A Case Study of Teacher Roles
in Engaging with Student Aspirations

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Master of Arts (English – Literature); Graduate Diploma (Secondary Education)

This thesis is submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education

Federation University, Australia

Submitted in December 2019

Abstract

        This thesis investigated the complex role teachers play, both formally and informally, in relation to engaging and supporting student aspirations. Due to the links that have been established between aspirations and school completion and involvement in tertiary education, aspirations are important in an educational context. Yet, despite the abundance of aspiration related research, most has focused on student or parent perspectives, with few scholars targeting teacher perceptions of their roles in relation to student aspirations. This research is therefore significant as it addresses this gap through a single case study investigating perceptions of P-12 teachers from a peri-urban independent school in Victoria, Australia. Data were collected from 57 teachers via survey, interviews, and school document analysis. A lens of research-as-bricoleur, incorporating the theoretical frameworks of Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1994), Turner (2001), Gottfredson (1981, 1996), and Patton and McMahon (2015), provided the interpretative basis for the applied thematic analysis of the different data sets. Findings demonstrated differences in the way that teachers conceptualised their role in engaging with student aspirations. While teacher participants identified various formal and informal roles that they played in relation to engaging student aspirations, they also reported a lack of clear guidance or guidelines, necessitating the development of personal processes to direct their involvement. Other important findings highlighted a number of factors that teacher participants perceived as facilitating or impeding possible roles they could play in engaging student aspirations. The understandings emanating from this research provide substantive assistance to stakeholders, including school administrators and teacher educators, in appreciating and appropriately responding to an area of practice which remains misunderstood and without clear policy or guidelines. Ultimately, this research adds to the growing body of research into student aspirations and the concomitant importance of teachers in helping students aspire to and achieve their goals.

Statement of Authorship

This thesis has no material published elsewhere by which I have qualified for a degree or diploma. No other person's work has been relied upon or used without due acknowledgement in the main text or bibliography of the thesis.

Signed: Signed:

Dated: 17/12/2019   Dated: 17/12/2019

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Candidate   Principal Supervisor

Statement of Ethics Approval

Ethics approval to conduct research on human participants for this study was received from the Human Research and Ethics Committee (HREC) at Federation University, reference number: A16-072.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my three children, Willis, Evelyn, and Wyatt. May you have many aspirations and the opportunities to pursue them! And, may you have supportive teachers to guide you along the way.

Acknowledgements

This has been a fantastic journey! I am so grateful for the opportunity to pursue a PhD. It combines my love of interviewing with writing, and I have gained confidence in myself while learning the skills needed to be a qualitative researcher.

It is hard to sufficiently express my gratitude to my supervisors, Associate Professor Jenene Burke, Dr. Sharon McDonough, and Associate Professor Margaret Plunkett. Two of my supervisors, Associate Professor Jenene Burke and Dr. Sharon McDonough, have been with me most of this experience. They have been so kind and encouraging, while challenging me to do my best. Associate Professor Margaret Plunkett joined our team later in the project and provided an amazing critical eye to help me progress to completion. I am so grateful to these women for their support and will be forever in awe of their talent as writers, editors, teachers, and mentors.

Thank you so much to my partner Simon for his consistent support through this research. He believed in me and encouraged me to keep going no matter what – even with two pregnancies during this project! I also want to acknowledge both the effort of Simon and his parents, Jenny and Graham, for taking such good care of our three beautiful children, Willis, Evelyn, and Wyatt, while I spent time working on this PhD.

I would also like to thank the other students that I have met at Federation University, and specifically all the hard workers in room E107. I am grateful for your conversations, food offerings and other kindnesses! I have made a few special friends – and these are friendships that will last forever! I look forward to celebrating everyone's ongoing successes.

Thank you so much to Sunnyside School for providing a scholarship for my research. I am appreciative of this opportunity and will strive to give back to the larger community and aspiring students through my subsequent research and teaching.

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1   Introduction

1.1   Background and context

Student aspirations vary greatly. "I want to be a fireman," "I want to learn English," "I want to live somewhere else," or ''I want to be able to support my family.'' As a student, I have been both encouraged and discouraged in my aspirations by teachers. As a teacher, I have listened to students as they shared their aspirations with me, and sometimes, I have witnessed a change in their desire, based on time, or their background, knowledge, or interests; however, my default responses to them have always been encouraging. As a mother, I hope that teachers engage with the aspirations of my three children and assist them with their future pathways. Now, as an aspiring researcher, I seek to understand more about the changeable aspirations of students and what other teachers do in the context of student aspirations. Do they play the role of steady cheerleader like me? Do they mitigate and direct students to something more appropriate? Do they overstep their job description if they interfere? Do they feel comfortable playing a role in the environment where they teach? Specifically, I seek to know more about the responsibilities of teachers: how do they understand their role in this regard and what are they doing to engage with student aspirations?

This study focused on teacher understandings about their roles in relation to student aspirations. For the purposes of this thesis, student aspirations are considered in a general sense, as Gottfredson (1996) explains what students may "wish for" (p. 179) in their futures, which may encompass those specifically directed towards study, career, work, volunteering, travel, or other possible futures. Through research into student aspirations, we have anecdotal knowledge that teachers do play a role (Alloway, Dalley, Patterson, Walker, & Lenoy, 2004; Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate & Albright, 2015; Cuervo, Chesters & Aberdeen, 2019; Fray, Gore, Harris & North, 2019; Helwig, 2004; Kuijpers & Meijers, 2017; Watson, Wright, Hay, Beswick, Allen & Cranston, 2016; Zipin, Sellar, Brennan & Gale, 2015). Research has suggested that teachers could engage or influence student aspirations, along with parents, family, and friends (Alloway et al., 2004). Parents and students looked to teachers as mediators of aspirations to help students navigate the pathways ahead (Bok, 2010; Gale & Parker, 2015b). In fact, Helwig (2004), from a United States (US) context, asserted that by secondary school, it was teachers who had the most impact on student occupational interests. In the United Kingdom (UK) context, Hooley, Watts, and Andrews (2015) argued that `` we know that young people often turn to their teachers for advice'' (p. 10) and, also in the UK, Johnson, Fryer-Smith, Phillips, Skowron, Sweet and Sweetman (2009) identified that teachers saw themselves as one influence of many on student transitions. Despite this agreement, questions remain about teacher views on their specific understandings of their role, as Oppenheimer

and Flum (1986), writing from Israel, claimed that notions of career education may be unclear to teachers, a view echoed by Tranter (2012) who asserted that teachers might direct students towards university, without regard to their personal achievement or needs.

A call for research into the impact that teachers have on student aspirations came from Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, Ellis, and Fray (2015), who argued there was much knowledge about aspirations during the transition from school to university, but little evidence on the "specific effects of schools and teachers on the transition process'' (p. 7). To answer this call, this research project employed a case study at one Australian independent school to investigate P-12 teachers' voices and add to this ongoing research; in this way, this thesis considered taken-for-granted assumptions around teacher roles with student aspirations. By investigating teacher understandings about student aspirations and analysing teacher experiences about what they did in relation to student aspirations, the aim is to increase knowledge around this topic.

1.2   Research Questions and Significance of Research

Much of the research regarding the influence of teachers emerged from researchers inferring about the role played by teachers in their studies of student aspirations (Alloway et al., 2004; Helwig, 2004; Hooley et al., 2015; Kuijpers & Meijers, 2017; Watson et al., 2016; Zipin et al., 2015), and other research has integrated teacher perspectives with student experiences (Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al., 2015; Gore, Fray, Patfield & Harris, 2019). However, previous research did not explicitly focus on teacher understandings of how they might engage with or influence student aspirations. This opened a gap in the field which was worth exploring in order to provide knowledge about how teachers perceived their impact and the limits of the role they invariably play. This study aims to contribute to ongoing research about student aspirations through interrogating the research question: *How do teachers understand their roles in relation to engaging with student aspirations?*

To help conceptualise the research question, four sub-questions enabled consideration of different aspects of teacher understandings in relationship to their role with student aspirations:

1. How do teachers perceive student aspirations forming?
2. What defined or undefined roles do teachers perceive themselves playing in relation to student aspirations and is this a shared understanding within the school?
3. How do teachers cope with interactions and uncertainties in relation to student aspirations?
4. How do teachers perceive influences on student aspirations working as barriers and facilitators?

These questions formed the embryonic tools for this research, guiding the development of an ethical framework to underpin this investigation into teacher understandings of their roles with

student aspirations at the case study school. To preserve anonymity, the case study school, in Melbourne's peri-urban fringe, will be referred to as Sunnyside. With careful analysis, leading to considered conclusions, this work aims to significantly impact upon the knowledge and understanding of Sunnyside school administrators and teachers, and perhaps other interested researchers or policy makers.

Despite literature acknowledging that teachers were important in student processes of forming aspirations, there was a lack of literature about how teachers conceptualised aspirations and this opened a space for research into their perceptions around this issue. Taveira, Oliveira, and Araújo (2016), writing from Portugal, argued more research was needed into the "importance of teachers for children's career development'' (p. 7). Fray et al. (2019) further discussed the lack of literature around "teacher views about their role in shaping young people's higher education aspirations'' (p. 11) and called for more research into this area. My research question was influenced by the work of Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al. (2015), who suggested there were few studies around teachers in the transition process, as well as Tranter (2005, 2012) and Alloway et al. (2004), who identified the challenges that teachers perceived in assisting students with aspirations. Their research focused on schooling effects on student transitions, while my work is positioned to contribute to current thinking about teacher effects on student aspirations. An additional focus was how educators from a similar environment – Sunnyside – understood this process and their associated roles. This research has relevance at the nexus of literature on teacher involvement in careers education.

Further importance of the current study is in relation to the academic study of student aspirations as it considered teacher voices about their perceived roles from Foundation[1] to Year 12, as well as their understandings about how student aspirations form. Looking at the diversity of Sunnyside teacher understandings across different levels of schooling was important considering recent research by Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate, et al. (2015) identifying how aspirational formation could be evident by Grade 4, and Berger, Holmes, Gore, and Archer (2019) observing that "children's career trajectories" could possibly be formed as "young as eight years" (p. 20). It was important to understand the roles teachers recognised themselves playing in these early years and what type of aspiration or career education was available within schools to support students. This research will enable Sunnyside stakeholders to understand teacher conceptions of how aspirations form and what their perceived roles are in the early years of schooling, as well as what teachers were already doing in relation to what was required.

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[1] `Foundation' is the beginning year of schooling in Australian contexts, also referred to as `prep.' Year 12 is the final year of secondary education in Victoria, prior to tertiary education.

This research focused on teacher understandings about their role in relation to student aspirations within a private school environment. Research into aspirations has typically examined students in lower socioeconomic contexts (Bok, 2010; Gale & Parker, 2014; Tranter, 2005, 2012) in response to students from this context being underrepresented in university (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008), whereas my study sought to investigate teacher understandings in a fee-paying, peri-urban school environment where families made a school choice for students to attend. In this way, I examined how school choice intersected with student aspirations in the context of one of Melbourne's growth corridors, examining the teacher perspectives of the encounters involving student aspirations. The understandings emanating from this research provide substantive assistance to stakeholders, including school administrators and teacher educators, in appreciating and appropriately responding to an area of practice which remains misunderstood and without clear policy or guidelines. Ultimately, this research adds to the growing body of research into student aspirations and the concomitant importance of teachers in helping students aspire to and achieve their goals.

1.3   Overview of Theoretical Framework and Research Design: Researcher-as-Bricoleur

This study adopted the perspective of researcher-as-bricoleur, a term further explained in the methodology chapter, but which basically involved drawing on different theories to interpret the data. No one theory enabled a comprehensive examination of the complexity of teacher roles as did a perspective using multiple theories. This approach was innovative, seeking theories that responded to the complex and multi-faceted nature of aspirations and of teacher work. A bricolage enabled the interpretation of the themes from the data, such as how teacher positioning in student lives facilitates their understanding of and role in aspiration formation. Furthermore, it assisted in the analysis of teacher perceptions of the processes and difficulties, along with the facilitators and barriers they might experience within this role.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1994) *Ecology of Human Development* work was useful in positioning teachers as key figures while student aspirations form. This model was coupled with elements of Turner's (2001) Role Theory, which used an interactionist perspective to explain teachers' conceptualisations of their roles with regard to student aspirations. Gottfredson's (1981, 1996) theory of circumscription and compromise as well as her zone of acceptable alternatives was adopted, which focused on the development of childhood career aspirations, examining teacher perceptions of how students changed or fixed their aspirations, and how learner opportunities were managed. I further adopted Patton and McMahon's (2015) Systems Theory Framework to conceptualise students' developing career understandings and to recognise the teacher could be a

part of a collaborative system, which included the career practitioners and others, with defined roles.

This research employed a case study approach (Merriam, 1988) with a survey completed by 57 teachers, with 14 semi-structured teacher interviews, and a document analysis of teacher requirements in relation to student aspirations. Ultimately, this research has instructive implications for ongoing research into student aspirations, specifically to shape the understandings that teachers have in relation to their concomitant roles.

1.4   Overview of Thesis Structure

The remaining chapters of this thesis include a review of the related literature; methodology and research design; data analysis and discussion; implications, recommendations, and conclusions.

In Chapter 2, I review academic literature pertaining to definitions and formation of student aspirations, followed by an examination of career education literature and its intersection with aspiration research. The literature associated with influences on student aspirations is then reviewed, focusing on parents, family factors and peers; socioeconomic status (SES); social spaces and schools; dominant messages about university, TAFE, and a changing job market; and prior achievement, gendered selections and serendipitous events. This literature review also examines teacher influence on student aspirations and identifies the gaps in knowledge around teacher understandings of their roles in this important area.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the methodology and research design of the project. The ontological and epistemological perspective is established before justifying a case study approach and providing information about the case study school, referred to as Sunnyside to preserve its anonymity. A position as researcher-as-bricoleur then foregrounds the use of Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1994), Turner (2001), Gottfredson (1981, 1996), and Patton and McMahon (2015) to provide an interpretative lens for diverse aspects of the data collected. Next, the discussion moves to the research design, including the sampling, selection and recruitment of participants using the data collection tools of survey, interviews, and a document analysis. An overview of Applied Thematic Analysis (Guest, McQueen, & Namey, 2012) used in the analysis of the data from these three streams is discussed, followed by a review of the ethical considerations for this research project and issues of credibility, validity, transferability, and confirmability.

The next four chapters contain the data analysis and interpretation for the study. Throughout this analysis, Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1994), Turner (2001), Gottfredson (1981), and Patton and McMahon (2015) comprise the theoretical lens to explain the data, while also referencing relevant literature pertaining to student aspirations.

Chapter 4 corresponds with the first of the sub-questions: *How do teachers perceive student aspirations forming?* In this chapter, I focus on Sunnyside teacher perceptions of how student aspirations form and what influences they consider impacting student decision-making. It also considers teachers understandings of what influences student aspirations, and it includes teacher perceptions of the relationship of aspirations to career education.

Chapter 5 relates to the second of the sub-questions: *What defined or undefined roles do teachers perceive themselves playing in relation to student aspirations and is this a shared understanding within the school*? In this chapter, I consider the roles that are defined within Sunnyside's teacher documentation and role statements in addition to other responsibilities that teachers perceive to be part of their roles. I also outline the similarities and discrepancies in teacher understandings of their roles.

In Chapter 6, I demonstrate the analysis in relation to the third of my four sub-questions: *How do teachers cope with interactions and uncertainties in relation to student aspirations?* In this chapter, I consider participating teacher perspectives on the processes that teachers develop to cope with role confusion, plus highlight the frequency of discussions that teachers report in relation to student aspirations. In addition, the chapter presents participating Sunnyside teacher understandings of the need for further education and cultural competence when working with student aspirations.

The final of the data chapters, Chapter 7, relates to the last sub-question: *How do teachers perceive influences on student aspirations working as barriers and facilitators?* Based on my analysis, this chapter is divided into sections including family expectations, aspirant school culture, school factors and external testing, which correspond to participating Sunnyside teacher understandings of influences on student aspiration working as barriers and facilitators.

In Chapter 8, important implications and recommendations are identified from the data, and the thesis is concluded. This chapter consolidates understanding from the data chapters and provides insight into teacher understandings in relation to their work with student aspirations. I further describe what understandings are shared or not shared within the school about the formation of student aspirations and associated teacher roles. This chapter also highlights issues at Sunnyside School with specific aspects of aspiration due to the overlap with career education, particularly in relation to the Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR), which ranks students in relation to other students based on their results from the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA). In the chapter, I outline areas that can be considered for further study and it concludes the thesis.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Chapter overview

In this literature review chapter, I explore definitions of student aspirations and research interest into this topic, conceptions of career education in schools, and influences on student aspirations, including the role of teachers. This research fits within what contemporary Australian education researchers (Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al., 2015) might view as the overlap of educational and career aspirations. The literature review allows me to explore this overlap and position the study of teacher understandings of their roles in relation to student aspirations at the nexus of literature around aspiration, career education, and school choice. I expose the paucity of research into teacher understandings about the specific roles they play in the development of student aspirations as well as barriers that may prevent them from performing their perceived roles.

2.2 Aspirations: Definitions, Establishment and Research Interest

Aspiration, as applied to students, has been a contested term in relation to general or career-focused aspirations. Certain definitions of aspirations have been delineated from the concept of career, and might be more general in nature, such as a student's "ability to identify and set goals for the future, while being inspired at present to work for these goals'' (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996, p. 130). McCollum and Yoder's (2011) definition of aspirations was inclusive of a career focus, however, these authors argued that "academic aspirations can be conceptualised as career- and education-based long-term goals that students attribute to their own future'' (p. 67). In a general sense, aspirations might be considered as what students "wish for'' in terms of their educational and occupational future (Gottfredson, 1996, p. 179) have drawn on these definitions of aspirations, and, taken together, they assisted me to position student aspirations as those in a general sense, but also those specifically directed towards study, career, work, volunteering, travel, or other possible futures. One critical aspect within the definitions chosen has been the US-based Quaglia and Cobb's (1996) inclusion of the words ``ability to'' aspire, which emphasised not only the student's desire but the environmental, relational, and social conditions surrounding the student as they develop aspirations – conditions that are increasingly focused on in current literature (Bok, 2010; Cuervo et al., 2019; Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al., 2015).

Contemporary research has indicated that student aspirations begin to form early in life (Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate, et al., 2015; Berger, Holmes, et al., 2019). Historically, aspirational work and career counselling occurred in the later years of schooling (Frigo, Bryce, Anderson, & McKenzie, 2007); however, waiting to help students formulate their pathways may mean that valuable opportunities for aspirational thinking are missed, with research suggesting that student

aspirations do not always change with age (Domene, Shapka, & Keating, 2006; Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate, et al., 2015). In theorising how student aspirations were often set early, Gottfredson's (1981) early work outlined the concepts of circumscription and compromise, and she asserted that a window of opportunity existed to build the knowledge and capabilities of student aspirations. She framed circumscription as limiting aspirations or career options based on gender biases, socioeconomic status, or other factors, while positioning compromise as giving in to a choice that might not have been a true aspiration based on student understandings of their personal circumstances (Gottfredson, 1981). Gottfredson (1996) argued that "children tend to recreate the social order of their elders, including gender and social class differences in employment, even before they themselves enter the labour market'' (p. 182) and that interventions could prevent students from circumscribing. Gottfredson's work on circumscription and compromise informed work that has examined how student aspirations might be formed quite early in school but changed over time (Gore, Holmes, Smith, Fray, McElduff, Weaver, & Wallington, 2017). Later researchers, such as Berger, Holmes, et al. (2019), Gore et al. (2017), and O'Connell (2017) adopted a similar line of thinking to Gottfredson's (1981) work to discuss how aspirations might be set in primary school, with an opening for intervention. Gottfredson's (1981, 1996) concepts of circumscription and compromise have informed the theoretical bricolage of this thesis, which will be explained and outlined more in the methodology and research design in Chapter 3.

Other Australian researchers have argued that the decision by a young person to attend higher education was generally set earlier than high school (James, 2002; Khoo & Ainley, 2005; Schultheiss, Palma, & Manzi, 2005). Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (2001) studied 11-12-year-olds in Rome to argue that "children's career trajectories are getting crystallised rather early in the development process'' (p. 202). These researchers posited that children progressively disregard occupations based on what they thought about their abilities, even though it meant ending an attractive aspiration (Bandura et al., 2001). Researchers such as these suggested waiting too long to help students formulate pathways to aspirations meant valuable opportunities might be missed. Frigo et al. (2007) contended that students engaged in a more active search for pathways in late secondary school, which implied that structures and components underlying choice were often in place by early secondary school. Differences, however, might have emerged between student aspirations and their intentions – whether educational or occupational (Bowden & Doughney, 2012; James, Baldwin, & McInnis, 1999). In the UK, Khattab (2014) found that for some students, aspirations, expectations, and achievement did not converge. The role that teachers played in the processes discussed in this research was a question that remained to be explored, and specifically the understandings that teachers had in relation to when students form their aspirations, the age at

which teachers perceived these as potentially being set, and their perceptions of achievement influencing student aspiration.

Current Australian researchers of student aspirations have also been interested in the links between aspiration and intentions for university, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and other pathways. Having an aspiration for the future has been linked to secondary school completion by students and a high likelihood of their attending university (Gemici, Bednarz, Karmel, & Lim, 2014; Hillman, 2010; Khoo & Ainley, 2005; Rowe, Cocoran, & Bell, 2015). Data from the 2009 Longitudinal Studies of Australian Youth (LSAY) study posited that those students with post-school aspirations tended to do better in school, regardless of their background (Gemici et al., 2014). According to a comparison of LSAY data from 1995, 1998, and 2003, Rowe, Corcoran, and Bell (2015) identified that "students with post-school aspirations are four times more likely to complete Year 12 and between two to ten times more likely to undertake university education than those who do not'' (p. 4). Early data from LSAY following Year 9 students from 1995 showed that 52% of those that intended to enter university did in fact participate in university (Hillman, 2010; Khoo & Ainley, 2005), with almost half not fulfilling their goal.

Contemporary research recognises that student perceptions of aspirational pathways are changing, as is the job market, due mostly to the influence of technology (NCVER, 2019). A young person entering the workforce today might change jobs 17 times across five career streams as the influence of technology is changing the conception of work, and more young people are working several part-time jobs to support themselves (NCVER, 2019). Differences between student perceptions of pathways with their eventual circumstances after school was apparent when comparing LSAY data reports. Nguyen and Blomberg (2014) reported that students identified the following categories as likely post-school destinations: attend university, undertake a VET[2] qualification, enrol in other study or training, look for work/get a job or travel, or unsure about the future (p. 5). A more recent LSAY report by Ranasinghe, Chew, Knight, and Siekmann (2019), identified five dominant pathways: higher education and work; early entry to full-time work; a mix of higher education and VET; mixed and repeatedly disengaged; and mostly working part-time (p. 3). It also emerged that fewer young adults were working in their preferred career job than people of the same age 10 years ago, and young people might spend longer in education to get the job they desire, and there was also the possibility that the notion of a job for life is changing (NCVER, 2019). This changing nature of the future of work highlighted an opening for more research into teacher

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[2] Vocational Education and Training (VET) provides students with a range of skills for the workplace and employed people may upgrade skills or aim to move to a different workplace.

understandings about the support students were receiving throughout their educational journey to anticipate future pathways.

2.3   Career Education as Influencing Student Aspiration

As evident with the considered definitions of aspirations, there was a close intersection between the concept of careers and that of aspirations, and this section of the literature review considers the ways that career education might be connected to and influence student aspiration. Drawing on the research literature into student aspirations (Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al., 2015; O'Connell, 2017), recent media attention has suggested that students should be receiving career advice in primary school to influence aspiration (Mitchell, 2015; Singhal, 2017, 2019).. As suggested earlier, Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate, et al. (2015) and O'Connell (2017) argued that some students needed career interventions from an earlier age as they were planning career pathways in primary school. The notion that career advice should begin earlier in schools to help students formulate pathways for their future was highlighted by other researchers (Hillman, 2010; Rothman & Hillman, 2010). In the UK, Hooley, Matheson, and Watts (2014) affirmed that careers education provided a range of benefits to students that included access to information, an understanding of labour markets, and an improved self-understanding; they also argued that career guidance should begin before Years 7 and 8 (the first two years of secondary education) and identified that teachers in charge could listen to aspirations, build skills, broker access to networks, and provide mentoring for students. In a small study of students, Berger, Hanham, Stevens, and Holmes (2019) found immediate computerised feedback to be valuable in solving student misunderstanding of the education level needed to achieve their aspirations.

The value of career education in schools depended on the individual student's perspective and take-up of available options, and Walker, Alloway, Dalley-Trim, and Patterson (2006) stated that "the perceived value of a school's career counsellor service was unambiguously linked in the student responses to the quality ascribed to the individual in the position of career counsellor'' (p. 39). Valued school-based guidance services "were described as being able to assist the student to `open new doors' using a range of counselling skills and strategies as people with whom students maintained `comfortable' exploring their dreams and aspirations'' (Walker et al., 2006, p. 40). Hooley et al. (2014) contended that career guidance contributed to social mobility and that it was critical for students; further, they asserted that career guidance could "encourage individuals to challenge their pre-existing assumptions about what they are capable of and to develop practical strategies to operationalise their aspirations'' (p. 4). Some students found personalised guidance most helpful as they communicated their personal thoughts and feelings one-on-one with a trusted source (Walker et al., 2006).

One issue that career guidance workers faced was lack of time, as Chen (2005) indicated that counsellors in the US could face a teacher/student ratio of 1:300 or more and were overloaded with other duties. This lack of time was a critical issue as Thomson (2005) warned it was vital that students gained career guidance, similar to Domene et al. (2006), writing from Canada, cautioning that some students who were overlooked for assistance potentially missed valuable opportunities to pursue desired pathways.

Not all research, however, supported the idea that available career education made a difference to all student aspirations. Rothman and Hillman (2008) argued that students had "positive perceptions of the usefulness of the career advice activities in which they had participated" (p. 27) as they may have desired more opportunities for participation. Although supporting the idea of early intervention, Domene et al. (2006) found that students were more likely to seek advice from non-professional sources, such as friends or parents, leaving career facilitators underutilised. Despite the research support for early career interventions in schools, there was a lack of literature around teacher perceptions of the need for this, and understandings of their related roles, presenting an opening for further research.

A debate within the literature concerned the placement of career guidance in schools. Domene et al. (2006) established that although there was a view that students used career counsellors, they identified that counselling sessions were used more for education-related issues and less in relation to careers; further, as students became older, career counsellors might be overlooked. Helwig (2004) contended that counsellors often had to prioritise other issues above career planning. With this in mind, time available for discussing aspirations with students might be limited in some schools.

The complex field of career guidance might place its responsible educators under pressure. *The Australian Blueprint for Career Development* (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) (2010) called for a collaborative effort from schools, teachers, and parents into the career development of students. Despite this call, Patton and McMahon (2015) suggested career development facilitators may be the only ones at the school focused on career information, placing them under pressure. They contended the field of guidance is complex, with competing demands and ethics and that there seemed to be little agreement about the place for career education in schools and how it should be provided, further arguing that it should be an "integral part of the primary and secondary school curriculum'' (Patton & McMahon, 2015, p. 340). Research by the Foundation for Young Australians (FYAP) (2017) pointed to the need for career education to stay current, documenting the urgent need to rethink the way

career guidance is delivered, so students understood that some current jobs might disappear and shift focus to skills, not jobs.

While effective guidance facilitates student transitions, Chen (2005) proposed that career practitioners, who struggled with excessive overload of duties, should seek teacher collaboration to assist students. Yet, as Hearne and Galvin (2014) suggested, in an Irish context, when the regular teacher became involved in career guidance, they needed appropriate professional development to become better equipped to deal with guidance as this assertion was based on research that identified that teachers were unable to help students with many situations. Hooley et al. (2015) argued that teachers needed a clearly conceived role. With the confusion looming about where career guidance fits in schools, a research opportunity into teacher views on the place for guidance has opened. This is in addition to the potential to investigate teacher perspectives about whether the school environment and curriculum encourage interactions with their students about aspirations or careers.

2.4   Influences on Student Aspiration

Research has identified the ``complex interplay'' (Gore et al., 2019, p. 2) of influences on students as they form aspirations. Influences are people, such as family, peers, teachers, and individuals in students' networks as well as influential factors like socioeconomic status (SES), social spaces, schools, gender, Indigeneity, prior achievement and being the first in a family to attend university (Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al., 2015; Fray et al., 2019). In this section of the review, a synthesis of this literature will be presented including parents, family factors, and networks; SES; social spaces and schools; dominant messages about university, TAFE, and a changing job market; prior achievement, gendered selections, and serendipitous events. Another significant factor, teachers, will be discussed in greater detail in a separate section of the literature review as it is a key concept in my research. Due to the scope of this thesis, some factors identified by researchers will not be covered in great detail, such as Indigeneity. When viewed together, all of the discussed factors have formed the environmental conditions that serve as a backdrop to developing aspirations, reflecting elements of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model, as discussed further in the methodological chapter of this thesis. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work indicates that the home, school, and larger cultural environment, and the intersections between these various levels are all at play in a child's development.

2.4.1   Parents, Family Factors, and Peers

Parents were identified in the literature as influencing student aspirations in a myriad of ways, with Bowden and Doughney (2012) holding the position that most students found

encouragement by their parents. They suggested the likelihood that in Australia, those from an ethnic background, and students with parents who attended university, were steered more towards higher education than others. James (2000) contended that parent advice was considered the most significant to students, and he suggested that parental education levels – a variable that researchers can use as a measure of SES status – might be the most reliable predictor of student aspiration levels. Similarly, Nguyen and Blomberg (2014) argued that parental aspirations influenced children's aspirations, while Gil-Flores, Padilla-Carmona, and Suárez-Ortega (2011), writing from Spain, perceived a gap between what parents want and what students were able to do, identifying a fissure between parent expectations and that of students, particularly when students did not perform as well academically as expected.

Alloway et al. (2004) contended that some non-university educated parents expected better outcomes for their children than they themselves achieved and sometimes pushed students away from their own paths. Similarly, Smyth and McInerney's (2014) study established that student narratives could challenge "ill-formed assumptions about working-class parents who are often accused of not caring about school'' where these parents often lacked the "social, economic and cultural capital of middle class parents'' (p. 57) but still held aspirations for their children.

An alternative to a materialistic reading of aspiration, such as aiming for a high-paying job through university attendance, suggested that aspiration might be socially constructed, with influences such as family and friends (Hoskins & Barker, 2017). Appadurai (2004) and Bok (2010) argued that aspiration was culturally constructed and the conceptions derived from different situations in the environment affected a capacity to aspire. In an opposing vein, Hoskins and Barker (2017) proposed that parents and environmental contexts in general influenced student aspiration to recreate a satisfactory home life, regardless of financial circumstances. They contended that many students were interested in being "happy'' (Hoskins & Barker, 2017, p. 63) as their intended aspiration, wanting to carry on the aspirations from their own family environment or one they admired, regardless of the later financial implications.

Being the first in family aspiring to attend university was equated by Gale and Parker (2015b) to having "tour knowledge" where they "follow a pre-determined route" but their lack of familiarity with the route means they may alter their course, whereas students with more access to understanding through family and friends have a greater ``map knowledge" providing them with an ability to ``improvise alternatives" (p. 148). Patfield (2018) argued that first-in-family students were likely to identify as indigenous and have a lower SES background, there were some exceptions and potentially ``these young people may be unintentionally disregarded'' (p. 3) by university outreach, and their aspirations were shown to have been impacted from Year 3. Devlin and McKay (2017)

argued that being first in a family to attend university potentially meant low levels of support from family and friends, while Whitty and Clement (2015) contended that awareness about pathways had huge implications for those students were first in their family to attend university. Gore et al. (2019) argued siblings or others in a student's network could provide a narrative to assist students navigating the pathway to university.

Another way that parents were influential was through school choice, as parents took an active role in choosing a secondary school known for successful higher education transitions, often promoting anxiety in parents over the choice (Ball, 2003a; Cahill & Gray, 2010; Campbell, Proctor, & Sherrington, 2009; McCarthy, 2007; Morgan & Blackmore, 2013). Campbell et al. (2009) identified higher education demands stemming from parents as more wanted to enrol their children in schools that had a reputation for directing students to university. Although many parents believed in the ideal of public education, they did not necessarily trust it for their children. Rather they relied on their capital (financial, cultural, social) to either secure what they felt to be an appropriate education for their children, or, in some cases were prepared to cheat the system, if needed, in order to get their children into a preferred school (Ball, 2003a; Campbell et al., 2009). Australian parents might be willing to pay for private tutoring to earn non-government school scholarships or to pass selective government school entrance exams (Campbell et al., 2009). In Australia, around 30 per cent of students attend non-government schools (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) (2017). There were others who had been reported using fraudulent home addresses, buying property in specific areas, or just writing letters for exceptions to reach government schools that had a good reputation (Ball, 2003a). Still more were willing to tolerate religious teachings at a school despite differences from their family's belief system (Beamish & Morey, 2013). Often parents did not easily trust information distributed by schools, trusting their networks more (Ball, 2003a; Rowe & Windle, 2012). This information then became part of the narrative about a 'good' school in the information transferred among parents through loose and amorphous communication grapevines (Ball & Vincent, 1998). Research by Ball (2003a) and Campbell et al. (2009) focused on the middle class parent aspirations where, generally, a choice about their child's schooling had been made.

Student aspirations could also be mediated by the location of family (Gale & Parker, 2015a). Bradley et al. (2008) found rurality could be a factor on student post-school plans. Rowe, Corcoran, and Bell (2014) concluded that regional movers were more likely to seek university, if from an area with many employment opportunities, and were more likely to attend university if studying in a small class and in an independent non-government school; whereas, metropolitan students tended toward university if they had experienced high teacher quality and studied in a government school.

Webb, Black, Morton, Plowright, and Roy (2015), in their study of Gippsland in Victoria's east, argued that it was unfair to conceptualise certain spaces as in ``deficit'' (p. 8). Further, their research identified that "popular culture and policy might celebrate mobility and dismiss the notion of staying local as a less attractive option'' (p. 8). These researchers reported that their study identified particular geographic and social factors that compelled significant numbers of young people to stay in their local communities. Webb and colleagues contended that factors are interrelated and that "socioeconomic status, geographical location, gender, ethnicity and parental influence are all interrelated to create each young person's socio-spatial location, with this specific location either opening up, closing off, or obscuring possible post-school pathways'' (Webb et al., 2015, p. 17). Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al. (2015) found that university intentions were related to ``students' perceptions of travel as a potential barrier'' (p. 2).

The origin of student aspirations for materialistic pathways or prestige in jobs might be linked to parental aspirations for these things, which tied into parent's anxieties around class status (Campbell et al., 2009; Smyth & McInerney, 2014). Attitude might be perpetuated within school environments through social networks in an effort to gain access to certain universities (Ball, 2003a; Campbell et al., 2009; Smyth & McInerney, 2014; Teese, 2000). Campbell et al. (2009) described an anxiety around the concept of middle class status experienced by parents who sought a specific schooling environment; this permeated communities, as members competed for the best education for their children to ensure a sense of cultural capital, and ultimately, a sought-after place in the workforce. Through this anxiety, some schools might be viewed as less valuable than others. Ball's (2003a) work in the UK and Campbell et al.'s work (2009) in the Australian context, indicated how this concept translated to teachers, in that they might not want to work at certain schools. Smyth and McInerney (2014) argued that low SES students might be seen at the other end of the spectrum and internalise class structures from early on, resigning themselves to specific education environments; further, they contended that reductionist viewpoints about students within certain classes abound. This, in turn, put pressure on students, as those not attending private school must "contest'' the notion they were attending a "rubbish'' school (Smyth & McInerney, 2014, p. 72).

Peers also played an important role as an environmental factor that influenced aspirations, both inside and outside the school setting. Gemici et al.'s Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth (LSAY) (2014) showed peer influence to be a significant factor on student aspirations, and similarly, Alloway et al. (2004) contended that students tended to value their network of friends, and this had an influence on their aspiration, such as a decision to stay in a regional area or move to a city for university. Peers were part of a "complex constellation of conditions and circumstances'' (p. 18), as described by Webb et al. (2015), and peers provided information to one another about pathways or

university options. Similarly, Ball and Vincent (1998) held that the notion of a parent grapevine might also be present in the form of a student one, as school information was shared amongst them, and this formed the basis for student aspirations or decisions to pursue certain pathways. As such, peer pressure could work as a source of encouragement or discouragement, depending on the social norms (Gale & Parker, 2015b).

In light of the dearth of research highlighted, it is important that teacher understandings of the intersection of their role with parental and peer influences on student aspirations, is a focus of future aspirational research.

2.4.2 Socioeconomic Status

The impact of socioeconomic status (SES) on student aspirations has been a contentious issue. In fact, a recent study by Berger, Holmes et al. (2019) observed in relation to student aspirations that ``empirical studies do not always agree about the magnitude of the effect of SES and our study further complicates the issue'' (p. 21). A commonality within the research was that socioeconomic status did play a role, although the way that researchers interpreted the influence varied. Smyth and McInerney (2014) linked the points of contention to a neoliberal context, where aspirations, or a lack thereof, were seen as an individual responsibility. This responsibility overlooked inequities in the system that students faced, and in Smyth and McInerney's (2014) view, aspirations became a battleground for social policy, where government rhetoric refused to accept blame for an individual's circumstances, with no regard for inequalities in the education or larger social system. A heightened focus on aspirations stemmed from the review conducted by Bradley et al. (2008), which provided specific targets for higher education access for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. These targets, that aimed to raise aspirations, suggested that lower SES students had low expectations or engaged in deficit thinking (Bok, 2010). This deficit view of aspirations ran concurrently in the UK, according to St. Clair, Kintrea, and Houston (2013), where education policies were affected by the pervasive idea that students from marginalised communities had lower aspirations while the privileged had higher aspirations. Similarly, Australian Government policy documents after this time began suggesting that aspirations needed to be "raised'' (Bok, 2010; Gale, Parker, Rodd, Stratton, Sealey, & Moore, 2013; Gale & Parker, 2015a) thus reinforcing a deficit conception of certain aspirations.

In response, social researchers sought to unpack the notion of `high' aspirations, as well as the assumption that people from lower SES backgrounds had `low' aspirations (Galliott & Graham, 2015; Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate, et al., 2015). Smyth and McInerney (2014) referred to this attention to aspiration as being in "hyperdrive'' and argued that the term "disadvantage'' (p. 61) should be considered as a constraint and limitation, contending that although social class location

influenced student success, students also had a degree of agency in this process. The conception that low SES was linked with lower aspirations has been critiqued, and refuted by researchers, including Bok (2010), Bowden and Doughney (2012), Gale and Parker (2015a), and Smith (2011). Governmental policy may be "oblivious" to student access (Cuervo et al., 2019, p. 856).

Critics argued that this `raising' aspirations rhetoric overlooked the complexities of what informed a student's intention, as well as how aspirations could be culturally formed (Bok 2010; Gale & Parker, 2015a; Sellar, 2015; Sellar, Gale, & Parker, 2011; Smith, 2011), and dismissed the notion that students might have well-formed, specific futures in mind (Smyth & McInerney, 2014). Yet, it was likely the absence of aspiration could negatively impact outcomes for those in rural, remote, Indigenous, and low SES areas (Bradley et al., 2008; Nguyen & Blomberg, 2014; and James et al., 1999). Ball (2003a) and Angus (2015), argued that aspiration was a matter of equity and an entrenched problem of neoliberalism, which was becoming a global phenomenon. Angus (2015) contended that the government's use of the *MySchool*[3] website was evidence of neoliberal thought, which kept students at a disadvantage due to disparity of resourcing in schools. Gale and Parker (2015b) argued that the lack of sociological imagination in government strategies worked to disadvantage certain groups and suggested that governments needed to take a more nuanced approach to defining aspirations, rather than relying on simplistic meanings.

Khoo and Ainley (2005) reported socioeconomic status as one of several influences on student aspiration to attend university, combined with other social background characteristics, which impacted achievement. Cost and distance to university can also play a role in detracting from student aspirations (James et al., 1999). Tranter (2005) identified that SES influences family resources, impacted on student decisions and that the pull of short-term work could be a strong motivator for students against university or other pathways. More recently, Rowe et al. (2015) contended that parental and peer influence might mediate SES influence, while Gore et al. (2017) asserted that SES was not the "most powerful predictor'' (p. 1397) of aspirations as students from lower SES backgrounds were found to have similar aspirations to other students. Hoskins and Barker (2017), writing from the UK, argued aspirations were socially constructed and some students rejected the "neo-liberal emphasis on wealth creation'' (p. 63), focusing on happiness, job satisfaction and opportunities to make a difference.

James (2000) indicated that although ninety per cent of students aspired to go to university, those from a higher SES were more likely to respond affirmatively (70%), while lower percentages

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[3] MySchool is a website maintained by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) that provides information on schools, including financial information and National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) scores.

were reported for those from medium (50%) and lower SES (42%), with 16% of the latter group responding they would not be able to do so (p. xi-x). In a similar vein, Bowden and Doughney's (2010) study in the Western Suburbs of Melbourne, traditionally a culturally diverse, lower SES area, identified students from higher SES backgrounds more likely than those from lower SES backgrounds to achieve through higher education. They suggested there was an "aspirations gap'' (p. 115) between intentions and outcomes of lower SES students.

Other researchers argue socioeconomic status did not limit student aspirations but worked to filter or alter choices in the context of other influences. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model framed how the home, school and larger cultural environment was at play in a child's development. Chenoweth and Galliher (2004), writing from the US, applied this model directly to their study of student aspirations, where they argued that choices made by families due to socioeconomic status, such as choosing schools, places to live or experiences, could impact student aspirations. This view was echoed by other researchers, such as Way and Rossman (1996), who identified SES as a factor in how families access resources for career planning. Frigo et al. (2007) argued that SES did not limit aspiration or career choice, but might be mediated by other factors such as family contexts, parent education levels, financial situation, culture, decision-making, and agency. These views were echoed by Bandura et al. (2001) who argued that SES was not a direct factor in aspiration but was mediated by factors such as parental aspiration and involvement with their children. O'Connell (2017) contended that a low SES might not limit a student's ability to aspire but rather their understanding of pathways to reach a preferred goal; this contention was similar to the interpretations of Gale and Parker (2015a), who observed how low SES could lead to unequal access to social, cultural and financial resources.

2.4.3   Social Spaces and Schools

Complex social, economic, and cultural pressures impinge on students' decision-making processes, and may affect their decision for non-university routes. Numerous researchers drew upon Bourdieu's (1986) ideas, specifically his theories of capital, habitus and field to explain the multifaceted processes at work on students' decision-making (Bok, 2010; Gale & Parker, 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate, et al., 2015; Smith, 2011; Zipin et al., 2015). Also using Bourdieu's ideas to consider the complexities of student decision-making, Stahl (2015) argued that "youth construct aspirations within fragmented rites of passage and contradictory social contexts, which results in complex identity work in order to constitute themselves as subjects of value'' (p. 133). While it might have appeared as though students do not aspire to attend university, what took place was perhaps more intricate – they might have self-regulated because it was "not for the likes of us'' (Zipin et al., 2015, p. 233). Some students were limited by the cultural "maps''

required for certain pathways, with those from lower socioeconomic status unfamiliar with the "scripts'' required for access or the confidence needed to take "risks'' (Bok, 2010, p. 164) outside of known situations. Snowden and Lewis (2015) asserted that the dominant message in society was that university was the higher choice, and those who did not make it were failures; this was then linked through government and media messages to their individual choice – and not to a system that failed to help them. Gale and Parker (2014) used Bourdieu's notions of taste to explain how society generally classified student aspirations, with university aspiration claiming the higher "distinction,'' while alternative aspirations might be viewed as "tasteless'' (pp. 143-4). Stahl (2015) suggested that students could navigate contradictory surroundings "… where a destabilised habitus enables students to accept the particular messages about education and upward mobility but simultaneously maintain their key dispositions in their habitus of origin'' (p. 141). Bourdieu's (1986) ideas have provided researchers a backdrop to explain the complexities of student aspirations.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) conception of development placed the child at the centre of a web of interconnecting influences, with children not exempt from the social spaces where hierarchies are evident; they did not lack awareness about their realities. Smyth and McInerney (2014) argued that many students saw the reasons behind their present circumstances, the way that their schools performed and the routes they had available, which was apparent when they were given the chance to speak. In other instances, students provided responses to surveys that they thought demonstrated their sense of `taste' or what was expected, which called those surveys into question (Parker, Stratton, Gale, Rodd, & Sealey, 2013).

In general, school factors were important to the formation of aspirations among students (Rowe et al., 2015; Webb et al., 2015), such as a school functioning as a place of inclusion or exclusion (Smyth & McInerney, 2007) or schools working to help students understand their ability level which helps form future plans (Beavis & Masters, 2005). Students that perceived a supportive school climate have been reported to have higher aspirations (Plucker, 1998). Yet, a study of Australian children in Year 6 noted that although school was one of several influences on career information, it was not a major influence (McMahon, Carroll, & Gillies, 2001). Several researchers, including Angus (2015), Apple (2012), Gale and Parker (2015b), Smyth and McInerney (2014), and Teese (2000), argued that the school reproduced the inequalities present in the larger society. Specifically, Angus (2015) was critical of promoting aspirations within schools because it reinforced a neoliberal ideology, which fostered the idea that individuals were responsible for their circumstances, and that system inequities were not responsible. Reay, David, and Ball (2001), from the UK context, labelled as ``a school effect'' where an institutional habitus produced a ``semi-autonomous'' expectation for students to attend university (p. 35). This harkens back to Bourdieu's

(1986) arguments about the potential for student development of dispositions within specific environments.

The curriculum might also be an indirect factor on aspiration as Teese (2000) concluded that many students did not have the cultural capital to navigate the Australian curriculum, and that despite many iterations, the situation had not improved for most. It might be that students from a higher SES background were better equipped to navigate the bounds of subjects and exams due to access to better resources (Galliott & Graham, 2015; Teese, 2000). Ultimately, students had to navigate the Australian curriculum to ensure they find a suitable pathway after school.

The next section considers dominants messages about university within a changing employment market.

2.4.4   Dominant Messages about University, TAFE, and a Changing Job Market

The dominant messages from the government, universities and the media have been seen as influencing student perceptions about further education such as university or TAFE (Snowden & Lewis, 2015). Pressures from multiple sources have resulted in young adults dealing with conflicting messages about whether to attend university (Snowden & Lewis, 2015). In their analysis of government, university and media reported speech and publications, Snowden and Lewis (2015) argued that certain dominant messages were reinforced through these communication channels, including that university was the top choice in society, with TAFE as a secondary choice. They demonstrated that the paradox within these messages, however, was that although university was perceived as the more advanced choice, those who did not make it to university were considered failures, and this was linked to their individual choice – not to the underlying system (Snowden & Lewis, 2015). It was not even accurate that university might hold up the promise of a career that it once did; in fact, the promise of finding a job after university might not be fulfilled for everyone (Sellar, 2015). Further, the FYAP report (FYAP, 2017) had documented the urgent need for shifting mindsets about the skills required for university and jobs of the future, which were changing with a greater demand for digital literacies, critical, and creative thinking, along with presentation skills.

The changing employment market, with current jobs disappearing (FYAP, 2017), influenced the messages that schools should acknowledge and incorporate into their career education programs. O'Connell (2017), in a Mitchell Institute report, demonstrated that more students might be entering university than jobs were available to accommodate graduates, with an excess of TAFE jobs possibly unfilled. Research by Hillman (2010), identified that higher numbers of Australian students were aiming for university, however, more jobs were projected to be available for those studying in the TAFE sector. O'Connell (2017) reported that a recent youth survey recorded 77.3% of 15-19-year-olds planning on university, with 7.7% aiming for TAFE and 4.3% undertaking an

apprenticeship. Despite these projections, the reduced interest in TAFE meant that graduates mismatch jobs, with more jobs expected to arise via studying within the TAFE sector (442,000 between 2018-2022), compared to those requiring a Bachelor's degree (412,000) (O'Connell, 2017). With this discrepancy in mind, O'Connell (2017) cautioned that more careful advice was needed to help students identify appropriate pathways leading to employment. In addition to more jobs being available to students after studying in TAFE, the types of skills needed for current jobs and jobs of the future were beginning to change. Young people will be required to "navigate complex and uncertain working lives'' (FYAP, 2017, p. 3) in the midst of the changing job market, and schools must be able to prepare students for these challenges and help young people identify jobs within clusters that match students' interests and skills (FYAP, 2017). The ideas covered in this section – dominant messages about university and a changing job market – can be viewed from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) perspective, as part of the macrosystem, pertaining to societal attitudes and conceptions about jobs, while the ways that students learn about and access these jobs through schools could lag behind technological changes. Thus, an opening for research has been presented to glean teacher views about student aspirations and teachers' associated roles in the context of a quick-changing, fast-paced, technologically advancing job market.

2.4.5   Prior Achievement, Gendered Selections, and Serendipitous Events

Research has suggested that prior achievement and serendipitous events were two factors that influenced student aspirations. Gil-Flores et al. (2011) had a similar contention to Gottfredson and Becker (1981) as they found that prior academic achievement influenced aspiration. Prior achievement was found by Gore et al. (2019) to be a significant predictor of attending university. Khattab (2015), writing from the UK, found students with ``high aspirations or high expectations have higher school achievement'' (p. 731) than counterparts with lower aspirations or expectations; this finding was supported by Berger, Holmes, et al. (2019) with "the criticality or high aspirations being supported by good achievement" (p. 22). A positive attitude to university and achievement was considered by Hillman (2010) and Khoo and Ainley (2005) with an intention to attend university. Nguyen and Blomberg (2014) advocated that those students who felt "average'' or "less than average'' (p. 7) were less likely to achieve their aspirations. Smyth and McInerney (2014) argued that a student's sense of "agency'' could be linked to aspiration as it promoted self-belief even in times of family upheaval.

Gendered selections of subject areas have stimulated research interest, particularly in science and technology disciplines (Johnson, 2009), where girls are seen to aspire less to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) areas of study (Archer, Dewitt, & Wong, 2014; Holmes, Gore, Smith & Lloyd, 2017). Efforts are being made by groups, such as the Australian

Academy of Science (2019) to keep females interested in STEM subjects and confident about their abilities. Another line of thinking is proposed by Chestnut, Lei, Leslie, and Cimpian (2018), writing from the US, where the myth of ``math people'' (p. 1) who are ``brilliant'' (p. 3) at mathematics has been perpetuated and affected the interest of students, particularly girls when the emphasis was on talent, not effort. Writing from the UK, Mendick (2005) argued that new stories of mathematics needed to include a range of student voices so they felt included in the field. Gender had a strong influence on the selection of VET subjects, with more males choosing a VET qualification as their highest level of education (Gore et al., 2017). Berger, Holmes, et al. (2019) asserted the importance of teachers to be aware of "gendered language and attitudes" at school that can support the "status quo" (p. 22) of student perceptions about careers.

Serendipitous events could impact on students' career understandings and choices, as Bright, Pryor, Wilkenfield, and Earl (2005) argued that unplanned and serendipitous events were commonly perceived to influence career decisions. They contended that "increasing the number of experiences with different and divergent vocations will enhance an individual's ability to choose an agreeable career path'' and "that counsellors should try to reinstate the context in which a past career decision was made in order to understand the motives behind it'' (Bright et al., 2005, p. 33) as well as understanding the context of those decisions. An opening presents itself for research into teacher perceptions of how students may modify their aspiration due to their prior achievement, gendered selections, and perceptions of what opportunities are available to them. The next section presents an overview of research into teacher influence on student aspirations.

2.5   Teacher influence on Student Aspirations

This section synthesises literature that examines teacher influence on student aspirations, including the impact of teacher mediation, encouragement, and uncertainties. In doing so, it lays the foundation for this research project and identifies where there are openings to contribute to existing knowledge.

2.5.1   Teacher Impacts on Student Aspirations

There is a consensus in the literature in the Australian context that teachers play a role in influencing student aspirations (Alloway et al., 2004; Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al., 2015; Helwig, 2004; Kuijpers & Meijers, 2017; Watson et al., 2016; Zipin et al., 2015). Various studies showed that teachers were instrumental in assisting students with aspirations, specifically through forming relationships with students, providing guidance and advice, and forming a link between students and school (Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al., 2015; Khoo & Ainley, 2005; Reid & McCallum, 2014). Cuervo et al. (2019) recognised the role of teachers in their research when they argued that

teachers, along with parents and other adults, such as coaches, played a role in shaping student "orientations towards education and work" (p. 847). Watson et al. (2016) found teacher support, along with peer influence and student belief in their ability in English and mathematics, to be strong predictors of student aspirations.

One way that teachers have had an impact on student aspirations was through forming relationships with students, as Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al. (2015) argued that teacher-student relationships were pivotal from the student perspective in terms of staying encouraged about school and forming aspirations. This attracted media attention with research claiming students liking teachers could boost results and motivate students in certain subjects (Singhal, 2019). Teacher-student relationships were also regarded as important from the perspective of informal conversations with students about their aspirations and intentions (Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al., 2015). Similarly, Howard, Ferrari, Nota, Solberg, and Soresi (2009) demonstrated that a connection to teachers promoted a sense of agency in a student, and consequently "supports higher academic grades and more career decidedness'' (p. 107). This connected to research by Hillman (2010), Khoo and Ainsley (2005), and Nguyen and Blomberg (2014), who all contended that positive relationships with teachers encouraged students to stay in school, and student belief in teacher quality was linked to stronger educational intentions.

In order to have conversations about aspirations, students had to build rapport and trust with teachers, as Reid and McCallum (2013) argued that trusted teachers offered "new language and meaning to students' future thinking'' (p. 205). As Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al. (2015) contend, teachers had knowledge about post-school destinations but ensuring teachers were better informed about pathways would be "one way to provide strong support for all senior secondary students'' (p. 64). This idea was deliberated by Schultheiss et al. (2005) who argued that "teachers can provide learning experiences that provide opportunities for children to acquire new skills and tap unique talents that have otherwise been overlooked'' (p. 259) and they created connections between academic subjects and occupations. In 2018, a research team based at the University of Newcastle, and supported by the Australian Government's Department of Education and Training and LaTrobe University, developed a free online professional development course for teachers, called "Aspirations: Supporting Students' Futures." This will be discussed further in the implications of this thesis.

Writing from the UK context, both Hooley et al. (2015) and Johnson et al. (2009) asserted the importance of teachers in playing a role with student aspirations. Hooley et al. (2015) proposed that "education and the development of career thinking are intertwined'' (p. 3), with every teacher having formal and informal roles, and a key role to identify students lacking guidance about

aspirations or careers. Johnson et al. (2009) named five attitudes of teachers in relation to supporting student progression, and these included `campaigning,' focused on traditional academic routes; `vocationalist,' valuing vocational education; `entrepreneurial,' focused on student employment; `laissez-faire,' emphasizing student initiative in the process; and `resigned,' with teachers disempowered (p. 6). Through these mindsets, Johnson et al. (2009) argued that the ``preferable'' (p. 6) mindsets needed to be supported by stakeholders to be effective.

Teachers could be a critical link between a student's decision to stay in school in order to fulfil an aspiration, as hypothesised by Carpenter and Western (1984), who claimed that student perceptions of teacher influence were considered a significant factor and a variable in access to tertiary education. Another study by Alloway et al. (2004) emphasised that students perceived teachers to be influential in decisions about staying in school and pursuing aspirations. Parker et al. (2013) observed that nearly half of all students they surveyed sought information from teachers about the future and that 73% of students indicated that teacher views were `important' or `extremely important' in assisting them with aspirations. St. Clair et al. (2013) underscored the importance of teachers in shaping student aspirations contending:

> The significance of other people in the formation of aspirations is illustrated by the extent to which the ambitions of young people reflect the hopes others have for them, and for 50% of the young people one influential individual was a teacher. (p. 735)

The commonality among this body of research was that teachers were playing a critical role in student aspirations, with the literature suggesting that along with parents, extended family, and friends, teachers were considered by students to influence their aspirations (Alloway et al., 2004). Zipin et al. (2015) acknowledged that teachers were significant in educating about aspirations and Kuijpers and Meijers (2017) affirmed that students regularly sought out teachers for advice, while Parker et al. (2013) argued that for some students, teacher views of their performance and ability ranked high in determining their outlook or aspiration. Helwig (2004), made a much stronger argument for the role of teachers, claiming that by high school, teachers had the most impact on student occupational interests. While the research identifies that teachers were playing a critical role in student aspirations, the specific types of roles they perceive themselves playing remains unclear, highlighting a space for research into how teachers understand their roles with student aspirations. In the next section, the impact of teacher encouragement and mediation on student aspirations is discussed.

2.5.2 Impact of Teacher Encouragement and Mediation

Teachers have been seen as mediators of aspirations as they helped students navigate the pathways ahead (Bok, 2010; Gale & Parker, 2015b) and assist students make links to the future (Smith, 2011). Teachers, along with the presence of the internet at home, and attendance at a Catholic or independent school, were factors that signalled a greater likelihood of students attending university (Bowden & Doughney 2010). These factors are in addition to those discussed in Section 2.5.2 SES, where Trantor (2005) identified that SES influences family resources, impacted on student decisions. Bowden and Doughney (2012) claimed that a student's aspiration increased as teacher encouragement increased, however, Brown (2011) warned against teachers raising aspirations without providing necessary emotional support. As aspirations changed with attention to student well-being, a teacher's pedagogical interventions helped students understand explicit links between curriculum, pedagogy, and aspirations (Wrench, Hammond, McCallum, & Price, 2013). Rowe (2003) argued that "the quality of teaching and learning provision are by far the most salient influences on students' cognitive, affective and behavioural outcomes of schooling – regardless of gender or backgrounds'' (p. 15); similarly, Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al. (2015) identified the pivotal role that teachers play in ensuring students do well in and engage in class. They contended that, "this role included formal and informal means of support for students and elements of the student–teacher relationship'' (p. 60). Yet, they identified that "some students believed that more support was available for 'smart' students'' (Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al., 2015, p. 60) and that the relationship with teachers was important in providing encouragement and motivation for students, as positive relationships led to better outcomes for students.

Teachers could link expectations to the realm of the more `practical,' yet when they judged student work and encouraged students to think about realistic pathways based on prior achievement, a teacher might feel "judgmental'' (Bok, 2010, p. 176). Smyth and McInerney (2014) advised that teachers must be wary of imposing deficit labels on certain students, such as those from poorer neighbourhoods or those with "reputations'' who might be "counselled'' or "directed'' (p. 49) by teachers into school completion options that did not provide a pathway into university such as the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), which allows students to prepare directly for the workforce through vocational training and is available in years 11 and 12. Labels that teachers used about students in the staff room, or behind closed doors, as Stahl (2015) observed, could "fix reductive identities" (p. 134) about students. Teachers' beliefs about the appropriateness of pathways for students, which was linked to SES, was argued by Allen, Wright, Cranston, Watson, Beswick, and Hay (2018) to be influential on student aspirations and could not be ignored when considering equity.

Teachers could turn student perceptions of their own liabilities into strengths or help them recognise potential within themselves. For example, teachers could help students maximise aspirations based on their abilities and backgrounds that might not be the most culturally desirable, something termed by Zipin et al. (2015) as "dark funds of knowledge" (p. 237). Stahl (2015) proposed that if students felt their experiences were valued by teachers, then they tended to aspire for more. Individual teachers were credited by many students for helping them plan futures with "certainty and confidence" (Alloway et al., 2004, p. 153), as teachers worked informally with students on aspirations through conversations (Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al., 2015). Webb et al. (2015) argued that teachers may be part of "critical events and disruptions" (p. 19), linked to Granovetter's (1983) "weak ties" (p. 1363), where they helped students form an idea or reach an opportunity otherwise considered unfathomable. McCollum and Yoder (2011) acknowledged that "students' positive regard for teachers is related to higher academic aspirations" (p. 71). St. Clair et al. (2013) contended that "it seems that a substantially positive attitude from teachers and other school staff makes an enormous difference to the lives of the students" (p. 735), concluding there was space for teachers to play a part in the "day-to-day support of educational and vocational goals" (p. 736). An opening for research presents itself into teachers' unique positioning with students, present in the day-to-day interactions, but also in an ability to see the bigger picture about aspirations.

While the literature identified that teachers did play a role in student aspirations, their roles might be mediated by their frustrations in relation to parents and families. Alloway et al. (2004) argued some teachers align parents' lack of knowledge with undermining career education. Teachers reported families not valuing education due to personal negative experiences, resulting in their children not being encouraged to aspire (Webb et al., 2015). Bok (2010) argued that a school employee might have to "go past the screaming" (p. 172) in order to understand what parents might be trying to communicate, which could frustrate aspirations for their child. Marjoribanks (1998) contended that "adolescents' aspirations were enhanced when positive perceptions of their academic interactions with parents and teachers were in harmony" (p. 193). There is an opening in the research to investigate teacher understandings of their role with student aspirations amid their other responsibilities and roles.

2.5.3   Teacher Uncertainties about Student Aspiration

The point at which teacher roles with student aspirations moves from informal conversations to the need for more formal education is where the literature pertaining to aspirations intersects with that relating to career education. Oppenheimer and Flum (1986) argued that teachers' guidance may not be a planned part of the curriculum, and the unplanned and

unrecognised work of teachers was identified in a recent study by Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al. (2015), who argue that "the informal conversations among teachers and students may be as important to some students as the formal careers activities'' (p. 64). Fray et al. (2019) proclaimed that teachers needed to be made more aware of their influence on student higher education influence and supported in their efforts. One of Helwig's (2004, 2008) recommendations was that teachers needed more education in this role to help guide parents, which assumed that parents often ranked number one in studies measuring what informs student aspirations.

Despite the nature of informal conversations, Alloway et al. (2004) summarised teacher influence over student aspirations as being "as deliberate and as strategic as any education system or government agency could engineer for the wider population'' (p. 156). They argued that students can have mixed feelings about teacher advice on careers, some even considering it "perfunctory'' (Alloway et al., 2004, p. 153), with guidance as an extra role; conversely, those students receiving targeted information were extremely grateful. Hooley et al. (2015) confirmed that in many instances teachers were providing career guidance despite the fact it was not something they were trained to do; and they contended that further education would help teachers better perform this function, in addition to having specific career guidance roles at schools.

The assumption that all teachers automatically knew how to advise students at critical moments in conceptualising their futures might be wrong, with Kuijpers and Meijers (2017) arguing that there was a "trend towards making teachers – who often do not have specific training in the field – responsible for delivering career and employment information to students'' (p. 83). Oppenheimer and Flum (1986) observed that conceptions of career education might be unclear to teachers who were expected to help students with careers in informal ways, while Akos, Charles, Orthner, and Cooley (2011) suggested that by identifying restrictions or teacher support for career education in the main curriculum, then "career explorations and transitions are likely to be more successful'' (p. 8). Teachers might be unclear about the type of advice to give students about university or careers and when faced with advising lower SES students aiming for university, Tranter (2012) proposed that teachers might be "divided in their opinions about how to advise students to make best use of the curriculum hierarchy'' (p. 905). The "dominant belief'' (Tranter, 2005, p. 15) within one school was to encourage students into hard courses directed towards university, despite their achievement, preparedness, and if the teachers considered that the student could actually pass. Hooley et al. (2015) suggested that teachers lacked experience with the labour market in relation to certain careers, such as forensic science, so avoided such discussions with students. Yet if teachers did not engage with students, it might be "demotivating for a student whose love of subject is bound up with enthusiasm for a potential career path'' (Hooley et al., 2015, p. 14). Hearne and

Galvin (2014) studied the role of the regular teacher with career guidance in Ireland, and observed how teachers had been recommended to provide guidance in a whole school approach; however, their ability to do so was limited by a lack of school wide professional development. In their study, Hearne and Galvin (2014) acknowledged that while teachers perceived a responsibility to care for students, many felt unable to deal with crisis issues; further, they reasoned that students did not feel comfortable receiving guidance from their regular teachers.

Schools might be sites of compromise for teachers, as evidenced by Tranter's (2012) claim that in lower SES environments, teachers were challenged to reach the standards of the curriculum despite some learners not being ready. Further, teachers had limited notions of what career education meant or had mixed feelings about it. Alloway et al. (2004) analysed teachers' responses in relation to student aspirations, from "outright pessimism to considered optimism'' (pp. 137-138), with some teachers revealing a pessimistic view about the lack of students accessing guidance programs or their own efforts at guidance. Optimism toward aspirations could still come in difficult times, as American teachers facing a `No Child Left Behind Focus' maintained the pressure to raise test scores yet still retained a positive attitude towards their career education efforts (Akos et al., 2011).

Teachers might feel overwhelmed by mounting pressure for student academic success while also providing a pastoral role in a whole school approach to guidance, with little education in the latter (Hearne & Galvin, 2014). It is also possible that personal negative perspectives on work could limit teacher views of student career interests as Oppenheimer and Flum (1986) argued that some wanted a knowledge focus – not one on careers or the future. They found teachers with high levels of education were resistant to incorporating career education into their classrooms because they did not perceive their role as focusing on student careers, while others were less resistant and showed greater interest in discussing hobbies and leisure activities with students (Oppenheimer & Flum, 1986).

The literature highlighted that teachers alluded to student deficits in social or cultural capital as impacting on aspirations. Tranter (2012) suggested that teachers' comments resonated with Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) theory of cultural reproduction, such as: "`I teach a lot of very intelligent kids but I think the bottom line is they have grown up in a particular culture which works against academic success''' (p. 910). One teacher revealed to Bok (2010) that teachers felt under pressure for students to perform, which was like "making them do a play without a script'' (p. 175). Teacher perceptions of students' lack of social or cultural capital could be seen in the contradiction highlighted by Stahl (2015), when he shared the discrepancy between the views of teachers and students. According to Stahl (2015), some students "knew the value of education, but the majority of

the participants saw education as a risk rather than a certainty, whereas their educators saw education as the certainty and low-skilled employment as the risk'' (p. 167). There is research potential around the idea of whether teachers perceive a lack of social or cultural capital to be a liability to student aspirations.

Marjoribanks (1998) contended that it was necessary to explore teacher understandings of social capital, with parents and students, in order to understand how this impacted student performance. McCollum and Yoder (2011) explained that teachers needed to be socialised in relation to their role in student achievement and aspirations. In fact, they argued it was not only necessary to educate teachers in their content but to "support them in developing skills that encourage positive relationships with their students and that support and reflect positive academic climates within their schools,'' (p. 72) which, in turn, enhanced the academic aspirations of students. In general, teachers perceived their roles in school changing over time, depending on their level of experience, as Drake and Miller (2001) identified in their study of teacher perceptions of their roles over a period of curriculum reform. In the beginning, teachers did not know what the reforms would mean whereas, afterwards, they realised it meant new expectations as Drake and Miller (2001) argued that teachers sought collaboration with peers and lifelong learning.

2.6   Gaps in the Literature and Chapter Summary

As this research fits within what contemporary Australian education researchers might view as the overlap of educational or career aspirations (Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al., 2015), the literature discussed within has focused on the intersection of research into student aspirations and career education. While the review of literature indicates that teachers have a role in the complex field of aspirations, the precise nature of their role and understandings is unclear (Fray et al., 2019). In light of the agreed upon influence of teachers on student aspirations, and with the identification of a number of gaps in the literature, this study has been designed to shed light into teacher understandings of their roles with student aspirations through designing pertinent research questions and an appropriate methodology. This study seeks to fill these gaps in the following ways:

- Uncover teacher understandings of how they perceive their role with student aspirations amid their other responsibilities and roles,

- Consider teacher perspectives in relationship to the changing landscape of future careers,

- Investigate teacher interactions about and understandings of student aspirations within a private schooling environment with growing numbers and a changing demographic, and

- Add to the growing body of literature around student aspirations by responding to the need for more research into teacher understandings about their role with student aspirations.

The next chapter outlines the use of a carefully considered theoretical bricolage, in the context of the larger methodology.

3   Methodology, Theoretical Framework, and Research Design

3.1   Chapter overview

The chapter explores the methodology, theoretical framework, and research design underpinning the current research project. The intention in designing this project was to respond to the identified lack of research into the understandings of teachers regarding the roles they play in the development of student aspirations. With this clear goal in mind, an appropriate methodology and research design was developed to fit this purpose, which is introduced and justified in this chapter. This chapter begins with a discussion of a relativist ontology and a social constructivist methodology, with a case study approach, moving into an overview of the theoretical framework. Next is the discussion of the research design, including the sampling, data collection, and data analysis, followed with an overview of the research ethics and issues of credibility, validity, transferability, and confirmability.

3.2   Ontology and Epistemology

Before embarking on a discussion of the ways in which this research has been conducted, it is first necessary to consider issues of ontology and epistemology. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) argued that "all qualitative researchers are philosophers'', guided by universal, abstract principles, reflecting ontology and epistemology, where "the beliefs shape and bind how the qualitative researcher sees the world and acts in it'' (p. 26). Guba (1990) contended that "all past paradigms, as well as emergent contenders, can be characterised by the way their proponents respond to three basic questions, which could be categorised as the *ontological,* the *epistemological,* and the *methodological* questions'' (p. 18). By answering these questions, it sets the "basic belief system or *paradigms* that might be adopted'' (Guba, 1990, p. 18) in research. Four paradigms have been considered as structuring interpretive qualitative research: positivist and post-positivist, critical, feminist-post-structural, and constructivist-interpretivist (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The discussion now continues with how this project fits best within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm.

From a constructivist-interpretivist view, which sits within a relativist ontology, there are multiple ways to approach a research question (Guba, 1990). Relativism is a way of remaining open to constant improvements on understanding (Guba, 1990) through interactions with the environment and other people. This paradigm acknowledges that people use "construct[s]'' or "mental framework[s]'' for viewing reality, so "knowledge is a *human construction*, never certifiable as ultimately true but problematic and ever changing'' (Guba, 1990, pp. 25-26). It is through interacting with the environment and other people that these constructs change. The epistemology

associated with constructivist-interpretivist paradigms is subjectivity, where the researcher must "identify the variety of constructions that exist and bring them into as much consensus as possible'' (Guba, 1990, p. 26). Like Guba, I hold a view that knowledge is a construction and through interactions, these constructions might change. In this way, the PhD becomes a story of the research, as Denzin and Lincoln (1998) suggested, where writing for the reader will be an attempt to make sense of these various constructions that teachers share with me during the data collection but also the constructions present in documents analysed, and in acknowledging how my understandings and abilities have changed through the data in this study.

In communicating this story of this research, I align myself with other researchers who hold the position that the social world affects reality. A key philosophical assumption behind this type of research is that "reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds'' and that "qualitative researchers *are interested in understanding meaning people have constructed*, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world'' (Merriam, 1988, p. 6, author's emphasis). To write from this perspective, "meaning is mediated through the investigator's own perceptions'' (Merriam, 1988, p. 6). Thus, as the researcher, I am involved in a creative process of meaning-making, as Denzin and Lincoln (2000) expressed that "interpretations are constructed''; a researcher makes notes and interpretations based on data, then this becomes a "working interpretative document'' (p. 23), which, after revision, becomes a public document for a reader. The interpretations that I am presenting draw on the understandings communicated to me by teacher participants, which may change or come into being during the process; to do this, a constructivist-interpretivist lens is appropriate, as it focuses on meaning made through interactions.

In choosing a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, it was necessary to critique and consider other paradigms. Neither positivism, critical, feminist, pragmatic nor post-structural were as well suited to this project as constructivist-interpretivist. Where positivism seeks objective answers about the "nature of the real world'' (Patton, 2015, p. 98), this research encounters multiple versions of the truth from teachers, and the research is time and place specific. Critical paradigms seek a transformative methodology, which aims to make changes in the research environment, yet this research is concerned more with understandings than social justice. Similarly, feminist-post-structural paradigms are often concerned with race, class, gender, cultural practices, and subjectivities (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998), but this research is not reliant on a critical standpoint or social criticism. Pragmatic approaches, as mentioned by Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) are often associated with mixed methods to emphasise solutions and practical methods with the goal of reaching outcomes, and although mixed methods was considered for this study, a focus on qualitative methods was deemed most appropriate for answering the identified research question.

3.3   Methodology

By choosing a social constructivist methodology, I acknowledge the importance of the research process in my effort to understand more about teacher roles with student aspirations. This thinking fits within my relativist ontology, which holds that people are making sense of the world through representations and that this sense is based on their situatedness and social interactions (Creswell, 2003); it further aligns with my subjectivist epistemology, meaning that individuals construct their knowledge, and this constantly changes through social interaction and learning (Creswell, 2003; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). As summarised by Mackenzie and Knipe (2006), social constructivism falls within the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm and tends to rely on respondents for understandings of their world. Creswell (2003) wrote that in social constructivism meanings arise out of communication and negotiations; researchers focus on specific contexts. Crotty (1998) considered such a view to acknowledge all reality is "contingent upon human practices'' (p. 42), developed and transmitted through interaction. Working from this perspective, this thesis privileged the rich insights gained through qualitatively collecting teacher understandings through a survey and interviews, along with the careful analysis of documents.

3.3.1   Case Study Approach

In choosing a case study approach, I demonstrate my position as a social constructivist through the interpretation of my data. Defining case study as an "approach" has been suggested by Hamilton and Corbitt-Whittier (2013), who argued that the case study "aims to capture the complexity of relationships, beliefs and attitudes within a bounded unit, using different forms or data collection and is likely to explore more than one perspective'' (p. 10). This aligns with Stake's (2000) suggestion that case studies are inherently constructivist as researchers make choices about what is to be studied. Merriam (1988) argued a similar point when writing that "the decision to focus on qualitative case studies stems from the fact that this design is chosen precisely because researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing'' (pp. 28-9). My understanding frames what is to be studied, presents guidelines for judging the project, and allows me to construct an interpretation about teacher understandings of student aspirations in a particular school at a particular time.

Revealing the case is a form of storytelling and the researcher decides what to reveal, which helps the reader construct their knowledge about the topic (Stake, 2000). A case study approach can provide readers with insight into actual situations, linking ideas and theory (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Yin, 2009). Further, my reading about case studies has convinced me that, as Stake (1978) suggested, case studies are important in qualitative research due to their compatibility with the "universality and importance of experiential understandings'' leading to an "epistemological

advantage over other inquiry methods as a basis for naturalistic generalisation'' (p. 129). From this perspective, using social constructivism for my project provides a sound basis for a naturalistic inquiry and to give insight into the particularity of this case.

More specifically this project was conceptualised as what Merriam (1988) termed a *particularistic* case study, where the `focus was "on a particular situation, event, program or phenomenon'' (p. 11). This project limited the research environment to a single P-12 school setting and focuses on how the teachers at this school understood their role in relation to student aspirations. Positioning the research in this way meant that I could study how a group of people confronted a particular issue, as Merriam (1988) described in relation to particularistic research. Further, in exploring a topic around teacher understandings, a case study was useful "when it is not possible or feasible to manipulate the potential causes of behaviour, and when variables are not easily identified or are too embedded in the phenomenon to be extracted for study'' (Merriam, 1988, p. 7). This proposed project into teacher understandings was non-experimental research as it sought insights into teacher understandings about their work, and my aim was to inquire into an issue and provide a detailed study; in addition, I sought to add to the academic literature around student aspirations. My interest in this project stemmed from personal curiosity about how other teachers work with student aspirations. Personally, I had not been taught or guided in how to handle situations involving student aspirations and this led me to wonder how others handle similar encounters. This type of research fit within a relativist ontology, as I made sense of teachers' understanding of their roles through representations, based on my situatedness and social interactions with teachers (Creswell, 2003). This fit within my subjectivist epistemology, where my construction of knowledge constantly changed through social interaction and learning as I engaged with teachers and research into student aspirations (Creswell, 2003; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

Case studies might also be defined by the "nature of the final report'' (Merriam, 1988, p. 27) and this also applied to this research, which was both particularistic in its focus, but also descriptive in its nature. A descriptive case study will be presented as a detailed account of something under study and was useful in "presenting basic information about areas of education where little research has been conducted'' (Merriam, 1988, p. 27). In researching the question about teacher understandings of their roles with student aspirations, this research sought specific insight within an area of limited literature and the results will be presented with a focus on the detail of the situation and environment within which the data collection took place. In considering the scarcity of literature around teacher understandings of their roles with student aspirations, other approaches were considered and critiqued for this project, such as ethnography, mixed methods, and narrative. Ethnography was unlikely to allow observations of teachers in discussions about student aspirations,

if the topic did not arise; the pragmatic, outcome focus of mixed methods was a possibility but this route was in contrast to the rich, qualitative data intended for this thesis; and, a narrative approach might have suited this project as well, however, again, this route might have limited numbers of respondents. In designing the project, the intention was to avoid limiting the number of teachers responding or teachers by the year level they teach; instead, the intention was to gain responses from as many P-12 teachers as possible because other researchers had not designed a study in this way. A case study captured a complexity of teacher responses within a bounded setting. The research was limited within certain parameters, otherwise the data set would have become unmanageable for a first-time qualitative researcher writing a PhD. To limit my project, the research was conducted in just one P-12 school setting. In doing so, the teachers were a pool of participants working in the same context. The school setting became a boundary for the project, as did the timeframe for conducting the research. In designing the research in this way, the project demonstrated what Stake (1995, 2000) described as two of the common case study features: boundedness through time and space.

Ultimately, a case study approach allowed the researcher to conduct a naturalistic inquiry that emphasised description and interpretation (Merriam, 1988). This project aligned with descriptions by Merriam (1988) and Hamilton and Corbitt-Whittier (2013), as it sought to understand the diversity of teacher understandings of their roles with student aspirations from a bounded school setting. To collect this data, the project used multiple sources of data to present an in-depth understanding of the issue, aligning with other examples of case studies (Cohen et al, 2011; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). This research consisted of triangulated methods, a survey, interviews, and a document analysis, detailed more in the research design. In the following section of the chapter, an overview of the case study school is presented, including an overview of teachers' responsibilities with aspirations and careers.

3.3.1.1 Sunnyside Overview

The case study school that formed the basis of this research is located on Melbourne's peri-urban fringe. For the purposes of anonymity, the case study school will be referred to as Sunnyside in this thesis. The school caters for the outer suburbs of Melbourne, and has students travelling from metropolitan areas. The school does not offer board to students. Recently, the school opened other campuses and has approximately 200 teaching staff across the P-12 levels. Sunnyside's junior school is from Foundation to Year 6 and the secondary school is from Year 7 to Year 12. In the survey and interviews, some participants may use the terms primary school and junior school interchangeably. Some of the literature used to support the data analysis also uses the term primary school. Much of the information that is presented about the school has been obtained from personal interactions,

the school website (School Document, 2017b), and analysis of school policy documents (School Document, 2015, 2016). To retain anonymity for the school, it is not possible to refer to the school website, so the information that follows in this section is not referenced to preserve this anonymity. As a researcher, I was an outsider, not having taught at the school. My previous contact with the school had occurred in my role as a community journalist for the Leader Newspapers, but this role had ended in 2009. My original principal supervisor had previously taught at the school.

When the school was founded it intended to meet the need for an independent co-educational school, free from any religious doctrine, and was smaller than the local public school. In the first few years, the school experienced a lack of government funding and low enrolments. After nearly a decade, the school was able to secure adequate funding. The principal changed several times during this period. The school's website mentioned the reliance on the School Council during the early years for keeping the school in operation.

In order that Sunnyside might survive, the board made changes to the school. A significant milestone in the history and growth of the school was when the current principal stepped into his role. The principal set out to alter the curriculum and make other changes to attract more enrolments from other areas, while aiming to appeal to a broader range of families. The changes instigated conflict, the majority of the School Council Members resigned, and new members were elected. Early this century, Sunnyside established a strategy with the intention of attracting new enrolments. Since the implementation of the plan, the school has grown from one with fewer than 500 students to an enrolment of over 2000. This push for more enrolments has continued and in the past decade, the school has capitalised on the growth in Melbourne's peri-urban fringe in order to secure enrolments.

The growth of student numbers and teaching staff meant that the school provided a diverse range of academic opportunities and extra-curricular activities. At the time of data collection, the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) offerings included approximately 70 subject choices for students. To complete secondary school, Victorian students may choose to complete subjects to gain credit for the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) (VCAA, 2020). VCE is also used as the main pathway to university. Students at the school were also able to participate in music, foreign languages, exchange programs, sports, dance, debate, drama as well as a range of other clubs, such as philosophy. The school participated in a non-competitive award program, which allowed all students to progressively work towards achievements in service, physical recreation, hobbies, or adventure.

Sunnyside encouraged involvement in various award programs or leadership programs. Students worked towards earning school colour badges to wear on their uniforms by completing

various academic and service tasks. Students were also able to complete a Year 10 leadership certificate and could apply for leadership roles at the Year 12 level, including as a prefect or captain.

3.3.1.2 Teacher Responsibility with Aspirations or Careers

Sunnyside provided vocational information and support to students through a designated careers practitioner. The position description for the careers practitioner explained that the role was to "provide effective careers advice and education to students and the school community including the parental/body'' (School Document, 2017d). The role was not limited to providing information to students, but also to staff and parents. During the data collection period in 2017, the school had one career practitioner who also had a teaching load. No specific careers course was offered to students. Two goals of the careers practitioner as listed on the position description were as follows:

- "Students to take control over their own career planning.
- Tutor teachers to exercise greater responsibilities and act as the first contact point in developing student career goals on regular and ongoing basis.'' (School Document, 2017d, p. 1)

New processes for career planning were implemented in 2017, in alignment with changes in the curriculum structure. All secondary teachers were assigned a tutor group role, and the careers practitioner distributed information through tutor group teachers, who then assisted students to work through websites or other teaching tools, as directed by the careers practitioner. Students are assigned a tutor group based on year level where they meet at the beginning and end of the day. Tutor group teachers check attendance daily, deliver some curriculum and are responsible for getting to know the students while staying informed of the students' academic progress. They are also the contact person for parents. Prior to this change, the careers practitioner was responsible for providing all appropriate career information to secondary students; however, with the change, professional development was offered to secondary tutor group teachers, and they took over career exploration with students. The careers practitioner provided teachers with the information they needed, such as information from *MyFuture,* Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC) and other websites. *MyFuture* is an Australian Government website aimed at helping students identify personal strengths and research career choices. Further, students wishing to schedule a meeting with the careers practitioner would be required to fill in a form, with the tutor group teacher's signature, and in some cases, the parents. Students would have to identify possible career pathways prior to the meeting.

The careers practitioner also published a careers newsletter online, with the assistance of the student prefects. Prefects at the school are student body representatives. There were 12 newsletters for 2017. The newsletters contained date-sensitive information about scholarships,

application deadlines for universities, TAFEs and other post-school programs, learning opportunities, testing opportunities, as well as general information about careers. Each issue contained information that provided students with an overview of different pathways. The timing of data collection provided a unique opportunity to witness the school's career program in transition as teachers took on a more active role with careers education[4] at the school, and this was reflected in my data as evidence of the dynamic and complex nature of teacher roles in the context of student aspirations.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the conceptualisation of the theoretical framework underpinning the main research question - *How do teachers understand their roles in relation to engaging with student aspirations?* Denzin and Lincoln (1998) explained that "a research design describes a flexible set of guidelines that connects theoretical paradigms to strategies of inquiry and methods for collecting empirical material'' (p. 28). Just as I aligned myself in the tradition of a relativist ontology, with a subjectivist epistemology and a social constructivist methodology, I positioned myself with other researchers who considered themselves to be "bricoleurs'' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 3), a term explored in the next section, in the way they designed the theoretical framework for their projects. A theoretical bricolage was necessary due to the fact my project sat at the intersection of research into aspirations and career education. Mingling theoretical perspectives allowed me to draw from various theories and to speak to the complexity of my data.

3.4.1 Theoretical Bricolage

To describe the layers of complexity inherent in teachers' perspectives about their roles with student aspirations, this project accessed the ideas of several different theorists. In fact, Gil-Flores et al. (2011) noted the complexity of any research into student aspirations when they wrote that "no single theory is comprehensive enough to address all of relevant influences on aspiration'' (p. 346). Before outlining the application of the multiple theoretical ideas relevant to the project, the next section presents the term bricoleur and how it has been applied in qualitative research.

In *The Savage Mind,* Lévi-Strauss (1966) used the term bricoleur to describe the types of artisans that approach their work with "whatever is at hand'' (p. 17). On one hand, Lévi-Strauss likened the bricoleur to the engineer as they are both "adept at performing a large number of

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[4] In Term 4 2019, Sunnyside School advertised for a Careers Teacher, who would focus on students from grades 7 to 12, and reporting to the careers practitioner, now referred to as the Head of Careers. One of the responsibilities would be to co-teach careers curriculum with tutor group teachers upon request.

diverse tasks'' (p. 17); however, he distinguished the bricoleur from the engineer by describing how the former "does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project'' (p. 17). The bricoleur did not need the "equipment and knowledge of all trades and professions'' (p. 17) but operated on what was available to complete a job. In his discussion about artisans, Lévi-Strauss described how there were always many solutions to the same problem. This idea could be applied to the way that qualitative researchers referenced many techniques and ideas in order to position a research project.

Lévi-Strauss's (1966) description was borrowed by Denzin and Lincoln (1998, 2000, 2005, 2011, 2018) as a reference point for their conception of the researcher-as-bricoleur. They wrote that "the bricoleur produces a *bricolage,* that is, a pieced together, close-knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem in a concrete situation'' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 4) and the researcher used what is available, depending on the questions being asked; new tools might be invented or strategies pieced together. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) asserted that the qualitative researcher-as-bricoleur was like a "maker of quilts'' that "uses the aesthetic and material tools of his or her craft, developing whatever strategies, methods and empirical materials are at hand'' (p. 4). During this piecing together, the researcher "understands that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and those of the people in the setting'' (p. 5). Ultimately, the product of the research was "a complex, dense, reflexive, collagelike creation that represents the researcher's images, understandings, and interpretations of the world of phenomenon under analysis'' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 6) and this way of constructing understandings will "connect parts to the whole, stressing the meaningful relationships that operate in the situations and social worlds studied'' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 3).

Denzin and Lincoln's (1998, 2000, 2005, 2011, 2018) concept of researcher-as-bricoleur was used by researchers to describe their various approaches. Rogers (2012) wrote that bricolage research "can be considered a critical, multi-perspectival, multi-theoretical and multi-methodological approach to inquiry'' (p. 1). From this approach, researchers could "respect the complexity of meaning-making processes and contradictions of the lived world'' and an interpretative bricoleur must "reflexively piece together their research'' and "scrutinize how their positioning affects their research process'' (Rogers, 2012, p. 4). Researchers choosing to employ a bricolage approach were acknowledging the multitude of ways that research could be interpreted and were expressing a sense of creativity in the way they pursued their projects (Rogers, 2012). Other researchers, like Kincheloe (2004) asserted that bricolage could provide a power for researchers who wanted to take a critical aim. The notion of a theoretical bricolage, therefore, was an apt way to explain to the reader how the theoretical frameworks in my research sat alongside

one another under a constructivist umbrella to explain all of the complexities inherent within teacher work, as explained further in the next section.

3.4.1.1   Theoretical Intersection

This section reviews the theories employed as the theoretical bricolage. This qualitative research question sits at the nexus of different areas of study, including research into student aspirations, influential teacher roles with student aspirations, teacher perceptions of their roles with student aspirations, careers education, and school choice. The myriad of frameworks adopted by researchers in these diverse areas of research necessitated that I become a researcher-as-bricoleur through adopting a multi-theoretical design that can account for the complexity of student aspirations and teacher roles within a private school environment, while not overlooking the intersection with careers education. Due to this density of theories, and the intersection of fields and concepts, not one theory was suitable in capturing the inherent complexity of teacher work, so a theoretical bricolage was employed for the data interpretation. These theories will be introduced in this section of the thesis and then used throughout the interpretation in the data analysis chapters.

In order to consider the various roles that teachers understood they had with student aspirations, a theory was needed that considered both formal and informal roles that one might encounter on a job and an interactionist reading of role changes, for which I drew on Turner's (2001) role theory. To contextualise how teacher perceptions of aspirations were influenced by the environment inside and outside of the school, I have drawn on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979). Furthermore, in order to situate teacher understandings of students' developing understandings of both career and aspiration, it was necessary to explain their perceptions in relation to theory around this topic, including Gottfredson's (1981) and Patton and McMahon's (2015) concepts. The reason that I chose these theories is the commonality that, although their foci are different, each considers the impact of social forces on an individual; further, each theory is compatible with my constructivist-interpretivist view (Guba, 1990). Used together in a theoretical bricolage, these theorists allow me to consider the complexities underpinning teachers' understandings of their roles with aspirations. The theoretical bricolage is represented in Table 3.1, with each of the theories reviewed in sub-sections below.

Table 3.1

Theoretical Bricolage

Theorist	Idea	Themes in this Project
Turner's Interactionist Role Theory (2001)	Formal and Informal Roles Role Change	Teacher roles
Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1994)	Ecology of Human Development Teacher as Observer and Participant	Environment
Gottfredson (1981)	Circumscription Compromise	Development of Student Aspirations
Patton and McMahon (2015)	Systems Theory Framework of Career Development Teacher in System	Career Education

The theories referred to in Table 3.1 are employed for different purposes in this thesis. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1994) allowed recognition of the teacher as both an influence and an observer to student aspirations, while taking into consideration other ecological factors, such as family, the school environment, and the larger culture. In contrast, Turner's (2001) ideas were not specific to a school environment but focused on the challenges that individuals faced when fulfilling a role, how they were socialised into a role and how they coped with more responsibility placed on that role in the context of organisational change. While Turner's (2001) ideas helped explain aspects of a teacher's role, as well as potential joys and frustrations in relation to it, Gottfredson's ideas, as outlined in the literature review, were oriented around the developing aspirations of students, as they delimit aspirations in response to perceptions of availability. Further, Patton and McMahon's (2015) Systems Theory Framework of Career Development explained how career education must be viewed from a systems framework in order to see the teacher as a participant in a student's career development.

None of these theories on its own supported the interpretation of complexity within the data; however, a theoretical bricolage mingled these theories together, under a constructivist umbrella, and allowed examination of teacher understandings about their role with student aspirations. Employing a theoretical bricolage also set this thesis apart from other work in aspirations, which drew heavily on Bourdieu's (1986) thinking, specifically his theories of capital, habitus and field (Bok, 2010; Gale & Parker, 2014; Gale & Parker, 2015a, 2015b; Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate, et al., 2015; Smith, 2011; Zipin et al., 2015). Although Bourdieu's (1986) work has been useful and there were linkages to his work in the data analysis, the positioning of my project – from teachers' perspectives – required a theoretical bricolage to adequately interpret and

understand the complexity of teacher understandings and roles in relation to student aspirations. The following sections will present an overview of Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1994), Turner (2001), Gottfredson (1981, 1996), and Patton and McMahon (2015), while showing the relevance of this research into teacher understandings of their role in relation to student aspirations.

3.4.1.1.1   *Overview of Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1994) and Application*

Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979, 1994) recognised the role that key people, such as teachers, played in the development of children. His model also described other forces at work on the child's development, such as the family, disruptions to the child's life, the school environment, or cultural influences. Certain factors that Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1994) discussed – teachers, family, disruptions, the school, and culture – were influential aspects upon student aspirations. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1994) recognised that children, from young ages, were unique individuals with insights into their own development, something which fit with literature into student aspirations, as researchers have been recognising that aspirations may form and set at early ages (Gottfredson, 1981; Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate, et al., 2015). As Taveira et al. (2016) argued in their review of literature around children's career education, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model offered an opportunity to link various studies together to add to current literature in the area.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed a model of human development based on interaction with the environment, which he "conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like Russian dolls'' (p. 3). These nested structures include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and later the chronosystem, as shown in Figure 3.1.

Child at Centre
Microsystem
Mesosystem
Exosystem
Macrosystem
Chronosystem
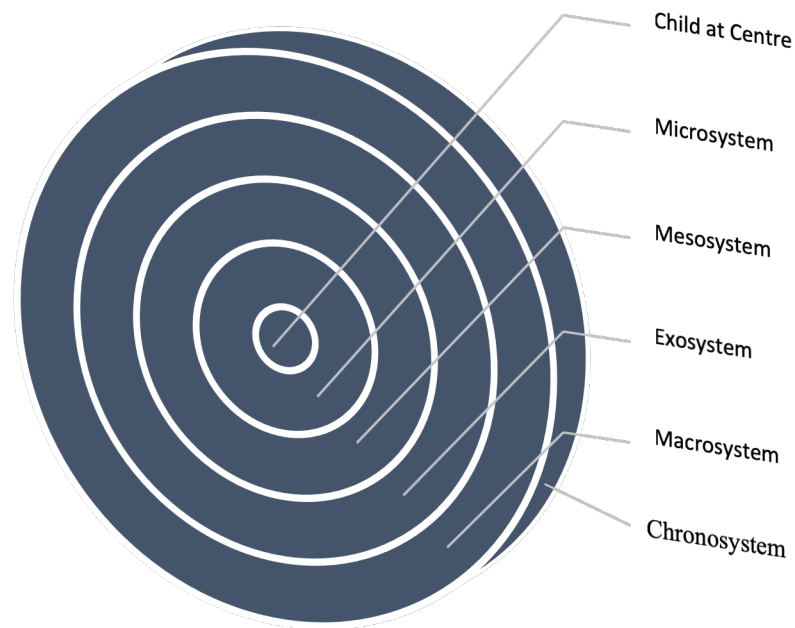
Figure 3.1. Interpretation of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model. Source: Adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1979) *The Ecology of Human Development*. Boston, Mass: Harvard University Press and (1994) Ecological models of human development. *Readings on the development of children*, *2*(1), 37-43.

The first four levels shown in Figure 3.1 refer to an environmental aspect of child development, while the last element, the chronosystem, refers to changes in time:

- Microsystem – This is the inner level, "containing the developing person'' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 3), and may include the home, classroom, familiar ground, or laboratory.

- Mesosystem – This is a level of relationships between the microsystem and the exosystem.

- Ecosystem – This level "evokes a hypothesis that the person's development is profoundly affected by events occurring in settings in which the person is not even present'' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.3), such as neighbours, industry, local politics.

- Macrosystem – This level again indicates the relationships between levels but also considers the notions of culture, social norms, and belief systems at play in society.

- Chronosystem – This notion, added later, "encompasses change or consistency over time not only in the characteristics of the person but also in the environment of which that person lives'' (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 40).

The model continued to evolve during Bronfenbrenner's lifetime, with expanded emphasis on the role the individual played in his or her own development (Tudge, Odero, Hogan & Etz, 2003). Bronfenbrenner (1994) argued that one of his aims was to study children within commonplace, or more natural environments. By the mid-1980s, his influence reached other sociologists as studies of children and adults tended to be in real-life settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In later work, Bronfenbrenner aimed to take account of an individual's role in their development, not just on contextual influences (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009).

Despite Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1994) work being framed around the psychological development of children, his theories were commonly applied in education and career research. Researchers note the theory's effectiveness in helping to orient research to the specific context, as Tudge, Odero, Hogan, and Etz (2003) used Bronfenbrenner to study what preschoolers brought to the interactions with their teachers and the impact on academic competence. Writing in the US, Sirin, Diemer, Jackson, Gonsalves, and Howell (2004) argued that Bronfenbrenner's "contextual perspective assert[s] the inextricable connectedness between individuals and their social context'' (p. 448), which underpinned their study into student aspirations. Taveira et al. (2016) reviewed 36 articles studying children's career learning and argued that Bronfenbrenner's ecological model could be used as a framework to link these ideas in relation to children's career education. In other disciplines, Crosnoe (2004) applied the theory to a study of marriage and family, using Bronfenbrenner's ideas to underpin the developing individual and explore the family context prior to marriage. Cook, Gilmer, and Bess (2003) used Bronfenbrenner's model to explore the identity of nurses as they began their careers while Dawson, Cawthon, and Baker (2011) had Bronfenbrenner as a backdrop as they explored teacher change through drama-based activities.

Although his theories have been widely used in education, and more recently in career theories, Bronfenbrenner's ideas have not been without criticism. His model has been criticised for not paying "sufficient attention to individual development'' and his ideas "complement those theories that have largely failed to place enough focus on the nature of children's learning and development'' (MacBlain, 2018, p. 68). Bronfenbrenner responded to this criticism in his later work, most notably in *Making Human Beings Human* where he detailed how he overlooked the individual's role in development while at the same time defending the ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Tudge et al., 2009). Bronfenbrenner also responded to critics by arguing that his work was continually evolving, and he was continually updating his theories until his death in 2005 (Tudge et al., 2009). Tudge et al. (2009) warned that Bronfenbrenner's theory was complicated and those applying it needed to specify what years or aspects of the theory they were using, to avoid confusion and to keep the theory intact. Bronfenbrenner's early work, and the addition of the chronosystem,

were applicable to my research, concerned with examining the notion of the ecological system located around a student, while the teacher became both an observer and participant during the development of student aspirations. In addition, some aspects of his revised theory were applicable to certain aspects of my analysis, specifically his arguments about a person's force in his proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Tudge et al., 2009). His theory provided a sound theoretical context from which to explain teacher viewpoints, and, ultimately, to contribute to current literature into factors affecting student aspirations and the intersection of career education literature arising in the data.

Just as Allen et al. (2018) used Bronfenbrenner's model of ecology in their discussion about the role of teachers with student engagement, I applied this model to assist in the exploration of teacher roles with student aspirations. Allen et al. (2018) argued that it was not their intention to "explore the interplay between the psychological characteristics of students and the exosystem of their environment'' (p. 414); instead, they positioned an argument that the "individuals, groups patterns of behaviour and activity within the exosystem can influence the outcomes of an individual at the heart of the microsystem'' (p. 414). They argued that "key educators'' were significant as they "play a role in shaping the development of young people in their interplay with the schooling environment, including their choices about school'' (p. 414). This was my intention too, as I borrowed from Bronfenbrenner to explain specific aspects of my data, particularly in the positioning of teachers as both participants in and observers to the processes that students go through when formulating aspirations. Also drawing from Bronfenbrenner, Siren et al. (2004) argued that "the dynamic interactions between individuals and their sociocultural contexts has a profound influence on one's future aspirations'' (p. 449). Similarly, my research drew upon Bronfenbrenner's ideas to expose teachers as uniquely positioned in playing key roles in engaging students through the development of aspirations. Figure 3.2 explains the application of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1994) model to interpret the positioning of teachers in this thesis, where in his model, the school is placed within the microsystem. My application draws attention to the teacher as both participant and observer using his model, in the context of student aspirations. This teacher positioning is shown as follows:

Child at Centre

Microsystem: Teacher as Participant In School Envrionment and Observer to Other Interactions

Mesosystem

Exosystem

Macrosystem

Chronosystem
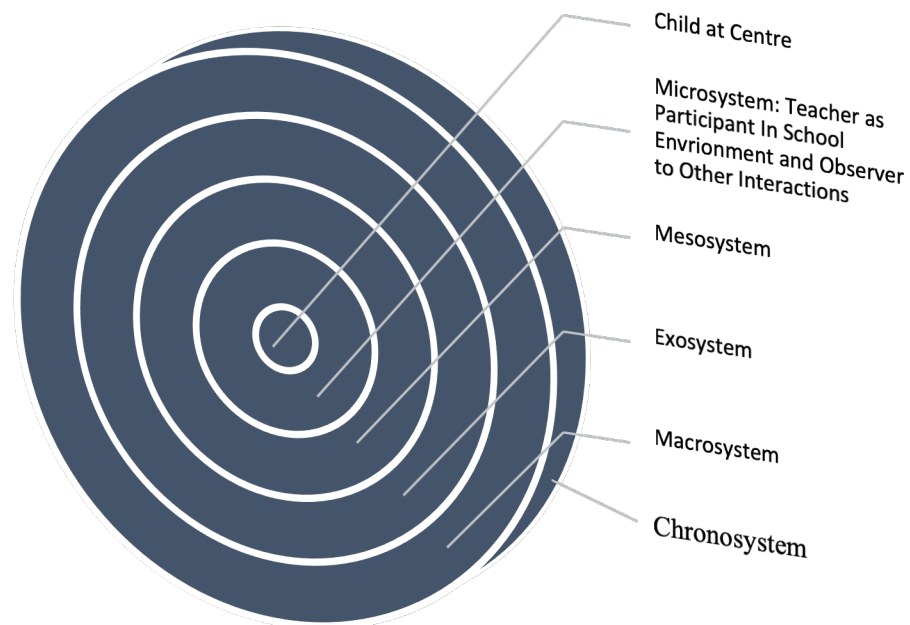
Figure 3.2. Interpretation of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model with teacher positioning*.*
Source: Adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development*. Boston, Mass: Harvard University Press and (1994) Ecological models of human development. *Readings on the development of children*, *2*(1), 37-43.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1994) model enabled me to explain how teachers' observations of their role with student aspirations has been understood within the context of the school and the environment; this included any changes to the environment and how this affected not only the teachers' role but also the way aspirations were conceptualised. Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1994) work was useful in explaining how teachers were participants in the system where student aspirations are formed, and how teachers were positioned to work with student aspirations. The next section explains the use of Turner's (2001) role theory and its application to this project.

3.4.1.1.2   *Overview of Turner's (2001) Role Theory and Application to my Project*

Turner's (2001) role theory was the second element of the theoretical bricolage. Drawing on this approach highlights how, as social actors in a particular social setting and time, teachers defined and carried out their role in relation to student aspirations – a role that was not specifically defined in role descriptions. Turner's work provided more detail into the way teachers were socialised into a role and helped to explore the difficulties they might face when a role was intensified or complicated.

Turner's (2001) theory explained how different individuals may react similarly in similar situations and therefore, assisted in exploring situations teachers encountered and how they conceptualised their role with student aspirations. It also assisted my understanding about why there were differences or deviations from what teachers considered to be the expected role. Turner (2001) explained that "it is important to understand that role refers to a *cluster* of behaviours and attitudes that are thought to belong together, so that an individual is viewed as acting consistently when performing the various components of a single role and inconsistently when failing to do so'' (p. 233). Turner's theory accounted for how people within a role looked to others for the appropriate ways of performing their role, and ways that they became socialised into a role. His theoretical argument stemmed from Mead's (1934) symbolic interactionist tradition, which separated him from other traditions of role theories.

Symbolic interactionist roles theories, following in the footsteps of Mead (1934) and Merton (1957), have been discussed and applied by several theorists, including Thornton and Nardi (1975), Yellin (1999), Stryker and Burke (2000), and Turner (2001). Thornton and Nardi's (1975) model of role acquisition discussed role diversification and accounted for the changing nature of roles while a person inhabited the role; however, it did not go into great detail about various tensions that a person might have encountered, which limited its relevance to my project. Yellin (1999) focused on the process of role acquisition, and although this work might have been useful in aiding understanding of how teachers learned their roles over time, it was not comprehensive or detailed enough to account for the specifics of teachers of all experience levels working with student aspirations. Stryker and Burke (2000) focused on symbolic interactionist role theories, and presented an alternative reading of the history of role; identity theory was more concerned with larger questions about roles in general, and although aspects were relevant to my project, it provided little detail to explain the specifics that teachers encountered, such as interactions with students and parents around aspirations. My application of role theory drew from Turner (2001), as his theory was not just concerned with the acquisition of roles, but also incorporated diverse types of interactions on the job, and it therefore lent itself to the type of situation encountered at Sunnyside.

Turner (2001) presented a dynamic model of role theory that was useful in a study about teachers working in ever-evolving environments, like schools. His view was that "interactional role theory starts from the patterning of social interaction among individuals and groups of individuals'' and that "behaviour that constitutes roles arises initially and recurrently out of the dynamics of interaction and that statuses and positions arise to place roles in a social organisational framework'' (Turner, 2001, p. 234). He included four broad types of roles in his definition: basic, associated with gender, age, and social class; position or status, positions in organisation and groups; functional,

situational identities in a group setting; and value, emergent and associated with positive or negative connotations (Turner, 2001).

Turner (2001) also provided five assumptions behind his interactionist role theory, summarised briefly in this paragraph. Turner (2001) held that role behaviour was a creative enterprise, because in day-to-day interactions, people engaged in role-taking and role-making. He also borrowed from Mead's (1934) symbolic interactionist idea about taking the role of the other, where people engaged with one another by "understanding a cluster of actions'' and acting in response with the surrounding the situation in question (Turner, 2001, p. 235). Turner (2001) suggested that social roles existed in pairs or sets, such as teacher and student, and that role-taking was "conveyed in culture'' (p. 235) and gained from past experiences. He also suggested that roles could become quite normative, with a basic level of predictability that could cause people to see things as fixed, and resistant to change. This perspective was useful in a study of teachers to consider if there were any entrenched mindsets associated with student aspirations.

His theory assumed that roles were constantly being remade in the context of other roles. This process was guided by functionality, representationality, and tenability. Functionality was the concept of separating roles so that processes were done effectively; representationality was similar to a stereotype, as people made assumptions about others in reference to roles; and tenability was related to the "benefits and costs to the role incumbent,'' such as prestige (Turner, 2001, p. 240). Turner (2001) contended that these three aspects of roles worked in relationship to one another, and in combination with other factors, such as role persistence, which was the notion that a role stays the same, regardless of the incumbent. He also described how people were allocated compatible roles, based on a role they held, such as in a social club (Turner, 2001).

Turner (2001) made specific comments on working roles. When a person was assigned a work role, such as a policeman or teacher, for instance, Turner (2001) asserted that they often "develop what might be called an informal or working role that differs significantly from the formal role'' (p. 243). In this respect, people habitually looked to their peers to negotiate the role and behave – they shared understandings. Examples of this were when groups of workers joined together and took an antagonistic role, in opposition to the employer, and similarly, when a formal role description was vague on a specific aspect, such as a moral responsibility, people looked at one another for appropriate behaviours. Turner's (2001) point about the vagueness of role descriptions has been applied in my data analysis and interpretation, to assist in explaining teacher roles.

Due to how he viewed roles as in a constant state of tension as they were negotiated by people, Turner's theory accounts for the discrepancies that arose in roles in several ways. Another aspect of Turner's (2001) theory was interrole conflict, and again he specifically mentioned teachers.

He suggested that "the elementary school teacher, for example, must respond to often conflicting expectations from students, parents, and supervisors'' and conflict can occur when "roles incorporate different functions'' (p. 244). He contended that interrole conflict was where people might be forced to take on two contradictory actions within a role. This conflict arose out of the complexity of the organisation. People found themselves in situations of role strain, facing anxiety or tension, or role overload, when they were performing too many roles (Turner 1978; 2001). Role change occurred when there was a major shift within a role, or "a change in role relationships with two or more role necessarily changing in some kind of reciprocity'' (Turner, 2001, p. 251). This involved a shift not only in responsibilities of a person or people, but also a shift in ways of thinking about the role, which could be attached to cultural values, different services, demographic changes, and resources. This aspect was something that I examined in my research with teachers at Sunnyside, in relation to their roles with student aspirations.

Interactionist role theory has been used to help examine roles in diverse school scenarios and education researchers have adapted role theory to their research environments. Walker and Shore (2015) used aspects of Turner's (2001) theory to help explain their data in inquiry-based classrooms, and argued that a teacher and student might negotiate roles according to what content was being considered. Valli and Buese (2007) used aspects of Turner's theory as they examined the impact that government policies had on the duties that teachers were expected to perform inside and outside the classroom over a four-year period, and identified that role expectations increased in four areas, instructional, institutional, collaborative, and learning. Richards (2015) also used Turner's interactionist theory to help fill in the deficits in relation to occupational socialisation theory to explain the socially constructed role of physical education teachers. Specifically, Turner's (2001) work helped to explain how a teacher was not able to perform their range of duties well when their commitments were spread across a range of responsibilities. Other education researchers have similarly studied the work of teacher-coaches in Hong Kong and have used interactionist approaches to explain their data. Wai Sum and Dimmock (2012) used role theory to disentangle the complexities of the role of a physical education teacher, combined with what was perceived to be low status of the role.

In summary, Turner's (2001) theory differed from the more static, functional role theories, instead dealing with "the organisation of social behaviour at both the individual and the collective levels'' (p. 233). His theory considered relationships between micro, macro, and intermediate levels, and through this it was possible to understand that individuals respond differently in situations, which sat compatibly with Bronfenbrenner (1979) and others in a theoretical bricolage. The tenets of Turner's (2001) theory presented an opportunity to understand the role of teachers when they

were faced with working with student aspirations, which were complex and dynamic and in the context of a quickly growing school.

This section continues to outline elements of my theoretical bricolage and presents a brief historical overview of career education theories in order to show the complexity of current research into career education. Gottfredson's (1981) stage theory and Patton and McMahon's (2015) Career Systems Theory were helpful to interpret the understandings of teachers about their roles with student aspirations, positioned at the nexus of research into career education.

Career development theories have had a short history, beginning with vocational guidance in the 1900s, which aligned people with appropriate jobs (Patton & McMahon, 2015). Trait and factor theories came later as did person-environment fit theories, followed by cognition and constructivist theories and more recently, systems theory of careers; career theories reflected the time they were constructed in and altered with changing times (Patton & McMahon, 2015). During the past century, authors have grouped career theories into like ideas with Hartung and Subich (2011) grouping different perspectives, such as differential, developmental, socio-cognitive-behavioural, and constructionist. Patton and McMahon (2015) presented an overview of career theories and categorized these theories into theory groups, including content, process, content and process, constructivist, and systems. The later work of Patton and McMahon (2015) was a useful guide to summarise the development of career theories, comparing and contrasting them in grouped time periods, as well as with their own systems theory of careers. It is important to note too that Patton and McMahon (2015) argued that certain theories were difficult to categorise, and this includes Gottfredson's (1981); this was because her theory was unlike others at the time as it focused on children and adolescents, and included contextual variables.

As mentioned in the literature review, Gottfredson's (1981, 1996) notions of circumscription and compromise explained how children perceive aspirations as they mature in the context of their sociological environments. Gottfredson (1981, 1996) conceptualised how children oriented themselves to the social world around them through four stages of circumscription: size and power, ages 3-5; sex roles, 6-8; social valuation, 9-13; and internal self, 14 and older. These stages reflected how Gottfredson (1981, 1996) theorised how children conceptualised a social map while they were young, and this social map contributed to their process of eliminating a potential pathway – before they completely understood it – based on their self-perception within the social map. Gottfredson (1996) describes how a child's "occupational exploration is confined to the zone of acceptable alternatives (social space) circumscribed at earlier stages'' (p. 195). Gottfredson (1996) suggested that children must be encouraged to "probe the boundaries of unacceptability set earlier in life to

see if they are appropriate'' (p. 217). These key aspects from her theory form part of the theoretical bricolage in this thesis underpinning the examination of how teachers perceive student aspirations forming. Gottfredson's (1981, 1996) ideas, along with Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Turner (2001) to assist the explanation of how teachers saw themselves as key figures within this process to educate students about possible futures. This sat alongside other current research that used Gottfredson's work in agreement about the need for early career education interventions (Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate, et al., 2015).

Patton and McMahon (2015) grouped content career theories based on the idea that influences on the individual were either intrinsic to individual or where he or she lives, and included influential thinkers like Parsons (1909) and Holland (1959) (as in Patton & McMahon, 2015). Holland (1997) categorised work environment into six types, realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, or conventional, aiming to match people with careers. Process theories, as grouped by Patton and McMahon (2015), were concerned with people's changes over time and their development, including Ginzberg et al. (1951), as in Patton and McMahon (2015), and Super's (1980) lifespan approach. Super's (1980) work was influential on many thinkers, particularly Savickas, Nota, Rossier, Dauwalder, Duarte, Guichard, Soresi, Van Esbroeck, and Van Vianen (2009), who expanded and updated aspects of his theory, with work incorporating adolescence in relation to career, and career becoming more of a dynamic process over time.

Linking content and process theories emphasised cognitive aspects of choosing a career, and included such theories as social learning theory and happenstance theory (Patton & McMahon, 2015), Krumboltz's Social Learning Theory of Career Decision Making (1976, 1979) and the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), derived from Bandura's social cognitive theory, integrating career constructs and focusing on specific cognitive mediators (Patton & McMahon, 2015). Around this time, Vondracek, Lerner, and Schulenberg (1986) were critical of theorists that adhered to stage explanations of career development; they argued that such frameworks overlooked the complexity of process.

In addition to the evolving content and process theories, several theories sought to account for views overlooked in earlier theories. For example, the views of women were addressed by Zytowski (1989), revising the central role of women as housewives (Patton & McMahon, 2015). Other theories were adapted for a purpose, including Astin (1984), focusing on students and academic success at university, and Gottfredson (1981), focusing on children and adolescents (Patton & McMahon, 2015). Ragins (2004) used a theory that concentrates on lesbian women, gay men, and bisexual individuals, which was adapted for diverse groups (Patton & McMahon, 2015). Patton and McMahon (2015) argued there remained a North American bias to theories, and a lack of

theories related to specific ethnic and racial groups. In addition, Skorikov and Patton (2007) studied research on children and adolescents, explaining that much of the work was descriptive rather than explanatory, acknowledging the need for a much deeper understanding of the factors and mechanisms to account for career exploration and choice.

More recently, constructivist theories that recognised the central role of the individual in constructing his/her life have developed. Theories that could be read as constructivist due to the nature of how they emphasised the importance of the individual and anticipated the influence of others and the environment on the individual include: career construction theory (Savickas, 2005; 2013), chaos theory of careers (Bright & Pryor, 2005), and career systems theory (Patton & McMahon, 2015). Specifically, Patton and McMahon's (2015) was a way of taking into account all of the theories, with the basic idea that it worked as overlapping systems: "The STF [Systems Theory Framework] is composed of several key interrelated systems, including the intrapersonal system of the individual, the social system and the environmental societal system'' (p. 24). They suggested that career was disputed in relation to the term vocation, while career might be thought of as an individual within contextual influences or it might be understood as a hegemonic term created by market forces (Patton & McMahon, 2015). An alternative way of thinking about careers, as more open, was suggested as such:

> The protean career displaces the notion of a linear and vertical career and acknowledges flexible and idiosyncratic career construction or career building; it includes all aspects of an individual's life as relevant to career, and places the individual at the centre of career and organisational and occupational contexts.
> (Patton & McMahon, 2015, p. 7)

Patton and McMahon's (2015) ideas were useful in this research to conceptualise student career understandings and to recognise the teacher as a part of this system as they considered the actual application in schools where career practitioners and teachers worked together. This was a useful theoretical tool in the context of an evolving school with teachers performing career-oriented tasks. I used their ideas as supporting theories in conjunction with other theories, such as Gottfredson (1981), Bronfenbrenner (1979), and Turner (2001). Together, this theoretical bricolage helped me fully explore and explain the complexity of my data and what it will mean for further research into student aspirations and teacher understandings of their roles with student aspirations.

3.4.1.1.4   *Summary of Theoretical Framework*

Working together under a constructivist framework, these theories helped explain the complexities at work behind teacher perceptions of their roles in relation to student aspirations.

Ultimately, the collaboration of these theories grounded my research in current thinking about the issues in question and gave me a sound theoretical underpinning for analysis of my data. As a bricoleur in my approach to theory, I accounted for the nuances of my data, and suggested new possibilities for further research into teacher work with student aspirations.

3.5 Research Design

In this section of the chapter the design of the research is introduced, including an outline of the research questions, methods of data collection, and analysis. I also present an examination of ethical issues and issues pertaining to validity and rigour. Each of these sections also contains a justification for the inclusion of particular data collection methods, in line with Flick's (2009) description of how researchers must choose appropriately for their research question. The researcher must design a strategy "open to the complexity of a study's subject" in order to "study complex issues" (Flick, 2009, p. 15). The complexity of the research question, aims, and methodology laid the foundation for the selection of data collection tools.

3.5.1 Research questions

This research was intended to explore the question, *How do teachers understand their roles in relation to engaging with student aspirations?* It necessitated remaining open to the perceptions of teachers about their roles with student aspirations and where their understandings led me. To explore this question four sub-questions were created:

1. How do teachers perceive student aspirations forming?
2. What defined or undefined roles do teachers perceive themselves playing in relation to student aspirations and is this a shared understanding within the school?
3. How do teachers cope with interactions and uncertainties in relation to student aspirations?
4. How do teachers perceive influences on student aspirations working as barriers and facilitators?

This main research question, along with the sub-questions, guided all aspects of the research and specifically the development of the methods. Further decisions about the research methods emerged from the positioning of this research, at the nexus of literature into student aspirations and career education. It was with these intentions in mind that I carefully chose my qualitative research methods.

3.5.2 Sampling

This section presents an overview of the sampling, selection and recruitment of participants.

3.5.2.1 Sampling, Selection and Recruitment of Participants

This research was an industry-funded project and the recruitment of the participants took place in the school context. As a means of inviting teachers to participate in the research project, I spoke for five minutes at the beginning of a whole school staff meeting after school. I explained that an email would be sent to them from a general school email address, which would have a Plain Language Information Statement (PLIS) attached. Both the email and PLIS were prepared under the direction of my supervisors and approved by ethics. The email is available in Appendix F and the PLIS is available in Appendix G. If teachers consented to participate in the research, they clicked a link to the survey from within the email. The survey provided excerpts from the PLIS in the opening pages, and by answering the survey, teachers were giving their informed consent. Those teachers that were willing to participate in an interview recorded their names and informed consent prior to the start of the interview.

Teachers working in the junior and secondary schools were invited to participate enabling the employment of purposeful sampling, described by Creswell (2013) as an approach where "the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study'' (p. 156). Purposeful sampling became an intention of the research as I was interested in obtaining participation from teachers within both the junior and secondary school. I invited all teachers from the population of the school staff to complete the survey.

Table 3.2 outlines the staff numbers at the time of the survey (School Annual Report, 2016), demonstrating that approximately one-third of teachers responded to the survey component of the research. This table also highlights that the majority of teachers within the school were female, and thus more females would have been available for participation in this study.

Table 3.2

Male and Female Teaching Staff Numbers

Staff Totals	Number
Female Teaching Staff	130
Male Teaching Staff	34
Total	164
Total Survey Responses	57

The following tables, Table 3.3 and Table 3.4 provide a demographic overview of the research participants, including their age range and education level. Table 3.3 shows that the majority of teachers responding were aged between 31-50, while Table 3.4 outlines teaching qualifications, showing that the respondents had obtained either a Bachelor's degree, Graduate

Diploma, or a Master's degree, or were working towards a Master's degree. However, in both instances, some participants, approximately 20 per cent, did not provide these details.

Table 3.3

Demographic Information – Age Range

Age Ranges	Number
21-30	5
31-40	14
41-50	19
51-60	5
61-70	3
71-80	0
Total Responses	46
No response	11

Table 3.4

Demographic Information – Education Level

Education Level and Totals	Number
PhD	1
Master's Degree or Work Towards Master's Degree	16
Graduate Diploma or Other Postgraduate Work	14
Bachelor's Degree	14
Total Responses	45
No Response	12

In addition, 45 teachers provided details of the number of years of teaching experience, with the lowest number of years being one and the highest reported 50. The majority of research participants who responded to this question had 15 years or more of teaching experience. When asked to provide their gender, 47 teachers responded, and 33 selected female and 14 selected male.

Through filtering the responses to the following two questions, "Which of the following BEST describes your role,'' no teachers chose junior school; however, seven selected junior school when asked "Please select ALL of the year levels that you are currently teaching," I determined that there were at least 10 junior school teachers who responded to the survey and at least 30 secondary school teachers. There were also at least two specialist teachers and two educational administrators.

When teachers selected the Year levels they were currently teaching, they had the option of selecting more than one year level. Of the 47 teachers there was a collective total of 32 primary year levels selected; of the year levels 7 to 10, a collective total of 125 secondary year levels were selected. Of the 46 that responded to the question requesting a further interview, 16 agreed to being interviewed, with one failing to put in an email address, and 30 declined an interview. I

attempted to contact the 15 that provided email addresses for an interview, but only 12 responded to my email and agreed to an interview. In addition to these 12, I was able to interview the principal and the careers practitioner, which brought the total number of interviewees to 14.

3.5.3 Data Collection

This section explains the choice to collect data for a triangulated case study through a survey, interviews, and documents.

3.5.3.1 Survey

The primary data collection method was an online qualitative survey, which suited the intention to examine a range of teacher understandings, including teachers at different year levels and their understandings about student aspirations at different ages. The survey opened on 8/5/2017 and closed on 2/6/2017. Using a survey within a case study aligned this project with Yin's (2009) suggestion that survey research as a data collection tool was useful when focusing on contemporary events.

The concepts studied were based on the sub-research questions, as mentioned earlier, and included participating teacher perceptions of the following:

- formation of student aspirations,
- defined or undefined teacher roles with aspirations,
- shared understanding of teacher roles,
- importance of student aspirations, and
- school handling of student aspirations.

Further, the research sought to uncover how often teachers worked with students on their aspirations, how these situations arise, and how teachers respond to the situations.

In order to develop the survey, the sub-questions were the initial starting point. This preliminary grouping stage, and early version of the questions, is presented in Appendix B. I worked with my supervisors to develop survey questions and, through these discussions, decided that a mixture of question types was most comprehensive, including a Likert Scale, ranked items, open responses, and demographic information. As there were no previous instruments appropriate for this research, the development of a self-devised instrument specific to this study was needed. The survey went through several drafts, including a pilot with one of my supervisor's other higher degree research students to gain feedback on the survey as an instrument. The final questions were listed in Appendix C, along with the opening definitions of aspirations provided for teacher familiarity with the topic.

Using the online survey tool, *Survey Monkey,* enabled participants easy access to the survey and required minimal time for teachers, approximately 20 minutes. A survey allowed for a range of responses with teachers from different year levels. Boudah (2011) contended that "many researchers are now using online survey tools to gather data from participants'' (p. 172), and participants generally found it "easy'' and "acceptable'' (p. 172) as long as it was a secure site.

Online surveying facilitated counting techniques on a computer. Merriam (1988) argued that "counting'' responses "is often ignored by qualitative researchers as too quantitative'' (p. 148); however, she suggested that while reviewing the data, qualitative researchers often counted as a way to gain an overall idea or picture of the data, providing a basic indication of viewpoints and patterns. Counting survey responses helped instill confidence in the understanding of the data as teachers confirmed they perceived working with student aspirations as part of their roles, both formally and informally. After initially reviewing the data, the survey allowed the calculation of basic numbers and percentages from questions and grouping of responses into junior and secondary respondents. Although not all of the 57 participants responded to each question, they provided detailed data in relation to the project.

3.5.3.2   Interviews

Using interviews as a data collection method satisfied the intention of exploring teacher understandings of student aspirations and perceived roles. As Merriam (1988) contended, a researcher must critically examine the type of information needed before using an interview method. An interview method was appropriate because a semi-structured interview environment gave participants space to comment freely about the questions. Interviews have been common as part of a case study investigation (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2009), with an interviewing method useful in qualitative research when one cannot "observe behaviour, feelings, or how people interact with the world around them'' (Merriam, 1988, p. 72). Thus, interviewing assisted the gaining of the type of information necessary for this research project.

In keeping with the intended constructivist intentions and techniques, semi-structured interviews enabled a "dynamic exchange of ideas based on researchers' open-ended questions or areas of interest'' (Trainor & Graue, 2013, p. 126), where my understandings were co-constructed through the exchanges. The semi-structured nature was in keeping with my relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology as individuals define the world in subjective ways, as Merriam (1988) argued that a loose structure aided researcher understanding in accessing particularities within participant responses. This was a strength of semi-structured interviews in that as the teachers answered the same questions, it increased the "comparability of the responses'' (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 211). This dynamic afforded teachers the opportunity to speak broadly about issues surrounding

student aspirations of interest or concern to them. It also provided the opportunity to ask questions of clarification or to probe situations that a teacher might mention, which as Kvale (1996) pointed out, allowed the interviewer to clarify meaning within the interview situation, attempting to verify understanding with the interviewee.

The 14 interviews took place after the surveys, which allowed time for careful analysis of the survey data and revision of interview questions. I spent approximately one month going through the survey data carefully prior to contacting the prospective interviewees. A timeline is included in Figure 3.3 that outlines the phases of data analysis. In April 2017, I returned from maternity leave, having taken a break immediately after the confirmation of candidature. In October 2018, I went on a second maternity leave for the PhD.
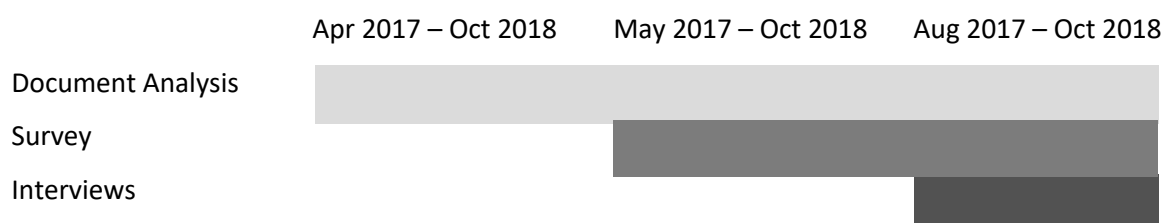
Figure 3.3. Timeline of Data Analysis

My final interview questions highlighted aspects of the survey that I wanted to clarify and included: the intersection of teacher perceptions of aspirations and careers; teacher understandings of their role with student aspirations; the impact of the school environment and other factors, such as attitude or parents on student aspirations; and teacher perceptions of student aspirations and their role in relation to student age or time. This honoured Trainor and Graue's (2013) suggestion that "researchers should identify a discernible relationship or pathway between the research questions and interview questions'' (p. 131). I went through several drafts of questions, aiming as Trainor and Graue (2013) advised, to avoid academic or theoretical terms in the interview questions and replacing them with terminology or definitions accessible to all participants. These final interview questions are listed in Appendix F.

In total, 14 interviews were completed, with five males and nine females. Table 3.5 presents an overview of the interview participants. In the table, I have used the descriptor `Postgraduate Study' as a means to preserve anonymity if the participant completed any degree that came after a Bachelor Degree. For each of the junior school teachers, I have listed J after the number. For each of the secondary school teachers, I have listed S. There are two with some responsibility in both, and I have listed W, for whole school. This is intended to assist the reader in the data chapters.

Table 3.5

Participating Interviewees Demographic Information

Interviewee	Gender	Junior or Secondary	Education
T1	Female	Secondary	Postgraduate Study
T2	Male	Secondary	Bachelor's Degree
T3	Male	Secondary	Bachelor's Degree
T4	Female	Secondary	Postgraduate Study
T5	Female	Secondary	Bachelor's Degree
T6	Female	Secondary	Postgraduate Study
T7	Female	Secondary	Postgraduate Study
T8	Female	Secondary	Postgraduate Study
T9	Female	Secondary	Postgraduate Study
T10	Female	Foundation to Year 10	Bachelor's Degree
T11	Male	Junior	Postgraduate Study
T12	Female	Secondary	Postgraduate Study
T13	Male	Secondary	Postgraduate Study
T14	Male	Whole School	Postgraduate Study

Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Before beginning the interviews, each participant recorded their consent. Throughout the interviews, I used two voice recorders and took notes. To protect their anonymity, each participant was assigned a number and I transcribed all interviews myself. I emailed a final request to all administrators in August, through the principal's assistant, asking if anyone would like to participate in an interview, but received no responses.

Due to our teaching connection, I felt a commonality with the teachers in the interviews. To establish rapport, I took in a drawing completed in a Federation University Higher Degree by Research (HDR) seminar where we were asked to conceptualise our research project. As they could gain insight into my project by asking me questions, I could simultaneously "see the situation from their viewpoint'' (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 655) in the context of exchanges. This bounded relationship developed with participants was consistent with my constructivist framework, as Trainor and Graue (2013) argued that "relationships between researchers and participants is not something to be avoided'' as in positivistic research, but "ethical relationships'' (p. 129) that do not breach neutrality enhance quality.

3.5.3.3   Document Analysis

A document analysis was the final data collection method used in the case study. In keeping with the qualitative, constructivist-interpretivist lens, the 67 documents selected for analysis, such as school annual reports, career newsletters and teacher role documents that are listed in Appendix E, enabled examination of teacher roles in relationship to student aspirations within the specific context of Sunnyside. The documents also enabled me to identify changes that were happening in the school at the time of the research.

My qualitative, interpretive document analysis was closely aligned with the iterative process Bowen (2009) described and sought detail, accuracy and meaning. I conducted an applied thematic analysis as Guest et al. (2012) outlined, which did not include a linguistic analysis but focused on content. Merriam (1988) contended that documents could "furnish descriptive information, verify emerging hypotheses, advance new categories and hypotheses, offer historical understanding, track and change and development" (p. 126). As Merriam posited, the shifting context of Sunnyside's environment was captured through the sourced documents and, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) observed, documents could be a "rich source of information, contextually relevant and grounded in the contexts they represent'' (pp. 276-277). It was through engaging with documents that I was able to gain an additional layer of understanding into the school environment, a concept that shifted and changed as the school progressed, aligning with documentary realities, recognising the impact of people's interaction on the nature of documents (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Further, as Prior (2003) stipulated, this thesis positioned documents as collective social products, reflected in their dynamic nature at the school. Ultimately, my purpose was to describe how the documents functioned within the culture and informed the teachers about their roles in relation to student aspirations.

Initial documents were retrieved early in 2017, along with student handbooks on the school's website as well as the website copy. Spending time skimming and familiarising myself with the materials before beginning a specific analysis was useful, as Bowen (2009) concludes, because it informed the developing understanding of the data analysis. I was also given a yearbook from the previous year (2016) and a financial report from two years prior (2015). These materials provided insight into the school's marketing to parents, organisation, financial situation, culture, and day-to-day operations. Later attempts to obtain documents were met with minor challenges and this conformed to Yin's (2009) idea that low retrievability may be a hurdle for researchers attempting a document analysis. However, in time, access to everything was available that I needed for completion. The final analysis included a broad range of documents, including role descriptions of teachers, tutor group teachers, and career practitioners; student handbooks; website copy; school career documents; career newsletters; school annual reports; and school policies. Some of the

documents analysed and listed in the appendices and bibliography required de-identification to preserve the anonymity of the school.

3.5.4   Data Analysis

This section outlines the systematic processes used, specifically an applied thematic analysis to analyse the data, collected through a survey, interviews, and school documents.

3.5.4.1   *Applied Thematic Analysis Overview*

An applied thematic analysis was used for a triangulated case study, which included a survey, interviews, and documents. As defined by Guest et al. (2012), it "comprises a bit of everything – grounded theory, positivism, interpretivism, and phenomenology'' (p. 15); they suggested it was not a new way of approaching data, but rather contended that it helped define a more specific technique for researchers. It was a "rigorous, yet inductive, set of procedures designed to identify and examine themes from textual data in a way that is transparent and credible'' (Guest et al., 2012, p. 14). One way to begin a thematic analysis was to use an exploratory, content-driven approach, where codes and categories emerged from the data that was usually generated (Guest et al., 2012). The analysis was mainly inductive, as codes emerged from the sources; however, there were deductive aspects evident through the overlap of codes from different data streams. Ultimately, by working through the data and constantly comparing it (Merriam, 1998), an applied thematic analysis was used while triangulating the sources. The purpose was to gain rigour and transparency through this exploratory, content-driven approach (Guest et al., 2012).

In order to choose an appropriate analysis strategy, I reviewed sources of information in relation to content analysis (Gregg, 2011; Krippendorff, 2012; Scott, 2011; Stemler, 2001; Weber, 1990), textual analysis (McKee, 2003), and concept analysis (Nuopponen, 2010). Content analysis was better suited for examining the frequency or patterns of information, as suggested by Stemler (2001); this was not my intention through the data analysis. The aims of the case study did not make a particular form of linguistic analysis useful as the features of the language were not a focus nor was conversation analysis suitable. Aspects of content analysis, as described by Krippendorff (2012), were used in parts of the document analysis.

In order to perform this type of analysis, it was necessary that the design of the research instruments specifically explored the research sub-questions. An early attempt of this design strategy is present in Appendix B. As the project developed, the research sub-questions became more focused, as did the focus of the research instruments became clearer, enabling a clear relationship between the two.

Table 3.6 outlines the relationship between the four research sub-questions, survey questions, interview questions and documents analysed. Referenced survey questions are available in Appendix C, interview questions are available in Appendix D, and documents analysed are available in Appendix E. Through this coordination shown in Table 3.6, the aim was to have survey questions, interview questions, and analysed documents all facilitating the goal of exploring the research question, *How do teachers understand their roles in engaging with student aspirations?* The next three sections explain the use of applied thematic analysis across each of the data collection tools.

Table 3.6

Relationship between Research Sub-Questions and Research Instruments

Sub- Questions	Survey Question	Interview Questions	Documents
1. How do teachers perceive aspirations forming?	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10	1, 3, 4, 5, 9	Web Page Copy, Annual Reports, School Newsletters and Career Newsletters, Pastoral Care Policy, All Student Handbooks
2. What defined or undefined roles do teachers perceive themselves playing in relation to student aspirations and is this a shared understanding within the school?	1, 2, 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10	Teacher Planner Text, Career Practitioner PD, Pre-referral Checklist, Role of the Classroom Teacher, Year 12 Counselling Form, Year 7-11 Referral Form, Career Counselling Pre-Referral…, Student Career Checklist, Pastoral Care Policy, External Documents Listed in Appendix E
3. How do teachers cope with interactions and uncertainties in relation to student aspirations?	2, 10, 11, 12	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10	(As Above)
4. How do teachers perceive influences on student aspirations working as barriers and facilitators?	1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 13	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10	Annual Reports, School Newsletters and Career Newsletters
Background Information on Teachers or the School	14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20		Annual Reports, Web Page Copy, Fee Forms, Business Notices, Fee Schedules, Term Dates, Prospectus, Child Safe Documents, Parent Information Flyer

In analysing the survey data, I used applied thematic analysis through reading, review, and classification of ideas and themes. In keeping with the approach outlined in the description of the survey, simple quantitatively counted information was tallied. As Merriam (1988) suggested about counting similar responses, researchers isolated something that appeared a number of times in a specific way (p. 148). In analysing similar responses, the visual tools in Survey Monkey were helpful in the analysis. Figure 3.4 presents an example of a visual tallied based on survey data, and the content is discussed further in Chapter 5.

I discuss aspirations with my students.
I create classroom opportunities for students to discuss their aspirations.
Students seek my advice about their aspirations.
Parents pressure me in relation to students' aspirations.
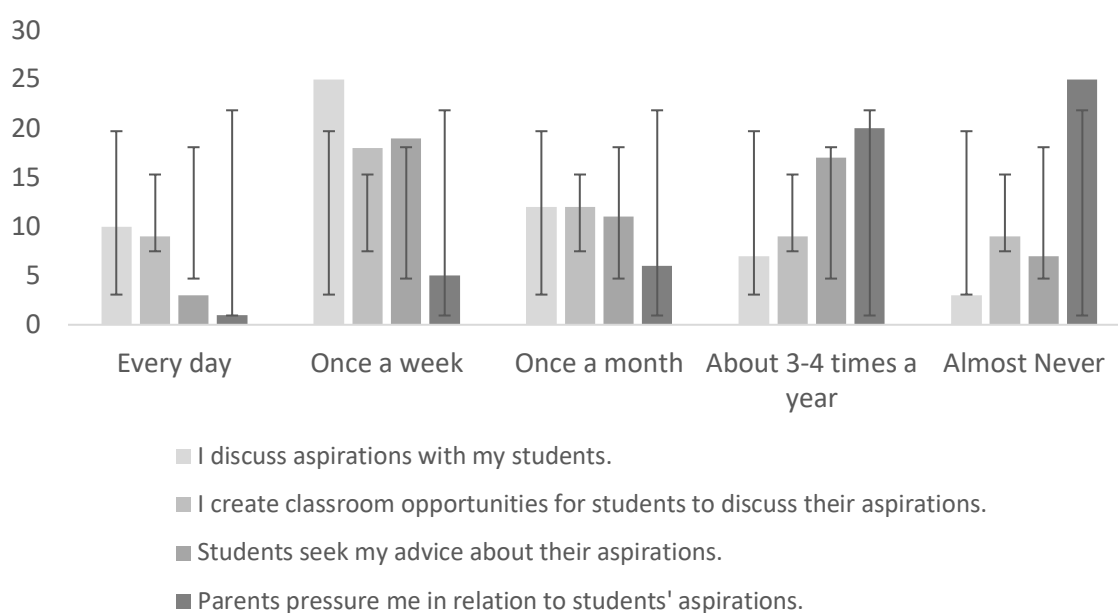
Figure 3.4. Visual Example of Survey Data

I developed an understanding of ideas that were recurring in the responses through initial coding, and this laid the foundation for early themes. By asking, "what are the teachers communicating with me?" I was able to carefully work my way through each question and first gain an overall understanding of the data, and then, through repeated readings, familiarity and grouping the data in different ways, I revised the themes. Through this work, I attempted to follow Merriam's (1988) direction to "notice evidence of the same pattern and remain open to contradictory evidence" (p. 149). In order to do this, I wrote my understandings out on paper, and compared the writing from distinct questions, all the while comparing findings with the information I was interpreting in the growing document analysis. My perceptions about the data developed and I

worked with my supervisors to create appropriate interview questions to ensure my understandings were clear.

3.5.4.1.2   Interviews

Applied thematic analysis was used throughout the process of working with the interview data. Transcribing my own interview data gave me a sense of closeness to the data as I listened to it a second time. While transcribing the data, the audit trail grew with important notes and memos of key information from my analysis, or links back to the survey. In this way, the notion of the constant comparative method, as outlined by Merriam (1988) and Strauss and Corbin (1998), arose organically through the act of transcription. In this way, I developed a system of notes, comments, and questions as an audit trail, as a way of "holding a conversation'' (p.131) with the data and interrogating it in different ways (Merriam, 1988).

The audit trail also represented my attempts to work with the interview data creatively. I created a mind map using ideas generated from the teachers' responses and also wrote short excerpts to summarise my knowledge of the interviews and distil the ideas that teachers expressed in relation to the questions. Lichtman (2013) described the process as taking a large set of data and imposing an organisation or categorisation in an effort to make sense of the data and bring the number of codes down to a reasonable number to be communicated. This allowed me to begin writing about my preliminary understandings about the data, organising it into a manageable task.

The NVivo codes were initially deductive but grew into inductive ones as well through my analysis. I approached the data in a similar way to the description of Miles and Huberman (1994), where a researcher had moments of counting, noting patterns and themes, seeing plausibility, clustering, making metaphors, constant comparison, building evidence and making theoretical coherence. This was also similar to the ways that Gregg (2011) described her analysis as "analytical,'' as I drew on what Patton (2002) contended as the movement of the researcher between both inductive and deductive frameworks. Specifically, he wrote that "sometimes … qualitative analysis is first deductive or quasi- deductive and then inductive'' (Patton, 2002, p. 454) as the researcher must employ different strategies to understand the data. Working in this way enabled me to approach the interview data thematically and constantly compare with the survey and growing document analysis. The first and second level of my coding structure from NVivo for the interviews is shown in Figure 3.5. The interviews became a rich source of data about teacher roles with student aspirations, along with teacher understandings of aspirations and career education at the school.

Nodes

Name
○ Aspirations
⊞ ○ Ages and Students' Aspirations
⊞ ○ Definitions of Aspirations
⊞ ○ Factors on Aspirations
○ Patterns in Relationship to Aspirations
○ Career Education or Careers in General
⊞ ○ Career Education at School, Career Counsellor
⊞ ○ Role for Education around Careers (and or aspirations)
○ Time
○ Type of Careers Education Given at School
○ Parents
○ More homework as a way of pushing kids
○ School Climate, Culture, Structure, Environment
○ Australian Curriulum
○ Classroom, School structure or expectation
○ Comparison Private School, Country School, School History
○ Legalities or Legal Boundaries, Inc Child Safe
○ Management
○ Primary vs Secondary Issue
○ Reporting on other teachers and sharing info
○ School Boundaries in Relation to Aspirations
⊞ ○ School Role
○ Testing or Exams
○ Specific Instances Around a Students' Aspirations
○ Tension or Misgiving within Specific Example
○ Student Issues
○ Australian or Other Culture
○ Barriers to Discussing Aspirations
⊞ ○ Behaviours Attitudes Feelings
○ Skills or Things Learned
⊞ ○ Spoonfeeding, Desire for Results not Skills
○ Student Misunderstandings of Lack of Understanding
○ Student Responsibilities with Careers, Aspirations or Other
○ Teachers' Roles
○ Boundaries
○ Euphemistic, Things Said, Unsaid
○ Misgivings
○ Pastoral Care and Tutor Teachers
○ Teacher Feelings or Emotions
⊞ ○ Teacher Responsibilities with aspirations or careers
○ Teacher responsibility generally with tasks or such
○ Teachers' personal histories, stories or schooling
○ Tensions or Challenges for Teachers

Figure 3.5. Coding Structure for Interviews

3.5.4.1.3   Document Analysis

As part of the document analysis, the early review of the documents was both an inductive and deductive process of examining the content and organising documents according to usefulness. The process was deductive because I was looking for any information relating to teacher roles in relation to student aspirations; however, it was also inductive, because I was interested in what would emerge from the data about teacher roles with student aspirations as well as learning more about the school environment. In this vein, other experienced researchers' publications on document analysis and guidebooks were invaluable resources on the specifics of this process (Bowen, 2009; Gregg, 2011).

During this initial review, the main aim was to look specifically for guidelines surrounding teacher roles in relation to student aspirations. The document analysis allowed me to view the

teacher roles in a broader school context and supported information analysed in the survey and interviews. Early on, I identified the following themes in the documents:

- Expectations surrounding teacher roles in relation to student aspirations

- Definitions of student aspirations

- Qualities of the school environment and school culture in relation to student aspirations, including the pastoral care program and careers program

- An overview of the school careers guidance program

- An understanding of student and/or parent responsibilities with student aspirations

- Expectations of students in relation to their aspirations

With this knowledge in mind, I decided to move one step further with my analysis, importing all the documents into NVivo in order to use similar nodeing codes to the interviews. To keep interview data separate for ease of understanding, I used a separate area to code my document analysis. This provided flexibility later in my analysis in relation to combining them or keeping them separate.

To ensure it was the correct decision to not pursue a word count approach for each document, I tested a word count on one document saved from the school's website into NVIVO. The tally of words was not helpful in coding because it took words out of context and did not code phrases; instead, reading each page carefully and choosing words and phrases enabled me to build thematic codes, and use the constant comparison method to complement my interview data.

The documents contained information outside the scope of my project. I decided to eliminate part of the text contained in the documents, and in doing so, Krippendorff (2012)'s questions helped eliminate unneeded information. The data for the document analysis were restricted to documents from Sunnyside, or the Government, determined to have information regarding teacher roles in relation to student aspirations, provide context about the school environment, or present an overview of how aspirations were conceptualised at the school in publications. The relative context for which the data were analysed is the environment of the school and information provided to the teachers about their role or general communication to students and interested parties about the school. The analysis was bounded by information relating to teacher roles, including tutor group role descriptions, plus any information regarding student aspirations, career education or career information.

Information in the documents that was relevant either provided information pertaining to exploring the sub-research questions or contained background information on the school. It was necessary to consider information regarding pastoral care at the school as well as general information about the school environment, as outlined earlier in Table 3.6. While looking for these

aspects in the documents, it was necessary to ensure that aspects not relevant to the project were not included in the analysis. For example, the school newsletters had information outside the scope of this project, such as about school uniform prices, whereas other aspects of the newsletters, such as celebrating sporting or academic achievements, could be seen as within the scope of this project as a way of understanding school culture.

In line with applied thematic analysis, I was able to understand the document purposes, audiences, and specific contents, as well as the relationship to teacher understandings communicated through the surveys and interviews. This streamlined my ability to highlight important sections or words within the coding structure. It was through this process that I began to develop specific aims for analysis of the documents, guiding my thinking and analysis, further enabling a constant comparison (Merriam, 1988) to the other streams of data – surveys and interviews. I reviewed each document again in detail, using NVivo, and coded longer phrases and ideas. Similar codes then emerged from the interviews, but also arising uniquely from the documents. Through several attempts at coding the documents, I developed the emergent categories, alongside a rigourous audit trail of ideas, insights and memos with my developing understandings and peer checks through the assistance of my supervisors (Saumure & Given, 2012). Ultimately, by working through the data and constantly comparing the data (Merriam, 1988), I was able to conduct an applied thematic analysis, triangulating the sources. The aim was to gain rigour and transparency through this exploratory, content-driven approach (Guest et al., 2012). The first and second level of my coding structure from NVivo for the document analysis is outlined in Figure 3.6. The lack of emphasis on aspiration in the school documents, specifically in the teacher role statements, assisted with the later analysis and implications as it allowed me to explore the formal roles of teachers.

Document Analysis

Name

- Careers Teacher Responsibilities
  - Educating Teachers and Parents
- Celebrating Sports or Activities
  - Camps DukeEd
  - Dance Drama
  - Debating
  - Elite Sports and Other Activities
  - Music
  - Principal's Awards
  - School Colours
  - Sports and Other Advertisements
- Celebrating Successes on Exams
- Direction about Careers Information
  - Advertisements for Careers
  - Age Level Career Informaion
  - Career Connection to School Value
  - Guest Speakers
  - Linking School Involvement and Other Involvements to Career
  - MyFuture Account
  - Seminars
  - Trades Apprenticeships Defence Force
  - University General Information
  - University Pathways
  - VTAC or ATAR
- Homework Club
- Parent Entitlement
- Parent Responsibility for Student Career Work
  - Parent Communication of Concerns
- Parent Satisfaction
- School General Info for Case
  - Building
  - Buses Geography
  - Diversity
  - Ecumenical
  - Financial Reports
  - Future
  - NAPLAN
  - School Communication with Parents and Reporting
  - School Growth
  - Staff Numbers
  - VCE and Destinations
- School Purpose or Ethos
  - Adversity
  - Assessment Values Updates
  - Communication
  - Curriculum NAPLAN
  - Environment
  - Junior School
  - Objectives
  - Pastoral Care
  - Senior School
  - Values
  - Vision and Objectives
- Student Opportunities for Pursuing Activities
  - Leadership
- Student Responsibility for Careers
  - Student Identifying Career Goal
  - Student Requesting Meeting
- Teacher Responsibiilty for Student Career Work
  - Teacher training career
- Teacher Responsibility General
  - Lessons
- Teacher Responsibility Pastoral Care
  - Child Safe
  - Tutor Group Tasks

Figure 3.6. Coding Structure for Document Analysis

3.6   Ethics

This project met the guidelines and standards for the ethical conduct of research, which I present in this section. Prior to starting my research, I sought approval to conduct research with human participants from the Federation University Human Research Ethics Committee through a detailed ethics application. Receiving the approval from the school provided assurance that procedural ethics were followed (Ellis, 2007). The university required an ethics report each subsequent year. As the site for the research was an independent school, the principal gave approval for the school to participate in the project, and no other ethical clearances were required.

One of the main ethical considerations for my project was to find teachers to participate with no coercion and to report their results anonymously. Due to the fact that this PhD contained a small sample size and the school could be identifiable, it was necessarily to protect the identity of the school and teachers. This precaution relates to the standards of procedural ethics to ensure the participants' confidentiality, right to privacy and safety (Ellis, 2007). To satisfy these requirements, the teachers that chose to participate in the interview portion were identified by numbers and this was reflected in my writing. The letter `T' was used with a number given to the participant. Teacher genders were sometimes altered as a way of further protecting the anonymity of teachers. Providing teacher anonymity gave them the assurance they would face no future unintended repercussions and experience no future regrets (Ellis, 2007). Teachers could withdraw from the research at any time and could contact me through phone or email. The only exception to this anonymity was that the title "principal'' might be used when giving background about Sunnyside, but not in the reporting of the data. Further, to protect the anonymity of the school, it was referred to as Sunnyside and documents were de-identified throughout this thesis.

Throughout the research, I also sought to uphold ethical standards of ``ethics in practice'' (Ellis, 2007, p. 4). As part of this, my research was conducted with ethical thinking, beginning with the literature review which included a detailed study of the related bodies of literature in an attempt to fulfill the requirements for the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, Section 1.1c (2018). The project was designed to be low risk to participants, in relation to the National Statement on the Ethical Conduct in Human Research Section 2.1, as it involved teachers reflecting on their daily practice and work with students, something which was a normal part of teachers' everyday practice as professionals. To ensure teachers felt safe and to achieve this ethical standard, I provided details about Lifeline or Beyond Blue if the participants needed support after completing the survey or interviews. Lifeline is a charity that does receive support from the Australian Government and is a crisis support and suicide prevention hotline; Beyond Blue is a charity that does

receive support from the Australian Government and offers counselling support for anxiety, depression, suicide and other mental health issues.

Some teachers might have benefited with their participation by developing an appreciation of the role they played in fostering student aspirations. Future benefit is also a possibility as the outcomes of the research might influence education practice in the school. In this research, I also attempted to uphold ``relational ethics'', valuing ``mutual respect, dignity and connectedness'' with the participants (Ellis, 2007, p. 4). I understood my role as a researcher, and clearly communicated this to the teachers; however, I was willing to respond to questions that the participants might have about my background or interest in the research area to help them understand my motivation for research.

The dissemination of my results will be through a thesis to fulfil the requirements of a PhD degree. A report will be written for the school summarising key findings of the research. I will also make myself available if the school board or other group within the school requests information. My intention is that the research will be of interest and value to those organising conferences or editing journals in education, career education or teacher education.

3.7   Issues of Credibility, Validity, Transferability, Confirmability and Limitations

This section presents how this project satisfies issues of credibility, validity, transferability, confirmability, and limitations. Flick (2009) explained that since the mid-1980s, alternatives to traditional positivist conceptions of validity and objectivity have been proposed for qualitative researchers. Theorists in this area differ on the number of characteristics they deemed appropriate; however, there has been consensus that qualitative researchers were expected to demonstrate these considerations from the beginning of their research project through to the end reporting of results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested five characteristics as the ideals of qualitative research including: trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Later, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) shortened this to four characteristics: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Flick (2009) argued that of these characteristics, the emphasis was generally placed on trustworthiness, with the other four characteristics demonstrating the trustworthiness of research. Farrelly (2013) proposed that an "interpretivist'' researcher "is never completely objective, indeed he or she is considered part of the research process, which takes a holistic view of the subject under examination'' (p. 149). With this in mind, I acknowledge my position in this research and present my analysis with "as much integrity and attention to detail as possible'' (Farrelly, 2013, p. 151). My integrity and attention to detail is reflected in my methodological and analytic processes.

3.7.1 Credibility

The credibility of my research project is evident through several factors. Flick (2009), echoing Lincoln and Guba (1985) in his work, wrote that the triangulation of different methods was one way to increase credibility, along with a "prolonged engagement'' in the field, as well as "peer debriefing'' and "member checks'' (p. 392) of the material collected and analysed. All of these elements were undertaken in my research. My triangulated methods, including a survey, interviews, and a document analysis, were designed and conducted under the constant guidance of my supervisors, and the data collection included an extended period of time from March until December 2017. After the interviews were conducted, I transcribed them and then conducted the member checks, during which time no teachers requested deletions, but one teacher added information.

3.7.2 Dependability

Dependability was established through internal and external auditing. Flick (2009) discusses how an internal audit was accomplished through an audit trail. The formal audit trail began on 8/5/2017 and continued through the course of my data collection and beginning analysis, up to 16/1/2018. The formal, typed audit trail contained notes of all of my observations, memos and developing understandings, and contained the progression to themes emerging and changing through the applied thematic analysis; this audit trail supplemented work conducted in NVivo, along with notes in a notebook and information provided to supervisors. The audit trail also logged issues, described earlier, with document collection.

The external audit for my data established dependability. Through working closely with my supervisors, they were able to conduct an external audit of my data understanding and interpretation in our bi-monthly meetings. They assisted me with ensuring the quality of my research, as Flick (2009) described, where they would challenge me to ensure my findings were grounded in the data, my inferences were logical, and my category structure was logical. I was able to present them with the NVivo data and my developing coding structure in the early stages, and then as my thinking progressed, I was able to present them with writing about the themes.

Dependability was also accounted for as this thesis provided information about how the research environment altered from the start to the finish. Farrelly (2013) wrote that there was a need to "account for the ever changing context within which research occurs'' and the research must describe "how these changes affected the way the researcher approached the study'' (p. 150). As mentioned earlier, professional development related to career counselling was provided to secondary tutor group teachers in 2017 after the survey but prior to the interviews; this might have impacted on how teachers formulated their responses in the interviews, which was acknowledged in

the data analysis. This was also mentioned in reviewing documents because these changes were not reflected in the teachers' role descriptions.

3.7.3 Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote that one way that transferability was conceptualised in qualitative research was through thick description, and my intention was to provide this through careful case study work. Thick description in a case study was considered "the process of paying attention to contextual detail in observing and interpreting social meaning'' and it involved looking at the "rich details of the case, sorting out the complex layers of understanding that structure the social world'' (Dawson et al., 2011, p. 2). In my particular case, the emphasis of my methodology was not on interpreting gestures or feelings of the participants as in some ethnographic research; instead, my thick description pertained to the "history, context and physical setting'' (Dawson et al., 2011, p. 3) at Sunnyside. Farrelly (2013) described how a qualitative researcher can do by "describing the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research'' (p. 150). I attempted to emphasise these elements strongly and it necessitated researching the history of the school, conducting a preliminary interview with the principal early in my research to gain a broader understanding about the school's history, and reading about the school on the website and in recent newsletters. This immersion allowed a deeper conceptualisation about the history of the local area, changes within the school setting and the emergence of the area as one of Melbourne's growth corridors. I also learned about the number of students and teachers, staff turnover and the demographic of the students through conversations with the principal and in the newsletters, which also helped me to clarify the socioeconomic status of the school and families. This background helped to ground my research into how parents made a choice for their children to attend this school; to enable this decision, families might have made financial or other sacrifices, as suggested in the literature review (Campbell et al., 2009), and this challenged my assumption that all students attending the school were of higher socio-economic status. It was through this background research and its integration into my project that I attempted to enhance transferability.

Despite attempts to enhance transferability in this study, a case study approach might limit this aspect of the project. A potential weakness of case study research is that it may not allow for the same level of generalisability as other approaches. Merriam (1988) wrote that "one selects a case study approach because one wishes to understand the particular in more depth, not because one wants to know what is generally true of the many'' (p. 173). In the instance of this case study, I was interested in the particular perspectives of a range of teachers from the case study school to provide insights into their understandings about their roles in relation to student aspirations at different year levels. Ultimately, it will be the decision of anyone interested in my results to decide if

it is for further research, as Farrelly (2013) wrote that anyone choosing to transfer results was responsible for ensuring a sensible transfer.

3.7.4   Confirmability

Aspects of confirmability overlap with dependability, and included aspects of this project, such as auditing and triangulation. Conducting an audit trail where a researcher recorded the procedures for checking the data was one way to enhance confirmability (Farrelly, 2013). The audit trail recorded insights and understandings about the data. Further, the decision to triangulate the data with a survey, interviews, and a document analysis, was a way to approach confirmability. Guest et al. (2012) explained that a solid analysis of triangulated data ensures validity. Other aspects of confirmability included reflexivity about the project, in addition to my positionality. It was important to acknowledge my position in relation to the project and the participants, as this research relied on relationships and interpretation (Trainor & Graue, 2013). It was important for me to discuss these issues because "reflexivity is the process of acknowledging, reflecting and reporting how one's identities, beliefs, knowledge, relationships to people, material and concepts influences one's work'' (Trainor & Graue, 2013, p. 130). In relation to the project, my identity as a dual citizen informed part of my interest and drive in the project. I migrated to Australia from America in 2004, taking up dual citizenship during the course of this research project, which provided me with the ability to see the Australian school system from the perspective of someone that did not attend junior or secondary school in this country. This perspective enabled me to have a different perspective on the subject of school choice in relation to student aspiration, which was a contested topic and part of my literature review (Campbell et al., 2009).

3.7.5   Methodological Limitations

This research project had several methodological limitations based on the scale of the research, which was a case study of P-12 teachers at Sunnyside. Due to the scope of the project, this research aligned with Stake's (2000) description that case studies were constructivist as researchers made choices about what was to be studied. Due to the scope of a PhD, it was necessary to limit the parameters of my research in some way, which occurred through the time and space boundaries of the case study approach. The project was limited to one P-12 school in Melbourne's peri-urban fringe, and this focus posed limitations on the generalisability of the study. As it was limited to one school, for one year, the project provided a glimpse in time and did not reflect any changes in the school after my data collection. Further, not all teachers in the school chose to participate in the study, and with those that did, not all teachers responded to every question, and this limited the type of analytic possibilities, particularly with the survey data. The emphasis in this case study was

on description and interpretation (Merriam, 1988) rather than generalisability. Another limitation is that this project revolves around student aspirations but student voices are not included in an effort to focus on teacher perspectives. Further research could investigate if the two perspectives match.

3.8   Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the methodology and research design behind my research topic: *How do teachers understand their roles in relation to engaging with student aspirations?* This chapter begins with a discussion of the Social Constructivist methodology from a relativist ontology, including the case study approach, presenting an overview of the case study school and defining teachers known responsibilities with aspirations and career during the data collection. The discussion covers the research design, including the triangulation of data in order to construct a solid, ethical project that will add to the growing literature around student aspirations.

The following four chapters as detailed in Table 3.7 provide a detailed analysis and discussion of the data related to the central research question, *How do teachers understand their roles in relation to engaging with student aspirations?* Data from each source is utilised throughout each chapter, with quotes from interviewees presented as indented text followed by the interviewee number, (T1 - T14), in parenthesis. Text from open-ended survey questions is presented in quotation marks or grouped together as indented text, with the word `Survey' in parenthesis.

Table 3.7 summarises the emphasis of each chapter and the relation to each of the research sub-questions.

Table 3.7

Overview of Data Analysis and Discussion Chapters

Chapter	Research Sub-Question
Chapter 4	How do teachers perceive student aspirations forming?
Chapter 5	What defined or undefined roles do teachers perceive themselves playing in relation to student aspirations and is this a shared understanding within the school?
Chapter 6	How do teachers cope with interactions and uncertainties in relation to student aspirations?
Chapter 7	How do teachers perceive influences on student aspirations working as barriers and facilitators?

4 Data Analysis and Discussion: Teacher Perceptions of Student Aspirations and Links to Career Education

4.1 Chapter overview

In this chapter, the data analysis and discussion section of this thesis begins; the purpose is to present an analysis and engage in a discussion of the data resulting from interpretations of the survey and interview data of participating Sunnyside school teachers, and the associated document analysis. In this chapter the first of the four sub-questions is considered, *How do teachers perceive student aspirations forming?,* which is key to understanding the research question, *How do teachers understand their roles in relation to engaging with student aspirations?* This data analysis chapter and the three following draws upon my analysis of survey responses, interviews and document analysis, as outlined in the methodology and research design in Chapter 3. The specific data informing this chapter was outlined in Table 3.6, while Table 3.5 provided a brief overview of the interview participants.

As suggested in the literature review, teachers have been considered by many researchers as significant in assisting students with aspirations (see for example Kuijpers & Meijers, 2017; Zipin et al., 2015). Despite literature acknowledging teacher importance in student processes of forming aspirations, there has been a lack of literature about how teachers conceptualise student aspirations, and teachers' associated roles.

The data in this thesis related to participating teacher conceptions about student aspirations has been interpreted using Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1994) ecological framework, as this enabled an examination of how interactions with a variety of sources influence children's personal development structures. In this thesis, Sunnyside teachers have been considered both participants and observers of student experiences, adopting Bronfenbrenner's (1979) notion of the "classroom'' (p. 3) as one environmental influence in the microsystem of the developing child. Though this analysis, participating Sunnyside teachers' conceptions of aspirations influenced their understood roles with student aspirations. Further, this analysis considered teacher perceptions of career education and its placement in the school, and in keeping with the theoretical bricolage described in the methodology, drew on Gottfredson's (1981) contention that student aspirations have often been set early, also draw on by Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al. (2015).

The analysis of data in this study highlighted that participating Sunnyside teacher conceptions of student aspirations, ranged from a very open, unbounded concept, to a narrower one involving a specific career path. Aspirations were also perceived by teachers as changeable, culturally and socially influenced, and as being high or low. The data of this study provided evidence that participating teachers at Sunnyside conceptualised student aspirations to be multi-faceted and

complex, with some students having fixed their ideas early, while others altered or changed their ideas over time.

Figure 4.1 provides a visual representation for the reader of the diverse ways that teachers in this study described student aspirations within the data. These identified themes will be discussed further in the remainder of this chapter, as the subheadings in this chapter align with the middle band of the figure.
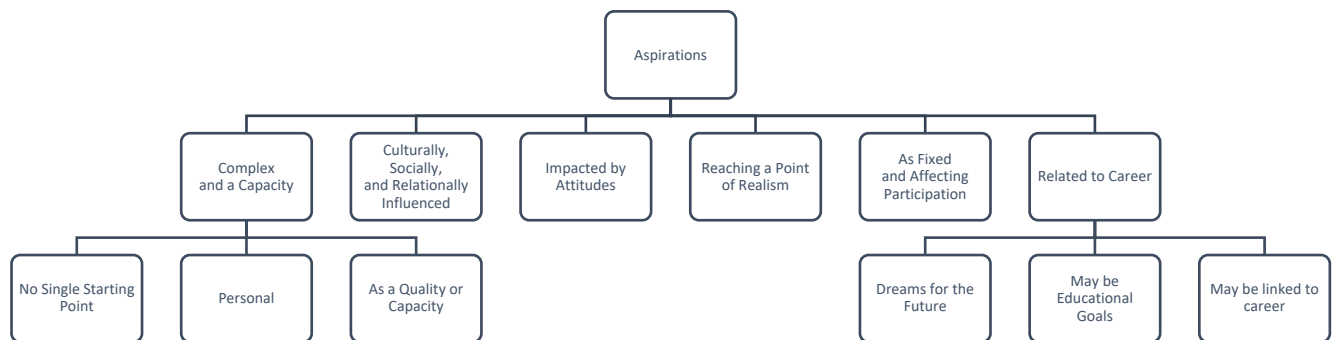
Figure 4.1. Teacher Perceptions of Student Aspirations

As briefly explained in the conclusion of the previous chapter, in this chapter and the three following chapters, the general APA guidelines were used for the presentation of quotes from research literature and data collected at Sunnyside with certain differences. Specifically, teacher comments are denoted either using quotation marks with interviewee number in parenthesis, or with quotes longer than three lines, their comments will be indented with the interviewee number in parenthesis. Teacher comments from the survey will remain anonymous with the word `Survey' in parenthesis after a comment either in quotation marks or grouped with other comments and indented, followed by `Survey' in parenthesis.

4.2   Complex and a Capacity

The teachers who participated in the research described aspirations as having a complex, changeable quality, as illustrated in Figure 4.1. In the previous chapter, Figure 3.1 illustrated how Bronfenbrenner (1979) described the ecological system as a variety of sources that influence a child's development, such as the school, and teacher positioning in the school affords them a chance to observe how many sources can affect student aspirations. As T6 explained, in her view aspiration had no single starting point but pointed to a range of influences:

So, aspirations might come from external influences, it might not be school-

related, so maybe ideas come from family or friends, that students might see in

their everyday lives and what they do in life, maybe even media and TV. (T6)

In a similar vein, T8 explained the link between aspiration and imagination as, "When I think aspirations, I think more in terms of an unlimited imagination for a child to be able to say they could be anything that they want to be'' (T8). In her comment, aspirations were broad, changeable, and complex. T2 also characterised this openness as changeable, depending on the child's age or situation:

I think aspirations are depending on the student, what they see themselves

doing, at 12 years old, you might be completely happy with where you think you

are going, but then by 14, you completely changed it, whether you want to be an

apprentice or when you are 14, you want to be a brain surgeon, you might end

up as an electrician. It's just where you see yourself, your own views on how you

can, I'm not going to say prove, but how you can get where you want to go. (T8)

In this conception by a teacher, aspiration took on an unbounded, complex quality, depending on the circumstances and influences in the context of the child's situation. Ultimately, taken together, these comments illustrated teacher conceptions of a complexity of sources for aspiration and pointed to a complex, changeable nature of aspiration as students were influenced by the world around them and as they began to know themselves better, a point that resonated with Gottfredson (1981). Gottfredson's (1981) work showed how student aspirations could alter with age as they orient themselves to the social world around them. Further, these teacher comments illustrated aspirations not only having a personal quality, but formed in the midst of their social and cultural interactions (Bok, 2010; Cuervo et al., 2019), a point continued in the next section.

Aspirations, as observed by participants, could be identified through a personal capacity, and T3 and T4 described this quality with a motivating quality for students in the direction of their hopes or dreams. T13 further captured the potential behind a student aspiration when he explained how it became an "amazing resource":

… and certainly there might be people who are directionless, and you try and give

them some kind of reassurance that that's okay, but you know, make sure you do

what you enjoy, and along those lines, but when there is a desire for it, yeah, that

willingness and encouragement, and …. the potential they've got is utterly

precious, it's an amazing resource. (T13)

This teacher described holding an aspiration as something "precious,'' not shared by everyone, that should be encouraged and supported. Bronfenbrenner (1979) contended that the teacher is an integral part of the student's development, having had ongoing contact with students, having formed a relationship with them through daily interactions in the classroom. In this way, the teacher was also in a position to participate in the development of a student's aspirations, where T13's view of aspirations – as "precious'' and "amazing'' – spurred him to not just observe the aspiration but actively participate and play a role in encouraging the student, a role further discussed in Chapter 5. This teacher's desire to support a student's aspiration resonated with current literature, as Hooley et al. (2015) argued that "education and the development of career thinking are intertwined'' (p. 3) and that every teacher has been an important part of this process.

Other teachers at Sunnyside also conceptualised student aspirations as a capacity. For instance, T12 recognised this capacity for students to aspire in an unbounded way, and to make a connection between their values and future work plans. In this way, aspiration was not necessarily limited by a specific career choice, but instead career could be influenced by this broadness of aspiration:

> So, it's nice to see when I say to a student, you want to be an accountant, but do
> you realise that you can go and work, you need to embed your values, you can
> work for a company and you might have strong social justice values, so go work
> for a non-for–profit organisation as an accountant, and they don't realize they
> can connect the two. (T12)

Viewed in this way, aspiration was considered a capacity that the student could build through discussions around how to embed their values into aspirational thinking about the future. From this perspective, teachers might have a hand in building a navigational capacity for broad thinking about pathways to aspirations, as discussed by Appadurai (2004) and Bok (2010), who described aspiration as a capacity that can be fostered through the support of others. This comment illustrates the potential for aspirational capacity formed in social interactions (Cuervo at al., 2019), as a teacher might assist a student to confidently affirm his or her self-perceived place in society.

Another teacher participant demonstrated when the capacity for some types of aspiration might be lacking, with some students not yet able to comprehend how aspiration could be for a pursuit greater than of the self. In the following example, T8 aimed to have students think about how their contribution to the world could be linked to personal aspiration, but found the student's response to be self-serving:

I believe I do have a responsibility to try to direct them appropriately, but I also believe I have a responsibility to direct them on a path to what does it take to be a person that is going to contribute to the wider world …. I said, "so today we are actually going to focus on not just how we talk to ourselves and how we think about ourselves but how we contribute to other people" …. so, one of my students put up her hand, and said, "ah, I am so funny that I do all of these funny things, and my dad thinks" …. I couldn't believe it, I sat there going, the ego (laughs) …. I couldn't (laugh), I couldn't marry up the conversation that we were having with this idea that she was presenting… (T8)

In this quote, the teacher aims to foster a student's sense of aspiration for helping others or contributing to the world. My analysis determined a disconnection between what the teacher expected and the student answered, with the student perhaps not demonstrating the capacity to aspire outside of herself or maybe not yet mature enough to envisage her greater impact in the world. The student's perception was potentially limited by circumstance, exposure, and understandings about the future. The teacher might have misinterpreted the processes going on in the student's mind, and again, this was reminiscent of what Gottfredson (1981) suggested about how over time students formed and limited aspirations, first based on family and then later to exposure to other environments and ideas; she suggested there is time for intervention before students settled on specific aspirations. Here, and in later sections, the data highlighted teachers observing conversations and instances where students needed more guidance about forming aspirations and what their aspirations meant for the world around them, opportunities were presented for teachers to intervene before students limited their ability to see alternatives. This space for intervention is discussed later in this chapter and also in the implications of the study.

4.3   Culturally, Socially, and Relationally Influenced

The data analysis highlighted how participating teachers considered student aspirations to be influenced by cultural, social, and inter-personal forces, as illustrated in Figure 4.1, and has been interpreted to be reflecting Gottfredson's (1996) view that children reconstructed the socio-economic environment of their families and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) descriptions of a student's layered environmental influences, where the microsystem includes the school and, outer layers, such as the exosystem or microsystem, would influence student and parent notions of success. The analysis demonstrated that teachers understood student aspirations having developed in a context of social and cultural exposure, where schools, parents, peers, and teachers themselves, all played a role.

T10 and T4 observed that students' family background and relation to culture influenced their aspirations. T10 shared an example of a student in year 4, whose parents put immense pressure on her to succeed and this pressure was also on the teacher:

> … there's a set of parents of this beautiful little girl and they want her to be exceptional, um, in every area …. the parents, I can't, they are Indian, so there is that cultural barrier as well. They have an exceptionally high, so, okay, there's two barriers here, parents, are very unreasonable in their expectations at this point in time of their daughter, they are unreasonable of their expectations of me, I can't give her a pill and say, she's now well above because I've given her this pill of knowledge … (T10)

The teacher framed this example in terms of the parental influence on the student, weighing in on the girl's aspiration for success in the classroom. This teacher's comment resonated with work by Gottfredson (1981) as she described the influence of parents on student aspirations as well as Appadurai (2004) when he explained how aspirations might be best thought of as culturally and relationally informed, and in this example, the parents expectation took precedence over any personal aspiration she may have had in order that she meet certain schooling benchmarks. Further, this parental influence on the student might also be envisaged using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) conception of the child at the centre of layered environmental influences. This teacher also discussed the high expectations from the parents on the teacher, which will be discussed in Chapter 6.

In another example, T4 generalised that the newer, more diverse families entering Sunnyside brought a desire for higher student academic results:

> Deep down I actually think kids need to be happy, I'm a believer in happy kids will learn but it does get a little bit challenging if parents will not push them at all. So, I think culturally that is going to change and I'm sure you've had a look at our demographics and with some new cultural groups becoming larger in our school, different cultures definitely have different views and I'd say … our Anglo-Saxon parents in this region would rather them be happy, that's number one, and also tend to want to see their kids involved, sports and drama, and things like that, whereas in other cultures, the academic is the most important part, so that could change. (T4)

This teacher explained how some students had experienced pressure from their parents for academic aspirations, based on a cultural background. This pressure for academic aspirations was

echoed by T14, a teacher with administrative responsibility, in reflection on the changing expectations of parents over time, where "15 years ago,'' some families were content if the child was happy, whereas now, there was a pressure for a high ATAR score and university entrance:

> Some of our new, some of the kids, and there's been a lot of discussions along those lines, for some of the families that we are now getting an ATAR of 99, is a failure. Sorry, an ATAR of 90 is a failure. Now, um, that's something new for this community. (T14)

In this comment, T14 equates the rising expectation of some families as affecting the school ``community'' through discussions about what was considered an acceptable score. This echoed the research findings of Campbell et al. (2009) when they wrote about school choice and parents having sought educational environments to satisfy the hope of their children's success in reaching university or another specific outcome. In their book, Campbell et al. (2009) outlined an anxiety in the middle class status, where members strategically sought the best education for their children to ensure a sense of cultural capital, and ultimately, a job. The changing demographic of Sunnyside and cultural competence of teachers when working with student aspirations is discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7.

In another comment by T14, students were seen to gain an aspirational outlook by being around others in the school, articulating aspirations as something that cannot be explicitly taught to students, but permeating the school. He characterised aspirations as "nebulous,'' and "in the woodwork.'' He observed this aspirational quality shared by many students, parents, and teachers involved in Sunnyside:

> Aspirations, as I see it, is a much more nebulous concept. Aspirations education
> …. infuses through the institution. The aspirations live in the woodwork. They live in the way that the teachers talk. And, they live in the way that the expectations that the parents have when they send their children to the school. And, they also live internally within the children. (T14)

His view was that aspirations were a quality that students could gain by being in a certain environment, like the school, or around certain people, like teachers or some parents. This resonated with the work of Reay et al. (2001), who described an institutional habitus which could produce a ``semi-autonomous'' expectation for students to university (p. 35). In this way, aspirations could be conceptualised as socially and relationally formed, as contended by Appadurai (2004). The environmental conditions impacting the students, as T14 described, also illustrated the thinking of both Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1994) as he conceptualised the influence of the school on a student's

development generally, but also Gottfredson (1981) in her description of students' aspirations changing as they age an in the context of social sources.

T14 further described how students adopted this aspirational mindset over time, yet he explained that aspirations differed from child to child: "Now, in some people, in some children, that will be highly formed. Um, and in others, it will be very, very vague'' (T14). He considered education for aspiration as something that could not be formalized to be taught specifically in primary school. Whether or not aspiration could be taught or encouraged is an important point to consider when thinking about how policymakers view aspirations and teacher roles in relationship to them, which I return to in Chapter 6, and also discussed in Chapter 8, which contains the implications for this study.

T13 provided ideas similar to T14, where aspirations have been gained by some students through the environment of Sunnyside. Again, this comment linked to Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1994) conceptions of the microsystem, where the school setting impacted on the student development. In this comment, the development of student aspiration was impacted by a school situation that "fostering that kind of desire to really pursue'' (T13) aspirations, as below:

> Aspirations is something that I guess we all kind of drive and have this sort of
> emotional investment in, but I'm not sure how explicit it is, there's certainly
> leadership programs and pastoral programs that talk about developing personal
> skills and personal attributes but in terms of really fostering that kind of desire to
> really pursue, this is something that goes on but I think it's a lot more something
> that is a result of inter-personal interactions rather than anything that is
> formalised (T13).

T13 described aspirations as fostered through their experience in the school, despite not necessarily having had a formal program to cater for aspirations. Instead, he pointed to general programs – such as the leadership and pastoral ones – that have encouraged aspirations through day-to-day activities. He further pointed to the social relationships that students developed with others, such as teachers or students.

Peer pressure was viewed by other teacher participants as a strong influence on the formation of aspirations and as both a positive and negative influence. With the changing demographic in the school, and evolving perceptions of success, some participants observed that an upward peer pressure within the school, and this influenced the formation of aspirations. T1 acknowledged that the student conversations in peer groups has changed due to their increased appetite for specific careers:

That means the peer group of students is changing and therefore the way they

interact with each other and the conversations they have about aspirations

probably more … more focused on university … And, that's sort of becoming

more of the topic of conversation within the year 12 cohort about what are you

doing? What do your parents do … that sort of thing. (T1)

T11 communicated that students were sometimes not choosing certain pathways because it had been deemed less socially acceptable than university:

I think in the bigger picture that idea I mentioned before about it being socially

unacceptable these days before your time is done and to want to go out into the

community and, whether it be to leave school early to start a family because

that's your aspiration in life or whether you have other opportunities presented

to you, like apprenticeships or whatever else, it's not as socially acceptable as it

used to be, in my opinion at least, um, so I feel like those things are factors. (T11)

Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1994) ideas about how a range of voices and sources impact a child's development is relevant here, as students have been influenced not only by people immediately surrounding them, such as parents, teachers and peers, but also by extended networks in their parents' social circles and wider societal influences as well. In addition, the idea aspirations have been influenced by a "socially acceptable'' route is akin to the ideas of Bourdieu, specifically his theories of capital, that some aspirations researchers used to explain the multifaceted processes at work on students' decision-making in relation to aspirations (Bok, 2010; Gale & Parker, 2014; Gale & Parker, 2015a, 2015b; Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate, et al., 2015; Smith, 2011; Zipin et al., 2015). They identified the complex social, economic, and cultural pressures that impinge on students' decision-making processes, where what was socially acceptable can influence aspirations.

There was a converse idea to this increased peer pressure and emphasis on results, with T11 also having seen some students accepting an identity as a "trudger" and this became part of their identity, or their "brand," as he called it:

And, again, as that massive peer group social identity, as I've used this term

before, and take it how you will, young people have their own brand now, they

really have their own brand, their own FB page, twitter account and they want to

preserve their brand, their value with their peers, and so when they start doing

badly there's a lot less sort of well, I'll try and do harder, there's a number of

students who will do bad, so they will just trudge, and rather, rather externalise

and appear to be a trudger rather than someone that underachieves, if you see

what I mean. (T11)

He suggested some students identified themselves as `dumb,' and this became part of their identity. Cultivating the identity of the "trudger,'' as T11 said some students do, linked with Stahl's (2015) work where he argued that complex identity work happens simultaneously with student formation of aspirations. Seen from this perspective, a "trudger'' identity was not just the laziness or disengagement of a student; instead, it was possibly a carefully crafted persona to retain a certain peer perception. As in my literature review, peer perception was important to students and peer pressure has been identified as an important factor in student aspirations (Alloway et al., 2004; Webb et al., 2015). In fact, close peer friendships were part of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1994) conception of the microsystem, which played an important role in a child's development over time.

Peer pressure might have masked some opportunities for students, as at times, failure became a `reality' check for some students, allowing them to see a pathway to the future, as observed by T14 and T13. This `natural dropping off' of aspiration that T14 identified around year 9, is a point returned to later in the data analysis as a point of realism, a perception shared by a number of participants. However, other times, this sense of failure was misplaced and due to peer pressure, with T13 worried that students compare themselves with others, and this led to an unfair dismissal of aspirations through a misperception of their own ability:

Absolutely, it's like, I don't fit in this norm, therefore, I'm not in the fast lane, oh,

fair enough, and the ones in the fast lane, I must fit the norm, I must have it at

this stage, when you might not necessarily be cognitively ready at that point or

you might have, your own cognitive skew in the fact that you excel in a subtly

different way that doesn't show in that kind of things but in others, and also in

terms of English again … large amounts of it, are your inference of classical text

and nuance, which isn't necessarily a lot of people's priority. (T13)

A student's perception of what the "norm'' was, as this teacher suggested, might have been skewed and an unfair assessment of ability. It was times like these that teachers – or someone – might be able to intervene with students. Further, this perception of the "norm'' might be flawed because the student internalised social expectations in formulating views of ability or aspiration. These internalised social expectations were hidden from view or not acknowledged, but, as Smyth and McInerney (2014) argued, if having been given the chance to articulate their views, many students saw the reasons behind their present circumstances, the way that their schools performed and the routes they had available to them. Seen from this perspective, trusted people like teachers

in a student's microsystem, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) term, might have had an opportunity to assist students to articulate their perceptions of the "norm.'' Further, teachers might assist students to avoid circumscribing and compromising their aspirations, as Gottfredson's (1981) contended that some students did when they discussed possible pathways based on their perceived abilities. Here, teachers, as both participants in and observers to a student's microsystem and developing aspirations, might have a role to play in helping students to see all possible avenues, a point further discussed in the Implications.

As outlined in the preceding discussion, Teacher vantage points on student aspirations and understandings of the formation of aspirations indicated those aspirations to be culturally, socially, and inter-personally influenced from both students' situations at home, but also in the school environment. This recursive nature of student aspirations having been influenced from diverse situations, including the school, was in line with Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1994) conception of the ecological model of child development, and aspirations have been understood as changing in line with the student. Further, it demonstrated an aspect of Patton and McMahon's (2015) argument in their writing on students' career development, where the school existed as a "subsystem of the broader social and environmental systems'' (p. 329) within a particular timeframe, with recursive links to broader systems. The teachers in this study are both observers and participants in this conglomerate of social, cultural, and inter-personal factors on student aspirations.

4.4   Impacted by Attitude

Of the 51 teachers that responded to the survey question asking them to rank factors on aspirations (Q6 as listed in Appendix C), 34 (71%) selected attitude, making it the top factor overall. Attitude was listed as a contributing factor on the survey in light of research by Hillman (2010) and Khoo and Ainley (2005), both having linked attitude with a student's intention for further study. Devlin and McKay (2017) found attitude was a factor in the success of students at university. Student attitude in relationship to aspiration has been conceptualised using Bronfenbrenner's (2005) revisions to his bioecological model, where he focused on the biological or genetic individual characteristics a person brings to situations. Two characteristics were useful in the analysis, specifically in Bronfenbrenner's (2005) definition of the "mental and emotional resources'' (Tudge et al., 2009, p. 200) that a child possessed, relating to their mental and emotional situations, and force characteristics, as "temperament, motivation [and] persistence'' (Tudge et al., 2009, p. 200). Although I applied Bronfenbrenner's (2005) ideas in a qualitative manner, these characteristics have been intermingled below in teacher descriptions as they perceived a relationship between the two, and a range of attitudes that positively or negatively impacted student aspiration or teacher roles

with student aspirations. This section shows how teacher participants reported a diversity of attitudes that they saw in relation to student aspirations.

The analysis demonstrated that teachers distinguished between their perceptions of what constituted a students' good or poor attitude and how this impacted aspiration. For example, T10 suggested that a "better'' attitude meant the students seemed to have a higher sense of what they could accomplish:

> There's definitely that contributing attitude, that the better the attitude
> essentially, the grander the aspirations are going to be and in terms of what they
> can achieve as people, really, essentially the bar is set very high by students with
> better attitudes. I think the poorer the attitude towards their relationships with
> staff, um, their relationships with peers, um, their connectedness to the
> schooling environment, I think when that attitude is low or poor, I think their
> own aspirations would be seriously hindered. (T10)

In her view, those that had "better'' attitudes seemed to have greater expectations for themselves, and those with a "poorer'' attitudes were not as connected to the environment or people. Similarly, T13 found attitudes drove a student's interest in school and aspiration; however, this was a complex relationship and closely linked to home environment, and if the caregivers encouraged the students to engage in school:

> Again, I would trace a lot of the student attitude back to their home
> environment, and it's not me passing the buck, the home environment does set
> up the parent expectations of what the child or the student needs to do .... we
> have this upper end, who are hugely aspirational and self-directed and self-
> pressured, and a lovely cohort in the middle, and a fairly a-motivated meh, little
> cohort at the bottom, and it's managing them in terms of trying to get them to
> move along as much as their parents will let us, really. (T13)

T13 categorised students, and their families, into three groups – the highly aspirational, the middle band and the "meh,'' which he defined as less aspirational and most challenging. In this example, a teacher tried to motivate a student to have an aspiration:

> … there's a percentage, a grouping of young people who don't necessarily have a
> direction, and without self-discipline, some of them are aimless and not
> necessarily motivated, and I've always with this group of people had to pitch it in
> terms of, maybe this is clutching a straws, at least work to have a choice, to have

an option, their working for choices to be able to decide what they want to do.

(T13)

A challenge that was mentioned was for teachers to motivate students that did not have an aspiration or goal. T4 also linked this type of "meh'' attitude to aspiration: "Whereas you've got other students who are just like, I don't care, can't be bothered, I don't want to do this, that will flow through to what they aspire to do next year'' (T4). The data analysis highlighted that teacher participants perceived a poor attitude about school as potentially masking other issues – whether a student had an alternative aspiration influenced by their family or that a student believed his or her aspiration was not suited to the school environment. T1's comment below demonstrated his recognition that the relationship between attitude and aspirations was complex, and what may have outward appearance as a poor attitude could have been a personal struggle with school, or familial pressure in relation to an aspiration:

> … so I think students who have a very sort of poor work ethic or are not engaged
> in school very well and struggle for whatever reason I think they are the kids who
> tend to have particular aspirations so they might have sporting aspirations or
> aspirations to work with their dad whose a bricklayer, we have quite a lot of kids
> in school whose parents have [a trade] and they say they want to work with dad
> or their uncle or whoever and I think they still have aspirations but they are not
> related to tertiary study and I'd say there is a link between the two there. The
> kids are very academic and hard-working in class tend to have more academic
> aspirations; I think. (T1)

This quote illustrates the complexity of sources for student aspirations, whether students aim to pursue further education, work or alternative pathways. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ideas have been useful to analyse how T1 observed the home context as an influence on a student's aspiration to be a bricklayer due to her family obligations. His view of the microsystem was that the context influenced development, and students internalised these influences while developing aspirations. Bronfenbrenner's (2005) later work also assisted in understanding how a student's motivation might have been propelled towards other outlets, so what appeared as a poor attitude could really reflect a lack of interest in what was offered at school, or in a particular subject. Another aspect of a potentially hidden struggle was when T7 linked a student's poor attitude to low self-confidence in the school setting, affecting her aspiration:

> … the kids do sometimes go, I can't do this, I can't, I don't know what a cell is, I'm
> never going to learn this, you need to encourage them to keep working on it, and

to keep trying, don't give up, you need to try and try and think of different ways

for them to achieve that, so sometimes you know, some kids learn really well

from taking notes, well, not all the kids do that, so you need to provide them

with different ways of learning, and different language, and things like that to

help them get around those barriers, so just because they've reached a conflict

doesn't mean you can't overcome that. (T7)

T7 perceived some students having developed a poor attitude when faced with difficult tasks, and the students' localised aspiration to do well in the class was affected because they thought it was beyond their capabilities. Repetition of a pattern over time was highlighted by Bronfenbrenner (2005) in his revised theory about process, where a student might come to believe something about themselves. Over time, this repetition potentially contributed to a view that school is "not for the likes of us,'' linking with Bourdieu's ideas, specifically his theories of capital, and observed by other researchers in student aspirations, that some pathways were deemed more socially acceptable (Bok, 2010; Gale & Parker, 2014; Gale & Parker, 2015a; Gale & Parker, 2015b; Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate, et al., 2015; Smith, 2011; Zipin et al., 2015). T7 responded to this type of situation incrementally, and her perception of intervening relates to the discussion in Chapter 5 later in this thesis, where perceived formal and informal roles of teachers are considered in relation to student aspirations.

A number of participants also challenged the notion that attitude was fixed, so a student's attitude and aspiration could perhaps change in time. T2 aimed to build a capacity for a positive attitude through identifying what was behind the poor attitude and working on skills to solve issues the student might face:

… poor attitude can come from low self-confidence, and a student that sits there

being obstructive, may not actually be able to read and write. They might not

have access at home to be able to sit quietly somewhere and do homework and

do research, so I think student attitude, if you can build that capacity with them,

their attitude can change …. but the majority of the students at this school have

really positive attitudes towards learning because it's an environment that

fosters learning. (T2)

His perception was that the environment fostered learning and this helped students' attitude and aspiration; in his view, it was possible to build different skills with them, and this could positively impact the attitude and desire for learning or aspiration. This comment resonated with Gottfredson's (1981; 1996) contention that as students age, aspirations could alter or change with

the developing self-concept, and what was considered acceptable pathways to them. It further related to the notion of aspiration as a capacity, as discussed by Appadurai (2004) and Bok (2010), when this teacher described the day-to-day skills needed to be successful at school, and through building skills, it could impact attitude.

T10 suggested that an attitude was not constant, and it did not affect aspiration that much:

> … it's interesting because a student attitude, or a student frame of mind fluctuates, depending on the age and stage, depending on what's happening environmentally at that point in time, so I think that whilst a student attitude could play a role in a student's aspirations, I don't think that it is, um, concrete enough or consistent enough to have a really big impact on a student aspiration. So, I think because, um, attitudes, feelings, emotions are ever changing, I think and evolving, I think it is one component in a snapshot of time to impact on an aspiration. (T10)

This teacher considered attitude to be constantly changing, so an aspiration lingered longer than a particular attitude. These views of changeable attitudes and aspirations aligned with Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 2005) conception of child development in time and through repetition, as well as through changes in the environment. This conception also linked with Gottfredson's (1981) arguments that interventions were possible to prevent a student from fixing or limiting their aspirations. These teacher participants saw an opening to impact student aspirations through working with them on skills to ensure receptive attitudes in relation to school.

This section considered how participating teachers developed diverse understandings about the links between student attitudes and aspirations, yet a common thread was that many saw the two working synchronously. The data showed that teacher participants perceived attitude and aspiration working together, as do many cultural, social, and other factors in tandem with them. This data from the teachers' perspectives aligns with Abu-Halil's (2000) findings that promoting positive attitudes towards school subjects would be "aimless and fruitless if considered in isolation of students' goals and intentions'' (p. 82). With Abu-Halil's research in mind, teachers seeking to improve attitudes about their subject matter could consider how to link it to student aspirations. The next section will consider participating teachers' observations of how aspirations can become fixed.

4.5   Fixed and Affecting Participation

The data showed that some teacher participants perceived that students with a fixed aspiration having a non-receptive mindset to certain types of schoolwork. Specifically, some

students questioned or refused work they saw as unnecessary for their future plans. The data demonstrated teacher participants observed younger students forming set ideas about future pathways based on poor task performance, or students perceiving a task irrelevant based their intended career. This linked to other research on aspirations that found children could set their aspirations early, reflected in the work of Gottfredson (1981), Bandura et al. (2001), and more recently in Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al. (2015). In particular, the data illustrated some teachers' unique positioning in the students' microsystem enabled them to observe student misunderstandings about their intended careers, which could place a burden on teachers to justify the relevance of their curriculum. For instance, T10 had encountered primary students with set ideas about their aspirations and they rejected work: "I have definitely have students in [Year] 4 … I won't need that for later on in my life anyway'' (T10). This comment specifically aligned with research suggestions that some students limited their aspirations by Year 4 based on prior performance (Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate, et al., 2015). The comment also indicated the potential classroom impacts of a student setting an aspiration early, which was that students have disregarded other options before they had a chance to consider or explore them as no career class was present in the primary school.

Historically, aspirational work and career counselling has been implemented in the later years of schooling; however, it might have been that waiting to help students formulate their pathways meant valuable opportunities for aspirational thinking were missed. Students potentially needed scaffolding to understand the complexities of careers, the types of skills a job required, and the capacities for jobs to change over time with technologies and other advancements. Early exposure to ideas such as this could prevent students from seeing skills for careers as so siloed. As Gottfredson (1981) suggested, a window of opportunity existed to prevent students from circumscribing their aspirations. This was reflected in T6's observations of how some early secondary maths students questioned the content's relevance to their lives:

> In my maths class, yeah, any career-related conversations mostly have in year 7 maths, are what can I use this in outside of school because at the moment they are struggling to find more and more, struggling to find the relevance of maths in everyday life. I teach [subject] and that happens even more so because they are low. (T6)

As T6 explained, students in this class that could not see the work's relevance to their lives and this meant the teacher had to step in to correct misunderstandings. Without a connection and a motivation for participating, students risked losing interest in the subjects. T6 further explained: "So, if they are motivated, you know, and if they are proactive too, there're going to look to challenge

themselves a little bit more'' (T6). Again, Bronfenbrenner's (2005) conception of an individual's characteristic of force helped to explain that the student's motivation for a subject might be determined by their conception of its use later on. In this situation, teachers like T6, played an important role through helping students to develop a receptive attitude to a subject by connecting its relevance to students' interests and aspirations, and teacher roles will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Another connection identified in the data between student aspirations and attitudes related to teacher discussion of negative self-perceptions or disconnectedness by students. T12 expressed how a student's experience of failure in the classroom could become an attitudinal barrier hard to overcome in relation to student aspirations. She speculated that when students fail, the behaviour problems often began:

> It happens, it's always based on the end results that they receive in particular
> subjects. So, there's that shut-down of that mindset that they can achieve and
> it's so easy then you will start to see the behavioural issues escalate. (T12)

Here the teacher suggested that a student's self-belief became wrapped up in a task, test or particular subject, and a student's sense of failure hindered their aspiration for success in the classroom. A student's sense of success or failure in the classroom was critical to their aspirations, as Nguyen and Blomberg (2014) contended, because students risked not reaching their aspirations if they perceived themselves as average or below in their schoolwork. A sense of disconnectedness was also noticed by T7 when she linked student attitude with their perceived ability and intended aspiration. She observed that students who "have sort of written themselves off, saying I'm dumb, I'm never going to achieve anything, their behaviour and their attitude is generally negative, and that obviously has an impact on my role, because that affects how you are with the student'' (T7). Researchers, like Zipin et al. (2015), have contended student perceptions of self as limiting student aspirations. While it might have appeared as a lack of aspiration, students could alter an aspiration based on an opinion of their place in the world (Gottfredson, 1981; Zipin et al., 2015). T7 perceived her role either as one where she must motivate the student, or constantly correct the student to stay on task. This teacher shared her strategy for encouraging positive behaviour and motivation through calling upon her knowledge of a student's aspiration:

> If you're going to be a doctor long-term, do you think your behaviour in class is
> going to achieve that, do you think that not doing your homework is going to
> help you achieve your doctor goal? Or, you might help reflect on the, you know,
> if that's what you want, well, is this going to help you achieve it? (T7)

This teacher reported that knowing a student's aspiration assisted teachers with `teachable' moments in order to engage the student with the curriculum on any given day in an effort to reach a later goal. This has connection to teacher's tacit understandings of their role and how, at Sunnyside, where aspirations have not been formalised in the curriculum, teachers could learn this on the job.

This section discussed perceptions of teacher participants that students could fix their aspirations, and this may affect participation with schoolwork. The idea that teachers take on informal roles in relation to aspiration will be further discussed in Chapter 5, while the notion that teachers can be uncertain about their role with student aspirations is discussed further in Chapter 6. The next section covers teacher perceptions of student aspirations reaching a point of realism.

4.6   Point of Realism

The data analysis showed that teachers perceived student aspirations reaching a point of realism in mid-secondary school, where aspirations became quite detailed or related to specific careers. Teachers' descriptions in the interviews and survey revolved around their perceptions of the open-endedness of student aspirations in the primary school narrowing to a point of realism in middle secondary for students, whether teachers perceived them to be sufficiently informed about pathways or not. These perceptions about students reaching a point of realism might be viewed from the theoretical perspective of Gottfredson (1996), where she considers the zone of acceptable alternatives. In her conception, children progressively eliminated possible futures that do not fit with their self-perceptions of gender, prestige, or ability. Berger, Holmes, et al. (2019) acknowledged a "transition to realism" (p. 20) as their participating students tended to respond to this period of decision-making by "adjusting their aspirations downward" (p. 22). In particular, this sense of `realism' that teachers described might link with student self-perceptions of ability and fit within society, with students eliminating certain choices.

A number of teacher participants conceptualised an open-endedness about aspirations with students in primary school, narrowing as they reach middle secondary. Prior to VCE, there was a point where this change occurred, moving from the broad, open ideas of aspiration to a more narrowly focused pathway, and then intermingling with careers. This was demonstrated by T4's comment that a `reality' set in during the middle secondary years, where a student switched from an unbounded freedom of aspiration to one bounded by reality, learning strengths and weaknesses in academic or sporting ability:

> I think very young children are aspirational because they haven't learnt any
>
> limitation on their education yet …. But then I think probably the real turning
>
> point on a lot of I think what would take it to aspirational to being more realistic

is probably that year 9/10 phase when maths becomes very obvious whether you

are capable, willing to, compete in higher level maths and sciences or you

strengths lie in your written ability and you look to extend yourself through the

humanities and Englishes, or, which is very typical for our area, sport, a lot of

students at that year 9/10 sport either become something or it's going to be fun

or something they wish to pursue. So, I would say year 9/10 where the real

reality sets in. (T4)

This teacher perceived a point of realism stemmed from students' abilities to monitor and gauge their abilities in relation to their interests, likes or dislikes. In this teacher's comment, it is possible to see the elimination of potential careers based on student perception of ability (Gottfredson, 1996). It was here, in this moment of student self-reflection, that the school and teachers might assist students with aspiration work (Gottfredson, 1981). This comment also related to the larger question of this thesis – *How do teachers understand their roles in relation to engaging with student aspirations?* – as the subtle role of the teacher was evident in T4's comment, where a teacher assisted and encouraged students to find their way. As student roles changed when transitioning to more realistic views about their futures, so did teacher roles alter, an idea best understood through Turner's (2001) notion of role sets, where closely linked roles impacted each other. The point of realism was an important point not just for students, but one for teachers too as it signalled a greater student need for their expertise and guidance about potential student pathways.

This point of realism appeared to permeate the school as a significant amount of work was completed in year 8 to assist students towards choosing subjects that would lead them towards VCE, as indicated through the document analysis. School documents reflected this narrowing of focus, such as the "Year 7 and 8 Handbook" (School Document, 2017i), "Year 9 and 10 Handbook" (School Document, 2017j), "VCE Handbook" (School Document, 2017m), the "Career Counselling Tutor Group Teacher Pre-Referral Checklist" (School Document, 2017b), "Year 7-11 Referral Form Career Counselling" (School Document, 2017k), "Year 12 Counselling Form" (School Document, 2017l), and the "Student Career Investigation" (School Document, 2017g).

T1 described how there was flexibility for students once they had chosen subjects all the way through the remainder of school; however, she noted that students did not always understand they were not "locked in" to choices made when they were younger. T1 described how the organisation of the school impacted on how these decisions were made:

I think because this school has a year 9 and 10, all of the electives are delivered

to year 9 and 10, so they are all combined classes. They have to choose those two

years of electives at the end of year 8. So yes, in my opinion, that means that

year 8 is quite early to pre-determine, and there is flexibility in the system, they

certainly aren't always locked in, but they feel they may be locked in, so

therefore if they don't choose for example, the science/maths electives, they feel

that's going to be more difficult for them to pick those up later on and do well.

(T1)

T1 perceived students might not have understood there was flexibility for them to change paths. Her comment illustrated how this feeling of realism in the way that students "feel they may be locked in'' by what they had selected as a pathway. T1 described how some students had a "generalised sort of response or they might kind of express a bit of a wish that if I had my time again I would have done it this way" (T1), 'reflecting a regret about some earlier pathway choices. T1 observed students bemoaning a sense of freedom about aspirations they perceived they had somehow lost as this perception of `reality' set in, and she assumed a role in advising them it was not too late to alter a pathway. Walker (2006) acknowledged the "incongruence between aspirations and workforce realities when working alongside school leavers," and argued it was important to equip students with resilience, methods to ``reframe an experience and reset goals" (p. 58). The idea of teachers' informal roles is discussed in Chapter 5.

With students encouraged towards practical pathway decisions by the end of year 8, T5 suggested some students had a definite idea of the route to their aspirations while others had to select something with little conception of future plans. She explained how some students made decisions about subjects with little insight, and some told her this worried them:

So, if they are going to be picking subjects in year 9, they need to be thinking a bit

in year 8, they are turning 14. Say some kids, why do I have to think about being

an adult already? But, they already know what they like or they don't like. They

can't make any choices in year 9, or even 10, which is going to totally stuff things

up…Based on how our subjects work in year 9, so there are very few, in year 9,

they have to do English and Maths … they choose which science they want to do,

they have to do a certain number of science, they all have to do health, and they

all have to do Australian History, but after that, it's which ones and how many.

(T5)

T5's comments illustrated a different view in that she did not perceive students making any choices that could not be corrected later. She did not think the choices were too great for the students to handle. This sat in contrast to T1's explanation of how she counseled VCE students that

they could always pick up subjects they missed because T5 illustrated how she was advising students to pick a pathway, even if they did not know where they were going. These comments, together, illustrated how teachers described the point of realism was linked to subject choices. Gottfredson's (1996) conception of the zone of acceptable alternatives might help explain the reasoning behind student choices for pathways and, in turn, subject choices. Gottfredson (1996) conceptualised students were progressively able to eliminate options based on perceptions of self and how characteristics of jobs suited them.

There was a mixture of opinions about the point of realism that permeated student choices, and how this impacted their aspirations. Some participants communicated that in year 8 students were locking in choices too early for a pathway that extended to VCE and a career choice; whereas, other participants reported wanting to see more work completed before to ease students into these decisions by having enough exposure to make informed choices. A solution proposed by one teacher on the survey was that exposing children earlier to careers prevented them from being overwhelmed at the intense periods of subject selection in years 9 and 10, suggesting that introducing career education early was better because there would be less pressure later in school:

> I think primary students are very interested in jobs and this could be an
> opportune time to introduce the concept of career aspirations. I have found that
> Year 9 and 10 students are swamped with career planning and become
> disengaged or overwhelmed at times. (Survey)

This teacher perceived that primary students had a natural interest in jobs and this was an ideal time for the school to facilitate their exploration of various pathways. This teacher communicated how some students found the narrowing of subject choices stressful when they had not given enough thought to their pathway through the end of secondary school. Similarly, T9 explained that some students were not ready to make those decisions, and the age varied for different students:

> When they are more mature. At year 8, sometimes they don't want to listen. Like
> even when, I want to share stories to make them feeling empathy, but they are
> not so sensitive sometimes year 8… Some students, this is based on my
> experience, some students still don't know what they want to be in the future.
> They are just enjoying teenager's life, partying, or socializing, gossiping, especially
> girls, uh, and while their parents already start pushing them that direction
> because the parents are accountant[s], you have to do this, you have to do this.
> (T9)

This suggests that some students, without exposure to diverse pathways, had not questioned their parents' aspirations for them and fell in line, making decisions based on limited information. This indicated the possible notion of the family script where a lack of exposure to other pathways meant students had only parents as models (Bok, 2010). In Bok's (2010) study, she described students as not lacking aspiration but "they have access to `scripts' – comprising economic, cultural, social and cultural resources – that make it relatively difficult for them to produce the performances to realise them'' (p. 176). Bok's (2010) analysis was carried out in a lower SES school than mine, but the logic remained the same – that children worked from a family script and if they were not exposed to other professions, they likely never moved from this script, influencing their aspirational capacity. A point of difference with my research was that Sunnyside is a private school, but its location made it attractive to a diverse range of families from different backgrounds, cultures, and professions, as evident from the School Website (School Document, 2017a). As Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 2005) ideas suggested, the repetition of processes over time confirmed student perceptions about their world. Some children had a family script that exposed them to diverse careers, whereas others did not. This idea of the need for more exposure to diverse career paths prior to the point of realism in middle secondary was recognised by teacher participants.

A number of teachers mentioned that they saw themselves, and the school as a whole, as needing to expose students to a range of pathways earlier in school, which would occur prior to any point of realism or student fixation on any aspiration. Through her work in the primary school, T10 described that it was in the early ages that the school had the ability to impact the lives of students and their aspirations:

> I think … when you asked me the questions about boundaries, what was the question, the year level and the impact. That's why I think we need to really have more of an open mind about the whole child from a very early age and understanding that there are a lot of environmental and geographical factors that are going to influence a student's aspirations and that happens from birth. (T10)

This teacher pointed to the possibility for intervention early on, as recognised in the literature (Gottfredson, 1981; Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al., 2015). She also mentioned various factors that impacted on a student's aspiration outside of the school, as discussed earlier in this section, such as environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and geography – a point that literature on aspirations has recognised as an influence (Webb et al., 2015). She considered early in school as an opportunity to focus on the "whole child'' in order to increase the child's exposure to aspirational opportunities. In a similar vein, another teacher in the primary school, T11, insisted that students

needed more exposure to a range of pathways in primary school before they made important decisions. In this view, formal experiences needed to be enhanced in primary school, because some students were not getting the exposure at home:

> I think there are missed opportunities. Like I've been saying, they are not getting the exposure to it. You know, some of them, I wouldn't say all of them at this age, at the grade 3 and 4 age, are aware of what their parents do, they can tell you their parent is a doctor or a teacher or what have you, they have no concept of what that's, type of career involves, or occupation involves, they've got no concept of how to get to that point …. I think there is a big opportunity being missed in those lower years to give these kids exposure to all sorts of experiences. (T11)

Similar to the comment above, this teacher's comments reflected the notion that a family script (Bok, 2010) might be playing in the background, and what a student's parents may have or have not achieved became a barrier for student aspirations. As a result, T11 discussed that the school could have missed opportunities for exposing students to pathways in the primary school before they made decisions about their futures in the secondary school.

There was an assumption by some teacher participants at Sunnyside, particularly those in the secondary school, that students were being exposed to a range of pathways in the primary school before making decisions at the `point of realism' in secondary school. T13, whose focus was VCE, assumed the students to be exposed to many possible futures before narrowing their preferred pathway:

> But with the younger years, again because I don't have much input there, it's how much we're actually fostering the pathway or the interests, again, this is the luck of a place like (this school) because it's so big, there is a broad range of experience that they can get exposed to and you hope that something catches. It's like kissing a lot of frogs to find your prince. (T13)

It seemed that although the assumption, or the hope, was that many students were being exposed to a range of opportunities before making decisions, this was not formalised in the primary school. Again, the idea that students would experience exposure in informal ways was evident in the way that T14 narrated an imagined informal discussion about student aspirations. In this example, he specifically pointed to the fact that the cultural and social surroundings of the student determine the focal point of any discussion about aspirations:

> I believe [what] happens here as it does in many schools is that the culture and social context determines and limits the kind of discussions that will occur. So, there will be a discussion, Nathan says he wants to be a carpenter, and you'll get the teacher who will open that discussion up and says 'well, that's great, Nathan, that you want to be a carpenter, but have you thought about being an architect and someone who designs buildings?' Or, 'Milly, you want to be a nurse, why do you want to be a nurse? Have you thought about being a doctor?'So there are conversations in some classrooms that will open up possibilities where, in other classrooms there will be, 'that's great, Nathan, what do you want to do, Sam?
> (T14)

This was an important perception in the data because a student's cultural and social background was influencing the discussion, and there was the potential that they were in keeping with family scripts. Appadurai's (2004) work emphasised how aspirations are culturally imagined. Whether this script was to become a tradesperson or a doctor, like a parent, teachers could potentially play a role in questioning the student's motivation and allowing them to see other alternatives. a secondary teacher, T7, expressed how it was important that the science curriculum opened up opportunities:

> I guess it's hard because primary schools is so literacy numeracy based, they don't necessarily get to experience different subjects, arts, The Arts, drama, arts and craft, building, construction, woodwork, you can't do woodwork with a primary school student because they are just not capable, there are safety concerns as well. But I guess our school here is really good, the science program that is offered to the junior school kids, it's really adapted and adept, and they have specific science teachers and we have language teachers for junior school ...
> (T7)

The teacher's assumption was that students could have access to more scientific careers through exposure to different science offerings in the primary school. There could be an opening for the school – and teachers – to play a part in helping students with the navigational capacity to consider other aspirations through the curriculum.

Tense situations that participants found themselves in with student aspirations narrowing to a point of realism became apparent from the data analysis. A tension between an unbounded optimism for an aspiration and a sense of realism put the teacher in a quagmire, as evident in this comment from T14:

It's that process of seeds, seed-planting, um, and also, opening of opportunities,

and also, I suppose, the other side of that is, um, I'd really like to be, other times,

kids who are in grade 5 and 6, I really want to be a, um, professional surfer, well,

that's great, Milly, but have you thought about whether that will enable you to

buy the house that you want, and wherever it might be. (T14)

The view expressed by this participant was that teachers needed to be seen encouraging students towards an aspiration, while at the same time ensuring that that aspiration would one day `pay the bills.' In this school context, where discussions of aspirations were not formalised in the primary school, this comment indicated the fuzzy, double-sided expectation of any teacher's discussion about student aspirations as they progressively narrowed to a `point of realism.' A teacher might have been placed in an ethical dilemma when observing a student's aspiration. After having shared a specific example from her research, Bok (2010) argued that a teacher could face an ethical dilemma of effectively "lowering'' a student's aspirations when the student's academic performance "may constitute a barrier'' to that goal (p. 175). If a teacher suggested the student worked towards a different aspiration, the student might reach the original aspiration on an alternative pathway, the cost for some students would be high, presenting a sense of deficit about their ability. This quagmire is an idea returned to in Chapter 5 in my examination of teachers' formal and informal roles in relation to student aspirations. The next section examines teacher understandings of student aspirations in relationship to when career education should start.

4.7   Linked to Career Education at the School

While some Sunnyside teachers participating in this study did not foresee a need for formal careers education in the early years of schooling, they identified in the survey and interviews, discussed below, that opportunities to discuss aspirations with students would be valuable. They supported the notion that appropriate education for teachers needed to be available. The diversity of the teacher comments revealed a lack of clarity around careers education, including when it should begin, and indeed if it should even be called `career education.' As this research exposed the thinking of teachers, it has the potential to help decision makers know what types of education to provide to educators to increase their awareness of more recent research into student aspirations, and to carefully consider the language used to name any career education programs.

Specifically, the analysis found that teachers communicated a diverse range of opinions about the commencement of career education. Careers education in primary school, as expressed by the participant teachers at Sunnyside, was not entirely acceptable, but there were some convinced that earlier interventions would enable students to explore options and eventually make more

informed choices about their futures. In the survey, 21 (40%) teachers nominated primary school and 31 (60%) nominated secondary school as the appropriate launch for formal careers education. One teacher wrote in a survey response section that choosing secondary school for the beginning of careers education was "my opinion based on teaching young students who are immature and not ready for goal setting related to a career" (Survey). Another survey response communicated this quite succinctly with "love of learning and self-efficacy should precede this'' (Survey). These comments suggested that teachers were possibly not aware of the recent research into aspirations signalling that students eliminated aspirational pathways early in school. The idea that young students crystallize their thinking about career opportunities in primary school has been a focal point in the literature (Bandura et al., 2001; Gottfredson, 1981; Gore et al. 2015b), which was earlier than the formal career program started at Sunnyside, and that is offered in most schools. Thus, where adults might have viewed some children as having a set aspiration based on interest, it might have already been limited by a student's self-perception of ability. The analysis demonstrated that teachers perceived a need for students to be exposed to more types of aspirations and job opportunities in the junior school. This point continues in the implications.

Some participants on the survey regarded career education as a necessity for primary students, as indicated with 21 nominating the junior school as the most appropriate time for its commencement. These research participants were amenable to the idea of working with children on aspirations or future careers if it were less formal than secondary school and focussed on opening up possibilities for student exploration. This concept was represented by T1 who suggested that career education could have a place earlier, but it would need to be very informal:

> So, I see a role in it for that type of education quite early, but I suppose it would
> have to be pretty informal thing, and probably a supportive type of education
> which really encompasses all kinds of aspirations and perhaps exposes children
> to a wider variety too, because they may only have limited understanding of
> what jobs are out there or what jobs are available based on their own families or
> what they've been exposed to. (T1)

T1's idea that students would benefit from some form of career education earlier was present in the literature in the UK context, as Hooley et al. (2014) contended careers education before years 7 and 8 helped students with accessing information, understanding labour markets and an improved self-understanding. This challenged any limitation placed by family "scripts'' (Bok, 2010, p. 175). One teacher, T10, envisioned informal career counselling as something as simple, such as visits from a career counsellor, which might get students conceptualizing their future plans:

I think from a student's perspective, it would give them more of an

understanding that they aren't going to be the age of 10 for the rest of their life

and they will have to progress forward and there will be an opportunity for them

to be adults to make decisions and to have to justify decisions. So I think if

somebody, say a careers advisor, whether it be from the senior school or

external, did come and speak to the younger grades, it would get them thinking

and focusing more on who they are and who they aspire to be. (T10)

This sentiment was shared by other teachers, as T9 provided a similar idea: "It's important, not just for the career, or aspiration-giving ideas, but also to, yeah, to induce some, the skills for them, to protect themselves'' (T9). Viewed together, T10 and T9's comments, as well as T11's comments earlier in this chapter about missed opportunities for primary school students, suggest that the act of exposing children to different pathways helped them conceptualise a future. Others, in the survey in question 3, provided in Appendix C, (Career education should start the following year: (Choices: Kinder, Prep, Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3, Grade 4, Grade 5, Grade 6, Grade 7, Grade 8, Grade 9, year 10, Year 11, Year 12)) agreed in comments that early career education discussions allowed students more time to explore and work on specific skills. The following comments by survey respondents provides examples of this view:

Students should know what is available early on as many of them have a limited

idea. The earlier they know, the more informed their decision will be later on.

(Survey)

Even if students want to be an astronaut they should be encouraged to work on

the skills. (Survey)

Often coming into secondary school students will be asked to make subject

selections (e.g. languages), a discussion about the uses of these is helpful at this

stage and links to aspirations. (Survey)

Students can begin having `job' awareness at an early age. They should also have

the opportunity to explore the limitlessness of their creativity in terms of their

future, e.g.: I want to fly to the moon! (Survey)

Teachers observed the potential energy resting in some students. The way that one teacher above described early investigation into careers as "job awareness,'' with this type of work opening students' minds to diverse possibilities they might not have even considered. Without career education, or the investment of a teacher, some students might never understand the connections

between what they are good at doing, or interested in doing, and the potential for a career. In fact, Kewalramani, Phillipson, and Belford (2018) highlighted this in their research where they suggested teachers played an influential role in helping students with aspirational career choices, "when students feel supported by their teachers in encouraging them to build on their academic capabilities, and accordingly choose subjects, this may further enhance students' overall career choice success'' (pp. 93-94). In addition, the concept of "disruption'' to a student's aspiration was highlighted by Webb et al. (2015), where unplanned events dislodged a student's supposed fixed aspiration or informed them of possibilities otherwise unconsidered. As discussed further in the implications, the data showed teachers potentially facilitated some positive disruption with primary students as a result of introducing informal career education.

Other teacher participants questioned the term `careers education.' T12, who had some responsibility for careers education, suggested the term "careers'' might be a misnomer. She interpreted careers as "multiple changes,'' not a "dead end,'' which, in her opinion, had a negative connotation. Her view of a career as multiple changes was not reflected in other teacher comments; however, her interpretation of career education as a "dead end'' was present in the views of two survey respondents who questioned the term "career education.'' Again, in Question 3 on the survey (Appendix C) relating to when career education should start, two respondents expressed the notion that if careers would be taught rather than skills, then it was not acceptable:

> Career education, as opposed to getting a job education? To be honest, I
> sometimes think we pressure students too much about `what they want to do in
> the future' when many of them have no idea. I think `getting a job' education
> should be in Year 8, but career? No(t) sure…as late as possible! (Survey)

> Until this point students shouldn't limit themselves to one particular direction,
> they should experience all facets of educational opportunity. (Survey)

Although these respondents took issue with the term `career education,' the data analysis demonstrated that underlying this opposition to the term they expressed an idea similar to other teachers. As the remainder of this section will show, most teachers wanted the notion of aspirations to remain open, not shutting students down. These two teachers perceived career education as a potential barrier to aspirations because it was potentially too heavily focused on jobs, where other respondents saw it as expanding students' interests. Here, an opening has presented itself for the Sunnyside school administrators to consider ways to further coordinate career education as a coherent system within the school (Patton & McMahon, 2015). Information about how teacher conceptions influenced the way they engaged with student aspirations or career education would be

informative in any further career activities within the school. There is also opportunity to consider ways to expose younger students to a range of careers as well as linking personal values to careers and opening up definitions of careers as multiple changes over time (FYAP, 2017), while possibly avoiding the label `career education' and potentially adding aspirations education within the school. These ideas will be discussed in Chapter 8, which contains the implications from this research.

The possibility for expanding student interests was present in the way T4 described career education as the "nuts and bolts'' of aspiration. She suggested that her role made her take a narrow conceptualisation of aspiration as specifically linked to careers, but ultimately, she believed it was truly expansive and linked to student happiness:

> I take aspiration in my role looking at pathways, futures careers, that way, but I
> also believe people do better when they are happy, so maybe, you know, do we
> need to further, as a school, even look at aspiration about what they want from
> their personal life, because ultimately sometimes that's more important than
> your professional one, so, I guess I've answered most of these based on career…
> Is aspiration career-oriented, or can we aspire to get married or having children,
> what is actual aspiration? But that is another thesis. (T4)

This teacher's reflection in this quote challenged the idea that all aspirations must be career-oriented, and suggested that "as a school,'' they could consider a broader conception of aspirations. The sentiment was similar to what T11 expressed, but he did not suggest it was a problem for the school, but more an inadequacy with Australian curriculum; he was frustrated by the choice of curriculum and how it limited discussions for aspirations, thus creating a disconnectedness for students with the world and possibilities around them:

> … I think there are too many boundaries on me as a teacher to expose these kids
> to being able to have those aspirations and career choices, I mean the, I think
> the, to go off on a bit of a tangent, I think the Australian curriculum itself it quite,
> what's the way to put it, it's very narrow-minded, and it's very, it's very fishbowl,
> I think, it doesn't open itself up to allow for the exposure to the students these
> days, and as an educator, using the Australian curriculum I'm really handcuffed in
> a lot of areas to be able to expose students. (T11)

T11 communicated a feeling that the curriculum restricted student aspirations by placing barriers on what students were exposed to. Both T4 and T11's views suggested there were aspirations that did not fit within what was traditionally constructed as career education within the curriculum, where students had a range of aspirations but teachers were unable to assist due to lack

of experience. These views related to the arguments of Hoskins and Barker (2017), who suggested that aspirations were socially constructed and they also identified a number of students rejected "neo-liberal emphasis on wealth creation'' and sought the "desire to be happy, make a difference and experience job satisfaction'' (p. 63). From this perspective, some students were reaching a decision to pursue happiness, which might not include a specific career track. T10 described her perception of the intrinsic connection between aspiration and career education:

> I think they are intrinsically aligned, an aspiration is your wants, your needs your
> desires and that relates directly to your career because that does really develop
> who you are as a person and we're going to the career, well most people go into
> the career that they are, I wouldn't say naturally inclined to, because there is a
> lot of learning involved, but I think there is some natural inclination towards the
> career path that you are going to go down, that aspiration is the key. (T10)

These comments were reminiscent of Holland's (1997) typology for organising people and jobs, where he asserted that people sought vocations that allowed them to express their desires, but also their attitudes and values; it also connected with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ideas about the reverberations within a person's development from a myriad of influences. T10 expressed how aspiration and career were mingled together, representing the individuality of each person and the connectedness of all aspects of students' development as influential. Taken together, the interpretation of these teacher comments found them observing students with a range of aspirations that may or may not be related specifically to a career, and they wanted this reflected in any career education. In the absence of clear definitions, it is my contention that teachers' personal definitions of aspirations or career education in this study, and their overlap, may affect their understanding of students' developing aspirations and whether this is seen as part of their role, a discussion continued in the next chapter.

4.8   Chapter Summary

In this chapter, teacher participant conceptions about the formation of student aspirations and associated influences were discussed. The analysis indicated that the teachers conceptualised student aspirations forming in complex ways, taking on a multi-faceted quality, and being potentially influenced by a range of sources. The analysis found some teachers viewed aspiration as a capacity, which had to be nurtured and developed in students, and many teachers observed aspirations as heavily influenced by attitudes, culture and students' surroundings, including peers and what was perceived to be the norm in relation to marks and future plans. Also discussed were participant teacher perceptions about student aspirations reaching a point of realism where more intervention

was required, and their inconsistent perceptions about the appropriate placement of career education. Building on this analysis, the data showed that teacher understandings influence their perceptions of their roles with student aspirations, which is discussed in the next chapter. Specifically, the formal and informal roles played by teachers when working with student aspirations are analysed and named.

5   Data Analysis and Discussion: Teacher Perceptions of Roles with Student Aspirations

5.1   Chapter overview

In this chapter, an analysis of the data pertaining to the second of the four sub-research questions, *What defined or undefined roles do teachers perceive themselves playing in relation to student aspirations and is this a shared understanding within the school*? is presented. This sub-question can be further broken down into three: What defined roles do teachers perceive themselves playing in relation to student aspirations?; What undefined roles do teachers perceive themselves playing in relation to student aspirations?; and, Are teachers' perceptions a shared understanding within the school? This builds upon the data analysis from the previous chapter, which focused on the research sub-question, *How do teachers perceive student aspirations forming*?, by linking Sunnyside teacher perceptions of aspirations to the roles they perceive themselves playing. The specific data that informed this chapter was outlined in Table 3.6, which includes survey and interview questions focussed on teachers' roles in relation to student aspirations and documents pertaining to teachers' roles within the school. This work is key to considering the overall research question, *How do teachers understand their roles in relation to engaging with student aspirations?*

As canvased in the literature review, research suggested that teachers have been playing an important role with student aspirations. Parker et al. (2013) determined that nearly half of all students they surveyed sought information from teachers about the future and that 73 per cent indicated teacher views were `important' or `extremely important. Allen et al. (2017) argued that teachers played a significant role in academic self-concept and educational aspirations. Both writing from the UK context, Hooley et al. (2015) suggested teachers often played an informal role with careers education while Johnson et al. (2009) highlighted that their participating teachers wanted to support student progressions. The data from Sunnyside demonstrated a strong consensus amongst teacher participants that working with student aspirations was part of their role and these findings fit with available academic literature.

The analysis of roles that teachers perceived themselves performing continued through a bricolage lens. Turner's (2001) ideas assisted in explaining how alongside formally defined roles within the school, informal roles also existed. Analysis of the data revealed that in the absence of any definition around certain perceived responsibilities, teachers were performing these informal roles situationally, as needed, in order to assist students with aspirations. Further, Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1994) model enabled recognition of the position teachers held as both participants and observers to students' formation of aspirations and to recognise that teacher conceptions of

aspirations, as discussed in Chapter 4, influenced how they perceived their formal and informal roles in relation to student aspirations.

5.2   Teacher Conceptions of Their Formal and Informal Roles

Before moving into a discussion of specific formal and informal roles identified in the data, this section outlines how the data analysis highlighted teacher conceptions of working with aspirations. A visual illustration comparing formal and informal roles is also presented.

Analysis of the survey data from Sunnyside showed that the majority of teachers agreed that working with student aspirations was part of their role. Teachers were asked about their level of agreement for the statement, "It is important that students perceive my support in relation to their aspirations.'' The responses indicated that 37 (65%) strongly agreed, 18 (32%) agreed, and two were uncertain that it was important. Survey respondents expressed a strong sense of agreement when asked, "Discussing student aspirations is part of my job,'' 29 (51%) strongly agreed, 27 (47%) agreed and one was uncertain. These questions formed question one of the survey and made available in Appendix C. There were no respondents that selected "disagree'' or "strongly disagree" to either of these questions. This strong consensus indicated that teacher opinions supported that working with student aspirations was perceived as part of their role.

Despite a strong general consensus that working with aspirations was part of a teacher's role generally, some primary teachers did not consider questions around student aspirations or careers education relevant to their work, with the following comments provided on the survey:

"Slightly, as a primary school teacher it isn't a huge focus.''

 "I feel this is done predominantly in secondary school.''

"As a primary teacher, I have no experience of this.''

In addition, when prompted for general comments, one teacher suggested that the survey "would have been more applicable if I were a secondary teacher'' (Survey). These responses indicated that some primary teachers did not consider working with student aspirations to be part of their job. These comments were important to consider in relationship to student aspirations in light of the study by Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al. (2015), which questioned the idea that aspirations crystallised in secondary school, with findings showing that students as young as Year 4 had targeted university aspirations. These early aspirations were distinct from fantasy and deemed to be relatively certain (Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al., 2015; Gottfredson, 1981). If, as Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al. (2015) and Gottfredson (1981) suggested, students were making relatively certain aspirations in the junior school, with no specific support structure within the case study school as teachers did not consider this part of their role, there was potential for change. There were differing views among participating teachers in the junior school, as later sections in this chapter will show, as

some considered working with student aspirations to be part of their role and wanted change in light their perception that valuable opportunities for working with student aspirations might potentially be missed.

In contrast to the primary school teacher comments provided above, another important aspect of the data, relevant to this section, were the changes that took place in the secondary school during the year of my data collection, which likely impacted the way some teachers perceived their roles. This demonstrated elements of what Bronfenbrenner (1979) termed a "setting transformation'' (p. 152) in the nature of the structural changes that took place at Sunnyside, and the resulting changes to teacher roles in the secondary school. In the beginning of 2017, which was the year of my data collection, all secondary school teachers were allocated a tutor group. There was no change for junior school teachers, who continued to be the pastoral carer for their main classroom. In mid- 2017, in between the administration of the survey and completion of the interviews for this project, this pastoral role for secondary teachers changed to specifically include career education. This was after the careers practitioner provided an optional in-house professional development session, with no formal policy change but new career documents created in support of these changes. Some of the documents created included the ``Student Career Investigation'' (School Document, 2017g), ``Year 7-11 Referral Form Career Counselling'' (School Document, 2017k), ``Career Counselling Pre-Referral Tutor Teacher Checklist'' (School Document, 2017b). This formal linkage of their teaching role to an aspect of student aspirations was evident in teacher interview comments, which took place after the professional development and discussed below, and in the next section on career education; the professional development was met with mixed reception from teachers. The murkiness of this role change, and professional development that occurred without required attendance, was reflective of Turner's (2001) comments about some roles in a state of tension, apparent in the comments of teachers in the data analysis. The role of the teacher was under sway with movement towards more career responsibilities in a dynamic school environment, as the emphasis on career education changed. According to participants, the role of the secondary teacher changed as they took on more career responsibility, as elaborated on further in the forthcoming analysis of formal roles.

Alongside the formal roles identified by Sunnyside P-12 teachers in this case study, a greater number of informal roles perceived by teachers were identified. This division corresponded to Turner's (2001) ideas that certain roles, such as policing or teaching, often "develop what might be called an informal or working role that differs significantly from the formal role'' (p. 243). The data indicated that teacher participants were negotiating their own methods of interacting with student aspirations situationally; this responsiveness was due to their perception that working with student

aspirations as part of their role, despite this not being formally represented in their role descriptions. As they worked with student aspirations, participating teacher described crafting appropriate responses without prior planning, and, in the absence of formally defined roles, they played a myriad of roles. These teachers appeared to rely on what they knew, in order to respond to a student's need.

An overview of the formal and informal roles is presented in Table 5.1. The role names are my conceptualisation, based on my analysis of the surveys, interviews, and document analysis. This table not only provides a summary but a visual representation of the data to highlight that the number of informal roles perceived by teachers outnumber the formal roles documented by the school. The discussion of formal and informal roles will explain each of these roles in detail, grouping some together, and using data to support the analysis.

Table 5.1

Formal and Informal Teacher Roles with Student Aspirations

Role Name	Formal/Informal	Description
Carer	Formal	Perform a pastoral care role for primary and/or secondary students.
Vocationalist	Formal	Administer some level of career education (if working in secondary school at Sunnyside).
Navigator	Informal	Take an active role to assist students to find potential pathways and ways to achieve the pathway.
Cheerleader	Informal	Cheer students to any goal, no matter what barriers or consequences.
Dissembler	Informal	Present one face to students, another to other teachers.
Dreamslayer	Informal	Judge and inform a student that a goal may not be possible based on scores or prior performance.
Guru	Informal	Provide advice to student based on personal experiences.
Teammate	Informal	Work closely with students, and sometimes parents, in more of an equal relationship, to develop a goal and meet it.
Networker	Informal	Negotiate with students, parents, careers teachers or others to help students reach a goal.
Interrogator	Informal	Question students, parents, teachers, or the system in relation to aspirations.

The analysis will show that the number of informal roles signals an important issue for schools, which is that when roles are not clearly defined, teachers must decide for themselves the

most appropriate responses and strategies for working with student aspirations. This work aims to contribute to an underrepresented area of the literature which is how teachers understand their perceived roles with student aspirations and how they perform them.

5.3   Formal Roles

As represented in Table 5.1, some Sunnyside teachers did perceive formal roles in relation to aspirations. The formal roles identified in the data analysis of the survey, interviews and document analysis centred on two responsibilities related to career education – pastoral carer and vocationalist – discussed next. In analysing the way that some teachers seemed to understand these roles, there was limited definition around them. The data analysis also indicated that some teachers thought that formal responsibilities with aspirations were needed in the junior school.

5.3.1   Carer

Many participating teachers perceived a formal role for working with student aspirations through pastoral care responsibilities. This is despite aspirations not being explicitly linked to the "Role of the Classroom Teacher" (School Document, 2017h) and the "Pastoral Care Policy" (School Document, 2016). Some participants explained this role of working with student aspirations as ongoing, whereas others experienced a change after the 2017 in-house professional development, discussed earlier.

In the review of role description and policy at Sunnyside, pastoral care did not specifically outline a teacher responsibility for student aspirations. Teachers' pastoral care role was defined in School Documents (School Document, 2016; 2017f, 2017h).The "Role of the Classroom Teacher" (School Document, 2017h) required that a teacher became an "advocate for the school's Pastoral Care Program'' (p. 1); further, in the secondary school, teachers had to liaise with a student's tutor group or year level coordinator in the event of a pastoral care related issue. The Teacher Planner Text" (School Document, 2017f) recorded pastoral care as a significant responsibility of tutor group teachers, and a link between the school and parents. The "Pastoral Care Policy" (School Document, 2016) sat in relation to other policies, such as the "Curriculum Documentation" (School Document, 2016), "Child Protection Program Handbook" (School Document, 2016) and the "Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy," "designed to promote the social and emotional wellbeing of our students'' (School Document, 2016, p. 2). Through the "Pastoral Care Policy" (School Document, 2016), teachers were required to deliver information to students about topics, such as "healthy and respectful relationships, "resilience and coping with adversity,'' "personal responsibility and self-discipline,'' and "social awareness and being an active member of the local and wider community'' (p. 2). This policy applied to all teachers in the school, both primary and secondary. Although none of

these documents specifically referenced student aspirations, analysis revealed some teachers made a link between their responsibilities in pastoral care and their responsibility for student aspirations, as evident in the following discussion.

Despite it not being formally defined in role statements or policies, survey results indicated that 58% of teachers perceived discussions of student aspirations as falling under their formal pastoral care role. In responding to the statement on the survey, available in Appendix C, "Discussing aspirations falls under a formal pastoral care role'' from Question one, 11 strongly agreed, 22 agreed, 12 were uncertain, nine disagreed and three strongly agreed.

The analysis suggested that some teachers have held discussions about aspirations with students in their tutor group on an ongoing basis, and was indicative of what Turner (2001) referred to as the creative enterprise of role behaviour. Turner (2001) held that in day-to-day interactions, people engaged in role-taking and role-making. T7 and T6 illustrated this creativity in the way they approached discussions of student aspirations. T7, suggested that she held discussions about aspirations with students in her tutor group time focused on small goals, and what they wanted to achieve each day:

> So, at the start of the year with my tutor group, what's a goal for yourself for this
> year? Just one goal. A lot of them said, we have two school badges that they can
> get at the end of every year they can get outstanding effort or academic
> excellence … I asked them what I could do to achieve that, and what are they
> going to do to help them achieve that, and that was the first couple of days at
> school, and I know that's small, and short-term, but it's something that I use then
> to remind them regularly, are you achieving that, are you working really hard
> towards your goal for the year, one of the girls, she was like, I want to read 20
> books this year, and I was like, okay, how many books have you read? That's
> something that I can use to regularly speak to them about, but small, very small.
> (T7)

T7 linked her pastoral care role with her tutor group role and perceived herself as having a responsibility to encourage student aspirations through an ongoing, incremental basis. She reported: "that's something that I can use to regularly speak to them about'' (T7) and this gave her a way to speak to the student about an aspiration. Similarly, T6 explained how aspirations and careers had been an ongoing topic with her tutor group during the past few years:

> So, in a pastoral care sense, because we are all tutor teachers, I guess you try to
> tease that out and make them think about it a little bit more, and question them

to really think about it, not just skim over it…we in terms of pastoral care, we did
do a bit of career-related activities in year 8, 9 and 10, and even now, you know,
we're just looking into it because my tutor group is in year 11 now, and you
know, we're getting into the nitty gritty of it and what do you want to do, what
are you sort of looking into…Aspirations…well, if the students are excelling in
something, we support them in that towards a certain career, if they want to go
towards a certain career, you know, we help them put something in place or if
they need a particular subject, I guess, and they aren't meeting the standards,
then we help them, from a pastoral care perspective, we'd be looking into what's
plan b, if you're not meeting these requirements to get into this course, is there
an alternative. (T6)

Here, T6 had specific career-related activities with students as well as more general
discussions about student aspirations, which might in turn have led to discussions of specific career-
related information, with students, as needed. Her perception was that as the students were getting
older – and in Year 11 – the discussions were into the "nitty gritty'' of it, meaning the conversations
were more formal and specifically related to careers. This perception of student aspirations taking
on a realistic form relates to the previous discussion about aspiration reaching a point of realism,
discussed in the last chapter.

The perception of this role as pastoral carer, or tutor group teacher, shifted in response to
the new demands as required by the school. As mentioned earlier, although this was not reflected in
policy documents at the time but new career documents were created in support of these changes,
such as the ``Student Career Investigation'' (School Document, 2017g), ``Year 7-11 Referral Form
Career Counselling'' (School Document, 2017k), and the ``Career Counselling Pre-Referral Tutor
Teacher Checklist'' (School Document, 2017b). Again, this data linked to Turner's (2001) conception
of how some role shifts occurred as needed. T5 agreed that after the 2017 in-house professional
development, they were expected to have discussions about careers with students in tutor group
sessions when instructed to do so:

It comes under the pastoral care, the year 8 pastoral care program. So, we have
an extra 20 minutes two mornings a week to do pastoral care stuff with year 8
and year 7s, right, so, sometimes we talk about drugs, bullying, sometimes we
talk about mental health … and now we are talking about careers stuff. (T5)

T5 explained that topics of conversation in tutor groups vary, depending on what was
directed. Where previously the emphasis might have been on a topic like "mental health,'' an

emerging focus became "careers stuff.'' This teacher described that there were instances where students had less academic interest, and she might "zone out'' a bit:

> … then there are subjects like, I want to be a fashion designer, or I might want to
> get into hospitality, so I kind of zone out a bit then because I don't know. (T5)

This teacher followed the direction of the careers information provided; however, she was aware that her knowledge was limited. This teacher's lack of knowledge connected with Alloway et al.'s (2004) contention that students had mixed feelings about the input on careers they received from teachers, where some students considered the advice "perfunctory'' (p. 153), when guidance was seen as an extra role. Conversely, those students that had received targeted information were extremely grateful (Alloway et al., 2004). The teacher was fulfilling the formal role but with an awareness of her limitations, a topic explored in greater detail in Chapter 6.

The analysis demonstrated that there was an opportunity for specific time allocation of moral or aspirational thinking at all year levels. T8 explained how the pastoral care program had changed as the school had grown, with less focus on ethics and moral thinking:

> Well, pastoral care over the years has been altered considerably, we did have a,
> what we had originally was like an RE and ethics program right through the junior
> school until year 9 but that's stopped about six or seven years ago … we basically
> have two pastoral care sessions, which are 20 minutes every Tuesday and
> Wednesday morning. And that's it. So, I feel like there's been limitations on our
> ability to even have a moral discussion with students because it's not a part of
> our curriculum time … (T8)

T8 expressed concern that with other responsibilities squeezed into the designated tutor group time, this left little space for discussions around aspirations and other moral issues. According to her, staff should have understood how to deliver these discussions:

> I think teachers need to know how to engage with students in those discussions
> and I don't necessarily think that it's natural for some staff ... If it's a priority of
> the school, then it needs to be appropriately delivered to staff. (T8)

Here, the designated pastoral care time was perceived as limited, and this hindered the teacher's ability to promote aspirational discussions. This teacher's frustration with the lack of emphasis on thinking resonated with Turner's (2001) suggestion that the role holder felt that "the effective performance of one function may undermine the performance of another function'' (p. 244). This teacher acknowledged how other pressures were collapsing the space or time for

moralistic, or aspirational discussions, and this undermined what she considered to be part of her formal role as a pastoral carer.

Further analysis of the interview data indicated that some teachers sought specific time for aspirational work, which would allow teachers to understand their student aspirations and target their learning towards those aspirations. Envisaging the teacher as both an observer and as a participant in students' development, as suggested in the theoretical framework, and borrowing from Bronfenbrenner (1979), recognises teachers in a unique position to assist students during the formation of aspiration. One junior school teacher, T10, explained that the pastoral care role could allow more time for the specific discussions of aspirations:

> I think in terms of pastoral care, I think it is something that we should really incorporate in order to understand out students, but also I think it will assist us to individualise the curriculum for each student and it comes back to that ability to know who your students are, strengths, weaknesses and work with them to enhance those (T10).

This teacher perceived the formal role in pastoral care could target discussions of student aspirations in the junior school, allowing teachers time to get to know more about their students' interests and goals and framing schoolwork to match those aspirations. This desire of the teacher to connect with student aspirations in order to facilitate the students' learning was present in the literature, with Howard et al.'s (2009) contention that students' connection to teachers could promote a sense of agency, support marks and career decidedness.

Ultimately, drawing on the evidence of this study, participant teachers appeared to make a link between their formal responsibilities in pastoral care and what they perceived as a responsibility for student aspirations. This is evident despite the fact that aspirations were not clearly defined in role documents and no shared definition existed at Sunnyside. This section also highlighted how teachers conceived of openings to formalise the link between pastoral care and aspirations, so this critical work did not get lost in the midst of other responsibilities. The next section discusses the career educator role that secondary teachers took on from mid-2017, which I term vocationalist.

5.3.2 Vocationalist

This section focuses on how participating secondary teachers described their changing role in the interviews after the in-house training described earlier. In naming the formal role that teachers describe with career education, I adopt the term `vocationalist,' which is also used by Johnson et al. (2009) in their UK study to describe a teacher attitude that values career education for student transitions. As Sunnyside teachers were directed to emphasize the importance of a career

pathway to students, it reflected Turner's (2001) concept of role diversification: the teaching role at Sunnyside diversified with secondary teachers holding increased responsibilities in career education from mid-2017, which took place after the survey but before the interviews for this project. New career documents created in support of these changes were the ``Student Career Investigation'' (School Document, 2017g), ``Year 7-11 Referral Form Career Counselling'' (School Document, 2017k), and the ``Career Counselling Pre-Referral Tutor Teacher Checklist'' (School Document, 2017b).

At the time of the survey, when asked if any had careers professional development, most participants stated that they did not. Out of 42 teachers that answered the question, five said yes, and another two said they had participated in informal professional development. One secondary teacher expressed a complete disinterest in helping students with careers education:

> No. It sits distinctly separate from teaching and pastoral functions in this school. And I would not really be interested. It's not my aspiration and it couldn't be forced on me! (Survey)

Despite this teacher's disinterest, all secondary teachers were required to take on a tutor group role at the school in 2017, and the teacher would have been "forced'' to take on an aspect of career education. This teacher might have been unprepared for the increased responsibility. As Kuijpers and Meijers (2017) contended, there has been a "trend towards making teachers – who often do not have specific training in the field – responsible for delivering career and employment information to students'' (p. 83). As reported by participants T12, T13, and T14, the careers practitioner was working on a more integrated career education approach in the secondary school, but at the time of data collection, the school did not have career education represented in the junior school, as evident from information presented by T10, T11, T12 and T14. This situation illustrated how the field of guidance is complex, as Patton and McMahon (2015) contended, with little agreement about the `place' for career education in schools and how it should have been provided in schools; they argued that it should become "integral part of the primary and secondary school curriculum'' (p. 340). This push for the teachers at Sunnyside to take on a role is complicated, and data analysis from the interviews highlighted how some teachers saw it as advantageous, while others perceived it as an unwelcome burden.

In relation to the informal professional development, T7 expressed how it helped her understand her role with career education in the tutor group and this boosted her confidence:

> I was feeling like I wasn't 100% sure about what I was going to talk to students about in relation to the aspirations, but now we've had the training and we've

had those resources given to us, I feel a lot more confident in helping those

students with those decisions, so that's definitely helped a lot. (T7)

A similar response was provided by T9, who stated that the informal professional development provided by the careers practitioner in mid-2017, as discussed in Chapter 3, would have helped her in previous roles too:

I think it's good for us to know because a long-time ago, or in my old school,

usually we just handballed them to the career counsellor or the teacher who

knows the careers advice, make appointment with them. But after the

explanation, now I know how to guide them and how to, so the kids, they don't

need to go to the career counsellor because if it's not … critical, I can help them.

And, the website, VTAC website, MyFuture, the websites, they are good. (T9)

The responsibilities were not too great for T6, who discussed how to incorporate this increased responsibility into her tutor group session:

So, in tutor group when I see my class … we talk about, do you need this for this

course, might there be a more suitable course to look into, also, we are getting

newsletters from the careers leader, and she provides those so we have a look

and we see if there is any information that might be relevant, especially open

days, if there is a guest speaker coming from a university. They had careers day in

May, so then we were having those conversations a lot more frequently, I would

say per student, weekly to monthly, depending on the student. (T6)

In this comment, T6 observed how the careers counsellor provided information that the teacher could share with students, and she used that as a stimulus to start conversations with students. This comment also connects to Chapter 6, where the frequency of discussions that teachers have around student aspirations is discussed – in this instance, the teacher was having weekly conversations with some students. Other teachers had reservations about the changing expectations on tutor group teachers. For instance, T5 was dissatisfied with the fact that the school only had one careers teacher and identified a changing burden on tutor group teachers to take on a career role:

I don't like that we have one careers teacher, that's only part-time really with a

1000 7-12 students, and they can't just email her and say I'd like to book an

appointment next week, when suits you, they can't do that, it goes back to them

… so when they get to her, it can be as efficient as possible, and I don't think

parents can just do that either … I think that is a problem. (T5)

This teacher's frustration with one person looking after so many students was echoed in the literature with Chen (2005) indicating that US counsellors may face a ratio of 1:300 or more. Alternatives to this overload were considered by Patton and McMahon (2015), putting forward a systems theory of career education, with shared responsibilities, and teachers playing a defined role. This is discussed further in the implications.

Despite participation in the professional development from the careers practitioner, T8 still described reservations about providing careers advice in tutor group sessions, while having not hesitated to discuss aspirations:

Well, as a tutor group teacher, yes, I wouldn't have that careers conversation

alone, I can have the aspirations conversation alone but I wouldn't have a careers

conversation without one of the specified team sort of guiding that. (T8)

This teacher recognised a difference between the formal role of discussing careers, and the informal role that she might have discussing aspirations with students, with the latter is discussed further in the next section on informal roles. T5 did not agree that the professional development was enough and there was none provided in her degree:

Yeah, I didn't learn a thing about that. I did my BEd. But we don't really get any

PD, maybe we all should. We should here. If tutor group teachers are the first

port of call … we all follow the kids through, we have them year 7, year 8 and

year 9…we get a kid in year 7 in our tutor group and we stay together, so every

teacher, and there's teachers who are primary-trained, for instance, and they

probably never teach VCE so they don't have much to do with the big kids, so

when they get to year 10, 11, and 12, how are they advising the kids?... (T5)

She suggested that it is a problem when the professional development was informal and not everyone was required to attend. From her perspective, she did not think that was fair to the students: "[The teachers] don't know what to say so they might not say anything and the kids are missing out.'' (T5) This teacher expressed concern that teachers were being asked to help students with aspects of career choices having had no formal professional development. She identified that teachers might stay with their students from year 7 until year 12, and if a teacher did not have the formal professional development to help a student with choices, then the student could be missing out. She described some teachers as "out of their league", with her concern illustrating Kuijpers and

Meijers (2017) argument that the trend was for teachers without specific professional development taking responsibility for career information dissemination.

In conjunction with this change in some Sunnyside teacher roles, in mid-2017 handouts were provided to teachers from the careers practitioner. Specifically, in the document titled "Careers Program Overview" (School Document, 2017e), tutor group teachers were informed of the changing role:

> The Careers Counselling Team will provide support to all Year Levels through the Pastoral Care Program and through Tutor Teachers and Year Level Coordinators. Career Counsellors will 'mentor' and 'professionally develop' Tutor Teachers to run relevant Career Development Activities with their respective Tutor Groups. Information about related career activities and opportunities presenting their groups will also be flagged at timely Tutor Teacher meetings and through appropriate communication channels. (p. 1)

The document provided an overview of the responsibilities for tutor group teachers at each year level. Another change to the teacher's role was that if a student wanted to make an appointment to see the careers counsellor, the tutor group teacher had to complete the "Career Counselling Tutor Group Teacher Pre-Referral Checklist" (School Document, 2017b), with the student as well as having to perform the following duties:

- Read through the relevant 'Sunnyside Careers Program Overview' document.

- Student and Tutor Teacher to Complete 'Student Career Investigation' referral sheet.

- Are parents aware of this referral? Record this referral in the Student's Pastoral Care Interview notes.

- Notify Year Level Coordinator (YLC) of this request.

- Provide all 'Required Documents' to Careers Practitioner.

- Communicate Careers Counselling Appointment time to Student. (p. 1)

All the language in the required action related to careers, as in the "Student Career Investigation" (School Document, 2017g) and "Year 7-11 Referral Form Career Counselling" (School Document, 2017k). This change represented the changeable nature of teacher roles despite this change not being reflected in teachers' role descriptions.

However, although these documents were created and distributed by the careers practitioner, the analysis of policy documents at the school, state, and national level did not contain formalised role descriptions for teachers in relation to careers or aspirations. Teacher responsibility

for student aspirations was not detailed as part of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers Graduate and Proficient Career Stages (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2017). The Victorian State Government Human Resources Department's document entitled "Roles and Responsibilities Teaching Service,'' fell short of recognising the work they did with student aspirations (Victorian Department of Education and Training, 2017). This document guided teachers in the public system and provided a general framework for other schools. Analysis of the document did not identify any set formal role for teachers in relation to aspirations. Similarly, there was no formal guideline in the "Role of the Classroom Teacher'' (School Document, 2017h) for the school nor was teacher work with student aspirations mentioned in junior or senior school materials, such as the "Year 7 and 8 Handbook" (School Document, 2017i) or "Year 9 and 10 Handbook" (School Document, 2017j). The documents did, however, emphasize vocational guidance beginning at year 7 and identified that senior school tutor group teachers had a small formal role that commenced in 2017. On the school web site, a statement was provided that the senior years program was for students to "develop a clear set of goals and ambitions'' through a "heavy emphasis on career development vocational guidance and student support'' (School Document, 2017a). Sunnyside did not offer any formal aspirational or vocational curriculum for junior school students, nor did they have formal description of roles that teachers played with student aspirations in the junior school.

Prior to this professional development in 2017, and the new teacher roles, all of the responsibility was on the careers practitioner, as reported in interviews. T12 explained how a new integrated approach was alleviating pressure on the careers practitioner:

> I think it's already happening, so the understanding of careers being something
> that should be owned by all is starting to happen and that will alleviate a lot of
> the pressure, so now that …year 8, 9 and 10s are running ahead with [the] career
> investigation sheet, um, that's taking away at least a 30 minute conversation with
> a child individually. (T12)

T12 also communicated that new documents, such as the "Student Career Investigation'' (School Document, 2017g) and "Year 7-11 Referral Form Career Counselling'' (School Document, 2017k), provided a focal point for the career practitioner's discussion with a child, so it did not have to be a "long-winded'' process. She said it also helped change perceptions that career education was just the careers practitioner's role. Patton and McMahon (2015) suggested career practitioners might be the only ones at a school focused on career information, placing them under pressure, but a system approach could curtail these issues, a point discussed in the implication in Chapter 8.

Criticisms of participating teachers in the interviews highlighted a perception of issues around careers education as it intersected with teacher roles. Another aspect of the careers program

that T5 described was that the work experience program, available at the time of data collection, was left to tutor group teachers to run, and not all students took it seriously. T5 leveled these criticisms at the work experience program:

> None in year 11, one week in year 10. And it's got nothing to do with the careers people. It's all about getting the form back and it's the year 10 coordinator, and the tutor group teachers have to mail out the forms, and a kid two weeks beforehand may say, I don't know what I'm going to do for work experience. It's a matter of ticking a box and doing it…One boy came here and worked in the IT department, he came here and worked with the staff. That's ridiculous. He's working with people that he sees, and anyway. Yeah, but it should be related to what they are thinking of at the time because yeah, there just doing, do you want to be a chemist? No, I want to be a hairdresser, but couldn't find…well…that's a shame. (T5)

T5 touched on her concern that if too many responsibilities within the careers program were handed over to tutor group teachers, then the students might not take the program as seriously, as she highlighted with a student who took a role in Sunnyside's IT department, instead of choosing to work externally.

Where there was a lack of definition, teachers might have conflated the concepts of aspirations with careers. In a question about aspirations on the survey, a teacher responded:

> As a teacher? Not sure what this question is looking for…are teachers really the right people to be influencing career choices? Many of us only know about teaching as a career! We often don't know nearly enough about students' support structures in terms of suggesting career paths that might mean a university degree/moving away from home/significant expense, etc. What are their barriers? (Survey)

In asking specifically about aspiration, this teacher questioned a teacher's role with career choices suggesting that teachers might not separate the notions of aspirations and careers; instead, the two might be conceptualised as one and the same, which was similar to how Trice et al. (1995) conceptualised aspirations and careers. Yet others, like Appadurai (2004) and Bok (2010), built their research around aspirations, with no focus on career research. In the comment above, the analysis found career education was outside the scope of a teacher's role as many did not have enough knowledge or experience. This respondent pointed out that there were too many unknown factors about a student that effectively prevented a teacher from giving advice, which aligned with what

Kuijpers and Meijers (2017) warned against teachers with little or no experience taking on career responsibilities. In the absence of formally defined roles, and considering that teachers played a role in student aspirations, as argued by Alloway et al. (2004), Helwig (2004, 2008), and Reid and McCallum (2014), this was an issue for Sunnyside policymakers to consider, as discussed further in the implications. In the next section, informal roles identified in the data analysis are presented.

5.4   Informal Roles

In this section, the informal roles represented in Table 5.1: Formal and Informal Teacher Roles with Student Aspirations are discussed. These roles are distinct from the formal roles documented by the school and identified in the previous section. The section indicates how teachers perform these informal roles, which are interpreted using Turner's (2001) role theory that defined how informal roles may develop alongside formal ones, and with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) positioning of teachers as part of the context of the student's microsystem, which was adopted in order to explain teacher positioning as both participants and observers to students' development of aspirations. In this section, it is argued that teachers use a situational judgement to work with student aspirations in ways that are not formally required of them. The diversity of their responses and encounters involving student aspirations in the data led to the realisation that teachers may perform roles that differed from their formal roles. It is my contention that Sunnyside teachers participating in this research played a range of informal roles in order to meet the demands required of them as situations unfolded; teachers performed one or more roles in any given situation. The roles were identified from the data and have been labelled as navigator, cheerleader, dissembler, dreamslayer, guru, teammate, networker and interrogator, and are each discussed in the following sub-sections. These categories were drawn from discussions with participants and in language used by them, with support from literature where possible.

5.4.1   Navigator

The data analysis indicated some participant teachers performed a role in relation to student aspirations that could be termed as navigational. Using this metaphor, the teacher as navigator steered the student on a pathway towards an intended aspiration. The use of the term navigator derived from teacher conceptions of themselves as guides on the survey, available in Appendix C, when teachers were prompted to provide a metaphor in question 10, and as 13 of the responding 47 teachers used the term guiding or a derivative. I found a connection between the data and the current literature that reported teachers to be mediators of aspirations as they helped students navigate the pathways ahead (Bok, 2010; Gale & Parker, 2015b) and teachers helped students make links to the future (Smith, 2011). This navigation work that some Sunnyside teachers did was

conducted in the midst of competing contextual pressures at work on the student, a point that was clear when conceptualising a student's development using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model. A teacher's placement as navigator allowed them to assist students to find a suitable pathway towards an intended aspiration.

Comments from interviews below also demonstrated how teachers performed a guiding role through conversations with students or in navigating them to the appropriate resources or people. In an interview, T10 perceived herself as presenting classroom opportunities for students so they took concrete steps towards understanding themselves and developing an aspiration suited to their strengths and weaknesses:

> I think the role for the teacher is to give the students opportunities to investigate
> various skills and opportunities to articulate their thoughts and processes in
> terms of those skills and opportunities, they need to, we need to give them
> opportunities to discover their strengths and weaknesses and enhance both the
> strengths and weaknesses. (T10)

In this conceptualisation, the teacher assisted students to navigate choices. Whether her students had a specifically defined aspiration or not, T10 perceived herself as navigating students to a space to explore possibilities, as well as providing "opportunities to discover their strengths and weaknesses.'' Through this process, the students had the chance to connect with possible aspirations.

Providing a specific instance of navigating a student's pathway was T8. The teacher was not trying to fulfil the student's first aspiration at all costs; instead, the teacher worked with others to open up the student's mind to a range of possible pathways in his area of interest promoting his success in that field but also catering to his wellbeing:

> I had one particular child, um, in my tutor group about eight years ago now, and
> he was not academically strong, but really wanted to do subjects moving forward
> into VCE that were academically challenging, and we sat down with the careers
> advisor and also his parent, and spoke to him about, you know what the options
> might be moving forward, trying to narrow his thinking down … the careers
> advisor said these are the sort of subject areas that would be best suited to you,
> he was in year 8, so as a year 9 student, so definitely narrowed his perception
> about where he was headed, but he needed that, because he was not going to
> achieve what he thought he would, and I don't think that's healthy for his

wellbeing for him to have this unrealistic perception about where you are

headed. (T8)

This teacher's concern and awareness enabled her to guide a student, with assistance, to a suitable pathway that was within his reach, providing him a pathway through VCE in relationship to his ability and aspiration. She helped him avoid disappointment by preparing him early for a pathway and enacted this as a way to protect the student's well-being, balancing roles as navigator and pastoral carer. The teacher promoted this sense of well-being through what Marjoribanks (1998) described as a harmony. He contended that "adolescents' aspirations enhance when positive perceptions of their academic interactions with parents and teachers were in harmony'' (p. 193). The teacher effectively became a networker, connecting with Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1994) suggestion that some coordination might take place by those in student's microsystem, working in the negotiation level of the mesosystem, with the outer community.

A teacher as navigator was also present in the way that teachers drew out the intricacies of career paths, sometimes on a daily basis. T4 explained how it was often a daily occurrence that she might help students navigate the details of a general career path to see possible pathways that might not have envisaged for themselves:

So, daily, it would probably be more, there's two ways, in my classroom, as my

classroom teaching, when we are doing something, I'll often identify the job of

the person, so if we're looking at how a law is made, we'll look at the

parliamentary drafts person and what their role is, and I try to expose them to, as

I said, not just being a lawyer, what other jobs could you actually do within the

legal system, we go on excursions to prisons, so prison guards to talk to them

about careers in corrections, we went to court … and stopped and had a look at

the clerk of courts, because that's actually something you don't need to go to

university for, which could be really obtainable for those students that don't

want tertiary education, so trying to even expose them to some of those great

jobs that are out there. (T4)

T4 challenged students to think about options as she broke down career fields for students into a range of job possibilities. For example, she pointed out to students that may have an interest in law that field was not limited to the job choice of lawyer. This particular teacher demonstrated a strong knowledge of connecting aspects of her subject to careers and she indicated that there are "great jobs'' at different levels in a field. This was an exception to what Hooley et al. (2015) described when some teachers lacked experience with the labour market in relation to some

careers, so they did not speak to the student about it, and by foregoing this conversation, they risked "demotivating for a student whose love of subject is bound up with enthusiasm for a potential career path'' (14). Instead, this teacher used a situational judgement based on her experiences and also networked with others – like the prison guards or court clerk that she mentions – to help students conceptualise the range of jobs on offer. In the next section, the discussion relates to how a teacher may become a cheerleader for a student's aspiration.

5.4.2 Cheerleader

The analysis illustrated that teachers perceived their role as a cheerleader for students who disclosed an aspiration. Sometimes the student disclosure required the teacher to become an unbiased supporter of a student's aspiration even though the teacher did not necessarily find the aspiration to be the most desirable option for the student – a role discussed in the next section, dissembler. Again, the analysis highlighted that some teachers perceived that they must respond in the moment, to assist the student in whatever way possible as a cheerleader for whatever aspiration the student desires.

T10 became cheerleader for the student's aspiration but also an opportunist as she used her knowledge of the student's aspiration to help him access the curriculum:

> So, for example, a boy I taught last year, he struggled a lot with academics. It just wasn't an interest for him because he did struggle. He was very good at tae kwon do, and throughout last year, I think last year he went through two or three belts, and he did exceptionally well, so I spent a lot of time talking to him about where that could lead him, talking to him about his likes and dislikes in that sense, the discipline of it, and then when he did come across a task that he did struggle with, I was able then to relate that task to the amount of time and effort that he needed to train. Well, you will need to actually train your mind in terms of training your mind in terms of learning this skill or concept. So, I was able to transfer those (T10).

T10 used tacit knowledge from previous conversations with the student about his aspiration to compete in tae kwon do, so she connected the skills and discipline of the sport to his schoolwork. She made specific links with the curriculum for the student, and this was an example of teachers in a prime position to link aspirations to curriculum, pedagogy, and aspirations (Wrench et al., 2013). This positioning of the teacher as both participant and observer in a students' microsystems, borrowing Bronfenbrenner's (1979) term, allowed them a closeness to build a tacit knowledge

around the student aspirations. This, in turn, meant the teacher could link the aspirations to the curriculum.

Other teachers described the need, in the moment, to be an unbiased supporter of student aspirations. This was the case with T1's example of a student sharing a non-academic aspiration. The role she played was remaining optimistic and non-judgmental:

> I've got another boy in our tutor group, he just wants to get through year 12, he is not concerned about his results, he wants to have a year off and have a coffee van. So, that's his aspiration … So, I think, even if the aspiration is not academic, which is generally-speaking what most of the kids focus on, I think it's our role to present a positive reflection of that and be hopeful and not pessimistic in any way about that student's aspirations. (T1)

T1 suggested just being positive with students could help them along. In this scenario, the teacher used tacit knowledge to support a student's aspiration. This unbridled optimism for students fits with Bowden and Doughney's (2012) claim that student aspirations increased with teacher encouragement. Allen et al. (2018) argued that teachers' beliefs about students were pivotal in influencing students' aspiration. Here, the teacher, in responding positively in the moment, aimed to provide positive momentum for a student's aspiration. The next section covers how teachers may have to reserve their own personal judgements about a student's ability to successfully attain an aspiration, while still assisting the student with it.

5.4.3   Dissembler

Teacher participants explained that they sometimes presented a cheerleader perspective to the student about student aspirations while reserving judgement. In these instances, the teacher played a role of dissembler, where he or she disguised or concealed true feelings from a student. As highlighted during interviews, teachers had different motivations for keeping an opinion on a student's likelihood to reach a desired aspiration. Teachers also sometimes wanted or needed to share this information with others, such as other teachers.

Analysis demonstrated that the informal role of dissembler was expected by T14, who had some administrative responsibility. T14 acknowledged some teachers were dissatisfied with aspects of the school, but, at the same time, he anticipated this to remain private amongst teachers:

> … within 200 academic staff in any school there will be a degree of people who are here because it's the, because of the nearest, closest best job that they can have, it's not because they share the vision of the school, and in fact, in private,

they are probably quite damning of the vision of the school, and that's fine, they

can have, they can say and think whatever they want … The only expectation the

school has of them is that they publicly support, um, aspirations. Now, teachers

will also flip in and out of buying into aspirations, you know, I've been guilty in

staff rooms of both, um, taking the mickey out of aspirations, and at the same

time, being responsible for implementing those aspirations … But that happens

all the time. Look, it's great that you want to be an astronaut, we fully support

that and will do everything we can to assist you in that process, God knows how

he is going to get into the spaceship … (T14)

T14 had played this dissembler role himself and understood that teachers sometimes held conflicting views about thoughts versus actions. The expectation on teachers appeared to be ensuring that they publicly supported both student aspirations and school values. This duality was apparent when he described how "teaching probably has the public face and the private face'' (T14). Again, the document analysis demonstrated this was not a formal role for teachers; instead, my interpretation of this phenomenon is that it was an understood informal role. This set teachers up for the possibility of interrole conflict (Turner, 2001) when they had to allow the public face to triumph over the private face, in order to fulfil what was expected of them by Sunnyside School administration.

The data highlighted that the role of dissembler was being played by teachers with various responsibilities, and T5 described how she thought a student did not understand the academic rigour required to become a vet:

Another girl in my tutor group last week, she was like, ''I don't have to answer

these questions, because I already know what I want to be,'' I said, ''oh, what do

you want to be,'' she said, ''I want to be a vet.'' Now, if she wants to be a vet,

she's in year 8, she should be acing everything now because it's only going to go

down, if she chooses the hard maths and science, etc., now, her mom wasn't

happy because her drama report wasn't good, because she got Cs and Ds

because she left it to the last minute and she stuffed around … but you gotta

work your backside off … (T5)

This was an example of this dissembler role in action. The teacher held that the girl needed to be taking subjects to prepare her for the rigour of VCE; however, the student's scores in other subjects were not good. This teacher showed a supportive face to the student but confided her views to me, the researcher.

Sharing an example about keeping silent was T1. She did not say what she really thought because the peer group in her class did it in what she considered to be a positive way:

> I had a student earlier this year who's since left the school. She was in year 10 and very disinterested in school generally and very underperforming student. And, much more interested in sort of the social aspects of school. And, there was a discussion pretty much in the room when she was wasting time in class. A few of her friends said to her why are you here, what are you doing? And, yeah, so I didn't have to say that, because they said that to her directly and that was her peer group. She has since gone to a TAFE college. So, she's changed her course and she left school and she's doing some vocational course. (T1)

Here the teacher took on a role of silent dissembler. She had an opinion about the student's progress but did not share this with the student. Instead, she let this unfold in her classroom:

> … there's a more dominant feeling within the peer group that they should aspire to something and so sometimes you don't need to say anything as a teacher because the peer group will interject and express that kind of feeling they should have some aspirations … So, they weren't saying it in a nasty way, they were just sort of, why are you here, what are you hoping to get out of school when you don't do any homework, there was that sort of attitude … (T1)

The teacher observed while an interaction with the peer group intervened with a student's aspiration. This illustrated what Gale and Parker (2015b) suggested when they write that peer pressure could work as a source of encouragement or discouragement, depending on the social norms. The teacher allowed the discussion to occur as "they weren't saying it in a nasty way'' (T1) and she described the peer group as "close''; the students became the voices of realism as they asked her, "why are you here, what are you hoping to get out of school'' (T1) and the teacher kept her opinions private.

The role of the dissembler was evident in T7's comment where she shared the need to be careful when suggesting to students what they might achieve. This teacher said they must not make promises about a students' ability as it could have repercussions later:

> We've had discussions previously in meetings and stuff like that, I'm not a VCE teacher, so it wasn't directed directly at me at the time, so, I remember them being like, don't say a kid's going to achieve 80s and 90s because they may not. We don't know what's going to happen in the exams, we don't know how that's

going to play out, so be very careful in the way you speak about results because

you don't want to go, yeah, you're going to get 80s, and the kids goes yeah, I'm

going to get 80s and they get 60 … Exactly, don't promise them the world and

then they don't achieve it. You've got to be careful, yeah … (T7)

The data highlighted that a teacher's role was to stay silent about potential end results. If a teacher allowed a student's expectation of results to become too far out of reach, it could have negative consequences as the teacher could be held responsible for a promise. This connects to the discussion in the next chapter on processes that teachers adopt in the absence of formal guidelines.

In a reverse of the dissembler role, another participant, T3, tried full disclosure and shared how he tried to intervene with concerns for a student's safety, but the student did not listen to the advice. T3 recounted an incident where he attempted to explain his hesitations to a student about entering a particular trade:

… a student from a few years ago wanted to go into a trade. I was concerned with

that. My concern was, you really need to focus on your OH&S understanding,

your awareness around you, and your interaction with others. He lost seven

apprenticeships, didn't understand it. I say it came back to him not

understanding his interpersonal aspects. He would make short-cuts regularly,

which goes back to how he was in year 9 and 10; again, I would advise the best I

can. And, unfortunately, he did suffer an injury on the workplace, he lost half a

thumb … (T3)

In this instance, the teacher did try to counsel and advise the student directly with his concerns, but they were ignored. The teacher reversed the dissembler role in an effort to intervene in a situation that he thought might be dangerous but, unfortunately, the student lost jobs and a thumb.

This role of dissembler could be seen as one that teachers were aware of and performed without it being specifically named. In order to promote student aspirations, the teachers hid their thoughts about student progress from the students, which promoted a positive outlook. This potentially served students well, as St. Clair et al. (2013) suggested that "it seems that a substantially positive attitude from teachers and other school staff makes an enormous difference to the lives of the students'' (p. 735). Teachers might have shared opinions about student aspirations with other teachers, as T14 acknowledged, but needed to be careful of fixing "reductive identifies'' behind closed doors, as Stahl (2015) observed, when labels were tossed around by teachers in the staff room (p. 134). Teachers must be agile in the role of the dissembler, ensuring that they present the

suitable sentiments to the appropriate audience. The next section covers how teachers may perceive their roles as dreamslayers as they may have to end a student's aspiration for a particular job.

5.4.4   Dreamslayer

The data set provided a counterpoint to the concept of teachers who perceived their main role as cheerleaders; others appeared to see a role as realists or dreamslayers. Sunnyside teachers' perception of a point of realism, as discussed in Chapter 4, meant the perception of their roles morphed to assist some students whose aspirations began to narrow to specific pathways after junior and middle school. The role of realist or dreamslayer emerged for some teachers that needed to have serious discussions with students about pathways that could be difficult to reach based on test scores or other factors.

Analysis determined an implicit school expectation on some teachers and staff to promote a sense of realism about aspirations with the students. T14 described a "smooth dropping off'' of unrealistic aspirations in middle secondary, and it was "unfair'' to let students continue with expectations without giving them a "sense of realism":

> Look, I would say that for a lot of kids and parents will realise, and it will be a
> smooth dropping away, the point of realism for most kids, if it is not going to be
> that, then it will, it's unfair to send a kid into the VCE or the high stakes
> examinations wherever, if you haven't given them some sense of realism. (T14)

This teacher provided a sense of the value judgements that teachers are accused of making about student aspirations (Stahl, 2015). In this example, he anticipated that students would not pursue an unrealistic aspiration because they reached a point of understanding about their own ability and chose something more suitable. This is similar to Gottfredson's (1981; 1996) contention about students narrowing their choices to specific alternatives after eliminating potential career choices they deem unsuitable for themselves. Walker (2006) described how some students "may not view their career as a primary source of fulfilment" and this "conflict[ed] with the dominant discourses present in much career advising" (p. 54). In T14's view, the responsibility fell on some teachers or the careers practitioner to make a value judgement and present this view of "realism" if a student happened to miss the "smooth dropping off'' (T14). It was not clear exactly who was responsible for this role at Sunnyside School, but what the data showed was that some teachers were willing to perform this role and others were not.

Holding a similar opinion to T14 is T13, who recounted that a drop-off of some aspirations did occur naturally with students. He wanted to maintain the optimist role with students, despite

the fact that he also played the role of dissembler, and hoped other adults remained positive with students:

> In terms of, it's rare to have students with very unrealistic expectations. And certainly, the careers counselling and guidance they get here makes abundantly clear that the scored requirements, if it's the very selective courses, like dentistry, veterinary science, medicine and so forth, but certainly I think that if a student then decides to go for it, I don't think anyone says you can't, I would hope no one does, we may with each other, think, really, and then in discussing with staff, this person wants to do medicine and they are more of a C average, can they do it, but ultimately, face-to-face with the students, I'll still say go for it. (T13)

Here, the teacher remained a cheerleader for a student, even though the student's marks suggested that a selective course at university might be out of reach. Again, this teacher played the dissembler and had two different conversations - one with staff about a student's likelihood of reaching the course and one with a student where he would remain positive and optimistic. This teacher avoided discouraging a student's aspiration. By avoiding this discussion or 'levelling' with a student, the teacher created a role for other teachers who were willing to make a value judgement and take on the voice of 'realism.' In this sense, the teacher avoided the feeling that Bok (2010) observed in her research, where teachers felt judgmental when they assessed student work and encouraged students to think about realistic pathways based on prior achievement. Despite not all teachers wanting to play the role, there were some that felt the need to become a pessimistic dreamslayer to students.

For students who carried on with `unrealistic' ideas, one teacher was on hand to help. T4 referred to herself as "the dreamslayer,'' a role that involved ending or redirecting student aspirations. This teacher was in a unique position as her role ventured into territory where she had difficult discussions with students about their futures. Her perception of this responsibility highlighted the tension that some teachers faced between the role of raising aspirations and levelling aspirations; this became a dual role that teachers navigated in each corresponding situation with students:

> I used to nickname myself the dreamslayer, because I'd have to be the person who would sit there with a student, you know, and halfway through year 11 and they've barely passing Chemistry, Physics, Specialist, and you actually have to say to them, "You're probably not going to get into Medicine," … you try a lot of ways

to be euphemistic, "Have you gone to a tutor?" "Have you thought about other options?" "Have you done that? but you're essentially the person who has to say, "You know, we need to think about some other options." (T4)

Just as those teachers playing a dissembler role thought one thing and said another to a student, so would T4 not call herself a dreamslayer to any students. She was not alone, as other teachers, such as T14 and T5, also found the need to be "euphemistic'' in letting a child or family make their own decision about an aspiration in light of school data or reports. Even though she sometimes considered herself the dreamslayer, T4 tried different avenues to help that child find a suitable path and gave several examples of how she tried to link students with appropriate pathways for their aspirations. These examples showed how teacher roles vary based on their ability to draw from a range of understandings, to help students, and it could be linked to their perceptions around students making their way from the open-endedness of some aspirations to a more narrowed conception of a specific future, referred to earlier as the point of realism permeating Sunnyside. The judging role that teachers took on as they gave marks became critical in guiding students to make choices, as suggested by T4. Other teachers observed or facilitated aspirations, and some just wanted to encourage, like T13.

Some teachers were troubled with the changes this point of realism meant for their role. T8 expressed that student aspirations were sometimes limited quite abruptly, and what responsibility this placed on her:

> It's probably something that doesn't necessarily sit well with me, but I think it is part and parcel of education and that is that we as teachers, we start to see an endgame for a child in terms of what they will eventually leave us, eventually they get to an end point and we can no longer influence their future options, and I think we see that end point and so we start to put in these limitations perhaps where they, where previously we would have taken their aspirations and said, you know, reach for the stars, I think we start to go no, this is the end point and this is as far as we can take you, this is as far as we can influence you, so we need, so we have some moral responsibility I suppose to direct you, we have to give you, give you this, the boundaries that are going to exist in an adult world. (T8)

This teacher described an issue with the idea of cheerleading students to "reach for the stars'' (T8) up until a certain point and then transitioning to a gatekeeper of aspirations. She regarded this as a troubling shift in her role, but she deemed it a moral responsibility to help

students prepare for a future beyond the school. Again, this dilemma illustrated how teachers felt troubled when judging student work and encouraging 'realistic' pathways based on prior achievement (Bok, 2010). Teachers faced the murky area of having ill-defined responsibilities around student aspirations. Despite this uncertainty, Walker (2006) argued that "The realities of the workforce often force young people to redefine themselves and their aspirations" (p.59) and it was important students were equipped with the resilience to cope. A shared language around aspirations at the school as well as better teacher understanding of pathways, as I will discuss in my implications, is a possible opportunity for future development, and to prevent uncomfortable positioning of teachers, aiming to prevent student misalignment with aspirational pathways and supporting the resilience of students for the realities of work.

5.4.5   Guru

Sunnyside teachers mentored students in different ways, based on their own experiences. Several teachers explained how they related personal experiences to student situations, and the teachers referred to what they learned in life to help students envisage pathways for particular aspirations. In the interactions in this section, teachers played an expert, or guru, role as they provided insights based on their own backgrounds or understandings. In this way, teachers gave students the "certainty and confidence'' (Alloway et al., 2004, p. 153) to pursue aspirations. Teachers also became part of "critical events and disruptions,'' (p. 17), as advocated by Webb et al. (2015), which they linked to Granovetter's (1973) notion of "weak ties'' (p. 1363), where teachers disrupted students' expectations by presenting opportunities for aspiration otherwise considered unfathomable.

T1 had taught at a university, so she shared that she had no misgivings about advising students on applications:

> So, because I used to work at [a university], I've got a bit of an insight into that,
> so sometimes they will aspire to get into particular course, and they want some
> guidance about that. I haven't had any misgivings about doing that sort of thing
> because it's an area that I've got some knowledge of, I don't feel that there is any
> conflict with me. (T1)

T1 mentored students with the application process to university. Normally, this was beyond the scope of her role as a teacher; however, she explained that she held no misgivings or internal conflict about helping students with this task – and was sometimes asked by the careers practitioner to do so – because her prior knowledge was valuable. This teacher provided students with the

conviction that Alloway et al. (2004) described as she was able to share personal knowledge directly related to an aspiration.

Another participant, T6, balanced a guru role with a voice of realism as she shared a story of her brother's alternative pathway into engineering with students, so they remained positive in the instance of low test scores:

> I just look at it in a positive way. I always say to my kids there's always many ways
> to get to somewhere, you know, if you don't get the score you want, it's not the
> be all and end all, there are a lot of ways to get to it. I use personal examples as
> well, so my brother he finished year 12 … didn't get the ATAR he wanted, but he's
> still doing engineering, and he's doing it through an associate degree … and he
> will finish with a Bachelor, we look at things like that, what happens if you don't
> get the score you really want, is there another way to get there, there is a plan b
> and plan c, definitely. (T6)

T6 provided lessons of experience for students to understand that they might have not received the test scores needed to pursue their aspiration in a traditional way. Just as her brother pursued an alternative pathway to his aspiration, she informed students that there were other ways to fulfil their goals. Here, T6 became a "disruption'' (Webb et al., 2015, p.17), as she dislodged the traditional way into university as the only pathway conceivable and helped students formulate an idea that they previously rendered unfathomable.

T2 became a voice of inspiration when calling upon a range of experiences to advise students on potential pathways:

> I've done a fair number of different jobs, teaching and non-teaching, and
> boundary-wise, I think there shouldn't be any boundaries in terms of the teacher
> advising the students that you know, because I've done so many different jobs, I
> can talk about them, because I've travelled, I can talk about what they can do. If
> they want to teach, get yourself an English qual[ification] and teach in Cambodia
> for a year, if you like it, come back and get your course. If you want to be an
> electrician, go out and get a part-time job. So, in terms of being a teacher, it's
> being approachable and being open in order to let the students know you
> supporting them because if you start limit their choices and their own thoughts,
> and they will start doing it to themselves, and you know, we don't really have the
> right to do that, and they shouldn't really have that imposed upon them. (T2)

Similar to others mentioned above, T2 responded situationally, used his knowledge and experiences in a way to inspire students, and helped students to formulate ideas they may not have considered. T2 shared information about his own experiences in other parts of the world to help the students think more broadly about their future aspirations. T2's insistence at the end of this quote that teachers needed to be "open" and support students was at the centre of what Gottfredson (1996) argued about interventions possibly preventing students from circumscribing in their career choices too early. T2 was encouraging students to think broadly about aspirations.

Sometimes a teacher became a voice of inspiration to a student but did not realise it, where a student looked up to a teacher's experience. T9 shared a story of unknowingly becoming a catalyst for a student's aspiration and ultimate career choice:

> I thought I was just sharing. But at the end, when I met them later, ah, they are still doing [a language], and even one student was accepted in nutrition in Deakin, that's her dream since year 10 to be a nutritionist, but after I shared that story that [description of where T9 worked] she changed, she took, what you call it, a gap year, and she went to [place] … suddenly in the middle of the year, she sent me an email, and said good news good news … she changed the subject to International Studies and Teaching, so she did the international studies, and she's been to [overseas place] three or four times, and she got a scholarship and everything, and she was doing a Master's degree in teaching. (T9)

The teacher inspired the student through her own personal experience, without any specific intention of doing so. Teachers might be seen as sources of inspiration to students and in this instance the student was inspired by the career of the teacher and this connected with Schultheiss et al.'s (2005) suggestion that "teachers can provide learning experiences that provide opportunities for children to acquire new skills and tap unique talents that have otherwise been overlooked" (p. 259) and they created links between academic subjects and occupations. It is important for all teachers to recognise the impact they play on student aspirations, even without having a specific intention to do so. This is a critical point for the future of student aspirations and an issue that will be returned to in the implications.

5.4.6   Teammate

When working with students on their aspirations, some teachers described situational encounters where they did not consider themselves an expert, but more as a teammate. Teachers collaborated with students on situations or tasks that emerged through encounters around student aspirations. The role occurred when a teacher is willing to work with a student directly on an

aspiration and provided concrete or emotional help, which connected to what Gore, Holmes, Smith et al. (2015) suggested about the importance of teachers' informal advice to students, and Kuijpers and Meijers' (2017) argument that students regularly sought out teachers for advice. Comments by teachers below showed their interest in collaborating with students, informally using a situational awareness to assist students.

Teacher and student as teammates came in working together on small goals; T7 viewed her role with aspirations as first helping students through incremental learning, which was linked to confidence:

> I definitely think about my tutor group, the small aspirations, building confidence with them is probably a weekly for more of my classes, it's more the confidence, guys, we don't get it now, we're going to understand this by the end of the topic, let's work on this little bit today, you build that with them… (T7)

This teacher became a teammate by helping the student make tangible moves forward to smaller aspirational goals – such as understanding a concept. T7 also had a personal philosophy that students must experience enjoyment to succeed, and by helping them stay focused on what they enjoy means they would choose the right subjects. Just as a teammate might, T7 was using her knowledge in the situation to help the student make the next move. This was not necessarily something T7 had learned from anyone else, or even been told to do from the school, it was her reasoning, and the way she viewed her role as helping students with aspirations. The notion of this teacher having knowledge or accessing knowledge that she was not necessarily aware she had, resonated with Berry, Loughran, and Van Driel (2008), who endeavoured to explain that teachers often have resources of information they accessed when needed, and was something shared by expert teachers. Further, the informal roles that teachers assumed in certain contexts demonstrated what Loughran, Keast, and Cooper (2016) argued when they wrote that professional knowledge developed in response to need and the complexity of what teachers did was not be easy to articulate. T7 accessed a personal reservoir of knowledge, she may have been unaware she had, to engage student aspirations incrementally.

T10 took on a teammate role by offering concrete help in such a way to engage a student's aspiration with the curriculum and was also able to bring the student's mother in on the team:

> So, she really struggled with noise and she struggled with completing set tasks in certain time frames and I had to really differentiate a lot of the curriculum for her, so what I ended up doing was developing an individualised plan for her, where as much of the curriculum as I could, I centred more towards a creative

arts focus, so, for example in maths, with measurement, I would ask her to create

a dress design, and within that dress design, she had to measure whatever the

focus was, or calculate the cost of material and I would really direct the

curriculum and her learning to that aspiration. She, with her reading, she really

was a reluctant reader, so I talked to her mum about bringing in a lot of

magazines relating to fashion or relating to you know what was dress designs …

(T10)

As a teammate, the teacher worked side-by-side with the student to develop a strategy for learning and engaging with the curriculum, which linked in with an aspiration. She was also fortunate to have the support of the student's parent, and this meant the three worked together as teammates, using the aspiration as a catalyst for learning. Although not required of T10, she took time to "differentiate a lot of the curriculum'' (T10) to make an individualised plan for the student that took in her interest. Supporting teachers with the required time and resources to differentiate the curriculum to engage student's interests is a point I will return to in my implications.

Another way the teammate role might be envisaged is through encouraging a student to get in the game of aspirations. This is different than the navigating or the guru roles, as the teacher did not profess to have a specific level of expertise – she was developing a strategy with the student as partner. In this instance, T6 explained it was "troubling'' to her that a student seemed to lack aspiration, and she tried to encourage him in his interest in computers and video games.

... he presented his portfolio and he had an interview at the end of year 10, and

he was very, it was very short, there wasn't anything in it, because he needed to

talk about himself, but he has no hobbies, no prior experience, things like that,

afterwards, it was troubling me, because in our days, the world is very

competitive, and we would like them to have an edge, …. and I said, maybe you

can ask if they will let you do some work experience, or some part-time work, so

you can get some experience in their field where you have an interest… (T6)

Here the teacher took on a teammate role by thinking alongside the student about how his interest could become part of an aspiration; she attempted to get him to pursue a practical engagement with this possible aspiration by taking on work experience or a part-time job. This, in turn, she hoped would provide him with an "edge'' in a "competitive world'' (T6). This teacher was attempting to assist him by intervening with options, to help him become aware of the complicated social contexts where he was selecting a pathway, as identified by Stahl (2015), who argued that "youth construct aspirations within fragmented rites of passage and contradictory social contexts,

which results in complex identity work in order to constitute themselves as subjects of value'' (p. 133). The student might not have recognised how hobbies and work experience could help him later on, and the teacher tried to provide the student with potential avenues for aspiration.

Sometimes the help a teacher gave was more emotional, and this might have sometimes involved becoming a confidant as a teammate might do. This role was distinct from mere listening, discussed later in this chapter, as some teachers not only became secret keepers but played an emotionally supportive role, as T1 shared: "I think that's what I want to see, my role as being more of support or counselling role because there is anxiety from some of the students about that process'' (T1). This was in keeping with Brown (2011) who argued that teachers needed to provide emotional support when working with student aspirations. T1 gave a specific example of supporting a boy that was struggling cope as his parents pushed him into his academic subjects:

> I have an example of a boy in our tutor group class at the moment whose parents
> want him to be an orthodontist and he is struggling quite a bit with year 12 with
> results, and feeling that he probably won't achieve what they want him to
> achieve and he said to me a number of times, I wish I've done studio art, which is
> an art subject in year 12 because he maintained it would have given him better
> balance between the science and maths subjects, he maintained that might have
> given him more diversity and a creative outlet, but that wasn't something his
> parents were willing to support. He's got all maths/science subjects and he's
> feeling quite pressured this year … (T1)

T1 became like a teammate for the student, as she supported him emotionally but also acted as a secret keeper. T1 did not want to cross the advice of the parents, and this was in keeping with the findings of James (2002), who contended that parent advice was considered the most significant to students. In this instance, T1 did not speak to the parents on the student's behalf but found a way to help – as a teammate – and ultimately, the outcome would be up to him, whether he spoke to his parents, changed his subjects, or stayed silent. T1 recognised that dealing with the emotions of the students about their aspirations was part of her job, but sometimes it required a professional counsellor.

The data suggested that at times, Sunnyside teachers were able to enlist the parents as part of the team they formed with students, but this was a process that developed It was explained by participants that parents sometimes came to the school with rigid expectations, which posed a challenge for teachers, but this could change as some parents became more flexible over time. Thus, the parents who once posed a barrier – a point returned to in Chapter 7 – could be viewed as facilitating students' successes in cooperation with teachers and the school. As her role put her into

contact with parents as students enter the school, T12 noticed that some parental expectation became less rigid, as they became more aware of their child's strengths and weaknesses, then they could eventually work together as a team:

> Well, it's funny because I actually see the parental expectations change over the years…So, it may be at a particular level when they first enter the school…But, as they get to know their child and what their strengths are and how they are faring, it does become quite flexible. (T12)

She gave an example to illustrate how a new student entering the school had a particular aspiration, which needed direction to suit the child's capability. There was also a suggestion that a previous school had misjudged the child's potential:

> An example, a family came in at, or a student came in at year 10 from another school, the child was academically strong, supposedly, wanted to go into dentistry, and you know, we had a nice discussion about the pathways into dentistry… by the time they sat through a year of studies with us, we realised that that child wasn't as academic as the other school had described, and certainly the parents noticed that change, so another conversation was brought about, then we looked at ways we could improve and extend that child so we could get that child to that level required ad we also looked at another alternative. (T12)

In this situation, it was apparent how the individuals – Sunnyside teachers, parents and the student – worked together as teammates to accommodate the student's aspiration, as it was not his first choice. Through a process of working together, he was able to find a pathway close to his initial aspiration. Over time, the family became more flexible with their expectations of their son, helping to facilitate the work of the teacher. Research indicated that aspirations could change with attention to student well-being by a teacher's pedagogical interventions; teachers could make explicit links between curriculum, pedagogy, and aspirations (Wrench et al., 2013). Further, this interaction among the teachers and parents demonstrated a theoretical connection to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) thinking about the interconnectedness of the students' environment and the networks forming around the student. As Kewalramani et al. (2018) pointed out in their study of student experiences of career counselling processes in secondary subject choice, borrowing from Vygotsky (1978) and Bronfenbrenner (1979), students often looked to a teacher as a "significant other'' (p. 83), similar to parents, in subject choice processes revolving around aspirations. Teachers were in a unique position, as Kewalramani et al. (2018) pointed out, where they reviewed students' "current

achievements, aspirations, career knowledge and educational experiences at home'' to help them with appropriate choices (p. 85). This potential collaboration illustrates my view that the teacher is both observer and participant in the students' developing processes of aspiration, assisting the student frame their outlook on the future. The next section outlines how some teachers perceived their role of working with student aspirations to be a networker – sometimes requiring the education of parents.

5.4.7   Networker

Some participants discussed how they became networkers, with particular parents, as they worked with student aspirations. The networker role was observed in the data as some teachers were to speak on the student's behalf to a parent or mentioned providing the parent with information about how to help the student. The networking role appeared distinct from the teammate role as parents and students may not always have the same aspirational goal in mind for a student. By taking on this role with parents, teachers were engaging in what Marjoribanks (1998) described when finding "adolescents' aspirations were enhanced when positive perceptions of their academic interactions with parents and teachers were in harmony'' (p. 193). To illustrate this, T11 described that teachers often interacted with families about student aspirations, while teachers supported students with the ability to articulate an aspiration, or skills, such as self-confidence, in order to discuss their ideas with parents:

> … I feel like we need to become, we need to become better at, again for a want
> of a better phrase, better at counselling students at, you know, them being able
> to make choices and become more independent, and experience life as it should
> be experienced, and give them the confidence to go out and do those things, and
> at the same time, I feel like we need to do that for parents as well … (T11)

T11 positioned teachers at the crossroads of parent and student aspirations, where students needed to be supported to make decisions for themselves, and may need to support students as they speak to parents. This positioning of the teachers was problematic in some situations, as James (2002) contended parent advice was considered the most significant to students. In some cases, students were unwilling to question their parents. T11 shared an example where he became involved in the intersection of a student's developing aspiration and the parent concern about it:

> … I discussed with one set of parents, they are concerned their son is obsessed
> with airplanes, and mind you, the father works in the aircraft field, so he's had
> experience and again, exposure to that so found that that's an interest area, and

they can't get him to do anything else but … plane-related things, and I asked

them what they thought the issue with that way, "Well we just want him to do

other things," and I said "Are you giving him experiences to do other things? Are

you taking him out to do other things? Are you taking him to boats, to trains? …

"He's an intelligent boy who needs stimulation, are you stimulating?" "No." I

said, "Okay, what do you expect him to do if you're not giving him those other

experiences? He's going to follow the one that he knows." … (T11)

T11 became a networker as he intervened in order to encourage understanding between the student and parent. He explained that the student was developing an aspiration based on personal experiences, and he was able to articulate how the family could provide avenues to widen the student's experiences. This example illustrated Gottfredson's (1996) ideas that "children tend to recreate the social order of their elders, including gender and social class differences in employment, even before they themselves enter the labour market'' (p. 182). The student looked to his environment to form his aspirations, and the teacher suggested to the parents that more exposure to other environments could alter or confirm the boy's aspirations. Here, the teacher was both participant and observer in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework surrounding a student, where the teacher understood the influences at play on student aspirations and intervened, and served as a potential disruptor to student expectation of aspirational capacity (Webb et al., 2017). In the remainder of the interview, T11 also suggested legal boundaries prevented the school from providing some experiences for students, based on safety and other concerns, so the impetus was on parents to ensure students are exposed to varied aspirations.

Other participants experienced conflict in a networking role when parent expectations did not match a child's aspirations or ability to fulfil a specific aspiration. This was evident in the literature by Alloway et al. (2004), who identified some teachers maintained that parents' lack of knowledge undermined career education. In the examples below, teachers discussed a role with parents that placed their primary role of education in conflict with their perceived role of supporting student aspirations:

I think the only tension I would mention is that sometimes I see my role as

primary as supporting students, but it becomes difficult when you feel that the

student is not necessarily supported by the parent. And that makes it more

complex because you essentially working on behalf of the parents in many ways

(T1)

Where I see there is a difficulty, and this is where you know, there is sometimes a

mis, a mismatch, is where a parent wishes something for their child that the child

is not capable of. Now, um, there comes a point where the school does have a

responsibility to lay the facts out in front of the child and the parent. (T14)

Different expectation or different belief of what the child should be doing, should

not be doing. So, just making sure that we understand the family as well, the

family dynamics are huge and we can't ignore them. (T12)

Similar among these responses was the tension that teachers found themselves in during the middle of a conflict between a student and parent. This tension perhaps gave the teachers a sense of what Turner (2001) termed interrole conflict. He suggested that "the elementary school teacher, for example, must respond to often conflicting expectations from students, parents, and supervisors'' and conflict can occur when "roles incorporate different functions'' (p. 244). This type of interrole conflict placed undue stress on teachers. Another way this interrole conflict surfaced was when a student did not perform well in a particular class, compared to the previous year, and this did not conform to parental expectation, as T3 observed:

… a lot of the teachers, and the expectations from the parents will get

hammered, oh, last year my child was an 80 plus student, this year, they are a 70,

well, it's a different type of math or different type of English, and it's put back on

the staff, by that being their focus there, the time to focus on the students talking

about their potential careers and stuff, I don't think that's there. (T3)

A parent built up a specific expectation for a child based on performance in a particular class. When the student does not perform as well, the parent could blame the teacher for the underperforming student. Again, some participants explained that they were experiencing role stress as a result of parental expectations surrounding their aspirations for students. This is a point I return to in my implications, suggesting that the emergence of a role stress on Sunnyside teachers based on parental aspiration for their children is something that needs to be considered by stakeholders when reviewing teacher roles.

Other teachers, including T5 and T13, expressed concern that parents did not really understand the ATAR and this impacted on how they viewed students' progress and aspirations:

… I think probably parents aren't educated enough. Parents don't know enough

… Do parents … do all parents realise that they are tested against the whole

state? (T5)

> Which is why I am working on the parents now at the info nights, this is what you
> do to support your child, forget the scaling forget moderation, forget all these
> things, just do the best you can and you get the best result … where you begin to
> have league tables which are comparing apples and oranges, completely
> different things, parents are aspirational in the sense they want their kids to get
> the best results, but the best results, as you see from qualitative research,
> numbers completely don't tell the story … (T13)

This highlights how teachers were concerned educators, but also networkers, signaling the ability of the teacher to use a situational awareness and draw on expertise when needed in response to parents (Loughran et al., 2016). For instance, T5 was concerned that parents did not understand that ``numbers completely don't tell the story'' (T13), and he had to remind parents. Similarly, T13 was concerned that some parents were blinded by an individual student's score without considering what this meant for the individual and how this individual had progressed throughout the VCE. This positioning of the teacher – in the middle of this negotiation between student and parent – highlighted again what Turner (2001) suggested with interrole conflict where the teacher took on the informal role to assist parents with their understanding about testing. This pressure from external testing is discussed more in Chapter 7.

It was apparent that teachers were at times being placed in a quagmire as parents sought high scores for their students and bought into the logic that higher scores equated to a pathway for university, discounting other avenues for aspiration. Research into school choice (Campbell et al., 2009) reflected this anxiety of parents, which was underscored by the prevailing assumption that the dominant message in society was that university remained the more appropriate choice (Snowden and Lewis, 2015), or even a choice of "distinction'' (Gale and Parker, 2014, pp. 143). Viewed from the perspective of Bronfenbrenner (1979), teachers had a unique positioning, as they networked with parents in a students' microsystem but observers to influences at other levels; however, this responsibility placed high demands on teachers. Taking the comments of the teachers together – and considering the interrole conflict (Turner, 2001) they faced in these scenarios – it is possible more parent education about pathways is needed to celebrate the ability and individuality of the student, despite the score, a point taken up in the implications. In the next section, I discuss teachers taking on an interrogative role with student aspirations.

5.4.8   Interrogator

Data analysis highlighted that Sunnyside teachers also had an interrogative role to play in relation to student aspirations. The data analysis revealed the interrogative role working in two

ways. Firstly, teachers conceived themselves as listeners to student aspirations, sometimes just as a passive role, but often allowing students to speak freely to them and to ask them questions clarifying their aspirational intentions. Secondly, teachers asked broader questions in general to me as researcher, to themselves, or potentially to one another, interrogating the relationship between aspirations and the curriculum as well as in how students understood aspiration.

Teachers as interrogators of student aspirations firstly came through the data as a perception of their role as active listeners. Analysis of the data indicated that actively listening to students was another informal role that teachers played, which included listening to students and communicating aspirations, by paying attention and asking specific questions. A teacher may be a sounding board for students who may just want someone to listen to their idea about an aspiration. Listening was perceived by some teachers as just as important a role as other actions teachers may take in relation to a student aspiration. With the knowledge base that teachers have in relation to students, such as knowing their interests, test scores, or family histories, teachers are in a position to initially listen, but also gently interrogate students with questions. T1 described that her initial role was not to have a major influence on the students' decisions, but rather she expressed that her role was to listen: "I try and keep it more generalised and not really advisory I suppose, I just try and listen.'' T10 discussed how sometimes students just wanted to share aspirations with her, and she perceived her role to just listen or to converse with the student:

> Or, I played my first game, this is a conversation I had with a student from last
> year, she's just started playing basketball, she got to Hoops or something on the
> weekend, so she came to tell me about that. So that's relevant to her, and that
> inspires her to be better at her game. (T10)

The student wanted to share this information with the teacher and T10 perceived her role of listening to a student's aspiration as inspiring for the student. Sometimes listening became a challenge, however, as T6 described listening as important, but identified that students had to be open to discussions around the help that they needed for intended aspiration: "I think the students who have, who you have these conversations with, they do, and the kids who are reluctant to ask and engage in these conversations, they don't'' (T6). T6's comment suggested that students were willing to have conversations and were open to help from teachers, but the students who were "reluctant to ask or engage in these conversations'' (T6) for whatever reason might have missed out on those critical discussions. Analysis indicated that listening to students was an important role that teachers played in understanding and assisting with the student aspirations. Having a common language around what it means to listen to an aspiration is a point that I discuss in my implications, later in this thesis.

The second way Sunnyside teachers became interrogators came through strongly in the interviews, where some participating teachers were demonstrating an interrogative role as they began to question what form the teaching of aspirations might take place in the school. The data revealed that this interrogative role had some teachers conceptualising aspiration as a capacity – one that could be taught. If thought of as a capacity, some researchers, like Bok (2010) argued that some students lacked the capacity to aspire for certain pathways. The teacher, then, might have a role to help students develop this capacity for aspiration. The data highlighted that explicit skills might be taught to build aspiration, and this is an opportunity for the school that I return to in my implications.

The role of interrogator came through teachers posing questions about a lack of curriculum relating to aspiration development and that teaching to student aspirations might enhance the way curriculum was delivered. T13 questioned if this was something that could enrich students' time at Sunnyside. T12 suggested that aspirations education was separate from careers education, but closely linked:

> … the term aspirations to me implies something that is more implicit for the child, it's something that's personal and if I had to think of two terms, confidence and resilience, and in terms of careers education, I think about developing a student and their vocational slash employability type skills and generating awareness of how they can contribute to the world around them later on. So, aspirations is about making sure the students can be comfortable and see success, be in a subject, be in an oral presentation or a task they have to complete, and perhaps when there are points when they are set back or perceived failures, they understand how they can cope and move forward, so, aspirations is about the self-improvement side, always wanting something more, staying motivated … It's definitely incremental, everyday learning, that growth that they've got to experience year to year, even day to day. (T12)

This teacher's view of aspiration was that it might be taught in relation to resilience through failures and instilling in students the desire to improve on past performance. She also suggested that aspirations were also about self-improvement with the emphasis on the day-to-day, incremental improvements. This view of aspirations was not focused on a single goal, but a constantly moving target, with the teacher playing the role of interrogator by constantly asking herself next incremental step to make available to the student. T12's ideas linked with the idea of Bok (2010) where aspiration was a capacity and the skill to cope with failure that T12 identified was also part of

Dweck's (2012) idea of the growth mindset, which focused on how people saw failure as an opportunity for feedback.

T7 outlined an opportunity to question student understanding about how aspirations could be "enjoyable'' and not just about careers to make "lots of money'':

> I think sometimes they see careers as something that you need to make lots and lots of money from, whereas something you enjoy might not necessarily be the thing that you do for a career. Students don't understand necessarily that you can enjoy your job (laughs), you can enjoy what you do … "Miss, why are you a teacher?" "Because I really like what I do." "Oh, but you're so smart (laughs)." … "I can be smart and be a teacher (laughs), I have to teach you." … you can do something you enjoy at VCE, you don't have to do the hard subjects because it's going to get you that really good job that's going to get you lots of money, no, you can do enjoyable stuff too. (T7)

T7's comment demonstrated how some students lacked the capacity to link something they liked to do with their future life choices. She pointed to a misunderstanding by some students that a career was something where the emphasis was on money and students would not stop to consider that a career might be something they "enjoy'' too. T7 indicated how students bought into notions of what were considered aspirations of "distinction,'' as when Gale and Parker (2014) used Bourdieu's notions of taste to classify student aspirations (pp. 143-4). T7 was questioning any 'tasteless' notion when she informed students "no, you can do enjoyable stuff too'' (T7). Here, the teacher disrupted the way that aspiration and careers were conflated in the students' minds, and she questioned the reason behind fixed notions that a career was linked to money and not necessarily enjoyment. Playing the role of interrogator, this teacher questioned students' limited thinking and challenged their conceptions of aspirations as only linked to a high-wage career.

5.5   Chapter Summary

In this chapter, building on the work from the previous chapter, there was evidence that Sunnyside teacher understandings of student aspirations influenced their perceptions of their roles with student aspirations, evident in the manner in which they engaged with students around aspirations. This chapter presented the analysis and names that were identified from the data analysis to describe teachers' formal and informal roles that they played when working with student aspirations. The formal roles identified and named in the data are carer and vocationalist, and these were roles expected of teachers as evidenced in the documentation and further supported by data from interviews and the survey. The analysis highlighted that Sunnyside teachers were often playing

a multitude of informal roles in relation to student aspirations, not expected of them by the school. This data analysis identified eight informal roles that teachers play in relation to student aspirations, including navigator, cheerleader, dissembler, dreamslayer, guru, teammate, networker, and interrogator. By conceptualising these roles and demonstrating differences between them, the analysis illustrated that in the absence of formal definition around these informal roles, teachers responded situationally and created their own ways for working with student aspirations. Identifying these roles for Sunnyside stakeholders is important so they can identify the types of undocumented work teachers were doing in relation to student aspirations, and where assistance might be needed. The next chapter details processes and uncertainties associated with participating teacher performance of both formal and informal roles, and areas where teachers perceived they needed support in order to sufficiently work with student aspirations.

6   Data Analysis and Discussion: Teacher Processes and Uncertainties When Working with Student Aspirations

6.1   Chapter overview

In this chapter, the data analysis continues, focusing on the third of four sub-research questions, namely, *How do teachers cope with interactions and uncertainties in relation to student aspirations?* This question is critical in building on the last two data analysis and discussion chapters, which discussed Sunnyside teacher understandings of how student aspirations form and if this was a shared understanding in the school as well as roles they perceived teachers playing with regard to student aspirations. The specific data that informed this chapter has been outlined in Table 3.6 and includes responses from survey and interview questions pertaining to how teachers explained their processes for working with student aspirations. By building upon these ideas, further understanding of the central research question, *How do teachers understand their roles in relation to engaging with student aspirations?* will emerge.

The analysis in this chapter will illustrate the processes Sunnyside teachers participating in the research have developed over time to work with student aspirations, and the uncertainties they have faced in these interactions. These processes were interpreted through Turner's (2001) role theory, specifically when he suggested individuals with similar roles could feel and behave differently in situations, or they may look to others for a model of how to respond. He borrowed from G.H. Mead's symbolic interactionist theory about taking the role of the other, where people engaged with one another by "understanding a cluster of actions'' (Turner, 2001, p. 235) and acting in response with the surrounding the situation in question. In the data, I identified individual Sunnyside teachers developing processes over time to work with student aspirations, arising out of the situational responsiveness they drew on, demonstrative of what Loughran et al. (2016) argued, which was that professional knowledge could develop in response to need. Turner's (2001) role theory also provided a backdrop to explaining the way Sunnyside teachers might be socialised into a role and helped to explore some of the difficulties they faced when their role was intensified or complicated. In this chapter, these processes are explained through three sub-sections: processes for dealing with role confusion, processes in relation to the frequency of aspirational discussions with students, and uncertainties when engaging with student aspirations.

6.2   Processes for Dealing with Role Confusion

Knowing exactly what to do to help a student with an aspiration might vex some teachers. The literature in this area acknowledges that not all teachers knew what to do when faced with assisting a student about an aspiration. Alloway et al. (2004) gleaned responses about student

aspirations, from "outright pessimism to considered optimism'' (pp. 137-138) with some revealing a pessimistic view about the lack of students accessing guidance programs or their own efforts at guidance. It is likely that participating Sunnyside teachers felt overwhelmed by mounting pressures for student academic success along with an expectation to provide a pastoral role in a whole school approach to guidance, with little experience in the latter. This finding aligns with the work of Hearne and Galvin (2014). This was likely based on the mixed messages from management in previous years as well as in the year of my data collection. Teachers responded with a situational judgement in the absence of clearly defined boundaries of their role. In this section, I demonstrate that in the absence of certainty, teachers developed their own processes for working with student aspirations.

Prior to and at the time of the survey, it appeared that teachers lacked clear guidelines about counselling the aspirations of their students from any school documents, some chose to advise students while others gave no advice at all. This did not change for some Sunnyside teachers until just prior to the interviews, when tutor group teachers were offered in-house professional development by the careers practitioner, as discussed earlier. Despite the professional development, some teachers still shared uncertainties about their roles in relationship to student aspirations in the interviews.

Before specific processes that teachers developed are presented, the following comments from the survey illustrate the confusion of the situation, as some teachers thought discussions to advise students were forbidden whereas others did not. When surveyed about any misgivings they might have had in providing advice on aspirations, four teachers explained that management had specifically forbidden this interaction:

> We have been advised not to advise. This is a restrictive doctrine. I appreciate
> that the Careers Advisor is more capable of delivering specific university advice,
> but I also believe the classroom teacher can have awareness of appropriate
> discussions on aspirations. (Survey)

> We have been told by management not to give advice to student(s) on their
> future aspirations because we are not qualified to do so. It is to be left to the
> career counsellor, or other senior management. (Survey)

> I find that we are told (not) to discuss too much with students and leave it to the
> careers advisor. (Survey)

> No, we can ask them, as classroom teachers, but we cannot advise. (Survey)

These responses demonstrated a shared understanding amongst some of the Sunnyside teachers. The comments did not point to specific documents but referred to information communicated by school administration.

Despite some teachers stating that these discussions were off limits, other responses demonstrated a different understanding. Some participants openly described sharing career advice:

> I have only given career advice to my tutor group students based on my personal experience, or have helped them find information online about any careers they are interested in. (Survey)

> I discouraged a student's aspiration because I believe he is capable for a higher one. (Survey)

At the time of the survey, these differences indicated that teachers did not share the same understanding of the boundaries of their role in relation to student aspirations. The idea that secondary classroom teachers were not supposed to advise changed during data collection with changes to tutor group teachers' responsibilities.

The analysis of interview data highlighted that tension lingered in teacher understandings. Some teachers had developed processes to cope with restrictions – they knew how to obey the rules but still provided advice when they found it necessary. The data illustrated that teachers developed a sense of personal boundaries when dealing with students' aspirations, becoming personal processes for coping with uncertainties. Some of these processes are outlined in the following sub-sections.

6.2.1   General Discussions

An emphasis on general discussions, with no specifics, became a strategy for some participating Sunnyside teachers. T3 recalled being told not to advise students by management and he developed a boundary to manage any student queries through a process of giving general advice:

> … one of the directives from the principal, you don't give career advice, so I'll never give career advice to say you should do this…I'll tell them about possibilities but I will never tell them to do it. I believe there was an incident a few years ago where someone had really tried to tailor several students to go into a course that [the students] had loved, and at a briefing we were told that that is not our role, and our role, the directive as far as courses go, and where to go, falls to the career advisor or to key senior management, such as the principal, at the time [gives a name] and a few others … (T3)

This teacher created a process for interactions, having provided some students general advice while not overstepping a self-perceived lack of knowledge about university. Giving students general advice did not cross that teacher's notions of the perceived boundary within the school**.** This teacher's willingness to work with student aspirations was important, in light of what Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al. (2015) argued, which was that "the informal conversations among teachers and students may be as important to some students as the formal careers activities'' (p. 60). Helping teachers understand their specific roles is something I return to in my implications.

Finding a way to work within this perceived restriction was echoed by T1, of the secondary school, who explained she was ``wary'' when approached by some students for advice. She suggested there was tension in this boundary, and she kept her advice general too:

> … there is a formal process here but I think they want to have informal conversations and there is a bit of tension, as you mention, for us at times because we're not trained as careers advisors so generally speaking the advice is not to give careers advise but students often approach you and want to have a conversation about those topics so there is a kind of a not a concern, I don't think that's the right word, but you are aware when you are talking to them there are certain things you need to be wary of discussing with them … (T1)

She had awareness of an invisible line that she should not cross in terms of discussing certain aspects of careers or subjects with students. This teacher also picked up on a common idea that others shared too, which was keeping it "general'' meant that there were no problems if things went wrong. There was a connection with Turner's (2001) interactionist role theory as teachers negotiated the level of detail and assistance they were willing to provide students about their sought-after aspirational pathways in the moment, in the process of interaction. Here, the teacher was "wary" of discussing anything deemed outside of her role. This teacher's comments highlighted the tension in knowing exactly which discussions were appropriate and in developing her own processes over time to handle student queries.

6.2.2 Defined Personal Boundaries

Another process identified in the data for some participating teachers was fixing personal boundaries about what they were willing to discuss with students. In contrast to the comments in the previous section, T5, perhaps unaware of the directive not to advise, communicated that "no one's clearly said, don't advise students, no,'' which contradicted other teachers. T5 perceived this was part of her role with some students, but if she did not do it, no one would have criticised her;

instead, she identified the giving of aspirational advice to students was from her own sense of responsibility:

> I could just say, oh, I'm not sure, you need to talk to the careers person, I could
> just say that, if I couldn't be bothered, no one would say to me, no staff member
> would say to me, come on [she says her own name], it's your responsibility to
> talk to them, no one would say …. Yeah, whereas, another person that teaches
> exactly the same subject, might say, ah, probably best to talk to the careers
> person … (T5)

T5 was unsure if all teachers would feel the same responsibility and described the impetus was on teachers whether they wanted to help a student. Similarly, T10 did not perceive a strong imposed boundary from the school: "In terms of boundaries, probably the only boundary is not allowing your aspirations for the students to be an overwhelming influence on what opportunities you give them'' (T10). This teacher highlighted that it was important not to let her own perceptions of what would be suitable for the student blind her to other possibilities.

6.2.3 Cautious Language

The data analysis demonstrated another strategy was the use of cautious language. Teacher participants expressed wanting to help students with their aspirations as needed, but for some this desire was tinged with a need for self-protection, so their job would not be at risk, balanced with the need to provide their students with a realistic perspective. This was highlighted by T7's explanation of assisting students with their aspirations:

> With my advice, I tend to try to not give them specifics, you know, try and be
> very, I don't know, just you don't want to lock yourself in to a promise, like we
> were talking about before, you need to be careful, but I do try and you know, talk
> to them about enjoyment and things like that when their subject-selecting and
> things like that, are you going to enjoy this subject, did you enjoy this part, and
> things like that, so, I try and be a little bit more, bring it back to the student and
> go, tell me what you enjoy … (T7)

T7's process was to assist students while not putting herself in any risk. She explained that "you do need to be careful'' because she did not want any information that she communicated to a child to be perceived as a "promise'' of their performance, and she attempted to offer encouragement to students towards subjects they enjoyed. This teacher's sentiment about not wanting to make any false promises was reminiscent of Ball's (2003b) arguments about teachers

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working in a culture of performativity, in a space that "employs judgements and comparisons'' and teachers were under scrutiny for their actions (p. 216). T7 wanted to help but had developed a process of being careful with her words when discussing student aspirations. She saw the need to negotiate careful speech with her penchant for realism, as her self-perceived informal role was providing realist feedback to students, as discussed in Chapter 5, "I guess my role as a teacher is a little bit of realism'' (T7). She aimed to ensure that students did not have a false sense of over-confidence and they were aware that whatever aspiration they might have had may be a "long-term goal'' that would "require a lot of work'' (T7), while at the same time balancing this with the perception of the confines of her role.

It seemed that a philosophy of being careful with language sufficed for other teachers, with T6 explaining being willing to help students with an aspiration but cautious of what she could say to help a student:

> Again, I've still got that in the back of my mind that I don't want to be liable and I know how, not, I haven't seen how career advice can go wrong but I've seen how other things can go wrong, with relationships, with teachers and students, what comes out could be perceived as the wrong thing, and there's been incidents like that and I've just, you know, I just take everything with a (inaudible). A voice in the back of my head (laughs). (T6)

This indicated a sense of uncertainty or misgiving that some teachers had when considering whether to help a student with an aspiration as the words she used could be misconstrued by the student. This teacher said she was not sure how career advice can go wrong, but she knew other things can go wrong, so she wanted to protect herself. This uncertainty connected with Johnson et al. (2009) in their study of teacher attitudes in relation to student progression in the UK, where some teachers may feel less informed about emergent career paths and are more comfortable with older routes, and they may be unclear about routes to particular pathways (p. 63). Seen from this uncertain perspective, T6 chose self-protection rather than potential misunderstanding between herself and the student.

6.2.4   Balanced Student and School Interests

The analysis highlighted a definite boundary for some participating teachers when it came to the interests of the school versus the interests of the students. Keeping students at the school was a top priority and T3 described how teachers should not under any circumstances advise a student to go to another school. This was a clear boundary to him:

… there have been staff that have advised students to go to other schools for, because they could get more out of that at other schools, I don't understand that…Well, that was again, the principal came out and said, we got a letter from a parent, thank you for the time with the school, and thanking the staff member that advised them to go to the elite special consideration school, whatever it was, that would better suit them, and to me, and, I will use his wording, if you believe that, then you are at the wrong school, you should be teaching at that school. (T3)

T3's anecdote that any teacher encouraging a student towards another school that might supposedly "better suit" the student would not be approved of by the school. This action supposedly taken by the described teacher might be seen as an "entrepreneurial mindset" (p. 36), as identified by Johnson et al. (2009), where the teacher was industriously pushing the student for an outcome; however, it conflicted with the needs of the school.

This idea of not counselling a student towards an interest in another school was highlighted on the survey. Some teachers described this when asked, "Is there anything that might stop you from helping some or all students with the pursuit of an aspiration?'':

Any assistance that is for entry to another school. (Survey)

I feel if they would be suited in a school with more VET programs/trades. (Survey)

Yes. We have been told not to by management and that it opens a legal mine field and it needs to be left to those with training. (Survey)

T4 highlighted this boundary, but stated that this was not fixed, as communicated in an interview:

Look, I probably, because I work a little closely with the principal and the vice principal and the careers department, I do know there are some tensions about don't recommend that they go to other schools. Let's try to push them into things that will result in jobs, but they are not things that are a directive, it's more a sort of a discussion there, but… (T4)

In considering the survey responses together, it seemed that as long as teachers stayed within a philosophy of realistic advice, while not encouraging students to leave Sunnyside, they remained within a safe operating boundary. However, those with more experience – management, the careers practitioner, and others with specific responsibilities – might be allowed to counsel

students in a more discreet way that a student's aspiration cannot be met by the school. The goal was to find a student a suitable pathway from within the school first, but ultimately, this might not be possible. According to T4, the student or the student's family would have to make this determination themselves:

> Definitely some limits in that most students will work it out for themselves, but it is not something that I would say to them, we are not the right place for you, we try to find the best program we can for them, that would be our other limit, I wouldn't actually say I think you need to go elsewhere. (T4)

Ultimately, T4 recognised that Sunnyside aimed to provide for all students and would not directly counsel a student to leave on the grounds of their aspiration. These participating teachers observe the school as a business, with an aim of continued growth through enrolments – so their participation was also protecting their job.

In this process of balancing student and school interests, Sunnyside teachers demonstrated their shared positions of observers and participants in a student's development, as I interpreted their placement in Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1994) description of the school as a contextual influence in the child's life. Teachers were aware of the school as an educational environment for students, but also as a business aimed at surviving and making money, so they acted in accordance with what was demanded of them by the school while still trying to help the student. This dissonance experienced by some participating Sunnyside teachers was identified when they discussed differences in their perceptions about the needs of the school and of the student; this might be evidence of what Turner (2001) called interrole conflict, where their positioning in the role meant they faced two contradictory impulses. Again, in the absence of formal direction, Sunnyside teachers developed their own processes in relation to this uncertainty about the conflicting needs of the school and student.

6.2.5   Advice Matched to the Student

The analysis highlighted that some teachers coped by making advice specific to a student when they had the confidence to do so. This was illustrated in two examples as T5 described the challenge of assisting students with their concerns, which might ultimately impact the students' future subject choices or pathway:

> I was talking to a girl this morning, and she can't decide which maths she wants to do in year 12 … so I said to her, "What do you want to do when you're big?" She said "Orthopedics," and I said, "I would always think that you should do

harder maths for that," but I said, "Is it a prerequisite? Is there a place where it is not a prerequisite? The harder maths, yes, at this place or this place." I kind of think, if you do it at school it will make it easier when you get there, so I kind of generally, probably, encourage the kids to do harder, and so, where's the boundary? … (T5)

I helped a girl after school yesterday, and she's doing year 10 hard maths, and I'm like, I don't know why you're doing this, you're not cut out for it, I don't know why she chose it, maybe mum thought it would be a good idea, maybe she thought it would be a bit easier. Where is the boundary, who knows? I don't know where it is. (T5)

These two examples illustrated the level of complexity this teacher faced in discussions of aspirations. These examples demonstrated two different conversations around student aspirations the teacher had in a 24 hour period, a point that will be returned to in the frequency of discussions around aspirations in the next section. The teacher communicated her uncertainty in the boundary around advising students, pointing to a role confusion: "Where is the boundary, who knows? I don't know where it is?'' (T5). Many researchers argued teachers do play a role in influencing student aspirations (Alloway et al., 2004; Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al., 2015; Helwig, 2004; Kuijpers & Meijers, 2017; Zipin et al., 2015), but the data analysis in the section shows participating Sunnyside teachers were unclear in their understandings and might be uncertain about their roles in situations when students presented to them for advice. As their role around aspirations was ill-defined, teachers could find themselves in uneasy situations just as this teacher pushed a student she regarded as capable into studying a more difficult subject, but was wary of using that same professional judgement to counsel a struggling student to take an easier pathway. Further, the second example given from T5 highlights the teacher performing the role of the dissembler, presenting an encouraging persona to the student while harbouring different thoughts about the student's ability, as highlighted in Chapter 5. This teacher had to navigate this complexity on her own in the absence of explicit direction, calling on her reserves of knowledge (Berry et al., 2008).

6.2.6 Students Directed to Aim High

Without clear boundaries or guidance for counselling students, another strategy was to encourage students towards their heart's desire, no matter the consequences. T13 communicated a process of teaching students to "aim high.'' (T13). T13 encouraged his students to "aim high,'' to ensure they would never "hit low.''

… the way I work around it is just to really, even if there was a very high

requirement that one might suspect is possibly beyond the realistic expectations

of best performers to put it diplomatically as I can, still the default for me, and I

would hope the default for others would still be, just go for it, aim high, and you

won't hit low, in that respect, it's still trying to couch in the most positive terms.

The counterfoil to that would be, I always say, have a plan b, c, and d as well.

(T13)

The idea that encouraging students was a process that some teachers used in the absence of specific role boundaries as echoed in the literature. Tranter (2012) found a "dominant belief" around one school she studied focused on encouraging student aspirations into hard courses directed towards university, "regardless of their prior achievement'' (p. 906), preparedness and the teachers' conception of whether the student could actually pass. It seemed that T13's "default'' position was shared by other teachers, because in the absence of knowing exactly what to do, some Sunnyside teachers took on the cheerleader role, as identified in Chapter 4.

6.2.7 Information Streamlined for Teachers

Another strategy was to fix the system. T12, commented that the confusion over roles was a systemic issue, and that structural changes and new careers responsibilities for tutor group teachers was a step toward greater ``role clarity'' (T12). In this way, her process might be viewed as attempting to change the system, which started occurring after my survey; she suggested that over time, this would assist everyone. T12 stressed that changes would alter the information delivery and help tutor group teachers in time as staff adopted to the new delivery of careers information in tutor group sessions:

I think we have systems in place where it's very clear, we have year coordinators,

we have designated staff member in charge of pastoral care, and I think the chain

of command is clearer for staff, all staff, in which information can then be

disseminated more efficiently and, like I said earlier, people are accountable for

their roles. Role clarity has become a greater feature, which then in turn helps

everybody else. And, yeah, the example is the tutor group system. (T12)

Streamlining this information dissemination may have not only helped students access careers information more easily, but teachers as well, argued T12, as she perceived a better system for all involved. This teacher's description fits with Turner's (2001) description of role change, where "a change in role relationships with two or more role necessarily changing in some kind of reciprocity'' (p. 251). This interactionist perspective of role theory related to how the tutor group

teachers' responsibility with careers meant a greater sense of role clarity for everyone – and perhaps this would change the role confusion around student aspirations highlighted earlier in Chapter 4, which some teachers experienced. T12's line of thinking – that teachers need to be involved in the process – corresponds to my theoretical bricolage where Patton and McMahon (2015) suggested that a system-like approach to careers in schools includes teacher roles with the careers practitioners "promoting current thinking about work and learning and providing current information to parent and employer bodies, as well as teachers" (p. 334). The work is like a system, not just the careers practitioner working in isolation, a point further considered in the implications. In the next section, the frequency of discussions that teachers have in relation to student aspirations is discussed.

6.3   Processes in Relation to Frequency of Aspirational Discussions with Students

The data analysis highlighted participating teacher perceptions on the frequency of their discussions with students about potential aspirations. The reported frequency of these discussions indicated that teachers were having many discussions with students around their aspirations, some initiated by teachers and some by students. In order to facilitate the frequency of these discussions, and in the absence of clear direction, teachers indicated that they developed their own processes to be available to for this aspect of their role. The frequency of these discussions indicated it was something that stakeholders needed to be aware of as teachers were using this as a way of extending the curriculum in their classrooms or in connecting with students' outside interests, and there was potential for further connections between student aspirations and the curriculum.

The survey data indicated that many participating teachers at Sunnyside took the initiative and connected the curriculum to student aspirations daily, weekly, or monthly, which required the teachers to use their reserves of knowledge to have these conversations (Berry et al., 2008). When the survey asked about how often they discussed aspirations with students, there was a tendency for teachers to take the initiative to speak to students about aspirations, rather than students approaching them, as shown in the following tables. Table 6.1 shows teachers chose weekly as the highest response when asked to estimate how often they were having discussions around student aspirations, while Table 6.2 shows that teachers chose weekly as the highest response when asked how often they created classroom opportunities for discussion of student aspirations. Similarly, Table 6.3 shows that teachers chose weekly as the highest response when asked how often students approached them for a discussion about student aspirations. While the numbers in these tables demonstrate that teachers reported they were more likely to create classroom opportunities for discussing aspirations with students (25/57), the number reporting that students approached them

was only slightly lower (19/57). These numbers support the contention of this thesis that many responding teachers perceived this as an informal role.

Table 6.1

Frequency of Discussions about Student Aspirations

Amount	Totals
Daily	10
Weekly	25
Monthly	12
3-4 Times a Year	7
Almost Never	3
Total Responses	57

Table 6.2

Creating Classroom Opportunities for Discussing Student Aspirations

Times	Number
Daily	9
Weekly	18
Monthly	12
3-4 Times a Year	9
Almost Never	9
Total Responses	57

Table 6.3

Students Approaching Teachers for Advice about Aspirations

Times	Number
Daily	3
Weekly	19
Monthly	11
3-4 Times a Year	17
Almost Never	7
Total Responses	57

The interview data supported the notion that some Sunnyside teachers perceived a responsibility to hold these discussions in classrooms, making space for such interactions and creating their own processes.

6.3.1   Purposeful, Planned Discussions with Students

Two teachers in particular, one primary and one secondary, illustrated this need to purposefully discuss aspirations with students. T10, in the primary school, tried to find time for a daily discussion with students, sometimes about aspirations:

> In terms of teaching, with, so with the students, I would probably I try and speak to each of my students daily, try to have a conversation with each of them daily, wouldn't necessarily be on aspiration but it would be on something that is a part of their life outside of school, whether football or whatever it is. (T10)

In this example, T10 understood conversations about aspirations to be part of her perceived role in the classroom and her process for engaging with students. Another secondary participant, T4, discussed aspirations daily with students and connected the curriculum to a range of jobs for students when she tried to explain the multitude of jobs related to a child's conception of a job, like that of a lawyer: "what other jobs could you actually do within the legal system?'' (T4). This teacher deemed herself accountable for exposing students to the nuances within different streams of careers, and this became part of an informal process for her teaching. She maintained this was part of her sharing informal information with students when she was able, helping them understand there are variations of a job in law. This type of teacher enterprise might be critical to the aspirations of some students, as Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al. (2015) argued that "informal conversations among teachers and students may be as important to some students as the formal careers activities" (p. 64). This teacher, T10, took her own initiative, developing her own process, to establish how often and when it was possible to connect student aspirations to the curriculum.

6.3.2   Situational Discussions with Students

The data from the above examples also confirmed that teachers' processes for discussing aspirations with students at Sunnyside was situational, depending on the classes they taught, when the opportunities arose, dependent on the skills and knowledge of the teacher. This was further evident in a comment by T1, who said that he discussed aspirational information daily with students due to the circumstances:

> I'd say at the moment because of having year 12 homeroom group and a year 12 class, I would say it's [discussing aspirations] almost daily at the moment because they're very mindful of getting preferences in and choosing preferences and this is quite…it wouldn't always be that way but just because of those factors it's quite frequent at the moment. (T1)

Discussions of aspirations became situation-dependent as teachers made decisions about the appropriateness in their teaching environments. T1 allowed conversations of aspirations to happen daily as she considered this appropriate for the year 12 students. This was indicative of what Loughran et al. (2016) argued in response to the intricacies of teaching situations, which was that professional knowledge could develop in response to need. Teachers worked to overcome gaps in knowledge over time, ensuring they could respond to students' needs, and in the case of aspirations, teachers began to assume this as an informal role.

6.3.3   Engagement in or Avoidance of Discussions with Students

As highlighted in Table 6.1 and Table 6.3, teachers were both creating opportunities to discuss aspirations with students on a weekly basis, but also some students were approaching them weekly for one-on-one discussions around aspirations. From this perspective, teachers have a responsibility that is potentially unrecognised by Sunnyside stakeholders as the number of discussions can place a burden on teachers. Seen from this light, teachers may choose to engage in or avoid discussions above and beyond their formalised roles with students, based on various factors, such as the time available on that particular day or what the discussion might entail.

In the primary school, T11 raised the idea that discussions of aspirations required teachers to choose to take up a conversation with students:

> I wouldn't say for me it's a daily, weekly, monthly, I wouldn't say there is a set specific time, it's more when the opportunity presents itself or when the opportunity requires it or when the occasion needs it, um, which is not a specific answer at all … I mean I don't set out to, discuss aspirations and careers involvement in the future because it's not part of what we're expected to do here or whether we are expected to do it or not … but it's not part of our curriculum anyway. (T11)

This example indicated that the teacher needed to recognise and respond to an opportunity for discussing student aspirations. In a situation such as this, it suggested teachers also have a choice, and they must be willing to form a dialogue about aspirations with students, despite it not being part of the required curriculum, otherwise students might miss out on the potential of these discussions. T9 communicated how she was willing to have this type of interaction with students, often when career counsellor advised that they should during tutor group sessions, but otherwise she would have chosen not to. Due to the changes in the tutor groups, T9 responded that she was required to do this as a tutor group teacher; however, in her own classes, she would do this "rarely," only "if it's the topic of aspirations then I might talk about it'' (T9). T9 was willing to have these types

of conversations in a planned way but not informally, whereas, T11 was more willing to have informal discussions around student aspirations as they arise. With the changes to tutor group teacher roles in secondary school, there may be more required times for these discussions in coming years.

Although time might have been scheduled for these discussions with the changing roles of the tutor group teacher after 2017, the ability to have the discussion could be a challenge for teachers as T7 related that talking to a student about careers might mean wading through other behavioural things first:

> So, I'd want to sit down with them and talk about their grades and how they're doing and their behaviours as well, because that can definitely affect a student in their abilities, you know, if you're not a focused student and you're mucking around in classes, you're never going to achieve well. So, it's more, you bring it back more, those discussions back to where they are at now, rather than where they're going to go. (T7)

This teacher explained that the here-and-now, day-to-day came first in terms of priorities, and if a student was misbehaving, this had to be taken care of prior to any discussion of future pathways. T7, as other teachers in this section, had developed informal processes and appropriate timings for discussing aspirations. This action of the teachers again demonstrated Turner's (2001) assertion that people often held informal working roles alongside or in the absence of formal roles, where teachers negotiated time and space for aspirational interactions with students. This section highlighted that many teachers used discussions of aspirations as a way of extending the curriculum in their classrooms or in connecting with students' outside interests; with this in mind, it is imperative Sunnyside stakeholders consider potential connections between student aspirations and the curriculum, a point I return to in the implications of this study. The next section highlights the importance of teacher education and cultural competence in relation to student aspirations.

6.4   Uncertainties when Engaging with Student Aspirations

The data from the survey, interviews, and document analysis provided evidence that participating teachers from Sunnyside School had unclear role boundaries, or a fuzzy conception of their role when engaging with student aspirations. This uncertainty was reported by participating teachers about assisting a student with an aspiration, and some doubting whether their colleagues had the necessary skills to assist students with an aspiration. Yet, the analysis points to the notion that some participating teachers demonstrated the ability and knowledge but perhaps needed this formalised within the school to provide a sense of confidence in their roles. Participant teachers

communicated the need for more professional development as the school became more diverse, and, as discussed in Chapter 4, teachers perceived student aspirations were often linked to their cultural background.

6.4.1 Unawareness of Teacher Importance and Current Skillset

Data indicated that teachers were performing roles with student aspirations but may not be aware of their importance and the valuable skills they have available as part of their present practice. As indicated previously in the data, some teachers are unaware of the impact they have on student aspirations until told, such as discussed in Chapter 5 where T9 found a student following in her footsteps and working overseas. This influence can go unnoticed, and T4 stressed that teachers needed to understand they had the opportunity each day to expose students to information about aspirations or careers, and become a role model for hopeful thinking:

> … We need to have time for staff to actually understand what they are doing and
> time is always the barrier, and that would be the same for teacher training …. I
> think so because I think they need to understand their role is very important in
> being positive about the future, um, opening students' eyes to possibilities, and
> also being really careful of language that would allow a student to think they
> were bad at something, and you know, when they are in grade 5 or 7, and then
> all of a sudden a kid has shut out a whole area because they are bad at
> something … (T4)

T4 proposed that teachers needed to explicitly be made aware that they were important to student aspirations, ``to understand that their role is very important'' (T4). She also communicated a perceived role to be "positive about the future'' and "opening students'' (T4) eyes to possibilities, with an emphasis on language to avoid ending a students' aspiration by negligence.

Not only did T4's propositions above signal her perceptions of the teacher's role in relation to student aspirations in a general sense, but pointed to the possibility that there were explicit skills teachers could learn in order to perform this job. What she described were skills that teachers needed in order to handle aspirations. This teacher, who in an earlier section considered herself the dreamslayer at having to end some older student aspirations, suggested that there was a point for realism, but while students were young, teachers needed to be open-minded about student aspirations and encourage them.

For example, she said "being really careful with language that would allow a student to think they are bad at something'' (T4) is an idea that teachers could be aware of in their work with student aspirations. Just as Holmes et al. (2018) suggested that teachers be aware of gendered language in

the classroom, so could teachers be aware of language that presents student ability from a deficit view. This type of awareness and skill with language was something that could be shared among teachers and developed to work with student aspirations. In the data, there were instances where other teachers made reference to skills that they used to assist students with aspirations, all of these from within comments identified in Chapter 5 on informal roles: including T1's ability to listen to students without being judgmental or giving advice; T10's attempts to diversify the curriculum when she can to help students; T13's enthusiasm for student progress, and, T7's work to break down a goal for students into manageable tasks. These are just some of the actions performed by teachers as part of their interactions with students that could be formalised as explicit skills that teachers might share and learn.

Despite my interpretation of these explicit skills, the notion that all teachers could work equally with aspiration was questioned by T14. In his view, working with aspiration was a "craft" learned over time, and that not all teachers understood this at first:

> I don't believe it is defined. I believe that is one of the, teaching, I think is, as
> much craft as it is profession. So, one of the components of the craft is being able
> to recognise in kids where they are, and it's often expressed in terms of them
> being a little lost or again, sometimes it will be as direct as they don't have, we
> need to give them something to think about … a lot of it is intuition, it's things
> that people pick up by seeing conversations in staff rooms, it's by being on the
> job …. There's no document that says you will have a chat with your colleagues in
> the staffroom and work out the kids whose attitudes is being affected by their
> aspirations. (T14)

This was seen as tacit knowledge by T14, or the `craft' of teaching, which was either learned on the job or passed from teacher to teacher through informal conversation. The idea that more experienced teachers shared knowledge with less experienced ones in the staff room was questioned by Huberman (1993) when he wrote that "unsolicited offers of advice or technical assistance are widely interpreted as an expression of arrogance or as a play for higher status" and that the "conversation in the teachers' lounge steers clear of instructional topics" (p. 29). With this in mind, the counter view of teacher "craft" (T14) with student aspirations might be that it is something teachers learnt on their own, in the absence of formal professional development.

At Sunnyside, during the data collection, the conception of all teachers working with student aspirations remained subjective and reliant on teacher knowledge and experience, particularly in the primary school where it was not formalised. It was highlighted that there were possible `teachable' moments that new teachers might be missing, and helping them identify points where aspirations

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could be used to help a student understand the curriculum was important. This idea resonated with Bertram and Loughran's (2012) research where science teachers had trouble communicating some aspects of their tacit knowledge and opportunities for improvement were available. The possibility of teachers learning explicit skills to work with student aspirations will be discussed further in the implications.

6.4.2   Uncertainties Due to Lack of Education in Student Aspirations

The data indicated that teachers linked their uncertainties to a lack of education around engaging with student aspirations. There was strong agreement by teachers on the survey, available in Appendix C, that more professional development was needed to support teachers working with student aspirations. Of 57 respondents, 44 either strongly agreed or agreed to the statement in question one, "Teacher professional development is needed to assist teachers to link discussions of student aspirations to the curriculum.'' The remaining responses were 12 uncertain and one disagreed.

This strong agreement was echoed by the participants in the interviews. T4 commented that ``resources for teachers do need to improve'' so they could work better with student aspirations. T5 stipulated that more education was needed to promote consistency and responsibility amongst teachers in the information that they were giving to students:

> I think teachers need a lot more PD …. we need to be educated to ensure that
> everyone knows what they are talking about .... when the careers teacher came
> along to talk to us, mind you, there were a fair few not there, I got what she was
> saying. I learnt bits, but I understood, I got it, and I was okay, and I've said to her
> since, "This is what I've done with my kids," but there might be some people that
> were just like, "Oh, that went over my head." So, if they are the people who are
> talking to those kids, oh my god, oh my god, I feel sorry for those kids. (T5)

A speculation by T5 was that more teachers needed to understand that career education was now part of tutor group teachers' responsibility, and if professional development was offered, then they needed to make themselves accountable for going. She observed that at the July 2017 professional development offered by the careers practitioner that "there was a fair few not there''; in addition, she perceived there might be "some people'' that thought "that went over my head'' (T5) meaning they did not understand the information. T5 voiced a concern about the accountability of those absent teachers, or the teachers that might not have fully understood the information. A possible issue might be that some students miss out on opportunities to discuss aspirations if teachers were not interested, unable to, or unwilling to do so.

Professional development was needed, according to T10, in relation to the ``whole child'' to foster relationships in order to work with student aspirations:

> I think teacher training is a big one. I think just, not as much teacher training but just, talking to teachers about the importance of knowing the whole child, ensuring that an important focus of our job, of what we do day-to-day, reminding teachers that that's a, our impression on these students is a very large impression. And, we need to be fostering those relationships, and talking to our kids. (T10)

This participant observed teachers as making a "large impression'' (T10) on students and articulated that teachers needed to foster relationships and understanding their backgrounds in order to talk about aspirations. She was not alone in her thinking.

Wanting any teacher professional development on aspirations to be focused on all aspects of life, not just career, was voiced by T1: ``I feel it's becoming … very career-focused, and my personal view is that it should be focused on a number of aspirations that people might have for their life'' (T1). T1 perceived that an intense focus on the measurable qualities of student scores meant that aspiration takes on a limited quality. She described this as "a narrow view of education'' (T1) where students might perceive the school focused on only one outcome: university. This teacher communicated her "frustration'' (T1) and wanted future teachers trained to combat limiting notions of aspiration equating to career education, and take into consideration family, interests, and other aspects of life. This desire for professional development, as expressed by these teachers, has become available through "Aspirations: Supporting Students' Futures" (2018), developed by a project team at the University of Newcastle, which I recommend in my implications to Sunnyside stakeholders as well as scenario-based teacher education resulting from the data in this thesis, included in Appendix I.

One teacher reported playing devil's advocate to the idea that teachers needed more education to work with student aspirations. T12 suggested that the school was good with providing teachers with information and that teachers needed to be proactive in learning a new skill: "So, yes, I think the school is good in providing information to support teachers but I also do feel that teacher need to be active in asking questions if they don't understand how to deliver certain sessions'' (T12). This teacher referred to the tutor group sessions and suggested that if teachers did not understand how to communicate a message about aspirations, then the onus was on them to ask questions.

6.4.3 Hesitancies around Cultural Diversity

The concept of cultural competence was another aspect identified in the data, where teachers were progressively assisting a diverse student body with aspirations – and not all were confident in doing so. T14, who has some administrative responsibility, summarized this when he suggested that ``the demographic of the [side of Melbourne] is changing and they, really, let's be really brutal, they've come to a school that is inherently an Anglo-Saxon school, and some of [the teachers] are not coping as well as others, um, with the fact that it's no longer going to be an Anglo-Saxon school'' (T14). T11 commented that the student population had a mixed cultural heritage and not all teachers were equipped to understand the types of aspirations that emerged from such diversity, and, therefore, education was needed:

> Twenty years ago, when I took my first job … straight out of university, it's a different world altogether, and I've been out and seen all the aspects of it in … different countries and lots of different schools and I feel … some of the ones that have been here for a long time, they don't have those experiences to be able to fall back on when it comes to dealing with the different attitudes and the different cultural expectations of the clientele we've got here now, they're not properly prepared and educated on how to deal with the cultural differences because they haven't had exposure to it, and I feel like the teachers that come here as graduates, and have had no other experience in other schools, like the government system or international schools, really very narrow-minded when it comes to their teaching … I think you've got to understand those different personalities and the background these students and families are coming from. (T11)

T11 clarified that making a connection with students and understanding their cultural backgrounds were two skills needed by teachers to be successful in catering to the aspirations of Sunnyside students, which now represented diverse cultural groups. This teacher posited that not all teachers, particularly those that had little experience with a range of cultural groups or those who were new teachers, may not have the skills to deal with "different attitudes'' or "different cultural expectations of the clientele'' (T11). He found that some teachers were "not properly prepared and educated on how to deal with the cultural differences because they haven't had exposure to it'' (T11) and he suggested that some may be "narrow-minded'' in their teaching towards some students, and in another comments, he identified what he considered a "racism'' to "the sub-continental kids here … among some of the staff'' (T11). To combat this, the teacher sought more professional development so educators could work through their misunderstandings of other

cultures in order to cater for a culturally diverse student body. The growing diversity of the school is a critical aspect for Sunnyside stakeholders to consider, in light of Appadurai's (2004) observations that aspirations are culturally informed. This growing diversity in the school and other changes will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. This is also a point I consider in the implications.

6.5   Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the discussion from previous chapters that identified participating Sunnyside teacher views of student aspirations and subsequent roles that they perceived themselves performing was extended. This chapter focused on the processes that Sunnyside teachers developed over time to work with student aspirations, and uncertainties that teachers faced in these interactions. To communicate the processes and uncertainties that these teachers faced, there were links, where possible, to the formal and informal roles identified and named earlier, namely carer, vocationalist, navigator, cheerleader, dissembler, dreamslayer, guru, teammate, networker, and interrogator. In performing these roles, teachers often experienced role confusion as various roles came into conflict. The chapter outlined the frequent discussions that teacher participants had around student aspirations and the lack of guidance that left teachers to respond situationally, as well as face situations where they did not feel adequately equipped in terms of cultural competence. Highlighting aspects of teachers' role confusion, frequent discussions around aspirations with students, and cultural competence challenges is important for Sunnyside stakeholders so they understand where professional learning might be needed. The next chapter further develops the discussion around the complexity of teacher roles as perceptions of barriers and facilitators to student aspirations and teachers' associated roles are highlighted.

7   Data Analysis and Discussion: Teacher Perceptions of Barriers and Facilitators to Student Aspirations and Their Perceived Roles

7.1   Chapter overview

In this chapter, the data analysis focuses on the final of the four research sub-questions, *How do teachers perceive influences on student aspirations working as barriers and facilitators?* This question is key to understanding the central research question, *How do teachers understand their roles in relation to engaging with student aspirations?* The specific data that informed this chapter has been outlined in Table 3.6, and includes teacher responses to survey and interview questions where they described aspects of the environment working as barriers and facilitators to their perceived roles with student aspirations. The chapter builds on the previous data analysis and discussion chapters, which focused on Sunnyside teacher understandings of the formation of student aspirations, teachers' perceived roles, and processes and uncertainties when working with student aspirations.

This chapter describes the four overarching factors stemming from the analysis of data that participating teachers perceived as social and structural barriers or facilitators to student aspirations and/or teacher roles with student aspirations, which include:

- family expectations,
- school culture,
- school factors, and
- external testing.

For the purposes of this chapter, the social and structural barriers are considered factors that teachers perceive as hindering the development of student aspirations and associated teacher roles, while facilitators are considered factors that teachers perceive as enabling student aspirations and associated teacher roles.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) conceptions of influences on child development as nested structures, with the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, was used to conceptualise the data collected at Sunnyside School. Figure 7.1 presents a visual of where the four factors would be placed using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model as the theoretical underpinning for the interpretation. The data analysis indicated that teachers were more acutely aware of factors affecting the microsystem, which is where they form part of the environmental context of the school; however, the barriers and facilitators identified have links to the macrosystem, which refers to societal attitudes about school and testing, along with the chronosystem, signaling changes to the overall system in time. The overarching factors are visually presented in Figure 7.1.
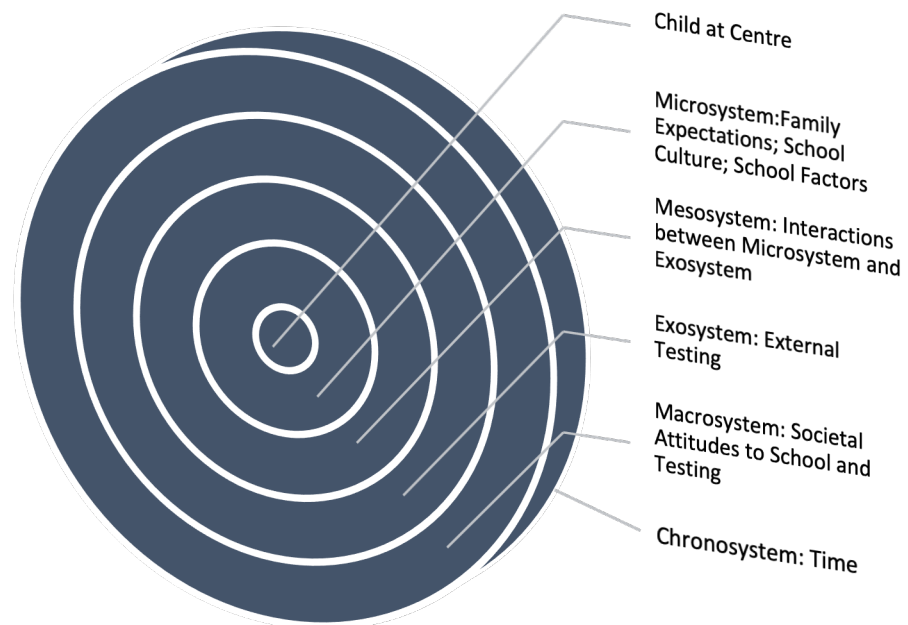
Figure 7.1. Teacher perceptions of Barriers and Facilitators to Student Aspirations, populated in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model. Source: Adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1979) The Ecology of Human Development. Boston, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Figure 7.1. highlights both the participatory and observing roles of teachers during formation of student aspirations. This interpretation was assisted by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) contentions about the "interrelations'' (p. 209) between the microsystem and the macrosystem, termed the mesosystem. In the mesosystem, as explained by Sirin et al. (2004), "the dynamic interactions between individuals and their sociocultural contexts has a profound influence on one's future aspirations'' (p. 449). This chapter highlights teachers' abilities to perceive the structural barriers and facilitators at work on student aspirations. I found that participating teachers played a role as observers, or in assisting students in the interactions within the mesosystem, engaging with factors at work on students' development of aspirations.

7.2   Family Expectations as Barrier and Facilitator

The findings aim to contribute to current academic literature about student aspirations as it specified participating teacher views on how family expectations worked as both facilitators and barriers to student aspirations and associated teacher roles. As discussed in the literature review, various researchers asserted the importance of family expectations on student aspirations (Alloway et al., 2004; Bowden & Doughney, 2012; Gil-Flores et al., 2011; James, 2002; Nguyen & Blomberg,

2014). This project canvased Sunnyside teacher views on this phenomenon. In the data, some participating teachers found parents to be facilitating aspirations through encouraging students to aim high and entertain university aspirations, whereas others labelled them intrusive and demanding, making unrealistic demands on students and teachers. The data in this section links back to Chapter 4, where teacher perceptions of aspiration as culturally, socially, and relationally influenced were discussed.

7.2.1   Participant Conception of Parental Expectations

Participating teachers perceived some parent expectations as facilitating student aspirations by expecting higher results. According to T14, changes within the school had heightened the importance of aspirations at the school as many families pursued specific types of aspirations for their children, such as sought-after university places. He reflected on his perception of the changing expectations of parents, where "15 years ago'' (T14) some families were content if the child was happy, whereas now, there was a pressure for a high ATAR score and university entrance, and "an ATAR of 90 is a failure'' (T14): "And what we are now faced with is people are going no, (laughs), they will be going to Melbourne, they will be doing medicine, they will be doing law, and it's your job to make sure that they get in there'' (T14). Parental expectation such as this was highlighted by Campbell et al. (2009) when they suggested parents exercised choice in the school market to ensure their children had an education that would lead to university and a job. This data showed parental perceptions of certain student ATAR scores as a ``failure'' (T14), demonstrating a parental expectation of excellence in Sunnyside school.

Yet, the changing demands from parents on teachers and students were perceived by some participants as a barrier on student aspirations; in particular, teachers perceived pressure on their role to meet these expectations. This echoed the survey data, which revealed that almost 40% of participating Sunnyside teachers felt pressure from families on their roles with student aspirations about three to four times a year. This type of pressure was clarified through the interview data, as teachers were expected to meet parent demands for specific types of aspirations and some families saw it as a teacher's role to ensure a student's place in university or other pathways they had envisaged for their children.

T4 gave a specific example of how parents may put pressure on teachers. The teacher was attempting to help accommodate a slightly different aspiration that the parent wanted, but the parent told T4 she did not have the same cultural reference point, and could not understand the aspiration:

The mother actually said to me, you're not Asian, you don't understand, and you are not an Asian mother, you don't know what that means, but for me, I'm one of those people, I'm not, it doesn't worry me, but I worry about what happens to those kids after I have those conversations sometimes. (T4)

This example illustrated how a parental expectation might form a barrier to student aspirations as it limited the scope of what the parent is willing to accept. A further comment indicated how teachers could provide expert advice, but this advice might be taken or ignored: "But, we have sometimes sent letters and said we do not recommend that you know, that, it is against, just so that you know, when the ATAR does come back at 30, we can say, we did try, so…'' (T4). This highlighted how a teacher's role was bounded by what the parents wanted for their students. This fit with recent literature, where in Tranter's (2012) work, she found that some teachers' comments resonated with Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction, such as: "`I teach a lot of very intelligent kids but I think the bottom line is they have grown up in a particular culture which works against academic success''' (p. 910). Here Tranter used the word culture to refer to the environment or background of the home. In my research, some students might have had the advantage of attending a private school and coming from a higher SES, but the same logic applied: students and teachers might be pressured by parents of various backgrounds to gain specific results or enter specific fields, despite what the child wanted or what the teacher thought was possible for the student, based on student prior performance. This will also connect to my discussion about demographic changes later in this chapter where Sunnyside experienced changing demands for the school as it attempted to market itself as a competitor in the school marketplace, appealing to more diverse, competitive cultural groups.

The data also indicates that teachers see the parental expectations coming across as barriers when there was a mismatch with students' desires, or when the parents did not push their students at all. T1 expressed her view that parents were a strong influence on student aspirations, "I think home and parents is the number one influence on kids' aspirations'' (T1), and she described how parental influence on student aspirations intensified as students progressed through school, "I think there is a percentage of families where they will leave it up to the kids and say we'll support you whatever you do, but I think that is a minority'' (T1).

Some teachers also observed parental pressure on student aspirations in the junior school, as the parental perspective formed a barrier against a student's natural progression with school and personal aspirations. As discussed earlier in the section on teachers' perception of aspirations as culturally influenced, T10 shared an example of a student in year 4, whose parents were putting immense pressure on her to succeed with their aspirations for her:

She has to study every morning. She has to study every afternoon, and they just expect more and more. They put her in to do external maths competitions, to do further study, and, that at the moment is a real barrier for me because I'm looking at the whole child and I can see that this child is going to implode if she is not given an opportunity to be a child and if she is constantly pushed to the point where she is going to implode …. In terms of what happens at home, I have no, I have no exposure to what's happening at home nor would I want to, but I also can't control the parents' choices for their daughter. (T10)

The teacher faced an inflexible barrier of parental expectation for a child. As a result of this barrier, she expressed her trouble communicating her opinion and she appeared worried about disastrous consequences for the student – the student would metaphorically "implode'' (T10). Her perceived duty of care was about the student's well-being, and she wanted to nurture the student through a learning process, not to force the student down a particular path. Perhaps here, the best way to compare the teacher's frustration was to liken it to what a teacher revealed to Bok (2010), which was that when teachers were under pressure for students to perform, it could be like "making them do a play without a script'' (p. 175). In contrast to Bok's research, Sunnyside was a private school, but the notion of the little girl struggling with the script that the family wants for her was still valid: the script might be in contrast to the girl's interests or desires.

In contrast to the situations above, another barrier was the absence of family expectation, something identified by T4:

Deep down I actually think kids need to be happy, I'm a believer in happy kids will learn but it does get a little bit challenging if parents will not push them at all….I think, from my point-of-view, some students just, their parents are happy as long as they are here and happy, there has been and never been no parental pressure to improve results. (T4)

Some parents did not see their role with student aspirations, explained previously by T11 in Chapter 4 around the concept of networker. Teachers, like T4 and T11, aimed to educate parents about their role in student aspirations in addition to the role of the school. As in Turner's (2001) role theory, and discussed in Chapter 4, teachers might be taking on additional informal roles as parent networkers and parent educators. In the absence of an aspirational push or a lack of family expectations, the school, or more specifically, teachers, helped provide students with what Appadurai (2004) described as a navigational map in the routes of aspiration.

7.2.2   Participant Conception of Parent Misunderstandings

An example provided by T13 expanded the theme of parental expectation to an unrealistic barrier formed by parent misunderstanding. He said some parents assumed the school was like the movie "The Matrix'' (T13) where people can be plugged into a machine to download information into their brain (if you're unfamiliar with the movie, this is after taking a pill). One of his perceived roles was to debunk this mythical way of thinking with families and explain that the way to success was through hard work, and students had to be prepared for class each day, as parents had to support students at home:

> … there is a parental drive, that you know, their child wants to become this or
> that, and so there's the expectations that we will enable that to happen … for
> some people the idea that education is just a service industry, that you can come
> up here and learn real good, we'll just plug you in, it's like "The Matrix," and I
> have openly, I haven't been batted down for it, I'm glad of that, told people, "No,
> it's an active, cooperative process, that unless a young person gets into the class
> and engages, they're not going to get as much out of the learning process" … but
> ultimately it's the learners' preparation before class and review afterwards and
> the ways in which parents can support that, and foster that at home that enables
> the real progress … (T13)

Specifically, a lack of parental understanding about classroom learning formed a barrier here. This teacher pointed out that parents needed to understand the classroom and to encourage their students to engage. T13's view alluded to one informal role of the teacher, discussed in Chapter 4, of networker, where parents needed to be informed about optimal ways of preparing for class, which ultimately assisted with long-term aspirations.

Informing parents about optimum ways to become involved was perceived as difficult in light of parent misunderstanding about the classroom activities. This informal role of the teacher, as networker, was not formally identified by Marjoribanks (1998), but important, when he contends that harmony was needed with teachers and parents in relation to student aspirations. This harmony can be difficult to achieve, as some teachers perceive themselves working in opposition to parents, or to clarifying understandings, and this formed a barrier to student aspirations. For example, T13 observed that some parents, and students, mistakenly believe that poor-ranking ATARs brought down other students' scores, and he was often clarifying this idea. T12 echoed this when she communicated that there were some traditional mindsets that some parents held, which could be expanded to include new orientations of careers and aspirations: "I actually think we could … educate parents about what students are experiencing but how the world of work has changed''

(T12). T11 similarly explained that "I feel like the teacher's role is as much to educate the parents to understand their kids' aspirations and to further them (T11).

Intervening in parental understanding was not something participating Sunnyside teachers actively aimed to do, but sometimes it was necessary. Sometimes there were points, suggested T14, that parents had to be told that, based on their child's results, that a student might not be able to pursue a particular pathway: "there comes a point where the school does has a responsibility to lay the facts out in front of the child and the parent'' (T14). This might not be common, as there were multiple entry points to some pathways, but it happened. T4, who held a position of responsibility at Sunnyside, had a difficult task at times in relaying this information:

> Sometimes it about explaining to parents and this is difficult one for parents they sometimes think if the child just works harder, they'll get it, but as you know with particular types of maths or science, if you just don't get it, you won't get it, there isn't a magic wand I can wave to make somebody be able to understand specialist maths, so sometimes that's the hard conversation, getting parents to understand that their child will never get more than a D in something like chemistry… I try to come at it form a welfare point of view and say, we want to put them into something they can experience success in, rather than something they are something they are always going to be demoralised in, so there's that aspect of having to talk to parents. (T4)

This was further clarified by T4's example of how a parent asked her frankly if the student could achieve success in the medical field. If not, the parent was prepared to move her child to another school: ``One parent wanted me to give her an answer if she should pull the kids out of the school and sent them back to the country they've come from because she knew she could pay for medical degrees over there'' (T4). The parent's response to T4's suggestion that the students were possibly on track for nursing or health sciences was "that was embarrassing, we're not going to have that conversation" (T4). Again, reaching a harmonious view with parents was a difficult task for the teacher. This was not the case for all parents, as T6 contrasted this by saying, "not every parent is expecting one hundred percent. Just their best" (T6). This misunderstanding that the parents might have in relation to what is needed to further their student's aspiration could be related to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) conception of the macrosystem, which is the outer level where societal attitudes would be positioned. The dominant messages from the media and government about the prestige of a university place (Sellar et al., 2011; Snowden & Lewis, 2015) may be influencing parents' perceptions of what they value for their children, with parents potentially misunderstanding the various pathways available to their children. The next section discusses

teacher perceptions of parental intervention as both a facilitator and barrier to student aspirations and teachers' associated roles.

7.2.3   Participant Conception of Parental Intervention

The data further highlighted that the marketisation of Sunnyside as a high performance school in order to attract families impacted the role of teachers with student aspirations. Certainly, in some situations where parental pressure was involved for students to reach certain scores, some teachers noticed that parents were engaged, which was a facilitator, but the barrier was that parents were willing to question teachers about marks resulting in pressure placed on teachers. Campbell et al. (2009), in their work about school choice, described instances of parents using a personal power within the school to influence their child's progress, in an effort to get them the best scores generally directed towards university pathways. T3 suggested that some parents considered themselves acutely aware of their child's ability, and if the child was not reaching a particular score, then it must be the fault of the teacher:

> …expectations from the parents will get hammered, oh, last year my child was an 80 plus student, this year, they are a 70, well, it's a different type of math or different type of English, and it's put back on the staff, by that being their focus there, the time to focus on the students talking about their potential careers and stuff, I don't think that's there. (T3)

This teacher was referring to the pressure on some teachers from some parents. He observed that some parents insinuated that if a student was not performing well then it was related to the teacher and not the child's work ethic or changing ability level due to the altered course material from one year to the next. T13 found that when parents approached him dissatisfied with a teacher, he tried to give certain responsibility back to the parents:

> … [parents will] come to me with sometimes an issue with a member of staff or a particular subject and a member of staff to which I'm happy to mediate a way towards they can solve the problem, but I will ask, beyond the questions I ask a member of staff, "What are you doing?" and if I have to speak to the parents, "What are they doing at home, how much preparation are they doing, are they asking for extra help, are they prepared for classes?" (T13)

Wanting parents to ensure students were prepared for classes was T13. He also suggested that the demands on teachers of millennials was harder as, in his opinion, it was a generation savvy with technology and getting information. The demands on teachers were not just to help raise the

scores of students but to make sure they could make the content interesting and appealing as well. T12 had a pragmatic way of approaching scenarios when tensions arose with parents in relation to a students' aspiration – she created a way to remove emotion from the interchange of ideas – a process of her own design as described in Chapter 5:

> You might personally feel that a child should be steered in a particular direction because of your interactions with them and your assessment of their abilities and interests and what have you, but the family may feel a different way too…So, just delivering all the information to them about different scenarios, making them aware of them, it's more about providing all the knowledge, really. So, when I say, take away emotions, it's not to put my sentiments forward and make them strong. (T12)

In this example, T12 had a practiced, practical, non-emotional way of holding discussions with families about student aspirations. However, some teachers found a way through barriers by just doing what they could, as T7 tried to work towards the aspirations of the parents, but find some expected the impossible:

> I can only work with the student that I have, I can't work with the student that you think I have, I can't make them into something that they are not going to achieve, I can only work with what they've got…And, that means if I can push them to be a little bit better than they are, you know, excellent, but I'm not going to get a D-grade student to an A overnight … sometimes I think the aspirations of the parents are definitely playing on. (T7)

Like T12, this teacher had negotiated a way to not let the tension overtake her role by developing her own process, working incrementally, to "push them to be a little better than they are'' (T12) She explained this to the parents when given the opportunity, demonstrating the role of networker, as discussed in Chapter 4. In this situation, parent expectations could be a barrier but teachers worked with these expectations, when possible, and tried to turn them into facilitators.

In this section, teacher perceptions of family expectations on student aspirations were discussed in terms of working as both barriers and facilitators to student aspirations and teachers' associated roles. In the next section, teacher perceptions on aspects of the school culture are discussed as both barriers and facilitators on student aspirations and teachers' associated roles.

7.3   Perceived Aspirant School Culture as Barrier and Facilitator

The survey and interview data supported participant perceptions of student aspirations as linked with perceptions of the school having an aspirant culture and being a safe space, which worked as both a facilitator and barrier to student aspirations and teachers' associated roles.

7.3.1   Participant Conception of Aspirant Culture

Survey data revealed that participant teachers perceived the school as an aspirant environment. There were 39 teacher responses on the survey to the open-ended question `Do you perceive any connection between this school environment and student aspirations?' All of the respondents agreed in some form. One teacher responded that, "this school has aspirations as part of its DNA,'' and another, "aspects of the school have a genuine concern for aspirations.'' Others touched on the idea that the school encouraged `high' aspirations, such as "Yes – one that promotes success and achievement will help student seek this later in life,'' and "The school strongly encourages teachers to set the bar high and encourage student aspirations to meet that standard.'' Collectively, these responses indicated a general consensus that the school promoted success, achievement, and high standards, as teachers perceived these factors as facilitators to student aspirations. These collective responses were possibly indicative of what Reay et al. (2001) labelled as ``a school effect'' where an institutional habitus which could produce a ``semi-autonomous'' expectation for students to attend university (p. 35). The following section outlines how the deliberate push by administration might be viewed retrospectively as intending to create this type of ``school effect'' (Reay et al., p. 35).

One teacher in particular who saw an aspirant school culture as a facilitator to student aspirations was T14 as provided a historical overview of how the Sunnyside school board set out to change aspiration within the school. His comments illustrated how a shift in the school's level of `aspiration' for its students, over time, entangled with `expectation' for students, and shifted teacher roles. According to T14, the ``expectations'' for staff and students changed, starting with ``little things … like the way the kids' dressed, the opportunities they have, their approach to studies, the whole graft of things that go together to basically enable them to have the tools … to do whatever they want to do when they leave school'' (T14). His view was that moving the boundaries on a range of small tangible targets eventually set expectations and facilitated student aspirations. The impact of school ethos on aspiration is an ambiguous concept reported by Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al. (2015) to be influential.

This view of T14 as a push by the school might be seen as changing aspects of the school to be associated with an aspirant environment, where expectations became a "continually improving point" (T14) and specifically ATAR scores became one tangible measure of this strategy: "we set

benchmarks and gradually those benchmarks keep getting higher…So, the aspiration, what we aspire to isn't a fixed point, it's a continually improving point" (T14). This upward pressure from aspirations for its students – to expectations – had possibly altered the culture of the school into a more "high stakes game'' (T14) and changed the role of teachers over time: "the role of the teacher is to understand why it is a high stakes game and help facilitate the higher aspirations being met" (T14). A changing school environment focused on results, as highlighted by Skourdoumbis (2014), would impact the way that Sunnyside teachers interacted with students about aspirations. In this type of environment, teachers would demonstrate their complicity to participate in a game of raising student performance and aspirations, as Bourdieu (1986) categorised some environments. Teachers could be said to have been informally contracted into a culture of performativity (Ball, 2003b), "a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions – both material and symbolic'' (p. 216). In the context of these changes, the Sunnyside school context risked creating what some researchers deemed as deficit conceptions of some aspirations, with an emphasis on "high'' and others "low'' (Bok, 2010; Gale et al., 2013; Gale & Parker, 2015a).

This data analysis highlighted that teacher perceptions were mixed about the notion of aspiration at Sunnyside as a continually, upward-moving point. One teacher, T13, took encouragement from the push from management for constant improvement; from this perspective, this school-wide push might be seen as a facilitator to student aspirations:

> One thing I'm glad about being here … because there is always that insistence on getting better and refining and getting better, and that's wonderful, you don't stagnate, because if you stagnate you accept that from the students as well, so everyone is trying to get that little bit better all the time, which is great, teaching never gets boring, but it's that trying to get … you can't make young people realize just how precious potential is necessarily, no matter how emotive your speech is, but you can at least get them positive in their mindsets towards achieving their aspirations that they can do it … (T13)

Here, T13 celebrated the upward push and envisioned his role to press for better results, to avoid stagnation in the school. Thus, playing his role in relationship to aspirations, combined with the school effort, worked to facilitate student aspirations. His role was to help students be "positive in their mindsets'' (T13) about an aspiration, while aiming to fulfil the school's need for continually improving results. T13's comments also illustrated that aspect of Turner's role theory (2001) which "deals with the organisation of social behaviour at both the individual and the collective levels'' (p. 233). It was possible to see T13's sense of a role for enabling student aspirations, although not

formally defined, was influenced by the school management's understood expectation of teachers to continually improve student scores and promote aspiration. In this way, T13's comments are suggestive that student aspirations can be a marketing tool to attract families.

Despite the school's perceived expectation of higher results working as a facilitator for some, the comment of T1 illustrated how this expectation could also become a barrier due to a lack of tangible information about how to achieve it. T1 described how management pushed "continuous improvement," but without providing needed support to some teachers:

> [There is] an expectation of continuous improvement but not necessarily how that is to be achieved. But I mean there is always the message from the school management that that's about, the reason we are striving for these improved, measurable results, because we want students to have greater options with aspirations, which is a legitimate argument. (T1)

This teacher perceived a need for this expectation of improvement but articulates that the ways to accomplish the improvements were not always obvious to teachers. Some Sunnyside teachers needed explicit instruction about how to accomplish this demand. In a situation where the school was looking for constant improvement, specifically in ATAR scores, teachers found themselves not having enough information to fulfil this role.

Teachers suggested the new demand for delivery of careers information in tutor group time placed them under more pressure, as further discussed later in this chapter. This perceived pressure illustrated what Turner's role theory (2001) suggested could happen, "where people might be forced to take on two contradictory actions within a role'' (p. 246) as teachers attempted to play a pastoral role with students while pushing them for better results. This point was specifically argued by Hearn and Galvin (2015) as they contended teachers might feel overwhelmed by mounting pressures for student academic successes and an expectation to provide a pastoral role too in a whole school approach to guidance, with little in the latter.

This data indicated that the constant pressure for increasing performance outcomes may affect some teacher conceptions of the school culture and their roles, which although the school administration intended as a facilitator for student aspirations, could ironically result in a barrier to them. As mentioned in Chapter 5 in discussing the role of the dissembler, T14 acknowledged that not all teachers understood they had an underlying role to assist students with aspirations, and this might pose a barrier to students: "Now, teachers will also flip in and out of buying into aspirations … I've been guilty in staff rooms of … taking the mickey out of aspirations, and at the same time, being responsible for implementing those aspirations'' (T14). Again, in this aspirant school culture, as long as the teachers presented the acceptable face to the students – and parents – then they were

welcome to think and, quietly, say to other teachers what they really thought about a students' aspiration. As Turner (2001) suggested in his role theory, teachers need to address "conflicting expectations from students, parents, and supervisors'' and conflict can occur when "roles incorporate different functions'' (p. 244). It is important that teachers navigated the boundaries of private and public faces, keeping their actions amenable with the aspirant environment of the school.

Voicing an irony about the expectation from the school was that students would do well was T8, who suggested the push resulted in a student apathy and it worked as a barrier to the aspirant environment. From her perspective, a lessening sense of pride in the school meant a move towards student apathy:

> … over time there has been a movement away from this pride associated with being a [Sunnyside] student and what that means, and the values that instils, towards this ego-centric (laughs) culture, and this ego-centric thinking, and I do think that impacts this aspirational stuff that we're talking about, because these kids that I work with, they are very much driving this, we want apathy to essentially be limited … (T8)

In this comment, the teacher suggested that other teachers, and other students, were aware of the "apathy'' (T8) of some students, and there was a goal for this to be "limited'' (T8) and make changes, so all the school shares the same "aspirational thinking'' (T8). T10 designated that despite the perception of an aspirant environment, not all students shared a similar mindset about aspirations, with some not having had an aspiration in mind at all, placing teachers under pressure to "fire up some aspirational goal'' (T10):

> And what, hand on heart, I think [Sunnyside] does an absolutely fantastic job in smoothing the cracks, it's not even so much formalised, it's just, well maybe it is, maybe it is intentional, you know that accident by design thing, certainly in that space, especially in the fact that we've got such well-behaved students here, it is teacher heaven that we are able to get them safe enough to feel they can invest and can go through it, it's not universal yet … there are going to be some you are literally banding your head against a brick wall trying to fire up some aspirational goal … (T10)

Just because the school was perceived as aspirational did not necessarily mean that all students `performed' in the same way or develop an aspiration in the way that they were `expected' to. This emphasis of aspiration implicitly revealed that made it easier for teachers if students had

certain types of aspirations, such as university, because it fit with the school's push for raised aspirations, as discussed earlier. However, as some literature argues, students are aware of society's push for university outcomes, where Bourdieu's notions of taste explaining how society generally classifies student aspirations, with university aspiration as "distinction,'' while alternative aspirations are "tasteless'' (Gale & Parker, 2014, pp. 143-4). And, as student aspirations are formed while students are in the throes of complex identity work (Stahl, 2015), some may be self-regulating because it is "not for the likes of us'' (Zipin et al., 2015, p. 233), or are limited by the cultural "maps'' required for certain pathways (Bok, 2010, p. 164). Further, students may grow weary of the goal of university with the chance that jobs may be hard to find after (Snowden & Lewis, 2015). Another teacher suggested on the survey that advice or ideas from school staff could result in negative reactions from some students, where the pressure to do well could have the opposite outcome: "some students resent school suggestions and will behave reactively as a result'' (Survey). Taken together, the comments indicate that although the school may be perceived as an aspirant environment, students may not always connect with the expectations of the school and in some instances, there is an undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the upward pressure from teachers and students, serving as a barrier to students' aspiration and teacher roles with student aspirations. The next section examines how participating teachers identified barriers working simultaneously as facilitators in perception of the safety of the aspirant culture.

7.3.2   Participant Conception of School as Sheltered

The data analysis showed a connection between participating Sunnyside teachers' perception of the school as a sheltered space to the aspirant school culture. This section will consider how teachers considered the undercurrent of factors working as facilitators simultaneously working as barriers. It was identified that teacher perceptions of student aspirations were connected to the notion of a safe, sheltered space, which included an emphasis on high results and a general notion of happiness amongst students. A safe environment was sought by families when choosing a private school, as highlighted by Campbell et al. (2009), as they suggested many Australian families feared bullying and other problems at public schools. Angus (2015) noticed this trend, when he discussed this expectation as a fantasy created by school choice: "It is claimed that market competition forces schools to continuously improve their standards in order to attract parent-consumers of the educational `product' they are offering'' (p. 395). Yet, despite this perception of a safe space at Sunnyside, a private school, teachers perceived aspects of the school made it too sheltered for some students to find their independence upon graduation.

Teacher perceptions of the space as safe, through targeting aspirational thinking, parental expectations and student happiness was evident in my data. T1 commented that "the climate here

is pretty aspirational and I think that's only increasing'' (T1) and T10 explained that "I think it's viewed as aspirational from a parental perspective'' (T10). T12 described that the school helped with student happiness, "I do believe our school environment is quite different to those of others. I do find in general most of our students are, are quite happy. They are students that are, have high expectations for themselves, in general, and so do the parents'' (T12). Teachers linked the high self-expectation of students with happiness, contributing to the overall aspirational environment of the school. This general perception of a happy, aspirational environment fits with the one that Campbell et al. (2009) identified as highly sought after in school choice contexts.

The data showed teacher perceptions of students retaining "innocence" at Sunnyside. To illustrate this, T2 likened the school to the *Sound of Music* movie where the students were not pressured into thinking about adult things, and could enjoy school:

> In this school, it's more like the Von Trapps at this school than other schools. And, the way that children, in the school, children and most of the children are children because generally they might have less stress in their life, they don't have things that adults should be dealing with. They can enjoy being children and the innocence and the open-mindedness helps them just to enjoy being a child, being a student. I think even in this kind of school, I would be exactly the same as in any other schools I've worked out. The school I worked at in London, the doors were locked and you could only get out through two sets of locked doors in reception, and there were policeman. (Laughs) A little bit different. (T2)

Here, the teacher identified certain aspects of the school, such as lack of stress, a protected environment, and an open-mindedness, as facilitators to student aspirations, and characteristics of students, such as "innocence and the open-mindedness'' (T2). He contrasted this to a school in London where students would not have had the same experience in a potentially violent or dangerous environment or neighbourhood where they had to go through "locked doors'' (T2) to get out of the building. This sense of safety was found in some teaching spaces, as T1 specifically observed how the physical teaching space was a possible facilitator to the discussion of aspirations, which was not available to all teachers, but her course cultivated aspirations through student talk in the area:

> I think it's because of the physical environment in the room I teach in. I think it fosters conversation because and I think this applies to other practical subjects too. Students might be working on a process but they can still have a conversation at the same time about something else. So, if they overhear

somebody talking about what they want to do or one of their aspirations, sometimes there is a group discussion, so not when we are doing theory or the work that is very direct teaching but when we are doing practical work. (T1)

Both T2 and T1 articulated how the physical environment of the school or classroom could cultivate a sense of safety with students, contributing to the perception of the school as facilitator of aspiration.

Yet, although the analysis revealed the school environment working as a facilitator to student aspirations, a number of teacher responses indicated a barrier in the way some aspirations are managed. There was a similarity in the following comments in that at the beginning of the statement, each teacher pointed out an aspect of the school that they found to be promoting aspirations in some way; further, the similarity continues in that each teacher ends their comment with something the school is lacking and could do better to promote aspirations:

I believe that this school does provide an environment that values aspirations. I do also believe that those aspirations may be conservative and limited in nature due to the conservative environment and parents' priorities. (Survey)

I think the school does create an aspirational environment however I believe it primarily relates to achieving results in NAPLAN and VCE. Students are offered multiple opportunities to gain insight into various career pathways. (Survey)

Whilst there are some great educators through our school whose main aim is to develop lifelong learning skills for our students to draw upon, I feel that this is an area that needs to be more actively incorporated into the learning opportunities that we provide. (Survey)

Each comment similarly observed the school promoting aspirations, but all three teachers also suggested that the way the school approaches aspirations was limited in some way. The first comment linked valued student aspirations to more conservative choices, where more historical notions of success might be viewed as positive, such medicine or law. The second comment married the school's focus on aspiration with tests, with high performance on tests as a manifestation of both student and school success. And, the last comment positioned the notion of lifelong learning as a concept that could be developed further within the school, not just an emphasis on success markers while in school. These comments were interpreted with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) conceptions of a child's microsystem, the most inner layer of factors in his nested structures, where students attending Sunnyside were exposed to this school and teachers each day and this type of

environment would impact their aspirational outlook. Here, teachers perceived both the facilitators and barriers to student aspirations in the school environment, based on the environment and what is expected of staff and students.

In addition, the idea of the school as both a safe and nurturing environment could ironically become a barrier to student aspirations. This was highlighted by T4 who discussed how Sunnyside was different than other schools, and had a culture of inclusion, which was a facilitator to students feeling comfortable for pursuing and achieving their aspirations. The barrier was getting students to leave:

> I think we are a very caring environment. I think you know we deal with things like dealing straight up, we sort of try to deal with things, we don't let things...so I think we're often sent students that might be a little bit odd or different in another school where they might attract negative attention, here, it doesn't really happen. We have students who are outwardly gay and nobody picks on them and we have students who have gender identification issues and you know the boys who you would assume that would pick on them will go and have a chat with them. The culture is quite inclusive.... they are happy and they are safe, they are doing well, it's hard to them make them really push themselves because I guess they are not striving to get out of this, if that makes sense. (T4)

Students were encouraged to support one another in a culture of "inclusion'' (T4). This type of environment facilitated students' diverse aspirations through promoting a sense of safety and security, even if students have "gender identification issues'' (T4). T4 continued that she found the school did such a good job of nurturing students and assisting them in VCE that it made it hard for them to leave. In this way, the onus is on the school to support students to overcome potential perceptions of risk when leaving the school environment This connected with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) idea about the developing child finding it easier to move into successive environments with more exposure. For example, some students from Sunnyside lacking exposure to university or other environments might find it intimidating, as this teacher suggested.

In this section, a discussion of teachers' comments demonstrated that the notion of the school as a sheltered space was a facilitator to student aspirations; however, some challenged the idea that a safe space for students always promoted an aspirant environment. In the next section, the discussion moves to school factors working as barriers and facilitators to student aspirations and teachers perceived roles.

7.4 Participant Conception of School Factors as Barriers and Facilitators

In this section, the data is used to argue that participating Sunnyside teachers perceived several school factors working as simultaneous facilitators and barriers to student aspirations and teachers' associated roles. This section focuses on the changes within the school and how aspects like school growth and demographic changes in the study body affected student aspirations. Further, the discussion focusses on participating teacher perceptions of peers' aspirational work as well as the tutor group teachers delivering careers education. This section positions the data analysis in the midst of the current academic literature as the school environment was thought by several researchers to play a strong role in relation to student aspirations (Rowe et al., 2014; Webb et al., 2015). Specifically, schools could help students understand their ability level and this helps form future plans (Beavis & Masters, 2005, p. 56), while students that perceived a supportive school climate have higher aspirations (Plucker, 1998). The school factors identified were positioned in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) conception of the microsystem of the developing child.

7.4.1 Participant Conception of Demographic Changes

Changes to the school, as discussed in the overview of Sunnyside School in Chapter 3, meant it had become an attractive option to a diverse range of families, most notably a broader range of cultures and wealth, discussed earlier in teacher perceptions of the contextual influences on student aspirations. As literature around school choice reveals, as schools are selected by families, teachers could be faced with mounting pressure to perform a certain way to achieve results (Ball, 2003b), and some parents were also looking for "role models'' (Beamish & Morey, 2013, p. 27) in educators. This section discusses how perceived demographic changes worked as both facilitators and barriers to student aspirations and teachers associated roles in the midst of an increasingly, sought-after school environment.

Early on in the school's history, the majority of students were from the local town, the neighbouring town as well as smaller surrounding country towns (School Document, 2017a). At the time this study was conducted, the school drew students from a larger radius, taking in Melbourne's growth corridors and even reaching into areas considered part of Melbourne (School Document, 2015). This shift in student numbers had also resulted in a change of student demographic, both in student background and in family wealth. This changing demographic was documented in the 2015 Annual Report, where the principal discussed how the diversity in the school had changed to now include students from 30 different national backgrounds (School Document, 2015). In addition, the 2016 Annual Report referred to Melbourne's growing outer suburbs, accounting for the demographic changes in the school (School Document, 2016).

This change to the demographic was present in teacher comments. T2 explained his understanding of the early days of the school where there was less diversity:

> So, from what I understand, when the school started, the demographic of the school was more, you'd have trades people's children and that's changing more with, we've got the same mix, other or more affluent parents in different kinds of jobs sending their children here. (T2)

In this comment, the teacher explained how school changes meant that it attracted affluent parents as well as the earlier demographic. Affluent parents were able to exercise choice in the school market, and this, in turn, was altering the aspirations within the school as a whole, as selective parents sought the case study school. Researchers such as Campbell et al. (2009) linked parents' work environments to school choices, suggesting a correlation between higher salaries and non-government schools. Angus (2015) explained that "schools and other service providers are expected to be responsible to market discipline and to adopt an enterprising approach by anticipating and satisfying the expectations of education consumers'' (p. 396).

At Sunnyside School, this shifting demographic seemed a facilitator of aspirations, as a growing population allowed for expansion and more opportunities for students, and a continuing rise in expectations of aspirations. Yet, the changes also worked as barriers, where conceptualisations of aspirations became a pressure for students to succeed with certain types or aspirations, such as university pathways, and this increased pressure on teacher roles to support these types of aspirations. Although the participating teachers perceived all aspirations to be of merit, as outlined in Chapter 4, they related a perceived pressure that some students felt familial, cultural or systemic pressure that valued some aspirations more highly than others. Again, using Turner's (2001) ideas of role sets, as the student aspirations changed, so were the teachers' role impacted.

As more diversified consumers chose the school, the nature of aspirations was affected as previously discussed in the administrative push for aspirant culture, again apparent in a comment from T14, who linked the changing aspirations over time to changing SES within the school:

> The other thing that is happening in school is that the school is actually getting wealthier. Now, um, it's an interesting chicken and egg thing. Is the school getting interest from wealthier parents because it's perceived to have a culture that is aspirational, or, is it getting, um, parents, because it is getting parents who are wealthier and better educated, they are by definition, uh, producing kids who will also be better educated, and aspirational. (T14)

According to T14, the ``school is actually getting wealthier''; he perceived this as altering the culture, in addition to the changes mentioned earlier by him in the section on aspirant school culture, with the students attending already arriving "better educated'' and "aspirational'' (T14). This comment reflected a reciprocity between teacher perceptions of the school as an aspirant environment with a similar parental perception. In choosing the school, T14 perceived that parents sought this perceived aspirant environment for their children, which aligned with the thinking of Campbell et al. (2009) and Angus (2015) above, which could help explain school changes in response to this desire by their consumers. School changes could be interpreted using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ideas to make a rippling affect through a student's microsystem, and also with Turner's (2001) description of how a change in student needs would impact teacher roles. These incremental changes over time impacted the roles that teachers played in handling student aspirations as expectations adjusted to the school marketplace.

Teacher perception of this changing demographic was that it became simultaneously both a facilitator and barrier to student aspirations and teacher roles as the public conception of the school changed. T11 linked the changing demographic to the rising prestige of the school. The growing prestige of the school was a drawcard for some cultural groups, which both facilitated and bound aspirations:

> I think among the sub-continental community, this school gets chosen, one
> because it's the only one of its type in the region and a large portion of the sub-
> continental community lives out this side of Melbourne and secondly they like
> the prestige of this type of environment … it's seen as something that needs to
> happen within their family and family is a big part of their community, so there is
> an expectation on these children to be the ones when they get older to support
> the family therefore they need to have career paths to allow that to happen so
> the parents choose career paths for them quite often. So, I think that aspect that
> has an effect on those student aspirations because they aren't given the
> opportunity to have any. (T11)

This teacher highlighted a Janus-faced impact of the school's changing demographic on student aspirations and teacher roles with student aspirations. Students' development sat in the context of these shifts, a focal point for Bronfenbrenner (1979), who considered how linkages between environmental factors surrounding a developing child were formed and negotiated amongst parents, teachers and the associated community. The types of parents described in the above comment were part of the process involved with facilitating aspiration within the school environment, as they sought a prestigious school culture offered by the case study school. This

prestige of a private school was linked with a concept of aspiration, where families had certain expectations for "career paths'' (T11) for their children as an outcome of attending this school; however, the barrier was when the teacher identified how some "parents choose career paths for them quite often'' (T11) and that some students "aren't given the opportunity to have any'' (T11). This contradictory nature of parents seeking environments where students aspire, yet having had set aspirations for the students, might be evidence of what Campbell et al. (2009) wrote about where they outlined the motivations for parents seeking private schools – class mobility and positive student demeanor. Students were at once encouraged, but simultaneously discouraged, from seeking out their own aspirations.

Wealth and other markers of prestige as a facilitator of parent aspiration for students was apparent in the data from the perspective of participating Sunnyside teachers. T1 and T10 both noticed the fact that the school was now drawing from a pool of wealthier families, more parents with a higher education background in addition to a greater number of wealthy students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Both T1 and T10 linked demographic changes with pursuit of specific types of aspirations expected by parents, such as careers like medicine or law requiring university, due to the cultural and social expectations of success:

> The SES of the school is going up and parents' education background is changing … so high income education levels, that's the trend, it's been changing over the last few years … some students will say their parents will be happy as long as they are a doctor or a lawyer or a dentist and so I think that those sorts of comments I'm hearing more frequently that I would have five years ago. So, I do think within the demographic there is an expectation … I think a lot of their parents feel strongly about educational achievement. (T1)

> They work really hard in their jobs, they, all of their money goes towards school fees, and then, you know, they want their children to achieve better than they ever did so they don't have to struggle the way they had to struggle, and at the other end of the spectrum, you've got the parents who are extremely … successful, in their positions, and they aspire for their children to be as successful, if not more successful that they are, so you've got the two ends of the spectrum, and both put a lot of pressure on the student aspirations and the opportunities that the students allow themselves to aspire to. (T10)

The way this phenomenon was explained by teacher participants was that some parents' concepts of aspirations linked to certain social and cultural expectations of success, plus they

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wanted value for money. The teachers' comments connected with another aspect of Campbell et al.'s (2009) where they noted an increase in migrant families seeking good quality education for children. Walker's (2006) argument that it was beneficial for schools to teach students to interrogate dominant messages from society about aspirational pathways, as well as educating them on resilience strategies, is relevant in relation to this comment, as students may need assistance in coping with mounting pressures or expectations about their futures.

For instance, one teacher identified a specific barrier that if not sensitive to the needs of specific families, teachers could miss the appropriate moments to engage with students about aspirations:

> I don't feel like many teachers these days are getting to the point where they
> have a strong enough connection with the kids where it reaches a point where
> they can discuss or even consider aspirations because a lot of them, because they
> lack these confidences in certain areas and experience in certain areas, well, they
> aren't able to make that leap and they are only really scratching the surface of
> each individual personality and each cultural aspect and all those related factors.
> (T11)

This comment not only signaled the need for teachers to become more aware of the cultural aspects of aspiration, as suggested by Appadurai (2004), but also linked with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) idea that "`learning and development are facilitated by the participation of the developing person…with someone with whom that person has develop a strong and enduring emotional attachment'' (p. 60). This comment highlighted that an outcome to these demographic changes is that teachers must work to overcome this perception as a barrier by developing bonds with students and ensuring student aspirations are being catered for at the school.

7.4.2 Participant Conception of Lack of Cohesiveness in Schools

The analysis indicated a perceived barrier in relationship to student aspirations and associated teacher roles due to a lack of cohesiveness in teacher understandings of their responsibilities in the junior and senior schools. At the time of data collection, Sunnyside was structured into two schools, the junior school, with students from Foundation to Year 6, and the secondary school, from year 7 to year 12. My interpretation was that these junior school teachers who agreed to an interview were acutely aware of student aspirations in the junior school and spoke about how more action needed to be taken by the school. The evidence indicates that those primary teachers who spoke to me in the interviews provided evidence of a perceived division between junior and secondary, which signaled teacher division about when student aspirations formed,

changed, or stabilized. This was apparent in the comments of T10, who described the division like having two different schools:

> The students will cross paths in the playground but they are distinctly senior
> school and junior school and the mindset is really strong in that culture. So, in
> terms of aspirations and the senior school teachers feeling that it's really starting
> at a year 7 or year 8, and then it stops at year 10, because at year 10 they are
> focusing on their career that really doesn't surprise me, because that is the
> culture. (T10)

This teacher espoused a view that the role of the junior school teacher was greater than what she supposed secondary teachers or the administration understood it to be. In her view, she found focused work on aspirations to be quite limited, as it was not happening in the junior school, which began in year 7, and then students must have an aspirational pathway formulated by year 10 prior to VCE. In this way of approaching aspirations, there was no role for junior school teachers with student aspirations but T10 believed there was an opening for change.

Another junior school teacher, T11, had a similar opinion, when he considered that the approach to aspirations was not whole-school, but limited to the secondary school: "Well, I guess I feel, I don't feel like it's whole school at all. I feel that it's, as far as, I think it's only based at the half of the school that ticks the box on'' (T11). Below, he says there were opportunities to motivate children in the junior school without pigeon-holing them, which would enable them to have meaningful experiences related to aspirations or career-education before making decisions early in secondary school:

> … most of the comments that you would hear is that in primary school is that we
> shouldn't be pigeonholing them and we shouldn't be saying, you're a scientist,
> you're good at science … putting a positive spin on it, and furthering the strength
> areas for them, doesn't detract from them also doing science, literacy and still
> having those opportunities open. But it just presents them with the opportunities
> and experiences they are going to need, when all of a sudden when it comes to
> year 7 or year 8 when they are sitting in an assembly, right, you need to choose a
> career path, well, I think it's not right to put it on them at that point, I think we
> can prepare them from a much younger age ... (T11)

This teacher's comments, along with the earlier ones from T10, highlighted how the changeover between the two schools left gaps when it came to the potential for students' aspirational thinking, and teachers' abilities to help them with it in the junior school. Without

scaffolding children in the junior school for these decisions in early secondary, this teacher noticed an unfairness. With the changes that began in the secondary school during my time of data collection – with tutor group teachers delivering career information and lessons to students from year 7 – some of T11's concerns might have been answered.

The division between the junior and secondary schools was also apparent in the interviews as secondary teachers described they had little knowledge about what happened with student aspirations in the junior school. One teacher said this was not a topic of conversation and s/he had little knowledge of it:

> No, I don't think the [junior] school would think about it very much. Hard for me to say. I'm not down there. I've never heard it sort of come up in a conversation with any of the primary staff that they sort of think too much about that. (Survey)

A similar sentiment was exhibited by T1:

> I really don't have any knowledge [of junior] school. In this school, they are quite separately run. There is not much integration. Even though we are on the same campus, they are quite separated from each other. (T1)

While T13 expressed a lack of awareness:

> …in terms of earlier years, yes, there's that leadership process, and I guess there's the building of self-esteem within the pastoral programs, but to be honest, I'm not, again, this comes down to that explicit term, I'm not 100% sure how aspiration actually is fitted in to the construction of that, it may be, I'm not going to say it isn't, but just in terms of my own role, I'm unsure…. (T13)

Here, T13 assumed that something must happen in relation to aspirations but is unsure the extent of it. T5 commented that "I don't know about primary school'' (T5). Even a teacher with some careers responsibility, T12, was not familiar with what happened: "The primary is an area that I'm not really familiar with'' (T12). Again, with no formal careers program in the junior school, any work on aspiration was left up to the discretion of the individual teachers, but there seems to be an assumption that some careers education took place in the junior school. This sits in opposition to research by Gore and her colleagues (2017), where they have pushed for more work with aspirations at younger ages.

The division between the junior and secondary schools at Sunnyside sat as a barrier for student aspirations and teacher roles with student aspirations. Teachers' shared uncertainty about their colleagues' roles in the other half of the school. This division and lack of understanding of one

another's roles contributed to an uncertainty about teacher roles in relation to student aspirations. One teacher, in particular, T10 suggested that this division had a definite impact on discussions with students about aspirations:

> I've got some good friends that teach secondary school, and they have a much more relaxed classroom environment and they spend more time discussing with the kids whereas I think in the primary, we want them to sit, we want them to learn, be concentrated, and I don't think the discussions are as rich and engaging as they could be. Whereas I think in the senior school, teachers get a lot more opportunities. (T10)

T10 perceived that certain types of environments might foster discussions of aspirations, such as ones that are relaxed. She suggested that the secondary school teachers to have environments that promote an engagement with aspirations whereas junior school classrooms with an emphasis on structure did not. T10 and T1, whose comment was provided earlier, in separate schools and with different subjects, basically commented on a similar idea – that the space and nature of the work environment helped foster discussions of aspirations.

The assumption that all teachers are working towards the same goal with student aspirations was directly challenged by one anecdote as it highlighted the complex nature of working with aspirations, and how teachers might respond differently. This example was poignant in its demonstration of a teacher's ability to consciously – or unconsciously – impact a student's aspiration from a very early age, as well as how it showed that it is not possible to make the assumption that all teachers would counsel students in the same way. In this example, T14 explained how a recent school captain was told at a young age he would not be able to do anything do to a speech problem:

> it was our valedictory last night, last night's school captain was making the point he had a language disorder when he was in primary school and was told he wouldn't be able to do anything … I don't want any teachers to limit any kids' ambitions, but equally, at some point, where, the psychological pressure being applied to a kid that can't cope, or, there are other things going on then, then that's where the discussion has to be had ... (T14)

T14 explained how the student reported how a teacher discouraged an aspiration. It is unclear if the student would have attended Sunnyside when this happened, but T14 communicated that he did not "want any teachers to limit any kids' ambitions'' (T14) while at the same time, there were realistic discussions that must occur at the stage when a student might not cope with the pressure of some subjects. This example indicated that the boundary was not clear for teachers

when or if to inject realism into student aspirations, while taking care not to make value judgements on students' abilities. Whether or not teachers conceptualised their role with aspirations to be a critical one, some of the discussions they have had with students could impact the students indefinitely. The next section discusses teacher perceptions of limited time for discussions of student aspirations.

7.4.3   Participant Conception of Teacher Time for Aspirational Discussions

A growing student body appeared to create pressure points for Sunnyside teachers around their perceived role with student aspirations at the time of my data collection. Teachers perceived the growth of the school meant less time for discussions about student aspirations. Some teachers understood the growth to also reduce time for themselves to connect with students and form bonds to promote ongoing aspirational discussions. T14 acknowledged that student access to senior staff was reduced due to the growth of the school:

> So, we are no longer a small school, and so, the ability for, um, me, or other
> senior staff to have, to have time in the day to sort of, you know, be accessible, is
> much more reduced because that's a factor of size. (T14)

Where T14 might have had one-on-one time with more students in the earlier days of the country school, the student access to him and other senior staff was now reduced. This barrier was present in the comments of secondary teachers, who linked school growth to their lack of time to have unstructured, informal discussions about student aspirations. T10 described it was part of her implicit role but not one fulfilled due to time constraints: "it's part of your role, but you don't always get the opportunity to have that level of conversation'' (T10). Similarly, T6 pointed out that even in the tutor group time when these discussions were supposedly scheduled, it could be hard to get to a certain depth in the conversation with a student:

> … we just have so much admin to do within that class, so there's always
> something being put there, yeah, we often don't have time to just sit and have a
> conversation, the only time that we really had a good conversation about each of
> them about this was at the end of year 10 when they did the leadership
> interviews … that was a really good opportunity for us to hear about things like
> that. (T6)

T7, also teaching in the secondary school, identified this was a challenge, and, getting students to open up about aspirations took time, so these conversations were in competition with other important school matters:

It's hard. Well, as a tutor group teacher, in the morning, I have, I've got to read

the bulletin, check on student behaviour, uniform, diaries, I've got pastoral care

stuff that I need to take care of, plus I want to check in with my students and see

how are you, How are you, what have you been up to? There's a lot you have to

get through in a 20-minute morning, and that sometimes you don't have time to

talk to them about … "How are you going in your subjects? What are you thinking

you might want to do with English? You know, are you enjoying English, are you

not enjoying English, you know, why are you not enjoying English? Why are you

enjoying English?" (T7)

On one hand, the analysis identified that the access to conversations about student

aspirations was becoming more restrictive as the school grows, and the nature of relationships

changed as teachers become stretched. However, on the other hand, the data suggested that some

of this time pressure might change as Sunnyside tutor group teachers were taking on more of a

responsibility with careers. This was an outcome of the growing school, discussed earlier, as a way of

reaching all secondary students through tutor groups.

Yet, as T7 recognised, even though careers education was becoming associated with the

tutor groups, there was still a time pressure for teachers to get it done. T2 likened this time pressure

to a game, which was always a factor in teaching:

Time is always a factor in teaching. So, it's always a factor. You've never got

enough time, but that's just all teachers. Every teacher you'll know will speak to

will say I don't have enough time. Again, that's part of the game. It is a game. It's

about keeping your hand in the game and working … A game is … how do I

describe it? You play the game together with the students, the school, you are a

pieces, if you say this school is a game of chess, I am a piece in the game and I am

an important piece and that works with the other pieces to get the game … to get

the students the best of where they can be ... (T2)

This data illustrated how a teacher's role was like a game to maximise student performance;

the game had to be played with time constraints and constant demands to get the best outcomes

from students. The teacher's conception of playing a game, and getting students to play the game,

without explicitly saying this to the students is reminiscent of Domingo-Salie's (2018) use of

Bourdieu's game metaphor to describe the way that South African students adjusted to various

school cultures. In this way, the game metaphor that T2 used was an apt way of describing the

nimble nature of teachers as they adjusted their role of interacting with students to get the best

performance, as students also had to adjust to the new rules of this game. The next section discusses teacher perceptions of the facilitators and barriers of placing career education in tutor group time.

7.4.4   Participant Conception of Linking Career Education to Tutor Group Time

Another area identified in the data was that participating secondary teachers perceived the placement of career education in tutor group time as both a facilitator and barrier to student aspirations. Teacher views were mixed around the placement of career education as well as in relationship to their role around student aspirations representing both a barrier and facilitator to student aspirations and teacher roles with student aspirations. Through the 2017 structural change, the careers practitioner streamlined how careers information was presented to students. From the perspective of some teachers, this facilitated the dissemination of information related to student aspirations and careers, and the related roles of teachers. However, others perceived a barrier as it meant students had less opportunity to work one-on-one with the careers practitioner, and more responsibility was placed on teachers.

Linking careers education to pastoral care promoted a sense of enthusiasm in one teacher, T7, who saw personal benefit from learning new information:

> Yeah, so, we've already sort of linked aspirations and careers education, I think
> the careers education the school provides is really quite good. We do a lot of
> work, like I said, my year 8s start doing careers education this term in pastoral
> care. And then we, that obviously plays through in 9, 10, all the way through … I
> think that's awesome, that's just started, so I'm a bit excited about that and
> learning more about that, so yeah. (T7)

T7 expressed enthusiasm about the learning process and helping students reach potential goals. Despite this excitement, she also related how careers guidance was an extra responsibility because of tutor group requirements, such as "read the bulletin, check on student behaviour, uniform, diaries, I've got pastoral care stuff that I need to take care of, plus I want to check in with my students and see how are you, How are you, what have you been up to?'' (T7). This data illustrated it was possible that things could be overlooked in an effort to get everything done in limited time. Plus, as canvassed in the literature review, Alloway et al. (2004) identified that students could have mixed feelings about input on careers they received from teachers if it was seen as an extra role.

The analysis also indicated other teachers, like T7, conceived time as a barrier to completing work on aspirations and careers. Although positive about the linkages of aspirations and careers at the school, T6 realised time was scarce in relation to all the other responsibilities in pastoral care:

> Yeah, we just have so much admin to do within that class, so there's always something being put there, yeah, we often don't have time to just sit and have a conversation …. and there's always a million things going on in the school, there's always limited time to have conversations with students about you know, where there're at and what they're thinking in terms of their careers and has that changed? (T6)

The responsibility of teachers was clear from these comments. In altering the structure of how career information was given at the secondary school, which formalised some aspects of what teachers might have been doing earlier, teachers found this as both a facilitator and barrier to student aspirations and teachers' perceived roles. In fact, this pressure was identified in the literature. Teachers could feel overwhelmed by mounting stresses for student academic successes and an expectation to provide a pastoral role too in a whole school approach to guidance (Hearne & Galvin, 2014). Hooley et al. (2015) suggested that in many instances, teachers were providing career guidance despite the fact it was not something they were trained to do, and professional development would help teachers perform this function better.

Some participants considered the impact on students in this expanding teaching role. For example, T8 described how students might fall through the cracks as the time they have been allotted to discuss aspirations generally, or moral issues, was being squeezed. In fact, she saw a contradiction in the way that staff were encouraged to play this role but were "not allowed to talk about some things'' (T8) in relationship to careers or subject choices with students. She found this quite limiting, and it also placed strain in her role of knowing what to do:

> Yes, so, obviously we only have the one careers advisor at the moment, which means that that person's time is quite limited, even having appointments during the day is quite limited experience. I think that because staff are not allowed to talk about things, in certain ways, that's quite limiting, and I think it probably would affect some students that maybe are not able to voice, haven't yet been able to articulate where they're headed, and they just haven't been picked up and they kind of fall through the cracks in some ways, because they are not necessarily showing that drive or that initiative just yet and because there's not

enough resources, maybe, they are the ones that are sort of being left behind,

potentially … (T8)

This data signaled contradictions could occur when a teacher's role was not completely clear. The structural changes meant that teachers were responsible for disseminating certain types of careers information but still limited in some of the discussions they might have wanted to have around aspirations with students. In contrast to T6's enthusiasm, T8 emphasised the problems, specifically concerning time restraints. The literature around teacher's roles, specifically in physical education, pointed to a similar confusion. Richards (2015) used an interactionist role theory to help fill in the deficits in relation to occupational socialisation theory to explain the socially constructed role of physical education teachers, and used Turner's (2001) work to explain how a teacher might not be able to perform their range of duties well when their commitments are spread across a range of responsibilities. In a similar way, some tutor group teachers at Sunnyside found themselves stretched and frustrated with mounting pressure to deliver career information.

In some cases, teachers expressed a concern that students' career advisory needs might not be met by these changes. T3 explained that the careers practitioner was outstanding, but the issue was some students were getting too far in their secondary education confused about their next step. Without proper handling of student aspirations early on, this teacher said that students risked wanting to follow a new path but it was no longer a "10 minute change,'' but "could be 5 or 10 years'' (T3):

> … but we still find a lot of students and maybe it's the socioeconomics, maturity,
> changing culture, as in changing generation, a lot have no idea what they want to
> do, which is more than understandable, at year 12 … I think it comes back to they
> are told they can be anything they want to be, and they can change at any time,
> and they can do this at any time, but as a result of that, they don't understand
> it's not a week change, or a 10 minute change, it could be 5 or 10 years to get to
> where they think they want to go, because of their choices. (T3)

This showed the barriers that came into play with limited time for students to make future decisions, such as the cultural and social factors discussed earlier in this thesis. This teacher worried that with the lack of time given to student career choices, some might have chosen pathways because they had to, but a realisation could come late in secondary school that they had other interests. This was spoken by T1, where she pointed out that in this confusion, some VCE students encountered emotions, like regret, when they could no longer make a quick change. She suggested

there were some students that were already experiencing regret in VCE, due to the choices they made a few years ago:

> I think my role is to give them a bit more hope they are able to come back and learn certain things at any time in their life because they can't change their year 12 subjects half-way through, there's no point looking back and wishing things were different, in that respect, I would have a discussion about future opportunities or thing that would be presented to them later in life, not make them feel they've missed out on doing something. (T1)

This teacher's comment indicated how some teachers had to take on a further role to assist students to stay positive about their futures and perhaps find alternative pathways at the very end of their secondary schooling, as suggested in Chapter 4 around teachers' informal roles, where a teacher became a cheerleader or coach.

Although she perceived a mixed reception from teachers about including career information in tutor group time, T12 understood that teachers had started to willingly take up the changes. She suggested some might not be aware of the potential in their role in relationship to careers:

> They are just unaware of their role … the teachers are unaware and they are not making the connection that what they are delivering is, you know, an empowering career-type session. Because it doesn't have the language career in it. It might be a leadership session, but that's definitely, that has strong correlation with your career. (T12)

T12 could foresee the teachable moments in relation to students' future careers embedded in other discussions. The perception here was that teachers were unaware of the possibilities, and might be resistant to the word `career', but that in the future, language could play an important role in how aspirations (or careers) was seen at Sunnyside: ``I think [the term careers] has been quite negative in the past, how it has been perceived negatively, but … we can start to reshape that because we have been making some headway this year" (T12). She perceived opportunity in the changes taking place at the school. In this time of transition, some secondary teachers, as identified above, were experiencing role confusion as more responsibility was added to their work and some were unsure the boundaries of this role. Similar to how Richards (2015) applied an interactionist role theory to explore role changes with physical education teachers, it was possible that tutor group teachers at Sunnyside were in a period of transition during the time of data collection where they began performing their range of duties not previously perceived as part of their role. In this way,

aspects of the changing structure were working as both barriers and facilitators to student aspirations as teachers came to terms with the new responsibilities.

In time, the new structural changes might bring about a system-like approach, where the careers practitioner and teachers, like Patton and McMahon (2015) suggested, will work in cooperation towards a common goal. This type of shift will require a shift in some teachers' thinking, a point I return to in the implications section of this thesis. Another point I discuss is that perhaps the careers team at the school can identify moments of tacit understanding to be shared amongst teachers in order to generate best practice strategies. As more processes are identified and perfected, they could become common practice.

7.5   Participant Conception of External Testing and Subject Selections as a Barrier and Facilitator

The data analysis demonstrated that teacher perceptions of tests such as ATAR and NAPLAN were both perceived barriers and facilitators to student aspirations and teacher roles with student aspirations. The analysis demonstrated that most participating teachers were critical of the way that testing, interfered with student aspirations and aspects of their roles. The data analysis of participating teacher views in this section on external testing illustrated Johnson et al.'s (2009) contention that teachers perceived themselves as only one component in a complex system of factors influencing student aspirations, which were beyond the control of the school. In the discussion of data analysis related to teacher perceptions of factors influencing student secondary subject choices, aspects of the data aligned with aspects of Bourdieu's (1986) arguments in relation to prestige, where they viewed some students selecting specific subject choices to gain distinction, while other aspects of the data analysis aligned with Zipin et al.'s (2015) argument that students may alter choices due to their self-perceptions.

7.5.1   External Testing Affecting Student Aspirations

A number of teachers perceived test performance affected student well-being and aspirations. This finding supported the literature in this area, as Nguyen and Blomberg (2014) advocated the view that those students who felt "average'' or "less than average'' were less likely to achieve their aspirations (p. 7). They, along with Gil-Flores et al. (2011), Gore et al. (2019), and Gottfredson and Becker (1981), found that prior achievement influenced aspiration.

Participant teachers perceived the pressure of external tests impacting student aspirations in both the junior and secondary schools, as this altered teacher roles with student aspirations. T10 described how young students were affected by their results from NAPLAN and in one instance, the teacher stepped in to ensure that the student did not get discouraged in mathematics. As she

describes her work, my interpretation is that she is playing a teammate role, working with the student and parent, to get over this perceived barrier:

> I have a student in my class who, and this has happened, he was extremely mathematical, and he sat the NAPLAN in year 3, when he got his results, he got an exceptionally poor maths result, now this was during the days when you could photocopy the NAPLAN and keep them and work, they weren't put under lock and key as they are now. When the mum came in and we discussed it, and what he had done, is he had skipped a question, so all of the questions following, he had answered one above, so there was a very big impact of human error, of his own error that impacted on his overall NAPLAN result, now if that was to happen nowadays, my student who would normally receive an exceptionally high mark in the NAPLAN or the ICAS would get the result and that's it. (T10)

T10 explained how external tests became a barrier to a student's self-perception of ability and this affected well-being and aspiration to do well in a subject they previously enjoyed or had felt successful. Whether accidental or not, her view was NAPLAN scores affected aspiration, a view that was found in Gore et al. (2017), writing that NAPLAN scores could potentially alter student aspirations, which attracted media attention (Singhal, 2017). T10 experienced a student who made a single mistake by filling in the wrong blank with an answer, and this affected the remainder of his test. Fortunately, she was able to explain this as human error, but it draws attention to the impact the NAPLAN score had on her student. Here was an example of the macrosystem, as Bronfenbrenner (1979) might argue, impacting on the student's development as external perceptions of testing and success filtered through to the classroom. With research arguing that student aspirations could be set from an early age (Gore et al., 2017; Gottfredson, 1981), it might be possible for teachers, like T10, to step in and disrupt (Webb et al., 2015) negative self-perceptions of students in relation to external tests. This was an important point to consider in the context of Sunnyside as a teacher could play a key role in assisting students to navigate the results of tests, and to stay positive about the future.

The data analysis further identified teachers' perceptions of anxiety around the tests filtered to parents too. The following comment by highlighted the social aspect of aspirations as a competition began for achievement on ATAR which was characterised this not only as an obsession with the numbers by students – but by parents as well:

> This is the problem with league tables and results tables … parents are aspirational in the sense they want their kids to get the best results, but … there's

ATARs which are sub-average, which I'm jumping up, fantastic, this person has done so well. So, the results belie that, so we've got this, we are driven here to do well and we are driven here to improve marks, year on year and we want to see things improve. Excellent, I see the point in that, but also we need to also protect the individual from the negativity that can happen when they are not conforming to a norm. (T13)

T13 observed that the school attempted to "protect'' the student when not conforming to the perceived "norm,'' but this can be a barrier. A competitive culture perhaps boosted students along as they competed for marks; however, when students missed the mark, it created a sense of unworthiness – and teachers must help students navigate changes that needed to be made. Teachers played an informal role with student aspirations, as cheerleader, when the results did not flow as a student desired. Some students hoped for a specific outcome and prepared for it over many years, and may not be prepared when the results fail to meet their expectations.

Another teacher on the survey described how "many Year 12 students are still unsure of their aspirations and goals. Many of them struggle to select courses and then have to re-evaluate after school depending on their ATAR'' (Survey). This unavoidable fact for some was apparent in the literature around aspirations. Snowden and Lewis (2015) asserted that the dominant message in society was that university is the higher choice, and those who did not make it are failures; this was then linked through government and media messages to their individual choice – not a system that failed to help them. Students' pathways might have lacked the "distinction'' (Gale & Parker, 2014, pp. 143-4) they desired, if they missed a university place. Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al. (2015) had graduates sharing that too much focus was on ATAR and students should have been encouraged to keep trying for a university place through enabling programs and other mechanisms if their first attempt was unsuccessful. As in the case of T10 above, helping the student cope with the nonrepresentative NAPLAN score, teachers may be the person present as students seek an explanation for failure or to find another path when they discover the one they hoped for, or aspired to, is unavailable.

7.5.2   External Testing Dominating Classroom Time

Not only did some teachers think the emphasis on external testing could affect aspiration, but the preparation for it became a barrier as it absorbed time for other interactions. T8 suggested that the focus on NAPLAN had resulted in changed focus within the school, with less emphasis on other aspects of life, like aspirations:

Because, essentially, we are limited in time. Our focus, we don't have time to talk

about the bigger things, the big issues with kids anymore. We spend our time

making sure that they know how to approach NAPLAN appropriately and, you

know, instead of having the bigger conversation around their moral obligations

or having to say to them, have you practised this particular part of speech,

because that's not the area that you're particularly good at, that's what I'm doing

instead. There's that shift, absolutely. And, again, that speaks to that cultural

change. (T8)

This teacher commented that the interactions and discussions with students had changed as teaching time needed to focus on the intricacies of NAPLAN testing. The altered emphasis of classroom time due to testing was highlighted. This connected with literature that reflected the demands on schools and teachers for results. Skourdoumbis (2014) discussed how the school system had become product-oriented, actual experiences were subsumed by probabilities and schools were under surveillance, similar to how Ball (2003b) described teacher performativity to achieve specific results. T8 perceived teacher time was being allocated for a focus on results, not well-being or aspirations.

Despite the interview data from teachers above suggesting that a pressure results from NAPLAN on students and their roles, the document analysis revealed that participation in the test was something the school only took part in for diagnostic purposes and did not reflect a child's overall ability. Specifically, this was repeated in the school's 2015 and 2016 Annual Reports:

The school again participated in NAPLAN. Despite having some philosophical

difficulties with the use of these tests to make comment on group performance,

it provides one starting point to look at student performance in a diagnostic

manner. We do not use it in a simplistic way which indicates little appreciation of

educational methodology, but focus on using it for the real role of education,

which is to enable all students, not matter what their ability to achieve their best

and be prepared for life after school. (School Document, 2015; School Document,

2016).

In this excerpt, the NAPLAN was described as a teaching tool, not with an emphasis on end results. It discussed a philosophy that the test unfairly judged group results. Although the school's philosophy was this test should assist teachers with their teaching, there was no recognition in this comment about how it could affect some student aspirations if they suffered from poor results.

Instead, the above interview data highlighted teacher concern about student well-being resulting from the pressure of tests.

7.5.3   External Testing Changing Student Perception of Success

The other barrier emerging from the data was a change in the way that students sought success with the curriculum and conceptualised fulfilling an aspiration by getting the right answers to a test. Instead of an emphasis on working hard to learn the subject material in order to perform well on a test, some students were seeking the answers to do well on the tests, and expecting teachers to facilitate their success by giving them the answers or making material easy. When asked on the survey in question 11 (Appendix C), if there was a connection between the school environment and student aspirations, one teacher described a growing culture of spoon-feeding, affecting aspirations:

> Yes, I do. I believe that the students are spoon-fed and now expect it. As a result, when they have problems they deflect the blame onto teachers. This in turn affects the aspirations in that they believe they can have or do anything they like because they want it. (Survey)

This respondent viewed some students expecting teachers to provide them with the right answers, and if they did not, then teachers were blamed for their failure. Here, student aspirations were adversely affected as test-taking was equated to getting the correct score, not necessarily demonstrating knowledge.

This was also evident in the interview data. T8 said students were "definitely spoon-fed,'' and this related to her view of a growing apathetic culture in the school: "There's elements of that, definitely, of that contribution to being apathetic, and their delivery of the curriculum, giving them too much at times and the students not wanting to work hard to get something'' (T8). T4 suggested that many students would try to get teachers to work in this way, "Yeah, to a point, they want to be. It depends on how much you do that for them'' (T4). These comments together suggested that the changing expectations of the students around tests placed undue pressure on teacher roles – with students wanting to do well on the tests, and they were expecting the teachers to facilitate this performance. T4's comment indicated that teachers had to be on guard against these types of expectations of students expecting too much from the teachers instead of learning the material for themselves.

This idea of spoon-feeding was identifiable in comments by teachers of the junior school too. This notion of nurturing an obsession with scores was noticed by a junior school teacher, and connected to the idea of student aspirations. Specifically, making the curriculum easier for students

meant that students did not learn independent learning skills that would not only assist them in school but in selecting career paths:

> I feel like we really molly-coddle these students and I think we try and protect them from anything and everything, and, I don't feel like that's the right thing to be doing. Now, we certainly have to do it because of the parent community we have, but again I don't think they are getting the life experience that they need to, down the track, have any aspirations for career paths. I feel they are … are being handfed everything, and I really lacking that independence and life experience to be able to deal with social situations, to be able to deal with their own educational progress, to deal with, you know, the demands of day-to-day life (T11).

This teacher suggested that spoon-feeding equaled students unable to deal with the demands of everyday life. This comment could be considered in relation to research by Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate, et al. (2015) that suggests student aspirations did not always change with age. From this teacher's perspective, it was important that students were given the life experience in order to aspire. One might argue that they were young students, but as previously mentioned by a secondary teacher, T4, it was difficult to get students to feel comfortable leaving the safe space provided in Sunnyside's nurturing environment, and the school needed to do a better job of preparing them for their transitions.

In the secondary school, teachers observed students obsessing about the numbers for tests and potential ATAR scores. T9 suggested that Sunnyside is creating a culture of score obsession, and she contrasted this to another school:

> For example, in my old school, if I done the test and mark them and written back to them, when they receive 50% they will jump up and down, "I pass, I pass," while the kids here, even, especially the girls, when they got 90%, they will come back to me and say, "What did I do wrong, why I got just 90%?" (Laughs) So I was thinking, if everyone was to be 100%? …. They don't really see understanding that's important, or knowledge or skill they can get from that subject or exercises…They just care about the score … well I said, "That's not the way, if you know, if you have a good understanding, you know this topic well, automatically you will get a good score, not the other way around." (Laughs). (T9)

This data highlighted a teacher perception that some student aspirations were being limited to test scores. Scores were becoming a barrier to aspiration as students were equating them with

success and an ability to reach certain outcomes, with a lack of student understanding about the need for knowledge – or the value in low scores in order for a student to understand where more study was needed. T9 suggested she found a preoccupation with high scores at Sunnyside without as much concern for learning the material.

7.5.4   Subjects Selected for Distinction

A related barrier to the growing emphasis on tests witnessed by some teachers in the secondary levels was that students were choosing subjects based on their perceptions of what constituted an acceptable score or career, which impacted student aspirations. This highlighted what Gale and Parker (2014) argued when they used Bourdieu's (1986) notions of taste to explain how society generally classified student aspirations, so some subject choices enabled students to achieve those career avenues of "distinction" (pp. 143-4). This perception was apparent in my data, not only with students' choices but also with teachers noticing parents pushing students into subjects which had the potential for higher university entry scores.

T13 suggested that one subject in particular – Maths Methods – was a prerequisite subject for many university courses and carries a potential for the students to be scaled up. This teacher observed parental expectations supporting the students' desire to take the demanding class, regardless if the student was achieving well in this class. For some students, choosing this course indicated how aspiration became tied up with the subject's ability to "open doors" (T13), whereas others chose it because they enjoyed a subject or exceled in it:

> And, [maths methods] is a very challenging, cognitively demanding subject … I think this is very much backed up by parental expectations, it is seen as the subject that opens the most doors, when, whether it is a subject they are particularly interested in or not, or even whether they have the capacity for success. Increasingly I'm seeing students who are engaging in methods for the sake of having methods rather than really enjoying it, whereas there are students who do other subjects that they really enjoy and excel in. (T13)

T13 proposed that it was not the case for all students, but some were choosing harder subjects, like math methods, which was backed up by parental expectation, even if this subject was not particularly suited to their aspiration or ability. T1 agreed that subject selection might have been based on a score, not a particular aspiration, "[Students] are more knowledgeable about what scores they need to get into particular courses, and those courses tend to be ones their parents are happy with or approve of" (T1). These teachers acknowledged a tendency for students to choose subject choices for scores or to make parents happy, with many picking the hardest subjects in an

effort to boost their end scores through subjects that are scaled up. T5 communicated a worry with the way academic subjects were perceived and chosen by the less able through the guidance of aspirational parents based on "reading a book" (T5) of subject choices:

> …. so, we are letting them do what they want, I don't think, yeah, at the end of the day, it's their decision but I think we should be advising them better…. So, yeah right, so they are just like, here's the subjects, they are choosing, a parent told me on the phone yesterday, it's really hard to choose which maths to do when you are just reading a book … (T5)

She said the danger of allowing students to pick subjects they were not suited for meant sometimes the mismatch was too great, and also that parents did not understand what they should be picking – and why. She also said that students, parents, and even teachers did not understand the ATAR scoring and more education was needed:

> … so when you talk about an ATAR of 50, oh yeah, 50, 50 percent, half of you, on average, half of you will get below 50 and half above 50, kids, I don't think our kids are educated enough about that, so they are living in gaga land, thinking they are going to ace it, and thinking they should be right, or I'll start working in year 12 .… I think we could do a lot better along the way … I've got another tutor group teacher that is in a classroom next to me, who moved from [overseas] last year, well, she doesn't have a clue what a prerequisite of an ATAR is … (T5)

A teacher in her position, responsible for a sought-after academic subject, found students held misconceptions about scores, as she perceived some students did not work hard until the end of their schooling career. T5 suggested this was an issue as more teachers took on aspects of career education through tutor group sessions. The idea that more information could be given to teachers and parents about ATAR scaling will be taken up in my implications.

7.5.5   Choosing or Eschewing Artistic Subjects

The data analysis further highlighted how teachers noticed students chose or eschewed artistic subjects, sometimes at the behest of their parents, in pursuit of a high ATAR score. This became both a facilitator and barrier to student aspiration and teachers' associated roles as problems were created through this desire for specific subjects or results as a measure of success. T1noticed that the emphasis on results was pushing some kids away from artistic subjects from earlier ages:

I find it a little bit frustrating … students will not choose subjects that their

parents don't think have any academic merit so that would be typically design

subjects, or it might be things like food tech, pretty much practical subjects

generally speaking … there's a clear message from a reasonable percentage of

students that their parents don't perceive those subjects as legitimate subjects to

do in year 12. So, because those discussions take place in year 9 and 10, because

they have to choose electives sometimes pre-VCE, so essentially at the end of

year 8, they are picking electives … (T1)

This teacher found the search for academic merit and an ultimate score meant that some students or parents mistakenly perceived artistic subjects as non-academic. In her view, students missed the opportunity to explore their creative interest at school, and possibly put pressure on themselves by pursuing a limited range of subjects – and she found herself counselling them later for making inappropriate subject choices, as previously discussed in Chapter 4. In keeping with her sentiment above, T1 illustrated this tendency for the pursuit of subjects perceived as academic in the following example, where the student sought to take a creative class, but was not supported by the parent. According to the teacher, the conflict between the student and parent became a barrier to the student's performance in the artistic class:

… I've got another student in year 11 and her mother doesn't want her to do the

subject that I teach, so they've had a lot of conflict at home about that. And,

she's talked about that. And, her mother doesn't see any job pathway in doing

any creative subjects but she's a very creative person, so there is a lot of conflict

there at home and she brings that to school … it becomes difficult when you feel

that the student is not necessarily supported by the parent … so there is tension

when there is conflict between what a student might be telling you and what a

parent tells you at parent-teacher interviews. (T1)

This data highlighted a teacher caught in the middle; she wanted to support the student but had to be careful due to the fact that the parent was unhappy with the student's choice. This example provided a richness for me as a theoretical bricoleur, where the pressure of the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), or larger understandings of neo-liberalism (Angus, 2015) about the need for a certain subject selection worked on parent expectations, pushing their daughter to a path of distinction (Bourdieu, 1986). At the same time, the teacher communicated a role tension (Turner, 2001) as she tried to assist the student as a participant and observer in the students' microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Here, the teacher's informal role became apparent as she stayed a listener,

as discussed in Chapter 4, for the student while not creating conflict with the parents. This mismatch of ideas between student and parent also resonated with my earlier description in this chapter of parent misunderstanding, which was also present in the research of Gil-Flores et al. (2011).

Other teachers shared a similar understanding. T3 observed many students opting for woodwork because it was perceived to be easy, but not realising that it was quite demanding:

> …a lot of students will pick woodwork because they believe it is an easy bludge and they don't have to be smart to do it. Some academic students will pick woodwork because they think it will be an easy bludge and they will cruise through it, and it is usually the total reverse, some of the more academic students truly struggle in the subject… (T3)

T3 observed that some students are surprised when they discovered that it was not as easy as they expected, and they would not easily gain the high score they had imagined.

In contrast to T1 and T3's opinion, T5 gave an alternative view on artistic subjects, where she said that activities like sewing was an activity that could be learned outside of school, and the emphasis in school should be on academics. In particular, this teacher clarified that the students with higher academic ability should be pushed into the harder subjects so they did not miss out on any potential choices later:

> … there are kids who are geniuses in maths, and they are really good, "Have you thought about doing specialist," that means you do two maths, they go, "Oh no, I can't afford to have two spots left for maths," and you think, "They would be so good at that"… and you say, "What do you want to do? What are your other subjects you've listed?" (laughs), and they list off some, that I think are more hobbies – oh, did I say that (laughs) – they might do drama or food textiles or, because they like them because they like them, and so, what I really want to say is, "Look, how about you sew at home?" (laughs) … "Are you really paying money to come to school to learn? You don't want to be a fashion designer …. Listen, is that going to help you get a job?" (T5)

In this teacher's critique of students choosing artistic subjects at school, which she thought were best done at home, she played the role of dissembler – telling me, the researcher, about her inner monologue, but trying to stay open to what students wanted to do. This comment also showed that sometimes it was the stronger academic students that did not want to risk failure in a more academic subject choosing an easier one, whereas there were other students not suited for the harder subjects that were choosing them. This view aligned more closely with Oppenheimer and

Flum's (1986) study where some teachers viewed the school as a place to impart knowledge, and in some teachers' "campaigning" (p. 32) attitudes for student aspirations, which promoted traditional pathways to university and beyond, as identified by Johnson et al. (2009) in the UK report.

7.5.6   Gender Affecting Subject Selection

The data also showed that a few teachers perceived gender as a potential facilitator or barrier to aspirations within subject selections. An emphasis on scores – as well as peer pressure – influenced the selection of languages at VCE, and T9 noticed that understanding of scoring at VCE might have influenced a students' choice of subject:

> Ah yeah, some boys they influence. Like for example, if you continue learning [a
> language], you can do that in university, and the other boy will say, you only, you
> will get, you're [language] score will only help you when you do well, so the kids
> are influencing each other. (T9)

T9 sought to encourage students to continue with language; however, the way the subject was scored worked as a barrier to their interest in the subject, similar to my previous discussion of students eschewing art and woodwork. Further, she noticed that what students learnt from others about a subject might have influenced them as well. This same phenomenon could be found, but with girls, as T5 observed girls shying away from harder subjects as they feared upsetting their families with poor marks:

> Because if the girls aren't going to get perfect results, if I'm not going to get an A,
> then I'm not going to do It … Whereas boys, they might get 60%, and they're like,
> oh year, but girls, if they get 70, I failed, I basically failed. Oh, too much,
> yeah….but the girls, no no, I might not do very well, because I might not get an A,
> they are too focused on their stupid results, the numbers on their report card
> and whether it looks pretty, and I don't know grandma might think less of me …
> (T5)

From her experience teaching a VCE subject, T5 found girls were less willing to take a gamble with their result and prefer to choose a subject with a higher score. Research by Bowden and Doughney (2010, 2012) suggested that a preference for university exists for higher SES females.

In another comment linking to gender, T14 suggested the biggest challenge for teachers at the school was motivating boys to find an aspiration. He found girls to be motivated, but that it took most of secondary school to help many boys find a sense of direction:

Um, I have no issue with girls' lack of ambition. Girls don't perceive there are any limits on their ambitions. Boys are the ones that have put limits on their ambition...In our experience, the drivers of ambition in the school are the girls ...Uh, now, the reality is the discussion has commenced, well, when you, the reality is, is we now have to work with boys, what is, first of all, we have to identify what the problem is, I don't actually know what the problem is, the days of the strong, ambitious boy are gone.(T14)

T14 argued boys tended to lag behind the girls in the middle secondary years, but by the end of secondary school, often most of the boys were more ambitious with their schoolwork. Alloway et al.'s (2004) analysis helped account for how the geographic isolation or gender differences identified in the data might impact the academic interests of students. In their study, these researchers argued that there were activities on offer outside of school in the location of the study that might appeal more to boys and hold their attention. Although the case study school is not located in isolation, it is in the peri-urban fringe of Melbourne, with few pieces of infrastructure available to students that might similarly appeal to boys. With this in mind, girls might have been looking outward for aspirational pathways and inspiration whereas younger boys were potentially contented with what was available.

7.6   Chapter Summary

This chapter is the last of the data analysis section of this thesis. Here, discussion extended into the complex roles of teachers in relation to student aspirations with a focus on the factors perceived to impact student aspirations and how this triggers some teachers to take on certain roles. The analysis highlighted how certain aspects of the school, such as the administrative push for an aspirant culture, school factors and an emphasis on external testing were perceived as changing interactions that teachers had with students around aspirations. The perceived barriers and facilitators that emerged from Sunnyside teacher perceptions is information potentially important to Sunnyside stakeholders as they consider impacts on student aspirations. These impacts are further discussed in the next chapter, which contains my implications, recommendations, and conclusions.

8 Implications, Recommendations and Conclusions

8.1 Chapter overview

In this chapter, implications from the research for the central question, *How do teachers understand their roles in relation to engaging with student aspirations?* are provided. In presenting the implications and recommendations, I acknowledge that teachers have been identified as key players in the development of student aspirations (Alloway et al., 2004; Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al., 2015; Helwig, 2004; Kuijpers & Meijers, 2017; Zipin et al., 2015), but that no empirical research has clearly articulated their understandings of the roles they play, nor how they were prepared for that role (Fray et al., 2019).

The data from the case study at Sunnyside School highlighted that teacher voices were missing from this ongoing research and also provided evidence that what teachers were doing at each year level was not well understood; my analysis from this case study challenged taken-for-granted assumptions that teachers knew what they were doing in the context of working with student aspirations.

More specifically, this chapter presents the implications that arise from these assumptions around teachers and recommendations about policy and system changes for education stakeholders to consider. In particular, I highlight the implications of unclear definitions of aspirations and teachers' role boundaries, the situational engagement that teachers are engaging in around student aspirations, the perpetuated lack of knowledge of some teachers and parents around ATAR, gaps in teachers' cultural competency around student aspirations, and gaps in systemic career education. In light of these findings extrapolated from the case study, a number of recommendations are made regarding recognition of teacher work, further teacher professional development, changes to policy and role statements, and investigation into tangible skills around the possibility of aspirations education. Moreover, further links with the sub-research questions from the study are made with the implications and recommendations for further research, practice, and theory. This chapter also concludes the thesis.

8.2 Implication 1: Inconsistent Understandings of Aspirations

This section relates to one of my sub-research questions, (1) *How do teachers perceive student aspirations forming?* Two recommendations are discussed in relation to the issues raised around inconsistent understandings.

In Chapter 4, I highlighted how participating Sunnyside teacher perceptions of student aspirations lacked consistency and sat on a broad spectrum. The implication of these varying conceptualisations of aspirations is that teachers' personal definitions affected the ways they

engaged with students around aspirations. As the analysis suggested, aspirations were generally perceived as complex; culturally, socially, and relationally influenced; impacted by attitudes; reaching a point of realism; and sometimes – but not always – linked to career. The density of these categories was explained using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) contextualisation of student development, influenced by numerous contexts and the interactions of participants in these environments. In Bronfenbrenner's (1979) microsystem, students would have influences such as home, school, church, and other closely related groups, and I interpreted teachers to have a key positioning in this model, as participants, but also as observers to all of the contextual influences affecting students' aspirational development. With this complexity in mind, participant teachers demonstrated that they were attempting to make sense of student aspirations, an abstract concept, along with the perceived role that they had in relationship to them, which was not clearly defined, as identified in Chapter 5. The overlap of these uncertainties means there is opportunity for improved understandings around aspirations at Sunnyside, and the associated roles of teachers with regard to student aspirations.

The first recommendation is that Sunnyside stakeholders need to support teachers to learn more about the formation of aspirations and research into the influences on aspirations, as well as the overlaps with career education. Groups of teachers may even want to brainstorm their conceptualisations of aspirations as part of professional development, to gain an appreciation for the density of the concept and what others consider it to be. Sunnyside teachers should be given an opportunity to learn about their own influence on aspirations (Alloway et al., 2004; Helwig, 2004; Kuijpers & Meijers, 2017; Zipin et al., 2015), investigate research on when students formalise aspirations (Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate, et al., 2015; Gottfredson, 1981), and consider research that contends how understanding student aspirations may assist with attitudes in the classroom (Abu-Halil, 2000). Further research could be conducted at other schools to determine if similar responses are required by teachers.

The second recommendation is that Sunnyside teachers be involved in providing more students with exposure to a range of aspirations before the perceived point of realism in middle secondary, providing both teachers and students with ongoing learning opportunities about aspirations. This would also enable Sunnyside teachers to confidently connect these experiences to the curriculum.

My data also highlighted that teachers questioned whether some explicit skills might be taught to help them work with student aspirations. Further research is needed to investigate if explicit skills could be identified and become part of teachers' professional development in relation to their roles with student aspirations, considering the needs of both primary and secondary

students. My data analysis could be a starting point for this research as it points to skills that teachers identify as helpful to students. If explicit skills can be taught, there needs to be a scaffold developed and implemented in relationship to current curriculum.

8.3   Implication 2: Enthusiasm for Student Aspiration as Motivator and Curriculum Anchor

This section relates to two of my sub-research questions, (1) *How do teachers perceive student aspirations forming*? and (2) *What defined or undefined roles do teachers perceive themselves playing in relation to student aspirations and is this a shared understanding within the school*? There is one recommendation presented in relation to this implication.

Participating Sunnyside teachers exhibited an enthusiasm for student aspirations as a means of motivating students in the classroom. As illustrated in Chapter 5, several teachers commented on the manner in which having an aspiration motivated students towards a particular goal, which positively impacted on their participation in the classroom. Many participants explained how they took on roles, such as cheerleader or teammate, in an effort to assist students in the pursuit of that aspiration. Further, some teachers explained how a student's aspiration might provide an anchor for curriculum adaptations by the teacher to support the aspiration. Through the data, teachers identified that students with an aspiration were engaged with the material and became self-motivated in an effort to work towards future goals. The counter to this was that, as discussed in Chapter 4, sometimes students may `fix' an aspiration and they may see some classroom tasks as unconnected or irrelevant. This may be a challenge for teachers, but as argued by Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al. (2015), teachers play a pivotal role in ensuring students do well in and engage in class. By linking the curriculum with student aspirations where possible, teachers are potentially contributing to the student's ongoing engagement in school.

The one recommendation here is that Sunnyside stakeholders support teachers in this effort and consider more formal ways of allowing teachers to adapt the curriculum to support aspirational development where possible. Early on, this may be a process of teachers sharing ideas, and over time becoming more formalised into sharing of resources. Teachers would need recognition and time for the extra work completed.

8.4   Implication 3: Need for Aspirational Work for Students in Primary School

This section relates to two of my sub-research questions, (1) *How do teachers perceive student aspirations forming*? and (2) *What defined or undefined roles do teachers perceive themselves playing in relation to student aspirations and is this a shared understanding within the school*? There is one recommendation and idea for further research presented in relation to the need for aspirational work in the primary school.

Specifically, in the junior school at Sunnyside, my data illustrated that teacher work in relation to student aspirations was considered informal, as it remained undocumented and there was no professional development offered to these teachers. As a result of this not being pushed by the school, some teachers, as evident in Chapter 5, did not believe aspirational work was relevant to their work in the junior school. Their beliefs around aspirations were important, as noted by Allen et al. (2018), teachers' beliefs play an important role in influencing student aspirations, and teachers needed to understand their importance in students' futures. This lack of interest from junior school teachers and the school, in general, presents an opportunity to change mindsets, in light of information from Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate, et al. (2015), Gottfredson (1981), and O'Connell (2018) where student aspirations can form and set early in junior school. There is now tremendous opportunity for educating teachers at all levels of teaching at Sunnyside, as teachers can be made aware of how they could be "critical disruptions'' (Webb et al., 2015) while students were forming aspirations to not limit or settle on ideas, dismissing their potential futures based on faulty self-perceptions.

My recommendation is that formal professional development at Sunnyside needs to be implemented as a matter of urgency in response to research, such as that by Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate, et al. (2015), of the potential for early forming or setting of student aspirations. Professional development needs to become part of Sunnyside teachers' ongoing education as the analysis identifies most teachers hold weekly discussions about student aspirations. In this respect, teachers can play a role in interventions to prevent students from setting their aspirations too soon, giving students an understanding of their skills and abilities developing through time, and not just as an outcome of early testing. Two possibilities for professional development currently exist. As an outcome of this thesis, I have devised some specific discussion exercises for Sunnyside teachers, available in Appendix I. Sunnyside teachers are also able to access free online professional development, *Aspirations: Supporting Students Futures* (2018), developed by the research team from The Aspirations Longitudinal Study, about which I will inform Sunnyside school and recommend in the forthcoming report.

It is possible that further research into this area could be conducted to determine if this is a system-wide issue and if prospective teachers could be presented with formal education in the graduate career stage and ongoing professional development as part of their teacher development. During this professional development, it is important that teachers are made aware of contemporary research into aspirations, the roles that they can play, and influences on aspirations, such as SES, culture, and other factors.

8.5   Implication 4: Unclear Perceptions of Role Boundaries by Teachers

This section relates to two of my sub-research questions, (2) *What defined or undefined roles do teachers perceive themselves playing in relation to student aspirations and is this a shared understanding within the school*? And (3) *How do teachers cope with interactions and uncertainties in relation to student aspirations*? Three recommendations are made in relation to this implication.

The data highlighted a lack of clarity around teacher roles in relation to interactions with students about aspirations at Sunnyside. Secondary teachers described ongoing informal aspects of working with students on aspirations, which fell outside their tutor group responsibilities. Junior school teachers had mixed opinions about whether they were responsible for anything at all in relation to student aspirations. Due to these findings, an ongoing implication of this data is that, without clearly defined roles, teachers' personal definitions of aspirations, as discussed above, were impacting their interactions with students, and there was not a unified approach as teachers used a situational engagement with students about aspirations. In navigating this tricky terrain, teachers were creating and utilising their own responses about how to approach student aspirations. Teachers at Sunnyside responded situationally as participants in and observers of students' developing aspirations.

As discussed in my data analysis, I have adapted this idea from Bronfenbrenner's model (1979, 1994), which placed teachers as participants in a students' microsystem; he recognised teachers as key people in the development of children. My analysis indicated that teachers have different ways of engaging with students about aspirations, resulting from their personal dispositions, experience, time, perception of responsibilities, and other factors. These different ways of engaging with students were often on-the-spot interactions, and with little professional development, teachers did the best they could with the time and knowledge at hand, aligning with Hooley et al.'s (2015) observation that in many instances teachers were providing career guidance despite a lack of training in the area. I categorised these interactions as formal and informal, as the fuzziness of role boundaries aligns with Turner's (2001) role theory where "behaviour that constitutes roles arises initially and recurrently out of the dynamics of interaction'' (p. 234); at Sunnyside, it was apparent that teachers defined their own roles, as needed, in engaging with discussions with students around aspirations. Unclear role boundaries also pointed to a larger issue about teacher misunderstandings of when they should intervene with student aspirations. This uncertainty becomes a point for Sunnyside teachers and stakeholders, as well as potentially other researchers to recognise in light of the literature that agrees upon the significant impact that teachers play in relation to student aspirations (Alloway et al., 2004; Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al., 2015; Helwig, 2004; Kuijpers & Meijers, 2017; Zipin et al., 2015).

The first recommendation is that although I do not think the spontaneity of all interactions must be regulated, there needs to be a recognition of these exchanges and the associated pressures on teachers at Sunnyside. The tacit knowledge that teachers have developed in their perceived roles with student aspirations should be shared, which would help beginning teachers to recognise `teachable' moments about how aspiration can play a critical role in student learning. Learning how to work with aspirations might hold a key for engaging students at Sunnyside through understanding disengagement in a new light and reframing such discussions as `teachable' moments. The interactions about aspirations do not need to be performed in fixed ways, but Sunnyside stakeholders have an opportunity to advise teachers on ways of engaging, in conjunction with the importance of being exposed to emergent literature around student age, aspirations, and the concept of career. This could easily be added to a staff learning day, where teachers in similar year levels share information.

The second recommendation is that, due to the lack of research evidence in this area, there is potential for this to be considered at a systemic level – not just at Sunnyside school – in order for stakeholders to address these inconsistencies by working through scenarios that teachers might encounter. As evident in literature by Hearne and Galvin (2014) and Hooley et al. (2015), if teachers are performing a career role, they need support through professional development. A starting point to develop this professional development could come from my analysis that includes the general descriptors of roles provided in Chapter 4 of this thesis, which could provide an initial step for possible professional learning of teachers about roles they might play. These informal roles could be developed into a learning tool for teachers to discuss options of what to do in different scenarios, and what is expected of them by the school. This could be the starting point of a beginning scaffold for teachers of the types of roles they might be asked to play in formal and informal discussions of aspirations with students. As previously mentioned, my proposed professional development is presented in Appendix I.

The third recommendation is that role descriptions for teachers at all levels need to be reviewed in order to reference to the informal and formal roles that teachers play in relation to their work with student aspirations. Role statements at Sunnyside could be updated to include new career responsibilities in the secondary school, but also to formalise aspects of teachers' currently perceived roles with student aspirations. Further, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2017) need to be reviewed in light of this research, as they do not adequately capture and articulate all the important dimensions of teachers' professional practice. Not all aspects of teacher work with student aspirations can or should be formalised; however, it is necessary to recognise the ongoing work that teachers do in this area. In addition, there needs to be recognition of the work

that teachers conduct with parents in relation to student aspirations. My data identified that teachers need to be provided with more information on an ongoing basis to assist students, but also information to help them in communicating information about student aspirations and potential pathways to parents.

8.6   Implication 5: Lack of Cultural Competency by Teachers

This implication relates to one of the sub-research questions, (3) *How do teachers cope with interactions and uncertainties in relation to student aspirations?* There is one recommendation in relation to this implication.

The way that teachers engage with students around aspirations from a broad range of cultural backgrounds can be fraught with complications, as discussed in Chapter 5. This is important in light of Appadurai (2004) and Bok (2010) arguing that aspirations are culturally constructed, and the conceptions derived from different situations in the environment affect this capacity to aspire. My data analysis indicates that some Sunnyside teachers may seek to develop their cultural competency in order to understand the aspirations held by students and parents. Stakeholders have an opportunity to offer cultural competence professional development, specifically in relationship to student aspirations and parent aspirations for their children, as well as education in how to approach difficult discussions with students or parents in relation to aspirations.

My recommendation is that any formal professional development for teachers around aspirations needs to recognise the need for the integration of cultural competence. Teachers, not just at Sunnyside, but at the systemic level, need to be made aware of the influence of culture on student aspirations, as some researchers suggest aspirations are culturally formed (Appadurai, 2004). In learning to have a cultural competency around some aspirations, teachers will be able to mentor students and be able to converse with them about pathways and opportunities, feeling more confident and secure they are more aware of the influence of cultural expectations. Professional development by The Aspirations Project, as mentioned earlier, presents a good model for this type of inclusion.

8.7   Implication 6: Opportunity for Systemic Career Education at Sunnyside

This implication arises from one of my sub-research questions, (4) *How do teachers perceive influences on student aspirations working as barriers and facilitators?* There is one recommendation presented in relation to this implication.

This section focuses on one aspect of teacher perceptions of aspiration – the overlap with career education and how it is handled at the school. As identified in this thesis and in previous recommendations, participating teachers offered mixed understandings about younger students'

age-related career discussions and interventions, and teachers were not aware of contemporary research into the importance of career guidance beginning at earlier ages (Gore et al., 2017; O'Connell, 2017). The data supported a resulting discrepancy of teacher perceptions and language in relationship to age and aspirations, in connection to career education, at Sunnyside. This aligned with previous literature about student aspirations, where Tranter (2012) proposed that some teachers can be "divided in their opinions about how to advise students to make best use the curriculum hierarchy'' (p. 905). I identified variation in teacher understandings of their perceived roles in relation to student aspirations, and in relation to career education. Despite the lack of clarity around their roles communicated by some teachers, my data highlighted how some teacher understandings aligned with contemporary thinking (Patton & McMahon, 2015), such as the effort of the careers practitioner to involve the teachers as part of a greater collaboration.

My recommendation is that any role teachers are performing specifically in relation to careers education needs to be formalised within role statements, and the overlap with any aspirations work needs to be clarified. There is potential for teachers, administrators, and teachers with career responsibilities to organise career education into a system, not just at Sunnyside, but potentially at schools within the systemic level, to relieve the pressures on teachers to perform informal and formal roles. All educators in the school can work together and have awareness of their roles. With this type of arrangement, no one is exempt from taking responsibility for students' ongoing career development, but their role is also recognised. Sharing of this information openly, which was beginning to happen in the context of the secondary school section of Sunnyside during the time of my data collection, needs to be repeated each year, so all are aware, but also needs to filter through the junior school, and be a model for other schools. This information should be recognised and discussed by stakeholders and teachers need to be allowed to freely discuss concerns to acknowledge pressures on their workload.

8.8   Implication 7: Misconceptions by Teachers and Parents around ATAR

This implication emerges from one of my sub-research questions, (4) *How do teachers perceive influences on student aspirations working as barriers and facilitators?* There is one recommendation presented in relation to this implication.

The focus here relates to external testing for the purposes of university entrance, which was perceived as a barrier to aspirations by a number of teacher participants. My data highlighted that teachers perceived a lack of teacher and parent understanding about information related to certain external signifiers of student progress, such as the ATAR. While the perception was that some families believed ATAR scores were the only pathway for students to meet specific goals; my analysis revealed that there were alternative pathways, and more ways of sharing this information in order

to take pressure off students during the time of ATAR is needed. The notion that ATAR was equated with student progress was relatable to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) conception of the exosystem, as external testing was considered a norm by society and educational stakeholders as a pathway to university.

This misunderstanding was communicated by teachers about their peers as well as in relation to some parents and students. It is possible that parents are missing out on valuable information or misunderstanding information as it is presented, and these ideas are perpetuated through networks, similar to the idea of information transferred among parents through loose and amorphous communication grapevines put forward by Ball and Vincent (1998). As identified in Chapter 4, teachers often found themselves in the situation of educating parents; despite not necessarily having the necessary information to assist parents with information about specific aspirations. There is an opportunity for the school to provide more education to parents and teachers around the ATAR.

My one recommendation here is that teachers need to be recognised for their potential to help parents and students understand how a changing job market affects students' ability to meet their aspirations, and the pathways to get there. This connects with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) notion of the mesosystem, where relationships are formed between key stakeholders in the child's development. The idea that teachers can play such a role needs to be acknowledged by Sunnyside stakeholders, and more information about ATAR provided throughout the school levels so that misinformation is not disseminated. More research into these types of misunderstandings may be a potential research project that could investigate this phenomenon at a systemic level.

8.9   Further Study into School Spatial Influences on Aspirational Discussions

My data highlights that space and nature of the work environment may help foster discussions of aspirations. More research needs to be conducted into the space and nature of the work environment and the impact on discussions of aspirations. If a spatial element influences the openness of students' discussions of aspirations, then schools need to have provision for these types of environments for all students. This would particularly be of interest for groups of students that may not have been identified as struggling with the formation of aspirations.

8.10   Significance of the Study

While this research involved only a small case study with a number of limitations described in Chapter 3 (Section 3.7.5) it has the potential to assist in the understandings of the informal roles that teachers perceive themselves playing in relation to student aspirations, and in the absence of clear definition, the processes they develop to engage with students in discussions of aspirations. An

innovative approach was attempted, through theoretical bricolage, in the interpretation the data, extending Bronfenbrenner (1979) in the reading of teacher work in this area, to emphasise the importance of teacher positioning during the formation of student aspirations. Ultimately, this research aims to draw attention to the importance of teachers in relation to student aspirations and the concomitant support they require to enhance the types of roles they can play in the future.

8.11   Conclusion of Thesis

This thesis, which relates to a case study of teacher roles with engaging student aspirations at Sunnyside, contributes to ongoing scholarly research in the field of student aspirations through asking the question, *How do teachers understand their roles in relation to engaging with student aspirations?* This research exposes an aspect within the literature where taken-for-granted assumptions linger around teacher roles with regard to student aspirations. The focus of the study is on teachers' voices and their understandings around student aspirations as well as exposing their hidden roles in relation to them.

Specifically, the analysis of data indicates that teachers conceptualise student aspirations forming in complex ways, taking on a multi-faceted quality, influenced by a range of sources, and as a capacity, which has to be nurtured and developed in students before reaching a point of realism. A contention of this thesis is that teacher understandings influence their perceptions of their roles with student aspirations. The roles identified and named are carer, vocationalist, navigator, cheerleader, dissembler, dreamslayer, guru, teammate, networker, and interrogator. In performing these roles, teachers may experience role confusion as various roles come into conflict. This thesis highlights that teachers do have responsibilities around engaging with student aspirations but a lack of guidance leaves many having to respond situationally. The analysis also highlights how teachers perceive aspects of the school environment as well as family expectations and external testing work as both facilitators and barriers to student aspirations and associated teacher roles. In addition, this project provides a glimpse of roles teachers are currently performing in relation to engaging with student aspirations at all year levels, P-12. In summary, not only does this thesis expose the hidden roles teachers are performing in relation to student aspirations but also highlights how such roles are learned on the job, negotiated in situations, and in response to changes within the school and external environment.

It is through listening to teachers' voices that I present seven implications from this data about what is happening at the coalface, in Sunnyside School, where P-12 teachers are conceptualising and then performing their perceived roles with regard to student aspirations. The implications highlight the myriad of teachers' conceptualisations of aspirations and the impacts on their role as well as their role confusion, frequent discussions around aspirations with students, and

cultural competence challenges; the implications are important for Sunnyside stakeholders so they understand where potential professional development may be needed. Through careful consideration of these implications, I have also made 10 recommendations for future research and potential policy changes. I outline where more work can be done in research and policy in order to ensure teachers will be recognised for the work they do to promote student aspirations.

Ultimately, this work adds to current research into student aspirations by focusing on teacher engagement with student aspirations. By giving teachers a voice about student aspirations, it adds to the growing understandings around how student aspirations form and develop, and where educators can play a confident role in this process through the support of stakeholders. The aim is for students to have an opportunity, with the support of teachers, to find a pathway to their sought-after aspirations.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Final Ethics Report

Annual/Final Project Report
Human Research Ethics Committee

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Please indicate the type of report	☐ Annual Report **(Omit 3b & 5b)** X Final Report
Project No:	**A16-072**
Project Name:	A Case Study of Student Aspirations from Melbourne's Peri-Urban Fringe.
Principal Researcher:	**Dr Sharon McDonough**
Other Researchers:	A/Prof Jenene Burke **Ms Amy Darby Walker**
Date of Original Approval:	**From 27/05/2016 to 30/09/2018, Amended to February 2019**
School / Section:	Faculty of Education
Phone:	5327 9703
Email:	s.mcdonough@federation.edu.au

Please note: For HDR candidates, this Ethics annual report is a separate requirement, in addition to your HDR Candidature annual report, which is submitted mid-year to research.degrees@federation.edu.au.

1) Please indicate the current status of the project:				
1a) Yet to start				☐
1b) Continuing				☐
1c) Data collection completed				X
1d) Abandoned / Withdrawn:				☐
1e) If the approval was subject to certain conditions, have these conditions been met? (If not, please give details in the comments box below) N/A	☐ Yes		☐ No	
Comments:				
1f) Data Analysis	☐ Not yet commenced	Proceeding	☒ Complete	☐ None
1g) Have ethical problems been encountered in any of the following areas: Study Design			☐ Yes	X No

Recruitment of Subjects		☐ Yes	X No	
Finance		☐ Yes	X No	
Facilities, Equipment		☐ Yes	X No	
(If yes, please give details in the comments box below)				

Comments:

2a) Have amendments been made to the originally approved project?	
☐ No	X Yes
2b) If yes, was HREC approval granted for these changes?	
☐ Yes	Provide detail: ☐ Yes Application for Amendment to an Existing Project ☐ Yes Change of Personnel X Yes Extension Request
☐ No	If you have made changes, but not had HREC approval, provide detail as to why this has not yet occurred:
2c) Do you need to submit any amendments now?	
X No	☐ Yes Application for Amendment to an Existing Project ☐ Yes Change of Personnel ☐ Yes Extension Request * NB: If 'Yes', download & submit the appropriate request to the HREC for approval: Please note: Extensions will not be granted retrospectively. Apply well prior to the project end date, to ensure continuity of HRE approval.

3a) Please indicate where you are storing the data collected during the course of this project: (Australian code for the Responsible conduct of Research Ch 2.2.2, 2.5 – 2.7)
I am storing the data in a password protected computer and in a locked cabinet.
3b) Final Reports: Advise when & how stored data will be destroyed **(Australian code for the Responsible conduct of Research Ch 2.1.1)**
The data will be stored on a password protected computer and in a locked cabinet until it is destroyed in five years. Hard copies will be shredded and digital files deleted.

Annual/Final Project Report

Human Research Ethics Committee

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4) Have there been any events that might have had an adverse effect on the research participants OR unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project?

X No	☐ Yes * **NB: If 'yes', please provide details in the comments box below:**

Comments:

5a) Please provide a short summary of results of the project so far (no attachments please):

The survey and interview portion of the data collection were completed by July 2017. Collecting documents for the document analysis was completed by December 2017. I spent eight months analysing the data through NVivo and writing drafts of my analysis for my supervisors.

5b) Final Reports: Provide details about how the aims of the project, as stated in the application for approval, were achieved (or not achieved). **(Australian code for the Responsible conduct of Research 4.4.1)**

My study aims to uncover teachers' understandings about their roles in relation to student aspirations. This section describes how I am confident that the project has completed its aims, and that my data was able to uncover a range of roles that teachers do play with students' aspirations. My implications will enable key education stakeholders to consider if teachers need support in their ongoing interactions with students' aspirations.

Throughout my research, the main research question and four sub-research questions have remained the same. My main research question has teachers' understandings as the focus: *How do teachers understand their role in relation to student aspirations?*

There are four sub-research questions:

- *Do teachers within a school share the same understandings about their role in relation to student aspirations?*

- *Are the interactions that teachers have with students about aspirations part of their defined role?*

- *How acute is the demand for teachers to offer guidance to students about aspirations?*

- *How do teachers perceive student aspirations forming and the relationship between student aspirations, the curriculum and teaching?*

My research questions respond to the lack of literature from the perspective of teachers about their impacts on students' aspirations. I aim to answer the call from Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, Ellis and Fray (2015), who argue there is little evidence on the ``specific effects of schools and teachers on the transition process'' (p. 7). Although researchers agree that teachers do play a role in students' aspirations, along with parents, family and friends (Alloway, Dalley, Patterson, Walker & Lenoy, 2004), there is a lack of literature from the perspective of teachers about their role with students' aspirations. My research answers this need by investigating teachers' understandings about aspirations and analysing their revelations about what they do in relation to students' aspirations. I make a detailed study of the current literature, in an attempt to fulfill the requirements for the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, Statement 1.1c.

My data analysis describes the formal and informal roles that teachers do play when working with students' aspirations. I also discuss the processes and uncertainties that teachers have when they encounter situations where they must work with students' aspirations; further, I explore the external factors that weigh on teachers, including expectations of the school and parents, when assisting students. My data analysis has merit as it has the potential to inform school administrators and teacher educators about the understandings and perspectives that teachers bring to encounters with students about aspirations.

My implications and recommendations are directed at key education stakeholders to show that teachers need more support prior to critical interactions with students who are contemplating their educational and career futures. My research project will enable these stakeholders to access if educators need more education or support to guide interactions with students contemplating their educational and career aspirations.

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6) Publications: Provide details of research dissemination outcomes for the previous year resulting from this project: eg: Community seminars; Conference attendance; Government reports and/or research publications
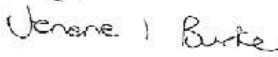
I participated in the Federation University 2017 HDR Research Conference. I was also a participant in the 2017 Federation University 3MT Heat.

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7) The HREC welcomes any feedback on:
- Difficulties experienced with carrying out the research project; or
- Appropriate suggestions which might lead to improvements in ethical clearance and monitoring of research.

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8) Signatures			
Principal Researcher:	Print name: Sharon McDonough	**Date:**	19/03/2019
Other/Student Researchers:	Print name: Jenene Burke	**Date:**	19/03/2019
	Print name: Amy D Walker	**Date:**	15/3/2019

Submit to the Ethics Officer, Mt Helen campus, by the due date:
research.ethics@federation.edu.au

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Appendix B: Preliminary Grouping of Survey Questions from Confirmation of Candidature

Appendix: Proposed Survey and Interview Questions

Amy Darby Walker

Survey:

Information Sought	Questions/Information
Background Information	• Year Levels Presently Teaching • Year Levels Taught (All Schools) • Total Number of Years Teaching (Including this one) • All Schools/Universities/Other Taught • Levels of Education and Universities Attended

Survey – Likert Scale Questions:

Research Questions	Questions/Information
Do teachers within a school share the same understanding?	• The school supports and encourages me to link the curriculum to aspirations or careers. • My classroom should just be for learning information generally, not focused on discussions of aspirations or career choice. • There is enough focus on aspirations or careers at this school. • All teachers in this school would share the same beliefs about their role in relation to aspirations or careers education.
Are the interactions that teachers have with students about aspirations part of their defined role?	• Discussing possible careers with students is part of my job. • Discussions about aspirations or job choices should be the focus of the careers advisor. • There is a lack of guidance from curriculum documents regarding aspirations or career guidance. • I have felt conflicted about my responsibility and a students' aspiration, or have felt external pressure to act in/counsel the student in one way or another.
How acute is the demand for giving guidance about aspirations?	• Parents pressure me in relation to students' aspirations or career choices. • More lessons in general should be directed to student aspirations or career choices.
How do teachers perceive student aspirations forming and the relationship among student aspirations, the curriculum and teaching?	• I think that career education should start…(Teachers' choice of Year Level) • I think students can articulate aspirations/career goals…(Teachers' Choice of Year Level) • I think it is possible to influence students' aspirations/career goals up until the following time period… (Teachers' Choice of Year Level(s))

Survey – Open-ended Responses:

Research Questions	Questions/Information
Do teachers within a school share the same understanding?	• What do you think are important factors impacting student aspirations? Examples might be parents, the school attended, peers, attitude or socioeconomic factors. • List the people you think are responsible for discussing aspirations or career options with students. These may be school personnel or not. • What role do you think a teacher plays in relation to student aspirations or career choices – and is this a key role?
Are the interactions that teachers have with students about aspirations part of their defined role?	• What do you do in your practise to help students with aspirations or careers? Is this formal or informal teaching? • Do you see classroom discussions about students' aspirations as part of your job? Why or why not?
How acute is the demand for giving guidance about aspirations?	• How are you likely to push high achievers, low achievers, or both – in relation to their aspirations? Please explain. • Have you encountered one of the following: a) you pushed a student towards or away from an aspiration, b) you felt conflicted about your responsibility in relation to a student's aspiration c) you felt pressure to act in/counsel the student in a specific way or d) another situation you would like to share. Please explain.
How do teachers perceive student aspirations forming and the relationship among student aspirations, the curriculum and teaching?	• Can you explain how you understand how students form aspirations and how they might change? • What is the relationship between age and aspirations? When do you think students decide on a career and how likely is this to change? • In what ways do you find students are buoyed or limited in their aspirations by the knowledge or social background they bring to school? What sort of responsibility does this place on teachers?

Semi-structured Interview Draft Questions: My intention is to ask teachers to explain some of their responses from the survey with these additional questions.

Research Questions	Questions/Information
Do teachers within a school share the same understanding?	• What do you understand students' aspirations to be? • Do you think students at this school would feel limited or expanded by the curriculum and teaching, impacting their aspirations or career planning? Please explain.
Are the interactions that teachers have with students about aspirations part of their defined role?	• If a student comes to you with an aspiration, seeking counsel, do you feel comfortable or uncomfortable handing aspirations of students? Can you please explain how you handle these situations, or provide a recent example?
How acute is the demand for giving guidance about aspirations?	• Do you often teach about aspirations or careers, or provide links in your material? If so, is this on the spot or planned in advance?
How do teachers perceive student aspirations forming and the relationship among student aspirations, the curriculum and teaching?	• Can you describe a recent experience with a student in relation to his or her aspiration? • Have you seen any patterns around when students start limiting their aspirations or career options in some way? For example, a student tells you that they cannot be something due to a specific reason, such as family, money or distance.

Appendix C: Final Survey Questions

In order to orient teachers to my research, the survey presented two definitions of aspirations in the introduction:

"Academic aspirations can be conceptualised as career- and education-based long-term goals that students attribute to their own future'' (McCollum and Yoder, 2011, p. 67).

And

Aspirations can be thought of as a student's "ability to identify and set goals for the future, while being inspired at present to work for these goals'' (Quaglia and Cobb, 1996, p. 130).

1. Please choose your level of agreement. (Scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Uncertain, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)
    a. It is important that students have aspirations for their education or career.
    b. It is important that students perceive my support in relation to their aspirations.
    c. Discussing aspirations with students is part of my job.
    d. There is sufficient focus on student aspirations in this school's curriculum.
    e. The school encourages me to link the curriculum to student's aspirations.
    f. The teachers in this school have a shared understanding of their role in relation to student aspirations.
    g. Discussing aspirations falls under a formal pastoral care role.
    h. Teacher professional development is needed to assist teachers to link discussions of student aspirations to the curriculum

2. Please choose a response based on the scale provided. (Scale: Every day, Once a week, Once a Month, About 3-4 Times a Year, Almost Never)
    a. I discuss aspirations with students.
    b. I create classroom opportunities for students to discuss their aspirations.
    c. Students seek my advice about aspirations.
    d. Parents pressure me in relation to student aspirations.

3. Career education should start the following year: (Choices: Kinder, Prep, Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3, Grade 4, Grade 5, Grade 6, Grade 7, Grade 8, Grade 9, year 10, Year 11, Year 12)
    a. Any additional comments?

4. Question 4: Students can articulate their aspirations by the time they are in the following school year: (Choices: Kinder, Prep, Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3, Grade 4, Grade 5, Grade 6, Grade 7, Grade 8, Grade 9, Year 10, Year 11, Year 12)

   a. Any additional comments?

5. Question 5: It is possible to influence a student's aspiration up until the following year: (Choices: Kinder, Prep, Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3, Grade 4, Grade 5, Grade 6, Grade 7, Grade 8, Grade 9, Year 10, Year 11, Year 12)

   a. Any additional comments?

6. Question 6: Rank the following factors on student aspirations from 1-12, with 1 being the most important: (Choices: Student Attitude, Parents or Primary Carers, School, Home Environment, Prior Achievement, Television/Media, Peers, Teachers, Career Guidance, Socioeconomic Status, Location, Network/Individuals Close to the Family)

   a. Any other factor or comment?

7. Rank the following people in order of their responsibility for discussing student aspirations with students, with 1 being the most important: (Choices: Grandparents or Relatives, Siblings, Teachers, Peers, Careers Advisor, Principal, University Recruiter, Friends of Family or Network, Parents, Other People)

   a. Any other factor or comment?

8. Provide a word that describes how you perceive your role in relation to student aspirations. Examples might include guiding, moulding, providing tools, or observing. Explain your choice of words in one to two sentences.

9. Do you perceive any connection between this school environment and student aspirations? You can refer generally to other school environments for contrast.

10. In what ways do you think that students' prior knowledge or background impacts on your ability (or that of the school) to assist them with their aspirations?

11. Can you describe a time where you had misgivings about the advice you were asked to give to a student about his or her future? For example: you encouraged a student's aspiration but this conflicted with your expectation for the student, you discouraged a student's aspiration or told them they would not be able to achieve it, you felt external pressure to direct a student in a certain way, or, you felt conflicted about your responsibility.

12. Is there anything that might stop you from helping some or all students with the pursuit of an aspiration?

13. Have you previously been offered or participated in any type of career advice training?
    a. Please add any other general comments.

14. Which of the following best describes your role? (Choices: Primary Classroom Teacher, Secondary Classroom Teacher, Specialist Teacher, Educational Administration)

15. Please select ALL of the year levels you are currently teaching: (Choices: Primary School, Secondary School)

16. Please select ALL of the year levels you are currently teaching: (Choices: Kinder, Prep, Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3, Grade 4, Grade 5, Grade 6, Year 7, Year 8, Year 9, Year 10, Year 11, Year 12)

17. Please enter the total number of years that you have experience teaching:

18. Please list your highest level of education completed:

19. Please select your age range: (Choices: 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, 61-70, 71-80)

20. Please select your gender: (Choices: Male, Female, Other)

21. Would you be willing to participate in an interview? (Choices: No, Yes)
    a. If yes, please provide your first name and email address

Appendix D: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. What do you consider the differences to be between aspirations and careers education?

    a. How do you think student year level or age impacts when various discussions/activities should start?

2. What do you consider to be your role as a teacher, and its boundaries in relation to student aspirations? Are there any tensions in relation to this role?

    a. Does the school influence your answer to this question or your role in general? Have you received information on the school on this?

3. Could you describe the environment of this school in relation to student aspirations or careers education?

    a. What responsibility does the school have to students or parents in relation to student aspirations?

    b. Would you say the approach is whole school? Information-centred or student-centred?

4. Can you describe a time when you worked with a student on an aspiration?

    a. Can you clarify if you had any misgivings in this situation?

    b. Did you want to share any other experience or misgiving?

5. Have you seen any patterns when students start limiting their aspirations?

6. Should all student aspirations be encouraged and what is a teacher's role in this?

    a. Is it incumbent on teachers to help or foster aspirations?

    b. What is a teacher's role when there is a conflict or barrier of some sort?

7. Can you explain how you discuss aspirations on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis, how this relates to your teaching and what these discussions might entail?

    a. How easy is it to have these discussions?

8. How certain are you in any advice that you give students?

     a. Can you clarify what you consider helping or advice – such as is pointing to a resource helping, or do you consider it something more involved?

9. Can you tell me if you think student attitude plays a role in student aspirations? If so, how does this impact your role?

10. Is there any tension between your perceived role of discussing aspirations with students and other roles?

11. Could you expand on any factors of significance impacting student aspirations or your role in discussing student aspirations?

12. What might you like to tell me that I have not specifically asked?

13. Maybe you'd like to comment on parents, resources for teachers, teacher training or other factors or barriers in relation to your role in relation to student aspirations.

Appendix E: Document Analysis List

Sunnyside School Documents Reviewed

- Web Page Copy (as of October 27, 2017)
- 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 Annual Reports
- 2015 Fee Form
- 2017 Business Notice
- 2017 Fee Schedule
- 2017 Term Dates
- Prospectus
- Teacher Planner Text
- Business Notice 2015
- Career Practitioner PD
- Careers Program Overview
- Child Protection Handbook
- Child Safe Standards Toolkit
- CSEF Application Form
- Parent Information Flyer
- Pre-referral Checklist
- Role of the Classroom Teacher
- Year 12 Counselling Form
- Year 7-11 Referral Form Career Counselling
- Career Counselling Pre-Referral Tutor Teacher Checklist
- Student Career Investigation
- Junior School Handbook
- Year 7 and 8 Handbook
- Year 9 and 10 Handbook
- VCE Handbook
- Pastoral Care Policy
- School Newsletters and Career Newsletters (Approximately 45)

External Documents Reviewed

- Victorian State Government, Roles and Responsibilities Teaching Service
- Career Education Association of Victoria, Career Development Quality Benchmarks
- Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, Graduate and Proficient

Dear Teacher,

Here is a chance to have your say about student aspirations!

Your voice matters, particularly in relation to student aspirations. We are hoping you will share some experiences with us and together we can try to influence policy and practice around student aspirations.

You are invited to participate in a research project: A Case Study of Student Aspirations in Melbourne's Peri-Urban Fringe. **The research focuses on teachers' understandings of their role in relation to students' aspirations.**

Please read this email and the attachment carefully before deciding whether or not to take part.

More details about the study are available in the attached Plain Language Information Statement (PLIS). You may contact any of the researchers listed in the PLIS at any point for more details about the project. This research study is conducted under the supervision of Dr. Sharon McDonough and Dr. Jenene Burke from Federation University Australia.

All survey responses will remain confidential. Once you click submit on the survey, your responses become anonymous and cannot be removed from the data pool.

The last question of the survey will ask if you are willing to participate in a follow-up interview. If you opt to participate, you will be asked to provide your first name and email address so that I can make contact with you. You will be given a pseudonym in the research. You may withdraw from the interview at any point up until the data has been processed.

The survey is conducted through SurveyMonkey.com and can be accessed through this link:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/QLKFYRB

The survey will remain open until the end of this month, May 31.

Thank you for your interest in this project.

Yours sincerely,

Amy Darby Walker

PhD Candidate

Federation University Australia

amydwalker@students.federation.edu.au

Plain Language Information Statement

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SCHOOL OF EDUCATION & ARTS

PROJECT TITLE:	A Case Study of Student Aspirations in Melbourne's Peri-Urban Fringe
PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER:	Dr. Sharon McDonough, Lecturer and Program Leader (5327 9703; s.mcdonough@federation.edu.au)
OTHER/STUDENT RESEARCHERS:	Dr. Jenene Burke, Associate Dean, Senior Lecturer and Program Leader (5327 9332; js.burke@federation.edu.au) Amy Darby Walker, *Second-year PhD Candidate* (04 1633 1216; amydwalker@students.federation.edu.au)

You are invited to participate in a research project. Please read the information carefully before deciding whether or not to take part. Thank you for your interest.

What is it about?

This study aims to gain more knowledge into teachers' understandings about the role they play in relation to students' aspirations. For the context of this study, aspirations are defined as the educational and career aspirations of students – basically what they want to do after secondary school. The research collected aims to contribute to Australian educational research into students' aspirations. Specifically, this research aims to help stakeholders determine if teachers need more education or support to feel equipped to handle discussions or interactions regarding students' aspirations. As a teacher in a P-12 school, you are invited to participate in this project and share your experiences and understandings.

What will you be invited to do?

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be invited to complete an online survey through Survey Monkey. There are three parts to the survey: background information, where you will be asked about your teaching experience; a Likert Scale, where you will respond to a statement by selecting from a scale of responses; and open-ended questions, where you will be asked to provide your own responses in sentence or paragraph form. The survey will also ask if you would be willing to participate in an interview. The survey will take approximately 30 minutes.

The next stage of the research will involve a selected number of interviews. Researchers will select approximately 15 teachers to interview from those respondents that agreed to participate in an interview. The interview will clarify responses from the survey, and ask the respondent for more information. Additional questions will be asked in the survey. The interview will take approximately one hour, and will be audio recorded.

Plain Language
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How will I benefit from participation in this study?

Although there are no direct benefits, you may gain indirect benefits from the research as the process of participating in the survey and/or interview may enable you to develop an appreciation of the role you play in fostering student aspirations. You may also gain benefit as the outcomes of the research may influence education policy and practice.

Are there any risks?

As you will be reflecting on aspects of your daily practice as a teacher, it is not anticipated that any risks will arise to participants as a result of this study. However, if you feel concerned, or if any of the questions cause you distress, we encourage you to speak to a member of the research team, using the contact details provided. In addition, if you feel distress, we encourage you to speak to your General Medical Practitioner or contact Lifeline on 13 11 14, or Beyond Blue (1300 22 4636).

This study has received clearance from Federation University's Human Research and Ethics Committee.

What experience do the researchers have?

Both Dr. McDonough and Dr. Burke are experienced education researchers and have published in international and local journals and books. They supervise students at both Masters and PhD level.

Ms. Walker holds two Master's degrees, one of which required sustained research and argumentative writing. She has worked as a community journalist, which required a sensitivity for the interview process and knowledge of writing up data collected in an accurate way. She has taught English at a private school, and continues to teach now through Federation College.

What will happen with the data that is collected?

If you choose to participate in the interview, you will be given a chance to review the information you shared once it is transcribed to make any adjustments necessary within a specified timeframe before the data is processed.

Every attempt will be made to keep the data confidential. Each respondent will be kept anonymous through the use of numbers, and only identified for the purposes of contacting those selected for interview. All interview participants will be given pseudonyms for any quotations used in published writing. The data collected will be only be used by the researchers listed. Electronic data will be kept in password-protected computers and any hard copy data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet.

It is planned that the data will be destroyed after a period of five years, the minimum date required for keeping research data.

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How will the findings be disseminated?

The results will be written within Ms. Walker's thesis and submitted to fulfil the requirements of a PhD degree. A report will be written for the school that summarises key findings of the research. The participants will be presented with information if requested. The hope is that the research will be of interest to those organising conferences or editing journals in education, career education or teacher education.

How do I give my consent to participate?

Your participation in the survey will be voluntary and this participation will indicate consent. If you agree to and are selected for an interview, your consent will be recorded digitally.

What if I want to withdraw?

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent at any time during the study in which your participation will cease immediately and any information not yet processed will not be used. You are also free not to answer any survey or interview questions. Declining to participate, or withdrawing from the project, will in no way impact your relationship with Federation University Australia.

By participating in the survey, you are giving consent and do not need to fill out any additional forms. Should you agree to and be selected for an interview, recorded consent will be taken during the interview process.

Who is funding this research?

This research is partly funded by an Industry scholarship with Bacchus Marsh Grammar.

If you have any questions, or you would like further information regarding the project titled **A Case Study of Student Aspirations in Melbourne's Peri-Urban Fringe**, please contact the Principal Researcher, **Dr. Sharon McDonough** of the Faculty of Education and Arts:
PH: 5327 9703
EMAIL: s.mcdonough@federation.edu.au

Should you (i.e. the participant) have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this research project, please contact the Federation University Ethics Officers, Research Services, Federation University Australia,
P O Box 663 Mt Helen Vic 3353 or Northways Rd, Churchill Vic 3842.
Telephone: (03) 5327 9765, (03) 5122 6446
Email: research.ethics@federation.edu.au

CRICOS Provider Number 00103D

Appendix H: Email to Teachers Seeking Member Checks

Hello xx,

Thank you again for participating in my study of teachers' roles in relation to student aspirations.

I have completed the transcription process and am attaching your transcript for review.

Could you please respond with any feedback, changes or additions by Friday, October 27? If I do not hear from you by this time, then I will assume that you are happy with the transcript as presented.

Please note:

*For your convenience, I have attached the questions used in the interviews.

*Any extracts I use in my writing may be edited for grammatical purposes only, or for any de-identification that needs to occur.
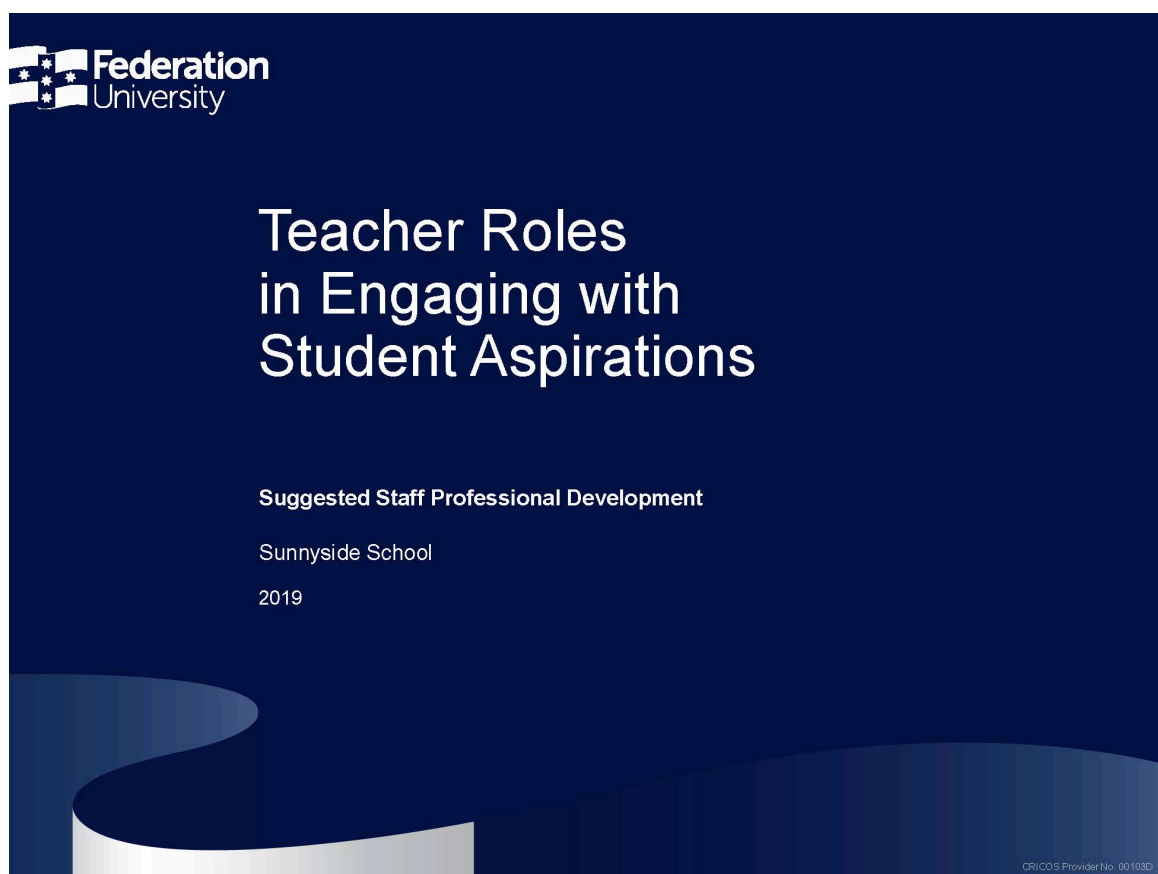
*If you have any questions, or if I can assist in any way, please contact me at any time. At this stage, I will be at the school on Wednesday, October 25 in the afternoon if you would like to discuss anything with me in person.

Thanks again for your time,

Amy Darby Walker

amydwalker@students.federation.edu.au

04 1633 1216

**Teacher Roles
in Engaging with
Student Aspirations**

Suggested Staff Professional Development

Sunnyside School

2019

CRICOS Provider No. 00103D

What are student aspirations?

Research	Student aspirations are conceptualised differently by individuals.
	Researchers have different ways of defining students' aspirations.
Definitions to Consider	``Academic aspirations can be conceptualised as career- and education-based long-term goals that students attribute to their own future'' (McCollum and Yoder, 2011, p. 67).
	and
	Aspirations can be thought of as a student's ``ability to identify and set goals for the future, while being inspired at present to work for these goals'' (Quaglia and Cobb, 1996, p. 130).

Why is this important for me?

Research Teachers do play a role in student aspirations, regardless whether intended or not.

Career practitioners may be overloaded, unavailable for some students one-on-one.

Student aspirations can become set early in primary school, based on student interest, or elimination based on self-appraisal.

Importance Teachers can potentially disrupt set pathways or awaken students to new ideas.

Teachers can potentially play a role in educating parents around aspirational pathways.

What role do I play?

Roles Teachers that participated in research performed both formal and informal roles in relation to student aspirations.

Teachers may be performing informal roles not identified as part of a teacher's formal ongoing role (see the next two slides).

Potential Outcomes Improve your understandings around student aspirations and develop ways of engaging with them.

Improve your understandings of the barriers and facilitators in relation to student aspirations.

Confidently engage with students around their aspirations.

Theoretical Perspectives

Turner (2001)	Some roles work in tandem with others, like teacher/student
	Informal roles may be performed alongside formal roles
Gottfredson (1981)	Students progressively eliminate occupations based on developing self-concept
Bronfenbrenner (1979)	A child's development is influenced by a range of environmental influences, including familiar environments but also the thinking of the larger community and attitudes of society
Appadurai (2004)	Aspirations are culturally informed

Specific formal roles based on research

I am a...	
Carer	Perform a pastoral care role for primary and/or secondary students.
Vocationalist	Administer some level of career education (if working in secondary school at case study school).

Specific informal roles based on research

Am I a...?	
Navigator?	Assist students with pathways.
Cheerleader?	Cheer students to any goal, no matter what barriers or consequences.
Dissembler?	Present one face to students, another to other teachers.
Dreamslayer?	Able to cut down a students' goal based on scores.
Coach?	Coach student over a period of time toward a goal.
Collaborator?	Work closely with students to develop a goal or to meet it.
Networker?	Negotiate with students, parents, careers teachers or others to help students reach a goal.
Interrogator?	Question students, parents, teachers, or the system in relation to aspirations.

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Teacher processes in absence of defined roles

Processes identified from participating teacher data	
General Discussions	Willing to have general discussions but not get into specifics of aspiration.
Cautious Language	Unwilling to make any promises to students about aspirations.
Defined Personal Boundaries	Creating a defined personal boundary of what willing to discuss with students.
Balanced Student and School Interests	Negotiating the interests of the student and the school as a business.
Advice Matched to Student	Carefully advising student based on his or her interests.
Students Directed to Aim High	Directing all students to go for their goal, regardless of circumstances.
Information Streamlined for Teachers	Working to change the system behind the scenes to help all teachers with advice.

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Ideas for PD

Bitesize Learning   Choose one short exercise or scenario to work through in a 5-15 minute block during a staff meeting.

Exercise #1

Brainstorm   Brainstorm definitions of student aspirations and compare these with other teachers.

Consider these definitions in relation to the theoretical perspective of Gottfredson (1981), Bronfenbrenner (1979), and Appadurai (2004) listed earlier. For example, does your definition take into account student culture? Or, how does the student eliminate choices?

Exercise #2: Scenarios

Think	Consider the informal role you would play in the scenario listed.
Pair	Share your thoughts with another teacher. Feel free to add in more detail or ``what ifs.''
Share	As a group, discuss what roles you are playing. Are these appropriate? What roles do students need?

Primary School Scenarios

1. **Student calls himself dumb, knocks back all pathways you suggest**

2. **Parents pushing child to strive hard, not much time for play, child stressed**

3. **Student breaks down to you after receiving NAPLAN maths scores and thinks she cannot be a scientist**

4. **Student expresses interest in an aspiration, other children overhear and tease him/her, student is deflated and does not want to talk about it anymore**

5. **Student has a strong interest in _____ (dressmaking, design, airplanes), and you want to incorporate this interest into your classroom, but it means more work for you**

Secondary School Scenarios

1. Upset student confides in you, in conflict with parents over pathway, seeks your help and discretion

2. Pushy parents seeking route for student, student will not likely have appropriate scores

3. Student wants alternative pathway from university, school promotes university pathways, you feel conflicted

4. Student wants to go to a different school, or would be better suited to a different school, but school does not condone counselling for leaving school

5. Student striving towards law, putting intense pressure on self, struggling in subjects, becoming unreasonable

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General Scenarios

1. Student overestimates or underestimates abilities

2. Lack of other teachers' interest in student pathways but you find it worthwhile, you feel you are doing more work than others, unsettling feeling for you

3. Misunderstanding of ATAR persists with students and parents, and one student has been bullied about ``lowering" others' scores even though she wants to pursue this as a career

4. Pressure on students around subject choices and choosing routes in Year 8, some students frustrated and feel it is too early

5. Student has no direction, gets angry with discussions around career, does not want to make choices

6. The school has insisted you incorporate more discussions of aspirations into your delivery of the curriculum but you are not sure where to begin

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Exercise #3:

New Roles

Are there informal roles not listed that you think teachers could play?

Could any of the informal roles be combined for better outcomes?

What support is needed to perform these roles?

Exercise #4

Processes

Referring back to the processes in the earlier slide, which of these processes have you employed when working with student aspirations? If none of these apply to you, describe how you have approached discussions with students about aspirations.

Which of these processes might be beneficial?

Discuss with others what types of processes teachers should use going forward when engaging with student aspirations.

Exercise #5:

Mapping Map out the ways that your team works in a system with the career practitioner, signalling who holds what responsibility.

How does career education work in your school? Who is primarily responsible?

What are your specific roles? Are all teachers equipped to handle this role at the moment?

Exercise #6: Choose a Question to Explore.

Share Can you think of an example, no matter how small, when a student approached you with an aspiration? What did you say?

What do you do now to relate aspirations into your curriculum? How can student aspirations be better related into the curriculum?

Could linking the curriculum to aspirations be a possible behaviour strategy?

What aspirational experiences or time with role models could be incorporated into the school's planning?

Conclusions

Teacher Choice Teachers can develop and choose strategies to engage with student aspirations

Teachers can participate in PD to improve their knowledge of student aspirations

Teacher Impact Teachers can work together to develop new ways to engaging with student aspirations

Teachers can make a different in the lives of students

Further Reading about Student Aspirations

Academic Article Bok, J. (2010). The capacity to aspire to higher education: 'It's like making them do a play without a script'. *Critical Studies in Education, 51*(2), 163-178.

Report Gore, J., Holmes, K., Smith, M., Lyell, A., Ellis, H., & Fray, L. (2015). Choosing university: The impact of schools and schooling. *Report submitted to the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), Australia. Teachers & Teaching Research Program, The University of Newcastle, Australia.*

Further PD on Student Aspirations

**Free PD
for Teachers**   https://www.aspirations.edu.au/

References

Appadurai, A. (2004). The capacity to aspire: Culture and the terms of recognition. *Culture and Public Action, 59*, 62-63.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Boston, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Gottfredson, L. S. (1981). Circumscription and compromise: A developmental theory of occupational aspirations. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 28*(6), 545-579.

McCollum, E. C., & Yoder, N. P. (2011). School culture, teacher regard, and academic aspirations among middle school students. *Middle Grades Research Journal, 6*(2), 65-74.

Quaglia, R. J., & Cobb, C. D. (1996). Toward a theory of student aspirations. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 12*(3), 127-132.

Turner, R. H. (2001). Role theory. In G. Ritzer & B. Smart (Eds.), *Handbook of Sociological Theory* (pp. 233-254). London, United Kingdom: Springer.