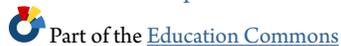Theses

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Perceptions of leaders, teachers, students and parents in high performing West Australian Catholic secondary schools within the context of tertiary entrance examinations

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate leaders', teachers', students' and parents' perceptions of successful Catholic secondary schools in the context of the tertiary entrance examinations in Western Australia. An overview of the study and an outline of its purpose, significance, context and overall structure is provided in this chapter.

1.2   Overview

Tertiary entrance examinations are significant. Each year, in most states of Australia, much attention is given to data surrounding the performance of students, teachers and schools in high stakes tertiary entrance examinations as students seek to qualify for a variety of programs in Universities. On an annual basis, so called 'league tables' are produced measuring schools on a number of criteria which differ marginally from state to state. Such tables place a spotlight on both successful and less successful schools. Notwithstanding the limitations of such comparisons (Rowe, 2000) and the fact that 'success' is a relative term, there is a great deal of interest in the factors that contribute to the attainment of success in the tertiary examination context.

In a climate of heightened accountability, Mulford and Silins (2011), show that education systems in Australia are increasingly focusing significant resources on working with schools that are not achieving as well as they might in external testing regimes such as tertiary entrance examinations and the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). In particular, analysts are focusing on the socio-economic background of school cohorts in an attempt to compare the performance of 'like' schools. The standard metric used to make such comparisons in Australia is the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) developed by the Australian Curriculum Assessment Reporting Authority (ACARA).

1.3   Purpose

This study sought to examine the factors attributed to the success of nine selected secondary schools in the Catholic education system of Western Australia (WA) who had consistently outperformed other 'like' schools in the context of the state tertiary entrance

examinations over a sustained period of time. The purpose of the study was fourfold: firstly, to identify characteristics of leaders in schools that had been identified as 'successful'; secondly, to identify characteristics of teaching that had resulted in high achievement in the tertiary entrance examinations; thirdly, to identify the characteristics of the student contribution to their schools' success and finally, to identify the contribution and perceptions of parents in the selected high performing schools.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2008) report, *Improving School Leadership Vol. 1*, noted that school leadership contributes to improved student learning. Research on school leadership effects has revealed a number of leadership roles and responsibilities that are particularly conducive to student learning. These have been identified as shaping the conditions and climate in which learning occurs, supporting and developing teacher quality; defining goals and measuring progress; and engaging with external partners (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Robinson, 2007; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003). This study seeks to build on this body of research examining perceptions of identified executive leaders, both principals and deputy principals.

Heads of Departments (HODS) in secondary schools play a pivotal role in the design and implementation of curriculum. HODS sit in a space between deputy principals and teachers in middle management roles and it is argued they have the capacity to be highly influential leaders in their own right (Brown, Rutherford, & Boyle, 2000; Dinham, 2007; Harris, 1995, 1998, 2000; White, 2001). The current study seeks to broaden the investigation of the role of leaders by including HODS as a key focus within the definition of leadership.

The literature (Dinham 2007, 2008; Hattie, 2003, 2009, 2012; Marzano, 2003; Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010) has definitively argued that the greatest effect on student achievement is the quality of the teacher and teaching students receive. Dinham's study of teachers and leaders in New South Wales (NSW) secondary schools which had very strong Higher School Certificate (HSC) results in 1999, found that school culture; faculty teams; teachers' personal knowledge and relationships with students; teachers' engagement with professional development; and the teaching strategies they adopted, all contributed greatly to student success. The widely publicised McKinsey report, *How the World's Best Performing Systems Came out on Top* (Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2007) found that "the quality of an education

system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers' and that 'the only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction" (p. 13). The current study therefore seeks to investigate the instructional strategies of teachers in high performing schools in the context of tertiary entrance examinations. In doing so, the researcher wishes to ascertain what are the necessary foundational conditions for high performance teaching in this context.

The third element of the current study addresses the role of students in their schools' high academic performance when measured against 'like' schools. The research seeks to clarify the perceptions of students concerning their own learning and high achievement, focusing on the influence of the peer culture, teaching strategies that students found motivating and effective and the influence of leaders in their schools. The study also investigates the perceptions of students concerning the role of their parents in relation to their academic achievement.

There is a significant body of research that has argued students are capable of insightful reflections concerning their experiences of learning in the classroom (Beresford, 2003; Flutter, 2006; Pedder and McIntyre, 2006; Robinson and Taylor, 2007; Ruddock, 2006; Watts and Youens, 2007). As such, the current study seeks to give voice to student perceptions concerning the role of leaders, teachers, peers and parents in their high academic performance. The students who were generally recent graduates of their schools were in a unique position to reflect on both immediate experiences of the preceding year and experiences leading up to their final year of schooling.

The final element of the study, concerns the role and perceptions of parents in the nine schools under investigation. The literature suggests that the role of parents has a powerful influence on student academic achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Epstein, 2009, 2010; Jensen, 2011; Jeynes, 2007; Pelco and Ries, 1999; Spera, Wentzel & Matto, 2008; Stewart, 2008). Hong and Ho, (2007), and Hattie, (2009), argued that parents' aspirations and expectations were a strong influence on students' achievement. Jensen (2011a) also noted that parental feedback affords a very important stakeholder voice in the appraisal of schools and teachers.

Parental insights may have the capacity to better inform and nurture the partnership between home and school. Ewington and Macpherson (1998) argued that a common feature from the research on effective schools showed that when parents and staff share a sense of direction the schools' academic performance improves. The present study will seek to ascertain whether there is evidence to support this view.

1.4   Context of the Research

1.4.1   Accountability

As systems and schools are required to respond to the call for greater accountability, reflective practice and give attention to whole school improvement (Caldwell, 1998, 2006; CEOWA, 2009; Canavan, 2003; Dinham, 2008; OECD, 2008; Timperley, 2007, 2010; Turkington, 2009), schools are increasingly seeking an evidence base from which they can develop strategies that support quality teaching and which may in turn improve student achievement.

In Australia and internationally, both in the United States and the United Kingdom, tools are consistently sought to measure quality teaching and school effectiveness. In most cases, the tools used are externally standardised tests. These instruments are the subject of constant criticism because they are inevitably narrow in their scope, often focusing only on literacy and numeracy and very often, particularly in the United States, they are designed only as multiple choice test instruments (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Such tests are also criticised because they do not encourage higher order thinking skills of synthesis and analysis and more often than not they are 'snapshots' of learning, a measure of performance at one particular point in time. The use of such measures creates two major problems in the eyes of their critics; they narrow the curriculum and create a 'teach to the test' mentality (Darling-Hammond, 2010). These tests also allow such data to be used to rank schools, sometimes unfairly, and as has been seen in the United Kingdom, so punish underperformers, (Caldwell, 2010; Cervini, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2011a).

Conversely, there are those who propose that there is some merit in the development of external measures that allow comparison of student performance between schools and that such measures should be reported publicly and transparently. When schools are underperforming, steps need to be taken by schools

and systems to analyse the data and move towards improvement. Removing external measures and the reporting of performance completely, may actually hamper students' performance, (Burgess, 2011; Hawkes, 2010; Jensen, 2011a). Burgess (2011), for example, found in a comparative study of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) outcomes between Welsh students and English students, that when the Welsh Assembly government abolished the publication of schools performance data or 'league tables' in 2001, there was a significant deterioration in the (GCSE) performance in Wales. "The effect is sizable and statistically significant. It amounts to around two GCSE grades per pupil per year – that is, achieving a grade D rather than a grade of B in one subject" (p. 1).

Further, Burgess (2011) noted the recent PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results run by the OECD, show Wales dropping further behind England since students were last tested in 2006, scoring worse in each of reading, science and mathematics. He thus argued that there is a causal effect produced by the abolition of public reporting of data, and that "public scrutiny of schools' performance discourages teachers and schools from coasting" (p. 1).

Similarly Hawkes (2010), in his commentary on the implementation of the My School website in Australia, stated that:

> Very few people like the shadow of accountability falling over them, but experience shows those who shun accountability often have something to hide. Schools need to be transparent. They need to give the Government and the public an indication of how well they are using taxpayers' money.... After tomorrow, half of the school principals in Australia will be "under the hammer" because half may well be seen to be underperforming relative to "like schools". This is an uncomfortable place to be, but perhaps it is a necessary place. (p. 1)

Jensen's (2011b) position provides a moderate perspective. He suggests that the community has a right to data but that it should be fair, accurate and comprehensive, in order to better measure student performance. He also contends that it is unlikely that we can judge performance using a single quantitative measure and that while qualitative data may not necessarily be suitable for standardisation it will complement quantitative data and help drive school performance.

The present study does not seek to analyse the advantages or disadvantages of external standardised testing. It recognises the reality of their existence and argues that some tests such as tertiary entrance examinations, PISA and TIMMS are significant in

that they purport to assess deep content knowledge and higher order thinking skills. This study focuses on one school system in Western Australia, namely, the Catholic system and its high performing secondary schools in the tertiary examination context. The Catholic system was chosen because of the detailed comparative analysis the system conducts on the performance of 'like' schools in the context of tertiary exam performance. This analysis provided the researcher with detailed data that informed selection of schools for the purposive sample.

1.4.2 The System

The Catholic Education system in Western Australia provides education for more than 73,000 young people in 158 schools across the State. Over 5,500 teachers work in the sector. With a focus on the development of the whole person - intellectual, spiritual, social, physical and emotional - Catholic Education is the State's second largest compulsory education provider, educating some 18% of all school-aged children in Western Australia, (CEOWA, 2013). Unlike any other state in Australia, Catholic schools in Western Australia are united as a system, with the four dioceses – Perth, Bunbury, Geraldton and Broome – all collaborating to provide similar curriculum approaches within West Australia, informed by national government guidelines and regulations (CEOWA, 2013). From a geographical perspective Western Australia is the largest state in the nation, covering one third of the continent and spanning 2.5 million kilometres. The state has a population of 2.5 million people (10% of the nation).

1.4.3 Measuring Successful Schools

The CEOWA has compiled longitudinal data measuring median Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) scores across schools in the system since 2004. The ATAR is a rank that allows the comparison of students who have completed different combinations of tertiary entrance courses across the nation in differing state jurisdictions. The ATAR is calculated solely for use by universities to rank and select school leavers for admission to tertiary courses across Australia.

Tables ranking schools have been produced in this State, as in other parts of Australia (and internationally) to rank student and school performance. Performance tables have for a considerable time been a standard measure of comparison for media commentary in Western Australia (Hiatt, 2013; Johnson, 2010). Often, crude measures of comparison are published in the media taking no account of significant contextual

factors that provide points of difference between schools that might account for variation in performance. Tomazin (2007) in a report in *The Age* newspaper in Melbourne, Victoria summed up the concerns of a number of labor premiers:

> …the premiers have stopped short of adopting an earlier suggestion by federal Labor to have so-called "league tables" comparing school performance, warning that "making comparisons among schools is not straight forward…(and) can be misleading since it takes no account of differences in school circumstances or student cohort. (p. 3)

Rowe (2000) had earlier expressed similar concerns when he argued that:

> Indicators should provide information that allow for fair comparisons. Indicators strongly affected by extrinsic contextual factors (such as student intake characteristics) should not be used unless adjustments are made for these characteristics. For example school rankings based solely on 'raw examination scores' should not be used. (p. 85)

It therefore behoves school systems to ensure that when comparisons are made in order to drive school improvement, that 'like' schools are compared.

In an attempt to overcome such crude comparison, the Catholic Education Office of WA (CEOWA) has created a tool identified as a 'value added index'. All schools in Western Australia and Australia are ranked on the one common measure, the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA). This measure was designed by psychometricians at the Australian Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and defined thus:

> The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is a scale that enables meaningful comparisons to be made across schools. It has been developed specifically for the *My School* website for the purpose of identifying schools serving similar student populations. The variables used in calculating a value on the ICSEA scale include student-level data on the occupation and education level of parents/carers, and/or socio-economic characteristics of the areas where students live, whether a school is in a metropolitan, regional or remote area, proportion of students from a language background other than English, as well as the proportion of Indigenous students enrolled at the school. (ACARA, 2011)

The CEOWA examines a school's individual ICSEA figure for a given year. From this data it then selects schools with similar ICSEA figures and derives a median ATAR for all schools with that similar socio-economic background. This median ATAR is then an expected minimum attainment a school should target. It is argued that this measure is fair and equitable.

The Western Australian measure is comprehensive because the final ATAR score is based on the study of 4 or 5 tertiary entrance examination subjects. To ensure that breadth and depth are achieved at least one subject must be a science or a mathematics subject and at least one subject must be from the social sciences. The study of English or English Literature is also compulsory to satisfy English language competence. The final mark includes a broad range of continuous assessment tasks completed during the Year 12 school year. These tasks include performance tasks, research projects, extended answers and investigations in science and mathematics. A rigorous process of school moderation overseen by the School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA) ensures comparability of results submitted by each school. Schools submit a mark out of 100 for each student in each subject studied, reflecting the school-based assessment for the year in that subject. Students also receive a mark out of 100 for the external examination in that subject. Both marks are statistically standardised and moderated. For a detailed description of how the final combined mark is arrived at see the School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA) website:

http://www.scsa.wa.edu.au/internet/Senior_Secondary/WACE_Examinations/Your_Marks (2013).

For a detailed description of the scaling process used by the Tertiary Institutions Service Centre of Western Australia see www.tisc.edu.au . Figure 1.1 below (SCSA, 2013) provides a graphic of the process outlined above.
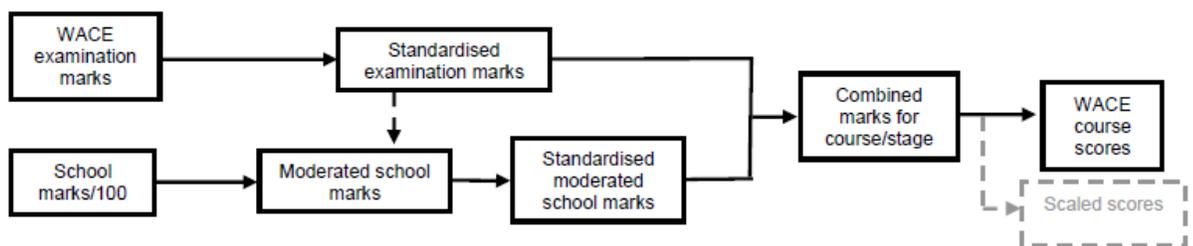

Figure 1.1. Marks adjustment process.

The other criticism, so often levelled at many measures used to rank and standardise student performance is the instrument itself. In the United States in particular as Darling-Hammond (2011a) noted, multiple choice objective tests are predominantly used to measure numeracy and literacy in state responses to the *No*

Child Left Behind policy. External tests for University entry like the SAT Reasoning Test, formerly the Scholastic Aptitude Test which measures critical reading, writing and mathematics are predominantly multiple choice. In comparison with these approaches Darling-Hammond (2011 b) examined three high performing countries, Finland, South Korea and Singapore in order to determine what lessons one might learn from others and see what steps the United States might take to improve its International ranking on the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Darling-Hammond argued:

> None of these nations was succeeding in the 1970's, when the United States was the unquestioned leader in the world. All created productive teaching and learning systems by expanding access while investing purposely in ambitious educational goals using strategic approaches to build capacity. (2011b, p. 21)

Darling-Hammond suggested that Finland, South Korea and Singapore have now all become leading performers, while on 2009 PISA data the United States languished in comparison, 31st in Mathematics and 23rd in Science. She found that in all three countries there was an emphasis on, among other things, "national standards and a core curriculum that focused on higher order thinking, inquiry and problem solving through rigorous academic content" (Darling-Hammond, 2011b, p. 21). All three countries "use assessments that require in-depth knowledge of content and higher order skills…..All three countries have matriculation exams for admission to college…These exams have open ended questions that require deep content knowledge, critical analysis and writing" (Darling-Hammond, 2011b, p. 21).

It is useful to apply Darling-Hammond's observations concerning university entry exams in Finland, South Korea and Singapore to the West Australian context. The West Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) exams are rigorous, predominantly a two or three hour examination, with rich open ended questions, requiring higher order thinking skills of synthesis and analysis. A majority of the examinations require short answer and essay responses. Multiple choice items are not weighted heavily if and when used. The WACE examinations are instruments that also pass the test of another of Darling-Hammond's concerns, that is, the involvement of teachers in the preparation of the external examinations. Teacher involvement in the writing of external examinations is a highly regarded professional development experience. As Darling-Hammond indicated,

In many high performing countries, teacher involvement, as seen currently in Australia's state assessment systems, in designing and scoring moderated assessments is one of the things that allows them to teach effectively, to understand what high quality student work is and how to produce it (Darling–Hammond, 2011a).

In WA, classroom teachers form the membership of examination panels which write the external matriculation exams. Classroom teachers also form the great majority of markers who assess student performance. As such, teachers have the opportunity to gain valuable experience constructing external assessment items and then utilising that knowledge in their own classrooms and applying their understanding of external standards in the assessment of their students' work.

On the basis of the evidence presented, it is argued that the instrument and process used to assess school and teacher performance in this study is a valid one. The instrument is fair, comparing 'like' schools with 'like' schools. It is accurate, utilising an ATAR score which has been subjected to a high degree of statistical validity. The process is comprehensive, in that the score is derived from a combination of continuous assessment carried out in schools on varied, rich assessment types as well as an external examination, which is written by teachers, and assessed by teachers.

The nine schools that were chosen for their high 'value-added' performance, that is over and above the predicted median ATAR of schools with a similar ICSEA, were also schools that ranged from the lowest socio-economic background to the highest socio-economic background in the system. Selection was also determined by sustained high performance over a five year period. The schools included two boys' schools and two girls' schools, five co-educational schools and one regional school (co-educational) 200 kilometres outside of the metropolitan area. In total they represented 25% of the secondary schools within the system. As such, it is argued that they were broadly representative of the system.

The CEOWA uses data on school performance in the tertiary entrance examinations to identify schools that perform well, that is, gain strong 'value added' figures as defined by a school's ability to achieve higher than their predicted score, as indicated earlier. The CEOWA then uses this information to acknowledge school performance, celebrating their success in public forums. In addition, schools that have underperformed, according to their predicted figure based on their ICSEA, are

supported via the provision of increased resources. Within the Catholic secondary school system of WA, there has never been a formal study of the characteristics of high performing schools in the context of the tertiary entrance examinations. As such, the present study fills this void.

This study sets out to do on a micro level what some analysts do on a macro level, when they ask what can we learn from high performing countries like Finland, South Korea and Singapore? Far too often systems spend an inordinate amount of time working with underperforming schools relying on evidence from the broader literature at the national and international level. In the worse scenarios, their performance is pathologized. Avoiding a deficit model, this study seeks to explore the characteristics of the healthiest schools in the one system, to learn from their practices and to hear the stories of their success.

It is important that school performance is measured by more than one single metric to discover the factors of their success. Affective outcomes such as relationships between staff, between teachers and students and between the school and the parent body play a key role in student and school performance, as does students' social and emotional wellbeing (Adler, 1935; ARACY, 2013; Beatty & Brew, 2005; Dinham, 2008; Fullan, 2008; Hattie, 2003, 2009, 2012; Scott, 2011; Seligman, 2011). The present study seeks to ascertain the prevalence of such affective outcomes and their impact on student achievement.

1.5   Process of data collection

In order to outline the process involved in gathering the data, it is useful to detail a scope and sequence of the steps. The first step of the process entailed identifying schools that met the rigorous criteria for performance described earlier, namely, they were schools that performed above expectations based on their ICSEA background and they had performed consistently well over a number of years. Secondly, from that original group of high performing schools a purposive sample deemed to be broadly representative of the system was chosen. This included single-sex, schools, co-educational, regional and metropolitan, totalling nine schools. Thirdly, in order to inform the development of interview questions for the qualitative interpretivist research,

descriptive statistics were obtained from the administration of a Likert type scale administered to over 450 teachers across the nine schools. The responses to these items concerning favoured strategies of teaching, perceptions concerning the culture of the school and teachers' views about the leadership within the school helped frame the interview questions for the semi-structured interviews. Fourthly, individual semi-structured interviews were carried out with principals and deputy principals in each school. Semi-structured focus group interviews were also conducted with heads of academic departments, teachers, parents and students in each school. The rationale for utilising focus groups in an interpretative phenomenological study is provided in the research methods chapter.

1.6   Research Questions

The main research question framing the study was:

What are the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding the success of their schools in the tertiary examination context?

Four sub-questions explored the perceptions of key stakeholder groups: leaders, teachers, students and parents:

- What are the perceptions of leaders concerning their role, and the role of teachers, students and parents in the success of their school in the tertiary examination context?

- What are the perceptions of teachers concerning their role, and the role of leaders, students and parents in the success of their school in the tertiary examination context?

- What are the perceptions of students concerning their role, and the role of leaders, teachers and parents in the success of their school in the tertiary examination context?

- What are the perceptions of parents concerning their role, and the role of leaders, teachers and students in the success of their child's school in the tertiary examination context?

1.7   Potential Significance

This research is arguably significant as it will complement the work done by the CEOWA in its analysis of annual data on schools' performance in university entrance examinations. As other Western Australian systems and sectors also do similar analytical work on their schools' performance, the research has significance for the broader Western Australian educational community. The CEOWA has always sought to identify schools that perform well, that is, gain strong 'value added' figures and acknowledge their performance. In addition, schools that have underperformed according to their predicted figure based on their ICSEA are supported to help them improve. Within the Catholic secondary school system of WA there has never been a formal study of the characteristics of high performing schools in this context. This study has enabled the collection of qualitative data that will provide the CEOWA with empirical evidence about what it is that these schools do to achieve such high results. Essentially, the study portrays what is inherently evident in the teaching practice, leadership and culture of these schools that enables them to achieve results higher than their 'predicted' performance. The study also has the capacity to disseminate its findings so that schools that are underperforming can learn from the practice of those that have achieved extraordinarily well, building capacity for whole school and systemic improvement.

Above all else, this study provides a multidimensional perspective that connects many of the pieces in the jigsaw of high performing schools. Its capacity to portray how each of the major characters; leaders, teachers, students and parents act out their part in the drama and endeavour of high performing schools may provide unique insights. The study seeks to describe the 'alignment', 'connectedness' or 'interconnectedness' between effective teachers and their leadership, between effective teachers and their school's culture and most profoundly, the connection between effective teachers and their students. Walker (2011) described the need for school leadership to be seen as "connective activity" (p. 3). In a rich metaphor likening schools to the human body and

applying an analysis based in the theory of reflexology, he described what he called three connective pathways in schools:

(1) Cultural connectors – the values, beliefs, norms and assumptions which form a shared school collective.
(2) Structural connectors – the formal, physical structures which form the school as an organization.
(3) Relational connectors – how people relate to each other personally, and work with each other – their humanity. (p. 9)

It will become evident that in a number of ways his observations about schools have much relevance to this study. The deliberate choice of a qualitative methodology allows the researcher to both see and represent these connections clearly.

1.8   Rationale for the Chosen Methodology

This study seeks to describe the 'gestalt' of effective schools, an organized whole that is perceived as more than the sum of its parts, and therefore a qualitative methodological approach has been chosen. Denzen and Lincoln (2003) define qualitative research as "a situated activity that locates observers in the real world. Such research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible" (p. 4). A study that sets out to 'make visible' the practice of successful school leaders and teachers in the real world of their schools and classrooms is aptly suited to a qualitative approach. Within a qualitative epistemology there can be a number of theoretical perspectives that a qualitative researcher may employ (Crotty, 2010). Because of the researcher's familiarity with the system of schools under study and the fact that he had held a number of roles within that system he was conscious that he might be prone to impose a particular interpretation on participants' views and thus needed to give careful thought to the choice of a theoretical perspective.

A phenomenological theoretical perspective enables the researcher to see how the events he or she seeks to describe are perceived and experienced as well as acknowledging that reflexivity, "an explicit evaluation of the self" (Shaw, 2010, p. 234), is a necessity. As Shaw noted, reflexivity evokes an interpretivist ontology thus an interpretivist phenomenological analysis has been chosen as the preferred

methodology for the current study. A more detailed description of this method is presented in chapter three.

Having introduced the purpose, context and significance of this study and justified the efficacy of the process used to select successful schools, it is now important to outline its structure.

1.9 Structure of the Thesis

Table 1.1

Overview of the Thesis Structure

Chapter 1	Introduction
Chapter 2	Review of the Literature
Chapter 3	Methodology
Chapter 4	Findings and Discussion: Leaders
Chapter 5	Findings and Discussion: Teachers
Chapter 6	Findings and Discussion: Students
Chapter 7	Findings and Discussion: Parents
Chapter 8	Conclusions, Recommendations and Future Directions

Chapter 1 introduces the topic under investigation, detailing its purpose, context, potential significance, the process of data collection, research questions and reason for the choice of methodology. It also serves to introduce the overall structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2 outlines the conceptual framework in relation to the literature on leadership in schools, school and teacher effectiveness, influence of the student cohort on academic achievement and the influence of parents on student achievement. Specific topics explored through the literature are the role of leaders in effective and improving schools, models of leadership, characteristics of effective teachers, the

influence of students and their peers on academic achievement, student motivation, personalisation and wellbeing, the student voice, parent-school relationships, relational trust, parental involvement and student academic achievement and teachers and family-school partnerships. The areas of literature are closely aligned to the four key research questions as portrayed in *Figure 2.1*.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology that was employed to gather the data and address the research questions. A framework is provided detailing the interpretivist theoretical perspective and the phenomenological lens employed in the study. The methods used to collect data are outlined, specifically, a Likert-type survey which informed the construction of semi-structured interview questions employed to interview individuals and focus groups. A description of the method of sampling and interview protocols is provided.

Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 are each provided as combined findings and discussion chapters. Each chapter presents the findings and discussion related to one of the four specific research questions and the literature specific to that area. Chapter four addresses the findings and discussion related to the perceptions of leaders, concerning their role, and the role of teachers, students and parents in the success of their school in the tertiary examination context. Chapter 5 addresses the findings and discussion related to the perceptions of teachers, concerning their role, and the role of leaders, students and parents in the success of their school in the tertiary examination context. Chapter 6 addresses the findings and discussion related to the perceptions of students, concerning their role, and the role of leaders, teachers and parents in the success of their school in the tertiary examination context. Chapter 7 addresses the findings and discussion related to the perceptions of parents, concerning their role, and the role of leaders, teachers and students in the success of their child's school in the tertiary examination context. These chapters collectively seek to provide an answer to the major research question: *What are the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding the success of their schools in the tertiary examination context?* In doing so, they also provide triangulation of data as each stakeholder is required to reflect on the role of each other.

Chapter 8, provides overarching conclusions and recommendations. This is an attempt to provide a summative narrative or "writing up", as Smith and Osborne (2008) put it, "the meanings inherent in the experiences of the participants" (p. 76).

Recommendations developed from the study are provided for the profession. This chapter also acknowledges opportunities for further inquiry arising out of the research project.