovered, but constructed…[and] different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon” (Crotty, 1998, p. 9).</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretivism</td>
<td>“This approach looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67).</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▼</td>
<td></td>
<td>A facilitated group discussion in which an interviewer asks a series of open-ended questions which are designed to trigger discussion among a panel of participants (Dick, 1998, p. 1-6).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic interactionism</td>
<td>Offers a perspective on life, society and the world.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research is gained by documenting the culture, perspectives and practices of the subjects being researched (Hammersley, cited in Crotty, 1998, p. 76).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Epistemological foundation

Epistemology corresponds to specific knowledge about “what is entailed in knowing, that is, how we know what we know” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). In social research, epistemology is relevant because it provides a “philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate” (Maynard, 1994, p. 10). In social research, epistemology needs to be identified, explained and justified (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). The epistemology that the present qualitative research invoked was constructivism. This will be defined in the following ways.

Piaget’s (1951) interpretation of knowledge is “regarded as a relationship between the thinking subject and objects” (p. 14). The essential considerations for constructivists are knowledge, its nature, and how human beings come to know. Constructivists maintain that “knowledge [and meaning] is constructed by the individual through his interactions with his environment” (Murphy, 1997, para. 2). Interpretations and perceptions of our experience of the world are constructed from previous knowledge, beliefs and attitudes (Crotty, 1998, p. 43) and received either through the senses or by way of communication” (Murphy, 1997, para. 2).

The concept of learning is central to constructivism. Learning, in the constructivist perspective, encourages learners to “gather, filter, analyse, and reflect on the information provided and to comment on this knowledge so that it will result in individualised comprehension” (Ozer, 2004, para. 16). von Glasersfeld (1995) argued that in order to develop new concepts and deep understandings learning “requires self-regulation and the building of conceptual structures through reflection and abstraction” (p. 14). Piaget (1964) reasoned that learning occurs as a result of experience and therefore knowledge must be assimilated in an
active process by a learner so that knowledge can be deepened. The learner balances new knowledge with previous understanding, thereby compensating for "transformation" of knowledge (pp. 7-20).

Using the constructivist epistemology, the researcher interrogates data by way of asking such questions as: What can be made of this information? What does this information lend itself to becoming? (Crotty, 1998, p. 50). Answering these questions depends entirely on how the researcher constructs meaning from the information. The researcher must constantly muse over the information contained in the texts for analysis in order to see what possibilities the data has to offer (p. 50).

Qualitative research operating out of the constructivist perspective requires the researcher to approach the data in a way that rich meanings and a new reinterpretation of the data is formed. Therefore, the process of forming new knowledge is the result of the researcher perceiving and conceiving and can then be used as a foundation for further acting and thinking (Crotty, 1998, p. 51, & Greene, 2003, p. 598-599). Constructivists argue that there are no true or valid interpretations (Crotty, 1998, p. 47). Different people construct and generate meaning in different ways and through a variety of social contexts even in relation to the same phenomena (Crotty, 1998, p. 54; Flick, 2004, p. 94). Yet, von Glasersfeld (1995) argues that “new knowledge is viable if it proves adequate in the contexts in which it was created” (p. 7). Meanings are modified and adapted throughout their use in social interactions. “The material an individual’s meanings are composed of can only be taken from that individual’s own subjective experience” (von Glasersfeld, 1995, p. 137).

The constructivist epistemology was integral to the present study. The subject under consideration, CAP, required three key steps in a constructivist perspective. First, before the
focus group could consider facilitating and developing CAP with the current learners, the participants were required to discuss how they understood CAP, and consider how these two phenomena could operate as a duality. Second, the participants were required to transmit this meaning to their current curriculum frameworks and link their cultural and social understanding of community and community action to topics within the prescribed curriculum. Third, participants were required to facilitate creative initiatives for their students to act in a social justice vein within the community.

These three steps required of the participants the drawing of ongoing connections between subject, object, and the fashioning of meaning derived from cultural and social realities to generate a response based on the meaning they constructed from the experience of integrating CAP. Thus, the focus group perceptions of applying CAP in the discipline of Humanities came out of their own constructivist endeavours. Based on a constructivist view, the participant responses were derived from their external worldview (previous realities, knowledge and learning) which were then absorbed (or assimilated) into the projects they facilitated, and experienced. Through participating in the process of CAP, participants constructed and reshaped their usual educational practices to fit a new experience requiring imagination and creativity. For the reasons outlined above, the researcher believes the responses of the participants functioned on a constructivist epistemological foundation.

The constructivist epistemology was of further use in the present study in terms of the role of the researcher. The study required the researcher to interpret the perceptions and opinions of the participants based on engagement with and reflections upon the transcripts of the present study. This involved the researcher recognising the shared principles, practices, attitudes, and values of the focus group, as well as areas of difference. It was also important for the researcher
to identify the social realities of each participant in the focus group through a process of interpreting and reinterpreting their perspectives (Crotty, 1998, p. 56). This was based on the texts collected from the interviews with the participants (transcripts) and the researcher’s observations of how each focus group participant participated in the experience. The researcher is aware that her own meaning and prior understanding was brought to the analysis of the transcripts in the present study and that this would affect the examination of the transcripts. The method of examining and interpreting the transcripts is discussed in further detail in the following sections of this chapter.

Theoretical perspective

Epistemology leads to a theoretical perspective (philosophical stance) “that lies behind our chosen methodology…[and] attempts to explain how it provides a context for the process and grounds its logic and criteria” (Crotty, 1998, p. 7). The purpose of providing a theoretical perspective is that in social research, the researcher brings many assumptions to the chosen methodology. As such, when a researcher elaborates their theoretical perspective they are stating what these assumptions are: “Such an elaboration is a statement of the assumptions brought to the research task and reflected in the methodology as we understand and employ it” (p. 7). In social research, the researcher accounts for, justifies and explains the grounds of the assumptions (p. 7). The theoretical perspective which flowed from the constructivist epistemology and grounded the assumptions in the present study was interpretivism.

Interpretivism is the point of view that supposes understanding of cultures (social-life worlds) by studying the important ideas, thoughts, and meanings of its members (Blumer, 1986,
According to this perspective, human beings gravitate towards ‘things’ on the basis of the meanings ascribed to those ‘things’. The meanings are modified through an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters (p. 2). While the methodologies of interpretivists include symbolic interactionism, phenomenology and hermeneutics, the present study employed symbolic interactionism.

Symbolic interactionism implies that meaning is formed through a process of interaction. According to Blumer (1986) each individual attributes a subjective meaning to their activities and their environments through: a) the meanings things have for the individual; b) the social interaction the individual has with others; and c) how the meanings are interrogated by the individual (p. 2). Thus, Blumer’s summary can be used as a focus for analysing social worlds, and in the case of the present study, it can be used to consider the viewpoints in the research transcripts (Flick, 2002, p. 17). Symbolic interactionism deals “directly with issues such as language, communication, interrelationships and community” (Crotty, 1998, p. 7-8). When analysing the transcripts of the present study, the researcher enters into the perceptions, attitudes and values of the participants, thus putting him/herself in the place of others (Crotty, 1998, p. 8) and thereby bringing forth a number of assumptions and a reconstruction of the participants’ viewpoints (Flick, 2002, p. 17) through interpreting the symbols – the language of the texts, or transcripts to be analysed. This interpretation reflected the researchers own construction of the meaning contained in them.

In summary, the present study has specifically drawn on symbolic interactionism as its theoretical perspective. It was valuable to this research because by understanding the perceptions of the teachers’ experience of CAP, the researcher was then able to examine the transcripts of the present study as though “seeing it for the first time” (Flick, 2002, p. 19). Further, the researcher
was able to use the transcripts to document the culture, perspectives and practices of the participants in the focus group (Hammersley, 1985, p. 152). While the researcher was intimately familiar with the research setting, it was important that such analysis and documentation took place so that the researcher was able to objectively assess the perspective of the participants (Crotty, 1998, p. 76). In this way, an analysis of the “meaning they attribute[d] to experiences and events” (Flick, 2002, p. 19) was more readily achieved.

**Methodology**

This far, this research design chapter has illustrated the epistemology and the theoretical perspective underlying the research. These lead to the choice of methodology. The methodology is the strategy, plan of action or process used to reach the desired outcome, shaping the researcher’s choice and use of particular methods (Crotty, 1998, p. 3 & 7). The present study was positioned within a qualitative paradigm and the choice of methodology for this research was ‘insider action research’ (Cochlan & Brannick, 2005, p. xii). Coghlan & Brannick (2005) offered this definition of action research: “Action research is an approach to research which aims at both taking action and creating knowledge or theory about that action” (p. xii). McKernan (2000) likens action research to field study: “Action research is by definition naturalistic inquiry, in that it refers to investigation of phenomena within and in relation to their naturally occurring contexts” (p. 93).

Action research operates as a cyclical process whereby a problem needs to be understood within a particular context, *by* or *with* insiders to an organisation or community (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. xii, & Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 3). The action research process can be
outlined in four main steps: (1) develop a plan of action; (2) take action to implement the plan and illuminate the issue or improve the situation; (3) observe the effects of the action; (4) and evaluate and reflect on the action with the intention of leading to further planning (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. xii, and Kemmis, 1982, p. 7). Action research should inform the researcher in such a manner as to compel them to take action in the organisation. This involves questioning the existing circumstances and being dedicated to searching for solutions (McKernan, 2000, p. 35 & 40). Action research is a collaborative process. Participants in the study are active in the process (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. xii), they usually have a stake in the problem under investigation, and they have the relevant skills and resources to aid in the success of the research (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 4).

While insider action research is not dissimilar to the action research definitions provided above, it presupposes that the researcher is a member of the organisation in which the research takes place. Therefore, the researcher takes on an explicit research role while continuing with his/her normal duties within their own organisation (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. xii). In the present study, the researcher was aware that this “multiple role identity both complicates and focuses the research project. There are issues around how to attain some sense of objectivity and move beyond a personal perspective by testing assumptions and interpretations” (p. xii). There are issues of power relations, research ethics and the validity of trustworthiness when conducting insider action research (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 3). In addition, Coghlan & Brannick, (2005) point out a significant sensitive issue for insider action research, specifically, when the researcher is “handling interpretations or outcomes which would be perceived negatively by the organisation” (p. xiii). The way in which these issues were dealt with in the present study is discussed in the following sections of this chapter.
In the present study, insider action research took place in a secondary school setting. Most often, the major reason why researchers engage in action research in schools is to “improve practice and to develop practical knowledge and reflective understanding” (McKernan, 2000, p. 44). Moreover, it can contribute to new curriculum knowledge and development, aimed at improving outcomes in the school (McKernan, 2000, p. 53). Action research is a practical approach to seeking out solutions to problems. It is the belief of the researcher that this is made even more possible if the researcher is familiar with the school. The advantage of using insider action research is that it allows the researcher to more easily identify and validate a problem within the school, and justify why action is necessary. In addition, having a professional relationship with both the research subjects and significant senior individuals of the organisation (for example, the Principal, Vice-Principal, Curriculum Coordinator), as well as being familiar with the organisational structures, can aid in more effective and straightforward communication, administration and general organisation which are imperative to the action research. Understanding action research in the researcher’s own organisation “is opportunistic” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 47) as, in this case, it allows for the improvement and development of the curriculum, the learning of the pupils, and the wider community.

In summary, action research is versatile. It promotes collaborative understandings and approaches, and allows for continuous reflection and evaluation. Further, the researcher as insider is at an advantage because he/she is familiar with the structure and dynamics of the organisation, and thus has a breadth of pre-understanding that can be brought to the research project (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 12).

Focus groups, which were used in this research, are often committed to the action because they are members of the organisation and are collaborating in the facilitating and
monitoring of the action. This can be empowering because the participants are contributing to potentially positive change in the organisation. The nature of focus groups is discussed in more detail below as it is linked to the research method used in the present study.

**Method**

Method in research is informed by the methodology. Research method is the procedure (or activities) used to gather and analyse the data related to the research question (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). The chief method chosen for the present study was a focus group. Inherit in the methodology of action research are a number of research techniques for gathering data, such as, interviews, case studies, diaries, and participant observations (McKernan, 2000, p. 141) gathered through the focus group. In the case of the present study, interviews were used to gather data. The strength of focus groups, according to Bloor & Frankland et.al (2002) is that they can “yield data on the meanings that lie behind those group assessments” (p. 4) and are used “as a resource for expert deliberations” (p. 6). That is, using action research as an example, the focus group’s interpretations of the action or research project is shared with a social group, and through the method technique of interviews, their interpretations can be questioned, clarified, and further elaborated (Bloor & Frankland et.al, 2002, p. 7). Thus, it was expected that the discussions that emerged from focus groups would provide rich data for the research findings (Bloor & Frankland et., al, 2002, p. 7).

Therefore, interviewing is a practical component of the focus group because the researcher learns what cannot be directly observed. The purpose of an interview is to enter into another person’s perspective (Patton, 2002, p. 340-341). “Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made
explicit” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). But, the credibility of the interview process relies deeply on the participants being truthful and open. Other factors including race, gender, ethnicity, and age can also play a role in the reliability of the interview transcripts. Often in formal or structured interviews, participants have had an opportunity to prepare their responses prior to the situation, the researcher has been prepared to reflect on the type of responses he/she may receive and can prompt and probe the interviewee, and personal interactions are minimized (O’Leary, 2004, p. 164).

Therefore, a way to address some of the issues of authenticity and credibility (or reliability of data) is to use the technique of semi-structured interviews that seek to extract information, opinions and beliefs around particular ideas without the help of formal, predetermined questions (O’Leary, 2004, p. 164). In this way the interview is like an informal conversation (or discussion). The interviewer is prepared with questions but will also develop questions on the spot as the conversation unfolds, or as areas of interest arise during the interview (McKernan, 2000, p. 128). The informal nature of the interviews helped to develop trust and rapport with the participants. This method of interview also allows for flexibility and autonomy, that is, to choose either one-on-one interviews or group interviews. Further discussion of the interview process is outlined in the next section concerning the research procedure.

The Research Procedure

a) Selection of the school

Bearing in mind the elements of Crotty’s (1998) research design, the researcher sought and achieved ethical permission to conduct this research from the University Research and
Research Training Management Committee (refer to Appendix D). Permission was also given by the Director of Catholic Education, Melbourne, (refer to Appendix B) to conduct research in the researcher’s current educational organisation. The Principal of the school was approached through a formal letter outlining the research, inviting participation, and seeking permission for five teaching staff to meet with the researcher and conduct action research in the school, (refer to Appendix C). With permission gained, the researcher approached the staff members personally to discuss the research and invite them to participate. A letter followed, which formally invited them to participate in the research (refer to Appendix A). This letter informed the participants that a focus group would be formed and that they would be asked to choose a topic within their curriculum subject to which they could apply the process of a social reconstructionist curriculum ideological design (Schiro, 2008, p. 141), and use it to facilitate CAP with their students in one of their classes.

The suburban school which participated in the present study was situated approximately 21 kilometers from Melbourne’s CBD in the North Region Zone of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne. It was a co-educational Secondary School (years 7 -12). There were approximately 1882 students enrolled in the school during the time the present research began. The school was culturally diverse with the major cultural groups being Lebanese, Greek, Italian, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Indian. The majority of students spoke English as their main language at home. While the majority of the students are Catholic, Greek Orthodox and other Orthodox traditions also represent a large portion of the religious affiliation of the student body.

For the purpose of anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant of the focus group: Andrea (Humanities Coordinator), Melinda (Year 10 Philosophy teacher), Dean (Year 10
Asian Studies teacher), Carmel (Year 8 History teacher), and Matthew (Year 9 Geography teacher).

b) Selection of the Participants (Secondary school teachers)

A total of five participants were invited to participate in the study. Three participants were female, and two male. Individuals were invited on the basis of the following: they were professionally trained Humanities teachers; they taught in one or more of the year levels between years 8 -10; and they had classes timetabled conducive to the researchers’ timetable, the year level, and subject requirements. With the exception of the Humanities Coordinator, the participants were not deliberately selected to participate in the focus group, although, both the Year 10 Asian Studies teacher and the Year 10 Philosophy teacher were the only teachers teaching that subject in the school. The researcher wanted to employ a range of disciplines within humanities to develop the research, hence, these two teachers were approached to participate. The remaining two teachers were chosen for timetabling reasons. The Faculty Coordinator of Humanities was invited to participate in order to shed light on her perceptions of managing a Curriculum area that potentially integrated CAP into their current curriculum studies.

Five participants was the preferred number of participants in the study. The researcher believed that this was manageable from the point of view of coordinating the administrative aspects of CAP. Further, as “interaction between participants is a key feature of the focus group method” (Bloor & Frankland et., al, 2002, p. 20), the researcher was of the belief that a small focus group would bring familiarity between the members of the group, allowing for confident participation where all members could contribute freely to the discussions (Bloor & Frankland et., al, 2002, p. 20). Furthermore, given the fact that this was a small focus group, the researcher
was of the belief that in the event that problems arose during the research, they could more likely be managed, without great burden to the research or the participants.

c) *Meeting with the participants and interview guide*

The focus group met twice formally in semester one, and once formally in semester two. In the first focus group meeting (semester one), the aims and objectives of the research were explained, details were provided about the social reconstructionist ideological design, examples of action projects using the social reconstructionist process were provided, and each participant were given the opportunity to consider the curriculum topic they would apply to facilitating CAP in one of their classrooms. This was followed by brainstorming, as a collective group, possible action projects that could support their chosen curriculum topic.

In the second focus group meeting (semester one) participants were invited to arrive prepared with: (a) their intended curriculum topic chosen; (b) details of the selected class with which they would facilitate CAP; (c) a comprehensive outline of what action project they would employ; and (d) a consideration of how they would execute this with their students. Focus group participants were interviewed individually, however, all participants were present for each interview. The semi-structured interview questions, delivered to focus group (meeting 2) are outlined in Table 2.

**Table 2: Interview guide for focus group (meeting 2).**
FOCUS GROUP Meeting 2

Semester 1 (April, 2010)

Interview questions:

a) How do you feel about the project?
b) Do you think this will impact on student learning? How?
c) What are your aims for the Community Action Project?
d) How will you use this project to provide opportunities to help current learners commit to service and justice?

Initially the researcher hoped the projects would be implemented in Terms one and two of the school year, however as a result of some administrative challenges, it was later decided that the projects could be implemented at any stage throughout the year. In the time between focus group one and two interviews, the researcher met regularly (and informally) with each member of the focus group to assist them in developing CAP. In particular, the researcher supported each participant to consider how they could make clear links with their current curriculum topics, and further assisted them, where necessary, to coordinate and facilitate the projects. The researcher coordinated the letters, phone calls and emails to various organisations to invite them to participate. In addition, the researcher spent a great deal of time on the administrative processes to gain permission for particular incursions and excursions to take place, and for resourcing and budgeting.

After the completion of all the community Action projects, the researcher met formally with the focus group participants for the third time towards the end of semester two. Each
participant was interviewed individually. The semi-structured questions for focus group (meeting 3) are outlined in Table 3.

**Table 3: Interview guide for focus group (meeting 3)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOCUS GROUP (Meeting 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester 2 (October, 2010)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interview questions:**

a) How do you feel about this project after completing it?
b) In what ways did it impact on student learning?
c) In what ways did students take responsibility?
d) In what ways did it impact on your teaching philosophy?
e) Were your aims for CAP realised? How?
f) Do you think learners will commit to service and justice?
g) What more needs to be done to support learners in this area?
h) What do you feel are the strengths of developing CAP?
i) What do you feel are the weaknesses of developing CAP?
j) In the Catholic secondary school, what encroaches upon developing the curriculum toward CAP”?”
k) What recommendations would you suggest to see CAP be more influential in the current secondary school?
Table 4: **Formal process of the three focus group meetings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group: Meeting 1</th>
<th>Semester 1</th>
<th>Date: March 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melinda, Year 10 Philosophy teacher</td>
<td>Dean, Year 10 Asian Studies teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmel, Year 8 History teacher</td>
<td>Matthew, Year 9 Geography teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea, Humanities Coordinator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Aims and objectives of the research were explained</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The social reconstructionist process discussed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Examples of action projects were provided</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Brainstorming action projects that could support their chosen curriculum topic.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group: Meeting 2</th>
<th>Semester 1</th>
<th>Date: April 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Melinda, Year 10 Philosophy teacher</td>
<td>Dean, Year 10 Asian Studies teacher</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmel, Year 8 History teacher</td>
<td>Matthew, Year 9 Geography teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea, Humanities Coordinator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participants shared their intended curriculum topic and their selected class</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Described the action project they would employ and organizational details</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Participants were interviewed individually (cf: Interview questions Table 2).</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group: Meeting 3</th>
<th>Semester 2</th>
<th>Date: October, 2010</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Melinda, Year 10 Philosophy teacher</td>
<td>Dean, Year 10 Asian Studies teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carmel, Year 8 History teacher</td>
<td>Matthew, Year 9 Geography teacher</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Andrea, Humanities Coordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Focus group participants were interviewed individually (cf: Interview questions Table 3).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
d) Selection of interview technique

Two semi-structured interviews with each participant were carried out and recorded. Many additional conversations took place but were not recorded. The researcher believed that these conversations were professional dialogue for the purpose of arranging the organisational matters of the projects, and therefore were not directly relevant to the present research discussion. The participants’ responses most relevant and directly significant for the present research (as reflected in the interview questions) were recorded using audio-tape and used for examination and analysis.

For the reasons outlined earlier in this chapter, the researcher preferred to use a semi-structured interview technique. In an attempt to ascertain their perceptions of developing CAP, it was imperative that certain questions were asked, and then answered by the participants; however, they were ‘open-ended questions’ which allowed for greater depth in responses, as well as allowing both the participants and the interviewer to raise further questions, ask for clarification, and develop the conversation as necessary.

The researcher used a variety of questions in both focus group interviews one and two. The three main types of questions were based on McKernan’s (2000) description: (a) “affect questions” to assess feelings and emotions, for example, ‘How do you feel about this project after completing it?’, (b) “leading questions” to explore or open up new areas of inquiry, for example, ‘What more needs to be done to support learner in this area?’, and (c) “normative queries”, used to assess values and beliefs, for example, ‘In what ways did it impact on your teaching philosophy?’ (p. 130). These types of questions were composed because they related directly to the research question, and therefore the researcher was of the belief that they were pertinent in gathering the data for examination. They provided opportunities for participants to
respond the questions in greater depth. The participants could elaborate where necessary or when probed by the interviewer.

**e) Selection of the Community Action Projects**

Each of the participants (except for the Humanities Coordinator) integrated Schiro’s (2008) social reconstructionist curriculum ideological process into an existing curriculum unit, and in *one* of their classes (with the exception of the year 9 Geography teacher who preferred to involve two classes). Each of these projects is briefly described below:

- **Year 8 History**

  This year 8 class of 19 students were studying Crusades and the Merchants in the time of the Middle Ages and Renaissance periods. A link was made between the current stereotypes in society about the Muslim community and Muslims in general, as compared to the attitudes and treatment of Muslims during the Crusades by the Christian states of Europe and directed to the infidels in Europe. The teacher’s aim was to outline the stigma in the middle ages and indicate the effects this had on a community and society, illustrating the same stigma and attitudes that exist around the world, with a particular focus on Muslims in Australia. A Muslim policeman working in the Broadmeadows area, in Melbourne’s Northern Suburbs, was invited to speak to the students about Islam and his experience of being a Muslim, and to debunk some of the stereotypes held by students. After the guest speaker, students explored ways in which they could take a stance on issues raised by the guest speaker. Students then became involved in a campaign to share the information and experience of the guest speaker and encourage other students to be
more tolerant of other religions and cultures. This involved the presentation of a report to other year 8 classes and the creation of advertisements to promote tolerance and understanding.

- **Year 9 Geography**

  In two year 9 Geography classes the students were studying global issues, including (but not limited to) terrorism, poverty, the ‘real’ price of chocolate, and child soldiers. In relation to world poverty, absolute poverty was explored and linked to relative poverty in Australia. Les Twentyman\(^7\) and Fareshare\(^8\), on two separate occasions visited the students and spoke to them about those living in relative poverty in Australia, and the work undertaken by their organisations. In their workshops, the guest speakers also discussed with the students possible ways they could take action against relative poverty.

  A guest speaker from Fareshare spoke to the students about their witness of poverty in Melbourne, what the organisation does to help alleviate this issue, and what the students could do to help the organisation. Les Twentyman spoke about his work as a youth worker and community activist, and presented to students his experience and knowledge of the levels of homelessness in Melbourne. Following each address, the teacher discussed with the students possible ways to assist the organisation with their work. The decision to collect money to buy industrial rolls of pastry to donate to Fareshare was made. Between the two classes, over $100 was raised and three rolls of pastry were purchased.

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\(^7\) Les Twentyman has been a street out reach worker for over 25 years, and is the founder of 20\(^{th}\) Man Fund Youth Refuge, and the Back to School Program. For further information: [http://www.20thman.com.au/main/lesttwentyman.html](http://www.20thman.com.au/main/lesttwentyman.html)

\(^8\) Fareshare is a small, non-profit community organisation who uses food donated by businesses, distributing it to the hungry and homeless in Victoria. For further information: [http://www.fareshare.net.au/index.php](http://www.fareshare.net.au/index.php)
Year 10 Philosophy

Students were studying the concepts of Morality vs Hedonism, and exploring the idea of whether you need to be a moral person in order to live a good life. The teacher spoke to the students about the moral responsibilities we have to each other and about basic human rights. This study led to the students analysing the ideas of an Australian philosopher, Peter Singer. In particular, his opinions on what constitutes a ‘human’ life. Singer believes that any being unable to display rational thought (including effective communication, the ability to process information about the past, make judgments, plan the future etc.) is not human and therefore not worthy of conserving (Singer, 1995, 2-3). Singer believes that we must possess higher cognitive powers than simply ‘being human’. According to Singer’s arguments, this includes people with profound mental or physical disabilities. For example, in the case of a fetus being deemed as having Down Syndrome, Singer would advocate for the parents to abort the child. Singer urges people not to use resources on these human beings, but rather on those deemed truly ‘living’ (pp. 2-3).

Donna Williams⁹ was invited to speak to the year 10 Philosophy class about Autism. Williams spoke to the students about her achievements, and the negative and positive experiences of living with autism. After the workshop, students were encouraged to use their social networking sites, a public forum, or write a newspaper or magazine article to debunk the stereotypes of autism and change attitudes and prejudices about disabilities in general. The aim was for students to make a contribution to change societal attitudes about people with disabilities

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⁹ Donna Williams is an author, screenwriter, singer-songwriter and performance artist. Donna Williams has autism and is also a consultant in the autism field. For more information: http://www.donnawilliams.net/about.0.html
in the community. Some students wrote an article for the school community magazine, while another student used her Facebook page to promote a message.

The teacher used the social reconstructionist process to facilitate CAP. This was as follows:

1. *Examine the Problem*: Singer believes that disabled people and premature babies are not “worth the effort required by the parents and the community to make it possible for the child to live” (Singer, 2007, para. 14).

2. *Examine improvements*: Students argue a point of view based on Donna Williams’ visit – namely the issues she raised.

3. *Clarify values*: students identify the values underpinning their arguments

4. *Take a stance*: students have a clear sense of where they stand on this issue

5. *Make a commitment*: what can be done about changing societal attitudes about disabilities/premature babies in society?

6. *Form a vision*: What can you personally do?

7. *Take Action*: How are you going to go about taking community action?

- Year 10 Asian Studies

The learning outcomes in year 10 Asian Studies, in the present school were: (a) an analysis of the events which contributed to Australia’s social, political and cultural development; (b) an explanation of why significant social and cultural movements have developed, and an
evaluation of their influence on societies; (c) an examine of the experience and contribution of Asian migrants in Melbourne.

A specific activity designed to complement the learning in a year 10 Asian Studies class was for the teacher to facilitate students in the creation of an information video made to dispel misconceptions of Asians in the community. The teacher and the students travelled to the city to video Asian communities, interview community members, and highlight the contribution of Asians to Melbourne’s community. Students then presented their video to a community audience.

f) Collection of data and reflection upon the transcripts

Each of the two focus group interviews were recorded using the Computer media player software, Audacity. It recorded the participants’ responses to the interview questions as well as additional discussion where the participants or interviewer raised issues and questions as the interview unfolded. These recordings were transcribed and examined closely to interpret the findings, noting similarities and differences in responses across the interviews and searching for recurring themes and critical points (McKernan, 2000, p. 133).

g) Techniques used for analysing the transcripts

“The interpretation of data is at the core of qualitative research...[therefore it is necessary to apply] methods for the interpretation of text” (Flick, 2002, p. 176) Flick (2002) declared that the interpretation of data served to develop the theory, however, there were certain techniques involved in interpreting texts in order to bring these theories to light (p. 176). One technique, Flick (2002) suggested, is the "coding of the material with the aim of categorising and/or theory
development” (p. 177). Ryan & Bernard (2003) assert that this technique is a "whole-text analysis" and believe that, "coding forces the researcher to make judgments about the meanings of contiguous blocks of text”. Further, “the tasks associated with coding are sampling, identifying themes, building codebooks, marking texts, constructing models." (p. 274). The means of analysing the texts for study in the present research was through coding of the material and using two tasks: identifying themes, and constructing models of concepts maps. Each task will be explained separately with justification of its relevance for the present study outlined.

Ryan & Bernard (2003) offer a straightforward explanation of the two techniques chosen by the researcher – identifying themes and constructing models - for their usefulness for analysing the present study’s interview transcripts. Identifying themes across the whole-text involves, "looking for processes, actions, assumptions and consequences" (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 275), while “looking for metaphors, for repetitions of words, and for shifts in content" (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 275). Other theorists have suggested that the researcher start with themes drawn out of the literature and add more themes and sub-themes as they interpret the data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 275). All three approaches to theme analysis were of use in the present study. The researcher believed that decoding the whole text ensured that themes could be identified, refined and applied to the entire research dissertation, through, more specifically, making clear links between the interview transcripts and the review of the literature.

A significant process for data analysis is the identification of themes and the linking of these themes in a theoretical model (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 277). According to Ryan & Bernard (2003), "Models are sets of abstract constructs and the relationships among them" (p. 278). They can be used to analyse blocks of texts (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 278). Once the researcher has identified the themes, the researcher links the themes together in theoretical
models that might have an overarching area of focus, for example: (1) compare and contrast themes and concepts; (2) create a set of concetric circles (each circle responding to a particular topic or theme; (3) memoing: recording relationships among themes that the researcher uses to summarise his/her interpretation of the transcripts (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 278 - 280). Once a model has been constructed, segments of the text can then be displayed (for example, quotes from the transcripts) to justify the researchers concepts and theories (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 280). Once the transcripts have been theoretically coded, the texts displayed, and the researchers rationale justified and explained, then interpretation of the transcripts are more likely to develop (Flick, 2002, p. 177).

In summary, underpinning the techniques for analysing the transcripts for evaluation in the present research was theme analysis. This is developed by linking the themes through theoretical models to group the discovered themes, ideas, beliefs, and values found in the transcripts relevant to the research question. This entails asking critical questions about the transcripts, making comparisons of similarities and differences between concepts, and noting key ideas that are relevant to the theory or research question (Flick, 2002, p. 180). Flick (2002) claims that the aim of coding data is to “breakdown and understand a text and to attach and develop categories and put them into an order” (p. 178). This contributes, “to the development of deeper understanding of the content and meaning of the text beyond paraphrasing and summarizing it” (p. 184). Figure 1 provides a summary of the techniques used for analysing the transcripts in the present study.
The techniques summarised above and outlined in Figure 2, can be guided by symbolic interactionism, which is informed by the theoretical perspective. As such, the researcher assumes, and expects, that different perspectives and views will be found in the transcripts, and therefore this requires the researcher to see things from the perspective of the participants (Crotty, 1998, p. 76) and concentrate on the “meaning they attribute to experiences and events” (Flick, 2002, p. 19). Assumptions made by the researcher, therefore, are unavoidable, and will be reflected in the analysis. However, the process outlined above for analysing the transcripts in
the present study enabled the researcher to defend her assumptions about the meanings in the text from the constructivist epistemological perspective. This led to a consideration of how the researcher validated the analysis of the transcripts, and how she presented a trustworthy and reliable account of the participant’s experiences of applying CAP in the discipline of Humanities.

h) Criteria for Analysis

Qualitative research depends largely on the methods employed for the interpretation of research data. Thus, when considering the epistemological assumptions underpinning the research, there will inevitably be questions relating to the “trustworthiness of what is inferred in the data” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 50). In addition, in order to present worthwhile findings, and convince the audience of the significance of the research, it was important to represent it in a way that reflected the views of the participants. In addition, the researcher needed to address her own bias’, acknowledging the perspectives drawn from the researcher’s own experiences, and thus building a “critical reflexivity into the research process…necessary for any action researcher” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 60). Herr & Anderson (2005) advise that the researcher’s biases, assumptions and subjectivity is acceptable in action research, providing that it is not ignored, but critically examined.

As well as the researcher developing habits of reflexivity (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 60), the researcher was also aware of the issues surrounding the reliability of the findings. This was especially pertinent because the researcher was an insider to the setting where the action research was conducted. To address this issue, the researcher engaged a group of people in academia to challenge the findings and discern where there were gaps, to offer alternative points of view, to
notice the researcher’s unexamined assumptions or biases, and to point out inconsistencies (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 61).

The present study used Herr & Anderson’s (2005) five validity criteria to assess the goals of action research (p. 55). These validity criteria were deemed significant to the present study because they reflected the goals of insider action research studies, and attempted to overcome some of the problems associated with the analysis of action research data. The validity criteria used in the present study are summarised in Table 3.5.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals of Action Research</th>
<th>Quality/Validity Criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) The generation of new knowledge</td>
<td>Dialogic and process validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) The achievement of action-oriented outcomes</td>
<td>Outcome validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) The education of both researcher and participant</td>
<td>Catalytic validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Results that are relevant to the local setting</td>
<td>Democratic validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) A sound and appropriate research methodology</td>
<td>Process validity</td>
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</table>

Each of Herr & Anderson’s (2005) validity criteria are briefly described below in terms of what each criterion meant for the present study, and how the present study demonstrated the criteria for validating (or presenting a trustworthy) analysis of the transcripts.

*Dialogic and process validity*
One of the goals of action research is to generate new knowledge, and this new knowledge requires monitoring through a process of peer review (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 57). Thus, the findings and discussion chapter of the present study was first presented to the supervisor of the present study to evaluate in terms of the rationality and authenticity of the inferences drawn from the transcripts, and to ascertain whether the findings were an accurate representation of what the participants may have meant in the focus group interviews. The researcher also used one other academic and colleagues in the research setting as critical friends to comment on the interpretations.

**Outcome Validity**

One of the major purposes of action research is that the researcher has clear action-orientated outcomes. Without action orientation the problem, topic, or issue to be investigated in the study cannot be resolved (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 55). Further, “it is the role of the researcher to [move] participants towards a successful action outcome” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 55). In the present study, the aims and action-oriented outcomes were presented clearly both in the written study and in the meetings with the focus group. The social reconstructionist curriculum design is in itself an action-orientated process and was employed explicitly by the focus group in the preparation and delivery of CAP. This provided opportunities for successful action outcomes.

**Catalytic Validity**

In action research, the researcher must be prepared to reorient their views of reality and their view of their role in the research process. The nature of action research is a transformative
process. Through the process, both the researcher and participants should deepen their understanding of the phenomena under study, and be motivated toward some action to change it, or at least endorse support of it (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 56). Thus, one of the goals of action research is that both researcher and participants form new knowledge in the social phenomena under investigation. In the analysis of the interview transcripts, the present study took note of any comments, or inferences, made by participants that alluded to them undergoing a process of transformation throughout the implementation of CAP. This was discovered through a close examination of the participants’ responses to the focus group interview questions, particularly their responses to the affect and leading questions (cf: McKernan’s, 2000, p. 130). This revealed any new knowledge participants had obtained (with a focus on noting whether the participants were motivated to continue implementing CAP into their current disciplines). In turn, the researcher obtained new knowledge to be able to respond overall to the research question of the present study.

**Democratic Validity**

One of the goals of action research is that the results must be relevant to those implementing the action. The potential results should also benefit other stakeholders in the community (organisation) and relevant to the local setting in which the action takes place (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 56). Thus, underpinning the criteria of democratic validity in the present study was the philosophy of community benefit. The present study, as far as possible, has made certain that the action research, and the results obtained from it, had benefit and relevance to the following stakeholders:
• the focus group participants;
• the current learners in the school;
• the insider curriculum workers of the school (teachers, including curriculum administrators); and
• the local setting, including: other Victorian Catholic secondary schools; secondary schools in general; current learners in general; the Catholic Church; and the larger community.

The relevance of some of the stakeholders of the present study is justified here, and discussed further in proceeding chapters. Firstly, the study enabled the focus group participants to undergo professional development to increase their expertise and understanding of a social reconstructionist curriculum ideology, and to improve their knowledge of community social justice. In addition, the participants also developed skills to improve their teaching with the aim of improving overall student results. In the process, the participants worked towards contributing to enhancing the overall curriculum in the school, while at the same time, promoting social justice through active involvement in the larger community.

Secondly, greater benefits were seen for the current learners in the classroom in which CAP took place. CAP enabled the learners to explore the curriculum topic from another perspective, and link their learning to events relevant to the community in which they belong. The researcher was of the belief that by allowing the current learners to dialogue about local, national and global issues, and by providing them with rich opportunities to exchange views and develop profound insights about important community issues, this would lead to a deepening of their understanding of social justice issues, while motivating them to continue working towards
social justice. If CAP was to be implemented in other secondary schools, this philosophy could also apply to those current learners, leading to greater benefit for the larger community and, ultimately, improving results for the learners, the schools, and the wider communities involved.

In the event that CAP becomes a school wide initiative, the same benefits would apply for the current learners in the school as a whole. Likewise, the same benefits as had been seen for the participants of the focus group, would apply to the insider curriculum workers of the school (teachers, including curriculum administrators). Similarly, a wider selection of community organisations would benefit as a stronger movement toward social justice becomes more prevalent in the school culture.

Finally, the Catholic Church benefits greatly from the initial implementation of CAP, and if implemented further in the wider Catholic secondary schools community, then the salvific mission of the Church is manifested: Catholic schools will be working towards forging a stronger social justice culture through innovative and creative curriculum means. All this is achieved through collaborative enquiry with the key stakeholders involved.

**Process Validity**

The criterion to assess process validity entails “a sound and appropriate research methodology” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 55). Having a sound methodology will indicate quality for the action research study. “If the process is superficial or flawed…the outcome will reflect it” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 55). Further, “a process of reflection should involve going back and forth to reexamine underlying assumptions and be prepared to justify evidence to sustain assertions” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 55). This also requires the researcher to include
multiple perspectives to prevent “viewing events in a simplistic or self-serving way” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 56).

The present study developed a sound methodology which outlined an appropriate research design, justified the choice of methodology, and provided a summary of the analytical techniques used for examining the transcripts. The researcher was aware of her biases and the assumptions underpinning the analysis of the transcripts, and therefore has justified her assumptions and assertions constructed from the examination of the transcripts. In this way, the outcomes of the present study were realised.

In summary, in an attempt to address some of the issues of trustworthiness, the present research applied much of Herr & Anderson’s (2005) validity criteria. It not only reflected the goals of action research significant for the present study, but it is aligned with the goals of insider action research and recognised the uniqueness of the action research field. It also attempted to overcome some of the problems associated with the analysis of action research data, and aimed to distinguish between quality and inferior data through the processes of peer review and collaboration. Herr & Anderson’s (2005) validity criteria are also optimistic, in that they infer consciousness of ethics and social justice, which of course, is one of the themes of the present study.

Summary of the Research Design and Significance for the Research Study

This chapter has explained how a focus group of five secondary school Humanity teachers collaborated with the researcher to facilitate the development of CAP within one of their Humanities classes. The responsibilities of the focus group were to trial a theoretical procedure
with the current learners and reflect on the implementation of the procedure through an interview process. The interview responses became the interview transcripts for analysis in the present study. The researcher analysed the transcripts to establish the projects’ successes and weaknesses, and to gain understanding of the participants’ perceptions of applying CAP in the discipline of Humanities and within their school context.

Flowing from the epistemology was the theoretical perspective. The theoretical perspective that flowed from the constructivist epistemology and grounded the assumptions in this research was interpretivism, but more specifically, the methodology of symbolic interactionism. By way of analysing the transcripts, the researcher brought forth a number of assumptions and a reconstruction of the participants’ viewpoints (Flick, 2002, p. 17). The transcripts were utilized in an attempt to understand the participants’ experiences and of CAP. In this way, the researcher demonstrated the relevance of symbolic interactionism for the present study.

The epistemology and the theoretical perspective led to the choice of methodology. The choice of methodology for the present research was insider action research (Cochlan & Brannick, 2005, p. xii). The present study used action research which aims to change or improve some aspects of the school in which the study was situated, namely, the curriculum, the learning of the pupils, and the wider community.

Finally, method in research is informed by the methodology. The method chosen for this research was a focus group, and the semi-structured interview technique was utilized which resulted in the transcription of interviews for analysis. By analysing the transcripts, the researcher was able to discern the perceptions, values, and perspectives of the participants that
cannot be directly observed. Figure 2 presents a summary of the major elements that were employed for conducting the research reported in this thesis.

**Figure 3:** A summary of the major elements that have been employed for conducting the research reported in this thesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative Paradigm</th>
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<tr>
<td>Epistemology: Constructivism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theoretical perspective: Interpretivism: specifically symbolic interactionism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology: Insider action research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Method: Focus group interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, included in this chapter was an outline of how the research proceeded, including the selection of the school and the participants themselves. A justification of the interview guide and selection of interview techniques was further detailed. This chapter also included a brief description of the selection of the CAP. Of importance here, was the selection of Herr & Anderson’s (2005) criteria for validating qualitative focus group research, and a comment on how their criteria was significant for the present study. The following chapter presents the findings of this present research study.
Chapter Four

Findings of this Research Study

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers’ experience of applying CAP in the discipline of Humanities in a Victorian Catholic secondary school. The research was undertaken in a northern suburbs co-educational Catholic secondary school, with a focus group of five participants. The technique used to assemble research data was semi-structured interviews. These interviews were transcribed and analysed, and the findings are presented in this and the following chapter. The previous chapter discussed and justified the proposed research design pertinent to the present study. Within a qualitative paradigm, the epistemology grounding this research was the constructivist perspective, and it drew on symbolic interactionism as its theoretical perspective. The choice of methodology for the present study was insider action research, and the method chosen was a focus group, using semi-structured interview techniques, which were then transcribed. This chapter presents the findings of this research in terms of five key themes that emerged from the interview transcripts:

- Experience and engagement for the learners
- Perceptions about the current learners
- Reflections of curriculum, leading to action
- Challenges of integrating CAP into the current school
- Integrating CAP into the current curriculum
The Findings

As discussed in the research design, Chapter Three, the participants in the focus group were assigned pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity: Andrea (Humanities Coordinator), Melinda (Year 10 Philosophy teacher), Dean (Year 10 Asian Studies teacher), Carmel (Year 8 History teacher), and Matthew (Year 9 Geography teacher). These pseudonyms are used throughout this chapter as a means of identifying the year level and project. Further, two focus group interviews took place as a way of collecting data. The following findings reflect the collation of analysis for both interviews. As outlined in the research procedure, Chapter Three, the interpretation of the data was by way of whole-text analysis of interview transcripts (see Figure 2, Chapter Three) which involved categorising and identifying the themes, ideas, beliefs and values of the focus group participants in light of the review of the current literature (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 275; Flick, 2002, p. 177). As a result of the interview analysis, the following five key themes emerged.

Theme 1: Experience and Engagement for the learners

The first theme to emerge from the focus group interview transcripts was the teachers’ reflections upon the experience and engagement for the learners either during the process of completing CAP or after they had been completed. Student engagement can be seen through learners asking questions and participating in meaningful conversations with their peers and the teacher about the topic and the learning materials. When learners have a positive experience in the learning process, they reflect on their learning, develop insights, and form deep meaning (Biggs, 2003, p. 16). Experience and engagement for learners occurs when learners invest time
and effort in the learning process, and are eager to produce positive outcomes. Engagement and experience for learners can occur when learners understand the purpose of their learning. Knowing the purpose of the learning, they are then able to set clear goals and act to realise these goals. Through the process of achieving these goals new knowledge is discovered, transformation of meaning and values take place, and the learner is moved to action (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009, p. 3).

When examining the interview transcripts the researcher found that all of the focus group participants believed that CAP was a positive learning experience for the learners. The learners demonstrated engagement in the learning process. Matthew’s reflections about the current learners in his Year 9 Geography class demonstrated that after their guest speakers, Les Twentyman and a representative from Fairshare, spoke to them about relative poverty in Melbourne, some of the students showed notable initiatives and were quite proactive. Matthew stated that:

Five of the students wrote the application form for fundraising...and five students organised an email...to send to [Fairshare], to invite [them] to speak [again], to give her...the pasty rolls the students have collected.

Matthew’s reflections revealed that as a result of the students gaining new knowledge some of them were moved to action. The initiative carried out by the learners inferred that through the process of learning about homelessness in Melbourne, the learners formed a vision and took steps to realise that vision to do just deeds. This is one of the philosophical underpinnings of the social reconstructionist curriculum ideology, which was discussed in detail in the Literature
Review (Chapter Two). In a similar way, Dean, (year 10 Asian studies teacher) indicated that he had,

    no problems getting [the students] to go home and complete [the project]
and finish it off, and to work together and to share the task…. [We] try to
do [this] in a group assignment, [but] just the nature of the project meant that
those sorts of things just flowed on quite naturally. This allowed the
students to really engage with their learning.

Comparable enthusiasm and engagement was evident in Melinda’s (Year 10 Philosophy teachers) reflections on her Year 10 Philosophy class. She noted that CAP gave her students an opportunity “to not just learn about philosophy but to do philosophy.” She remarked that they were “able to philosophise…and critically put their point of view across.” This, according to Melinda, “initiated debates and some critical discussion”. In addition, when asked about whether she thought the students would continue to commit to service and justice as a result of the experience, Melinda revealed that:

    I think, they will continue to take that message of seeing disabled people
as a human being…into future conversations, into future classes. I’ve
had comments from students that they were then able to bring up this idea in
Religious Education classes…. That is carrying on the learning into service
and justice, into other disciplines and with other people.
Dean’s students invested time and effort in their learning to produce positive outcomes. Melinda’s students developed insights and formed deeper meanings when they were able to share their philosophical learning in their Religious Education classes. Interestingly, however, Dean and Matthew were the only teachers who really talked candidly about the shift in the students’ behavior as they moved from the theoretical learning to the practical elements of CAP.

Dean stated:

I think the students really didn’t anticipate how much would be required of them. In the planning stages I...saw...the normal learning process from the students: they would be reluctant to start...some people would just want to joke around...[and] some people would want to take it seriously. As soon as we were on the train, the atmosphere changed, and...the gravity of the task started to dawn on some of the students. So they would actually see [that they] had to engage with other people...and [consider] what message [they wanted] to get across....An hour on the train, a lot of that joking...went away.

As a result, once the students got back to school to complete their projects, Dean observed that the students:

would edit and re-edit [their film]...the way you would wish they would work on their essays. But because it was something creative and something different, and [they] knew other people would watch it, they really started to engage with it. So, from my perspective, I really saw a lot more responsibility being taken
Dean’s observations demonstrate that his students experienced a transformation of attitude and values when they realised the purpose of their learning and experience. This is again indicative of Schiro’s (2008) social reconstructionist curriculum ideology. Through the process, students are taken in a social direction. They are imbued with a sense of purpose and vision (Null, 2011, p. 101) and are therefore compelled to take action. Similarly, Matthew noticed that:

Since then, we’ve worked on several other issues...including child soldiers and child labour, and the students have been switched on and...asking the questions why and how and what can we do about it...I think, that all started because of this project....Ever since…these students have been fantastic.

This experience and engagement for the learners is similar to the example Schiro (2008) gave of a successful social reconstruction model used in a Mathematics classroom. Using this process, good discussion takes place for students to clarify their understandings and their value stance on the issue, and to understand themselves and the role they could play to change the situation (Schiro, 2008, p. 138). This happens when the learners discover new knowledge and find a connection with the material, the topic and their own values.

In summary, the theme ‘experience and engagement for the learners’, emerged as a result of analysing the focus group transcripts from a constructivist epistemological point of view. The teachers credited CAP for providing rich learning experiences for the current learners. Many of the learners took the opportunity to take social action initiative with which they previously had
limited opportunities to explore. This differed from normal curriculum outcomes. While the current VELS curriculum encourages social justice and civic education, its preoccupation with content, assessment and reporting prevents the actual social action which is a compelling element of CAP. In addition, the process of CAP elicits important discussions, allowing the learners to form deep meanings in relation to the social problems with which they become engaged. CAP further provided a meaningful pedagogical experience for the teachers. They were indeed enthusiastic and proactive. This is one of the benefits of using ‘insider action research’ methodology. The focus group was committed to the action research because they were members of the organisation and believed in the potential benefits of the action research for the present school. The focus group endorsing support of CAP has brought about a valid action research study (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 56).

**Theme 2: Perceptions about the current learners**

The second theme that emerged from the focus group interview transcripts was founded on the statement made by participants regarding the current learners. Such statements are understood to be representative of the perceptions of the participants. The assumptions made by the researcher allude to either the behavior of the current learners, their attitudes about their learning, the expectation the teacher participants have about the learners as a generational cohort, or their opinion of what experiences they believed the current learners needed. Further, some of the participants’ comments were indicative of the literature on the current learners. Comments were made about the current learners’ social awareness, or it was inferred that they needed constant entertainment and stimulation. Some of their assumptions either contradicted the
literature on the current learners or affirmed the literature. The following teacher perceptions about the current learners was an example of the way in which the constructivist epistemology was emphasised in the present research. The focus group constructed meaning from the current learners through observation, interpreting their behavior, and through conversation and assessments. In turn, the researcher, in a process of interrogating the focus group perceptions, offered the following constructivist epistemological perspective.

In light of this, the four subthemes (parallel to the literature, as discussed in the Literature Review (Chapter Two) are related to the perception the focus group participants have about the current learners:

- Current learners as socially active
- Current learners as digitally literate
- Current learners as needing excitement and entertainment
- Current learners as having power and dynamism.

**Current learners as socially active**

Of all the five participants, four of those presented a concern that the current learners were protected and comfortable within the school environment, and so comfortable living in their suburban lifestyles that they were not aware of other communities, and not aware of social justice issues beyond their immediate school community. Andrea (Humanities coordinator) explained, “they are so afraid to confront things;” and Dean (Year 10 Asian studies teacher) revealed that when he talked to students after they had finished school “they...can’t believe what it’s like out there.” He also felt that the students were,
grounded in the culture of the college...the school’s expectations,
what’s appropriate, what isn’t appropriate…and [the] rigid structures
in which they learn.

Furthermore, Matthew (Year 9 Geography teacher) said that he believed the current learners he taught were too “protected within their school community”. Having insider knowledge of the present school, the researcher contends that the school does provide many opportunities for the current learners to participate in activities beyond the school environment, however, many of these activities are optional and do not occur regularly enough for it to have lasting impact. Due to the current structures of the secondary school it is a challenge to develop more regular and compulsory social justice outreach programs. Further, within ‘traditional’ secondary schools the structures can be quite inflexible in order for the school to function in a tightly organised fashion (Sharan & Tan, 2008, p. 86). The learners are forced to comply within these boundaries and structures. Perhaps this is what Dean, Matthew and Andrea meant when they spoke about the current learners being protected and comfortable in the school environment. It begs the question as to if these structures could be detrimental to the current learners ability to actively engage with complex communities and experiences beyond the school. The focus group participants seemed to think it did. Dean felt that the geographical location in which the school is situated and where the current learners live was another major reason why they were protected and socially uninformed and inactive. Dean referred generally to the current learners of the school when he stated,

A lot of students live in the very immediate vicinity. This is where they socialize,
this is where they play sport, this is where they exist. And so some issues that affect the wider community, they can’t really differentiate whether it’s location centric, or whether it’s actually something that the whole community’s experiencing, or whether they can actually make a difference here or anywhere.

In addition, Matthew accentuated Dean’s comment by stating that the current learners “don’t realise there are problems outside of their lavish lifestyles.” Herein lies an assumption that the current learners whom he teaches do have lavish lifestyles and that their lifestyles contribute to their inadequate understanding of social justice issues. On the surface the current learners of this particular school appear to have a lot of material possessions, especially expensive technologies and the majority of them live in relatively expensive housing estates. The researcher, as a teacher in the school and local member of the area, has knowledge of this. But to acquaint their material lifestyles with social inaction may not be correct.

It was suggested by Dean that due to the geographical location of the current learners they were cushioned from the social realities that exist beyond their school and the immediate suburban community. He claimed that this could be one of the reasons why the current learners were not socially aware or socially active enough. In the researchers view, there could be some truth to this assumption. Again, living and working in the same geographical location as the current learners, the researcher has observed that the vast majority of the people live in seemingly very quiet and insulated suburban environments. This environment acclaims individualism and materialism, is made up of smaller sub communities, and the major social gatherings occur at either of the two large shopping centers. The shopping centers have become critical social spaces for the majority of the current learners and for most of the local people. In
the shopping centers there is clear evidence of sub communities who socialise with their own ethnic communities. There appears to be little invitation for these sub communities to mingle with other ethnic groups. The researcher is of the opinion that where there are obvious separate ethnic communities there are also obvious cultural misunderstandings and cultural illiteracies. This does appear to be somewhat apparent in the geographical area in which the present school is located. The expectation among the focus group was that the current learners do have a social responsibility. Matthew explained,

I don’t expect my students to be able to solve every problem that we discuss in class, but I do think that they need to know that they’re the generation that needs to make a difference.

Most of the participants were of the opinion that the current learners were intolerant and that they condemned cultures, religions and people different from themselves. Carmel (Year 8 History teacher) referred to them as the “me generation” based on her assumption that they had a “very selfish way of looking at the world.” Likewise, Melinda believed that the value of getting rewarded prevented the current learners from social justice activities. For Melinda, these students were used to immediacy. Often there is no immediate reward for taking initiative in social justice issues.

Both Melinda and Carmel’s perceptions of the current learners is also revealed in some of the literature. The term, ‘me generation’ was first used by American writer Tom Wolf in the 1970’s to describe the ‘baby boomers” (those born between 1946 - 1964) because they appeared to aspire towards “self-realisation” and “self-fulfillment” rather than social responsibility (Land,
The term is now often used informally to describe Generation Y and the current teenagers. They are perceived to want instant gratification, considered to be rampant consumers, and trend towards individualism (Mason, Singleton, Webber, 2007, pp. 230-235, & Rosen, 2010, p. 26, 76, & 84). The researcher is of the view that when Carmel described the current learners as the “me generation” she was merely responding to a social perception about the current learners, not necessarily grounded on empirical evidence.

Dean considered that because of the current learners lifestyle, there was a minimal chance they would provide service to the community, and noticed that those involved in social justice or community outreach, “act as though it is just something they do, on the side” and did not feel they “absolutely should participate”. Dean was of the opinion that this attitude is reflective of an absence of energy and he further believes the school does not “muster that energy” to make social justice and corresponding action something automatic and natural, and noticeably embedded in the culture of the school. During the focus group, Melinda stated that “[the school needed] to provide [the students with] experience in dealing with other people and...not for the value of getting a reward.”

From a different perspective, however, Carmel contradicted her statement about the current learners being selfish as demonstrated in this more optimistic statement,

Some of the kids in that class will actually commit to service and justice. A lot of them are very involved…[for example, the 40-hour famine]. So they’re very interested in justice...and equality.
Although there is inconsistency in her statements, Carmel was the only participant who pointed out social justice initiatives her students were already committed to, and she was hopeful that CAP would “open up a dialogue so the students can be the next generation that accepts, rather than condemns.”

Paradoxically, a noteworthy finding based on the focus group comments is the suggestion that CAP acted as a transformative experience for the current learners. Carmel, for example, noticed that after the experience, her students “became a lot more tolerant towards other students.” She continued,

The comments that used to be made about kids of different cultural backgrounds, aren’t really happening anymore and I haven’t heard them for months. So there’s been a very big change.

On the contrary, Melinda did not get the impression that her students experienced a transformation after the project had been completed. While she expressed that although the experiences of CAP were positive for the learners, she felt that not all of the students in her class would commit to service and justice. She explained, “For some of them, they just enjoyed a few lessons but it will, unfortunately, stop there.” This impression may have come from her perception that “some students [were] not taking [the project] seriously because the project is so different to what they are used to.” However, Melinda added that there could be a few who might take the message they learnt into the community, but she did not sound convinced. Reflected in Melinda’s comment is the perception that if the current learners were not given opportunities to be socially active, then they would not take personal initiative.
The implication in Melinda’s comment highlights an important finding: if the current learners are only given one or two ‘one-off’ lessons and are not given further opportunities to become familiar with the process, then the learning experience is limited and it would not necessarily be a transformative experience. This finding reveals that for learners to want to take social responsibility, more regular opportunities to understand the issues deeply would be required as well as opportunities to develop skills in making decisions and become familiar with the many ways in which social action can transpire. This issue is developed further in the proceeding chapters.

**Current learners as digitally literate**

Interestingly, all of the focus group participants applied the current learner’s knowledge and skills in digital literacy to take social action. For instance, Dean’s students used digital cameras to film and then computer equipment to edit their films. Many of Melinda’s students used their social networking sites to send a message to the wider community. Carmel’s students used computer presentations to deliver their message to their peers. The majority of Matthew’s group used email to contact the relevant people. Thus, the current learners appeared acutely aware of the power of their technologies and, in this instance, used them for intrinsic benefits rather than immediate rewards. Through their technologies, the current learners were able to control and manipulate the information they sent out to the community (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008, p. 112). However, while they have superiority over their technologies (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008, p. 112) the current learners were not inspired to use their technologies for social justice and community benefit beyond the encouragement and opportunities presented by CAP.
**Current learners as needing excitement and entertainment**

Further, while the participants did not explicitly state that the current learners needed constant entertainment and excitement, they nevertheless inferred this through some of their reflections. For example, there was a common understanding amongst the focus group that whatever the project entailed, they hoped that the students would enjoy it and have fun doing it, and that they had to walk away with ‘something’. What they meant by ‘something’ was not explained. Dean’s comment that CAP “made the learning a lot more real” coupled with earlier comments about the nature of the project being “hands on learning” and “hands on experience” imply that the current learners needed something different to keep them engaged, stimulated and entertained. The assumption is that without this stimulation the students would not be as engaged and thus their learning would not be as successful. Dean considered this too, and expressed,

The students benefited from a more hands on and creative type of learning task…[it] took them out of the classroom and allowed them to really express themselves and express their….curiosities.

**Current learners has having power and dynamism**

In a similar way, although the participants did not explicitly state that the current learners had power and dynamism, in some cases, it can be inferred from their comments that the current learners were quite dynamic, especially in their behavior. Andrea, for instance, offered an insightful reflection:
Generally, our kids are extremely shy when they’re out in public. There’s a certain amount of awkwardness that they experience…It’s going to be interesting to see how they react in the outside world…I think they’re very, very focused in front of [the] public. When they’re in a group situation with their friends [at school], it’s a different thing. But when they’re in their uniform, when they’re out, it’s really, really different.

Andrea’s comments seem to imply that the current learners in the school reveal different facades depending on their setting or location. On the one hand they are shy, self conscious, and focused when they are in the public, but on the other hand, at school, in their uniform, with friends, they are confident. The implication is that at school the learners were less focused about their tasks. Similarly, Dean’s observation, noted earlier about the atmosphere between the students changing once they were on the train, was also indicative of this. Further, Dean suggests that if the learners feel empowered, they are going to be more compelled to make a social difference. He stated,

For probably, say, 55 or 60% of the students…there was a strong benefit in undertaking this exercise in the social realm, but also in the personal…. To address the social you’ve got to really empower the personal. And so once the students feel empowered, they matter, their opinions matter and they can make a change, and they can go on and make that change in the community.
This is again indicative of Schiro’s (2008) social reconstructionist curriculum ideology. One of the aims of the ideology is to empower the learners both intellectually and emotionally by providing them with avenues to form a vision of a better, more improved society. Further, the literature about the current learners suggest that they are used to their opinions being heard and valued because they have been given a degree of power in society and in their homes (McQueen, 2010, p. 53-54, Palfrey & Gasser, 2010, p. 6). Accordingly, the current learners want to be heard, and Dean detected this. Both Andrea and Dean’s insights implied that the learners were dynamic in their ability to shift between behaviour and attitudes, and that they felt valued and empowered when they were listened to. These impressions are important, as they have implications for the ongoing success of CAP.

In summary, the beliefs about the current learners in the school in which the present study took place, which emerged from the focus group interviews, are based on five teacher interpretations of making sense of the cohort of the current learners. They are useful interpretations nevertheless. They put a spotlight on the characteristics of the phenomena being studied (Crotty, 1998, p. 47-48) and some of the major themes explored in the Literature Review. Thus, the theme, ‘perceptions about the current learners’ that emerged as a result of the interview transcripts, revealed that the current learners in the present school were protected from the realities external to both their school and local community, and that they were not very socially aware or socially active, despite their teachers’ belief that they should be, and needed to be. Interestingly, most of the participants were of the opinion that CAP was a transformative experience for the learners. In addition, although it was not explicitly mentioned, the participants appeared to assume the current learners had a degree of competency for digital literacy, for all of the projects required the learners to use digital resources to some degree. In addition, there
appeared to be a common understanding amongst the focus group that they hoped the students would enjoy the project and have fun doing it. This is indicative of the assumption that the current learners needed to be excited and entertained in order to be engaged. Finally, it was implied by both Andrea and Dean that the current learners were dynamic and thrived in environments where they felt valued and empowered.

Theme 3: Reflections of curriculum leading to action

The third theme that emerged from the focus group interviews was that of the participants’ reflections about the current curriculum leading to action. This theme relates to comments about the nature of the current Humanities VELS curriculum in general or comments about the need for CAP due to the lack of opportunities for action in the current curriculum. Curriculum, here, refers to the current VELS Humanities curriculum, which operated in the school in which the research took place. The term ‘action’ in this context refers to the social justice action that was expected to develop through the process of CAP.

The researcher is of the impression that the participants considered there to be some shortcomings with the current VELS Humanities curriculum. For example, Carmel, Melinda and Andrea all believed that the Humanities curriculum was “theoretical,” “compact” and “crammed.” It was also implied that the very nature of the curriculum forced the learners to learn largely through textbooks. This was represented in Melinda’s comments:

[By participating in this research] I was able to give the students an opportunity to do some work and have some experience in philosophy
outside of our textbook learning, and outside of…rote learning of question and answer, essay based.

Likewise, Andrea believed that the “curriculum is always very, very theoretical and compact.” Carmel was concerned that there was too much time spent with the students “sitting at a table.” She believed that because of the “crammed curriculum” and because Geography is split with History,

we’ve got to...jam pack everything in towards exams and assessment tasks, rather than actually being able to spend the time on things such as [CAP].

Andrea believed that what students learned in the classroom was not enough. She stated, “Students need to see how the world really works apart from that theoretical work they do in the classroom, in the content books”.

These reflections were indicative of the analysis of the current VELS curriculum presented in the context section of this thesis. The VELS curriculum is heavy on content and learning leads to the completion of prescribed outcomes, assessment and reporting. It is academic and utilitarian in its philosophical underpinnings and therefore sets up boundaries for teachers and learners (Ross, 2000, p. 3). As reflected in their comments, the researcher was of the impression that the participants felt quite bound by the curriculum, and that the curriculum controlled what they did in the classroom. There seemed to be an appreciation that CAP is a refreshing change from what they traditionally do with their students. Both Matthew and Dean
drew attention to this. Dean openly and comfortably talked about his teaching philosophy and compared it to the current curriculum philosophies. He stated,

[CAP is] a fulfillment of that approach where it’s supposed to be student led teaching, and where they [the students] will build on previous knowledge and expand on it, through engagement and through their own pursuit of knowledge.

So, for me, [the projects] really served to [provide] a happy fulfillment of a theory that I always expected to work, but really struggle to get off the ground in a normal traditional classroom…Student-led learning, which is creative, which is expressive, which uses different mediums, which gives a lot of freedoms…actually does work and it’s very important to see it work.

Dean, and the other focus group participants, had very little experience with this approach. It begs the question of why teachers, like Dean, “struggle” to integrate similar projects. Dean’s reflections are indicative of the current VELS curriculum. In its very nature as a content-driven, skills-based curriculum, it leaves little or no room for external social justice action, and does not encourage this as an outcome of the curriculum. Mathew also shared his teaching philosophy, in a similar way to Dean:

As someone who is extremely passionate about social justice, it…is definitely something I wanted to do in the first place. It was definitely something that I want to be able to bring into almost all my classes as a Humanities teacher. I believe that bringing social justice or bringing in methods of action to all
aspects of the units of work that we study is imperative in a Catholic school.

During the interviews, when asked what challenges may encroach on integrating CAP into the current curriculum, Matthew referred to time restrictions and to the demands of the curriculum. Again, this was indicative of the nature of the current VELS curriculum, and therefore it could be assumed that this may be why he and Dean have not yet facilitated similar projects.

Grounding CAP is the ideology of the social reconstructionist curriculum, and the ideologies of the Catholic Church and Catholic Education. The promising social justice action that emerges through participation in the projects shed light on the principles, aims and responsibilities of Catholic Education and the wider Church community. However, interestingly, only Matthew and Andrea commented on this ideology. As seen earlier, Matthew believed that drawing on social justice methods in the curriculum “is imperative in a Catholic School,’ while Andrea stated that, “because the ethos of the Catholic education system is…to look to the …Christian values’...we should be doing more of it”.

Both Andrea’s and Matthew’s comments, referring to the ideologies of the Church and Catholic Education, were indicative of the three Church documents analysed in the Literature Review (Chapter Two) of this project. In brief, there is an expectation of the Church that through exposure to social injustices, and through opportunities to participate in social justice action, the current learners would be contributing to building a peaceful, more just world, and thus imparting Christian values into the community. In this way, CAP makes a significant contribution to the development and progress of a just society.
From a different perspective, while Matthew and Andrea were of the opinion that CAP was imperative to the Catholic School, Dean suspected that the Catholic School might instead encroach upon CAP. He stated,

[In a Catholic school], certain topics may be taboo, and as a consequence, even though students feel strongly and feel desire for social justice and certain issues, the Catholic doctrine probably would discourage that. And then you might have to face issues between teachings and what the students perceive to be social injustices. So that could start playing a role as well.

In the focus group interview it was not discussed further with Dean what issues the Church might discourage. However, Dean’s comments are no different to some of the concerns critics have of the social reconstructionist curriculum ideology. One of the perceived drawbacks of the ideology is that there are question marks against certain political views that teachers should be allowed and not allowed to express in the classroom (for example, views on controversial issues like abortion, gay marriage and embryonic stem cell research). There are concerns that a social reconstructionist curriculum may present one view and exclude all others (Null, 2011, p. 114) and that it may lead to social and political acculturation (Schiro, 2008, p. 153). Nevertheless, from a Catholic point of view, and a social reconstructionist point of view, schools can lead to social transformation. Despite Dean’s suspicions, his project and the other projects, have already proven the potential they have to transform students and therefore, if continued, make a significant contribution to society.
In conclusion, based on the reflections of the focus group participants, it is implied that they do not believe the current curriculum leads to action. Instead, they suggest that it is restrictive due to the “crammed curriculum” and the traditional academic (or theoretical) nature of the curriculum. The majority of the participants believed that CAP was relevant and needed to be integrated into the current curriculum. Two participants were of the opinion that this was especially important in a Catholic school. However, Dean offered a different viewpoint with a concern that some of the controversial issues in society may be taboo for Catholic Education and therefore he suspected that some issues may be discouraged in the Catholic school. Overall, the general opinion of the group was that the curriculum should lead to social action and that at present, it does not. These are significant findings and are an example of the way in which the data emanating from the methodology of action research generates practical knowledge of a phenomena, leading to deepening understanding and potentially improved practice (McKernan, 2000, p. 44).

**Theme 4: Challenges integrating CAP into the current school**

Thus far, this chapter on the findings of the research study has explored three themes. The findings have been largely optimistic and teachers have felt quite positive about integrating the projects into the current curriculum. However, integrating the projects presented a number of challenges that the researcher and the focus group participants had to overcome before facilitating them with the current learners. For some participants these challenges were quite significant, while for others, the challenges were minor.
In light of this, the fourth theme that emerged from the interview transcripts relates to the challenges faced by the participants when integrating CAP. It focuses on the drawbacks the participants observed, any problems or obstacles they encountered, or the weaknesses they saw in the projects themselves.

The most obvious challenge for all the participants that impacted, or could impact on integrating CAP in the future, is the challenge of time constraints. There was a general concern that it was “a challenge to fit it into the curriculum due to the time constraints,” and that it was “a lot of time and effort for one staff member”. Matthew commented,

We didn’t really...have enough time to prepare before, and to debrief after.

[The challenges have] a lot to do with the time, and the curriculum, more than this project itself.

When considering integrating CAP in the future, Andrea said that it was a time issue that would prove challenging for ongoing projects. She stated,

Our studies are so theoretical, at times, we don’t always have the opportunities to be able to integrate that practical work with [the] theoretical work.

While Andrea noted the current curriculum as an impingement on the success of CAP, Melinda attributed the difficulty to time constraints teachers have. She said,

Time allowance for staff [was needed] for staff involved…it is a lot of organizing, lots of phone calls, emails and staff can be put under pressure doing
Dean noted that being a first trial run, some of the challenges were not necessarily anticipated. He stated,

\[
\text{Just because of the time frames, it was very rushed, and there wasn’t enough lead up to it….Whereas we only had a two week window to really get…[the project] off the ground. It’s a very large project and really three, four weeks in rehearsals, and then going out and doing it. But that’s always going to be a problem when you go through your first trial run.}
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Again, discussing the challenges of integrating the projects into the current curriculum, Dean noted that the challenges he experienced were due to “the confines of a stringent curriculum” and said that he “felt that that was a major problem.”

Many of the participants also felt challenged from an administrative and organisational point of view. Matthew, for example, noted that, “probably the only other thing that would restrict [CAP] is the…issues…getting students out of class for the guest speakers, etc.” And Andrea, taking into consideration the size of the school, noted that if CAP continued to be part of the school, it could “become a mammoth task…when it’s such a big cohort it becomes a little bit more complex”.

Dean also noted that the size of the school would prove to be a challenge for the ongoing success of CAP:

\[
\text{The size of the school is a major problem….[There are] great opportunities}
\]
because the resources are there and the staffing is there...but at the same time,
because it takes a certain structure to make the whole system function, you can’t
just play around with that and start encroaching on other peoples time, effort
and energies. So a big level wide project would be impossible.

Further, Melinda and Andrea commented on the challenges of future budgets to fund CAP.
Melinda said, “These assignments cost money and we are employing people to either come to
school or to accommodate the students to leave the school.” Similarly, Andrea believed that
financial resourcing of the projects were a major challenge:

It’s a funding issue...if we were given more funds to be able to do more of these
community action programs…we’d get a lot more out of it and we’d do a lot more of
them, because budgets are always restricted. So it’s really a funding issue.

Thus, in addition to concerns about budget resources, curriculum restrictions and time
constraints, when considering the possibility of ongoing CAP, Andrea, Carmel and Matthew felt
that staffing CAP would prove a challenge. They noted that “not everybody’s interested in doing
it” and “there’ll be teachers that won’t be happy…working…outside the curriculum.”

Carmel had a somewhat different experience in the planning of the project and felt that
this was a major challenge that encroached on its success:

Due to the politics that were involved, I wasn’t allowed to take [the students]
out to a school that I wanted to take them to. So, it was safer for our school,
for them just to have somebody come in.

Carmel was hoping to take her class to a Muslim school and have the students do various learning activities (or workshops) with a class of Muslim students, and then invite that same class to her school and again workshop with her students. In this way, she was hoping that stereotypes would be deflated and relationships formed. Carmel was quite disappointed when this idea was rejected at an administrative level.

In summary, the major challenges that emerged in the process and completion of CAP were time constraints because the teachers felt that the curriculum was too dense, or that they themselves had little time to organise projects by themselves. Also, a legitimate concern and a challenge some of the staff members experienced were related to budgeting. CAP did cost money and if they were offered to a larger number of classes, the cost would be greater. The ways in which these challenges might be overcome in the future relates to the final theme that emerged from the interview transcripts.

**Theme 5: Integrating CAP into the current curriculum**

The final theme that emerged from the research data was the participants’ reflections on how the current school could overcome some of the challenges and integrate CAP into either the whole of the current Humanities curriculum or across the school curriculum generally. There was a general opinion among all the focus group participants that although they recognised that community service in the present school was currently an “external extracurricular” activity, they believed that the challenges they experienced when integrating CAP should be overcome so that
they could be incorporated into many of the other subjects taught at the school. The participants
were of the opinion that CAP needed to be entrenched into the curriculum as a whole, beginning
with year 7, so that they would become a strong and successfully part of the school culture.
Andrea hoped, “it should become the focus of the school, and a value of the school.” Dean
summarised it in this way:

In the school, you’d really want to create a...culture around this...
behaviour, where students seek to change – it goes through the college
where it’s just a normal thing. There’s an injustice, we’re going to go
and change it. So if the school was more malleable to those kinds of
demands, particularly student driven initiatives, outside of – the things
that could be considered more radical...then the school would just
constantly empower the students. Yeah, well that’s a great idea…we’re
going to do that, and not put road blocks.

Dean’s comments also reflect the viewpoint of the other participants. The participants suggested
that if CAP were going to become an ongoing focus of curriculum, then the whole school needed
to become involved and engaged in them, and they would need to see value in them for the
school as a whole. In this way, the school’s current ethos and vision for social justice would be
brought into existence through action. In order to do this, the participants were of the belief that,
firstly, the projects needed to be executed twice a year - “one a year isn’t enough to make a
difference.” Secondly, there needs to be an allocated budget to support the projects; and thirdly;
they would need to be implemented in the majority of the disciplines. Carmel suggested that the
discipline areas should consider “discussing what we don’t have to do in the curriculum, take it out, and replace it with CAP.” In this way, the academic principles of each subject remains, but there would be a shift in focus to social justice within each of these subjects. This is indicative of Schiro’s (2008) social reconstructionist curriculum ideology, as well as the ideologies of the Catholic Church and Catholic Education.

On the other hand, Dean suggested a very interesting and different perspective about how CAP could become part of the experience of every student in the school:

If the school had a year level wide...project where [the students] worked in little teams they could…engage with the community they were interested in. So the kids that were sporty could run sporting clinics or start their own club [etc]. The students that were interested in stereotypes could address those. The students that felt...road safety was an issue could address that, or cycling paths, or helping the elderly.

If schools were to integrate social justice projects into the curriculum, then one person, or a group of people, would need to oversee the projects. Three of the participants were of the opinion that CAP needed to be overseen by the Faculty coordinator in charge of individual discipline areas, or by somebody else who was given an adequate time allowance to oversee CAP and work with the subject teachers. Although Dean believed that the school “would need someone to supervise it to make sure it’s all flowing along,” he was concerned that this role could “become too top heavy….other staff say, ‘Well that’s that person’s job,’ and then that relieves them of their responsibilities.”
In summary, according to the participant reflections, if CAP were integrated into the school’s current curriculum or as a school-wide initiative in the future, there were five areas they believed needed to be addressed:

a) The availability of budgets to financially resource the projects

b) Key support from all staff

c) The embedding of social justice into the culture of the school

d) The integration of CAP through most of the curriculum disciplines

e) The allocation of a person to oversee the projects, who would be given time allowance to facilitate and help teachers coordinate the projects.

It was inferred in the participants’ comments that if these five areas were addressed to overcome some of the challenges of CAP, both the curriculum and the school could better transform the current learners to be more culturally and socially literate and advocates for social change. In this way, while offering a rich, academic, outcomes-based model for learning, the curriculum and the school would enhance its current offerings in the area of social justice and would better serve the needs of the wider community.

**Conclusion to the findings of this research study**

In his interview, Matthew shared the following thoughts:

There’s nothing more depressing, particularly at the moment with global issues, discussing things that are happening around the world...
and then not doing anything about it.

In many ways, Matthew’s view generally reflected some of the values of the other participants in the focus group. Their enthusiasm and willingness to embrace this initiative was noteworthy. After completing the projects, the participants revealed that their initial aims were realised and that the project was “really worthwhile”. Matthew was pleasantly surprised and shared, “I got a lot more out of it than I thought I would” and commented that “the initiative is a fantastic approach to the curriculum.” In addition, two participants were of the opinion that CAP reflected the Catholic Education ethos of social justice and Christian values and believed that their school should be providing more opportunities for such projects. The participants believed that CAP should be an ongoing part of the school curriculum.

Because of the researcher being a teacher in the school of the present study, she had knowledge that the following year Matthew and Andrea worked together to organise an incursion on relative poverty influenced by the present project. Matthew himself indicated in the interviews that it was “definitely exciting thinking about doing it again next year,” while Dean hoped that he could do it again the following year.

In conclusion, the findings that emerged from the focus group interviews confirmed that the projects did offer rich experiences for the current learners. There was evidence of engagement and a transformative experience for the learners, who were described by the participants as not socially aware or socially active prior to CAP. The participants felt that the current learners were protected both within their school environment and the local community, and that this did not engender in them the drive to make a difference in the world. Further, all the participants felt that the current Humanities VELS curriculum did not lead to social action
because of its theoretical nature. For these reasons, the participants remarked that they could see value, relevance and great purpose in the integration of CAP, but were very aware of the challenges they would face should they become part of what they ordinarily do in their teaching. The major challenge found was the time constraints, due to the nature of the current curriculum, and the participants felt that they themselves had very little time to organise the projects. Therefore, a possible solution to these challenges could be for the school to allocate a person to oversee the projects and work with subject teachers.

Using the methodology of action research, new knowledge has been generated from the interview transcripts relating to teachers experience of applying CAP in the discipline of Humanities in a Victorian Catholic Secondary School. The researcher is now able to respond overall to these findings through a detailed discussion of the three key issues that emerged within the findings of the present study. These are the focus of the following chapter.
Chapter Five

Discussion

Introduction

The previous chapter presented five key findings that emerged from the focus group interviews, which centred on the participants’ experience of applying CAP in the discipline of humanities in a Victorian Catholic secondary school. The participants were certain of the rich learning experience CAP provided for the current learners. However, through an interpretation of the symbols of the spoken language and the written language in the focus group transcripts, the researcher discovered a “complexus of assumptions buried within it” (Crotty, 1998, p. 66). Through the theoretical perspective of interpretivism, these assumptions have offered a comprehensive set of meanings. The researcher’s epistemology of constructivism has been used to extract three key issues that emerged from the research methodology of insider action research. This chapter presents a detailed discussion of these issues.

- Issue 1: The current learners are not socially active.
- Issue 2: Structure of the curriculum
- Issue 3: Structure of Secondary Schools

Issue 1: The current learners are not socially active

The research was conducted in a Catholic secondary school in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. As specified in the Introduction and Context (Chapter One), Catholic schools are
expected to adhere to official Church documents. These documents describe the distinctive nature of Catholic education and its principles, aims and responsibilities. One of the key responsibilities for a Catholic school is to position missionary action and evangelisation at the forefront of their educational community (CSTM, 1997, par. 3, 4, 8). The Church calls for Catholic schools to undergo “courageous renewal” and “prudent innovation” to cater for the demands of young people maturing in a world where (the Church believes) there is a “crisis of values” (CS, 1997, n. 1). It therefore calls upon Catholic schools to be more effective in their missionary duties (CS, 1997, n. 3) and asserts that teachers are the chief instruments to reflect and impart this (CS, 1997, n. 19).

Opportunities for social justice and community outreach in the present school

The present school is dedicated to providing Catholic education. It encourages participation in social justice ministries and opportunities for deepening students’ spirituality and imparting the Catholic faith (Strategic Plan, 2010, p. 2). The school’s mission statement declared that it is a witness “to the truths and values of Jesus Christ” and is “committed to justice through our fidelity to Gospel values” (Strategic Plan, 2010, p. 1).

The school’s social justice ministries were coordinated by the work of two staff members: a Social Justice Coordinator and a Community Programs Officer. Both of these were paid positions and formed part of the teacher’s timetabled load. The Community Programs Officer was responsible for ensuring that social justice initiatives occurred at each year level.
These included: a) Caritas Australia/Project Compassion,\textsuperscript{10} b) The Good Samaritan Inn, Melbourne,\textsuperscript{11} and c) the Children First Foundation.\textsuperscript{12} There were also a number of social justice projects that involved student volunteers including: a) Collingwood Cottage Food Bank,\textsuperscript{13} b) St Vincent de Paul Christmas Hampers, c) Ozanam House Drop in Center,\textsuperscript{14} d) and World Vision 40 Hour Famine.\textsuperscript{15} In addition, the Social Justice Coordinator facilitated the \textit{Be More (Social Justice) Group},\textsuperscript{16} and \textit{Face to Faith}.\textsuperscript{17} There was also one staff led social justice project, that is,\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{10} Caritas Australia began in Australia in 1964 is an Australian Catholic agency for international aid and development. Project Compassion is their annual fundraising appeal. The Year 7’s at the current school are involved in collecting money for this appeal. The appeal is also integrated into the Religious Education curriculum.

\textsuperscript{11} The Good Samaritan Inn, Melbourne, offers crisis accommodation to women and their children. The year 8’s at the current school collect food, cleaning products, toiletries, and raise money for the Inn.

\textsuperscript{12} The Children First Foundation, founded by Moira Kelly, brings children to Australia from developing countries for life-saving and life changing surgery not available in their own country. Children are cared for pre and post-surgery and return home once full recovery has been made. The Year 12’s at the current school are responsible for donating long life milk to their Kilmore home. The College also sponsors two children to come to Australia for medical support. Money is raised through a cup cake day at the local primary school. The College aims to sponsor a child each year.

\textsuperscript{13} Collingwood Cottage Food Bank provides food assistance to the ‘disadvantaged’ throughout the neighborhoods of Collingwood and Brunswick in Melbourne. The current school seeks student volunteers to help distribute fresh fruit, vegetables and groceries for those in need.

\textsuperscript{14} Ozanam House provides crisis accommodation for homeless men over the age of 18 years.

\textsuperscript{15} World Vision provides relief in emergency situations and works on long-term community development projects. 40 Hour Famine is an annual opportunity for people to give something up for 40 hours and fundraise for World Vision’s work.

\textsuperscript{16} The Be More Social Justice group is coordinated by one staff member. He meets fortnightly with volunteer students who are introduced to social justice issues and community action. Students are also involved in organising larger social justice activities, including, a Car Show for Project Compassion, Global Reality Meal, projects for World Vision, movie screening, and interfaith initiatives.

\textsuperscript{17} Face to Faith provides video conference opportunities for students to discuss global issues from the point of view of their faith with other students from other schools both nationally and internationally. Their discussion has the potential to lead to action.
fund-raising for the Presentation Sisters of Pakistan,\textsuperscript{18} and a well-established Environment committee facilitated by both staff and students. With several social justice ministries in action at the present school, externally and internally, the College appeared to be strongly committed to social justice, community outreach, and the responsibilities of Catholic education. The current learners have had sufficient opportunities to be involved in social justice activities. The researcher, as a teacher in the present school, had direct insider knowledge of this. Therefore, the researcher’s previous knowledge constructions, beliefs and attitudes were considered in the knowledge construction process, and they are positioned alongside the knowledge construction process of the focus group participants.

Focus group reflections: Current learners as socially active or socially apathetic?

Given the many opportunities the current learners have had to participate in social justice and community initiatives, it can be thought that they would also be committed to these initiatives. This further assumes that the current learners were aware and sensitive to the problems and hardships different communities faced on a day to day basis, and were willing to act towards changing the social justice problems in the community (Andrzejewski, Baltodamo & Symcox, 2009, p. 2). The focus group participants were of the impression that this did not appear to be the case.

\textsuperscript{18} For over 112 years the Presentation Sisters have been in Pakistan providing quality education for the children of Pakistan, especially education of the poor and girls in particular. The current school raises substantial funds each year through the selling of soft drinks, icy poles and an annual staff golf day to support the Sisters in their ministries. Each year the College also invites a Sister to Australia to educate the learners about Pakistan, its people, and the work of the Sisters.
It surfaced during the interviews that all of the participants viewed the current learners, in this particular school, as not taking their responsibilities for social justice seriously. They were not convinced that the current learners had a global perspective - or even a local perspective - on some of the urgent issues facing the world (Andrzejewski, Baltodamo & Symcox, 2009, p. 3). The focus group described the current learners as a generation who should make a difference but they appeared apathetic and despite the effort of the school, they were not acquiring deep understanding of important social issues. This opinion is based on the assumptions of the focus group. Student opinions were not collected. This is one of the limitations of this research project.

The participants attributed the current learner’s possible apathetic mindset to living within “protected suburban lifestyles”, having “lavish lifestyles” and further attributed it to the “rigid structures of their learning environment”. Carmel stated, “Our kids in our schools are….protected and don’t actually see what’s going on outside”. Further, some of the participants assumed that the current learners were not socially active because there was no immediate reward to be so, and they were used to being instantly gratified. Further, Dean implied that because the current learners were always being “watched and supervised” within both the school and the current curriculum structures, this was perhaps dismantling the current learners’ autonomy to explore subjects and social issues more deeply. Dean suggested that if the current learners were given more responsibilities and freedom in their learning that their indifferent attitudes toward social action may change. He observed that this happened as a result of CAP.

While they spoke of other contributing factors, the participants were also of the opinion that the current learners’ apparent withdrawal from social justice and community outreach had much to do with the fact that it was not integrated into the current curriculum. Despite the attempts to produce a school wide culture of social justice and community outreach, they
remained as extracurricular. Students were free to choose to participate or not. This was reflected in Dean’s comments when he referred to the current learners not prioritising these activities as an important aspect of their education and considered that the school could “muster” more energy in social justice and community action.

Dean’s assumption seemed to suggest that the learners did not regard extracurricular activities to be as important as other areas of their learning. This perspective accords with the views of Andrzejewski, Baltodamo & Symcox (2009). They advocate that integrating (or making mainstream) social justice, peace and environmental education is the only way education will “foster the practice of these values in our own lives and the lives of people around the world” (p. 3). This also echoes the ideologies of the social reconstructionist curriculum, whereby curriculum is viewed from a social perspective to bring about more humane civilizations, thereby directing learners towards social and political action (Schiro, 2008, p. 134). Therefore, if social justice and community outreach programs remain as extracurricular, it is less likely that the current learners would benefit significantly, than if these activities were part of the mainstream curriculum. This point will be explored further in this chapter.

The assumption that the current learners were not socially active is also indicative of Wyn & Cuervo’s (2005) research who claimed that there is a limited cross section of young people in Australia using technology for social action and a very small number of young people accessing the internet for news and current affairs (p. 5 & 26, p. 32). In America, Palfrey and Gasser (2008) also noted this (p. 226). It is not clear in the literature whether the current learners are using other mediums for social action. Mason, Singleton & Webber (2007) found that, overall, the youngest of Australian Generation Y were less likely to take an active lead in their social concerns. They explained that these low numbers could be due to their age, their relative
inexperienced, and limited exposure to those who are disadvantaged (p. 295). These key findings directly contradict both the current school’s expectations, and the expectations derived from McCrindle’s (2012) research which predicted that given their educational status and the expansive exposure to global social justice issues, the current learners will be aware of the challenges the world faces, have a social conscience, and use their technologies for social action (p. 1-3).

McCrindle’s predictions are optimistic and present an ideal, but the research is still inconclusive on this issue (Wyn & Cuervo’s, 2005, p. 32), and the responses from the focus group clearly appeared to disagree with McCrindle, for they expressed genuine concern that the learners in the current school had an insufficient commitment to social justice. This finding is based on the assumptions of just five teachers. The teachers assumptions could have been shaped by several factors, namely, a) they found it a challenge to draw from the current learners’ interest, questions and the desire to debate some of the important social justice issues in the classroom; b) the teachers themselves found that they had limited time to explore the important issues in the current structures of the school and the curriculum; c) the teachers could have been lacking in the skills to be able to integrate social justice topics within the curriculum; d) the teachers may not have considered social justice to be a priority for learning in the classroom because it had not yet been integrated into the curriculum. The current learners were therefore receiving very little exposure, thus contributing to their appearance of apathy.

This conclusion about the current learners - that they were apathetic - was the epistemological perspective of the participants. This view has been derived primarily from the participants’ interactions with the school environment. Within this environment the teachers have built knowledge of the current learners and organised and shaped the knowledge to account for
their perceptions. Their expectation of the current learners is indicative of some of the literature and the previously held expectations of the teachers themselves. Therefore, it is likely that their assumptions are adequate and viable in the context of the present study. This comes from the constructivist epistemology and is a valid and trustworthy interpretation because the teachers of the focus group were teachers in the school of the present research. Therefore, this information can be used to form new knowledge based on previous knowledge. Despite the current school’s strong affiliation with social justice and community outreach, it seems as though this is not impacting the current learners in ways otherwise hoped. The discovery that the current learners are not committed to social justice is an important finding. It is helpful evidence to support the integration of CAP.

Two major reasons could be suggested as to why the current learners at this school were perhaps not as socially active as could be. These could be attributed to: a) the extracurricular nature of social justice and community outreach programs in the school and; b) the geographical location of the participants. Each of these points are discussed below.

*Social justice and community outreach programs in the school as extra-curricular*

The social justice and community outreach programs in the current school were found predominately in opportunities for *extracurricular* activities. The term “extracurricular” here means the external activities, projects or committees for which the current learners volunteer outside of their regular curriculum subjects and studies (Blomfield & Barber, 2010). If the social justice and outreach programs were offered at a foundational curriculum level then the programs would be integrated into the current curriculum (or composed as a separate discipline) and learners would be expected to participate. As they were offered predominantly as extracurricular,
the learners were not obliged to participate, and the volunteers were also able to cease their involvement at any time.

The participants in the focus group were concerned about this. Andrea commented, “In this particular school...community service is...external extracurricular...and yet it should be incorporated in many of the different subjects that we have”. The participants were of the belief that as a Catholic community, social justice programs should be integrated into the core curriculum, believing that curriculum should lead to social action.

At the time of this research, the current school offered many programs of community outreach and the Catholic tradition was manifested in these. Yet it appeared that the extracurricular programs had not reinforced the current learner’s responsibilities to be advocates for social action. This can be seen in the small number of students and teachers seen to be volunteering for such programs. As a case in point, at the time of writing two teaching staff who were volunteer coordinators for the fundraising initiative for the Presentation Sisters of Pakistan, volunteered in addition to their teaching loads. Out of approximately 200 teaching staff at the present school, there were only three other teachers who assisted with the fundraising efforts. The inadequate number of volunteers helping this initiative hindered the program’s ability to expand such efforts and has further impacted the coordinators’ time outside of their teaching hours. Further, in the event that these two staff members could no longer coordinate the program, the school would perhaps struggle to find someone to continue the efforts. Similarly, at the time of writing, the Environment Committee in the current school had a total of 51 student volunteers, 4 teacher volunteers, and 7 non-teaching volunteers. Thirty of these student volunteers were in

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19 Information gathered from one of the volunteer staff members coordinating the fundraising for the Presentation Sisters of Pakistan. This staff member (outside of the focus group) granted the researcher permission to use this information.
the junior years. According to the Environment Coordinator, the volunteers were unable to help consistently because of the other commitments they had. Most often very few weekly volunteers could be relied upon. No doubt there would be numerous reasons why only a small number of teachers are volunteering for extracurricular (although not the focus of this discussion), but if teachers were not seen by the current learners to be committed to community outreach they miss the important opportunities to model for learners, appropriate action for change. With a lack of role modeling in this regard, it is perhaps understandable that only a small number of learners volunteer for such programs. Such small numbers places further pressure on the programs’ planning, coverage, and effective action. Often teachers were given little or no time allowance in their timetables to plan and develop extracurricular programs, and this was possibly used as a reason not to volunteer. As the choice of methodology for this research was ‘insider action research’ and the researcher was employed in the school, she was consequently aware of this information, and considered this knowledge useful as a way of possibly bringing positive change to the current school. The researcher’s insider knowledge helped her make sense of and contextualise what was said by the participants.

The inadequate response of volunteers for the community initiatives at the current school is generally reflected in a large cross section of Australian youth and people within the 20’s to 40’s age group. The findings of Hughes’ (2007) Australian youth spirituality research uncovered that although there were a significant number of Australian people, especially the younger generations, discussing the importance of voluntary work and the importance of contributing to civic society, there was a large portion who did not volunteer in a typical month, but would

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20 Information gathered from the Environment Coordinator of the current school. This staff member (outside of the focus group) granted the researcher permission to use this information.
occasionally volunteer, contributing in small ways, for example, donating blood. Significantly, a number of people surveyed talked about “doing their bit” for society, but this meant mostly “helping out” their friends and family. It was found that those who were actively involved in a community outreach program did so because they were influenced by their parents, who were also involved (pp. 96 – 104).

There appears to be many Australians who have the intention to be involved in social justice and community outreach, but for all their good intentions, this does not form a priority in their lives because they are not actively civically involved (Hughes (2007, p. 96 – 104). As extracurricular programs in schools are dependent on staff and student volunteers, this finding could greatly hinder the efforts of the extracurricular programs in this school. Again, there is strong evidence to suggest that CAP be integrated into the current curriculum, to encourage the current learners to recognise how they can contribute to social justice causes and community outreach, and also provide opportunities for such actions to be accessible.

Social justice should be given a prominent place in the current school.

Arguably, for the reasons provided in the Catholic Church documents social justice and community outreach should be given a prominent place in the school. Indeed, in a Catholic secondary school, such programs should be explicitly integrated into the curriculum. The fact that this is not the case in the current school could be due partly to the current curriculum structures and the formal reporting of student performance. Undue pressure is placed on teachers to teach the specified content, deliver learning outcomes, and assess and report student progress (Ross, 2000, pp. 1 -8, p. 99). From the perspective of Andrea, the Humanities coordinator, there
were limited opportunities to integrate explicit social justice action in the already ‘crowded’ curriculum. She experienced “time constraints” due to “the stringent curriculum” and perceived the current humanities curriculum to be “theoretical and compact.” She said that this resulted in having to “jam-pack everything in towards exams and assessment tasks, rather than actually being able to spend time on [CAP]”.

As discussed in Chapter One, the philosophical underpinnings of the current VELS curriculum (Ross, 2000, p.118) mirrors a business orientated and corporate-inspired approach (Andrzejewski, Baltodamo & Symcox, 2009, p. 3, Shlomo & Tan, 2008, p. 78). It therefore reinforces and validates development, production and consumption (a major cause of the social and ecological problems faced in the world) (Andrzejewski, Baltodamo & Symcox, 2009, p. 3). However, this does not validate explicit learning towards social justice and community outreach (Ross, 2000, p. 115). In light of this, within the current curriculum system, there is less flexibility for creativity in the learning and teaching experience because teachers are more likely to restrict the delivery of the curriculum to what can be easily assessed, and therefore are in danger of teaching content deficient in substance (Shlomo & Tan, 2008, p. 78). The message is transparent: In secondary schools, academic and more traditional subjects are ranked higher in importance than social justice and community outreach where these programs are not compulsory or not given equal status, and considered futile for access to careers and the contribution of the economy (Ross, 2000, p. 115).

Thus, the current curriculum philosophies are in tension with the discourse presented in the Church documents relating to Catholic education. Catholic teachers are receiving contradictory messages about their role as Catholic educators. On the one hand, they are expected to deliver an academic curriculum which is arguably utilitarian and but at the same
time, reflect and impart a Catholic philosophy of social justice (CSTM, par. 19). Given the demands of the current curriculum, this challenge is great. Further, as evidenced in Chapter One, given that there are often only a minority of staff in a Catholic school who are trained in Religious Education and even a smaller number of staff who are trained in theological studies, there appears to be a great divide in the skills and knowledge of Catholic educators in this area of social justice. This is another challenge that may need to be addressed and is another example of the ‘insider’ knowledge the researcher had of the present school.

Some of the above perspectives were indicative of Dean's comments. His teaching philosophy was to facilitate “student-led teaching” and “student-led learning” in a “creative, expressive, engaging and free environment”, and noted that CAP fulfilled his teaching philosophy, but he “struggle[d] to get it off the ground in a normal, traditional classroom”. Dean continued that for CAP to be enforced, and be successful, the school really needed to “create a…culture around this…behavior, where students seek to change [social injustices].” He suggested that it should become a norm in the College where students automatically recognise an injustice and strive to change it. He suggested that “if the school was more malleable to [these kinds of projects]…the school would just constantly empower the students.” Dean believed, however, that there were too many “road blocks” in the present school for this to happen in a normative way.

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21 While the current Catholic school has offered professional learning opportunities in the area of social justice, the professional learning was more often focused on developing social justice curriculum in Religious Education and contributing towards the Accreditation to teach in a Catholic School programme mandated by the Catholic Education Office (cf. CECV policy 1.6). The researcher, as an employer in the school, has knowledge of this.
The nature of the current curriculum may prevent a teacher such as Dean from implementing innovative and creative teaching practices. For students to develop sound social justice awareness and participate in ongoing community action, the philosophical underpinnings of the curriculum need to promote community and global collectiveness. A collective vision of education “asserts the importance of providing an education that prepares students for making a life for themselves and their communities, not just making a living” (Andrzejewski, Baltadano, & Symcox, 2009, p. 18). For curriculum to reflect a collective approach, learning needs to be transformative and provide a personal growth experience for students. The participants in the focus group desired this, but were aware of curriculum limitations. Contrary to this, in the current curriculum system teachers tend to the standardised curriculum and worry less about social outreach. In their view, according to the focus group participants, there were specific staff members paid to coordinate these programs (ie. the Social Justice Coordinator and the Community Programs Officer). This, in turn, made it easier to leave these programs as part of the extracurricular offerings.

In summary, based on the analysis of the data, it is assumed by then focus group participants that the current learners in the present school were not socially active. This was perhaps due to the fact that social justice and community outreach programs in the school were offered as extracurricular – a point most likely due to the current curriculum ideologies. The curriculum ideologies in the school did not appear to endorse social justice and community outreach curriculum because it did not accord with its academic and vocational philosophy. As a result, the humanitarian, environmental, and other major issues in the world (Andrzejewski, Baltadano, & Symcox, 2009, p. 1) were not being addressed explicitly, and not at the depth required. As such, the focus group believed that the current learners did not have the zeal,
enthusiasm or knowledge to be socially active. The participants implied that the learners’ understanding in this area was very narrow.

In keeping with the constructivist epistemology this discussion represents the construction of meaning by the researcher, based on the interpretations of the focus group. While there were possibly other perceptions of the current learners, through the theoretical perspective of interpretivism, the researcher drew these meanings from the text of the present study. If this was indeed an accurate reading of the texts, and a valid perception by the focus group of the current learners in the present school, then in the future the current learners, not having the skills and knowledge, may fail to engage minds, use resources, and take action for the greater benefit (Andrzejewski, Baltodano & Symcox, 2009, p. 1). Therefore, this new knowledge can be used for further reflection and searching for solutions to the problems identified, which is one of the fundamental purposes of action research methodology as outlined in the Research Design, Chapter Three (McKernan, 2000, p. 35 & 40; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. xii; Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 3).

Based on the constructivist interpretations of the findings, it can be concluded that the inflexible nature of the current curriculum, pressure to perform outcomes-based teaching, and heavy assessment and reporting loads, had overshadowed social justice integration. As a result of the extracurricular nature of social justice and community outreach programs within the school, the current learners were not receiving the exposure they needed in order to develop deep understandings. Thus, the important learning was extended to only a few (those who participate as volunteers in extracurricular social justice and community service and the action could not be as far-reaching as it would otherwise be with greater student participation. The present research offered a theoretical procedure for how CAP could be given equal status in the curriculum.
The secondary school is not the only place in which social justice and community action could be fostered and reinforced. The home environment, the external community in which the current learners belong, and their local areas, could all contribute to social awareness. This discussion now examines the implications of the current learners’ geographical location as another possible reason for their limited social awareness and social action. Again, the researcher had experience and knowledge of the geographical location in which the majority of the current learners resided, as she too lived and worked in the same area. The researcher brought this knowledge to the following section of the discussion. This is another example where the theoretical perspective provides a context for the constructed knowledge, and the researcher was able to clearly generate meaning from the focus group transcripts because she had direct experience in this area. The theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism came into play when analysing the transcripts of the present study. In addition to being aware of her own assumptions, values and attitudes, she was also entering into the attitudes, values and assumptions of the focus group (Crotty, 1998, p. 8; Flick, 2002, p. 17).

Geographical location of the current learners

The research took place in a regional secondary school in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. It is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Victoria (Strategic Plan, 2010, p. 6). The dominant religion in this area is Catholic, and 31% of the population held educational qualifications (Strategic Plan, 2010, p. 9). Much of the population of the learners were from the urban housing areas and in relatively new housing estates. They were also surrounded by two major shopping centers and substantial industrial and commercial areas. In addition, there were
other conveniences including numerous choices for schools, public spaces (such as parks and sporting ovals), and several institutions for further study, trades and careers. The current learners living in this well-established suburb had access to every convenience available. It could be considered to be an insular community, as there would be no reason for many residents to leave. All of the resources they need are readily available. The local area, therefore, could greatly influence the opportunities the residents have to develop as citizens.

The focus group participants were of the opinion that because the majority of the learners lived close to their school, and socialised and played sport in the same area, that they were shielded from developing broad perspectives about the wider community. Dean and Matthew even described them as living in a “cocoon”. Carmel was surprised to discover that some of the Year 8 learners (13-14 years old) whom she taught, condemned religions and cultures other than their own. This was despite living in and around multicultural suburbs. Carmel observed that students simply stated stereotypes as though they were facts, particularly when speaking of the Muslim community, but when challenged, were unable to respond. This may not necessarily indicate that this group of learners were prejudiced, but could have more to do with immaturity and not having the critical inquiry skills to ask important questions about religions and cultures to deepen their understandings. Further, it could have much to do with their limited interaction with the diverse community, especially when much of their time was spent in isolation (in their homes and shopping centers) derivative of living in well-established suburban environments. Access to conveniences meant the residents were less likely to travel outside of the local area. They instead use the local commercial businesses for entertainment, and are less likely to observe communities beyond their own friendship and family communities. This also suggests
that the current learners were less likely to form deep understandings of social justice and community outreach, and therefore less likely to take action.

The research suggests that urbanisation could be impairing community and social justice awareness, especially among the current learners. In the suburbs, individualism, materialism, commercialism is supported while the unjust sufferings of cultures, religions and community members remain overlooked (Adams, Bell, Griffin, 1997, p. 50). The individualistic cultural milieu of the current learners could be generating blind-sightedness, and their limited experiences of the community, and their lack of witness to those who are disadvantaged indicates that change is needed. The geographical location of the current learners cannot be changed, but creating educational pathways could be developed to address these challenges. A curriculum could be prepared to nurture the social conscience and community action of the current learners in the present school.

This could be made possible if as Dean and Andrea from the focus group suggested, community action became a value pervading the whole school. If indeed the current learners’ social inaction could be attributed in part to the geographical area in which they lived, then community action could be explicit to their local community. For example, it is ineffective to discuss the teenage drink-driving incident that occurred only a few kilometers from the current school from the perspective of the dangers of drink-driving (while this approach is important, it is not far reaching enough and much of the learning would only be based on facts and content). Instead, the deeper issues that could have influenced the actions of the teenagers, for example, social, domestic, or educational problems of significance, financial hardship, or the absence of community or government supports need to be explored. An important social action could include setting up homework programs (or homework spaces) or an after school tutoring
program for disadvantaged youth in the local area. Schools in America who applied the social reconstruction ideology had been very successful implementing similar programs (see Literature Review Chapter Two).

Many Victorian Catholic secondary schools in Australia have the resources, have a Catholic foresight, have financial support, and have the student and staff numbers to be able to put in place community outreach in their local areas to involve all the learners (not just those who volunteer for extracurricular activities). By focusing on local issues, the current learners may be given greater opportunities, gain new insights, and discover local social realities (Adams, Bell, Griffin, 1997, p. 50). If the current learners were unable to recognise and form deep understandings about local social justice issues, then they would be less likely to understand more complex global issues. People with a global perspective are more aware of “the interconnections between all forms of suffering and liberation” (Andrzejewski, Baltodamo & Symcox 2009, p. 2). For the current learners, this awareness could have been made more possible with a school-wide focus on community outreach and social justice.

In summary, while social justice and community outreach remain part of the extracurricular programs in the current school, and while the current learners learn about the world through limited contexts, it is highly possible that they would remain socially inactive. For the current secondary school to generate change, it would be important to consider the current structures of the curriculum, and how it appeared to prevent integrating CAP into the secondary school. This is now explored in detail.
**Issue 2: The Structure of the Current curriculum**

During the focus group interviews, when asked how he felt about integrating CAP into the current humanities curriculum, Matthew replied, “There’s nothing more depressing [then] discussing things that are happening around the world and then not doing anything about it.” Like Matthew, the other participants felt strongly about the need for more integrated community outreach. Dean and Melinda believed that students would benefit from a more creative learning environment, using phrases like, “hands-on learning” and “hands-on experience”. Melinda said that CAP “enabled the students...to not just learn about philosophy but to do philosophy.” Andrea said that CAP had “brought alive the curriculum in the classroom” and Dean believed that it allowed the learners to “really express themselves and their...curiosities”.

These comments appeared to suggest that the teachers’ approach to the curriculum was not engaging the current learners as well as they would have liked. This begs the question as to whether real engagement is built into the curriculum, or if adequate time is provided in the curriculum to engage the students with deep learning. Indeed, the participants spoke about the current curriculum restricting them from what they wanted to achieve in the traditional classroom and in regard to CAP. They spoke about being limited to the kinds of creative learning activities they wished to employ, and discussed not having the opportunities to be able to integrate practical learning with the theoretical content due to the “confines of a stringent curriculum”. The participants wished for more time to be spent on CAP, for they were concerned that it was “rushed” due to having to “move on with” the mainstream curriculum in order to prepare for assessments and reports. As a result, the majority of the focus group had not achieved
the scope they had hoped for, nor had they achieved the depth and breadth of which CAP was capable.

Although these limitations were apparent, CAP nevertheless provided significant opportunities for the teachers to enhance their teaching practices, and was clearly a transformative experience for the learners, the focus group, and the community which it benefited. Indeed, Carmel observed that after completing CAP, negative comments about particular cultural and religious groups were not heard at all, and the learners appeared more engaged and curious throughout the duration of the topic of Crusades and topics thereafter. CAP allowed Carmel opportunities to develop her teaching practices, provided opportunities for the current learners to find fulfillment and meaning with the content, improve their critical thinking skills and support a deep approach to learning (Biggs, 2003, p. 16). Furthermore, after completing CAP, Matthew observed a similar transformation. He reflected, “we’ve worked on several other issues...including child soldiers and child labour, and the students have really been...asking [thoughtful] questions...and I think that all started because of [CAP]”.

Biggs (2003) suggested that when the deep approach is used in teaching, the learners are challenged, they find the learning experience pleasurable, and transformation of knowledge and understanding has taken place (p. 16). This outcome is an expectation of the social reconstruction ideology (Schiro, 2008, p. 141). Learners are able to form a clear vision of what action is needed to begin to eradicate the social problem (Schiro, 2008, p. 146). Without the deep understanding, the learning becomes purposeless (Schiro, 2008, p.144-145). Dean conveyed that CAP was perhaps one of the few projects that allowed students to see the immediate purpose to their learning. This draws attention to the theory of transformative learning (Quinnan, 1997, p. 42, in
Mezirow and Taylor, 2009, p. 3) which shares similar philosophies to the social reconstruction ideology.

At the time of the research, the VELS assessment practices were carried out by teachers to stay abreast of student performances for the school, the state government, and the education department. However, it was inferred by the focus group participants that the assessment processes actually encumbered student learning. It was made clear by the focus group participants that teachers generally were more likely to resort to textbooks as their main resource, because through textbook teaching, planning and assessment was faster, outcomes could be neatly ticked off as completed, and teachers were seen to be doing what the curriculum required of them.

Heavy reliance on textbooks could mean that learning was not being put into meaningful contexts and experiences. The students were more likely to be engaging in surface learning, with only low cognitive level activities (Biggs, 2003, p. 14); teachers were not “bringing out the intrinsic structure of the topic or subject” (Biggs, 2004, p. 15-16). Biggs (2000) explains that even under the best teaching learners can still maintain a surface understanding (p. 16) but in curriculum that is too demanding in terms of heavy content, it is not always possible to engage students in deep learning (Ramsden, 1992, p. 38).

CAP provides the opportunity to use higher level cognitive activities so that students may feel exhilarated or enjoyment in the classroom (Biggs, 2003, p. 14). When using the deep approach to handle a subject matter the students are excited about the topic, they have questions they want answered, they find it challenging, they understand that what they are doing is important, and are so curious about the subject that they are determined to do well (Biggs, 2003, p. 16 & Ramsden 1992, p. 42-46). According to Biggs (2003) the learner is focusing “at a high
conceptual level, working from first principles, which in turn requires a well-structured knowledge base” (p.16-17). CAP very much emphasises this and is indicative of the transformative experience discourse. One of Dean’s observations during the process of CAP confirmed this:

the students…didn’t anticipate how much would be required of them
…some people would just want to joke around…then it all came together…
Just the nature of the project…those sorts of things just flowed on quite naturally and…allow the students to actually…engage with their learning…
I had no problems getting them to go home and complete it…and to work together and…share the task.

This is congruent with Biggs’ (2004) argument for deep learning (p.16). In Dean’s ‘normal’ classroom teaching, the learners would not continue with their learning at home, yet they did for this project, because the ‘new’ approach to learning was challenging, engaging and enjoyable. The structure of the curriculum, however, did not appear to support connection with the community, and the need for the current learners to build efficient skills to problem solve with real life problems. The current curriculum constraints appeared to be preventing teachers from focusing on areas that really need concentration, such as CAP.

In conclusion, using the constructivist epistemology, the researcher has constructed meaning from the information provided by the focus group and has concluded that while the current curriculum structures exist, and while they are regulated, the pedagogical skills of the teachers could be affected. There were limitations to what teachers were able to do with the
learners to help them investigate topics more deeply and creatively. The VELS curriculum, current at the time of the research, accentuated assessment and standards without explicit emphasis on the process of teaching and the process of learning.

Whilst CAP could easily test academic achievement and skills-based learning, it is not explicitly concerned with individual assessment. Instead, the focus is on linking curriculum topics to social issues, assessing for success of the action, and its success in moving towards reconstructing a social problem (Schiro, 2008, p.6 & Null, 2011, p. 101). When integrating CAP, the curriculum topics remained the same, but the curriculum orientation was different. Alternative assessment methods could be used.

Of further hindrance to developing CAP, which also emerged as a result of the focus group interviews, was the structure of the current secondary school. This is the third issue to be considered in this discussion of integrating CAP into the current Victorian curriculum in secondary schools.

**Issue 3: The structure of the secondary school in this research (which was indicative of the general structure of secondary schools)**

The focus group believed CAP had significant benefits for the current learners whom they taught, and benefits for improving their pedagogical teaching skills. However, as a result of the data analysis this researcher has concluded that due to the current structures of the secondary school the focus group participants did not even come close to realising the potential of what CAP had to offer. Compared to community projects that had occurred using a social reconstruction approach, for example, the Environmental Hazard Project which provoked
community change (Schiro, 2008, p. 138 – 141), the finite nature of CAP undertaken at the current school meant that they were not as successful as they could have been. The community actions chosen were narrow, confined to just a very small community, and the action stopped short of making real and permanent social justice change. For a number of reasons, the focus group participants were unable to encourage the current learners to develop the community projects further. The approach taken for action was diluted with narrow perspectives; thus the community actions could not gather strong momentum and provide lasting and infinite social justice change.

As a case in point, the topic for CAP in the Year 10 Philosophy class was Morality versus Hedonism. *People living with Autism* was drawn out as a subtopic, and used as a basis to argue against Peter Singer’s arguments for what constitutes human life (Singer, 1993, pp. 175-217). The learners were asked to consider a community action that would contribute to changing societal attitudes about people with disabilities in the community. The majority of the learners completed the ‘action’ component of CAP through a written piece to be published online (using Facebook) or published in the school magazine. However, using the medium of writing opinion pieces to inform a relatively large audience was merely an educational activity. While their message could have influenced some of those who read their discussion piece, one of the limitations of the present research was that it was very difficult to gauge the influence their discussion papers had on the wider audience. Given that there was no extended response by the teacher and the current learners in the philosophy class, it would seem that the community action was confined only to discussion and written pieces without effecting major social attitudinal change. As a teacher in the school at the time of research, the researcher can endorse this. This particular CAP was finite and stopped short of noticeable, measurable and lasting difference to
the lives of people living with a disability or to changing people’s attitudes about those living with a disability.

Thus, from a community action point of view, this particular Philosophy CAP was to some extent ineffectual. However, the changes that may have occurred in an ongoing way in the minds and attitudes of the students could not be assessed because all learning like this is developmental and integrated with many other aspects of the person’s life. Given this, integrating CAP into the curriculum was worthwhile, and this research still valid, because the philosophy teacher disclosed that the project transformed the attitudes of some of the current learners to ensure they questioned their prejudice and stereotypes before stigmatising those living with a disability. This transformation is an important and powerful aspect of the social reconstructionist curriculum approach, but if CAP was only to transform the thinking and attitudes of its learners, then it is no different to the aims and objectives of education as a whole. This is why, if CAP were to be integrated into the secondary school, much has to be considered to ensure that the projects have a lasting effect on the learners and the community for whom it benefits. Social change occurs when the attitudes of the majority are changed.

The social reconstructionist approach differs from the traditional educational approach because it aims to transform both the learners and communities to make lasting changes to an injustice or long lasting benefits to the disadvantaged community. If given an opportunity, the philosophy class in the present research could have set up a support group in the school community for students and their parents living with a disability and together use this support group for awareness-raising and fundraising for associations supporting disabilities. This community action would have had longevity and greater and measurable benefits to the community. Similarly, the Year 8 students comparing the prejudices of cultural groups during
the time of the Crusades with the prejudices being experienced by Muslim communities today could have also set up a human rights community group within the school, to focus primarily on the human rights of Muslims in Australia. The group could have been used for addressing issues of racism, educating the larger community about Islam and discussing religious freedom in Australia. The aim of this group could have been to provide a support group to Muslim learners and work towards changing attitudes in the community with a commitment to combating racism, violence and prejudice aimed at religious and cultural groups. If the classes were able to do projects similar to these outlined here, their CAP would have been much more effective in that it would have had recognisable long-term benefits to the community and the current learners.

One of the possible reasons why CAP in the current school was finite could have been that, although it differed from the traditional approach to curriculum, it nevertheless remained, to a certain degree, within the bounds of the current curriculum and the structures of the current school, and therefore could not reflect the community action expected of the social reconstructionist ideology. By way of comparing the approach taken by the focus group participants and the current learners to the actual process of the social reconstruction ideology (see Figure 1 in Chapter One) it is clear that although the present study achieved steps one to four successfully, collectively the classes did not form a group vision of what a more just situation may look like and did not consider long-lasting social action to correct the social and community issues (Schiro, 2008, p. 141). This is typical of one of the weaknesses of the social reconstruction framework as often more time is spent on the theory of the social injustice leaving less time for the community action (Null, 2011, p. 112). This is made even more challenging when there are time limits placed on the projects as was the case in the current school.
Limitations encroaching on the longevity of CAP in the current school

This section of the discussion explores another possible reason to account for the focus group underperforming CAP’s capabilities. It is argued that the structures of the current Victorian secondary school (also reflected in ‘traditional’ Victorian secondary schools) contributed greatly to this. Here the term ‘structure’ refers to the secondary school system and the general day to day organisation and administrative aspects of the secondary school, including staffing, timetabling, budgets, and class duration.

The school in which the current project took place predominantly adopted a ‘traditional’ structure, with each subject placed within a department and positioned in the school as a standalone subject within a hierarchal order (Ross, 2000, p.110). In the current school teachers predominantly also teach alone in the classroom. This is typical of the ‘traditional’ secondary school system (Sharan & Tan, 2008, p. 58). In schools where team teaching is practised, richer ideas and teaching practices can be developed. Teaching in isolation could result in a higher possibility of teachers delivering lessons within a narrower cognitive framework, and could lead to the practice of teachers taking possession and control over their self-developed resources and activities; sharing resources may not be a regular practice within such structures, perhaps leading to curriculum fragmentation (Sharan & Tan, 2008, p. 58). Therefore initiatives requiring cooperation, collegiality and creativity become more challenging to put into practice. For example, if CAP was to meet its full potential through lasting benefits to the community, this would require many teachers in the school to support it and to work in partnership. However, because the system in this school was set up so that teachers primarily worked in isolation, creativity was hindered, and lack of collegiality, subject integration and team teaching were even
more pronounced in this large school with relatively large class sizes (Sharan & Tan, 2008, p.86).

If in the present school a policy of shared practise and collegiality was explicitly practised, possibly more team teaching would occur and more teachers would be seen to be volunteering for extracurricular activities, as well as integrating the extracurricular into the classroom curriculum. Further, the focus group participants would not have hesitated to ask for support from some of their peers. This was implied when Dean commented that projects like CAP could encroach on other teachers’ time and planning. He would not have considered this as a limitation if there was explicit practice of flexibility in the school. The focus group participants implied that they believed the current system fell short of flexible ways in which to open up opportunities for CAP to be successful. For instance, there seemed to be an absence of shared practice and collegiality in the present school, as implied by the participants. Andrea, for instance, assumed that “not everybody [was] interested in doing it” because there would be people “within the school that [didn’t] really understand what the point of it [was]...didn’t really care...just want[ed] to do their curriculum.” Despite being able to overcome any potential misunderstandings through professional development opportunities, the focus group generally believed that teachers would not support the initiative within the pretext of it being “a mammoth task” because of year level sizes, and therefore the organisation would be significant. Dean stated that the school [had] the resources and the teachers, but the teachers themselves were more likely to argue that they did not have the “time” for planning and development.

The researcher had observed that in this particular school there were a number of teachers who claimed that they had inadequate ‘time’ to complete tasks when they were introduced to something new or otherwise not used to. This signals that the teachers were content to ‘play it
safe’ within the rigid curriculum and school structures, and therefore oppose new curriculum initiatives that might shift the current structures and especially, oppose new initiatives that require extensive planning, organisation, creativity, vision, and so forth. Given that the researcher was a teacher in the present school, she therefore had previous knowledge about this and brought to the research this understanding. Thus, programs like CAP are increasingly difficult to integrate in a system where student and teacher numbers are large, where teachers are typically used to teaching in isolation and where collegiality is not typically practiced.

However, Andrea commented that CAP would “have a better impact if something [was] already there ready for staff to just pick up.” This expectation is generally what occurs in secondary schools that operate within business orientated structures (Sharan & Tan, 2008, p. 16). Uniformity is imposed on teachers including prescribed curriculum, specific outcomes, rigid teaching timetables, and rigorous reporting (Sharan & Tan, 2008, p. 86). Therefore, teachers in such a system are so accustomed to abiding by the structures that they are more likely to expect that new curriculum initiatives be developed and overseen by teachers in a position of leadership who provide everything they require for implementation without it encroaching on their ‘time’. This did often appear to be the case in the school in which this research was conducted. Again, this is an example of the researchers ‘insider’ knowledge and assumptions brought to the interpretation of the focus group perspectives.

Another distinguishing characteristic of a large secondary school has to do with the controls over department budgets. Each department is allocated a certain amount of money to spend on department resources and planning. Often the department Coordinator is given some control over the budget. Each department is given a different budget based on their staff numbers and the resources needed. Melinda spoke about the much needed money to resource CAP:
“These assignments cost money as we are employing people to either come to school or to accommodate the students to leave the school. There are transport costs [etc].” Andrea, the Humanities Coordinator, also spoke about funding CAP as a significant hindrance, “If we were given more funds to be able to do more of these community action programs….we’d get a lot more out of it and we’d do a lot more of them, because budgets are always restricted.”

Interestingly, the researcher did find it a challenge to meet the financial needs of some of the intended projects and had to ask several departments and administrative staff to release some of their department money to help fund CAP. The Humanities coordinator was herself reluctant to part with some of the money in her department budget to fund one of the CAP ideas, as was the Professional Development Coordinator. This sense of ownership that some department coordinators have with respect to department budgets in this particular secondary school was symbolic of the tensions between departments and senior administration. Decisions are made by senior administration on behalf of departments in regards to their allocated annual budgets and these budgets must be pre-set based on perceived departmental needs in the coming year. Department coordinators feel that they need to be rigid with the budget in order to make sensible use of the money allocated to their department, for when the budget has been used, there is a perception that it would not be topped up. This is the educated perception of the researcher as a teacher in the school in which the research took place.

The present research found that the particular ways in which budgets were distributed and structured, and the holds and ownership individual departments placed on department budgets in the current school, greatly encroached on the potential for each focus group participant to develop and elaborate the scope of CAP with the current learners. Because of budget restrictions, almost all the focus group participants had little choice but to bring in a guest speaker. On one
occasion the researcher had to negotiate with one of the guest speakers to provide the school with a discount. The researcher was able to affect this because she was a staff member in the current school at the time of research.

Utilising guest speakers was perhaps more financially feasible and helped with organisational matters; students were able to remain in their classrooms during their allotted timetabled periods; the activity did not encroach on many external resources, including additional teachers; and less planning was necessary as the focus group participants themselves did not have to become experts in the topic. Hiring guest speakers created limitations because they became the major focus instead of the actual community action.

All four projects fell short of their expected aims: to take action and set up action for continuous change. For CAP to be integrated, it would have to merge with the current secondary school structures (for instance, the rigid timetables, budgets, and the mindset of the teaching staff). These structures could impact on the integration of CAP.

Conclusion

The school in which this research took place was aware of the need to connect its members to each other, for example, through teacher teams, professional learning focus groups, department meetings, curriculum planning teams, and so forth. On the other hand, given the size of its staff and students, it would consider that it had no choice but to assume business-orientated structures (Sharan & Tan, 2008, p. 86) so that the school, as a whole, could function in an organised and stable fashion. The current school was well organised and tightly structured. However, based on the research findings, it does appear that the current organisational structures
in the school (and most likely many other Victorian Catholic secondary schools) were too rigid, and therefore discouraged creativity in the system. In a system that was not so rigid, CAP may already exist. For Cap to be successfully integrated, it would require subject-matter integration and team teaching (Sharan & Tan, 2008, p. 86). Flexible scheduling of classes and cooperative team work among staff would also feature as key ideals for CAP to be successfully integrated in a school. With these in place, CAP could be developed at a high standard and, potentially, achieve extraordinary outcomes. In a school system where there is explicit collegiality and community-orientated behaviour, productive learning is supported and new curriculum initiatives have a greater chance of success (Sharan & Tan, 2008, p 86).

The findings of this research have made clear that CAP is of great importance for the current learners and Catholic education. As presented in the Literature Review (Chapter Two) through their technologies the current learners’ relationship with ‘the world’ enters into large global networks and, therefore, have far reaching access to global ideas, knowledge and creativity (Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004, p. 2). The secondary school in which this research took place may need to consider embracing and taking advantage of this by integrating a social reconstructionist curriculum ideology. In this way, it may contribute to the current learners’ identity, the community and the globalised world. As the current learners do appear to be globally focused (McCrindle, 2012, para. 7), if not globally active, by overcoming some of the issues that limit CAP in a secondary school, CAP can be a strong initiative that provides many opportunities for the current learners. CAP clearly enhances their civic identity and therefore provides opportunities for social action. The literature confirms that the current learners have a degree of power and control over their cultural environment (Palfrey & Gasser, 2010, p. 6). Therefore, it is highly possible that, given guidance, the current learners are able to see ways in
which they can be socially active in both the physical and digital communities. If the current issues that came out of the research findings could be addressed, CAP is made possible.

This chapter has presented a detailed discussion of three key issues that emerged as a result of interpreting the focus group transcripts: the current learners are not socially active; structure of the curriculum, and structure of secondary schools. The following and final chapter presents a brief summary of the research findings and proposes some recommendations as a result of the study.
Chapter Six
Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers’ experience of applying CAP in the discipline of Humanities in a Victorian Catholic secondary school in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. Using a social reconstructionist curriculum framework, CAP was established to integrate further social justice and community outreach in the curriculum of the current school. The establishment of CAP was grounded on the contention that the current learners needed opulent curriculum opportunities in this area if they were to act in accordance with societal expectations as the generation who will take their civic responsibilities seriously and respond to local and global social justice issues.

Five Humanities teachers from a Catholic secondary school tested a theoretical procedure (based on the principles of the social reconstructionist curriculum philosophy) with the current learners in one of their Humanities classes, using an existing curriculum unit. The research was situated within a qualitative paradigm. The epistemology grounding the research was constructivism, drawing on symbolic interactionism as its theoretical perspective. The choice of methodology for this research was insider action research. Data was gathered by way of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a focus group of five participants. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and these texts were interpreted using theme analysis.

The emergence of the themes emanated from action research methodology. The data was approached with the intention to create new knowledge about the action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. xii & McKernan, 2000, p. 93). While a range of possible themes may have been evident in the interpretations of the interview data, this study has identified five major themes that
appeared consistent with the focus group participants, and these became the focus for discussion in this study. The five themes were:

- Theme 1: Experience and Engagement for the learners
- Theme 2: Perceptions about the current learners
- Theme 3: Reflections of curriculum leading to action
- Theme 4: Challenges integrating the CAP into the current school
- Theme 5: Integrating CAP into the current curriculum

The findings validated the need for CAP in the current secondary school, but they also identified factors that could hinder integrating the projects into the current curriculum and the current secondary school structures. As a result of the five major themes, three key issues were identified and critically analysed in Chapter five. These were:

- Issue 1: The current learners are not socially active.
- Issue 2: Structure of the curriculum
- Issue 3: Structure of Secondary Schools

The purpose of this final chapter is to present a brief summary of the research findings. It then proposes some recommendations as a result of the study, and suggests possibilities for further research. Finally, some of the limitations and delimitations of the research will be considered.
The findings established that the focus group participants believed CAP provided extensive (and transformative) learning experiences for some of the current learners. CAP afforded them opportunities to challenge and clarify their values, delve deeply into a topic to aid in understanding, and link learning to the community and the wider world. In addition, CAP enriched curriculum units, teacher-practice, and academic understandings for the learners. CAP further directed the current learners to social action, while, according to the focus group participants, the current curriculum had provided no opportunities for this.

The participants of the focus group found it particularly challenging to develop CAP so that it reflected the social reconstructionist curriculum more acutely. For this to have happened, CAP needed to be applied over a much longer period of time – time that was not available because of the teachers’ other curriculum, reporting and administrative responsibilities. In addition, the school in which the research took place had a very large cohort of staff and students. Therefore, participants remarked that if CAP was offered from years 7 to 10 the organisational load would be arduous and may affect many administrative and structural aspects of the school. It seems, however, that if some of the challenges were addressed, CAP could be incorporated into each year level and could be embedded in the school culture.

The research data revealed that current extracurricular activities within the school that provided opportunities for community outreach were not sufficient to make a difference to the response of the current learners towards issues of social justice. On the contrary, these extracurricular offerings unwittingly encouraged social inaction. Furthermore, the geographical location of the current learners could also be hindering them from forming broad perspectives about the wider community, and also possibly causing social inaction. Therefore, it appears all the more important to provide opportunities for social outreach explicitly and in an ongoing way.
within the curriculum. The focus group participants implied that the current curriculum did not always provide a transformative experience for the learners, and that engaging them in deep learning was often a challenge. This directly contrasts with the expected aims of CAP.

In the school in which the current research took place, there were specific administrative systems in place that could impact on the success of CAP. It was identified that some teachers in the school would prefer to uphold the traditional structures of the curriculum rather than support new curriculum pedagogies. This has largely to do with the many obstacles to the successful integration of CAP within current school structures.

**Recommendations**

For CAP to become an important curriculum component in the school in which this research took place and, more broadly, in Victorian Catholic secondary schools, based on the data and the analysis, the researcher identified four key recommendations and concludes by considering how these recommendations can be achieved in practice. The recommendations are as follows:

1. **It is recommended that opportunities for community outreach should be integrated into the mainstream curriculum.**

   For CAP to be an effective curriculum element in a secondary school it is recommended that it be integrated across several subject areas, from Year 7 to Year 10. The current learners should be given two opportunities a year to participate (once a semester) and the duration of the
project should last between six to eight weeks. In addition, the curriculum units in the school would need to be reviewed, and appropriate topics chosen to link with the philosophical underpinnings of CAP. It is recommended that the school review its assessment and reporting practices to allow for flexibility to integrate CAP successfully. The findings have revealed that if the current learners were to be given more exposure to extracurricular programs, and in addition to participation in CAP, it is possible that their responses to issues of social justice could be improved. It is, therefore, further recommended that the school continues to extend their extracurricular social justice programs and community outreach, in addition to providing CAP within the standard curriculum. Where appropriate, some of the current programs could merge with CAP.

2. **It is recommended that staff receive professional development pertaining to the social reconstructionist curriculum, community outreach and social justice.**

   It is recommended that it be the responsibility of the school to organise professional development experiences for all staff involved in CAP. The professional development should develop teacher’s knowledge and skills proficiencies pertaining to local and global social justice issues and community outreach, with an emphasis on facilitating meaningful action among the current learners. Further, professional development pertaining to the social reconstructionist curriculum philosophy and the process used for CAP should also be given priority.

3. **It is recommended that the current secondary school structures be more flexible in order to effectively integrate CAP into the curriculum.**
If CAP is to be an important curriculum element in the school, it is recommended that the school consider restructuring the timetable to make room for team teaching, to share teacher responsibilities, and to enhance teaching and learning practices. If it is not possible to team-teach, then provisions could be made in the teachers’ timetables to allow for meetings with two or more teachers to plan for CAP. When teachers are organising excursions or incursions for CAP, the administrative processes for approval need to be more efficient. Decision-making processes need to be streamlined so that decisions are made quickly and easily, and decision-makers with regards to CAP are able to work closely with the CAP coordinator and the subject teacher/s.

4. **It is recommended that there be a professional leadership position created for a CAP Coordinator to oversee the integration of the program.**

If secondary schools are serious about integrating CAP into the current curriculum, and serious about it performing well and having profound effects on the current learners and their communities, then it is highly recommended that a leadership position be created for an appropriate teacher to coordinate CAP. The coordinator would have to be given a generous time allowance and paid according to their level of leadership. The position could be given to the current Social Justice Coordinator, it could become a Deputy Principal position, or an entirely new role could be created. It is recommended that the person responsible for CAP should form a committee of teachers to help enrich the CAP curriculum. Of further consideration would be to release the teachers in the committee from formal teaching timetables. Their time would instead
be spent team-teaching with the classroom teachers when integrating CAP. For all of these recommendations to transpire, a substantial amount of money would need to be invested into the project. The school might consider sponsorship from Government, the Catholic Church, or Catholic Education in order to fund CAP in its first trial years.

**Limitations and delimitations of the research**

While the findings of the present study could be transferrable to international contexts, and while it could contribute significantly to international education, and secondary schools generally, the research was limited to one Catholic secondary school in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, in Victoria, Australia. It was also limited to five participants, four of whom facilitated CAP. The researcher selected teachers from a cross section of Humanities subjects, those teachers whose timetables also corresponded with the researchers timetable. At the time of research, there was only one Philosophy class and one Asian Studies class at year 10, which effectively limited the number of teachers for the focus group. This was a limitation because four projects were too small a number to be able to develop sufficient variation. The result was that the findings represented only a small sample of what could be achieved by CAP, and the projects were hindered in terms of the provision of lasting social justice benefits.

Further, the CAP trial was limited in that it was undertaken only in the Humanities discipline. Had the research also taken place in, for example, the Science discipline, this could have provided more variation in the kind of community projects that could have been achieved. It is in retrospect that the researcher of the present study is able to see clearly what kind of community projects could have taken place. At the time of the focus group briefings, the
researcher was not clear enough with the focus group about the potential that CAP had to offer the current learners and the community. Examples of a social reconstruction project were presented, however, these were not then used as effectively as they might have been, to influence the kind of CAP the focus group could have achieved. There were sometimes large gaps of time between the focus group meetings, due to organisational structures within the school calendar. The members of the focus group also had other curriculum responsibilities (and priorities) and therefore had a very limited timeframe in which to complete their projects. If the projects had been developed as suggested above, this would have required much more time for planning, more resources, including more teachers to assist, much more class time, teachers and nominated students to coordinate, more money to resource the projects, timetable freedom, and much more. Budget and administrative limitations greatly affected the social action component of CAP compared to community projects that have occurred using a social reconstruction curriculum. Further, the study only considered the perceptions of the teachers integrating CAP; the current learners’ response to CAP were through the perceptions and eyes of the teachers.

In this particular school, there were many limitations that encroached on these projects to meet all the aims of the social reconstructionist ideology. Despite not having met its full potential in this particular incidence, due to the limitations and challenges discussed in this paper, CAP has the potential to offer remarkable outcomes. Some of these outcomes have already been seen in the present research. Arguably these could have been extended further.

The current action research was beneficial to the school in which the research took place. It was beneficial to the Principal in that it can inform decisions about social justice, the curriculum, and cross check that the vision and mission of the Catholic school is being enacted. CAP is a practical way of bringing the expectations of the Catholic Church and Catholic
education to life. The research was also beneficial to those involved in the school’s curriculum. The insights gained from the teachers’ perspectives on the experience of integrating CAP into the curriculum can be drawn upon to advance the practice of social justice and community outreach in Catholic secondary schools and support the current learners in their social justice responsibilities. This research is also significant because it has the potential to inform the curriculum across all states in Australia and can also be integrated into public and private secondary schools. Therefore, this research could be used as a model for other schools to follow. Further, it has the potential to improve teaching and learning more generally, by providing a model that allows for the practical applications of the curriculum outside of the classroom setting.

This research is one of the first major studies to explore the teachers’ experience of applying CAP in the current curriculum of Catholic secondary schools. It is one of the first to focus specifically on the current learners and their educational requirements within a Humanities classroom. The research has applied existing knowledge about the current learners and about curriculum philosophies, but also produces knowledge upon which new knowledge could be built.

**Recommendations for further research**

While this study explored the perspective of the teachers involved in integrating CAP, another possible research direction could explore the perspective of the current learners (agency and voice). Such research could seek to determine how transformative the experience of CAP was for the learners, with a focus on academic results, development of skills, and the likelihood
of future commitment to social justice and community action. Another research direction could be to concentrate on the leadership and management of CAP in secondary schools in terms of revisiting school and curriculum structures.

Conclusion

From the perspectives of Humanities teachers in a secondary school, this study has identified and analysed their experience of applying CAP into the current humanities curriculum and in an existing humanities unit in one Catholic secondary school in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. The research findings generated insights into the way in which CAP can be integrated and the challenges that encroach on its integration and which could impinge on its success. Recommendations were made in light of the findings of the study with a view to seeing CAP as an integral curriculum element in the present school and other Catholic secondary schools in Australia. If this study assists secondary schools to integrate CAP, then this study would have made a significant contribution to Catholic education and the responsibilities schools have toward social justice and community action, and it would have made significant contribution to ongoing improvements to teaching practices and student learning. The findings of the present study are likely to produce lasting educational value for the school in which the research took place. The model of CAP, using a social reconstructionist curriculum framework, is also transferrable across all educational contexts, both within Australia and internationally.
Appendices
APPENDIX A

INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS


PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (or SUPERVISOR): Dr Brendan Hyde

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Mrs Marie Bagh

PROGRAMME IN WHICH ENROLLED: Master of Philosophy

Dear Colleague,

You are invited to participate in a Master of Philosophy research project to be conducted at during Semester 1, 2010. The purpose of this research is to find out how you feel about applying a pedagogical framework to the current Humanities curriculum to provide current students with opportunities for community learning and life-wide learning. This will involve participating in a Professional Learning Team (focus group) to discuss and implement opportunities for students to apply their academic learning into the community to essentially benefit others.

The method to be used in this study is a focus group where you as a participant will collaborate with the researcher and the other participants. Structured questions will be asked, and semi-formal discussions within the focus group will take place. The purpose of the interviews will be to find out your critical thoughts on the project; discuss its successes and weaknesses; and make recommendations for potential future projects.

Although the risks of this research for participants are minimal, there is the foreseeable risk of potentially disclosing your identity to members of the College other than the College Principle and the Professional Learning Coordinator (as your names for the Professional Learning Team may be published on the Colleges Professional Learning website). Also, the interviews will be conducted using audio recording and therefore may identify you as a participant.

Another potential risk to you could be a matter of inconvenience. This may include the inconvenience of having to attend extra meetings, and possibly the meetings going over time. This may put extra demands on your workloads and may result in you being unable to meet project deadlines. In the event that concern arises, together we will seek advice from the Professional Learning Coordinator of the College.

During the research you will be asked to participate in approximately five meetings (lasting approximately 1 hour) with the focus group over six months and a minimum of two individual brief meetings with the researcher during the course of the research. During the focus group meetings you will be required to answer formal questions provided by the researcher and be honest in your responses. You will also be required to assist the researcher in organising the community projects for the benefit of your students. Further, you will be required to follow the
guidelines as stipulated by the researcher to apply the curriculum framework appropriately within the classroom and when participating in the community project.

This research is an opportunity for you to participate in innovative professional learning and develop new ideas for curriculum pedagogy. Participating in this project will also provide opportunities to reflect on your professional practice, enhance your skills in curriculum planning, and can be used to meet the compulsory Victorian Institute of Teaching teacher requirements to meet the required hours for professional learning.

If the findings are positive, this research will encourage the school community to launch a similar project across the curriculum, thus, the school could be used as a model for other schools to develop similar projects. This will contribute to enhancing the professional standing of the school.

The learners will benefit from participating in a new and innovative project to enhance their learning and their skills. The community groups of whom we work with will benefit from support and assistance.

The possible outcome of this project is the likelihood that the researcher may promote the major findings of the project to the College involved and to other Catholic Secondary Schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. This may then encourage further innovative pedagogical practice and also support the Catholic Education Offices project on the ‘Contemporary Learning Schema’.

If you feel that you wish to refuse consent, it is not necessary to justify that decision. Further if at any time you wish to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the study, you may do this without providing a reason. Any withdrawal from the research will not prejudice your future employment in the School.

During the conduct of the research, confidentiality will be protected by avoiding using your names when taking notes, when recording the interviews, and when reporting on data. In the written report all efforts to minimise confidentiality will be achieved through providing the school and you (as participant) with codes/pseudonyms during the collection of data and the written analysis. After the analysis is completed, any written notes assisting the data will be shredded and the audio erased.

At any time during the research process any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Principal Supervisor:

Dr Brendan Hyde  
Phone: 9953 3296  
School: Australian Catholic University, St Patrick’s Campus  
Address: 115 Victoria Parade, Fitzroy, Locked Bag 4115, Fitzroy MDC, Fitzroy, VIC 3065.

Australian Catholic University Limited, ABN 15 050 192 660  
Melbourne Campus, 115 Victoria Parade, Fitzroy, Victoria 3065 Australia  
Locked Bag 4115 Fitzroy MDC, VIC 3065 Australia  
CRICOS registered provider: 00004G, 00112C, 00273F, 00885B
Or Student researcher:

Mrs Marie Bagh
Phone:
School:
Address:

Please be assured, that if you are interested, the researcher will be pleased to provide you with appropriate feedback on the results of the project.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University.

In the event that you have any complaints or concerns, or if you have any query that the investigator (Supervisor and Student Researcher) has not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee.

VIC: Chair, HREC
CI: Research Services
Australian Catholic University
Melbourne Campus
Locked Bag 4115
FITZROY VIC 3065
Tel: 03 9953 3158
Fax: 03 9953 3315

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the Principal Investigator (or Supervisor) or Student Researcher.

Dr Brendan Hyde
Principal Investigator (or Supervisor)

Mrs Marie Bagh
Student Researcher
CONSENT FORM
Copy for Participant to Keep


(NAME OF) PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (or SUPERVISOR): ..........................................................................................................................

(NAME OF) STUDENT RESEARCHER (if applicable): ..........................................................................................................................

I ....................................................................................................................... (the participant) have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this focus group and support the researcher to coordinate the community projects for my students. I further accept being audio taped during the focus group meetings. I realise that I can withdraw my consent at any time (without adverse consequences). I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ..........................................................................................................................

SIGNATURE ............................................................................................................ DATE ...................................................

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (or SUPERVISOR): ..........................................................................................................................

DATE: ...................................................

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: ..........................................................................................................................

DATE: ...................................................
In reply please quote:

GE10/0009
1582
19 March 2010

Mrs M Bagh
11 Buckland Crescent
EPPING VIC 3076

Dear Mrs Bagh

I am writing with regard to your research application received on 17 March 2010 concerning your forthcoming project titled 'Action that matters: A qualitative study to investigate how secondary school teachers feel about applying community action projects in the discipline of Humanities in a Catholic secondary school'. You have asked approval to approach a Catholic school in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, as you wish to involve teachers there.

I am pleased to advise that your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the seven standard conditions outlined below. Additionally, I ask that you forward to this Office a copy of the notification of approval from the University's Ethics Committee when it becomes available.

1. The decision as to whether or not research can proceed in a school rests with the school's principal, so you will need to obtain approval directly from the principal of the school that you wish to involve.

2. You should provide the principal with an outline of your research proposal and indicate what will be asked of the school. A copy of this letter of approval, and a copy of notification of approval from the university's Ethics Committee, should also be provided.

3. A Working with Children (WWC) check – or registration with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) – is necessary for all researchers visiting schools.

4. Any substantial modifications to the research proposal, or additional research involving use of the data collected, will require a further research approval submission to this Office.

5. Data relating to individuals or the school are to remain confidential.

6. Since participating schools have an interest in research findings, you should consider ways in which the results of the study could be made available for the benefit of the school community.
7. At the conclusion of the study, a copy or summary of the research findings should be forwarded to this Office. It would be appreciated if you could submit your report in an electronic format using the email address provided below.

I wish you well with your research study. If you have any queries concerning this matter, please contact Mr Mark McCarthy of this Office.

The email address is ~km@cornell.catholic.edu.au~.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Nancy Bocchieri
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
Dear

As you are aware I am currently in the second year of a Master of Philosophy with the aim to complete it by early 2011. The Masters will be completed by thesis and will explore the topic: 'Action that matters: A qualitative study to investigate how secondary school teachers feel about applying community action projects in the discipline of humanities in a Catholic Secondary School.' The choice of methodology for this research is action research and I would like to choose a Focus group of five teachers within the humanities area of to take part in the project. These will include two Year 8 History teachers, one Year 10 Philosophy teacher, one Year 10 Political Studies teacher, and the Humanities Faculty Coordinator. The focus group will be part of an attempt to trial a theoretical procedure with their current students and then rely on in depth analysis of qualitative data to uncover the projects successes and weaknesses.

Through the Colleges Professional Learning Coordinator I will set this focus group up as an official Professional Learning Team in Semester 1, 2010 and therefore the meetings will take place during scheduled meeting times (according to the College meeting schedule). On occasion, I may need to meet with individual group members during my scheduled days off; however, as this is connected to my research, I will not ask to be paid, nor will I use this to accumulate time in lieu.

The teachers participating in this research will benefit from an opportunity to participate in innovative professional learning and develop new ideas for curriculum pedagogy. Their participation in this project will provide them with opportunities to reflect on their professional practice, enhance their skills in curriculum planning, and will assist them to meet the compulsory Victorian Institute of Teaching teacher requirements to meet the required hours of Professional Learning.

It is anticipated that the school will also benefit from the recommendations made in the final report. If successful, the College may consider participating in an official project called 'Action the Matters' and use it as a scaffold for other Catholic schools to implement. Hence, the professional standing of the school and staff will be enhanced. This research project also links to a Catholic Education Office project: 'The Contemporary Learning Schema' whereby there is more of an emphasis on the learner in the contemporary world as being an active citizen in the community. This ‘Learning Schema’ has been trialled in Catholic Primary schools, but as far as I am aware, only limited study has been conducted within Catholic Secondary Schools. If this project is implemented, therefore, it could put the College further in front of contemporary curriculum.

The demands on the staff involved in the focus group are minimal. They will be required to attend a total of five Professional Learning Team meetings over a period of six months. It is anticipated that each of these meetings would last for about an hour. Further, I may need to meet with the participants for one-on-one informal discussion/interview about the progress of
their project. Further, as this project requires the teachers to take the learners away from the school for one or two days in term two, then this may place extra demands on daily organizers of the College to cover the classes the participating teachers may leave for the day.

The only foreseeable risks while conducting the research is perhaps the inconvenience for participants attending extra meetings; and the possibility of not being able to meet project deadlines due to teaching loads. In the event that any of these foreseeable risks become apparent, then the researcher will discuss the matter with the participant at risk and further take advice from the Professional Learning Coordinator of the College.

The financial demands on the school will be minimal. We may need to use, for example, the schools bus, however, where public transport is involved, students will be asked to pay for their own train ticket and provide their own food for the day. If I foresee higher financial demands placed on the school during the research, it will be discussed in detail with you and the Professional Learning Coordinator of the College. However, please note that myself and the focus group will attempt to keep financial costs to an absolute minimum.

During the interviews and the written analysis, names and other identifiers of the teachers and the school will be removed and codes/pseudonyms will be used. Therefore, there is little to no risk of breaching confidentiality.

This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Australian Catholic University.

I look forward to hearing from you and will provide you with a copy of the completed Thesis.

Sincerely,

Mrs Marie Bagh

Teacher,
St Monica's College Epping

Dr Brendan Hyde

Principal Supervisor
Lecturer, School of Religious Education, Australian Catholic University
APPENDIX D

Human Research Ethics Committee

Committee Approval Form

Principal Investigator/Supervisor: BRHYDE Melbourne Campus
Co-Investigators: Melbourne Campus
Student Researcher: Marie Bagh Melbourne Campus

Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:
'Action that matters': A qualitative study to investigate how secondary school teachers feel about applying community action projects in the discipline of humanities in a Catholic Secondary School.

for the period: 13.04.10 - 15.10.10
Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number: V2010.28

The following standard conditions as stipulated in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (2007) apply:

(i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
- security of records
- compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
- compliance with special conditions, and

(ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
- proposed changes to the protocol
- unforeseen circumstances or events
- adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than low risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of negligible risk and low risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a Final Report Form and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an Annual Progress Report Form and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

Signed: ......................................................... Date: ......... 13.04.2010
(Research Services Officer, Melbourne Campus)
Bibliography


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