THE THREE RS, RELATIONSHIPS, RELATIONSHIPS, RELATIONSHIPS: HOW CAN TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS BE MORE POSITIVE AND PRODUCTIVE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS?

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Abstract

A positive teacher-student relationship has ongoing benefits for students and teachers alike, including improving student wellbeing, academic engagement and performance, and school retention rates, as well as protecting teachers from burnout and stress.

While research supports the importance of the teacher-student relationship, there is no clear framework of strategies for starting and maintaining relationships, particularly in secondary schools in Australia. Of interest to researchers is how to prepare and support teachers in relationship development, with the focus on strategies for teachers that may lead to improving relationships in the classroom. The current research considered attachment theory as a way to understand the teacher-student relationship in secondary schools.

Using a case study methodology, and drawing upon the views of over 60 stakeholders, this research sought the perspectives of teachers, students, their parents and school counsellors in relation to the characteristics of a positive and productive teacher-student relationship and what they thought were the strategies for teachers to start and maintain such a relationship. These data facilitated the construction of a comprehensive framework, the Student-Teacher and Relationship Formation Framework, which was then used to document strategies for starting and maintaining teacher-student relationships as articulated by key stakeholders. This framework was then considered in view of the current literature on the teacher-student relationship and the emerging view of the relevance of attachment theory to understanding relationships in secondary schools.

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Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: QUT Verified Signature

Date: 6 April 2022

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As a passionate educator, it has been my absolute privilege to explore an area of interest of mine that forms the basis of everyday interaction in schools – the teacher-student relationship. Specifically, finding out more about how to strengthen the relationship between myself and the students that I engage with on a daily basis, is such a reward. I value the new learning that I have gained from this experience, and know that it will enhance my capacity to be a better teacher.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The relationship between students and teachers has long been considered important in education as a means for improving student wellbeing, academic engagement and performance, as well as protecting teachers from burnout and stress (for example, Barile et al., 2011; Engels et al., 2016; Krane & Klevan, 2018; Kurdi & Archambault, 2017; Milatz et al., 2015; Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016; OECD, 2016; Raufelder et al., 2016; Sointu et al., 2017; Yoon, 2002). However, there is scarce literature that suggests how teachers start and maintain relationships with students. What is known about the teacher-student relationship is heavily based in a primary school context and has been generally researched outside of Australia. This current study focuses on exploring teacher-student relationships within Australian secondary school settings. In particular, the research sought the perspectives of key stakeholders (teachers, students, parents and school counsellors) to provide an overall understanding of how teachers can build and maintain these significant relationships. It is anticipated that this research will contribute to the understanding of the teacher-student relationship in secondary schools by developing a framework of strategies for teachers to start and maintain these relationships.

The introduction will briefly establish a definition of what a relationship is (Section 1.1) then consider teacher-student relationships in the context of schools (Section 1.2). Sections 1.3 and 1.4 describe the educational system in Australia and a brief introduction to the theoretical framework for this thesis. Section 1.5 outlines the research objectives in relation to three areas of particular interest for the research. Section 1.6 provides the research questions guiding the study. Section 1.7 establishes the significance of the research, while Section 1.8 positions the researcher

(who is himself a current teacher and school leader). Section 1.9 describes the thesis outline.

1.1 WHAT IS A RELATIONSHIP?

The term relationship is complex to define due to its various forms, purposes and existence in contexts such as home, school and work. What is known is that relationships exist between people and that they vary in their degree of formality and equity (Fehr & Russell, 1991; Steinberg & Silverman, 1986; Wish et al., 1976). One commonly referred to definition of the term relationship can be found in the work of Kelley (1983), who described a close relationship as "one of strong, frequent and diverse interdependence that lasts over a considerable period of time" (p. 38).

The teacher-student relationship is one such relationship that can be connected to the above definition. The teacher-student relationship has been defined as being interpersonal in nature, based on day-to-day and moment to moment interactions, and is quite often referred to by its importance and characteristics (Claessens et al., 2017). For example, if teachers have a good relationship with students, it can stand to improve students' learning and wellbeing, while also protect teachers from stress and burnout (for example, Barile et al., 2011; Engels et al., 2016; Krane & Klevan, 2018; Kurdi & Archambault, 2017; Milatz et al., 2015; Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016; OECD, 2016; Raufelder et al., 2016; Sointu et al., 2017; Yoon, 2002). In addition, the literature describes factors that contribute to a positive teacher-student relationship, which will be explored in Section 2.4, in order for the relationship to be understood.

However, the relationship that teachers can form with students must first be considered in the context in which teachers and students operate. There has been an historical change to the purpose of schooling, thus leading to the changing nature of

the relationship between teachers and students. Therefore, before delving into why positive and productive teacher-students relationships are beneficial, and the factors that contribute to the development of this relationship, it is important to understand the changing historical contexts in which teachers and students have engaged in the classroom.

1.2 THE CHANGING PURPOSE OF SCHOOLS

The evolution of schools over the last century could explain changes in the way students and teachers develop their relationship. Theories which have influenced educational practice such as the early work of Dewey (1938) have promoted a shift from traditional educational experiences towards progressive movements in pedagogy, where learning is an interactive, experiential process for students, as opposed to having knowledge communicated and imposed upon them by teachers (Good, 2008; Grennon Brooks & Brooks, 1999).

The purpose of schools during the mid-19th century was to offer free, universal and centralised opportunities for learning for children based on a common curriculum of reading, writing, spelling, mathematics, history and geography. A main aim for schooling young people was to prepare them for the working world beyond school so to benefit both students and society in general (Good, 2008; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2011). As well as an academic focus, schooling in Australia also offered an education to the masses that implanted the principles of morality and religion by the authority of the Church, in particular Anglican and Roman Catholic (although religious denominations also established schools), thereby educating the soul and spirit, as well as the mind.

In the earlier days of schooling, education was usually delivered in a single-room facility, with one teacher in charge of the student body (Barcan, 1965; Good,

2008). The purpose of traditional educational practices was based on disseminating skills, facts and standards for future generations (Dewey, 1938). Knowledge was imparted to students through oral recitation, seatwork, and listening and observation of the teacher. The classroom environment mirrored the intent of this approach to education where students were positioned in rows of desks that were bolted to the floor and faced the teacher positioned in the front of the room, discouraging cooperation between students (Cuban, 1993; Grennon Brooks & Brooks, 1999; Lanier, 1997). Teacher-centred approaches to learning were characterised by rote learning and memorisation (Good, 2008; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2011). Classrooms were dominated by "teacher talk", where the teacher disseminated knowledge and expected students to replicate this information on summative assessment pieces (Goodlad, 1984; Grennon Brooks & Brooks, 1999). Critical thinking and problem solving were not considered and teacher questioning was to solely discover whether students knew the right answers (Grennon Brooks & Brooks, 1999; Jackson, 1986). The learner of the 19th and early 20th century was considered a "blank slate" to which information was to be etched by teachers (Grennon Brooks & Brooks, 1999; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2011). Typically, students worked alone and learnt basic knowledge (Good, 2008; Grennon Brooks & Brooks, 1999). The relationship they had with their teacher was one of obedience. The teacher was absolute authority in the class.

However, during the late 19th century there was a change in educational theory which impacted on educational practice, affecting the teacher-student relationship. This change emerged from the seminal work of philosophers such as John Dewey who encouraged a different approach to education. Dewey (1897) influenced a movement towards progressive educational principles that focused on

education as a social construct where school represented present life, as opposed to future life. Teachers were encouraged to view students as social beings and this view informed the approach to education at the time (Dewey, 1897).

Dewey's view of education was taken further with the concept of constructivist teaching and learning. Instead of the student being a passive recipient of knowledge, constructivism recognised that students were active learners who could be guided in how to access and construct their own knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning was viewed as a social activity where classrooms were described as communities of learners which fostered curiosity, exploration and inquiry, and where memorising information was considered subordinate to learning how to find information to solve real problems (Bruner, 1961; Le Cornu & Peters, 2005). Classrooms were organised to encourage student-to-student interaction and students were encouraged to become emerging thinkers, free to develop their own ideas (Routman, 2005). Teachers were no longer seen as the sole figures of authority over knowledge, and this trend has continued into the 21st century (Vacca & Vacca, 2002; Wilkinson et al., 2010).

To achieve this student-centred approach in education, teachers are now encouraged to develop a close relationship with students; they are to be a knowledgeable and caring adult, working with a secure, motivated child for effective learning and teaching to take place (Arthur et al., 2003; Good & Brophy, 2000; Larrivee, 2005; McInerney & McInerney, 2006). Students' individual personalities and learning needs are paramount (Good & Brophy, 2000). The classroom teacher has an important presence in sharing the role of learning with young people (Good, 2008). Teachers have therefore been required to respond to this evolution by making changes in how they approach and build a relationship with their students (Le Cornu

& Peters, 2005). Teachers are thus someone who is needed to assist students rather than act as an authoritarian figure doing most of the work in the classroom (Probst, 2007).

The broader education system will be described below to place this changing purpose of schooling in the geographical context of Australia, where the research for this thesis is situated. In particular an understanding of the significant transition that occurs when students move from primary to secondary schooling, and the changes to their relationships with their teachers, will be discussed.

1.3 THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN AUSTRALIA

As children move from the home into schools, they have an increasing opportunity to form relationships with an adult other than their parent for optimal cognitive, physical and social and emotional development to occur (Pianta et al., 2012). To develop this concept, an understanding of the education system in Australia must be considered, particularly from a secondary schooling context.

The first formal stage of education in Australia, for children aged three to four-years-old, is known as Foundation, or often referred to as kindergarten, preparatory or preschool (Australian Government, 2021). For most children, entering Foundation may be their first extended period away from their primary caregiver, where they go through a transition from the care of their parents into the care of early childhood teachers. Howes and Ritchie (1999) describe the relationship that children can form with their Foundation teacher as parallel to the type of relationship that exists between parent and child, and that it is an important predictor of their cognitive and educational development. Researchers such as Koomen and Hoeksma (2003) found that children engaged in less behavioural inhibition and security seeking as they spent more time in kindergarten. During this time of their

education, parental contact is still present, as they attend classes and activities, have a presence in their child's classroom, and contact with their teacher. An outcome of this contact would be similar to that found in the research by Ebbeck and Yim (2009) where the teacher draws on information from the parent about their parenting and cultural practices to strengthen the bond and connection with their child. This Foundation year is pivotal to provide children with the opportunity to experience this form of attachment outside of the home, and also for their best preparation for primary school.

In Australia, students begin primary school before the age of six, most usually between the ages of four-and-a-half and five-and-a-half (Australian Government, 2020). When children enter primary school, their transition and adjustment is aided by the time they have spent in their Foundation year of education. The structure of a primary school, particularly in the early year levels, also supports their transition and adjustment as it is similar to that of the Foundation year structure. Students are predominantly taught by the same teacher for the full year, within the same classroom environment.

The transition for students from primary and into secondary schools has been a topic of consideration, and this transition has come into greater focus with the introduction of Year Seven as the first year of secondary schooling. The introduction of Year Seven to senior schooling occurred across Australia in 2015, which aligned with the implementation of the National Curriculum. State Governments were responsible for implementing these educational reforms, and developed policies and procedures to successfully achieve this. In Queensland, for example, the move of Year 7 to secondary schools was a change guided by recommendations in the Queensland Government green paper titled *A Flying Start for Queensland Children:*

Education Green Paper (2010). Students begin in secondary school between the ages of 12 to 13-years-old. To support their transition into secondary school, schools were recommended to adopt six guiding principles, including a focus on student wellbeing (for example, providing a home room to support students as they adjust to new routines and academic demands) and parent involvement (for example, wanting parents to stay connected with their child's learning and encouraging them to attend special events and ceremonies). Also, it was recommended that students begin to spend increasing time with specialist teachers, in specialist facilities, to engage in the curriculum in challenging ways, while keeping the same teacher for some of their subjects. This approach provided a balance of the familiar and the new, to support adaptation and adjustment to this new environment.

Transitioning into secondary school can be a time of high stress for students that can be reduced through a well-developed teacher-student relationship (Evans et al., 2018). The context for teachers and students to do so is different from the context of a primary school. In secondary schools, students see the one main teacher for decreasing periods of time and have multiple classrooms in which they learn. This change becomes increasingly frequent as students move through the year levels in secondary schools, with multiple teachers in many different classrooms. While primary school relationships can draw upon the child-parent attachment as a source of information, there is no manual or framework that suggests ways for teachers to start and maintain the relationships in secondary schools. Teachers are less likely to be able to draw from childhood attachment practices but draw from the emerging understanding that the student-teacher relationship in secondary schools might be similar to that of an adult attachment relationship, as will be discussed further in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

Overall, the transition that students make from primary to secondary school is a critical time for the teacher-student relationship. Teachers have an opportunity to form a relationship with students that has traits different to that formed between child and adult. Attachment theory can offer a framework for understanding this relationship in a secondary schooling context (Ainsworth, 1967; Bowlby, 1951, 1969; Riley, 2010).

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ATTACHMENT THEORY

Attachment theory has been selected as the theoretical framework for this research. The reason for selecting attachment theory is that there is emerging research within an Australian context that students, particularly in secondary schools, are continuing to engage in attachment-style relationships with their teachers throughout their secondary years of schooling. As secondary schooling is the focus of this research, the researcher has become interested in exploring the idea of attachment theory within this context, and how attachment theory has evolved as a construct that is not only relevant as a way of understanding the parent-child relationship, but that between teacher and student. A brief introduction to attachment theory is now introduced, with detailed consideration in Section 2.7.

As an overview, attachment theory has been developed by many researchers over time: from Bowlby's (1951) seminal work exploring the symptoms of maternal deprivation and separation and the importance of family relationships, Ainsworth's (1967) additions to the theory, through her explanation of patterns infants use in relation to the mother for developing secure relationships, to Riley's (2010) application of attachment theory to teacher-student relationships in secondary schools. Bowlby's (1951) work explored the importance of the child-parent relationship, and Ainsworth (1967) found that children needed to feel secure in a

relationship to explore their environment. Australian researcher, Riley (2010), explored the ideas from attachment theory within secondary school settings, suggesting that the interplay of attachment between caregiver and child can be applied in understanding the teacher-student relationship. He commented that teachers would benefit in knowing how to build positive relationships through understanding the elements involved in the process of relationship building. At the time of this research, Riley's proposal was the most current research into the area of attachment theory in secondary schools and thus, underpins the research objectives of the current study.

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The current research aimed to explore the strategies teachers can use to start and maintain positive and productive teacher-student relationships. Attachment theory was used to underpin the research.

The research was designed to respond to three essential problems:

1) There is relatively little research and understanding of the impact of the teacher-student relationship at the secondary school level;

2) There is no specific framework that could act as a guide to support key stakeholders on how to build effective teacher-student relationships; and

3) There is little research that draws on the voices and perspectives of a range of key stakeholders (students, teachers, parents and school counsellors) to understand the impact of the teacher-student relationship.

To achieve the research objectives of this thesis, students, teachers, parents and school counsellors were asked about the fundamental factors necessary to start and maintain the teacher-student relationship. The purpose of asking students and

teachers is that the relationship is between each of them and their insight into how to build an effective teacher-student relationship is critical. Parents have been interviewed for their perspective as they are an invested stakeholder in their child's education not solely from a learning and wellbeing perspective, but also regarding the expectations that they have of teachers, which will be discussed in the literature below. The inclusion of school counsellors' perspectives has been considered in this research as they too form important relationships with students in schools and are reliant on a positive and productive relationship for the benefits of students. Additionally, some school counsellors are also registered teachers themselves, and may have insight into what might enhance or hinder the formation of the teacher-student relationship from their combined professional experiences as teachers and school counsellors. The similar and differing perspectives of the four distinct stakeholder groups is aimed to provide whether or not different stakeholder groups were in agreement or at odds regarding how the teacher-student relationship should start and be maintained.

To respond to these key areas of interest, the following research questions were asked.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research was conducted to address the following questions:

1. What do key stakeholders believe are the fundamental factors necessary to start and maintain a positive and productive relationship between teachers and students?
    i. What behaviours are perceived as enablers of building this relationship?
    ii. What are the barriers to building this relationship?

2. What strategies for developing and maintaining teacher-student relationships are most relevant to key stakeholders?

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

There is much research on primary school formation of teacher-student relationships, which have shown to be vital in facilitating the education of students. However, there is scarce research on how to start and maintain positive and productive teacher-students relationships in secondary schools. Within the literature review of this thesis, reference will be made to some research conducted within Australian secondary schools (for example, Martin, 2007; Martin & Collie, 2019), the research considers the benefits of the teacher-student relationship in secondary schools, as opposed to how to start and maintain these significant relationships.

While the importance of the relationship is well established within Australian primary and secondary schools and beyond, what is not known is how teachers start and maintain this relationship in a positive and productive way in secondary schools. The current research is significant as it will provide an understanding of how teachers can develop a positive relationship with students by devising a framework of strategies to train teachers in teacher-student relationship development.

1.8 POSITIONING THE RESEARCHER

I am a current secondary school teacher and school leader (Deputy Principal) with a background in school counselling. When I first explored the idea to complete my own research, one of my supervisors posed the question to me: what is at the core of your teaching? To me, the answer was simple and beyond the bounds of the content that I was teaching and the resources that I was using. It was, and still is, the relationship that I form with students that remains central to my practice. In my

experience, I have found that taking the time to form a relationship with students has a positive and productive outcome. If students feel comfortable with you and feel they can trust you, they will build their capacity to take risks, solve problems, accept responsibility and grow and develop at a rate that is best suited to them.

From the beginning of my education degree two decades ago until now, I have found that universities and schools do not offer an opportunity for teachers to learn how to form relationships with students. Relationship development with students is not taught in a formal sense and is rarely offered through professional development. However, my experience has taught me that the teacher-student relationship is central to the best outcomes for students and teachers in schools. Some of the positive and negative interactions that I have with students, or that I have observed others having, all stem from the quality of the relationship with these students and an understanding of the student as a whole person, not a problem to be solved or a reflection of their behaviours. My observations have shown me that students crave connection and that the most positive and productive interactions with them come from seeing and treating them as a person in the first instance. We know this is true in our own relationships, so why would it be any different for young people?

I have been unable to find a clear framework to help me to develop relationships with students. This is specifically the case in secondary schools. A lot of understanding of how to develop relationships remains anecdotal. This does not lend itself to best supporting pre-service and beginning teachers who have a lack of exposure to experienced teachers and, understandably, an immense focus on what they are teaching, nor support teachers who are experiencing increasing educational pressure and change and a lack of time to discuss their teaching approaches.

I believe that both students and teachers deserve good relationships. Teachers should have access to an approach or framework for relationship development with students, and the voice of key stakeholders must be heard on this critical topic. This research brought together these voices and presents findings on the approaches and strategies considered to be important for the development of the teacher-student relationship in secondary schools.

1.9 THESIS OUTLINE

This thesis examines the perceptions of key stakeholders on the characteristics of a positive and productive teacher-student relationship, as well as how teachers start and maintain these relationships with students. The thesis includes six chapters as follows.

Chapter One: The introduction provides a brief definition of relationships, the changing purpose of schools and the emergence of the importance of the teacher-student relationship, discusses the research objectives and contribution, as well as the associated research questions that were addressed in this research. The significance of this research is also discussed.

Chapter Two: The literature review begins by highlighting existing studies that explore the importance of the teacher-student relationship, along with key stakeholders' expectations of teachers, specific to the teacher-student relationship. It emphasises the importance, and value, of teacher-student relationships for students and teachers. This chapter considers existing literature on how the teacher-student relationship is started in schools. This review demonstrates a gap in the literature on the strategies teachers can use to start and maintain positive and productive relationships with students in secondary schools. Following the literature review, the theoretical framework for this thesis is introduced. Attachment theory, a significant

theory used for understanding human relationships, is explored to critique the conceptual understanding of the relationship between human beings to consider how this may apply to teachers and students in secondary schools.

Chapter Three: The methodology chapter discusses the qualitative methodology selected for this study, including participants, measures used for participant responses, the procedure of the study, the data analysis method used, and relevant ethical considerations and implications.

Chapter Four: The results of this study are presented in this chapter. The emerging themes are provided for comparison with existing literature in the following chapter.

Chapter Five: The analysis chapter of this thesis discusses and interprets the results of this study in relation to the literature reviewed to consider the similarities and differences. The chapter will also present an original framework of approaches and strategies to start and maintain the teacher-student relationship in secondary schools, the Student-Teacher and Relationship Formation Framework (STARF).

Chapter Six: The final chapter of this thesis will discuss the contributions to practice and scholarship of this thesis, along with the limitations and areas for future research. The thesis will conclude with how the current research has addressed the research problem.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will review the existing literature related to teacher-student relationships. The focus of this review is to understand what contributes to a positive and productive teacher-student relationship to inform a clear and comprehensive framework of strategies for teachers to start and maintain these relationships with students in secondary schools.

The initial focus of the literature review will be to understand why the teacher-student relationship is important for students, including how a positive teacher-student relationship can improve student wellbeing, academic engagement and achievement and school retention (Section 2.1). The literature review will also explore the benefits of a positive teacher-student relationship for teachers by understanding how the relationship can improve teacher wellbeing through a decrease in stress and burnout for teachers (Section 2.2). To develop an understanding of the significance of the teacher-student relationship, the literature reviewed will then investigate what various stakeholders want as an outcome of the teacher-student relationship (Section 2.3), along with the available literature on how the teacher-student relationship is started and maintained (Section 2.4). The review will explore another important relationship in schools – that between a school counsellor and students – to understand the principles that guide this relationship and connect this insight to the teacher-student relationship (Section 2.5). The final section of the review will explore the theory of attachment as the principle theory used to explain human relationships and its relevance to understanding the

relationship between teachers and students in secondary schools. A summary of the literature will highlight the necessity for the current research (Section 2.7).

2.1 THE BENEFITS OF A POSITIVE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP FOR STUDENTS

There have been many benefits found for students when there is a positive and productive teacher-student relationship. The benefits include increased student wellbeing, improved academic engagement and achievement, and student retention in school. The following section describes some of these benefits as outlined in the literature.

2.1.1 The Benefit of a Positive Teacher-Student Relationship for Student Wellbeing

Student wellbeing is viewed as a combination of a student's physical, emotional, mental and social health, how students feel about themselves and their resilience and their capacity to deal with unpredictability (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011; Australian Government, 2020). Students who develop their social and emotional capacity feel more connected and engaged in their learning, and are believed to be happier. These positive attributes also enhance the learning environment for students (Australian Government, 2020; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011).

The benefits of a positive teacher-student relationship for student wellbeing has been a topic of research worldwide. In the 2015 *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) results, it was reported that students who had close relationships with teachers were found to be happier in school and had an increased sense of belonging to their school community (OECD, 2016). This study, which was first conducted in 2000, was administered to over 500 000 15-year-old students across 60 to 70 member countries and measured students' motivation towards

learning, their general social and emotional state, and also provided information relevant to student engagement within school. The research by the OECD also indicated that when students had a positive relationship with their teachers (for example, teachers were interested in their wellbeing, listened to what students had to say and gave them extra help where needed, and teachers treated them fairly) then students were able to make friends easily, have an increased sense of belonging at school and were reported to feel less lonely or out of place in their schools (OECD, 2016).

Additionally, students' relationship with their teacher has also been measured in the 2018 *Programme for International Student Assessment* PISA results (OECD, 2019). Students were asked to report on teachers' approaches towards them in the classroom, including students' perceptions on whether they were being treated fairly by their teacher (for example, whether teachers called on them less often than other students, whether students perceived teachers to grade them differently to other students, whether students were disciplined more than others and ridiculed or insulted in front of other students) (OECD, 2019). Students who reported to be treated unfairly by their teacher were found to be 1.6 times more likely to feel an outsider at school, thus impacting their sense of belonging. It was also found that students who reported their teachers to be supportive were 1.8 times more likely to feel a sense of belonging at their school (OECD, 2019). Therefore, teachers play an important role in students' sense of belonging which can be enhanced by teachers showing attention and care towards their students as part of the teacher-student relationship (OECD, 2019). Thus, internationally, secondary school teacher-student relationships have been found to be important for students' wellbeing.

The start of secondary school has the largest opportunity for teachers to positively and productively start the teacher-student relationship to support student wellbeing. The transition for students from primary into secondary schools can be quite stressful for some students as they leave the family-like environment of primary school into the more complex environment of secondary school. While some students are able to make this transition without stress and anxiety, it is not the case for all students.

To assist students who struggle with the transition into secondary school, various strategies have been implemented, such as encouraging stronger parent involvement (for example, parents staying connected with their child's learning and encouraged to attend special events and ceremonies), providing students with opportunities to engage in the curriculum in challenging ways, and also keeping the same teacher for some of their subjects (Queensland Government, 2019). One of the key features of supporting students in their transition from primary to secondary school is the development of good teacher-student relationships at the beginning of this transition, and therefore, teachers become key participants in helping students develop an increased sense of wellbeing (Australian Government, 2020; Queensland Government, 2019).

Research has been conducted that supports a positive teacher-student relationship having benefits for students' wellbeing. A study conducted in the United States examined the extent in which a positive teacher-student relationship protected secondary school students against depressive symptoms (Wang et al., 2013). Participant data was measured at multiple times, ranging from early adolescence to young adulthood (13, 15, 17 and 18-years-old). The teacher-student relationship was measured at age 13 only through teacher reports via a teacher-

student relationship scale adapted from the *School Climate Survey*. However, student depressive symptoms were measured at the four time points using items from the *Children's Depression Inventory*, where students responded to a questionnaire to items such as "In the past two weeks how often have you had these feelings?" such as "I am sad" and "I feel like I hate myself". This longitudinal study, which also explored student misconduct, parent-adolescent conflict and depressive symptom in students across time, found that a positive teacher-student relationship in the early years of high school protected adolescents from depression. However, the effect of the relationship on depression was stronger for boys than for girls (Wang et al., 2013). That is for boys, good relationships with teachers played a more positive role in their sense of community and connectedness with their school. These authors suggest that these positive relationships may lead to less possibility for loneliness and depression for boys than for girls (Wang et al., 2013). Good teacher-student relationships were found to have less of an impact on girls, reportedly due to girls investing more time in peer relationships which was thought to be protecting them from increased depression. Overall, the finding was that irrespective of gender a positive teacher-student relationship is an important source of protection for students' wellbeing (Wang et al., 2013). However, while this study provided significant insight about the teacher-student relationship, it is problematic in that students were not asked to provide their perception of their relationships with their teachers, unlike studies conducted by the OECD.

A positive teacher-student relationship and student wellbeing has also been examined in research conducted in Canada (Kurdi & Archambault, 2017). Although this study occurred in primary schools, as there is scare research in secondary schools, it still shows the benefits of a positive teacher-student relationship. The

longitudinal study consisted of 350 Year Three and Year Four students, and their 23 teachers. The study explored the teacher-student relationship and its association with student anxiety. The teacher-student relationship was measured using the *Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS),* where teachers assessed the relationship they had with students by responding to items such as "I have a close and warm relationship with this child" and "This child and I have always had a tendency to fight with each other" (Kurdi & Archambault, 2017). Students reported their anxiety on a self-assessment measure containing four items. The measure included items such as "in the last month you have been worried" and "in the last month you have been nervous or really tense" (Kurdi & Archambault, 2017). The study found that negative teacher-student relationships were associated with an increase in anxiety in students. Conflict in the teacher-student relationship (for example, the degree in which the teacher-student relationship is negative and problematic) was reported to have an influence on student anxiety, however, a warm relationship with a teacher (for example, the level of involvement, closeness, affection and openness of communication between the teacher and the student) was not found to have a direct influence on student anxiety as warmth may not be enough of a protective factor against anxiety in students (Kurdi & Archambault, 2017). Overall, a positive teacher-student relationship may not benefit student anxiety levels, however, the presence of a negative teacher-student relationship can increase student anxiety.

Therefore, research indicates that a proportion of a student's sense of wellbeing is connected to the type of relationship they develop with their teachers. A positive and productive teacher-student relationship has also been shown to have benefits for students' academic engagement and achievement, as described next.

2.1.2 A Positive Teacher-Student Relationship Improves Academic Engagement and Achievement

Academic engagement is characterised by a student's effort, attention and persistence during the initiation and execution of learning, and is viewed as a student's emotional involvement in their learning, including their enthusiasm, interest and enjoyment to be at school (Skinner et al., 2008).

There is a link between positive teacher-student relationships and students' academic engagement which shows that a positive teacher-student relationship improves student engagement (Engels et al., 2016; Lei et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2007; Martin & Collie, 2019; Raufelder et al., 2016). Most of the research considered has been conducted outside of Australia, due to the scant nature of literature available relating to Australian secondary schools. A study on the benefit of a positive teacher-student relationship on academic engagement was conducted in Belgian secondary schools. Researchers found that while overall student engagement in learning declined over the course of secondary schooling, students with a positive teacher-student relationship had higher levels of engagement over time compared to students with negative teacher-student relationships (Engels et al., 2016). This finding was made by analysing questionnaires from the same sample of over 1 100 adolescents across three-year levels and over three years (Years Seven-Nine, Years Eight-10, Years 11-12). Using items from the *Student Report on Engagement Versus Disaffection,* students reported on whether they paid attention in class and the effort they put into their schoolwork. Students also responded to the quality of the teacher-student relationship through a peer nomination process where they nominated peers who had a positive or negative relationship with their teacher. Students who experienced positive teacher-student relationships were found to have more emotional security, fulfilment of their sense of belonging and more positive

self-perceptions about their academic ability (Engels et al., 2016). These characteristics directly align with the description of student engagement, specifically students' emotional involvement in their learning proposed by Skinner et al. (2008). However, the methodological approach in this study of asking students to nominate peers with positive and negative relationships with their teacher is questionable as this approach limited the ability for students to report on their own relationship with their teachers; a relationship that they may better understand compared to a relationship they observe in their peers.

A meta-analysis explored the correlation between teacher support and students' academic emotions (Lei et al., 2018). The study reviewed articles that examined the teacher-student relationship and the correlation with student autonomy, structure and involvement (Lei et al., 2018). Academic emotions were also measured by the emotion students experience with their learning, which included enjoyment, hopelessness, boredom, anxiety and anger, all of which can impact students' academic achievement (Lei et al., 2018). The 65 studies, involving over 58 000 participants, found a link between teacher support and student positive academic emotions, thus teacher support was considered to be an effective approach to improving students' experiences of their learning (Lei, et al., 2018).

Research has also been conducted in German secondary schools to explore how students' perceptions of the teacher-student relationship can improve their academic self-regulation and motivation (Raufelder et al., 2016). This particular study was conducted with 1 088 Year Seven and Eight students and used a range of questionnaires to gather data. Teacher-student relationships were measured based on items from the PISA questionnaire (for example, "most of my teachers treat me fairly" and "I get along well with most of my teachers); student motivation, based on

liking their teacher was measured using the *Teacher and Motivation (TEMO)* measurement (for example, "I like the subject because I like the teacher" and "I want to do well in this subject because the teacher is nice). Students' intrinsic motivation and academic self-regulation were measured using items from the *Academic Self-Regulation Questionnaire* (for example, "I work and learn in my favourite subject…because it's fun [intrinsic motivation]…because it will provide me more future job opportunities [identified regulation]…because I want the teacher to think I'm a good student [introjected regulation]….or…because I'll get in trouble with my teacher" [external regulation]). The study found a positive correlation between teacher-student relationships, intrinsic motivation, and two forms of academic self-regulation, being 'identified regulation' and 'introjected regulation' (Raufelder et al., 2016). The study also found a positive correlation between students' motivation based on liking a teacher (Raufelder et al., 2016). A further finding of the study was that students who perceived the teacher-student relationship to be of low quality overall, but who had at least one relationship with one teacher that they liked and who motivated them, were reported to have better intrinsic motivation (Raufelder et al., 2016). The significance of this study is if students have one positive relationship with a teacher they would be motivated to engage academically. What is not explored in this study are the characteristics that teachers possess to be liked by students, nor the strategies that teachers can use to motivate students. While the focus of this thesis is not about teachers being "liked", it would be assumed that teachers who are liked have positive relationships with their students. Although Raufelder et al.'s (2016) research was conducted outside of Australia, the correlation found between a positive teacher-student relationship and academic engagement

provides justification to further explore how teachers start the teacher-student relationship.

Some research into the area of a positive teacher-student relationship and its association with academic engagement has also been conducted in Australian secondary schools (Martin et al., 2007). In a sample of 3 450 students in Years Seven to 12 from six Australian secondary schools, students responded to the type of relationship they felt that they experienced with their teachers. Items responded to included "In general, I get along well with my teachers" which students rated from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The type of teacher-student relationship was correlated with students' motivation to learn. Students' academic motivation was measured using *The Motivation and Engagement Scale – High School* which assessed adaptive cognitions (for example, self-efficacy, valuing and mastery orientation), adaptive behaviours (for example, persistence, planning and task management), impeding and maladaptive cognitions (for example, anxiety, failure avoidance and uncertain control) and maladaptive behaviours (for example, self-handicapping and disengagement) (Martin et al., 2007). The study found that the teacher-student relationship was significantly positively associated with academic motivation and engagement, academic self-concept and general self-esteem (Martin et al., 2007). The finding from this study is significant as it is reflective of secondary school students across year levels and genders.

It is possible that students' academic engagement may be impacted by the compulsory nature of studying certain subjects. Core subjects in secondary schools in Australia, such as English, Mathematics, Science and Humanities and Social Sciences have significantly more teaching hours per week than other subjects (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2021). An Australian

study has supported the finding that the teacher-student relationship is impacted by the compulsory nature of subjects that students' study (Martin & Collie, 2019). In a longitudinal study of over 2 000 students in Australian secondary schools, students rated their relationship with their teacher in their core subjects (English, Mathematics, Science and Humanities and Social Sciences) with their academic participation, enjoyment and aspirations (Martin & Collie, 2019). The teacher-student relationship was measured using three indicators: interpersonal ("my teacher is interested in me and provides help when I need it"), substantive ("my teacher sets work that is not too easy, but not too hard") and pedagogical ("my teacher explains things and tries to make things easier to understand"). It was found that when the teacher-student relationship was positive, student academic engagement was higher and student engagement was lower when the relational balance was negative (Martin & Collie, 2019). Students may have an increased ability to self-select teachers they have good relationships with in elective subjects rather than in core subjects where there is less ability to self-select teachers. If students experience positive teacher-student relationships, they are more likely to show greater effort, attention, persistence and emotional involvement in their learning (Telli, 2016). Thus, the Australian system of students not having a choice of teachers in core subjects could be lowering their motivation, while the choice of subjects, including the choice of teachers, could enhance their motivation in these types of subjects.

Teacher-student relationships can and do change over time, as students develop, therefore the challenge for the teacher is to manage this changing relationship. In a study conducted in the United States with over 100 Year Six to Eight students and 30 teachers, the teacher-student relationship was measured using the *TSR Positivity* and *TSR Negativity* scale with items including "how friendly is

[student/teacher name] towards you?" and "how angry does [student/teacher name] make you feel during class?". It was found that student relationships with their teacher became less positive over the course of the year, although some relationships were reported to improve (Gehlbach et al., 2012). Factors that appeared to affect the relationship included student outcomes and students' perceptions on how they anticipated teachers would respond in certain situations. The significance of this finding is that the teacher-student relationship is malleable and there may be ways that teachers and students can improve this relationship. As with student engagement, student academic achievement can be positively or negatively influenced by the type of teacher-student relationship.

In Australia, student achievement is usually measured using school-based assessment, standardised testing and national and international assessments. School-based assessment is developed in accordance with National Curriculum objectives but allows schools to develop the assessment items that suit their school context (ACARA, 2021). Students are assessed against nationally agreed criteria and teachers make judgements about the quality of student work. Assessment focuses on the development of a whole child (for example, the Australian Early Development Index [AEDI]) and in an academic sense (for example, the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN] and PISA tests). Although not within the scope of the current research, the connection between academic achievement that is assessment focused and the teacher-student relationship is worthy of further consideration.

Global research into student academic achievement supports the view that the teacher-student relationship improves academic achievement in secondary schools (OECD, 2016; OECD, 2019). For example, 15-year-old students who reported a

sense of belonging at school were found to score higher in science in the standardised international assessment than those students who did not report a sense of belonging at school (OECD, 2016). Also, students were found to achieve higher in reading in the standardised international assessment attributed in some part to the strength of the teacher-student relationship (OECD, 2019).

The finding that a positive teacher-student relationship can improve student academic performance has been replicated in another study conducted in Finland. The longitudinal study involved students aged 11-14-years-old, and their parents, and found that a student's behavioural and emotional strength in relation to the teacher-student relationship was a predictor of academic achievement (Sointu et al., 2017). In this research, of 600 students and 320 parents, the teacher-student relationship was measured using student responses to the *School Well Being Profile Questionnaire (SWBPQ)*. Items included "our school's teachers are friendly", "the teacher listens to my opinions", "the teacher trusts us students fairly and equitably", "students' opinion are taken into account regarding school matters" and "it is easy to get along with our teachers". Students' behavioural and emotional strength was assessed using parent responses to the *Behavioural and Emotional Rating Scale-2*. Items included students' interpersonal strengths (for example, students' ability to control emotions in social situations), family involvement (for example, students' relationship with his or her family), intrapersonal strengths (for example, a child's outlook on his or her competence and accomplishments), school functioning (the child's competence in school and classroom tasks) and affective strengths (for example, the child's ability to accept affection from others and to express feelings towards others). Students' grade point averages (GPA) were used to measure academic achievement. The study found that greater behavioural and emotional strength in students led to increased

academic achievement (Sointu et al., 2017). Students with greater behavioural and emotional strengths were found to be able to self-regulate in the classroom and at home (for example, sit still in class and focus on the teacher) and students with intrapersonal strength have a higher self-concept related to their academic competence (Sointu et al., 2017). What is interesting about this study is that the views of parents were considered, something that is not widely researched in relation to the teacher-student relationship. However, the study did not explore the views of students on their behavioural and emotional strengths. Furthermore, the study did not explore the responses of stakeholders associated with upper secondary year levels and it is unknown whether the teacher-student relationship correlated with academic achievement in these year levels. Similar to the study on engagement by Martin and Collie (2019), the focus of academic achievement was on school-based assessment in four subject areas and did not include a range of subject areas or standardised tests. Despite these limitations, the study still adds weight to the argument that a positive teacher-student relationship can improve academic success.

Thus, it has been shown that students who have a positive relationship with their teacher show greater effort, attention, persistence and emotional involvement in their learning, as well as the behavioural and emotional strength to succeed academically. A positive teacher-student relationship in secondary schools can also lead to increased academic achievement by students. It is hypothesised that positive and productive teacher-student relationships also have an impact on students finishing school, as described below.

2.1.3 A Positive Teacher-Student Relationship Maximises School Retention

Legislation in Australia states that it is compulsory for young people to remain at school until they have completed Year 10 or turn 16, whichever occurs first (State

of Queensland, 2020). In 2018 in Australia, the national retention rate from Year 10 to Year 12 decreased for the first time since 2012, by 0.5 percentage points to 82.8 per cent, and in 2020, the full-time retention rate was 83.6 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021; ACARA, 2020). This data shows that some students leave formal education prior to the completion of Year 12.

While students are generally required to 'learn or earn' in Australia, and those students who leave school prior to completion need to demonstrate engagement in relevant, purposeful employment, it has been shown that a positive teacher-student relationship can favourably influence students remaining in school (Barile et al., 2011; Bergeron et al., 2011; Krane & Klevan, 2018; Tilleczek et al., 2011; Whannell & Allen, 2011). A study conducted in the United States with over 7 500 secondary school students across Years 10 to 12 found that if a student had a good relationship with their teacher, they were more likely to remain in school, even if they were struggling academically (Barile et al., 2011). The research included student responses to items again from the *Teacher-student Relationship Climate survey* (for example, "Students get along well with teachers", "The teaching is good" and "Teachers are interested in the students"), as well as student retention rates (for example, whether students had completed their high school diploma or whether students had missed four or more consecutive weeks of school not due to illness or accident (Barile et al., 2011). This study concluded that if a student was considering leaving school, they may reconsider if the relationship with their teachers was warm and supportive. Another study conducted in secondary schools in Norway supported the notion that a positive teacher-student relationship is important for students who are at risk of dropping out of school (Krane & Klevan, 2018). The study was conducted via focus group interviews of 14 parents of secondary school aged

students, and found students who may consider leaving school find support and were "backed up" by their teachers to stay in school (Krane & Klevan, 2018). These findings, although not conducted in Australia, are important as they provide evidence of the benefits of positive and productive teacher-student relationship in secondary schools.

A study conducted in Canada had similar findings, that if the teacher-student relationship was of a lower quality, students may drop out of school (Tilleckek et al., 2011). The study was comprised of 193 participants between the ages of 13 and 25-years-old, including early school leavers or those had returned to school and graduated or were at risk of leaving school (Tilleczek et al., 2011). In the study it was found that if participants did not like a particular teacher/s (and presumably did not have a positive relationship with them), this risked their ongoing enrolment. Difficulty of the curriculum, passive instruction, a disregard for student learning styles and a lack of support were seen as potential risk factors for students remaining in school (Tilleczek et al., 2011). Another study, also conducted in Canadian secondary schools, supported the importance of the teacher-student relationship in predicting students' intentions to drop out of school (Bergeron et al., 2011). The quantitative study consisted of over 2 300 students from secondary schools between the ages of 12 and 15-years-old. Self-reported scales were used to assess student motivation and the teacher-student relationship, including "I feel I am close to my teachers and I can trust them", "I don't get along with my teachers" and "What we do at school is really interesting" (Bergeron et al., 2011). Students also reported their intention to remain in school, assessed by items such as "I would be a happier person if I left school" (Bergeron et al., 2011). The study found that a student's negative relationship with teachers was the strongest predictor of their intention to drop out of

school (Bergeron et al., 2011). The finding supports the premise that a positive teacher-student relationship can mitigate the risk of students leaving school.

Some research about the impact of the teacher-student relationship on school retention has also been conducted in Australia about the impact of the teacher-student relationship on school retention (Whannell & Allen, 2011). Participants in this study included 144 individuals aged 18-22 who had dropped out of secondary school but were attempting to gain entry into university through a tertiary entrance program. The study was conducted using a purpose designed questionnaire that measured scholastic engagement (for example, "I studied in preparation for exams"), emotional engagement (for example, "I like going to school"), capacity to cope with schoolwork (for example, "I felt prepared to start new work when it was introduced"), peer relationships (for example, "I had positive relationships with my classmates"), family relationships (for example, "My parents understood what I was going through at school") and teacher relationships (for example, "My school teachers were supportive of my work at school"). One major finding was that the quality of the teacher-student relationship impacted the quality of the educational outcomes for students. Participants who experienced low quality teacher-student relationships demonstrated low levels of emotional engagement with school and their schooling was adversely influenced by their perception of the poor quality of the teacher-student relationship (Whannell & Allen, 2011). However, the study did not use an existing instrument to measure student engagement, therefore the way in which engagement was measured may be exploratory or lack reliability and validity. Nevertheless, what is gained from research into the teacher-student relationship and school retention within Australia and globally is an understanding that the quality of

the teacher-student relationship directly influences young peoples' decisions to stay in school.

Overall, this review of the literature on the relationship that teachers form with students has been shown to impact on students' wellbeing, academic engagement and performance, and school retention. However, the available research is limited by some factors. The research in this area has been largely conducted outside of Australia, and while most of the countries are culturally similar, there could be subtle differences between educational systems across the globe and the value placed on education and educational stakeholders by members of society. Also, a range of stakeholders, such as parents, have not been included in the research that has been previously conducted, so perspectives are limited. In addition, some of the research was conducted using measures designed for the particular studies, which may lack reliability and validity.

Therefore, the research questions in this thesis are significant as they examined the views of key educational stakeholders (teachers, students, parents and school counsellors) in Australian secondary schools on the teacher-student relationship, specifically how to begin and maintain this relationship. It is expected that an analysis of their views will lead to the development of a framework of strategies for teachers to start and maintain the teacher-student relationship.

Notably, the benefits of the teacher-student relationship are not only important for students but are also significant for teachers. Teachers who experience a positive relationship with their students are reported to have improved wellbeing, lower levels of stress, and a decrease in the risk of burnout and leaving the profession.

2.2 THE BENEFITS OF A POSITIVE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP FOR TEACHERS

Teacher wellbeing is a significant factor for teachers remaining in the profession and research has shown that one of the factors that increases teacher wellbeing is the positive relationship that they can have with students. On the other hand, negative relationships with students often lead to teachers leaving the profession.

Teachers have been shown to choose to leave the profession with estimates that between 30-50% of teachers on average leave within their first five years of teaching, and that 8-50% of early career teachers left the profession in the first five years (QCT, 2013; Weldon, 2018). In an analysis of teacher registration data that explored the attrition rates of graduate teachers in Queensland, 14% of teachers cancelled their registration within their first four years of teaching (QCT, 2019). High workload, lack of support, job security and salary levels, professional training and school culture have been shown to be some of the reasons why teachers were leaving the profession (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2016). Conversely, in the available data within Australia, it was found that teachers were choosing to stay in the profession due to a combination of work satisfaction, intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, supportive relationships, stable employment and greater job security, manageable classes and opportunities for professional development (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2016).

In the past decade, research has emerged that links teacher retention to the quality of the teacher-student relationship. One study was a qualitative study of eight secondary school teachers in the Netherlands, which found correlations between a good teacher-student relationship and job satisfaction (Veldman et al., 2013).

Participants selected were those with high job satisfaction (based on the *Job Satisfaction* Index) and with a low burnout rate (based again on the *Maslach Burnout Inventory*). Teachers were interviewed in a narrative-biographical method to collect data on their memories and experiences as teachers (Veldman et al., 2013). This was then compared to students' perceptions of the interpersonal behaviour of their teacher (using the *Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction*). In this study, participants reported that during times when their relationships with students were negative, they perceived they had lower levels of job satisfaction (Veldman et al., 2013). The study also found that there were periods of time in the teaching careers of the participants where there was a perception of lower job satisfaction but good teacher-student relationships, reportedly to be due to other dissatisfying factors such as educational reform or personal problems (Veldman et al., 2013). Another significant finding was that participants believed they developed more positive relationships with students throughout their career and that there was a positive correlation between job satisfaction and the quality of the teacher-student relationship.

In qualitative research conducted in Austria and Germany with 83 female primary school teachers, it was found if a teacher had a close relationship with the students that they taught, it would lead to less teacher burnout than for teachers with more distanced relationships with students (Milatz et al., 2015). The study examined participant responses to items from the *Maslach Burnout Inventory* (MBI) about the frequency of emotional strain and accomplishment at work ("I feel burned out from my work", "I don't really care what happens to some students" and "I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job"), and compared this with their closeness in their interactions with students ("This child openly shares his/her feelings and experience with me"). The findings were that teacher connectedness

with students played a significant role in determining teacher burnout (Milatz et al., 2015). Depersonalisation (for example, having a negative attitude toward work and students) and emotional exhaustion (for example, the feeling of being emotionally depleted) were at their lowest as a result of teachers developed high quality relationships with students (Milatz et al., 2015). In contrast, if a teacher developed a low-quality relationship with students, they were reported to feel higher levels of emotional exhaustion.

The findings of another study connected teacher burnout with teacher-student relationships (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). This study was similar to Milatz et al. (2015) in that it found teacher burnout to be affected by their engagement with students. Participants in this study, conducted in Canadian primary schools, included 406 students across Years Four to Seven, and their teachers (17 teachers in total). The findings revealed a link between teachers' experiences of depersonalisation and emotional exhaustion (two indicators of burnout) and students' higher physiological stress levels (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). This effect was measured by sampling student saliva at three intervals throughout a school day (to measure students' cortisol levels: cortisol levels being used as a biological indicator of stress). Teacher burnout was measured using the same instrument as in the Milatz et al. (2015) study: the *Maslach Burnout Inventory*. The study found that higher cortisol levels in students (indicating higher student stress levels) were related to higher burnout levels in teachers (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). This finding was reportedly due to higher levels of stress being transferred to students, and that burnt out teachers had less capacity to manage poorer classroom behaviours in a positive

and productive way, thus impacting the relationship that teachers have with their students (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016).

Not only do students have an impact on teachers' stress levels in the relationship, but teacher stress levels have also been found to have an impact on students and thus the teacher-student relationship (Yoon, 2002). The study consisted of 113 primary school teachers in the United States, with data collected in the form of a questionnaire and administered at the end of the school year. It found that teachers' stress increased their displays of negative affect (for example, anger and hostility in their interactions with students), leading to negative relationships with students (Yoon, 2002). Teachers rated how stressful they found managing behaviourally difficult students (for example, "Having to deal with behavioural problem in class, I have considered leaving the profession") with their belief of being able to develop a positive relationship with behaviourally challenging students (for example, "I can build a relationship with even the most difficult student" and "I have positive characteristics that are very helpful when there is a problem with a student"). Teacher negative affect was also measured (for example, "I have difficulty controlling my emotions in front of students when there is conflict with students") and the types of relationships that they have with students in their classes (from very good to very negative relationships) (Yoon, 2002). Similarly, in the study of Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2016), teacher stress levels impacted the relationships teachers had with their students. Higher teacher stress levels were found to be a predictor of the number of negative relationships teachers had with students due to teacher stress impacting the tone of interactions they had with students (Yoon, 2002). Also similar to the study conducted in Canadian primary schools, teacher stress was found to transfer to students. The significance of these findings is that it develops an

understanding of how teacher burnout and stress can adversely impact the teacher-student relationship. Burnout and stress can transfer from teacher to student and impact how stressed students themselves feel. A stressful classroom environment, with a burnt out and stressed teacher, is not conducive for student levels of stress, nor the conditions to develop a positive and productive teacher-student relationship.

Although burnout and stress of teachers affects the teacher-student relationship, a positive teacher-student relationship has a significant benefit to the wellbeing of teachers (Aldrup et al., 2018). Aldrup and colleagues (2018) explored student misbehaviour and teacher wellbeing, and the moderating effect of the teacher-student relationship in German secondary schools. This longitudinal study of 222 teachers, and their students, considered teachers' emotional exhaustion and work enthusiasm, student behaviour and the quality of the relationship that they had with their students. Student misbehaviour was measured by asking teacher and student participants to evaluate the extent in which students paid attention in class and obeyed the teacher, by asking questions such as "In this class, instruction is barely disturbed". Teachers were asked to what extent their students appreciated, liked or respected them, using an adaptation of the *Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS)* (Aldrup et al., 2018). Items on this questionnaire included "The students in this class show me that they like me". Teacher wellbeing was measured using emotional exhaustion and work enjoyment. Emotional exhaustion was measured using the *Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)* with items including "I often feel exhausted at school" and work enjoyment was measured using a scale developed by Kunter et al. (2008) including items such as "I really enjoy teaching". Overall, the study found that teachers who experienced greater student misbehaviour had increased emotional exhaustion and a decrease in work enthusiasm (Aldrup et al., 2018). Student misbehaviour resulted in

a decrease in the quality of the teacher-student relationship, and a negative teacher-student relationship led to higher emotional exhaustion and lower work enthusiasm in teachers (Aldrup et al., 2018). Alternatively, a positive teacher-student relationship increased teacher work enjoyment and reduced their emotional exhaustion (Aldrup et al., 2018). A gap in this study is that student perceptions on the relationship they have with their teachers was not sought. This perspective could provide insight into the correlation between teachers and students on the notion of the type of relationship they have with their teacher (positive or negative) and how this impacts teacher wellbeing.

Another study concurred with the finding that a positive teacher-student relationship benefits teacher wellbeing. The study involved classroom observations and questionnaires of 79 primary and secondary school teachers in Norway (Virtanen et al., 2019). Teacher observations were measured using the *CLASS* observational instrument and explored three domains: emotional support (for example, positive climate, teacher sensitivity and regard for adolescents' perspectives), classroom organisation (for example, behaviour management, productivity, and negative climate) and instructional support (for example, content understanding, quality of feedback and instructional dialogue). The teacher questionnaires measured job satisfaction (for example, "I experience my work as satisfying" and "I perceive my work as useful") and emotional exhaustion (for example, "I feel emotionally drained from my work" and "I feel burned out from my work". Findings indicated that teachers who engaged in high quality interactions with students (for example, emotional support, classroom organisation and instructional support) were found to have higher levels of job satisfaction (Virtanen et al., 2019). Notably, improving the classroom interactions skills of teachers could lead to increased job satisfaction in

teachers, and improved classroom interactions between teachers and students (Virtanen et al., 2019). Again, student perceptions about the quality of the teacher-student interaction were not included.

Overall, the existing research has examined the purpose and significance of the teacher-student relationship on teacher wellbeing. The quality of the teacher-student relationship has been shown to be linked to the retention of teachers, while burnout and stress has been found to impact the quality of the teacher-student relationship. An understanding of how teachers can start and maintain positive and productive relationships with students could improve teacher wellbeing, their general satisfaction in the profession, and assist with attracting and retaining teachers in secondary schools. An understanding of what students and their teachers want from this relationship may assist with understanding how important the teacher-student relationship is in secondary schools and was included as part of the current research on the teacher-student relationship in Australian secondary schools.

2.3 WHAT STAKEHOLDERS EXPECT FROM THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

To design strategies to enable teachers to start and maintain positive and productive relationships, the expectation of stakeholders of these relationships need to be explored. These stakeholders are primarily students, teachers and parents. In addition, the professional guidelines for teachers, as established by peak educational bodies, also describes what is expected of teachers from the teacher-student relationship.

2.3.1 Student Expectations of the Teacher-Student Relationship

Students have clear ideas about what they want from their relationship with teachers (Beishuizen et al., 2001; Groves & Welsh, 2010). They have an

understanding of the personal characteristics of a good teacher, and what a good teacher-student relationship is based upon. Characteristics of good teachers have been explored on an international level in a study conducted in the Netherlands (Beishuizen et al., 2001). In this study, 198 students across four different age groups (seven, ten, 13 and 16-years-old) and seven primary school and ten secondary school teachers were asked to write an essay about good teachers (Beishuizen et al., 2001). Participants described good teachers from a personality versus ability view, and an attachment versus detachment view (Beishuizen et al., 2001). Students described good teachers from a personality view to be "calm", "puts things into perspective" and "makes students respect their teacher", and from an ability view when they "can teach all subjects", "takes care of the classroom" and are "careful". Students also reported to be attached to teachers who "pay attention" and "organise nice things" than teachers who "do not always assign independent tasks" and "do not punish too heavily" (Beishuizen et al., 2001). Of note in this study is a difference in views across age groups of students. For example, younger students favoured an ability view, while older students reported a personality view of good teachers. From an attachment perspective, younger students reported more attached characteristics of good teachers, while older students took a more detached view of good teachers, particularly when entering secondary school (Beishuizen et al., 2001). The differences were attributed to the uncertainty that occurs when students enter secondary school as they are unfamiliar with teaching practice in this context and what they consider makes up a good teacher (Beishuizen et al., 2001).

A study conducted in Australian secondary schools considered the expectation of the teacher-student relationship from a student perspective (Groves & Welsh, 2010). In this study of 14 student participants from Year 11, students reported they

wanted teachers to take the time to find out what they are interested in and to factor this into the lesson planning (Groves & Welsh, 2010). They perceived that lessons would be more interesting and fun, and much easier if their interests were factored into a teacher's planning and suggested strategies that teachers could use to learn about the interests and needs of students. These strategies included greater one-on-one time with students. How practical this strategy would be from a teacher's perspective was not considered.

Another finding of Groves and Welsh's study (2010) was the perceptions students had of the characteristics of an effective teacher. These characteristics included that teachers should have passion and enthusiasm for effective teaching along with subject area knowledge, an easy-going nature and a good sense of humour, a positive outlook, honesty, confidence and trustworthiness (for example, a trusting school environment and mutual trust between teachers and students) (Groves & Welsh, 2010). Further, students believed they were affected by the attitudes of teachers. A negative attitude, lack of mutual respect and holding grudges towards students were found to adversely impact the students' perception of the effectiveness of a teacher (Groves & Welsh, 2010).

Both Groves and Welsh (2010) and Beishuizen and colleagues (2001) found that students perceived that good teachers had four characteristics: (1) high subject area knowledge (are deeply knowledgeable about the subject/s they teach), (2) interest in finding out about students (pays attention to students' needs and interests), (3) a positive outlook (puts things into perspective) and (4) an easy-going nature (calm and careful). While the students have these perceptions of the teacher-student relationship, other stakeholders such as teachers and parents, also have an expectation of this relationship.

2.3.2 Teacher Expectations of the Teacher-Student Relationship

Although no research was found about what teachers expect from their relationships at work, nor the teacher-student relationship, we can draw upon an understanding of relationships in the workplace in general to inform what teachers might expect from their relationships. Research conducted by Kahn (2007) has identified elements that facilitate positive working relationships. These relationships were characterised by task accomplishment (relationships that enhance people's ability to perform their tasks effectively), career development (relationships that offer individuals access and opportunity to advance their careers) and sense making (relationships that help people make sense of events, experiences, and shifting organisational and environmental contexts) (Kahn, 2007). Positive working relationships were also facilitated through provision of meaning (relationships that enable people to feel validated and valued, connected to larger purposes, and reinforced in meaningful identity) and personal support (relationships that provide help with potential and real sources of stress and anxiety) (Kahn, 2007). Each element of a positive working relationship could directly, or indirectly, apply to teachers in schools and come as a result of a significant working relationship that teachers have – the relationship with their students. The relationships grow as a result of an attachment component where teachers may be temporary attachment figures (in place of parents) through their daily interactions with students and there are different kinds of attachments that teachers may have with students based on patterns of interactions from high supportive to low resistant (Schuengel, 2012; Veschueren & Koomen, 2012). These patterns will be described in more detail in Section 2.7 on attachment theory.

In the studies on workplace relationships, there is a suggestion that for these relationships to develop there must be a sense of community established in the

workplace, whereby individuals feel as though they belong and matter to each other and the organisation (Blatt & Camden, 2007). In addition, for relationships to occur, individuals need to experience support, trust and empathy from their colleagues (Settoon & Mossholder, 2002).

Surprisingly, while there is no research found on teachers' expectations of relationships with students, there is research detailing parents' expectations of the teacher-student relationship. These studies are mainly linked to what parents would like the characteristics of the teacher of their individual child to be like, but not necessarily the actual relationship.

2.3.3 Parent Expectations of the Teacher-Student Relationship

Parents desire their child to be happy and successful at school and believe that this goal is primarily the function of their child's relationship with their teacher (Family-School Community Partnership Bureau, 2011; Krane & Klevan, 2018). In an Australian schooling context, teacher quality emerged as the second most important factor for parents when choosing an independent school (Independent Schools Queensland, 2019). In this survey, conducted with over 3 600 parents of children in independent schools in Queensland, parents valued the quality of a school's teachers over the schools' reputation, academic performance, class sizes and size of school (ISQ, 2019).

Parents have expectations of the qualities of effective teachers. Parents want their child's teachers to be nurturing, caring, approachable, flexible, have a sense of humour and to be fair and kind, and to avoid asserting their authority through loud or hard words, or behaviours that intimidate students or undermine their sense of self-worth (Family-School Community Partnership Bureau, 2011). Parents also want

teachers to be multitalented and possess personal and professional skills, and for teachers to create nurturing classroom environments (Krane & Klevan, 2018).

Parents' perceptions of the teacher-student relationship were found to affect the teacher-student relationship (Kruger & Michalek, 2011). Parents who did not feel that their contributions were welcomed saw the teacher-student relationship as a dyadic bond, that they are the 'third' party in their child's schooling experience. Parents who felt like this may be overly critical of teachers with the follow-on effect of how their child may feel about a teacher. If the child gets along well with the teacher but the parent is critical of that teacher, the child can become conflicted in where their loyalties may lie. Parents who acknowledged that their child's teacher was making an effort to work effectively with their child held positive views of the teacher-student relationship. Indeed, this relationship moved from a dyadic model to a triadic model where parents felt a positive contribution to the teacher-student relationship.

2.3.4 Professional Guidelines for Teachers Impacting the Teacher-Student Relationship

There are significant professional and ethical guidelines for teachers which have been developed by peak education bodies that impacts the teacher-student relationship. One framework that describes these expectations of teachers is the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2017). For example, the descriptors in Standard One state that teachers need to know the students that they teach, and the backgrounds and characteristics of their students (AITSL, 2017). Teachers are expected to demonstrate evidence of meeting this standard as they progress through career stages (from Graduate, to Proficient, to Highly Accomplished and Lead) and need to show their professional development in this area as a mandatory requirement

for maintaining teacher registration. Therefore, teachers should have knowledge of approaches and strategies to know their students well and in ways described by the Professional Standards.

In addition, the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) have presented a Code of Ethics for Teachers Framework to guide high ethical and professional standards for teachers (Queensland College of Teachers, 2020). The framework articulates the values of integrity, dignity, responsibility, respect, justice and care that underpin the teaching profession (QCT, 2020). Within the value of Integrity, the Framework expects teachers to establish and keep professional relationships with students. Further, the Framework expresses that teachers must establish relationships with students and their families based on mutual respect, trust, and confidentiality, that teachers must be fair and reasonable, and show empathy and a rapport with students and their families (QCT, 2020).

Another clear standard for teachers to maintain is that of having professional boundaries with students. The APST state that teachers should Create and Maintain Supportive and Safe Learning Environments (Standard Four), and the Standard specifically expresses that teachers should support student wellbeing and safety in alignment with school and legislative requirements (AITSL, 2017). In addition, The Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) have also expressed their expectations of teachers within their publication, *Professional Boundaries: A Guide for Queensland Teachers* (2017). This Guide explores what professional boundaries for teachers are and the obligation of teachers in relation to these boundaries (QCT, 2017). A recent literature review on professional boundaries was commissioned by the QCT and prepared by the Centre for Children and Young People, School of Education, at Southern Cross University (Graham et al., 2018). The review focused on how

professional boundaries are defined, what the characteristics are of teachers who maintain professional boundaries, and how to support teachers to comply with the professional boundaries expected of them (Graham et al., 2018). It can be seen from these standards and frameworks that teachers are held highly accountable for their engagement with students, and are expected to establish and maintain professional and ethical relationships with them.

The above research and frameworks demonstrate that students, teachers, parents and peak educational bodies have standards of the teacher-student relationship. Some of the factors that stakeholders believe contribute to the teacher-student relationship are to be explored in the next section.

2.4 PERCEPTIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS ON THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO A POSITIVE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

Surprisingly, there is limited research on what students, teachers and parents perceive as a positive teacher-student relationship. One study examined the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of over 8 500 Year Six students (Zee et al., 2013). The interpersonal aspects of a student's personality (for example, extraversion and agreeableness) were found to contribute more to the quality of the teacher-student relationship than cognitive aspects (for example, conscientiousness and autonomy) (Zee et al., 2013). The findings indicated that the more extraverted a student, the more likely for them to experience closeness rather than conflict with their teacher (Zee et al., 2013). Further, high levels of conscientiousness exhibited by students were found to promoted warmth and security between teachers and students (Zee et al., 2013). These findings suggested that teachers were amenable to forming relationships or find it easier to form relationships with students who are

outgoing and friendly rather than with students who are the high academic achievers in the class.

Further insight from students into factors contributing to a positive teacher-student relationship were explored in an Australian secondary school context (Groves & Welsh, 2010). A study, conducted with Year 11 students, was a seminal paper in this field as it explored specific strategies that teachers can use (Groves & Welsh, 2010). Strategies students described included teachers finding out what students were interested in, having greater one-on-one time with their teacher and teachers using humour. Another study, also conducted in Australian primary and secondary schools, asked students to describe the characteristics that contributed to a good teacher-student relationship (Van Bergen et al., 2020). The study, conducted with 96 primary and secondary school students, reported that kindness, care, helpfulness, humour and effective teaching where characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships (Van Bergen et al., 2020).

Teachers have also been questioned about the factors they believe contribute to a positive teacher-student relationship, in a study conducted with 120 pre-service secondary teachers in the Netherlands (de Jong et al., 2014). In the study, teacher friendliness, extraversion, self-efficacy and disciplinary strategies were compared to the quality of the teacher-student relationship. Pre-service teachers completed questionnaires about their background, personality and self-efficacy, including the *Big Five* questionnaire to measure extraversion and friendliness, the *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES)* to measure self-efficacy and a questionnaire developed to explore the nature of disciplinary strategies of teachers. Student perceptions of the teacher-student relationship were measured using the *Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI)*, with items including "This teacher can take a joke" and "This

teacher is strict" (de Jong et al., 2014). The study did not find an association between teacher friendliness, extraversion and self-efficacy and the teacher-student relationship, however found disciplinary strategies, based on reward and recognition, contributed to a closer affiliation between students and their teachers. Students who experienced aggressive discipline found their teacher to be less warm (de Jong et al., 2014).

Parents have also expressed an opinion on the factors they believe contribute to a positive teacher-student relationship, in a study conducted in Australia (Family-School and Community Partnership Bureau, 2011). The qualities, as mentioned in Section 2.3.3, described parents wanting teachers to be nurturing, caring, and flexible and to have a sense of humour (Family-School and Community Partnership Bureau, 2011). However, the qualities were not comprehensively described and did not provide teachers with insight into how to develop and enact these qualities.

While there have been scant studies to determine the strategies which students, teachers and parents believe can be used to establish the relationship, there have been two theorists who have proposed conceptual frameworks. These two American researchers have studied the relationships that teachers have with students to explore some of the effective strategies they use. These frameworks, although evaluated in primary school contexts, may inform the teacher-student relationship in secondary schools relevant to the current research.

2.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR STARTING AND MAINTAINING A POSITIVE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

Newberry published a developmental framework for teacher-student relationships in 2010, and Cook and colleagues published a phase model in 2018. Newberry (2010) first postulated that there were four phases in the development of

the teacher-student relationship. The four phases included appraisal (for example, getting to know each other, getting to know the family), agreement (for example, establishing methods of interactions, power structures defined), testing (for example, exploring boundaries and limits), and planning (for example, reflection on patterns of interactions – communication and participation – to move the relationship on). The four phases in the development of the teacher-student relationship were applied to a case study between a primary school teacher and one student. In this study in the United States, the teacher was observed in their classroom and participated in written reflections over the period of one year to determine what was working and what aspects of the teacher-student relationship needed adjustment. The findings demonstrated that the teacher-student relationship has phases to its' development which may require a different set of strategies for teachers to use within each phase of the teacher-student relationship development. The limitation of this research is that it was conducted with only one student and one teacher.

Another framework to support the development of the teacher-student relationship was also explored in primary schools in the United States (Cook et al., 2018). The researchers developed a phase model for developing teacher-student relationships they called: establish – maintain – restore (EMR). In the establishment phase teachers initiated the relationship with students from the first day of school using a variety of strategies (for example, learning students' names, taking an interest in each student, monitoring tone of voice). It is in this phase that teachers establish strategies for acceptable and unacceptable behaviours for the class. The restore phase occurred when there was conflict in the teacher-student relationship which may occur because students perceive they are the target of negative interactions (for example, being disciplined unfairly, being ignored or misunderstood). Negative

interactions weaken the relationship leaving the student disengaged and less responsive to efforts to correct problems. The aim of this stage was to restore the relationship so no further harm can be done. In a study designed to evaluate the ERM method, 220 students and 10 teachers from three primary schools participated in the EMR training with a focus on targeting academically engaged time and disruptive behaviours (Cook et al., 2018). Results of the study indicated that the teacher-student relationships benefited from the EMR intervention in that disruptive behaviours were reduced resulting in higher academic engagement. In addition, the practice of EMR has also be found to have a proactive effect on developing the teacher-student relationship in schools (Kincade et al., 2020). Unfortunately, there are no studies available to date to determine the long-term effects of programs such as the EMR.

The two conceptual frameworks of Newberry (2010) and Cook and colleagues (2018) have provided some strategies that teachers can use to start the teacher-student relationship. However, both frameworks focus on the description of the phases of the relationship, rather than a deeper explanation of the strategies that teachers can use. In addition, a limitation of these frameworks is that each framework has only been evaluated in primary school contexts. The current research will draw on these conceptual frameworks and their phases, and compare and contrast the data with the strategies that have been articulated by Newberry (2010) and Cook et al. (2018).

One relationship that is reliant on a positive and productive relationship with students is that of the school counsellor. School counsellors are trained in frameworks to start and maintain good relationships with students and perhaps could

add to the knowledge of how teachers develop these relationships with secondary school students.

2.6 THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP

This section will define the therapeutic relationship and how counsellors develop positive relationships with their clients. The focus of this section will then move to school counsellors and the relationship that they form with students in schools. This section has been included within the thesis as many school counsellors have been teachers themselves, and they may have relevant insight into the teacher-student relationship.

2.6.1 What is the Counsellor-Client Relationship?

Work by Gelso and Carter define the counsellor-client relationship as "…the feelings and attitudes that counselling participants have toward one another, and the manner in which these are expressed" (Gelso & Carter, 1985). For counselling to be effective, it requires a unique relationship between the counsellor and the client, based on empathy, attentiveness, understanding, support, collaboration and respect (Geldard et al., 2017).

The counsellor-client relationship is believed to be divided into three components – the working alliance, the unreal (transference) relationship and the real relationship – acting as components of the total counsellor-client relationship (Gelso & Carter, 1985; Greenson, 1967). These important works provide a useful understanding for how the counsellor-client relationship works, for consideration in the current study and are described below.

Working alliance

The working alliance refers to the alignment that occurs between counsellor and client, which is the alignment between the reasonable side of the client and the

working and therapising side of the counsellor (Geldard, et al., 2017; Gelso & Carter, 1985). The working alliance comprises of three parts – the emotional bond between participants, the agreement about goals of counselling, and the agreement about tasks of work, and is considered the most basic of the three components as it contains the essential reasons for participants to partake in therapy to begin with (Bordin, 1979; Geldard et al., 2017; Gelso & Carter, 1985).

Unreal (transference) relationship

The unreal relationship is based on early conflicts with significant helping persons, such as parents or caregivers (Gelso & Carter, 1985). The client develops expectancies or anticipations of help givers who are in authority, and these expectations may be imposed or projected onto the counsellor in anticipation of initial contact (Gelso & Carter, 1985). How transference is dealt with by the counsellor has an impact on the outcome of counselling (Gelso & Carter, 1985).

Real relationship

The real relationship relates to a counsellor's genuineness, authenticity, congruence, and openness, or the extent to which the counsellor is willing to be open and genuine about their feelings in the relationship while "at work" (Geldard et al., 2017; Gelso & Carter, 1985). The real relationship also implies that a client tries to be open and honest at all times (Gelso & Carer, 1985). A real relationship consists of participant's genuine and realistic perceptions of and reaction to each other, which influences the working alliance (Greenson, 1967). The stronger and more positive the real relationship is, the sounder the alliance will be (Geldard et al., 2017; Gelso & Carter, 1985).

Understanding how the client-counsellor relationship is defined assists with contextualising the school counsellor-student relationship. The nuanced strategies of

the counsellor-client relationship may inform teachers when developing positive and productive relationships with students.

2.6.2 How do Counsellors Develop Positive Relationships with Clients?

A common therapeutic approach that is adopted by practitioners is that of person-centred therapy. Developed by Carl Rogers, person-centred therapy explains how counsellors facilitate a client's self-actualising tendency, or their ability to decide the best directions in their lives. The theory of person-centred therapy states that there are six necessary and sufficient conditions (and implied strategies) required for therapeutic change:

1. Two persons are in psychological contact
2. The first, whom we shall term the client, is in a state of incongruence, being vulnerable or anxious
3. The second person, who we shall term the therapist, is congruent or integrated in the relationship
4. The therapist experiences unconditional positive regard for the client
5. The therapist experiences an empathetic understanding of the client's internal frame of reference and endeavours to communicate this experience to the client
6. The communication to the client of the therapist's understanding and unconditional positive regard is to a minimal degree achieved

(Rogers, 1957, pp. 827-830)

Counsellors draw on a range of micro-skills that enable these six conditions for therapeutic change to be enacted. For example, three of the conditions – condition three, four and five (also known as the core conditions) – focus directly on the attitude of the counsellor towards their client and inform counsellors of

approaches required to achieve therapeutic alliance. For example, for a counsellor to practice unconditional positive regard for a client the counsellor must practice acceptance and respect for the client without passing judgement (Geldard et al., 2017). Also, for a counsellor to maintain congruence with their client, they must relate to clients in spite of professional and personal boundaries (Geldard et al., 2017). Empathy can also be achieved by communicating an understanding of the client's perspective (Geldard et al., 2017). Each of the three conditions form the mindset of the counsellor in their practice with their client, are widely accepted concepts understood by most counsellors, and form part of counselling training programs. School counsellors must also know how to form positive and productive relationships with students.

2.6.3 How do School Counsellors Develop Positive Relationships with Students?

School counsellors have formal training and a framework of practice to inform their engagement with students in schools (Australian Psychological Society, 2018). In their work, school counsellors draw upon consistent and well-established theories, therapeutic approaches and micro-skills that are learnt and practised, and similar to teachers, school counsellors are bound by professional practices outlined in their framework of practice and code of ethics to ensure they best support students' learning and wellbeing (for example, *Counselling Services in Anglican Schools Guidelines,* Anglican Schools Commission, 2017). The relationship that school counsellors form with students is a significant element within their framework of practice and code of ethics, where it is expected that school counsellors will develop trusting and supportive relationships with students and their families (Anglican Schools Commission, 2017).

2.6.4 Why Would Teachers Learn about Relationship Development from School Counsellors?

School counsellors appear to be in a credible position to share their insight into relationship development with students. Although their position and duties within a school is different from that of teachers, a common thread between them and teachers is the relationship they develop with students.

For school counsellors, research suggests that 30% of therapeutic outcomes are attributed to the therapeutic relationship, and that the quality of the bond between counsellor and client positively impacts the therapeutic outcome (Duncan & Miller, 2006; Horvath et al., 2011). The relationship that teachers form with students also has significant benefits, such as improving student wellbeing, academic engagement and performance, and protects teachers from burnout and stress (for example, Barile et al., 2011; Engels et al., 2016; Krane & Klevan, 2018; Kurdi & Archambault, 2017; Milatz et al., 2015; Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016; OECD, 2016; Raufelder et al., 2016; Sointu et al., 2017; Yoon, 2002). Therefore, both school counsellors and teachers have a compelling reason to develop the most positive and productive relationship they can with students.

However, there is a difference when it comes to the training that school counsellors and teachers have on relationship development with students. For school counsellors, a focus on relationship development is embedded across their formalised training, framework of practice and code of ethics. However, teachers, who also have formalised training and professional standards to abide by, do not experience the same level of training in relationship development with students, nor do they have a clear framework to inform their practice in this area. Therefore, school counsellors' understanding of relationship development with students in secondary schools might provide teachers with insight into the enablers and barriers to

developing relationships with students, along with the strategies that could be used to start and maintain the teacher-student relationship. While school counsellors may share their insights with teachers into relationship development in informal and formal ways, this research aims to include their perspective as a mechanism for sharing their expertise and experience.

To further support teachers' relationship development with students, the theory of attachment has evolved within secondary school settings, suggesting that teachers would benefit in knowing how to build positive relationships by understanding the elements involved in the process of relationship building. Thus, attachment theory will be described to establish the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis.

2.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS

Attachment theory has been developed by many researchers over time: from Bowlby's (1951) seminal work, Ainsworth's (1967) additions to the theory, to Riley's (2010) application of attachment theory to teacher-student relationships. The theories of Bowlby and Ainsworth are significant as a way of understanding why children need close relationships, who they form these close relationships with, and how the relationship changes over time. Riley (2010) expounded on the notion of attachment theory and its application to adolescents in secondary schools.

The work of Bowlby, Ainsworth and Riley is critical to this thesis, specifically Riley's link between attachment theory and the teacher-student relationship in secondary schools. To understand attachment theory and its relevance to the teacher-student relationship in secondary schooling, this section will firstly explore the origins of the theory (Section 2.7.1). Then, the changes to attachment that are experienced by children and adolescents will be established (Section 2.7.2). Finally,

Riley's (2010) proposal that attachment theory applies to the teacher-student relationship in a secondary school context is considered (Section 2.7.3).

2.7.1 The Origin of Attachment Theory

The foundations of attachment theory began with the seminal work of British psychologist and psychiatrist John Bowlby (1944, 1958, 1969) who devoted his career to exploring childhood development. Bowlby's observational and theoretical work indicated that young children require a relationship with at least one primary caregiver for social and emotional development to occur. This initial observation came to him when he volunteered at a school for maladjusted children (Bretherton, 1992). At this school, Bowlby had an experience with two children in particular, one of whom was a boy described as an isolated, affectionless teenager with no stable mother figure, and the other a boy aged seven or eight who was known as Bowlby's shadow as he followed him around. This experience led to Bowlby's interest in the effects of early relationships on personality development, and his decision to become a child psychiatrist (Bretherton, 1992).

Bowlby's initial study explored the symptoms of children with histories of maternal deprivation and separation, and the importance of family relationships (Bowlby, 1944). Bowlby tested the hypothesis that a disruption to the primary relationship between mother and child may lead to higher incidence of juvenile delinquency, emotional difficulties and antisocial behaviour. A sample of 44 children who had been involved in acts of juvenile delinquency, and a control group of 44 children who had experienced emotional problems but had not committed any crimes, were interviewed (along with their parents). The interviews were conducted to understand the details of the child's early life and whether the children had experienced separation during the critical periods of development (the first five years

of childhood) (Bowlby, 1944). The findings showed that over half of the children who had engaged in juvenile delinquency experienced more than six months separation from their mothers within the first five years of their lives (Bowlby, 1944). In contrast only two participants from the control group had such an experience of separation in the critical periods of development (Bowlby, 1944). Bowlby drew the conclusion that maternal deprivation and separation in a child's early life causes permanent emotional damage and antisocial behaviour (Bowlby, 1944). These findings were also published in a report written by Bowlby and commissioned by the World Health Organisation titled "Maternal Care and Mental Health" (Bowlby, 1951). The report drew upon extensive literature of the time on the effects of maternal deprivation, making the significant conclusion that for a child to grow up to be mentally healthy, that the child "should experience warm, intimate and continuous relationships with his mother (or permanent mother substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment" (Bowlby, 1951, p. 13).

Following this report, Bowlby sought a theoretical explanation for his observations. He was drawn to ethology (the study of animal behaviour) and developmental psychology (the study of human growth and change across the lifespan), and particularly the works of Lorenz (1935), Hinde and Spencer-Booth (1967) and Piaget (1951, 1954), to combine with his observations of parent-child relationships (American Psychological Association, 2019). It was this work that led to the first formal statements by Bowlby on attachment theory, as presented in three papers: "The Nature of the Child's Tie to His Mother" (1958), "Separation Anxiety" (1959) and "Grief and Mourning in Infancy and Early Childhood" (1960). Bowlby's first paper rejected the idea that the primary catalyst for the parent-child relationship was to satisfy a child's needs, and instead proposed that attachment behaviours of

children were based on instinctual responses to bind the infant and the mother (Bowlby, 1958). At this stage, Bowlby's exploration of ethological concepts occurred to draw clear contrasts between the social learning theory concept of dependency and his new concept of attachment.

Bowlby's work was extended by the first empirical study of attachment theory conducted by American psychologist Mary Ainsworth, in 1963 and 1967. Ainsworth (1967) travelled to Uganda to work at the East African Institute for Social Research, where she conducted an observational study into the development of the infant-mother attachment. The study occurred over a period of nine months and participants included 26 Ugandan families with unweaned babies (aged between one-24 months). During the study, Ainsworth focused her observations on proximity-promoting behaviours (for example, crying, vocalizing, smiling and postural adjustment) that were preferentially directed towards the mother. From her observations, Ainsworth was able to distinguish three patterns in the infants' use of the mother as a secure base for exploration: the amount of care provided by the mother; the mother's excellence as informant; and the mother's enjoyment of breastfeeding, and thought of these variables as crucial in determining infant attachment quality (Ainsworth, 1967). Ainsworth completed a second observational study in Baltimore (Ainsworth et al., 1978). For this study, 26 white middle-class mothers were observed during home visits until the children reached the age of 54 months. Ainsworth designed and introduced the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) to assess an infant's response to the presence of a stranger in an unfamiliar environment, both during the presence and absence of the infant's mother. This led to the four patterns of attachment to be identified: secure attachment, avoidant

attachment, ambivalent attachment and disorganised attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

Ainsworth (1967) described that once infants were attached; they used this attachment figure as a secure base for exploration of their environment. Drawing from Ainsworth's study (1967), Bowlby commented that the effectiveness of the attachment was based upon quality of the social interaction stating that

> "…when interaction between a couple runs smoothly, each party manifests intense pleasure in the other's company and especially in the other's expression of affection. Conversely, whenever interaction results in persistent conflict each party is likely on occasion to exhibit intense anxiety or unhappiness, especially when the other is rejecting" (Bowlby, 1969, p. 242).

It is evident that Bowlby's theory of attachment, and Ainsworth's contributions to the theory, have evolved over time. Australian Professor, Philip Riley, has expounded on the notion of attachment theory and its application to adolescents in secondary schools. The changes that occur in attachment from childhood to adolescence help to understand how attachment theory can be applied to the teacher-student relationship in secondary schools.

2.7.2 The Change of Attachment from Childhood to Adolescence

When children start their initial stages of formal schooling, in preschool and primary school, the attachment relationship with their parent changes. Research indicates that there are some similarities in the patterns of separation-attachment towards teachers and parents and that the teacher may be serving in the function of an attachment figure for the parent while the child is in school (Howes & Ritchie, 1999). Marvin and Britner (2008) describe that a child of preschool age increasingly

ventures from the attachment figure while exploring their environment. During this phase of exploration, these children may become mildly upset with brief separations from their attachment figure but become more willing than younger children to be left with a friendly adult. Further, when a child of preschool age is left alone, or becomes mildly distressed being left alone with a friendly adult, most are able to wait for the attachment figure's return before exhibiting attachment behaviours (Marvin & Britner, 2008). Children of preschool age, and primary school are less dependent on contact and proximity to their attachment figure and have become increasingly comfortable to spend time with non-familial adults, namely teachers (Marvin & Britner, 2008). What can be drawn from the decrease in attachment is that when infants and children mature in age and cognitive growth, and advance in social experiences, they are not as easily distressed by separation from their primary attachment care-giver. When children develop cognitively and socially as adolescents, their attachment to individuals outside of the family increases.

Research has explored the conflicting notion about whether attachment between parent and child becomes more or less secure during cognitive and social development through adolescence and describes the key changes in attachment between parent and child from childhood into adolescence (Theisen et al., 2018). A study was conducted in the United States of 690 children between the ages of eight to 16-years-old (Years Three, Six and Nine). Attachment was measured using the *Experiences in Close Relationships – Relationships Structure (ECR-RS)* scale and measured attachment-related anxiety (the extent that a respondent was concerned about availability and response from their mother) and attachment related avoidance (the extent that a respondent was uncomfortable opening up and using the mother as a secure base). Attachment-related anxiety was measured using items such as, "I'm

afraid this person may abandon me" and "I worry this person won't care about me as much as I care about him or her". Attachment-related avoidance was measured using items such as, "I prefer not to show this person how I feel deep down" and "I don't feel comfortable opening up to this person." The study found that there were changes in attachment to parental figures from childhood to late adolescence. Children were found to became more avoidant in their attachment to a parental figure as they became older (Theisen et al., 2018). This finding suggests that the changes in attachment may reflect a reluctance for adolescents to rely solely on their parents for attachment-related functions, and that adolescents could be seeking alternative forms of attachment with other people in their lives (for example, extended family members, peers, and teachers).

Further research conducted in Canadian primary and secondary schools found that teacher-student attachment changed as students transitioned through their schooling (Pepler et al., 2012). This quantitative research conducted in 436 Canadian primary and secondary schools found that the percentage of students who reported having high quality relationships with their teachers, based on care, acceptance, trust and interest, decreased in Years Six to Year Nine, but began to increase again in Year Ten (Pepler et al., 2012). The original decrease was attributed to the transition students experienced moving from primary to secondary school and the change from having one teacher in primary school to many teachers in secondary school. The finding suggested that it is easier for primary students to form a positive relationship with their teacher as they have that one teacher for most of each school day but it takes longer to form a positive and productive relationship with many teachers at the beginning of secondary school (Pepler et al., 2012).

The u-shape that has been found by Pepler and colleagues (2012) is an interesting concept where a positive relationship with teachers is found at the beginning of schooling, seems to regress, but then in senior school reforms positively. This points to an opportunity around late primary and early secondary, where the relationship is at its weakest, for teachers to reverse this negative relationship with students.

Another study examined the transition from primary to secondary school in the Netherlands (Bokhorst et al., 2010). This quantitative study was conducted with 678 participants aged nine to 18, and used the *Social Support Scale for Children and Adolescents (SSSCA)* to gauge student perceived support from their parents, teachers, classmates and friends. In this study, students responded to items that included the extent to which they felt they could talk about their problems and feelings with others and their acceptance by others. Between the ages of nine and 18, students reported that parents and friends were found to be more supportive of them than classmates and teachers, respectively. However, students perceived that their support from their teachers support (specifically emotional support) decreased during the secondary school years, which the researchers attributed to the transition students make from primary to secondary school where students have multiple teachers in secondary school (as compared to primary school). The research suggested that because of the increased number of teachers in secondary school it may be difficult for students to start and maintain relationships with their teachers (Bokhorst et al., 2010). These findings resonate with those of Pepler et al. (2012) described above.

Overall, research has found that the teacher-student relationship changes during the school years, in a u-shape, with more student perceived teacher support in the early and later years of school with a decrease from late primary to the beginning of

senior schooling. In the latter years of primary school and into secondary school, adolescents have changing attachment to their parents and varied attachment to their teachers. This finding means it is increasingly important for teachers to have a range of strategies to form positive and productive relationships with students. Attachment theory could provide a foundation for understanding the teacher-student relationship in a secondary school.

2.7.3 Attachment Theory in Secondary Schools

In his book "Attachment theory and the teacher-student relationship: A practical guide for teachers, teacher educators and school leaders" (2010), Philip Riley, an Australian university lecturer, registered psychologist and experienced primary and secondary school teacher, developed the argument that teachers need an increased understanding of the psychodynamic processes underlying the teacher-student relationship. He suggested that by using the principles of attachment theory, teachers could be more informed about the processes of relationship building (Riley, 2010). To conceptualise the relationship between teachers and students in schools, Riley (2010) drew upon the evolution of attachment processes beyond the period of childhood, based on the work on adult attachment (as suggested by Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990) to describe teacher-student relationships in schools.

Adult attachment builds on the original theory of attachment by Bowlby (1958, 1969). Hazan and Shaver (1987, 1990) conceptualised romantic love in adults as an attachment process that followed the same formative steps and resulted in the same kinds of differences as infant-parent attachment. The similarities between the attachment process are that: the emotional and behavioural dynamics of infant-parent relationships and adult romantic relationships are governed by the same biological system; the kinds of individual differences observed in infant-parent relationships are

similar to the ones observed in romantic relationships; individual differences in adult attachment behaviour are reflections of the expectations and beliefs people have formed about themselves and their close relationships based on their attachment histories; romantic love involves the interplay of attachment and caregiving (Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990). The fourth similarity in particular, that romantic love involves the interplay of attachment and caregiving, is a characteristic of the dyadic relationship that Riley believed occurs between teachers and students (Riley, 2010). If this is the case, teachers need to know how to form positive and productive relationships with students, of a professional nature, that allow the interplay of attachment and caregiving to occur. Importantly, teachers need to have an understanding of the ways in which they interact with students.

Riley (2010) asserted that teachers respond to students in the way that has been modelled to them from repeated interactions with their own school teachers. This finding is consistent with other research (Darling-Hammond, 2006) that suggests that new teachers do not develop individual styles as a teacher but emulate the teaching practices of a favourite teacher they had as a student. Riley suggested that teachers have predictive expectations of how the teacher-student relationship works and that they develop a professional internal working model based on their experiences of other relationships (Riley, 2010). This interpretation of attachment theory suggests that we have learnt to form and maintain our relationships by our accumulated experiences of relationships, and that these prior experiences may not always support the development of positive and productive teacher-student relationships. The current research sought to explore if and how this hypothesis is perceived by secondary school stakeholders in Australia.

In summary, the work of Riley (2010) asserts four key principles that are relevant to this thesis. First, it is suggested that teachers have a role in ensuring students feel safe and secure and engage in socially appropriate behaviour. Second, teachers need to draw on the principles of attachment theory to develop their understanding of the development of the teacher-student relationship. Third, teachers in secondary schools should form a dyadic relationship with students, and they also need one dyadic relationship with students to maintain their professional identity. Finally, teachers form relationships with students based on their experience with their own school teachers.

The principles of attachment theory, and Riley's link between attachment theory and secondary schools, can be used to reframe the way the teacher-student relationship is viewed in a secondary school setting. Teachers understanding of the fundamental principles of attachment theory may assist them in realising possible causes of student disengagement in school so that they could help students re-connect and re-engage in learning (Riley, 2010). Therefore, the main research objective of this thesis is to investigate the perceptions of student, teachers, parents and school counsellors on how teachers start and maintain positive and productive teacher-student relationships. These findings may help to enact the principles proposed by Riley (2010) to support the emerging belief that attachment theory is relevant in secondary school settings.

2.8 SUMMARY

Teacher-student relationships have been shown to have significant benefits for both students and teachers if developed and maintained positively and productively. Students, teachers and parents all have an opinion on what the teacher-student relationship should be, however, there is a dearth of research into the strategies for

teachers to use to establish and maintain relationships with students in the secondary years. Two conceptual frameworks of relationship development in primary schools within the United States have been developed and applied to the teacher-student relationship. These frameworks provide some insight into the phases of the teacher-student relationship and some of the strategies that teachers could use. However, there is no framework of strategies available for secondary school teachers for relationship development with students.

To fill this gap in the literature, students, teachers, parents and school counsellors were asked about their perceptions of the relationship that exists between teachers and students, and how teachers start and maintain these relationships. A comprehensive framework of strategies for teachers to start and maintain positive and productive relationships with students, based on Riley's (2010) proposition, will be developed.

Chapter 3: Research Design

This chapter begins with an overview of the methodology and research design used for this thesis and discusses why a qualitative methodology of research was chosen and how it was appropriate for the study being conducted (Section 3.1). This is followed by a description of the method of the study, which outlines the participants, the method for participant recruitment and data collection, and how the analysis of research data was conducted (Section 3.2). The final sections outline the trustworthiness and dependability of the method used (Section 3.3) and the ethical clearance obtained for this research (Section 3.4). To reiterate, the research questions for this thesis were:

1. What do key stakeholders believe are the fundamental factors necessary to start and maintain a positive and productive relationship between teachers and students?
    i. What are perceived as enablers of building this relationship?
    ii. What are the barriers to building this relationship?
2. What strategies for developing and maintaining teacher-student relationships are most relevant to key stakeholders?

3.1 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1.1 Research Method Using a Qualitative Approach

A qualitative method of research was used for this thesis (Creswell, 2012) as this approach supports the exploration and understanding of a social phenomenon (the development and maintenance of a teacher-student relationship) through the perspectives of local community members (teachers, students, parents and school

counsellors) in a natural setting (local secondary schools). Mack et al. (2005) suggest that qualitative research can provide rich and complex textual descriptions about "the values, opinions, behaviours, and social context of particular populations" (p. 1). Information gathered can provide deeper understandings of the realities of described experiences that help us better understand social phenomena. Using qualitative research for this study allowed for an understanding of how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Gathering the voices from different stakeholders in relation to the teacher-student relationship allowed different perspectives of the same experience to be explored.

Qualitative research has been described by Merriam (1998) as an umbrella approach that includes several forms of inquiry such as semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Information gathered reveals variations in perspectives, individual experiences and can indicate group norms. Each of these approaches helps us understand and interpret the meaning of the social phenomena under examination. Qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right that locates the observer in the world, and consists of interpretive, material practices that not only make the world visible but seeks to use these practices to transform the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The aim of qualitative research is to "capture and understand individual definitions, descriptions and meanings of events" (Burns, 2000). Further, the use of qualitative research in this study provided an opportunity for the inquiry to be richly descriptive (Merriam, 1998, 2009).

In this study, it is important to hear the authentic voices of the different stakeholder groups to understand the complex nature of building and maintaining teacher-student relationships. The collection of this data in this study is qualitative in

nature as these voices would not have been as rich in their description if participants were asked to respond to a survey.

3.1.1.1 Interpretivism

The particular paradigm used to understand the data was interpretivism. Interpretivism is an overarching epistemological position used to understand the phenomenon being studied and consequently the knowledge as it is perceived by the individual stakeholders (Scotland, 2012). Interpretivism is an approach to studying human action with the understanding that all human actions are meaningful and are to be interpreted within a social context (O'Donoghue, 2018). Merriam (1998) agrees that an interpretive approach helps in understanding both the experiences of participants and the factors that affect these experiences. Creswell (2005) suggests that an inquiry, interpretative paradigm is useful for exploring and understanding areas that have little previous research undertaken, such as this one. With respect to the current study, relationships that occur with individuals in a school setting have meaning for them in their everyday interactions. Thanh and Thanh (2015) suggest that there is a strong connection between qualitative research and an interpretivist paradigm in that neither seeks absolute truths. As such, data is used to interpret world views through multiple perspectives to gain deeper insights into the phenomenon being studied.

From an interpretivist perspective, the researcher is able to develop a deep understanding of the complexities that are unique to that context. Wray (2007) viewed this approach to include not only the understanding of meanings from human actions but also the consideration of experiences and histories that people have had and how these are understood in the context of these interactions. For example, teachers bring past lives and prior professional experiences to their current situation

that shape and affect their thinking and behaviours. By acknowledging past histories and experiences of participants, a richer analysis evolves than might have been had by viewing only immediate day-to-day experiences.

Scotland (2012) warned that knowledge produced by the interpretive paradigm can be of limited transferability for three reasons: it is usually fragmented and not unified into a coherent body; such research usually produces highly contextualised qualitative data; and interpretations of participants' data involve subjective individual constructions. The researcher of this thesis has taken these limitations into consideration. He acknowledges that the data can only provide a fragment of participants' understanding of teacher-student relationships and that further research with a greater number of participants may provide a more comprehensive picture of this dynamic relationship. He agrees that the data for the current research has provided a highly contextualised interpretation but as the purpose of the research was to create a framework for starting and maintaining teacher-student relationships, there was a need for this contextualisation of the data.

There is a common concern that qualitative data may be subjectively interpreted (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Merriam, 2009), thus the current researcher has applied rigour in interpreting the results of this data. He acknowledges that it is impossible to be totally free of personal interpretations but has endeavoured to minimise these possibilities through constant comparison of the data over a period of time. Further, Simons (2013) suggested that qualitative data should not be considered in the same way as quantitative data, nor that it needs or should be generalised in the same way. Simon's recommendation is that qualitative research cannot be generalised but can contribute in a significant way to understanding a particular phenomenon. An important factor in qualitative research

is the design chosen to gather and interpret the data. The following section provides details of the research design used in the current research.

3.1.2 Research Design

A case study design was selected as the best method to answer the research questions. There are different categories of case studies such as exploratory designs used to produce recommendations that precede future research and exploratory designs used to establish the cause and effect of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 1998). A further category is a descriptive design which presents a comprehensive description of a phenomenon within a natural environment (context). As the intent of the current research was to explore the perceptions of various stakeholders about the development and maintenance of teacher-student relationships, this research was categorised as an exploratory design.

A range of participants were included in the current study as a way to represent multiple explanations of how they viewed teacher-student relationships. A case study is non-experimental, but rather is descriptive and inductive in nature which makes it an ideal approach in the field of education (Merriam, 1998). This approach allows the researcher to compare and contrast the phenomenon from different perspectives to gain a deeper understanding of elements that are important for the different stakeholders (Stake, 1995). Case studies provide rich descriptions of participants' real lives as they describe them within the context of the study. In case study research the data should speak for itself, should not be presented merely as descriptive text but should provide a deep understanding of what is being studied (Merriam, 1998, 2009). The research assumed a relativist ontology where multiple realities exist, for example, understanding the teacher-student relationship from a range of different perspectives (Merriam, 1998). The research was conducted in

focus groups where participants could engage in a co-construction of reality or where ideas could be refined or refuted.

As indicated above, case study as a qualitative approach is not one-size-fits all. Instead, a particular area of study is examined. Researchers (Berg, 2017; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2008) describe this process as a 'bounded' phenomenon whereby the investigation of a person, social setting or event is 'bounded' to that particular context in an intensive and focused inquiry. It is paramount that the research has a clear focus on the congruence between the selection of the case study design and the research questions (Merriam, 1998). Keeping a clear focus on the boundaries within which the research sits will ensure that there is consistent theme guiding the research. The bounded phenomenon can be a setting or context such as secondary schools, which is the context chosen for the current study. Information revealed through this line of investigation is particular to that context and revealed through description rather than statistically, as would be the case in a quantitative inquiry. While each participant group holds a different position in the school, a bounded system of inquiry data collection from multiple sources of information provides multiple perspective to be heard and reported on as a description or theme.

Critics of case study designs describe that the nature of such studies are moulded by the researcher's own personal history as well as that of participants' histories (Stake, 2008) and so might offer a limited view of the phenomenon under investigation. The researcher of the current study is a Deputy Principal and so is familiar with the everyday dynamics of a school. Subjective epistemology enabled the researcher to co-construct understanding of the concepts and ideas being discussed due to this professional background.

Being so closely aligned to the phenomenon under scrutiny in this research, the researcher understood the potential for bias in data collection and analysis. However, the researcher took every precaution to reduce any kind of potential bias by making a point of not collecting data in his own school where he would be known as in a position of authority. In addition, the researcher self-identified as a higher degree research student, rather than in senior management of a school, to attempt to reduce any bias in participant responses. Further, participants were able to read the questions at the beginning of the interviews and focus groups.

A strength of case studies is that they provide a holistic description of a phenomena within the context that they occur (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). In this, the case study investigates complex social interactions through multiple perspectives, as with the current research. Conducting research that is qualitative in nature, requires that the site and participants be purposefully selected (Creswell, 2008). For this research, the case study setting was in secondary schools in Australia. This setting was selected as the research explores the views of secondary school stakeholders – students, teachers, parents and school counsellors – on the teacher-student relationship. The rationale for this sampling strategy was to draw on a wide range of stakeholders' views on the teacher-student relationship to maximise different perspectives on the issue, that being, how the teacher-student relationship can be more positive and productive in secondary schools. The case study used a collective approach to study the issue to highlight different perspectives, with key themes across these perspectives forming meaning from this case study. The following section outlines the participants of this case study and the qualitative measures used within the current research, including focus groups and semi-structured interviews, which will be discussed.

3.1.3 Recruitment of Participants

For this research the voices of a range of participants in relation to the teacher-student dynamic was needed to be heard. Individuals who were invited to participate in this research included teachers, students, parents and school counsellors as key stakeholders in considering the teacher-student relationships.

To recruit participants, an initial email was sent to eight schools inviting principals, all unknown to the researcher, to nominate teachers, students and parents to participate in this research. Following this initial email, two schools gave consent (School A and School B). School A is an independent, medium sized, co-educational primary and second school located in the Brisbane West region, while School B is an independent, medium sized, co-educational secondary school located in the Brisbane North region.

The eight schools were selected as a sample of convenience as they were members of a professional network of independent schools. The researcher chose independent schools as it was found to be challenging to gain access to Catholic and State schools for research to be conducted. Independent schools are not overseen by one overarching body where permission would need to be granted and, as such, could make independent decisions directly with the researcher on whether to participate in the study. The location, being in South-East Queensland, was also selected as this is the region in which the researcher resides, therefore providing for ease of access to participants for the research to be conducted.

For the recruitment of school counsellor participants, an email was sent to school counsellors who are members of a counselling network in South-East Queensland to seek school counsellor participants. Again, similar to the recruitment of teachers, students and parents, all school counsellors worked in independent

schools within South-East Queensland. A detailed overview of the recruitment of each stakeholder group is described below.

3.1.3.1 Teachers

Eleven teachers in total, consisting of four males and seven females from the secondary department of an independent school in South-East Queensland, participated in three focus groups (School A). A school contact was established through the participating school, and emails and phone calls were used to organise the focus group interviews. Teaching experience of the individuals ranged from a beginning teacher to teachers of ten or more years' experience, teaching a wide range of subjects and year levels. Based on an invitation to teachers to participate in this research, the school contact organised participants into focus groups. These focus group interviews were conducted in the second semester of the 2014 school year and were approximately 60 minutes in length. All focus group interviews took place in person and participants were audio recorded. All teachers gave written consent prior to participating in the focus groups.

3.1.3.2 Students

Participants for this study included secondary school students. Students from Year Seven and Year 11 were sought as the research wanted to explore the similarities and differences between students' perceptions of the teacher-student relationship as students enter secondary school and after some time in secondary school.

To establish student focus groups, an initial email was sent to eight independent schools to nominate students to participate in this research. One school (School A) gave consent and the school was contacted to arrange focus group interviews with students. These participants were from an independent secondary

school in Queensland. The school was the same independent secondary school in Queensland where the teacher focus groups were conducted (School A). Twenty-five students of both genders from year levels ranging from Year Seven to Year 11 participated in four focus groups (13 students in Year Seven and 12 students in Year 11). These interviews were approximately 60 minutes in length and were conducted face-to-face during the second semester of the 2014 school year. All focus interviews were audio-recorded and participants provided written consent to participate in this research aligned with university ethical requirements.

3.1.3.3 Parents

An email was sent to eight independent schools in the South-East Queensland region, inviting the schools to consider nominating parents to participate in this research. The eight schools were the same schools contacted who were invited to provide student and teacher participants for this study. One school responded and facilitated the opportunity for the research to be conducted. This school was the same independent secondary school in Queensland where the teacher and student focus groups were conducted (School A). However, only three parents participated and therefore a second independent secondary school was asked to allow the researcher to have focus groups with the parents (School B). A school contact in each school was established, and correspondence occurred by email to arrange the details of the parent focus groups. Across the two schools (School A and B), seventeen parents participated in this research. These participants, all parents of secondary school-aged children, were invited to participate in focus groups. No parents were related to the student participants in this research. There were three focus groups (Group One – three parents; Group Two - eight parents; Group Three – six parents) made up of parents of both gender (six males and 11 females), with

children of both genders, from Years Seven to 11 (11 parents of Year Seven students and six parents of Year 11 students). The school contact organised the participation of parents of current secondary school-aged students and arranged the participating parents into focus groups. The focus groups were conducted face-to-face by the researcher and were approximately 60 minutes in length. Three focus groups occurred in this data collection, with the first focus group conducted in the second semester of 2014 and the second and third focus group conducted in the first semester of 2016. All focus groups were audio recorded. All participants gave written consent to take part in the focus group.

3.1.3.4 School Counsellors

An initial email was sent to a network of school counsellors in South-East Queensland. Ten school counsellors from ten independent schools in Queensland replied and were interviewed. This included one male and nine female school counsellors. Participants engaged in an individual phone interview. Their experience as a school counsellor varied from two to over ten or more years' experience, with some counsellors being qualified and experienced classroom teachers. The number of male counsellors to female counsellors is a reflection of the membership of this specific network of counsellors. Email correspondence was used to establish an interview time for participants. The school counsellor interviews were conducted by phone. Interviews were conducted in the second semester of 2014 and were approximately 60 minutes in length. These interviews were audio-recorded. All school counsellors provided written consent to participate in the interview and to have the interview audio-recorded.

In total, there were 63 participants in this study across the four key stakeholder groups: teachers (n = 11; 64% female), students (n = 25; 52% female), parents (n =

17; 65% female) and school counsellors (n = 10; 90% female). The student sample was from Year Seven (52%) and Year 11 (48%) and the parent sample were parents of children in Year Seven (65%) and Year 11 (35%). Participants for this study are summarised below (Table 1). A description of these data collection techniques is described below.

Table 1

Focus Group and Interview Participants

Participants	**(n) 63**	**Data Collection Method**
Role		
Teachers		Focus Group Interview
Male	4	
Female	7	
Total	**11**	
Students		Focus Group Interviews
Male (Year 7)	6	
Male (Year 11)	6	
Female (Year 7)	7	
Female (Year 11)	6	
Total	**25**	
Parents		Focus Group Interviews
Male Parent (Year 7 Child)	3	
Male Parent (Year 11 Child)	3	
Female Parent (Year 7 Child)	8	
Female Parent (Year 11 Child)	3	
Total	**17**	
School Counsellors		Individual Interviews
Male	1	
Female	9	
Total	**10**	

3.2 METHOD

3.2.1 Data Collection

Data collection in qualitative research must be purposeful as there is generally a large quantity of in-depth data from multiple sources (Creswell, 2008). The underlying assumption is that exploring a broad range of perspectives helps us better understand the complexities of the phenomena under investigation. To gather such data careful consideration of the data collection techniques needed to occur. The following sections describe the data collection techniques, including focus groups and semi-structured interviews used in this research.

Focus Groups

There were no existing instruments that allowed for the investigation of how educational stakeholders define the relationship between teachers and students, and how they believe they are started and maintained. Therefore, a qualitative method was used as it allowed for in-depth investigation. As indicated in Table 1, the qualitative measures used were focus groups with the parents, students and teachers and individual semi-structured interviews with the school counsellors. This section begins with a brief justification for using focus groups as a procedure for data collection.

The aim of focus group interviews is not to reach consensus about an issue or seek a final solution, but to allow participants to discuss different viewpoints on the topics at hand (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). An important feature of focus groups is that they can achieve a cascade effect where participants are listening to other people's memories and experiences and these recollections may stimulate their own ideas and memories (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Focus groups enable participants to discuss a range of issues on the topic from a range of unique perspectives, providing

the research with a greater understanding of concerns stakeholders may have and where they may agree on some level (Creswell, 2012). Focus groups provided a descriptive method to ascertain the perceptions of stakeholders about starting and maintaining a positive teacher-student relationship.

The characteristics of focus groups allowed for themes to be developed. Using focus groups allowed for in-depth information to be shared, observation of non-verbal cues to be noticed, and a rapport to be established with participants to elicit their responses in relation to the research questions (Merriam, 2009). An advantage of group interviews is that they are less threatening for participants in that they eliminate the possibility of individual disclosures. Instead focus groups open up a sense of group awareness and agreement on issues as they provide a cross-check within the group on the consistency of perspectives and statements of individuals (Simons, 2013). In this way, group interviews facilitate shared frames of reference for analysis. An advantage for the researcher is that he can collect information from a range of participant perspectives at the one time (Creswell, 2012). Focus group questions for teachers, students and parents consisted of some of the following questions:

How would you define the relationship between teachers and students?

How do teachers start relationships with students?

How do teachers maintain relationships with students?

What advice would you give teachers about starting and maintaining relationships with students?

As the focus group discussions were audio-taped it was important to maintain confidentiality of participant responses. Therefore, participants signed consent forms once they agreed to volunteer to be in the research and were given assurance at the

beginning of the focus group discussions that their names and data collected would remain confidential and de-identified.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Because time and the logistics of gathering data with school counsellors did not allow for group interviews, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted. The purpose of the interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of the authentic experiences of how school counsellors establish and maintain relationships with secondary school student with some expectation that these professionals might offer some insight that could contribute to the development of a teacher-student relationships framework.

Semi-structured interviews allow participants to describe their thoughts, perceptions and values (Patton, 2002). Closed questions, on the other hand, are similar to what participants would find on a questionnaire and so do not allow for the collection of rich data needed to understand participants' thoughts, feelings and actions in relation to developing and maintaining teacher-student relationships. Semi-structured interviews allowed for the researcher to explore information from the perspective of the participant. This approach has the potential to unmask unexpected information not previously considered by the research (Turner, 2010). This characteristic of semi-structured interviews attracted the researcher as it is often the unintended discoveries that can lead to better understanding of 'how' something works effectively. To maintain integrity across the interviews, additional information extracted through probing questions were noted, along with the way in which information was gathered Turner (2010). Samples of the questions for participants included:

How would you define the relationship between teachers and students?

How do teachers start relationships with students?

How do teachers maintain relationships with students?

What advice would you give teachers about starting and maintaining relationships with students?

How would you define the relationship between counsellors and students?

How do counsellors start relationships with students?

How do counsellors maintain relationships with students?

The same questions were of school counsellors to those questions asked in the focus groups of teachers, students and parents to gather school counsellors' perspectives on the teacher-student relationship. In addition, school counsellors were asked how they themselves form with students from a counsellor-student perspective to gather data which may have the potential for comparison of approaches between teachers and school counsellors on relationship development with students.

The researcher followed the recommendations of Patton (2002) and prepared an interview guide for the session. However, the researcher was also prepared to allow participants to lead the interview 'conversation' to some extent allowing each to share their unique viewpoints. The interview questions were developed from the literature reviewed for the current research and from the researcher's own knowledge as both a teacher and a Deputy Principal.

During the focus groups and interviews, participants were asked how they believed teachers started and maintained positive relationships, and what particular strategies they used to do so or would suggest would be effective for such relationships.

3.2.2 Data Analysis

In qualitative research a rigorous approach to data analysis needs to be taken to ensure that the perspectives of participants are not subject to researcher bias. For the current research, thematic analysis was used to analyse participant data and to gain a holistic understanding of what participants conveyed. This analysis included the identification, examination and recording of themes associated with the research questions. The identification of themes describes the complex stories of the participants (Creswell, 2012). These themes can then be confirmed or disconfirmed in subsequent data. It is unlikely that a complete understanding can be revealed in one interview; therefore, it was important to analyse several data sets to gain an overall understanding of how the teacher-student relationship is viewed and enacted in schools.

The researcher used Braun and Clarke's (2010) six phases of thematic analysis as follows: reading and re-reading data; generating initial codes for patterns occurring; combining codes into overarching themes; recognising how themes support the data collected as a whole; defining each theme; and describing the results. Through this process a constant comparative analysis was used to understand the whole phenomenon being studied rather than using a word-by-word analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In a constant comparative procedure, raw data is formed into indicators or small segments of information from different people. These indicators are then grouped into several codes which then form categories. The researcher must constantly compare codes to codes and categories to categories in order to eliminate redundancy in the data (Creswell, 2005). Using this method ensured that the data did not become a summary description of the data.

This rigorous form of data analysis ensured reduced emphasis on the researcher's views. This was an important consideration as the researcher is also a

secondary school teacher and so a constant self-check on potential bias in scrutinising the data was undertaken. In the data analysis process, themes were defined and refined to recognise how each related to the entire data set collected (Braun & Clarke, 2010). This process ensured that the information recorded conveyed the intention of the participants' words. Further to this, a research supervisor verified the data extracted against participant transcripts. This provided an acceptable analysis method to ensure that the information coded was the intention of the participants.

The procedure described by Braun and Clarke (2010) aligns well for analysing the data using the constant comparative method. As suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the process begins with the participants' spoken responses (through the interviews and focus groups) being audio-taped followed by the data being transcribed verbatim, then followed by a first reading where all identifying features (person and school) are removed to ensure confidentiality. The above procedure was followed in the current research. Coding of the data began by the sorting of units of meaning (words, phrases or sentences) that indicated participants' thinking (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This initial phase provided a 'general sense' of the data (Creswell, 2012). At this stage, the researcher made marginal notes to identify categories that would lead into themes. The convention used to identify participants, but maintain confidentiality, was coded by gender (M for male and F for female), stakeholder (S for student, T for teacher, P for parent and C for school counsellor), focus group or interview number, then participant number. Each focus group and interview was analysed and coded separately. From here, the analysis for each participant group (teachers, parents, students and school counsellors) was

combined for each group. Then, the overall data set was combined and analysed so that the general over-arching themes of the data were revealed.

The data was entered onto a spreadsheet with data colour-coded into different themes (Table 2). This mapping process provided a process of triangulation (Patton, 2002) of the various sources of data to establish rigour in the research, providing rich insights of participants' perceptions teacher-student relationships. Table 2 lists the data gathered across a variety of data sets (participants and methods) and to explore experiences and perceptions. Gender and year level (if applicable) were also identified to explore any variation in experience in these aspects. An example of the coding, interpretation and participant response that occurred in this analysis is provided in Table 2 which provides samples of the predetermined categories of the data conveyed in the transcripts.

Table 2

Map of Emerging Themes

Theme Four - Trust (extract)				
Theme (Colour-Coded)	Coding			
	Stakeholder	Method	Gender	Year Level
C/S relationship is based on trust	C	Interview	F	N/A
C/S relationship involves trust and collusion	C	Interview	M	N/A
Students need to trust and relate to teachers	T	Focus Group	F	N/A
T/S relationship is built on trust	P	Focus Group	M	N/A
Students relate to teachers that trust them with information about themselves	S	Focus Group	M	7
Students want to be able to trust their teacher	S	Focus Group	F	7

3.3 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND DEPENDABILITY

An important aspect of analysing data collected through qualitative methods is to ensure that there is trustworthiness and dependability. The main components of trustworthiness are that the techniques used are credible, transferable, dependable and are able to be confirmed (Lincoln & Guba, 2002). Credibility occurs when the researcher faithfully represents the views of the participants. In this thesis, the

researcher has clearly stated the intentions of the research and contentiously strove to faithfully accurately represent the views of all participants in the data analysis and discussion of the findings to ensure that the voices of participants were accurately understood. Furthermore, the research methods aligned with the research questions and the theoretical underpinnings of the study. Trustworthiness as described by Lincoln & Guba generally has a 'positivist' ring to it so is not entirely compatible with qualitative research. Instead, they describe a set of criteria around the concept of 'authenticity', which includes fairness, respecting participants' perspectives and empowering participants to act (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The concept of authenticity is aligned more with constructivist perspectives in establishing the validity of the research. Simons (2013) suggests that a main strategy for validating data in qualitative research is through triangulation. Triangulation is the process of viewing things form different perspectives and is related to different data sets collected and well as the adequacy of sampling and the appropriateness of the method to understand the topic begin researched. Triangulation of the data in the current research allowed for a variety of perspectives to be heard as multiple perspectives were recorded and that these sources were socially constructed. The researcher has also clearly described the contexts in which the data was gathered so that decisions could be made about whether results could be transferred. As Simons described a deeper and, therefore, more valid understanding of the data is achieved when there are multiple perspectives given and meanings are constructed from divergent sources (e.g. teachers, students, parents and school counsellors) as was the case in this research.

Dependability in qualitative research aligns with the notion of reliability in quantitative research (Simons, 2013); however, the data is not statistically assessed

as in a more 'traditional' form of quantitative research. Dependability in qualitative research relies on the researcher organising a well-thought out approach and the procedures of the research well documented. In the current study, the researcher has made every attempt to ensure that the process and procedures to collect and analyse the data have been well-documented to ensure that the findings were the results of the research and not preconceived biases (Lincoln & Guba, 2002). The researcher has also confirmed the findings with his supervisory team throughout the research program. As described above, qualitative research more strongly aligns with the concepts of trustworthiness and authenticity, which has been achieved in this research through a rigorous interpretation of the data until the 'significance' is at a saturation point and there were no contrary findings and through the process of triangulation.

3.4 ETHICAL CLEARANCE

Ethical clearance was approved for this study from the Queensland University of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee in January 2014. This clearance was achieved through an application to the university that meet the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. A copy of the ethical approval for this study can be found in Appendix A and indicates that the study was considered as low risk. However, precautions were taken to ensure ethical considerations to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants and the data collected. Information for Prospective Participants and Participant Information and Consent Forms for Research for the focus groups and interviews can be found in Appendices B, C and D. The option for withdrawal from the research was given to participants, however, none of those who volunteered to participate chose to withdraw.

As part of the process for complying with ethical research, the participants who volunteered to participate in the research were assured that their identities would be held in confidence and not revealed in the thesis or through any other means by the research. The participants, who were all unknown to the researcher, were assured that the data collected through the interviews and focus groups would be de-identified with pseudonyms used as per the university's research guidelines. It was explained to participants that the audio recordings of the data collected would be destroyed once analysis was completed.

3.5 SUMMARY

This chapter has outlined the methodology and research design for this study, including the reasons for using a qualitative approach. A justification for using a case study design was given as an interpretive approach within this qualitative study. The method has also been outlined, describing the research participants, the recruitment of these participants and the data analysis methods used. Important to the integrity of the project was that a range of stakeholder voices be heard. Therefore, it was important to include participants who represented teachers, students, parents and school counsellors to understand how these different perspectives on the development and maintenance of teacher-student relationship are enacted and what makes some relationships more successful than others. Ethical clearance for this study has also been described with a focus on reassuring participants that their thoughts and ideas would be handled in an ethical way by the researcher. The results of this study are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents the findings from the data gathered on making the teacher-student relationship more positive and productive. This data was collected across four participant groups – teachers, students, parents and school counsellors – with 63 participants involved across secondary schools in Queensland, Australia. A case study methodology was used as the research design of choice, allowing for common themes to be identified within the data. Analysis revealed four main themes: 1) getting to know students (Section 4.1); 2) establishing professional boundaries (Section 4.2); 3) being consistent (Section 4.4); and 4) establishing trust (Section 4.4) as essential for building relationships. These four themes were then divided into subthemes. For 'getting to know students', the subthemes were: helping students feel comfortable (Section 4.1.1); having and showing an interest in students (Section 4.1.2); and invest time into students (Section 4.1.3). The theme of 'boundaries' was divided into the subthemes of: creating professional distance (Section 4.2.1); establishing expectations for students (Section 4.2.2); friendship and the teacher-student relationship (Section 4.2.3) and self-disclosure between teachers and students (Section 4.2.4). Within the theme of 'being consistent' the subthemes of providing predictability and stability (Section 4.3.1), expectations and boundaries (Section 4.3.2), authenticity (Section 4.3.3) and fairness (Section 4.3.4) were identified. 'Trust' was the final theme and the essential elements (or subthemes) of a relationship based on trust were: showing respect (Section 4.4.1); maintaining confidentiality and privacy (Section 4.4.2); and making a connection (Section 4.2.3). The themes and subthemes are summarised in Table 3 below. Table 4 provides a comparison of findings of the different stakeholders within the study. Following

this, the next section begins with description of the data for the theme: getting to know students.

Table 3

Research Themes

Getting to Know Students	Establishing Professional Boundaries	Being Consistent	Establishing Trust
Help Students Feel Comfortable	Create Professional Distance	Provide Predictability and Stability	Show Respect
Time and the Teacher-Student Relationship	Have Fair and Consistent Expectations	Model Fairness	Maintain Confidentiality and Privacy
Have or Show an Interest in Students	Friendship and the Teacher-Student Relationship	Develop Boundaries and Expectations	Make a Connection
	Use Appropriate Self-Disclosure	Be Authentic	

Table 4

Comparison of Findings

	Teachers	Students	Parents	School Counsellors
Getting to Know Students				
Help Students Feel Comfortable	✓	✓	✓	✓
Time and the Teacher-Student Relationship	✓	✓	✓	✓
Have or Show an Interest in Students	✓	✓	✓	✓
Establishing Professional Boundaries				
Create Professional Distance	✓	✓	✓	✓
Have Fair and Consistent Expectations	✓	✓	✓	✓
Friendship and the Teacher-Student Relationship	✓	✓	✓	✓
Use Appropriate Self-Disclosure	✓	✓	✓	✓
Being Consistent				
Provide Predictability and Stability	✓	✓	✓	✓
Model Fairness	✓		✓	
Develop Boundaries and Expectations	✓		✓	✓
Be Authentic			✓	✓
Establishing Trust				
Show Respect	✓	✓	✓	✓
Maintain Confidentiality and Privacy				✓
Make a Connection	✓	✓	✓	✓

4.1 THEME ONE: GETTING TO KNOW STUDENTS

The first theme that emerged from the data to describe building positive and productive relationships with students in secondary schools was in relation to getting to know students. All stakeholder groups described getting to know students as significant for a successful teacher-student relationship to occur. Participants described ways in which teachers could get to know students, for example, find out about students' interests, establish a common ground, and understand their strengths and ways to support them. Students were in agreement that they wanted teachers to get to know them in order to form the teacher-student relationship. School counsellors, however, felt that there was little opportunity for teachers to get to know students due to the structure within secondary schools. Within this theme, four subthemes have been identified to describe how teachers can get to know students. The subthemes are: helping students feel comfortable; showing an interest in students; investing time into getting to know students; and showing respect towards students.

4.1.1 Helping Students to Feel Comfortable

For teachers to get to know students, it emerged that students needed to feel comfortable as described by a Year Seven student: *[You've] got to be comfortable,* (MS12). While not elaborated on by the student, this perspective highlighted what was important for the student within the dynamic between them and their teachers as a way of describing a positive and productive teacher-student relationship. Parents and school counsellors concurred that feeling comfortable was essential for building positive relationships with their teachers and also suggested that for students to feel comfortable they needed to feel safe and secure both with their teacher and in the classroom environment. As described by one parent, teachers could make students

feel a sense of comfort in the classroom environment by making them feel welcomed and safe:

> *Just make them feel welcome and make them feel safe,* (FP13).

The description provided by this parent was discussed in the context of playing games with students to get to know them and to make students feel welcomed and safe in the classroom environment and with their teacher. By feeling this way, it was suggested that students would be more likely to be able to form relationships with their teachers.

The views of school counsellors supported the notion that in order for students to feel comfortable that they needed to feel safe in the environments that they are in. One school counsellor stated:

> *I think kids really need to feel much more, you know that stability, that predictable environment, they feel a lot safer, they feel a lot more comfortable in that sort of environment,* (FC5).

What is being suggested here is that if students experience a sense of predictability in their environment it provides them with a sense of safety within that environment. It was suggested that this sense of safety then has a positive impact on the student in being able to form relationships with others, particularly teachers, in this space. This belief was shared by another school counsellor who saw the value in making students feel safe in the counselling environment to build a relationship with students:

> *I just make a really good point of helping the student feel relaxed and comfortable in my office. I think that is all kind of building towards that relationship of trust,* (FC7).

In this quote, the school counsellor is drawing upon her role in making an intentional effort to make the student feel comfortable in the counselling environment. It was

the belief that by doing so, that the counsellor would then be able to form a trusting relationship with the student. The same counsellor drew a connection between their counselling space and the classroom space to provide a suggestion to teachers:

> *I think that the student feeling comfortable and in a safe space in their classroom is essential,* (FC7).

A different school counsellor also described the need for students to feel safe within the classroom environment. This need was framed through the experience of students not always feeling this way within their classrooms:

> *They've got to feel safe in that classroom and I think that comes from the number of students that come in here and say that they don't feel safe in the classroom,* (FC8).

This school counsellor is describing that students do not always feel safe within the classroom environment, which would have a negative impact on their ability to feel comfortable within that environment. The participant is suggesting that students must feel safe within the classroom environment for any form of teacher-student relationship to be established and maintained.

There was a perception that there were academic benefits for students. For example, participants in a student focus group suggested that they were more likely to have a relationship with a teacher, and be able to learn more, when they felt comfortable with their teacher. Two Year Seven students described this in this way:

> *It has to be close enough that you can learn easier…that you are comfortable with the teacher,* (FS25 and FS21).

These students described that if they felt comfortable with their teacher, they would then become close to them, presumably forming a positive and productive relationship with their teachers. They described that it was easier for them to learn if

they felt a closeness and comfort with their teacher. A Year 11 student also shared this opinion:

> *A kid's not going to learn if they don't feel, if they feel uncomfortable, a kid won't learn. They're too busy being uncomfortable,* (FS42).

What this participant is describing is that if a student is not comfortable in the classroom environment or in the presence of their teacher that they will be preoccupied with feeling uncomfortable within this environment and that this preoccupation gets in the way of their learning. The suggestion here is that for students to learn to have social and academic success, teachers must have the ability to help students feel comfortable.

A Year Seven student also described that there were boundaries needed for students to feel comfortable in working with a teacher. If a teacher-student relationship, for example, was too close then it would likely make students feel uncomfortable and hinder the chances of a successful partnership:

> *Although they want to build a connection with you, I don't want to tell you my whole life story. I want it to be a friendship but I don't want it to be everything about me. I don't like having teachers try and force stuff out of me. It's uncomfortable,* (FS22).

This participant is describing the type of relationship that they want from their teacher in order to feel most comfortable. Although they want to be close to their teacher, they do not want to be so close that they felt uncomfortable with their teacher. The change from feeling comfortable to uncomfortable appears to be in the depth in which the teacher gets to know the student. The depth of getting to know students is described as the tipping point between a student feeling comfortable and uncomfortable in the teacher-student relationship.

Some participants suggested that teachers also needed to feel comfortable in the relationship and that there was a need for them to be themselves in order to make students feel comfortable. A teacher shared this perspective in the following way:

> *If you are comfortable in the classroom and you're comfortable in establishing that relationship with the kids…if you as a person are comfortable with doing that then that will come very easy,* (MT11).

This teacher suggested that not only did a teacher need to feel comfortable in the classroom environment itself, but also in forming relationships with students, needed to have the skills to be able to make students feel comfortable as well. This mutual comfort would then directly impact the ability of the teacher to get to know the student to start to form the teacher-student relationship.

As well as teacher, parents suggested that teachers need to be themselves to be able to form the teacher-student relationship. As one parent put it:

> *Feel comfortable with being yourself, I guess,* (FP12).

This suggestion was offered when parents in this focus group were discussing an example of a teacher that they all knew and the different ways in which this teacher went about forming relationships with students. The examples focused on the ability of the teacher to connect with students by feeling comfortable to open-up to students about your own interests.

However, it was not a given that teachers automatically knew how to build positive relationships with their students. One school counsellor described that the teacher-student relationship was based on what the teacher felt comfortable with:

> *There's no right way to do this. It's more about knowing yourself…what you're comfortable with,* (FC5).

This excerpt suggests that if a teacher must be comfortable in themselves before being able to form the teacher-student relationship, that there is no set way to form this relationship, but that if a teacher feels comfortable within themselves that it could assist with forming the teacher-student relationship.

Finally, parents and school counsellors described that the way in which physical spaces are set up contributes to whether students feel comfortable. Participants described that when that space feels welcoming more positive relationships can be formed. Whereas when that space is not welcoming it can be intimidating for students. Although how this space needed to be arranged and managed was not expanded upon, parents discussed a settling-in period between students and their teacher as important in establishing a relationship. It can be inferred from these comments that the set-up of the classroom environment can have a direct impact a students' level of comfort in that environment, specifically during the initial stages of their interaction with their teachers.

Two school counsellors offered that their counselling space had an informality to it, different to the classroom space and this provided a safe space for students to feel comfortable:

> *I guess it's not intimidating. It is intended to be comfortable…and it is quite informal,* (FC1).

As the one counsellor described, counsellors made a deliberate attempt to create a comfort zone for students by providing an informal space for interactions:

> *The room itself I would describe as a very comfortable type of situation. It's a really comfortable place for them to sit in. It is not official. It is not an office-looking place at all,* (FC8).

From the above descriptions, parents and school counsellors are suggesting that the physical environments within schools in which students spend their time can be constructed in a way to feel more welcoming and less intimidating for students. School counsellors suggest that the set-up of their space has a positive impact on student comfort levels because the informality contributes to the space being comfortable for students. Teachers on the whole did not describe how they changed the physical space in the same way counsellors did, perhaps because teachers and students in secondary schools move from one classroom to another and so do not have that single dedicated space that counsellors do. Rather than focusing on the physical space, one teacher described that establishing classroom routines helped students to feel comfortable in the classroom environment:

> *I work really hard on routines. A lot of the kids know what the routine is, they know the consequences and you start that from the beginning. They're comfortable in the room,* (FT11).

This teacher is suggesting the need to establish routines and consequences at the beginning of the relationship with students as this experience has led to students feeling a sense of comfort in the classroom environment.

Overall, comfort was an important factor for participants when describing the teacher-student relationship in secondary schools. Comfort was described in different ways by participants who shared a breadth of perspectives on what comfort meant in terms of building the teacher-student relationship. Helping students feel comfortable was a significant way to inform how teachers could get to know students. It was the comfort of both students and teachers that provided a dynamic between teachers and students that allowed them to get to know each other and to build the teacher-student relationship. From their own practice, school counsellors

supported the need for students to feel comfortable in working with their teachers for more positive and productive relationships to be formed.

4.1.1.1 Being Non-Judgemental

The data demonstrated that a way to make students feel more comfortable was through an approach of being non-judgemental of them. Students described the importance of teachers being non-judgemental towards them and counsellors also shared the importance of this dynamic in their own practice when forming relationships with students. Students felt that being non-judgemental allowed them to relate to teachers and allowed them to trust teachers with information about themselves. A Year 11 student stated the following:

Don't ever judge someone or make them feel bad, (FS43).

This student's comment is a directive to teachers about the types of interactions students prefer to have with them. It is a call to action for teachers to understand that being judgemental towards students has the result of students experiencing negative emotions about themselves. Such an experience is in direct contrast to building positive and productive relationships with students and would result in students feeling less comfortable in the presence of their teachers and less likely to allow teachers to get to know them in fear of being judged by them.

Students also stated that they will be more likely to share information with their teacher if they felt that the teacher was non-judgemental. They described that they preferred feeling comfortable with a teacher who is non-judgemental and who is open to sharing information about themselves. If this balance is achieved, student described that they would be more likely to share information about themselves and to allow teachers to get to know them. A quote from a Year Seven male student describes it thus:

If you know that they're not going to judge you, and they're cool sharing information with you, then you can share information with them, (MS11).

Students also described that they believed that teachers could be less judgemental than their parents, therefore allowing for them to be comfortable about disclosing information about themselves to their teachers. Two Year Seven students described this feeling in the following quote:

> *I think that people seem to be able to talk to their teacher easier than they talk to their parents. Because they're so close to their parents that they think their parents might think something about them. But their teacher, they're close, but not that close…that they're going to judge them,* (MS11 and MS12)

What these students are describing is that the closeness that they have with their teacher will allow them to more easily share information with them. However, the level of closeness they have with their teacher is not as close as they relationship that they have with their parents. Because of this, students felt as though their teachers may be less judgemental than their parents, making them feel more comfortable to share certain information about themselves with their teachers that they would not feel as comfortable sharing with their parents.

School counsellors also shared the importance of being non-judgemental towards students. One school counsellor described the counsellor-student relationship as being a relationship void of judgement:

> *Some children feel quite reluctant to disclose something that they might have done or seen in case they get into trouble in case they're going to be judged or they feel they are going to be judged,* (FC7).

From this description, the participant is stating that students will not disclose information to counsellors if they feel as though they will be judged by the

counsellor. This fear of being judged, or being disciplined, may lead students to feeling too uncomfortable to open up, impacting the ability of the counsellor to get to know the student and to know what is happening to them and around them. A quote from another school counsellor supports the need for students to not feel judged by them:

> *They like to know that you sort of are…not judging them,* (FC9)

While both school counsellors did not state that teachers needed to be less judgemental of students, their experience with forming relationships with students, may provide insight to teachers. For example, one school counsellor offered a suggestion on how they build a non-judgemental relationship with students from their initial interactions with them:

> *From the first session, I talk to them about that it's not my place to make those kinds of judgements,* (FC7).

It appeared important from both school counsellors that students were offered a relationship that was non-judgemental in nature.

Being non-judgemental of students described a way in which relationships could be formed between teachers and students in secondary schools. Students and school counsellors believed that judgement impacted the ability for students to feel comfortable in themselves and to share information. It was reported that the more comfortable a student felt, the more likely they were to disclose information about themselves. A relationship free from judgement was described as being achieved if teachers felt comfortable sharing information about themselves with students and if they had a close relationship with their students.

4.1.1.2 Showing Authenticity

Participants suggested that teacher authenticity would help students feel more comfortable in the presence of their teacher. Authenticity in this sense is having teachers act as themselves and feel comfortable about who they are. Parents believed that teacher authenticity is important to build trust, which has previously been described as a way to make students feel comfortable with their teacher:

> *I think authenticity is probably important…to pull that off and to build trust with children over time,* (FP23).

School counsellors also believed that teachers needed to be authentic and be their real self when with students for students to feel comfortable with their teacher. One school counsellor described it in this way:

> *Just being real. They need to be authentic,* (FC5).

By being real and authentic, the school counsellor is suggesting that students will feel greater comfort in the presence of teachers who feel comfortable about who they are; that they act as their 'real' self. Being authentic was described as a way to increase the opportunity for teachers to get to know their students. Further, school counsellors stated that the relationship itself that teachers have with students needs to be authentic:

> *Having those authentic relationships, I guess. That when you say something to them that they believe that what you're saying is true and they know that you are just not feeding them jargon or what you're being paid to do,* (FC10).

This quote suggests students feel more comfortable with their teacher if the relationship that they have with them is a genuine, real relationship. In addition, the participant believes that an authentic relationship also has the qualities of trust, which has emerged as Theme 4 from the data and will be discussed below in Section 4.4.

4.1.1.3 Being Approachable

For students to feel comfortable with their teacher and allow them to develop a positive and productive relationship with them, it was believed that teachers needed to be approachable in their manner towards students. Students felt that they wanted, and subsequently liked, teachers who were approachable, with a Year 11 student stating:

> *Just be approachable to start with. If students want to actually talk to you about something, just say 'yeah, yeah, I'm open for a chat',* (MS31).

This belief was supported by a school counsellor, who stated that teachers needed to be approachable to build relationships with students:

> *I think that if students are aware that teachers are willing to give them extra support, if it is giving up their spare time to help them when they're struggling and obviously, they need to be approachable to get to that point, I think that definitely builds the relationship,* (FC9).

This counsellor is suggesting that an approachable teacher will have success in forming and maintaining the teacher-student relationship. Overall, students and school counsellors believed that an approachable teacher would have a positive impact on a teacher's ability to get to know students. Another strategy described by participants for teachers to get to know students was using self-disclosure. This will be explored next.

4.1.1.4 Using Self-Disclosure

As described above in Section 4.2.1.1 on Being Non-judgemental, an important aspect of building teacher-student relationships is for teacher to feel comfortable about disclosing something about themselves. All stakeholder groups had an opinion on the role that self-disclosure by the teacher contributed to making students feel

comfortable with their teachers. Students and parents described that teachers build relationships with students by giving background information about themselves, which made students feel more comfortable about sharing information with them. A Year Seven student described an example of a teacher that used self-disclosure to begin the teacher-student relationship, stating:

> *Like with a teacher that some of us have now, she is very open with us. The first couple of days she told us all these stories of her background and stuff that helped us develop an idea of who she was,* (FS26).

This student's description of their teacher suggests that students benefit from self-disclosure of their teacher during the early stages of the teacher-student relationship. In this example, the student suggested that it provided them with an opportunity to get to know their teacher. One Year 11 student describe that a teacher's self-disclosure helped them to feel more relaxed with their teacher:

> *If the teacher kind of gives you a little background info about themselves…it makes me feel more relaxed,* (FS43).

Students also reported that they liked it when their teacher shared something about themselves and trusted teachers who shared about their own life experiences. As previously mentioned, trust is significantly important in making students feel comfortable with their teacher. Two Year Seven students shared an example of their teacher's self-disclosure and its impact on their relationship with this teacher in terms of trust and feeling comfortable:

> *Our teacher tells stories about what happens at home and everything first thing in the morning. So that really does make me comfortable. Just the fact that she's willing to open up to us and trusts us with that information helps you to relate,* (MS12 and MS11).

What the students are suggesting is that it was the self-disclosure of their teacher that provided them with a sense of comfort in the relationship, along with also feeling a sense of being trusted by their teacher due to this self-disclosure. Both students believed that this assisted their ability to relate to their teacher in a positive way.

Parents also believe that teachers should share information about themselves in order to support the establishment of the teacher-student relationship. One parent made the following statement:

> *If you're not constantly doing a little something like disclosing something about yourself so it's this constant building a relationship…you can start great but it's going to fizz pretty quick,* (MP23).

This parent draws the connection that teacher self-disclosure needs to be a continual process for relationship development between teachers and students. A school counsellor, in contrast, shared their belief that self-disclosure should not occur in earlier sessions with students, stating:

> *I definitely make a conscious decision in the first one to sit back and let them tell me who they are. They didn't come to find out who I am,* (FC9).

This counsellor also believed that the teacher-student relationship can be impacted negatively by too much self-disclosure from teachers to students. This will be further explored within Theme 2 on 'boundaries' (Section 5.3). While self-disclosure drew mixed opinions from stakeholders, it emerged that teachers should have and show students that they are humans too and that they are interested in students to get to know them. While allowing students to get to know them was a factor in developing the teacher-student relationship, teachers having and showing an interest in students was also an important factor. This will now be explored.

4.1.2 Having and Showing an Interest in Students

For teachers to form positive and productive relationships with students, getting to know students has emerged as a significant theme across participant groups. The different stakeholder groups shared the perspective for the need for teachers to have an interest in students to get to know them better. A school counsellor tended to describe how their showing interest in students was beneficial for forming relationships:

> *I like to take a genuine interest in the student in all aspects of their life,* (FC4).

This counsellor described that having an interest in the whole student allowed them to relay genuine curiosity for the student to get to know them. Another school counsellor offered a similar belief, stating:

> *I suppose to me it's letting them know that you are interested in them and that you're willing to listen to them and whatever they say is actually important to them,* (FC9).

This school counsellor made an association between active showing an interest in students was very important to students and suggested how this approach communicates to students that what they disclose is of importance.

Teachers also believed that having an interest in students was an important foundation skill for getting to know students. This belief is demonstrated in the following quote:

> *If you show an interest in them and it's a genuine, honest interest, the kids will see that and from that then the first brick is put down,* (MT11).

The suggestion from this teacher is that having an interest in students is a significant component to getting to know them and forming and maintaining positive and productive teacher-student relationships. A participant, from a parent focus group,

described the consequence of a diminished or lack of interest by teachers towards students:

> *If you're not interested, I think it's cactus. I think you've got no hope,* (MP23).

This quote provided a stark warning to teachers that a lack of interest by teachers in the students that they teach would significantly impact getting to know students and the ability to form or maintain any type of relationship with them.

A key theme that participants described was the importance of showing an interest in what students are interested in. School counsellors, for example, believed that for teachers to get to know students they must find out about what students are interested in. One school counsellor stated their belief by saying:

> *Sometimes it's a matter of finding something that they are interested in,* (FC3).

A different school counsellor shared a similar belief:

> *I kind of connect around what you'd do in a normal relationship…just by connecting with interests,* (MC2).

The suggestion made by this school counsellor was that finding out about what students are interested in should not be a matter of form in building relationships. Another school counsellor believed that it was the responsibility of counsellors to maintain their own understanding of the things that students are interested in. The counsellor stated:

> *I make it part of my job to be up on teenage issues and interests,* (FC4).

This counsellor is suggesting that by keeping abreast with the things that students are interested in, provides them with the ability to build a rapport with students.

Teachers also shared the belief that finding out about students' interests allowed them to get to know students. One teacher suggested that if teachers engage with students outside of the classroom that it helped to get to know students' interests and to form the teacher-student relationship:

> *Seeing them in another situation…that helps too. And taking an interest in the stuff that they do outside the classroom,* (FT31).

The association drawn here was that if a teacher took an interest in a student inside and outside of the classroom that this interest would allow teachers to get to know students better.

Students also felt that they were able to get to know, and relate better, with teachers who they shared common interests with. As suggested by a Year 11 student:

> *I've kind of noticed that you get along with teachers that almost share similar interests or hobbies. Like you can just easily relate to them,* (MS32).

This student is of the opinion that if teachers have common interests with them, that this is an important factor in teachers getting to know students. Similar to the belief of some school counsellors, some students stated that teachers should keep up with students' interests to get to know them. One Year 11 student stated:

> *Keep up with interests as well. If a teacher keeps up with some of your interests…you can keep a conversation going,* (MS36).

The association the student is making here is that if teachers can maintain currency with students, that this currency provides for topics of conversation between teachers and students beyond classroom subject areas, that could allow for an inroad into getting to know students better.

The notion of showing an interest in students and their interests can be expanded to the pedagogical approaches of teachers. From the data, it emerged that the teacher-student relationship would benefit from teachers who had an interest in their subject, and delivered their curriculum in an interesting way to excite students to learn. A teacher described this idea in the following way:

> *You've got to show interest for your subject. Otherwise, the kids pick up on that and go 'well what am I doing it for?'* (FT11).

This participant is suggesting that if teachers show a lack of interest in the subject that they teach, then students would mirror that lack of interest and this would have a detrimental effect on getting to know students and the formation of positive and productive relationships. Similarly, if a teacher failed to make their subject interesting then it would impact the ability for a student to engage with that subject. A teacher stated:

> *My adage is if it's not interesting to me then why the heck would it be interesting to a teenager? And you know if it's not relevant to me, why would it be relevant to them?* (FT12).

A parent also stated this belief:

> *They have to continue to display an interest otherwise the child knows that they've switched off and they've lost them,* (FP21).

Parents also described that the manner in which the curriculum was delivered had an impact on a student's interest in the subject, as described in the following statement by a parent participant:

> *I also think the way in which the content is delivered is important because that also keeps the interest,* (FP13).

The concern outlined in the above quote is that students who lose interest in a subject may struggle to get to know their teachers and to form positive and productive relationships with them. Students also reported that teachers should keep them interested in the curriculum as a means for starting and maintaining the teacher-student relationship. A Year Seven student stated:

I'd say keep us involved in activities, and maybe interested, I'd say, (MS12).

Overall, having and showing an interest in students, and presenting curriculum in an interesting way, were suggested to provide ways for teachers to get to know students. Showing empathy towards students also emerged as an important factor to get to know students, which will now be discussed.

4.1.2.1 Showing Empathy

Showing empathy towards students was another reported feature for forming a positive and productive teacher-student relationship. Teachers shared that showing empathy relayed to students that you cared about them.

There's got to be some empathy there. You've got to be able to show that you at least care about something about them, (FT12).

Parents were also in agreement that empathy was required as a foundation for a good relationship between teacher and student:

It's part of a good relationship if you've got some…empathy, (MP33).

A school counsellor described showing empathy in this way:

You must be able to enter that child's world and walk in their shoes, (FC6).

Another school counsellor described how they show empathy to get to know students:

G*ive them an idea that I do know what they're feeling,* (FC6).

Overall, teachers, parents and school counsellors believe that empathy plays a significant role in showing an interest in students. This suggests that if teachers demonstrate empathy towards the students that they teach, they may strengthen their ability to get to know their students better.

4.1.2.2 Being Approachable

While being approachable was a strategy to make students feel comfortable, it was also used by participants to describe ways that teachers can show interest in their students to get to know them. A Year 11 student described being approachable as an opportunity to get to know their teacher better:

> *If they introduce themselves and it's kind of friendly and approachable, then the students will see that as an opportunity to get to know them better,*
>
> (MS35).

Another student, also in Year 11, stated that being approachable allowed students to talk to their teachers:

> *You want them to be approachable and talk to anything that you want to,*
>
> (FS44).

These descriptions from students suggest that if teachers maintain an approachable attitude and interest in students, then students would be more likely to get to know their teachers to form positive and productive relationships.

4.1.2.3 Understanding Students

To form relationships with students all participants described that teachers needed to understand their students. Teachers needed to know how students learn, about their personal lives, and to see students as individuals. Having a better understanding of students through being interested in them was perceived to help start the teacher-student relationship. For teachers, understanding their students was

one of the initial ways to develop the teacher-student relationship. One teacher stated:

A mutual understanding is a good place to start from, (FT31).

School counsellors believed that knowing a student personally assisted to form a positive and productive relationship between teacher and student. One school counsellor said:

Those teachers that get to know the student a bit more personally and understand their situation tend to have a better success with building a relationship with students, (MC2).

One school counsellor described that knowing a student supports in helping to understanding what is happening in students' lives assisted with the purpose of providing appropriate support:

Rather than react to the behaviour, just stop and think about why it's happening and approach it in that way, (FC8).

What school counsellors were saying was that understand who students were and what was happening in their lives was fundamental to starting a relationship with them.

Parents also believed that students preferred teachers who understood them. One parent stated this directly:

The kids like teachers who 'get them', (FP24).

Another parent stated that teachers need to see students as individuals to best understand them and get to know them:

Appreciate that there's different types of learners, (MP21).

This was also described by another parent:

Turn your x-ray vision on. Look deep into my child's eyes and comprehend what you see, (FP21).

A Year 11 student also described that having a teacher getting to know and understand how students learn was important in helping the teacher-student relationship to develop:

Know how they learn and what they're used to. Not make them go your way, (FS46).

This quote shows a clear directive from students that they want to be treated as individuals and that teachers needed to understand how they learn by showing an interest in them.

4.1.2.4 Using Humour

Humour was a common feature to start the teacher-student relationship. It was seen to assist teachers with forming connections with students (as described later) but also used as an approach to get to know them. One teacher believed that using humour was effective with different students as a way of showing an interest in them. This teacher described an interaction with a student based on one of their personal sporting interests where using appropriate humour, particularly based upon a students' interests, was an effective strategy to develop the teacher-student relationship. Another participant described a similar interaction with a student who the teacher perceived was closed off to forming relationships with teachers. The teacher found that using humour helped to get to know the student.

I'm thinking of one child who was…really closed off. I really had to work hard to have that bit of rapport, even really quite more casual that I would normally, like be a bit more jokey, (FT21).

Parents also shared the belief that teachers need to have a sense of humour to get to know students. One parent described it in this way:

> *You need relatable teachers that kids feel like they can just go up and have a laugh with and have a joke with,* (FP11).

Each student focus group reported that using humour was important in relation to students getting to know their teachers; for example:

> *Personally, for me, humour, then I kind of like them.* (FS26), and: *I find that if they use humour, that's a big way to get to me,* (FS44)
>
> and:
>
> *Humour is really important for maintaining and establishing a relationship,* (FS42).

What these students were saying is that humour is a critical factor for teachers to use in getting to know them, and to form a connection with them. Another student, in Year Seven, described that using humour was a way to keep students interested with the teaching and learning occurring in the classroom.

> *You want to keep the children entertained, and use sarcasm and jokes during class, because you don't want them to kind of just sit there and look around and muck around,* (MS11).

Overall, using humour was described as an effective strategy for teachers to get to know students and to maintain their relationship. This was a strategy shared across all participant groups.

4.1.3 Time and the Teacher-Student Relationship

In an effort to form the teacher-student relationship, the notion of time was used in conjunction with getting to know students. Time was described in several ways, such as investing time into the relationship, but also from the perspective of

the timeframe in which relationships form as well as the impact of time on the ability to do so. Stakeholders also described that it takes time for a connection to form and that the relationship forms over time. Time was also described as a shortcoming that hindered the ability for teachers to start positive and productive relationships with students. This notion was shared by school counsellor, parent and student participants. Firstly, school counsellors believed that there were significant pressures on teachers and their time, which impacted negatively on their ability to form relationships with students. One school counsellor described it in this way:

> *Teachers are gaining more pressure…fitting more in the curriculum. We are getting less time for teachers to be involved in the other. We know that good teaching is about building relationships so it is a conundrum,* (MC2).

This school counsellor is describing the pressures on teachers to accommodate increasing curriculum demands into their teaching, which was perceived to be directly impacting the ability of teachers to spend time on building relationships with students. This sentiment was described by another school counsellor in the context of whether teachers were able to give time to listen to students:

> *Teachers who just always don't have time to do that,* (FC3).

School counsellors empathised with teachers and the impact of their lack of time to form relationships with students. This is described in the below quote.

> *I really feel for teachers because they have so much to deliver and get across that is external and often in conflict to relationship building,* (FC6).

It was the belief of this particular school counsellor that teachers may not only find it difficult to form relationships and get to know students, but that their lack of time to do so is beyond their control. Further, counsellors described that they had more time

to form relationships with students than teachers do, which aided in their ability to get to know students:

> *Counsellors can spend more time with them and actually get to know them a lot more than a teacher can, unless a teacher is going to spend extra time. But that would be going beyond their role as their teacher,* (FC9).

Parents also shared the belief that it was difficult for secondary teachers to form relationships with students, given the impact of the limited time they have to work with individual students:

> *It's going to be harder because you've got less time. I mean a primary school teacher you've got six hours with that child so developing a relationship, you would think, would be a simpler matter because you come to know them better much sooner. Whereas, if you only see them for two hours a week then it must take longer systematically to know that child and thus develop a relationship with them,* (FP21).

The perspective of this parent is that teachers in secondary schools have less time to get to know students than teachers in primary schools and, as such, this impacts the ability for teachers to get to know students and form a relationship with them. Another parent participant held a different view to the issue of time and the impact on the curriculum on forming relationships:

> *[It] is not about the subject but about the interpersonal relationship that's built right from the start…if you pushed the curriculum back a week and just spent the first week just bonding,* (MP31).

This parent believed that the teacher-student relationship was more important than the curriculum and that it was important for time to be allocated to getting to know students.

Students also described the difficulty of time for teachers to get to know them and to form a relationship, with a Year Seven student stating.

> *If you have time with teachers on your own, good luck doing that. Because there's a lot of students,* (MS15).

What this student is saying is that due to the number of students and limited time with teachers in secondary school settings, that there is a difficulty in teachers and students getting to know each other. Building on this, the notion that getting to know students occurs over time will now be explored. It was the general belief of participants that the teacher-student relationship took time to develop. This was significantly true for teachers in secondary schools who have less classroom contact time with individual students than do primary school teachers. Firstly, school counsellors felt that it took time for teachers to form relationships with students.

> *It takes a good term for teachers to build relationships,* (FC9).

Further, teachers themselves acknowledged the time it takes for the teacher-student relationship to develop. One teacher stated:

> *You've got to wait [and] you've got to understand that it doesn't happen overnight,* (MT11).

This particular teacher participant is not only acknowledging the fact that teacher-student relationship and getting to know students builds over time, but that there is an acknowledgement of the patience required to form this relationship. Another teacher's perspective supported this belief:

> *It's something that takes time to build up. It's not an immediate thing,* (FT31).

Another teacher had the opinion that it was necessary for teachers to actively invest time into connecting with students to form the teacher-student relationship. As stated by one teacher:

> *I put building a relationship as the number one thing in the classroom. I invest a lot of time in that,* (FT22).

For this teacher, the teacher-student relationship is described as their primary focus in the classroom. This teacher acknowledges that to build this relationship, a significant investment of time is required to achieve this.

Parents also acknowledge that starting the teacher-student relationship takes time, stating:

> *I know when you've got twenty-five kids in a class that's going to be difficult and it's going to take time,* (FP11).

This participant's description appears in support of teachers and the fact that within a classroom environment with so many students, that there was an appreciation that getting to know students and develop a relationship with them would occur over time. Another parent shared a similar belief, while also acknowledging the differences between students and the impact that this has on the time it takes for teachers to get to know students:

> *It takes a while to get to know the students. It's not something that just happens instantly because they're all different,* (FP22).

The above statements show that stakeholders believe that the most positive and productive teacher-student relationships take time to develop and for teachers to get to know students on an individual basis. Overall, getting to know students emerged as a significant theme when participants described the teacher-student relationship. Participants believed that to get to know students that teachers need to

make students feel comfortable, and to have and show a genuine interest in students. In addition, time was considered important when getting to know students, from the perspective of investing time into the teacher-student relationship and that the relationship developed over time. These considerations will be used to strengthen the understanding of how teachers the teacher-student relationship can be more positive and productive in secondary schools.

4.2 THEME TWO: ESTABLISHING PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

The second theme that was evident in the data was that of professional boundaries. Three subthemes emerged to describe how teachers can establish boundaries. These are: creating professional distance; having fair and consistent expectations; the notion of friendship and the teacher-student relationship; and appropriate self-disclosure. The data revealed that for positive and productive relationships to form that there was an understanding of a professional distance between teachers and students, and that it was effective and necessary for teachers set clear expectations of students. Where stakeholders differed in opinion was on how casual or strict teachers should be when establishing these expectations. Stakeholders also discussed their opinions on the teacher-student relationship and the notion of friendship, and how this relates to appropriate levels of self-disclosure and professional boundaries for teachers. Students had a view that the relationships they formed with teachers had characteristics of a friendship, while teachers, parents and school counsellors were clear that the teacher-student relationship was not like a friendship. The effectiveness of creating professional distance will first be explored.

4.2.1 Creating Professional Distance

To establish positive and productive relationships with students, participants described that teachers be close, but not too close, with students. Professional

boundaries were described as important when establishing a teacher-student relationship. Teachers likened their relationship with students as like that of a mentor, but not as close as a family member:

> *It's almost like a mentor role. Like another not family figure but someone they trust they can go to,* (MT12).

Students also stated that there was a professional distance between teachers and students, with a Year Seven student stating:

> *You're pretty close, but not close enough that I's like parent close or sibling close or best friend close,* (MS11).

This student is comparing the teacher-student relationship to other relationships in their lives and describing the distance between their relationship with their teacher, compared to their family and friends. This student perceives their relationship with their teacher to not be as close as that with their family and friends. Another Year Seven student shared this perspective:

> *I think that a teacher and student need to have a good bond, but I think that if you're hanging out together every single day, it's going to be a bit weird,* (MS14).

From the same focus group, another Year Seven student participant elaborated on the distance in the relationship between teacher and student by explaining what they would be comfortable telling their teacher.:

> *You're comfortable talking to them, but not so comfortable that [you'd] talk to your teacher like you talk with your mates. There's a line but below that line is normally pretty good. But above that line it's a bit awkward,* (MS11).

Similarly, a Year 11 student went on to describe that in order for effective learning to occur, that they needed to have a close, but not too close, relationship with their teacher.

> *They can't be too close, but it has to be close enough that you can learn easier,* (FS25).

Teachers had an opinion on appropriate professional distance in their relationship with students. One teacher stated:

> *You've got to have that distance and it's the rules of the game isn't it? We're on one side of the fence and they're on the other side,* (MT32).

In the context of describing positive and productive teacher-student relationships, this teacher shared the belief that a professional distance must continue to be maintained between teacher and student. A parent participant stated a similar belief:

> *There has to be that professional distance,* (FP21).

Overall, participants stated that the teacher-student relationship was built on acknowledging a professional distance between teachers and students and that the relationship was different in nature to other relationships that students have with their families and peers. To establish professional distance, professional boundaries will be explored. Some participants described the role that professional boundaries played in building the teacher-student relationship in secondary schools. To begin, one parent stated that boundaries protecting students from becoming too familiar with their teachers were important:

> *I feel there needs to be a distinct line between what's acceptable, what's unacceptable so you can't become too familiar with each other,* (FP13).

This opinion was similarly shared by school counsellors who held a strong belief for the need for professional boundaries between teachers and students:

One of the things that I'm on about all the time to teachers is to have clear boundaries between their role as a teacher and that they're not a friend, (FC5).

This participant is describing that the relationship between a teacher and a student is not a friendship but is defined by professional distance between both parties. Another school counsellor uses self-disclosure as an example of the need to maintain professional boundaries:

Obviously, you're not revealing too much about your personal life, (FC9).

Following this statement, this participant commented that students perceived their ability to form relationships with school counsellors more like a friendship than that of their relationship with teachers, in spite of their professional boundaries:

We do have to have very clear boundaries but I think that students see us more as friends than they can a teacher, (FC9).

This view was in contrast to another school counsellor who believed that teachers can have closer relationships with students than them due to the type of the relationship they must create with students and restrictions placed on counsellors:

Teachers can have a bit of a different relationship [with students] than counsellors because ours is more of a therapeutic thing and it is defined by those boundaries. Teachers also, but to a less extent, (FC10).

What was revealed in the data was that the teacher-student relationship was perceived to be different to relationships that students have with their family or their peers, and that professional boundaries were of importance when establishing and maintaining such relationships. The notion of boundaries will now be explored in the context of expectations on students in secondary schools and how this relates to the teacher-student relationship.

4.2.2 Establishing Expectations for Students

In the context of professional boundaries, teachers stated that they set expectations straight away with their classes. One teacher said:

> *I always like to set the parameters straight away,* (MT11).

Another teacher believed that it was the school who set the expectations within the classroom:

> *I think the relationship is initially formed by the college's expectations. Like I think when you start off with a new group of students it's very formal,* (FT12).

This teacher is inferring that when they establish relationships with students in their classes the approach they take is often set as an expectation by the school, rather than by preference of the teacher. Another teacher shared the same belief about setting expectations with students:

> *I think they've got to be in line with what the college expectations are. I think broader college policy at that stage. So, if you're doing something that's contra of that then that's not such a good idea,* (MT31).

The data also revealed that teachers have a clear idea when expectations should be given to students. One teacher suggested:

> *It's not a bad idea to sort of spell it out at the beginning of the year,* (MT32).

Another teacher agreed that it was the clear communication of expectations that was important to set boundaries within the teacher-student relationship:

> *I think the most important thing at that point in time is you've communicated your expectations clearly with them,* (MT31).

Both teachers supported the notion of establishing expectations with their students as a process for building a positive and productive relationship.

Parents also stated the importance of establishing expectations to create boundaries:

> *I also find that setting a standard so that children know what's acceptable, what's unacceptable,* (FP13).

This parent is suggesting is that if students know the behaviours and traits that are acceptable and unacceptable within the classroom then they know what to expect in that environment, which may assist in establishing the teacher-student relationship. Another parent stated that students want to know what is expected of them.

> *My daughter likes to know what the rules are, what does this teacher want? What does this teacher want that's different…so that I'm doing the right thing?* (FP24).

This quote suggests that while students want to know what their teachers expect from them, teachers may have different expectations and, therefore, students want to know these upfront so that they can work to meet the expectations of their teachers.

Students described the need for the setting of clear expectations by their teachers. One particular Year Seven student stated the practical sense in why teachers needed to set expectations:

> *They've got to keep all of the children contained…so they've got to set the rules,* (MS16).

Another student, in Year 11, shared their preference for teachers to establish expectations as the 'ground rules' of them early:

> *I think it's really helpful for a teacher and a student if they set ground rules first. Not crazy things that no-one is going to respect,* (MS33).

While this student wanted teachers to establish expectations with input from students, they also provided their opinion on the type of expectations that they

preferred – ground rule that conveyed respect for the dynamics of the relationship. Another Year 11 student stated a similar opinion but with a focus more on how the rules and expectations were applied:

> *Obviously, there are rules you have to maintain, but not enforcing them so strictly,* (FS42).

The views of students demonstrated an understanding of the need for teachers to have expectations and boundaries, but their focus was on the way in which these expectations are enforced that makes the difference in a students' ability to relate to their teacher. A Year 11 student participant offered an approach one teacher had in setting expectations in a way that students prefer:

> *He's set the rules, but he's set it in a way that it gets it over and done with. Casual about it then get on with the work. So, you don't want to push it,* (FS44).

For this student, teachers who set expectations, in an informal, efficient way helps students respect this approach and consequently they are more likely to respect the teacher and the boundaries they have set.

A school counsellor, who was also a teacher, had a contrasting opinion. This participant suggested that setting expectations at the beginning, and in a strict manner, was the preferred approach for establishing boundaries:

> *I always found it better to be a little bit more on the stern side if anything initially, just until you get all of those sort of expectations and procedures really down pat and then, you can kind of be a little bit more flexible. You just can't go the other way. It doesn't work,* (FC5).

This participant is describing that teachers should initially be firm when setting expectations and establishing boundaries with students. However, two student

participants from the same Year Seven male focus group believed that teachers needed a balanced approach to establishing expectations in the classroom:

> *You don't want them to be too strict because then it makes you feel really awkward. But if they're too casual it gets really annoying because everyone just be's stupid in the classes,* (MS13 and MS11).

This quote suggests that students find it challenging if teachers are too strict or too casual when setting expectations, and that a student's opinion of a teacher can suffer as a consequence, thus, impacting their ability to a form positive and productive relationship. Year Seven female student also stated that they found it difficult to form a relationship with a teacher who was strict:

> *It's harder to develop a relationship with a teacher that's strict,* (FS22).

These students are suggesting that if a teacher is too strict, particularly when establishing expectations and boundaries, it may be counter-productive to building relationships with students. A participant from the Year 11 male focus group described how students will challenge what they perceive to be a demanding teacher:

> *It's not really good if they're sort of demanding you to listen or demanding that you respect them, because that sort of doesn't work at all. Because then you sort of immediately try to go against that,* (MS33).

Within the same focus group, another Year 11 student acknowledged where it would be appropriate for having a teacher with a strict approach and expectations:

> *If your class is full of people who just continually push the boundaries with the teacher, then it's good to have a strict teacher to make everyone just sit down, do their work and just get everything done. Without a level of strictness, nothing's going to get done,* (MS35).

From this quote, it can be perceived that students want a teacher to firmly enforce expectations and boundaries not necessarily at the beginning of their interactions with teachers, but when students require interventions by their teachers. Overall, all participants agreed that teachers should set expectations within the classroom. When and how teachers do this varies, but there is a fundamental acceptance that establishing expectations has a place within the teacher-student relationship.

4.2.3 Friendship and the Teacher-Student Relationship

Across the data, the notion of friendship and the teacher-student relationship was discussed. While friendship will also be discussed within the theme of 'trust', it will be explored here from the perspective of boundaries. To begin, teachers were clear that the teacher-student relationship is not the same as a friendship. One teacher participant described the pitfalls of blurring the lines between the teacher-student relationship and a friendship, particularly from the perspective of a beginning teacher:

> *They don't have experience so therefore they…do the obvious 'I'm going to be everyone's mate'. I'm going to be the cool teacher and everyone is going to love me,* (MT11).

This teacher also stated that:

> *The mistake people make is go in for the personality straight away. You know let's make them like me instead of saying 'no, my job is to teach them this',* (MT11).

Another teacher within the focus group expressed the dangers of starting the teacher-student relationship as a friendship:

If you start from friendship, there is no way in the world you're going to get back to any kind of discipline or behaviour management. It's not going to happen, (FT12).

This teacher's view concurs with that of the previous teacher that professional boundaries become blurred if teachers try to build a friendship into the teacher-student relationship and that this has an irreversible impact on establishing boundaries with students.

Parents also held the view that the teacher-student relationship is different to that of a friendship. One parent stated:

It's [the teacher-student relationship] not a peer, (MP23).

Students also shared their views on the notion of a having a friendship as part of the teacher-student relationship. One student stated that students needed to feel comfortable with their teacher and so had to connect with their teacher as a friend:

To teach better…[have] to connect with the teacher and be more like friends than just a teacher because you learn more and you are more comfortable with the teacher, (FS21).

A further two Year 11 student participants likened the teacher-student relationship to that of a parent and friend:

It should be like a parent who teaches you stuff…like a friend…and you feel comfortable around them, (FS43 and FS44).

As with the previous quote, these students are seeking the comfort that they have with their family and their friends as a quality that they would like in their teachers, while not directly stating that their teachers should be their friends. Another Year 11 student stated that there were similarities in the way all friendships work and that through conversation and not ignoring one another are ways to maintain a friendship:

It's kind of like keeping a friendship going really. You have to talk to them. You can't just…start befriending me and stuff [then] ignoring you all of a sudden, (MS36).

While students described the role of friendships in the teacher-student relationship, from the data it emerged that teachers and parents did not support teachers starting friendships with students. However, while students described the relationship that they have with teachers as possessing qualities of a friendship, there was no direct suggestion from students that they wanted to be friend with their teacher nor to establish a friendship with their teacher. This type of relationship was not considered to be essential to forming a positive and productive teacher-student relationship.

4.2.4 Self-Disclosure Between Teachers and Students

Self-disclosure was an important theme that emerged across stakeholder groups when describing professional boundaries between teachers and students. For school counsellors, there was a belief that counsellors need to restrict self-disclosure in the earlier sessions with students, and that it is the students who should invite self-disclosure:

At that very early building block stage…I don't give anything of myself. I don't give them any of my personal stuff until such time as it is right. They didn't come to find out who I am. It's got to happen when they are ready to hear it and it can't be when I think they should hear it, (FC8).

Another counsellor suggested that to maintain boundaries self-disclosure should focus on the professional role that they have, rather than personal self-disclosure:

I generally just stick to what I do here…the role and that sort of stuff, (FC10).

Some teachers felt that self-disclosure did not have a place in forming teacher-student relationships. One teacher described it in this way:

You share too much information…that boundary is just gone, (MT12).

Within the same focus group, two teachers were in disagreement about whether to share information about themselves with students and when. They said:

Just give them a bit of background about yourself, (MT11),

and:

I usually wait, (FT12) and

Depends, like there's that line you can tell the kids about, (MT11).

The agreement between these two teachers was around how much information they should share about themselves and the timing. Another teacher had a very strong opinion about the role of boundaries and self-disclosure in the teacher-student relationship believing that if a teacher shared too much personal information with students that it would significantly impact the teacher-student relationship:

You can never mention anything about home, but some staff do. If you bring that into the classroom you're sharing far too much. The ability for the kid to look at that teacher, it's tainted them, (MT13).

While this opinion was focused on the dangers of self-disclosure, other teachers felt that sharing such information was not blurring boundaries but allowing students to see teachers as human:

Putting across a little presentation of sort of my life and you know where I've come from and maybe a couple of pictures of the pets and you know things like that that make you seem more human to them, (FT31).

A parent and a Year 11 student also shared this view:

I think sharing a little bit of themselves too. Like being human, (FP32).

and

When you first meet a student, you should tell them about yourself. I think that's really important because it makes them human, (FS32).

Further, parents commented that teachers should use self-disclosure to form relationships with students and that boundaries were maintained by the amount of self-disclosure by teachers. Three parents within the same focus group said:

Give a bit of background knowledge of where you're from, (FP13)

and

Let them feel easy about you I guess, (FP12) and

And they'll start to open up about themselves, (FP11).

The belief of these parents was that if teachers offered some self-disclosure to students, it would lead to students feeling comfortable with their teacher and this sense of comfort would then enable them to open up to their teachers more easily. Another parent agreed that self-disclosure, within reason, was appropriate to form the teacher-student relationship:

Sharing some personal anecdotes with the children and so on from the foundation of 'this is who I am', (FP25)

However, two parents were not in agreement about the role of self-disclosure in teachers forming relationships with students. They said:

[It] still boils down to the teacher sharing those personal things about themselves, (FP33)

and

I don't think that personal detail needs to be shared, (MP33)

and

I don't think it hurts for the students to know a little bit about your personal [life] like you know 'I've got a sore throat today' or little one-off things. But bigger picture things, (FP33).

It was the view of this particular male parent that students did not need to know the personal details of their teacher, but the female parent believed that a broader knowledge of the teacher was appropriate and respected boundaries. In addition, parents felt that knowing something about their child's teachers helped them to have conversations at home about the connection between their child and their teacher:

It's knowing something about them and that gives us a conversation to be had at home about that teacher and about the connection that they have, (FP24).

From a student perspective, self-closure had an important role in forming the teacher-student relationship. A Year Seven student described it in this way:

I think that opening up is pretty essential. Like, if they open up to you, you feel instantly comfortable with them, (MS11).

This sentiment was echoed by another student in Year 11:

Teachers have a personal life outside of school, so they sort of need to bring some of that in. Make themselves more relatable, (MS35).

What these students are suggesting is that if their teacher shares information about themselves, that it helped students feel more comfortable in their presence. These students indicate their understanding that teachers have lives outside the classroom and in essence students were acknowledging that self-disclosure made the teacher appear to be someone that they can relate to, which contributed to the teacher-student relationship being formed and maintained. Overall, school counsellors, teachers and parents held differing views about the role self-disclosure within boundaries played in starting and maintain the teacher-student relationship, whereas students had no

reservations about this. What emerged, however, was the level of self-disclosure that teachers should engage in with students, with a focusing being on some information about the teacher being appropriate to share.

In summary, professional boundaries were a significant theme that emerged from the data about starting and maintaining the teacher-student relationship. To understand boundaries, professional distance emerged as an important factor, particularly from the perspective of whether the teacher-student relationship was similar to that of a friendship. All stakeholder groups did not view the teacher-student relationship was a friendship, but rather, a dynamic that respected professional distance and appropriate self-disclosure and having fair and consistent boundaries as a framework for positive and productive relationships to be formed.

4.3 THEME THREE: BEING CONSISTENT

The third theme that emerged from the data was that of consistency. This theme was discussed in the context of providing students with predictability to establish and maintain the teacher-student relationship. In addition, stakeholders believed that expectations and boundaries needed to be consistently and fairly applied, and that teachers needed to be consistently authentic in their approaches with students. The notion of consistency providing predictability and stability for students will first be explored.

4.3.1 Consistency Providing Predictability and Stability

Consistency was viewed to be an important factor to provide a predictable and stable dynamic environment for the teacher-student relationship to be formed. Consistency in a counselling environment was related to the behaviour of the counsellor when working with students to provide a clear level of consistency. One school counsellor stated:

I think consistency is really important. I think most kids need something that is really kind of stable and certain. I normally aim to try and act the same way so that they know what they're getting, (FC4).

This participant then went on to suggest the importance of consistency in the teacher-student relationship, stating:

One of the things that kids complain about is when the teacher is really moody or cranky and not clear and consistent. They really hate that, (FC4).

This statement suggests that students seek consistency in their teacher's approach and appear to resent teacher's behaviours that lack such consistency. This reinforces the need for teachers to provide students with predictability and consistency to establish positive relationships.

Teachers also shared the view that teachers need to provide predictability and stability by being consistent in their approach. One teacher participant said it this way:

Consistency is massively important. You've got to be consistent but happy. There's no point in being consistent and being miserable all the time. Every class you've got to walk into and start again, not like carry your baggage with you, (MT11).

The suggestion by this participant is that not only is consistency important, but that teachers must remain stable in their own selves to be able to establish positive and productive relationships with students.

Three parents shared this same view:

Be consistent. Just be the same, (FP11)

And

I think that consistency of attitude and demeanour [provides predictability], (FP22) and

An understanding of how particular teachers work and then some consistency that that's what you can expect when you rock up, (FP24).

Each participant is suggesting that if a teacher's approach is consistent, it provides students with a predictable and stable environment for the teacher-student relationship to develop. Another parent articulated the need to meet students' expectations about teachers' behaviours when they walked into the classroom and how a lack of consistency and predictability can 'throw them' off balance:

Consistency is the most important thing. If a kid comes to school one day and this is what they expect and they get there and it's not that, they're thrown, (MP31).

However, one parent participant acknowledged the fact that teachers were human and cannot always remain consistent in their attitude and approach, but that it was important for an overall ongoing consistency in attitude from teachers:

I still think one or two days you can be off, but not a whole year, (FP33).

A Year 11 student participant shared this view, believing that teachers' attitudes and approaches needed to remain consistent to provide predictability and stability, stating:

Don't suddenly change personality, (MS32).

Students described that to effectively form and maintain the teacher-student relationship that teachers' attitudes and approaches needed to be predictable and stable both in and outside of the classroom. A Year 11 student described this by stating:

Don't look like, scary as hell outside of class. Some teachers are like 'yeah, I'm here to teach, we've done all the work'. As soon as they get out of class, they just have the face of like 'no-one come near me' like looking really menacing. It's like I don't want to approach you after class and you're like 'oh God, I have to go to speak to them to ask them a question and I'm dreading it', (MS35).

This particular quote highlighted that if students perceive an inconsistency in teachers' behaviour it would negatively impact the predictability and stability in the relationship that they have with their teacher. Another student from the same focus group shared a similar view:

They need to carry on outside the classroom. Can't just be one sort of style inside and then outside they turn into a completely different person, (MS34).

Therefore, consistency provided students with a sense of predictability and stability from their teachers. If teachers could ensure a sense of certainty for students within and outside the classroom, in terms of their attitude and approach towards students, then students would feel more comfortable in the presence of their teachers. This would, as emerged in Theme 1, help teachers to be able to get to know their students and help students to get to know their teacher. Another emerging subtheme within consistency was boundaries and expectations, which will now be discussed.

4.3.2 Consistency with Expectations and Boundaries

Overall the research participants suggested that teachers needed to consistently apply expectations and boundaries for students to form positive and productive relationships with them. A school counsellor believed that teachers need to establish clear expectations with students and maintain these expectations, stating:

I think the best way to start is with those clear expectations so they really do know and really stick to those expectations, (FC5).

One teacher concurred that consistency in terms of expectations and boundaries was important. This teacher suggested that students' trust would be compromised (they'll know) if the teachers are not consistent in their application of expectations and consequences. It is the teacher's responsibility to set the expectations and follow through with consequences, as described in this quote:

Never say you're going to do something and don't follow through. Because it doesn't matter if they're this big or this big, they'll know that teacher says one thing and doesn't follow through, (FT21).

This belief was shared by other teacher participants, who stated that teachers who had clear expectations, consequences and boundaries that were consistently applied would be respected by students:

Even if you're very, very hard and disciplined they'll still respect you for it…as long as you're consistent, (MT32)

and

You've got to be very consistent. If you say 'I'm going to punish you for not handing homework in' then every single time…this kid is going to do it. And the one time you don't is the one time they'll notice, (MT31).

Teachers described that if there is an inconsistency from the teacher, students may become unsure about expectations and this may impact their ability to work productively with teachers.

Parents also viewed consistent application of expectations, consequences and boundaries as important for the teacher-student relationship. One parent said the following:

> *The other thing I find is consistency. You must only say the consequence if you know you can follow through on them, because they'll soon know 'oh she doesn't really mean what she's saying',* (FP13).

Like teachers, this parent is suggesting that students will pick up on inconsistencies in approaches and its consequential negative impact on a productive teacher-student relationship. This particular participant went on to state that students easily recognise this inconsistency in their teachers:

> *I think children see it so easy. We're not even aware of it but they will see you're not being consistent,* (FP13).

The suggestion here is that students are quite aware of inconsistencies in their relationships, so teachers need to be consciously aware of this within the teacher-student dynamic. Another parent has stated the positive role that teachers can play in helping students understand the need for consistency in establishing expectations and boundaries in any relationship:

> *I think one of the things my child likes is to understand not only know the rules but get a bit of a rationale behind that and know that it's not going to change tomorrow,* (FP24)

The above quote is suggesting that teachers act as role models for students in helping them understand how to behave appropriately in a relationship. This particular quote not only reflects the need for a consistent approach to expectations and boundaries, but also links to the previous subtheme of predictability and stability. Overall, school counsellors, teachers and parents believe that consistent application of expectations and boundaries is important to form and maintain the teacher-student relationship. Building on this, the focus will move to participants' view that

consistency ensures a sense of fairness for students within the teacher-student relationship.

4.3.3 Consistency and Fairness

Participants shared the belief that consistency was an important factor to model fairness within the teacher-student relationship. A teacher described the relationship between consistency and fairness by stating:

> *If you're not consistent then you're playing favourites,* (FP12).

This participant is describing that inconsistencies from teachers may be perceived to compromise fairness. This idea married to that stated by participants in the previous section would suggest that students are aware of inconsistencies in teachers' approaches. Perceived inconsistencies and favouritism on the teacher-student relationship was highlighted by a number of participants:

> *I think as well showing that you don't have favourites because kids are very quick to pick up on you. You know you might find certain children who like to contribute more than others to their answering questions in class. And they will pick up very quickly if you keep responding to one more than the other. Or well this one hasn't given their homework in, why have you reprimanded them? And they're very sharp when it comes to that,* (FT31).

This quote suggested that students will quickly perceive inconsistencies in approaches teachers take with different students and the negative impact on the ability of teachers to form and maintain relationships with all students in the class. Another teacher used a specific example of a colleague who successfully balances consistency and fairness and the resulting positive consequences:

> *The kids see her as being so consistent. She is so consistent and that's what they love about her. She's very, very fair,* (FT11).

This example suggests that when students perceive their teachers to be consistent and fair with all students in the class, they have a positive association with the teacher. This example was supported by another teacher participant who stated:

> *I think that kids need to see that you're not playing favourites and you are not discriminating in that sense. So, I think you maintain relationships by being consistent,* (MT32).

Parents also shared the belief that consistency and fairness was an important factor in developing and maintaining the teacher-student relationship. One parent suggested:

> *Students don't mind a teacher that's strict as long as they're fair and consistent and they know where they stand,* (FP33).

The suggestion in this quote is that students will have positive relationships with teachers that are fair and consistent, irrespective of the type of approach the teacher has with their students. Therefore, parents and teachers held the view that teacher consistency ensured a fairness for students that was important for establishing and maintaining the teacher-student relationship. Consistency was also suggested to make teachers appear more authentic, which will be discussed below.

4.3.4 Consistency and Authenticity

Participants described the need for teachers' authenticity in establishing and maintain positive relationships. Authenticity was described as having a consistent approach in relationships with both students and parents and that without such consistency, relationships are compromised. Parents described how consistency in teacher attitude and approach was important as it reflected a teachers' authenticity. A parent described the impact of an inconsistency in a teacher's attitude and approach on their authenticity:

The relationship was inauthentic. She would totally change her behaviour when the parents were around. And the kids picked that up and that really upset the relationship. So, I think that authenticity is really important, (MP21).

A school counsellor believed that being genuine and consistent provided a good balance for starting and maintaining positive and productive teacher-student relationships. This counsellor stated:

I don't think you can go wrong as long as you really are genuine and really are consistent, (FC5).

The need for authenticity by teachers was supported by another parent participant, who stated:

The fundamental thing is 'be yourself' and be that consistently, (FP25).

Such a statement suggests that there are positive outcomes for the teacher-student relationship if teachers could consistently be themselves. This subtheme also emerged in Theme 1 as an essential element for students to feel comfortable with their teachers, allowing teachers to get to know their students. Therefore, teachers who provided predictability and stability, set consistently clear expectations, boundaries and consequences, were consistently fair and demonstrated continuous authenticity, resulted in the ability to start and maintain positive and productive relationships between teachers and students. The ability for a student to establish trust with their teacher is the final theme to be explored from the emerging data.

4.4 THEME FOUR: ESTABLISHING TRUST

The final theme that emerged from the data was the theme of trust. Establishing trust was believed to be fundamental to achieving positive and productive relationships between teachers and students. Within this theme, three

subthemes emerged to explain how a relationship is built on trust which includes: showing respect, maintaining confidentiality and privacy, and making a connection. Prior to exploring the subthemes of trust, this section will explore the notion of trust as a broad theme. Most school counsellors described the counsellor-student relationship as one that was based on trust. As stated by one school counsellor:

> *Well it is based on trust for a start,* (FC1).

Another school counsellor described that the trust relationship was not unidirectional but that there needs to be a common agreement that can be achieved between counsellor and student where both counsellor and student need to put in the effort to make the relationship successful. One school counsellor described that trust was fundamental to the counsellor-student relationship as it made students feel comfortable:

> *I think the most important part of the relationship is one of trust, that they feel they can really share and disclose all kinds of personal information that might be really difficult for them to talk about. That they feel comfortable enough to be able to trust that that information is not going to be shared with other people. I think that is probably the biggest issue, is the trust issue,* (FC7).

The theme of trust being described here as fundamental to the counsellor-student relationship relates to the theme of 'getting to know students' and 'upholding confidentiality'. School counsellors also shared that trust between them and students was earned, not expected. One counsellor suggested that building trust takes time and careful consideration:

> *It is me giving them information…in terms of building that trust rather than expecting them to trust me when they don't know me,* (MC2).

In this quote, the school counsellor is suggesting that trust is initially established by orientating students to the environment of the counselling situation, rather than any expectation of self-disclosure by either the counsellor or student. Counsellors also spoke about the role that establishing boundaries played in establishing trust with students:

> *I actually set them up with a full understanding of what my limits are and I never break those. I never breach them,* (FC6).

By describing and maintaining such boundaries, this counsellor is suggesting that this becomes an important strategy to establish trust within the school counsellor-student relationship. Students are made aware of both the breadth and the limits of the counselling relationship from the start and these expectations should not alter over time. This sentiment was shared by a different school counsellor, who suggested that a trusting relationship was fundamental to a productive counsellor-student relationship:

> *It's built on trust. It takes a while to actually build that trust and I don't think that you can help the student unless you have that trusting relationship,* (FC9).

Another school counsellor described that it took time for counsellors to build trust with students:

> *It has taken me probably the best part of the first three years I had here to actually build that trust,* (FC1).

This school counsellor is suggesting that trust not only has to be earned with students, but that time was required for them to be able to establish a reputation of trust within the school environment and with particular students they see for counselling. Counsellors also commented that while trust between them and students

was paramount the role that trust plays in the teacher-student relationship was equally important:

I think that the whole aspect of trust is essential between a student and a teacher, (FC7).

Another school counsellor, who was also a teacher, concurred with this view suggesting:

A teacher who evokes trust in their class is going to be far, far more helpful than the ones that students…resent, (FC8).

Overall, trust emerged as a significant feature within the counsellor-student relationship. Counsellors perceive trust to be a mutual understanding that developed over time, and that was required for a positive and productive relationship. Teachers, students and parents also believed that trust was an important aspect of the teacher-student relationship, and this will now be described.

Teachers also described that the teacher-student relationship was based on trust, with one participant stating that for students, teachers were:

Someone that they trust, that they can go to, (MT12).

One teacher described that any absence of trust was detrimental to the relationship:

You know if they can't trust you and if they can't relate to you and you're not even speaking on their level, you know what's the point? (FT11)

Students have also described the importance of trust in the teacher-student relationship, with a Year Seven student stating:

If they've told you their problems then you seem to be able to go 'oh yeah, they've told me a bit about themselves so I can tell a bit about myself, because they trust me to keep that so I can trust them, (MS11).

This quote is similar to the mutual understanding of trust that was described in the school counsellor-student relationship where, in this statement, a Year Seven student is suggesting that they can achieve a common agreement of trust between themselves and teachers who trust students enough to reveal a bit about themselves:

They have to build a trust that you both feel comfortable with, (FS24).

Here, trust is not being described as making students feel comfortable (as suggested by school counsellors), but for trust to be achieved that both teacher and student had to be comfortable with the level of trust established.

A Year 11 student described the personal responsibility they placed on themselves when teachers trusted them:

In senior, I'm thinking that if you feel like the teacher places a modicum of trust upon you, you sort of feel like you owe something to the teacher, (MS34).

This statement highlights that students perceived personal responsibility in the teacher-student relationship had to be taken in order for trust to be established and grown.

Parent participants also shared the view that the teacher-student relationship was based on trust. One parent stated that the teacher-student relationship provided students with another trusted adult in their lives, other than parents:

It's a trusted situation other than parents where kids might need a sounding board, (FP31)

Another parent described trust by stating:

There has to be some sort of rapport based on trust. If you don't trust someone the show's over anyway, (MP23)

The essence of this participant's comment was similar to that stated above by a teacher participant suggesting that any absence of trust was detrimental to the teacher-student relationship. In summary, trust emerged as a main theme and has been considered above in a broad sense. The theme of trust will now be further explored focusing on the essential elements that form a relationship built on trust. This exploration will begin with the element of showing respect.

4.4.1 Showing Respect in a Relationship Built on Trust

Respect has emerged as an essential element of a relationship that is built on trust. Participants across all stakeholder groups discussed the role of respect in relation to forming and maintaining relationships with students. As stated by one school counsellor:

> *I think there is…that kind of respect - that mutual respect,* (FC7).

This same participant went on to describe that, like the counselling-student relationship, the teacher-student relationship would also benefit from being a respectful relationship by stating:

> *Mutual respect is absolutely essential between a teacher and the student,* (FC7).

Teachers shared in the view that respect was important in their relationships with students. As stated by one teacher:

> *The teacher-student relationship [is] mutual respect between student and teacher,* (FT31).

While respect was described as a significant factor for building a positive teacher-student relationship, one teacher participant pondered on whether respect was a realistic expectation for teachers to have:

> *Do you ever expect respect? I don't. It's not demanded, it's given. And if you get it, you're lucky and if you don't well that's tough and you just have to deal with that,* (FT11).

This teacher is inferring that teachers cannot expect to automatically receive respect from their students. This view suggests a somewhat haphazard view that teachers have to be lucky to get respect from students and if they do not get it, there is not much they can do about it. This view does not suggest the significance of respect in a relationship built on trust, but rather, a perception on how respect is somewhat tenuously received by teachers from students. In contrast, another teacher in the same focus group endorsed the view of respect between teachers and students:

> *I don't walk into a room expecting authority. I just expect respect. If you give that to the kids, you'll get that back,* (MT12).

While this teacher stated that he expected students to respect him, he also inferred that there is a mutual element to respect where teachers' attitudes and behaviours towards students play a role in the level of respect that students give them. Another teacher participant shared their perceptions on respect, stating:

> *It's got nothing to do with liking them. It's got to do with respecting them,* (FT12).

Here, this teacher is suggesting that respect is mutual and that teachers must respect the students that they teach for students to respect them and there to be a productive relationship. A different teacher summed up the idea of respect being mutual:

> *Let's face it, if people don't respect you, you tend not to give them as much respect in return,* (FT22).

From the perspective of teachers, it is respect between teachers and students that is essential in a relationship built on trust. The views of parents will now be considered.

Parent participants generally explored the pragmatics of respect by describing the actions that teachers should take to be respected by their students. One participant said:

> *It's more important that the students see that the teacher is organised. And I also think that they then have more respect,* (FP13).

The suggestion here is that a teacher must earn respect from their students and that this is achieved through the teacher's actions. From the same focus group, a different parent believed that extra-curricular activities played an important role in forming the teacher-student relationship:

> *The extra-curricular activities probably help form the relationship in the classroom. Because they come back in, they've had fun at lunch with the teacher, and they come back in and they will listen to them because I guess they've given them respect,* (FP12)

The above quote is another example of teachers earning respect from students, this time through their involvement with students outside of the classroom. This example, however, did not provide suggestions about how students contribute to developing respect in a relationship built on trust but that the teacher's actions are pivotal for student respect. Another participant described that something as simple as learning students' names was an action that teachers could take to show respect towards students:

> *Peoples' names are important. It's a sign of respect,* (FP25).

A different parent also believed that respect was earned, not expected by teachers and that teachers need to appreciate that roles have changed in modern times in teacher-student relationships, including earning respect:

> *Don't expect it, earn it. Teaching in the past has always been something that you're a teacher and you had to be respected, that's it. That's changed and it's really something that needs to be seen. Every teacher needs to understand that it's a two-way street, that you're not going to get respect if you don't give it to them as well,* (FP31).

Finally, a parent participant shared their opinion there is a negative impact when there is of a lack of respect in the teacher-student relationship. The participant stated:

> *When they [students] don't get treated with respect is when the relationship turns quite negative,* (FP33).

Generally, parents felt that there were actions teachers could take to establish respect with students. Parents described that a positive and productive teacher-student relationship was based on mutual respect.

Students' described that it was what they noticed their teachers doing that led them to respect them. An example of this was described by Year 11 female students discussing the additional tutorials that their teacher offered them throughout the year:

> *He doesn't get paid for that and it makes you feel like he's going above and beyond, and we want a relationship with him,* (FS42).

This description highlighted that students recognised the generosity of their teacher and respected when teachers went above and beyond for them, without the expectation to do so. This same participant also commented on whether respect was given or earned and described their opinion in this way:

I respect the teacher from the start, but then I expect to also be respected. If they start treating me poorly, then I'm going to return that. You get what you give, (FS42).

For this student, a relationship built on respect was considered important and if respect is not achieved, then they believed that there would be negative impacts on their ability to have a positive and productive relationship with their teachers.

All stakeholders shared an opinion on the role of respect within the teacher-student relationship. Respect was largely favoured to be mutual and something that was earned and not given. Therefore, an essential element of a relationship built on trust was perceived to require mutual respect. Next, the ability to maintain confidentiality and privacy, and its role in the teacher-student relationship, will be explored.

4.4.2 Maintaining Confidentiality and Privacy in a Relationship Built on Trust

The need to maintain confidentiality and privacy emerged as a subtheme of 'trust' when discussing relationships. However, confidentiality and privacy were discussed only by the school counsellor interviews in the relationships that they form with students. For school counsellors trust with students was created by being transparent about confidentiality during their first session with students. One school counsellor stated:

You've got to be really clear about confidentiality right at the beginning with any conversation so that they really understand that what they talk about to you is confidential, (FC3).

School counsellors also described how confidentiality and trust were connected:

It is around that issue of trust and trusting that information is going to be kept kind of quiet, (FC7).

This statement suggests that if a student knows that their private information is kept confidential, then they are more likely to trust counsellors. Counsellors described ways in which they maintained the privacy of students in their daily school interactions:

I really want to stress that nobody even knows who comes to see me except obviously the parent and the teacher, and I say that to the student. I explain to them that it is really important for them to know that nobody even has to know that they are here, so it's not only about that I don't disclose information that they have told me, it is also that I don't disclose that they've actually come to see me, (FC7).

While the above approach is to maintain privacy and build trust, one counsellor stated that maintaining privacy was sometimes difficult:

Some students don't like you saying 'hi' to them too much whilst walking around the grounds because they might not want others to know, so that's a bit tricky, (MC2).

A different school counsellor shared how they managed a similar challenge relating to privacy:

I'm very aware that some students don't like to acknowledge me out in the playground, so I am very careful not to say hello to people unless they look and say hello first, (FC5).

This counsellor describes that the way they maintain privacy of students, and build their trust, is to intentionally give students privacy. Confidentiality and privacy emerged as a significant subtheme within the school counsellor data. Counsellors

clearly described their use of confidentiality and privacy to establish and maintain a relationship with students built on trust. Lastly, the subtheme of connection and the association between connection and trust will be considered.

4.4.3 Making a Connection in a Relationship Built on Trust

Participants described ways that teachers can make connections in a relationship built on trust by being supportive of students (being non-judgemental, listening to students), by being *human*, and by being constantly aware of their reputation as a teacher. To begin, teachers shared that a connection was necessary to start and maintain the teacher-student relationship. As stated by one teacher:

> *It seems to be you have to make a connection… but you've got to know what that connection is,* (FT11).

The suggestion from this teacher is that a teacher's understanding of what connections are is a requirement for actually forming a connection with students. Teachers described ways that teachers can go about forming connections with students:

> *Every day I make sure I try and have contact with every single student one on one,* (FT22).

This teacher described that it is continual, individual contact with students that can be used as a strategy for making connections with them. Another teacher shared a similar belief that making connections with students was about it being individualised and personal:

> *I think trying to find a personal connection,* (MT31).

A different teacher described that a benefit of making connections with students was that if something goes wrong or there is a misunderstanding, students

are more likely to forgive a teacher that they have a connection with. This teacher stated:

> *I also think if you have that kind of connection with them, they tend to be more forgiving,* (MT32).

The notion of connection also emerged in parent focus groups. A parent participant described the teacher-student relationship as a connection built upon understanding the student:

> *I think it's a connection on some sort of level in the students' mind particularly,* (FP21).

This quote is congruent with the belief from teachers that connection is about the individual student and about personalising that connection with each student, in this instance, through their thoughts.

A word that appeared within the student data was to describe the teacher-student relationship as a *bond.* As stated by one student from a Year Seven focus group:

> [The teacher-student relationship is] *the bond between a student and a teacher,* (MS13).

Another student from the same focus group suggested that teachers can form bonds with students by sharing things in common:

> *I think if you have a bond with your teacher, you kind of share the same things in common and have sort of the same personality,* (MS14).

For this student, a bond with their teacher could be established if there were common interests between their teacher and themselves which encouraged students to make a connection with that teacher. The same student then described how a lack of

understanding about expectations and boundaries (Theme 2) can impact the bond that students have with their teacher:

> *You need to understand the boundaries pretty good, otherwise the bond breaks,* (MS14).

What is being suggested by this student is that if a student does not clearly understand expectations, boundaries and consequences, then the bond that they have with their teacher may be in jeopardy. A different student, from another Year Seven focus group, believed that the teacher-student bond strengthened over time. This participant stated:

> *If you've known the teacher for quite a long time, you'll have a better bond with them compared to other students,* (FS26).

The suggestion by this student is that relationships form over time and that a more positive and productive teacher-student relationship would be likely to occur the longer teachers and students had a bond or connection. A different student, again from a Year Seven focus group, highlighted a challenge for teachers to form a bond with students, and offered a potential solution:

> *Good luck with having time with teachers on your own. Because there are a lot of students. Because teachers have so many students, hundreds of students, they need to be able to bond. But the student could be the one that bonds,* (MS15).

The view of this participant is that students themselves can take responsibility for forming a bond with their teachers, and that this was too difficult of a task to be the sole responsibility of teachers. Therefore, the connection between teachers and students was described as a *bond* by student participants, who offered ways to strengthen and safeguard this bond. What will now be explored is how stakeholders

believed teachers made connections with students, starting with giving support to students.

4.4.3.1 Giving Support to Students

It emerged from the data that if students felt supported by their teachers then they would form a connection with them. School counsellors described that making a connection with students was essential for forming a positive relationship. As described by one school counsellor:

My relationship with students here at the school is one of a supportive mentoring guide. I walk beside students, (FC1).

This was further described by the same counsellor in this way:

A counsellor's relationship with a student should be one of supportive assistance to enable, to assist and aid a student to find better solutions, (FC1).

For this counsellor support is an important factor within the counsellor-student relationship for helping students to take ownership in solving problems. The role of the counsellor was as a support for students. A different school counsellor concurred that support was essential and provided advice directed at to help them with the teacher-student relationship, stating:

Don't be a reactionary, rather be supportive. Always realise that every single one of them needs support, (FC8).

This school counsellor believed that it was preferable for teachers to take a supportive approach to their relationship, similar to the relationships that students have with counsellors with an added note that every student needed the support of their teacher. Another school counsellor made the suggestion that giving students extra support built the connection between teachers and students:

I think that if students are aware that teachers are willing to give them extra support, whether it's during the class or whether it's after the class, if it is giving up their spare time to help them when they're struggling, I think that definitely builds the relationship, (FC9).

What this school counsellor is suggesting is that if students have the perception that their teachers are willing to help them, both during and outside of class time, this support had a positive impact on the teacher-student relationship.

Teachers themselves see their role as being supportive but not intrusive of their students. One teacher described support by saying:

You allow them to just get on with their life and you iron out the dips and the humps that get in their day, (FT11).

This belief is similar to that previously described by a school counsellor, whereby an effective connection with students stems from walking beside students as a supportive guide.

A student from a Year 11 focus group described the type of support as similar to that from a parent:

It should be like a parent who teaches you stuff, and you feel comfortable around, and they support you, (FS44).

The suggestion by this student is that teachers can work towards a connection with students that is similar to that of their parents, by giving support to students. Participants described different ways to show support of students.

Being non-judgemental towards students emerged as an important factor for developing a connection with students in a teacher-student relationship built on trust. One school counsellor described the importance of having a non-judgemental approach in the counsellor-student relationship, stating:

If you judge in the first moment and you make statements that might contradict how they are feeling or thinking, I think that's a dangerous game to play because you already offset that person and typically in teenagers, they lose faith immediately, (FC6).

Such a statement highlighted that if counsellors make judgements or assumptions about students that it can damage the ability to form and maintain a connection in the counsellor-student relationship. As suggested in the previous section, trust is vital to a counsellor-student relationship and being judgemental breaks trust for a student.

Being non-judgemental was also commented on by parents, relating specifically to the teacher-student relationship, with one parent stating:

I think you have to develop that relationship where they feel they can come to you and not be judged, (FP13).

This parent suggested that teachers who adopt a non-judgemental approach to forming relationships with students they are in a better position to make a connection with students where students will feel supported. Feeling supported and not judged was deemed necessary for the relationship to grow. As one Year Seven student described it:

If you know that they're not going to judge you, then you can share information with them, (MS11).

Like parents, this student suggested that they would open up, and connect with teachers that adopted a non-judgemental approach towards forming connections with students.

The ability of teachers to listen to students also materialised as a significant method to show support to students. A school counsellor described that students like and trust teachers who listen to them:

From what kids tell me I think the kind of teachers that they like and trust the most are the ones that will kind of listen to them, (FC4).

A different counsellor also used listening to students as a way of building a connection:

The main thing is just to listen to them and then use what they tell you to latch onto. It's just them knowing that I will listen to them, that the wall doesn't speak, (FC8).

The suggestion is that by listening to students that you are able to get to know them (Theme 1) and that you can establish trust through maintaining confidentiality (Theme 4). Another counsellor described the significance of listening and its association with communicating your belief of students:

I mean listening to them and I think that giving the sense that you actually believe what they are saying, (FC9).

In this statement, listening can be likened to genuinely understanding and trusting what a student is saying, and that you believe what they are saying is important.

It emerged that listening was also an important strategy for teachers to build a connection between teachers and students. A teacher described the strategy of listening in the following way:

Listen and 'give a fig', (FT11).

This participant went on to further describe this quote by stating: *It really means 'give a care'. Or show you care by listening,* (FT11). For this teacher, listening was associated with showing that you cared about students in an attempt to support them and make a connection with them. Another teacher from the same focus group also described the importance of listening to students:

Just listening to them and you'll find then the kids will come to you with all sorts of problems or even share information with you, (MT11).

From this quote, the suggestion is that a teacher who listens to their students will build trust in students that they can go to a teacher who will be willing to help them. A parent also shared this belief when suggesting a way that teachers can form positive and productive relationships with students:

Be prepared to listen to what is going on with them, (FP31).

Here, this parent is suggesting that by listening to students that teachers can show an understanding for what is going on for students, which demonstrates support of and for the students that they teach. Therefore, listening emerged as a key strategy to support students for the benefit of forming connections.

Overall, the notion of support for students was believed to be important in forming a connection with them and positively impact a teacher-student relationship built on trust. The notion of being human was also suggested to improve connections between teachers and students and have a positive impact on their relationship. This will now be explored.

4.4.3.2 Being Human

It was a shared belief by participants that any attempts for teachers to appear *human* was of benefit to forming connections with students built on trust. There were different aspects of being human described but one suggested behaviour that teachers could adopt was to acknowledge and admit to their mistakes. Teachers described that when a teacher was able to admit to their mistakes that it made them appear more human and approachable to students. One teacher said:

You have to have the ability to go 'I'm sorry, I was wrong'. Kids look at that and go 'oh crap, she's human you know', (FT12).

This teacher's suggestion of humility is an important human trait for making a connection and building trust with students. Being human makes students see teachers as more authentic in their connections with students. One teacher described how important it was for teachers to be themselves:

> *Show them you're human as well. Your human side,* (FT32).

This teacher suggested that if teachers can find ways to show who they are as everyday regular people then they would make stronger connection with students. Similarly, when discussing ways for teachers to form and maintain relationships with students, a parent suggested that teachers could show that they were human by engaging in outside of classroom activities, stating:

> *[This shows] that they're human and they play sport and they have fun and you can have a laugh with them I guess,* (FP12).

A different parent from another focus group shared described that appropriate self-disclosure by teachers also helped with humanising the connection between teachers and students:

> *I think sharing a little bit of themselves too. Like being human,* (FP32).

This parent offers the notion that if teachers can share some information about themselves with the students that they teach, that students may form the association between teachers and their personal, humanistic side.

Two students from a Year 11 focus group also described the belief that when teachers shared information about themselves and admitted to their mistakes that teachers offered an insight into their vulnerabilities and their personal, humanistic side. The following two quotes explore this:

> *I think when you first meet a student, you should tell them about yourself. I think that's really important because it makes them human,* (FS42)

and

To know their weaknesses…to know they're not some inhuman robot, to know that they are also a person…makes themselves seem more human, (FS44 and FS42).

These thoughts articulate the view that students want their teachers to share personal information about themselves, including their weaknesses, as it helps students understand that their teachers are *human* like everybody else, thus increasing the ability for students to form connections with their teachers. Part of being *human* is the reputation that we form of ourselves and from the opinion that others have of us. The impact of a teacher's reputation on the teacher-student relationship will now be considered.

4.4.3.3 Forming Opinions of Teachers Based on their Reputation

Students, parents and teachers believed that the connection that they can have with a teacher is partly shaped by the reputation of the teacher. For students, opinions of a teacher are significantly influenced by other students' opinions of that particular teacher. One student from a Year Seven focus group described it in this way:

If you hear someone else talk bad about another teacher, and you've never met that teacher, you instantly don't like that teacher, (MS15).

This student is suggesting that without even meeting a teacher they will begin to form an opinion of that teacher based on what other students say. As a result, the connection that could be established between this student and their teacher may be diminished prior to them meeting. Another student from a Year Seven focus group also suggested that the opinion of their sibling about particular teachers shaped their own opinion about that teacher:

If your siblings think that the teacher's bad, pretty much no matter what the teacher does, you will agree, (MS11).

A different student from another Year Seven focus group described how friends can have an influence and impact on forming connections with teachers:

If your friends have had a bad experience with a specific teacher, it's the little thing in your ear going, 'Don't like this teacher', (FS22).

Again, students believe that another's prior experience with a teacher is significant enough to colour their own relationship with the same teacher, as also described by a student from a Year 11 focus group:

They have their status already given to them by the students, (MS36).

A parent felt that a teacher's reputation was established students prior to students being taught by that particular teacher. This parent said:

I think something that happens before you go into the classroom…that teachers have a reputation. They all talk. Before the teacher even gets to the classroom their reputation amongst the parents, but mainly among the kids, I think in a high school that reputation will follow them for a very long time, (FP31).

This parent also believed that a teacher' reputation, whether positive or negative, stayed with the teacher over time. However, a student in a Year 11 focus group suggested that teachers could change their reputation in order to establish connections with students:

If a teacher hears or knows that they're probably not exactly liked or people don't respond well to how they teach or their style, maybe not completely change their persona, but try to sort of identify things that people don't respond well to, and then try to manipulate them or change them in a way

that, while still keeping to your ideals, you can also become more acceptable to other people and students, (MS33).

This student was insightfully optimistic that teachers could repair their reputation amongst students, without compromising the teacher's own beliefs or ideals. This was a positive contribution to the emerging narrative about the impacts of a teacher's reputation on their ability to form connections with students.

Teachers also had an opinion on the impact of reputation in relation to connecting with students. One teacher stated that their relationships with students were shaped by previous relationships that the student had had with other teachers. Further, and similar to students, participants from teacher focus groups suggested that the relationship formed between the teacher and student was influenced by siblings who may have had the teacher in previous years, and whether that teachers had a positive or negative reputation amongst students. This is described in the following two quotes:

Relationships are probably coloured…by those kids who have a sibling who you've taught, (MT21)

and

I think having a reputation is a good and bad thing. Because you can have an aura, can't you? Like often if you have siblings come through and the older sibling has had you as a teacher. They are sort of pre-warned, (MT31).

These two teachers acknowledged the role that siblings play in shaping the reputation of teachers, through their formation and communication of their opinion of teachers. The quotes also suggest that teachers have an appreciation of the fact that their reputation may have a positive or negative impact on their ability to form connections with students. Therefore, it has emerged from the data that the opinion

of students about their teachers shapes the reputation that teachers have in schools. This is a significant consideration that adds to the overall understanding of how teachers form connections with students in a relationship built on trust.

In summary, trust was a substantial theme that emerged from the data when exploring how the teacher-student relationship could be more positive and productive. Trust was believed to be earned by teachers who showed respect towards students, maintained confidentiality and privacy, and who made connections with students. If teachers could establish trust with students, then it was thought to benefit the teacher-student relationship. Overall, the themes across the data sets have provided patterns of description about the teacher-student relationship associated to the research questions. These themes will now be critiqued against the literature reviewed in this area and contribute to this literature through the development of a framework of strategies for teachers to start and maintain positive and productive relationships with students in secondary schools.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter, the data will be discussed in relation to the research questions and embedded in the existing literature (Section 5.1). From the findings a comprehensive framework was developed, the Student-Teacher and Relationship Formation Framework (STARF) which outlined key strategies to establish and maintain a positive and productive teacher-student relationship. This original framework is a significant contribution of the data gathered within this research study and has implications for ongoing work with students and teachers (Section 5.2). The findings of this study will be discussed across the four main themes which evolved.

5.1 FINDINGS

5.1.1 Getting to Know Students

The first major finding, as presented in Chapter Four, was that all stakeholders, that is students, teachers, parents and school counsellors, believed teachers must get to know students to start and maintain the teacher-student relationship. Although this finding would seem unsurprising, only Newberry's (2010) four phase conceptual framework seems to have explicitly stated in phase one that teachers should get to know students (as well as self-disclosing as described below). Although this framework has only been applied to the observations of one student and their teacher, the finding of this current study that getting to know students is an enabler of the teacher-student relationship adds to this literature.

In the current study, the major theme of knowing students revealed three subthemes as strategies to accomplish this aim. The subthemes were teachers: (1)

helping students feel comfortable; (2) making and investing time; and (3) showing an interest in students. To get to know students, the approaches and strategies that emerged included:

Help student feel comfortable

- Be non-judgemental
- Show authenticity – be yourself
- Be approachable in your manner
- Use appropriate self-disclosure

Have or show an interest in students

- Show empathy
- Be approachable in your attitude
- Understand your students – how they learn and who they are
- Use humour

Time and the teacher-student relationship

- Invest time into the teacher-student relationship
- Allow time to establish the teacher-student relationship

Data with respect to each of these themes and subthemes will now be presented.

5.1.1.1 Helping Students Feel Comfortable

All participants in this study believed that helping students feel comfortable was an enabler of the teacher-student relationship in secondary schools. However, helping students to feel comfortable was not found to be explicitly expressed in the literature. Rather, studies were found to describe what could be perceived as the characteristics of comfortable that students may experience with their teachers. For example, students and teachers described good teachers as being calm (Beishuizen et al., 2001), and students wanted their teachers to be easy going (Groves & Welsh,

2010). Parents also suggested that effective teachers are nurturing, kind and caring (Family-School Community Partnership Bureau, 2011; Krane & Klevan, 2018), and believed that teachers who developed warm relationship with students were found to demonstrate closeness and openness of communication (Kurdi & Archambault, 2017). Care, acceptance and trust were also believed to be the characteristics of a highly effective teacher-student relationship (Pepler et al., 2012). The theoretical framework for this study, attachment theory, also describes children needing a secure base from which to explore, which would suggest needing to feel comfortable in the presence of that secure base (Ainsworth, 1967). Some of the above characteristics do emerge as separate themes within the current study, however, the notion of comfort was not explicitly expressed in existing research on developing the teacher-student relationship as it was within the current research.

There were differences in the way in which comfort was described by stakeholders in the current study. Students, parents and some school counsellors described comfort from a student-centred perspective (where the focus is on the needs of the student), while teachers and some school counsellors described comfort from a teacher-centred approach (where the focus is on the needs of the teacher). While students identified that they wanted their teachers to make an effort to get to know them as individuals, a barrier emerged. Students described not feeling overly comfortable with teachers who were inquisitive or pushy about gathering information about them. They described a balance between feeling comfortable in sharing information about themselves with their teacher and feeling like a teacher was trying to force information out of them. Overstepping this line had the effect of making students feel uncomfortable. While this would seem like an obvious and

unsurprising finding, this has not been explored in the existing literature on developing the teacher-student relationship.

Parents shared a similar belief that students needed to feel comfortable with their teacher to form a positive and productive relationship. They described comfort in terms of students feeling welcome and safe with their teacher, *"just make them feel welcome and…safe"* (FP13), as an enabler of the teacher-student relationship. Parents described strategies that teachers could use to make students feel welcome and safe, which included playing 'getting to know you' games, for example. Parents offered what could be perceived as a safer, alternative approach, by providing an opportunity for students to share information about themselves through fun and sharing activities.

In the current study, teachers had a different view on comfort and its role in the teacher-student relationship. The view of teachers was mainly teacher-centred and focused on their own need to be comfortable in the classroom. Teachers believed that the more comfortable they were, the easier the relationship with students would form. This finding is different from how students and parents described comfort, which was student-focused in nature, and teacher comfort was not a finding in the literature reviewed on the teacher-student relationship. This finding may have emerged in the current study as teachers, who have vast experience in forming relationships both within and outside of school environments, felt that their own comfort was achieved then it was easier for students to feel comfortable. In addition, Riley's (2010) theoretical assertion that attachment theory has a place in secondary schools and that teachers need one dyadic relationship with students to maintain their professional identity, may provide some insight into the comfort level required by

teachers in secondary school settings. This new finding suggests that teachers look to satisfy their own comfort before they establish relationships with students.

School counsellors shared a similar belief to teachers about a teacher-centred approach to comfort. These stakeholders, most of whom were teachers themselves, described that teachers who knew themselves and what they were comfortable with, would use this understanding to form a relationship with students. However, school counsellors' description of teacher comfort had a different nuance to it than that of teachers, being focused on teacher self-awareness as a way for teachers to form relationships with students. They believed that if teachers were in a position to know themselves well, then they would understand the ways that they felt comfortable to start relationships with students. This finding is supported by literature from a counselling perspective that counsellors must know themselves and what their role is to form the most effective counsellor-client relationship (Geldard et al., 2017; Gelso & Carter, 1985). Counsellors may be suggesting that when teachers do not know themselves it becomes a barrier to forming genuine and authentic relationships with students.

Students and parents did not directly describe elements of teacher comfort in their strategies, which could reflect that people believe that teachers should put the needs of students before their own (Family-School Community Partnership Bureau, 2011). However, teachers actually need to feel confident and comfortable in themselves to form relationships with students (Blatt & Camden, 2007; Kahn, 2007; Settoon & Mossholder, 2002).

The school environment itself emerged as fundamental place and space to help students feel comfortable, described in terms of the tone set and the physical environment itself. School counsellors and parents believed that an environment that

feels uncomfortable for students risked the positive development of the teacher-student relationship, *"I guess it's [school environment] not intimidating.*" (FC1). This finding was similar to a study where it was shown that parents thought teachers should create nurturing classrooms to assist with establishing the teacher-student relationship (Krane & Klevan, 2018). In addition, students in Australian secondary schools stated that a trusting school environment would assist them in developing a positive teacher-student relationship (Groves & Welsh, 2010). However, no other available studies suggested whether teachers and school counsellors believed the school environment to be an enabler of the teacher-student relationship. So, while students and teachers in the current study did not describe the physical classroom environment as an enabler to forming the teacher-student relationship, they described how expectations set in the classroom could be an enabler of the relationship (discussed in Section 5.1.1.2), suggesting the tone of the classroom was more of an enabler than the physical environment.

Predictability and stability were also found to be strategies to help students feel comfortable at school. Students believed that if they felt comfortable then learning would be easier. It was intriguing that girls, and not boys, expressed that they found being comfortable with their teacher to improved their learning. Teachers, parents and school counsellors did not describe any academic benefits of students feeling comfortable with their teacher. Although no literature had mentioned this particular finding, there were studies that had demonstrated that a positive teacher-student relationship did improve academic engagement and achievement (Engels et al., 2016; Lei et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2007; Martin & Collie, 2019; Raufelder et al., 2016).

5.1.1.1.1 Being Non-Judgemental

Students reported that a non-judgemental approach by teachers was crucial for them to form positive relationships. That is, teachers avoided applying their own personal standards or opinions or were opening or overtly critical them. In the current study, all students described being more likely to feel comfortable and to share information about themselves with teachers who did not *"make them feel bad*" (FS43). Students expressed needing to feel good about themselves and have the teacher demonstrate that they liked them in order to form a positive and productive teacher-student relationship. Students stated that teachers played a role in helping them develop their self-esteem, and believed that teachers who were seen to judge them would have greater difficulties making them feel comfortable and consequently impact the ability to form relationships with them. The idea that a non-judgemental teacher would improve the teacher-student relationship is unsurprising, however, has not been widely explored in the existing literature. One study that expressed parent expectations of the teacher-student relationship suggested that effective teachers do not undermine the sense of self-worth of students (Family-School Community Partnership Bureau, 2011). However, the current study seems to be the only one documenting students' views on a non-judgemental approach by teachers.

Students felt their teachers may be less judgemental than their parents about certain situations, with some students describing the likelihood of disclosing information to teachers more readily than their parents, if they felt that teachers would not judge them, *"they're so close to their parents…but their teacher, they're close, but not that close…that they're going to judge them"* (MS11 and MS12). School counsellors also believed that students were reluctant to share information with adults that they felt may judge them in a negative way. The literature suggests

that teachers with a non-judgemental approach towards students provided an opportunity for a close connection to be formed with students (Theisen et al., 2018).

5.1.1.1.2 Showing Authenticity

Authenticity emerged from parent and school counsellor data as a way to help students feel comfortable with their teacher. However, this was not expressed by teachers and students themselves. This may be due to the fact that teachers and students described the importance of teacher approachability and self-disclosure (in Sections 5.1.1.1.3 and 5.1.1.1.4), which could all be considered ways for teachers to demonstrate authenticity. Parents and school counsellors, however, suggested that if teachers were able themselves, then students were more likely to trust them and form positive relationships with them. From a school counsellor perspective, this again is a description of the authentic relationship that must be formed between counsellors and clients, based on a counsellor's genuineness (Geldard, et al., 2017; Gelso & Carter, 1985). While the notion of knowing yourself in the previous section was an important strategy, being yourself was also mentioned as a strategy not found in the literature.

5.1.1.1.3 Being Approachable

Teacher approachability was reported by students and school counsellors to make students feel comfortable with their teachers. Interestingly, teacher approachability did not emerge from focus groups with teachers and parents. Students described wanting their teachers to introduce themselves in a friendly way and for teachers to be open and receptive when speaking with them. School counsellors felt that teachers who were approachable and willing to give students' support and their time could develop a more positive teacher-student relationship. However, the particular view of students was only described by Year 11 students,

and not by Year Seven students. An explanation for this could be that Year Seven students have limited experience forming relationships with their secondary school teachers. This finding supports existing research that students have less of a connection with their teachers in the lower years of secondary school as they transition from primary school (Bokhurst et al., 2010; Pepler et al., 2012).

5.1.1.1.4 Using Appropriate Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure was described by all stakeholders as a way of enabling the development of the teacher-student relationship, however, self-disclosure was described differently by each of the groups. Students and parents reported that when a teacher shared information about themselves, it helped students to connect and feel more relaxed and comfortable with their teacher. Self-disclosure was viewed differently by teachers across focus groups, with some teachers stating that self-disclosure did not enhance the teacher-student relationship, while some teachers believed self-closure was important to the relationship. School counsellors perceived the interaction between adult and child should initially be student-focused and not about the teacher. The idea of teacher self-disclosure has not been explored widely in the literature as a strategy to assist the development of the teacher-student relationship. However, Newberry's (2010) conceptual framework does suggest that teachers and students need to get to know each other to establish their relationship. Teachers getting to know students occurs within the Appraisal phase of Newberry's (2010) relationship development framework between teachers and students. During this phase, both parties spend time gathering information about each other, and it is an intentional opportunity for teachers to get to know students, and students to get to know their teacher. The notion of self-disclosure will also be discussed within

Section 5.1.2.4 on the role of self-disclosure and establishing professional boundaries.

5.1.1.2 Time and the Teacher-Student Relationship

Teachers, parents and school counsellors believed that it takes time for the teacher-student relationship to develop. Also, students, parents and school counsellors saw the lack of time available to secondary school teachers as a barrier to forming a positive relationship with students, because they do not spend all of their time with one teacher. In the reviewed literature students were reported to want greater one-on-one time with teachers (Groves & Welsh, 2010). In addition, Newberry's (2010) conceptual framework for relationship development also suggests that, within the Appraisal phase of the relationship, that time must be allocated and spent for teachers to get to know students, and students to get to know their teachers. Overall, time is a complex factor in the teacher-student relationship as teachers and students spend a great deal of time together through lessons; however, the quality of time spent together seems to be the issue. The quality of time is impacted by students not having the same teacher for long periods of time during the day, like they do during primary school, and the number of students that teachers have in secondary schools, limits the amount of time they can invest into each student.

5.1.1.3 Showing an Interest in Students

All participant groups reported that teachers need to show an interest in students to get to know them. This finding emerged more prominently with Year 11 students as opposed to Year Seven students, suggesting that older students either expected or noticed teachers when teachers were showing an interest. Showing an interest was described by stakeholders as most effective when it was genuine, honest and real. School counsellors described that teachers need to find out what students

were interested in to get to know them, including keeping up to date with adolescents' interests, "*I make it part of my job to be up on teenage issues and interests"* (FC4); a view that was expressed by Year 11 students as well. The limited literature available also expressed that teachers who pay attention to students and find out what they are interested do form positive relationships with students (Beishuizen et al., 2001; Cook et al., 2018; Groves & Welsh, 2010; Pepler et al., 2012).

Teachers expressed the belief that there were benefits to getting to know students in non-classroom environments and to take an interest in what students do when they are not in the classroom. Other stakeholders believed that teachers who showed an interest in their subject, what they were teaching and how they taught could help to form a positive teacher-student relationship, *"you've got to show interest for your subject"* (FT11). A lack of interest and passion was reported to hinder the ability for students to engage and therefore jeopardise the benefits that come from having a positive and productive teacher-student relationship. This finding concurred with research by Groves and Welsh (2010) and Cook et al. (2018), for example, where a teacher's passion, enthusiasm and subject area knowledge all contributed to students' perception of an effective teacher and a harmonious relationship with that teacher.

5.1.1.3.1 Showing Empathy and Use Humour

Empathy and humour were found to enable the development of the teacher-student relationship. Empathy emerged as a finding among the adult participants of the research (teachers, parents and school counsellors). It was believed that empathy provided a deeper understanding and appreciation of students and their experiences, which would help to understand who they were. Interestingly, the students did not

directly describe empathy from their teacher as an enabler to developing a relationship with them. However, students wanted to be in environments where they felt safe and welcomed and where teachers were non-judgemental. One could argue that teachers would need to be empathetic with students to achieve these ends. The finding aligns with some of the existing literature where care and empathy shown by teachers was reported to lead to higher-quality teacher-student relationships (Cook et al., 2018; DiStasio et al., 2016; Pepler et al., 2012; QCT, 2020).

Also, teachers who used humour were reported to make students feel more comfortable. Students (except Year 11 boys), teachers and parents felt that humour was a way to make an initial connection with students and also to re-establish negative and unproductive relationships. Using humour is supported in the literature, (Family-School Community Partnership Bureau, 2011; Groves & Welsh, 2010; Van Bergen et al., 2020), for example, in Groves and Welsh (2010) humour was described by Year 11 students as a characteristic of an effective teacher.

Younger male students also suggested that teachers were responsible for keeping students entertained in the classroom, and that using jokes and banter helped to keep students engaged and to manage their behaviour and to keep them engaged in the relationship. Using banter (sometimes referred to as sarcasm by students) to build teacher-student relationships seems somewhat at odds with the above findings where students wanted teachers to be non-judgemental, as banter could be perceived as judgemental by nature. It could be that these younger male students, just starting their first years in secondary school, may be expressing some kind of cultural bravado; they needed to express that they were ‘mature’ enough to be able to handle banter or sarcastic humour by a teacher. However, there is scant literature available

that discusses this finding so it warrants further research to understand why this strategy would be described in a positive way by younger male secondary students.

School counsellors did not consider humour to be a strategy to start and maintain the teacher-student relationship. This may be because their relationship with students is generally established within the framework of their Code of Ethics which does not describe humour within the guidelines for the counsellor-student relationship (for example, ASC, 2017). Also, the purpose and nature of the counselling service provided by a school counsellor may be complex and sensitive in nature and not warrant humour. From the findings it appears that humour does have a place as an effective strategy for teachers within the teacher-student relationship according to the views of students, teachers and parents.

5.1.2 Establishing Professional Boundaries

Participants in the study perceived that if teachers established professional boundaries with students it would assist in starting and maintaining the teacher-student relationship. Within this major theme, four subthemes emerged for teachers: (1) create professional boundaries; (2) have fair and consistent expectations; (3) friendship boundaries; and (4) use of appropriate self-disclosure. To establish professional boundaries, the approaches and strategies are:

Create professional distance

- Be close, but not too close

Have fair and consistent expectations

- Be clear about your expectations
- Set expectations early

Friendship and the teacher-student relationship

- Maintain a professional relationship, not a friendship

Use appropriate self-disclosure

- Share appropriate information about yourself

5.1.2.1 Creating Professional Distance

The data from the current study revealed that all stakeholders believed if teachers could create professional distance between themselves and the students that they teach, this would enable the formation of a positive teacher-student relationship. Notably, the exploration of creating professional distance to enable the teacher-student relationship is not widely considered in the literature. However, there is literature available to guide and inform teachers on the requirement to balance professional distance within their relationship with students (Graham et al., 2018; QCT, 2017, 2020).

Teachers and students in the current study compared the relationship to other relationships they have – for example, with family, siblings and friends – and reported that teacher-student relationships were different. For teachers, they likened their relationship with students to that of a mentor. They described themselves as being someone that students could trust and speak with when they needed to. Students described the relationship with their teacher as close but reported the importance of a professional distance between students and teachers. The data revealed that students were comfortable talking with their teachers but that they could become uncomfortable if professional distance was compromised. They expressed that they wanted their relationship with their teacher to be close, but not too close, *"I think that if you're hanging out together every single day, it's going to be a bit weird"* (MS14). Although, from an attachment perspective, students seek alternative relationships to that of their parents when they progress from childhood

into adolescence (Marvin & Britner, 2018; Theisen et al., 2018), they do not want their teacher to get too close to them that it makes them feel uncomfortable.

Data from parents and school counsellors revealed that teachers needed to establish boundaries with students to create professional distance in the teacher-student relationship. Parents described professional boundaries as teachers understanding what was acceptable and unacceptable in their relationship with students, and school counsellors described the need for teachers to establish clear boundaries with students based on not being their friend nor engaging in too much self-disclosure, *"I feel there needs to be a distinct line between what's acceptable, what's unacceptable"* (FP13). Teachers who failed to maintain distance and establish boundaries could lead to forming a relationship with students that may be considered unprofessional and/or that made students feel uncomfortable. Guidelines for teachers, such as the Code of Ethics for Teachers in Queensland Framework (2020), outline the expectations for teachers to create and maintain appropriate professional relationship and demonstrate integrity, however there are a lack of studies available that describe specifically how professional distance enables or becomes a barrier to the development of the teacher-student relationship.

5.1.2.2 Having Fair and Consistent Expectations

An additional factor that emerged from the current research is that of establishing expectations for students. All stakeholders believed that setting expectations with students was fundamental to establishing a positive teacher-student relationship. In the limited research available, expectations have also been described, particularly in conceptual framework for developing the teacher-student relationship published by Newberry (2010). Within the Appraisal phase of relationship development with students, teachers establish routines and patterns of

interaction. This is the phase when expectations are outlined either overtly or subtly and boundaries are established (Newberry, 2010).

In particular in the current research, teachers believed that their expectations should be aligned with those of their school and formal in nature, while school counsellors suggested that expectations with students should be set firmly. Teachers described quite a formal introduction of themselves and their expectations of students based on guidelines and expectations set by the schools in which they worked. This description contrasted with the idea from students that teachers should share information about themselves or use humour in the initial phases of the relationship (as mentioned previously).

Students, on the other hand, appreciated that teachers should set expectations with them, but described that these expectations should be enacted differently than described by teachers, *"I think it's really helpful for a teacher and a student if they set ground rules first"* (MS33). Students also saw the value in teachers setting expectations in their initial interactions with students, however they were cautious about the extent of these expectations. Students did not comment on how formal their introduction with teachers should or should not be, but rather, that the expectations that teachers set be reasonable and communicated in a less strict, casual manner. The finding on setting expectations, particularly from the perspective of students, aligned with the literature that students attach with teachers who adopt an easy-going nature to setting expectations (Beishuizen et al., 2001). In addition, in the current research, a particular finding from boys was their belief that developing expectations in a strict manner had its place, and could lead to improved outcomes in the classroom, such as more behaviour management and academic focus. This finding, of a comparison between expectations and discipline, is new insight into

how expectations contribute to a positive and productive teacher-student relationship in secondary schools.

5.1.2.3 Friendship and the Teacher-Student Relationship

The notion of friendship was mentioned in varying ways across all participant groups when discussing the enablers and barriers to the teacher-student relationship. Students across year levels and genders described wanting the teacher-student relationship to be like a friendship, but within boundaries (as previously mentioned). Students stated that in order to connect with their teachers and to learn and feel comfortable with them, that they had to establish a relationship with them like they would with their friends. Students felt that teachers who were more like a friend benefitted their learning and allowed them to feel more comfortable with their teacher. These findings align with the existing literature where students feel more engaged in school if their teachers took an interest in them (as a friend would) and that they create a safe and welcoming environment (Beishuizen et al., 2001; Cook et al., 2018; Groves & Welsh, 2010; Krane & Klevan, 2018; Pepler et al., 2012). However, students in the current study appeared to express some uncertainty about how teachers could 'be their friend' but also maintain professional distance and boundaries. The *Code of Ethics Framework for Teachers* (2020) and the literature review on professional boundaries prepared by Southern Cross University, for example, clearly express that teachers are to maintain professional relationships with students, and must be aware of the characteristics of blurred boundaries, including teachers who want to be perceived as friendly and to be liked by students (Graham et al., 2018).

The data showed that teachers used the notion of friendship to describe the teacher-student relationship, but with a more cautious view than students. They

described that wanting to be liked and to be everyone's friend was a barrier to forming positive and productive teacher-student relationships. Further, it was their belief that if a teacher-student relationship started more like a friendship that expectations and boundaries would be difficult to establish and boundaries would then risk being blurred. Unlike students, teachers did not see themselves as being friends with students and believed that if the teacher-student relationship was started or maintained in that way that it would have a negative impact on the ongoing nature of that relationship. This finding is aligned with the aforementioned literature review conducted by Graham et al. (2018), where teachers were described as blurring their professional boundaries by being overly friendly and wanting to be liked by students. Similarly, parents and school counsellors did not view the teacher-student relationship as a friendship but that the relationship was characterised by professional boundaries.

Overall, participants used the idea of a friendship to describe the teacher-student relationship but did so in slightly different ways. Teachers, parents and school counsellors held the strong opinion that the teacher-student relationship did not share any of the characteristics of a friendship and that teachers should not be friends with students. However, students across year levels and genders, shared a differing perspective by describing the relationship like a friendship without stating that the relationship was an actual friendship. They described a closeness with teachers, like that of a parent or friend, but also saw the differences between this closeness and that within their friendships (also described below in reference to professional boundaries). In the literature available, Beishuizen et al. (2001) described older students as conceptualising teacher-student friendships in relation to the teacher's characteristics. They found that students prefer to be with teachers who

are ‘calm’, ‘careful’, in control and behave in ways that ‘makes students respect their teacher’. It is probable that these characteristics are seen as friendly, allowing for a particular friendship to form with such teachers that is different to the one they have with their peers. However, de Jong et al. (2014) also described teacher friendliness to have no association to a high-quality teacher-student relationship (de Jong et al., 2014).

5.1.2.4 Using Appropriate Self-Disclosure

An inconsistency emerged within the data on teacher self-disclosure and its role in the teacher-student relationship. Year Seven and 11 students described teacher self-disclosure as an enabler to the development of the teacher-student relationship, *“I think that opening up is pretty essential”* (MS11). This finding aligned with the previous data on self-disclosure stated previously where students and parents believed teacher self-disclosure helped students to better connect with their teachers, to feel more relaxed and comfortable about being in school. Parents saw the value in teachers sharing personal information about themselves to develop the foundations of a positive teacher-student relationship. While the idea of teacher self-disclosure has not been explored widely in the literature as a strategy to assist the development of the teacher-student relationship, as discussed in Section 5.1.1.1.4, Newberry’s (2010) conceptual framework expressed that teachers and students needed to get to know each other to establish their relationship.

However, the data collected from teachers in the current study revealed the most inconsistency. Some teachers believed that teacher self-disclosure could be detrimental to establishing professional boundaries, while other teachers felt that self-disclosure had an important place in the teacher-student relationship. What this may reveal is that teachers would benefit from a broader understanding on the role,

and perhaps nature, of self-disclosure in their relationship development with students.

School counsellors consistently mentioned that self-disclosure did not have a place in their relationships with students. This finding is important when understanding an adult-child relationship in a school context, providing an opportunity to explore how school counsellors feel about teachers using self-disclosure as a strategy to start and maintain the teacher-student relationship.

What can be learned from the current research is that, generally, an awareness of teacher self-disclosure could enable the forming of the teacher-student relationship. While the perceptions of participants varied, it was nevertheless an important factor to be considered. The differing of opinions about teacher self-disclosure is interesting and noteworthy for emerging understanding in this area.

5.1.3 Being Consistent

The data from all stakeholders suggested that teacher consistency would assist in developing and maintaining a positive and productive teacher-student relationship in secondary schools. Within the major theme of consistency, four subthemes emerged: (1) providing predictability and stability; (2) modelling fairness; (3) developing expectations and boundaries; and (4) being authentic. For teachers to achieve this, the following approaches and strategies were described:

Provide predictability and stability

- Provide a sense of certainty, inside and outside of the classroom

Develop expectations and boundaries

- Apply expectations and boundaries in a consistent manner

Model fairness

- Be fair to avoid showing favouritism

Be authentic

- Show a genuine side to yourself

5.1.3.1 Providing Predictability and Stability

Teachers, parents and school counsellors described that teachers needed to maintain a positive attitude and demeanour towards students and their work to achieve predictability and show stability, *"you've got to be consistent, but happy* (MT11). Students (in particular Year 11 males) also described being able to form higher-quality relationships with teachers who did not suddenly change in demeanour and who remained consistent in their attitude and approachability. Teachers who were found to be inconsistent in terms of their approach and demeanour, plus different inside and outside of the classroom, could damage their ability to form relationships with students. Interestingly and notably, female students did not discuss teacher predictability and stability as fundamental for establishing a teacher-student relationship. The findings of predictability and stability as a strategy to start and maintain the teacher-student relationship is unsurprising, however, research to date has not considered this as a strategy. One study does suggest that, in contrast, teacher flexibility is a characteristic of good teachers (Family-School and Community Partnership Bureau, 2011). Further, attachment theory suggests that predictability and stability with one caregiver, whether it be with a parent or teacher, provides young people with a continuous, stable relationship from which to explore for their overall development (Ainsworth, 1967; Bowlby, 1951). However, there would be a benefit in further exploration of predictability and stability as strategies in the development of the teacher-student relationship.

5.1.3.2 Modelling Fairness

Teachers fairness emerged from the data as fundamental for developing a positive and productive teacher-student relationship. Teachers and parents felt that if teachers were inconsistent, and therefore unfair, that they would appear to be playing favourites, however, teachers who were perceived by students as being fair would assist teachers in being respected by students. Interestingly, the belief about consistency and fairness did not emerge as strong within the other stakeholder groups. Only one student focus group (Year Seven males) described fairness. This was a surprising outcome as fairness was a significant finding in the literature for teachers to establish positive and productive relationships with students (Cook et al., 2018; OECD, 2016, 2019; QCT, 2020) and was expected to emerge more prominently within the current research.

5.1.3.3 Developing Expectations and Boundaries

There was a strong belief by teachers, parents and school counsellors that consistency by teachers was important when establishing expectations and boundaries. While this is unsurprising, the research available does not widely explore consistency in expectations and boundaries as an enabler of the teacher-student relationship. Cook and colleagues' (2018) conceptual framework articulates that when the teacher-student relationship needs to be repaired, it can be as a result of negative interactions between teachers and students, in particular discipline being applied unfairly. Overall, though, the notion of consistency in expectations and boundaries is widely underdeveloped in the available literature.

In the current study, participants believed that an inconsistent application of expectations by teachers would be noticed by students and that this could damage the teacher-student relationship. Students, however, did not describe consistent

application of expectations as significant to forming the teacher-student relationship. The teacher sticking to the expectation rather than arbitrarily changing expectations may for students be a manifestation of strictness but also a form of consistency in that students know what the boundaries are for expected behaviours.

5.1.3.4 Being Authentic

Consistency and authenticity also emerged within the data of the current research. Parents described teachers lacking authenticity if they changed their behaviours when in the presence of parents and suggested that students are able to pick up on this inconsistency with their teachers and this lack of authenticity negatively compromised the teacher-student relationship. While the need for authenticity and consistency was identified as enablers by parents it did not emerge as a finding from student and teacher focus groups. This is also similar to the finding about authenticity and its correlation with making students feel comfortable as described in Theme 1. Consistency and authenticity have not emerged in the available literature as a strategy to develop the teacher-student relationship.

5.1.4 Establishing Trust

Students, parents and teachers believed that trust between them and their teachers was important for the teacher-student relationship. It was believed that if trust was not established then students would not feel comfortable with their teachers, could not relate to them, and that the relationship would face significant challenges. Trust emerged in the literature available as a characteristic of an effective teacher, where a trusting school environment and mutual trust between teachers and students were found to be enablers of a positive teacher-student relationship (Groves & Welsh, 2010; Pepler et al., 2012; QCT, 2020). A link can be made between trust and attachment theory, as it has been found that children require

a secure, trusting relationship with a primary caregiver – a parent, or in the case of adolescents, a teacher – for development to occur (Ainsworth, 1967; Marvin & Britner, 2008; Theisen et al, 2018).

In the current study, school counsellors also discussed the importance of trust from the perspective of the teacher-student and counsellor-student relationship; a finding that suggests that trust is an essential element to the success of relationships between adults and students in schools, *"I think that the whole aspect of trust is essential between a student and a teacher"* (FC7). Trust is an important element of the working alliance that is created between school counsellor and student and as a feature of counselling frameworks and codes of ethics for counsellors (Anglican Schools Commission, 2017; Geldard et al., 2017; Gelso & Carter, 1985).

Within the major theme of trust, three subthemes emerged. These include: (1) showing respect; (2) maintaining confidentiality and privacy; and (3) making a connection. The approaches and strategies to do so included:

Show respect

- Be mindful that respect is earned, not given
- Learn the names of your students
- Go above and beyond what is required

Maintain confidentiality and privacy

- Model confidentiality and privacy in your interactions, inside and outside of the classroom

Make a connection

- Give support
- Appear to be human
- Be mindful of your professional reputation

5.1.4.1 Showing Respect

All stakeholders in the current study described the importance of respect shown between teachers and students in the teacher-student relationship. Students stated that they developed respect for teachers who went above and beyond for them, because they felt that by their teachers doing this demonstrated that they actually wanted to have a relationship with them. Students felt that if teachers did more than what students perceived they were paid for, then that was a trait that they respected in their teachers. Teachers also shared the view that respect was important to developing their relationship with students. They stated that respect is not a given right as a teacher and felt that teachers needed to show respect towards students in order to gain respect in return. Like students, teachers believed that a lack of respect would be a barrier to the teacher-student relationship. This finding concurred in the literature by Beishuizen et al. (2001), Groves and Welsh (2010), and the QCT (2020) where it was stated that a lack of respect between teacher and student impacted the students' perception and trust of their teacher.

Parent participants went a step further with their description of respect within the teacher-student relationships. Parents described specific ways in which respect could be established by teachers, such as knowing students' names, engaging in extra-curricular activities and by the teacher being organised. Interestingly, parents did not describe what students needed to do to show respect to their teachers, which may suggest that parents felt it was also the teachers' role to model respect to students to gain respect in return. However, the ideas stated by parents are congruent with the research by Cook et al. (2018) who described learning students' names, for example, was a strategy to establish respect in the teacher-student relationship. The

above findings help to provide strategies for teachers to show and establish respect as a foundation of a trusting teacher-student relationship.

5.1.4.2 Maintaining Confidentiality and Privacy

Confidentiality and privacy were strategies suggested by school counsellors for establishing trust in the teacher-student relationship. School counsellors shared the importance of establishing confidentiality and privacy through an assurance for students that their conversations were private. Confidentiality and privacy are important characteristics of the working alliance that is created between school counsellor and student and feature within counselling frameworks and codes of ethics for counsellors (Anglican Schools Commission, 2017; Geldard et al., 2017; Gelso & Carter, 1985).

However, it is interesting that confidentiality and privacy did not emerge in student, teacher and parent focus groups. While there was insufficient research to rely on to compare this finding, the *Code of Ethics Framework for Teachers* has described that teachers should base their relationship with students on confidentiality where appropriate (QCT, 2020). Overall, students, teachers and parents may not expect confidentiality and privacy from teachers, nor perceive this as realistic in a secondary school environment where there are many students in classes, and teachers lack opportunity to have confidential and private conversations with students. Given this, teachers may benefit from being more mindful of confidentiality and privacy in secondary school settings. They may explore ways to provide students with opportunities to share confidential and private matters with them, in ways that maintain professional boundaries.

5.1.4.3 Making a Connection

While all stakeholders described making connections in the current study as necessary for the teacher-student relationship to form, each stakeholder viewed connections somewhat differently. The notion of connection has a direct correlation with attachment theory, as young people need to make at least one attachment, or connection, for their development throughout childhood and adolescence (Ainsworth, 1967; Bowlby, 1951; Riley, 2010).

Students described their connection with teachers using the term 'bond', and that this bond occurred when they had something in common with their teachers, *"[the teacher-student relationship is] the bond between a student and a teacher"* (MS13). Students described that a bond with their teacher could strengthen over time or be jeopardised if students did not understand the expectations and boundaries of the teacher-student relationship, *"you need to understand the boundaries pretty good, otherwise the bond breaks"* (MS14). This quote refers back to earlier data where students want teachers to be friendly and take an interest in them, but they also want teachers to maintain a professional distance in their relationship. Interestingly, the phrase 'bond' emerged from focus groups with Year Seven students and was not a characteristic described in the Year 11 focus groups. This finding may indicate that students transitioning into secondary school are negotiating within themselves how to navigate the new kinds of relationships they have with a range of different teachers rather than the smaller more family-like setting of teachers in a primary school. Further, this bond may not be forming in the early secondary years, as suggested in the literature that students' relationship with their teacher occurs in a u-shape (Bokhorst et al., 2010; Pepler et al., 2012). In the current study, older students were found to want their teacher to be more themselves rather than needing to share

common interests with them. As described in the available literature, older students more than younger students favoured a personality view of their teacher (who the teacher was), rather than an ability view of their teacher (what a teacher can do) (Beishuizen et al., 2001).

Teachers described that the importance of admitting to their own mistakes could be a way of appearing human to students. This aligns with the data from students from Year 11 focus groups who were looking for their teacher to be vulnerable and open, to make a connection with them, *"to know their weaknesses…makes them seem more human* (FS44 and FS42). Teachers who were not caught up with needing to be perfect, and who were able to show a level of vulnerability, were more likely to form connections with students than teachers who were unable to show this side of themselves. By admitting to mistakes, for example, teachers were thought of as more of a person than a product, standing a better chance of forming a connection and a relationship with students. These findings seem to support Riley's (2010) argument that the teacher-student relationship in secondary schools is similar to adult attachment. It appears that when students progress through their secondary schooling years, they are forming a more mature relationship with their teacher. The data in this research indicates that older students are able and willing to accept the teacher being more themselves rather than living up so some idealised version of what a teacher should be. Teachers who are able to share their vulnerabilities and unique personality with older students may do so in similar interactions with other adults in their lives. The difference is that teachers need to also maintain a professional distance within these connections with students. Therefore, the teacher-student relationship becomes more of a professional dyadic relationship.

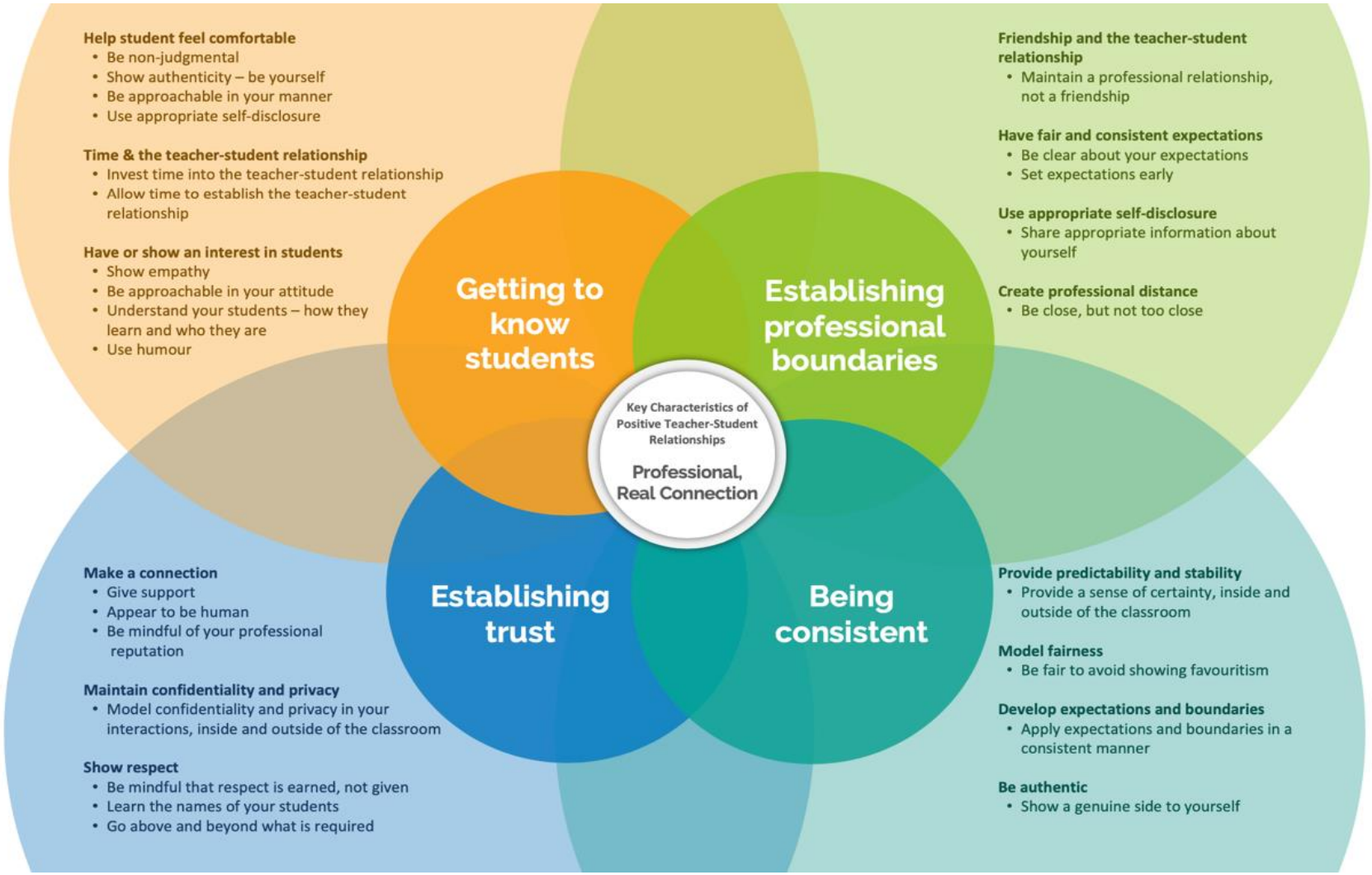
In summary, this current research has contributed to an understanding of the fundamental factors to start and maintain the teacher-student relationship. The findings provide new insight into some of the enablers and barriers that participants associated with relationships in secondary school settings. These understandings contribute to the literature that is available in this area. Data gathered in this research allowed for a range of participants' views on positive and productive teacher-student relationships in secondary schools to be captured and explored to best inform a relationship development framework for teachers. The emerging framework will be discussed below.

5.2 STARF (STUDENT-TEACHER AND RELATIONSHIP FORMATION) FRAMEWORK

An original framework was developed which could assist teachers to effectively develop the teacher-student relationship in secondary schools. This framework, *The Framework for Developing Professional, Real Teacher-Student Relationships in Secondary Schools* (Figure 1) articulates the most relevant, collective approaches and strategies for relationship development as derived from the current data.

Figure 1

Framework for Developing Professional, Real Teacher-Student Relationships in Secondary Schools



At the centre of the framework overlapping each of the four quadrants are the key characteristics of a positive teacher-student relationship. The phrasing *professional, real connections* were used by all participants to express an expectation for teachers to behave in a professional manner with students, and maintain authenticity in their interactions with students.

The framework then presents the approaches teachers can use to start and maintain positive and productive teacher-student relationships. Each quadrant is an expression of the key themes that have emerged from the data gathered, and are used within the framework to express the four overarching approaches to relationship development between teachers and students. The overarching approaches are: 1) getting to know their students; 2) establishing professional boundaries; 3) being consistent; and 4) establishing trust. Within each approach are specific strategies that teachers can use, which have emerged from the subthemes within the data. Teachers can get to know their students by helping them feel comfortable, having and showing an interest in them, and investing time into them. To establish professional boundaries, teachers create professional distance, establish expectations for students, use appropriate self-disclosure, while being mindful that approaching the teacher-student relationship as a 'friendship' will be a barrier to the relationship. Teachers can be consistent by providing predictability and stability for students, while expressing authenticity and modelling fairness. To develop a relationship built on trust, teachers show respect and maintain student confidentiality and privacy.

As written previously in this thesis, substantial research has been conducted that has provided an understanding of the reasons why the teacher-student relationship was important. The findings from research have shown that when there were positive and productive teacher student relationships, students' wellbeing,

academic engagement and achievement improved while teachers were increasingly protected from burnout and stress. The expectations of the teacher-student relationship – from the opinion of students, teachers and parents – clearly articulated what key stakeholders anticipated as an outcome of the relationship. The missing element in the research to date was how teachers could go about forming and maintaining the teacher-student relationship, particularly in secondary school settings within Australia. Therefore, the purpose of the current research was to develop an understanding of the how; that is the procedures and processes which enable the relationship to begin and to be maintained. The opinions of students, teachers and parents contributed to an emerging understanding of the enablers and barriers to the development of the teacher-student relationship, and what teachers could do to start and maintain their professional relationship with students. Another voice, that of school counsellors, was added to the narrative around teacher-student relationship development. It was decided to include the opinions of school counsellors as they too form important relationships with students in schools. Their insight into how to start and maintain a relationship with students was explored, to understand whether any strategies they use, and suggestions they may have, about developing the therapeutic relationship with students in schools could be transferred into the classroom for teachers and students.

From the findings of this study, an original framework has been developed to describe the approaches and strategies that teachers could use to start and maintain positive and productive teacher-student relationships in secondary schools. The approaches and strategies that are included in this framework take into consideration the equal contributions from all stakeholders in this study. They are an expression of

the main themes and sub-themes that have emerged within the current study. The potential for application of the framework will be explored in Chapter Six.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The final chapter of this thesis will demonstrate the following: the contribution of this work to current educational practice (Section 6.1) and the contribution of this work to the existing theoretical and empirical literature (Section 6.2). It will also discuss limitations of this research (Section 6.3) and provide suggestions for further research (Section 6.4). Final conclusions will also be presented (Section 6.5).

6.1 CONTRIBUTIONS TO PRACTICE

The development of the STARF provides many opportunities for teacher practice, in particular assisting teachers to begin and maintain meaningful and productive teacher-student relationships. Teachers could use the original framework in the following way. Each of the quadrants of the framework are not meant to be privileged in any way (for example, where there is a disproportional focus on one quadrant over another), nor used in isolation from one another (for example, where the strategies from one element are used, without considering how they work with or in conflict with other elements). Therefore, it is important that teachers consider implementing the overarching approaches and associated strategies into their practice in an interdependent manner, seeing the overlap and connections between each quadrant (for example, using strategies in combination with one another) to establish and maintain relationships with students.

The framework can also be used in a dyadic way, where teachers and students are considered equal partners in their interaction and that they both have a part to play in cooperating to make the relationship work. The notion of a dyadic teacher-student relationship foregrounds and incorporates the theory of adult attachment

purported by Riley (2010) as a way of exploring the teacher-student relationship in a secondary school setting, and the idea of a dyadic relationship is also commonly used to explain the counsellor-client relationship.

The practice potential for the STARF in both initial teacher education and in professional develop for teachers is also significant. University teacher education in early childhood and primary initial teacher training is significantly focused on teaching the child, as well as the knowledge and skills needed. However, the focus is different in secondary school teacher training. Secondary teachers are expected to have in-depth subject area knowledge to effectively do their job, and it seems this becomes more important than teaching the child. However, the literature review in this thesis has demonstrated research which shows that early adolescence is still a crucial time for forming relationships, and that the social-emotional and academic benefits of a positive teacher-student relationship are well established. Therefore, university secondary education courses should become increasingly focused on teaching the child, rather than the subject, and providing initial teachers with an understanding of ways to connect with students would be of significant benefit. The findings of this thesis have shown how valuable these connections are perceived by all key stakeholders. For pre-service teachers to have access to a framework such as the STARF which provided structured ideas and strategies could be of significant assistance. Such a framework of strategies to connect with students in their classes removes the potential uncertainty and ambiguity for emerging teachers. In addition, the framework could allow teachers entering the profession to have insight into what enables the development of the teacher-student relationship. This understanding might not be gained through a pre-service practicum experience or innately by new

teachers, therefore the framework could serve as a supportive tool to draw and rely upon as they find their feet and own style within the classroom.

The framework, underpinned by the findings of this current study, could also form the basis of professional learning and conversation in schools. Understanding each element of the framework, and offering professional learning specific to each element, would be of benefit. Professional sharing amongst teachers of the strategies found to work could also deepen application and strengthen practice. The current study may also broaden teachers' perspectives of those within their school communities who may have valuable insight into how to form positive and productive teacher-student relationships and spark conversation with not only teaching colleagues, but students, parents and other adults within the school community (for example, school counsellors).

The literature review prepared for this thesis has demonstrated the value of positive teacher-student relationships for teachers in relation to wellbeing and the prevention of burnout and stress for teachers, and possibly therefore the reduction of teacher attrition. It would seem that a broader systems level teacher employing authorities could be interested to sponsor the use of the STARF in teacher professional development to support teacher wellbeing and reduce teacher attrition.

Similarly, the literature has demonstrated the significant benefits of a positive teacher-student relationship for student wellbeing, student achievement and engagement, and student school retention. At both a school and systems level, the use of the STARF could seem to be beneficial for students as well.

6.2 CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCHOLARSHIP

The purpose of this current study was to explore the perception of students, teachers, parents and school counsellors on what they believed were the ways to

develop a positive and productive teacher-student relationship in secondary schools. Findings from this research contribute in a significant way as outlined below.

1. As the research was conducted in secondary schools within Australia, the findings make a significant contribution to the limited understanding of how teachers can start and maintain positive and productive with their students in a secondary school setting. The current research has provided an original framework of strategies, expressed from a variety of perspectives, on how to enable and develop the teacher-student relationship. The present participants believed that teachers need to get to know students, establish professional boundaries, be consistent, and establish trust, for the teacher-student relationship to start and be maintained.

2. The research adds knowledge to the area of the teacher-student relationship from a range of perspectives, a body of work that has only had limited empirical focus. The findings of the current research demonstrated that each stakeholder had an opinion on what enabled and created a barrier for teachers to form relationships with students and provided an insight into common beliefs of these stakeholders. By drawing on a range of stakeholder opinions, the current research communicated a broader, yet deeper, understanding of the dynamic between teachers and students, what constituted a positive and productive teacher-student relationship, and how teachers could develop this.

3. The contribution of school counsellors provided an insight into the ideas that could be transferred from their relationship development with students, into

the practice of teachers. Generally, school counsellors' views were in agreement with that of students, teachers and parents, with examples including that the relationship be student-centred, non-judgemental in nature, with expressions of authenticity and empathy. School counsellors contributed new insight and ideas, namely that the environment in which the relationship developed as an enabler to the relationship, whereas the use of self-disclosure and humour were examples of barriers to the relationship.

4. Each stakeholder group – students, teachers, parents and school counsellors – were found to be an untapped resource in their collective understanding of how to start and maintain the teacher-student relationship. There is a logic that can be applied to inviting each stakeholder to participate in the current research. Students and teachers are obvious choices as the relationship is about them, while parents have expectations of their child's teachers, which carries from primary into secondary school (Kruger & Michalek, 2011). School counsellors, who rely on a working alliance for therapeutic success, would also logically have ideas about what works in developing relationships with students in schools. Overall, the research problem, of understanding the ways in which teachers could form relationships with students in secondary schools, was able to be successfully addressed by inviting the views of a wide range of educational stakeholders and including a synthesis of the common views into the development of a clear framework of strategies for teachers.

5. The current research concurred with, but broadened, the conceptual frameworks of Newberry (2010) and Cook et al. (2018) on teacher-student relationship development. Each of these conceptual frameworks explored the

phases of the teacher-student relationship and expressed some of the strategies that teachers can use within each phase of the teacher-student relationship. The current study was able to broaden the range of approaches and strategies that teachers can use, while also providing insight into the strategies relevant within a secondary school setting.

6. The research supported Riley's (2010) theoretical assertion, based on attachment theory, that the teacher-student relationship in secondary schools showed traits of adult attachment. Riley (2010) asserted four key principles relevant to this thesis: (1) teachers have a role in ensuring students feel safe and secure and engage in socially appropriate behaviour; (2) teachers need to draw on the principles of attachment theory to develop their understanding of the development of the teacher-student relationship; (3) teachers in secondary schools should form a dyadic relationship with students, and they also need one dyadic relationship with students to maintain their professional identity; and (4) teachers form relationships with students based on their experience with their own school teachers. The first principle of teachers ensuring students felt safe and secure was found in the literature and in the data to be relevant to the teacher-student relationship. The data revealed that students wanted comfort and trust in their relationships with their teachers, while seeking fair boundaries and consistency. The second principle, that teachers need to draw on attachment theory to develop relationships, was reflected in the data. The relationship with their teacher that younger students were describing differed to the relationship that older students were describing. Younger students mentioned more ability traits of their teacher (what the teacher can do), while older students mentioned more personality traits of

their teacher (who the teacher was) (Beishuizen et al., 2001). This suggests that as students progressed through secondary school that they were looking to form more of a dyadic relationship with their teacher. Therefore, the third principle, that teachers should form a dyadic relationship with students, emerged strongly in the data. The idea that a *professional, real connection* be formed between teachers and students was a common way to express the dyadic relationship, and participants described the traits of a dyadic relationship, for example, where individuals were authentic, approachable, used appropriate self-disclosure, empathy and humour, and developed mutual trust and respect within the connection. Finally, the fourth principle, that teachers develop their relationship with students based on their own experiences, did not emerged within the data. However, overall, Riley's (2010) proposal has been mostly supported by the current research, that the relationship between teachers and students in a secondary school setting could be described as adult attachment.

6.3 LIMITATIONS

As with any study there are a number of limitations. As in all qualitative research, the results are not generalisable beyond secondary schools in Australia. It may also be that non-private school teachers, students and parents have different views. However, a strength of the study was the diversity of stakeholders whose perceptions were gathered and explored, and the practical strategies which emerged.

A second limitation of the research was that the majority of school counsellor participants was female. However, the gender proportion is reflective of the demographics of this workforce group in the state in which the research was

conducted. The other stakeholder groups – students, teachers and parents - were all representative of gender.

A further limitation is that the framework that has been developed, the STARF, requires further validation. This could be achieved through empirical testing with teachers in classrooms via observation or experimentation. In addition, validation by experts in the field of teacher-student relationships, or by participants, may be appropriate approaches to test and confirm the framework prior to implementation.

Finally, a limitation of the current research was the lack of previous research on the topic of positive teacher-student relationships in secondary schools. A large proportion of the available research was conducted in primary schools, did not consider a wide range of stakeholder perspectives, and was not conducted in Australian secondary schools. As such, the current research was designed within a framework of limited prior research. However, a corollary of this is that this research has opened a new vista for ongoing research in this field.

6.4 FUTURE RESEARCH

Further research could consider how the traits of adult attachment relate to the teacher-student relationship in secondary schools. While this theory has been proposed by Riley (2010), and explored in the current study, more research is needed to develop an integrated theoretical understanding of this relationship. Adult attachment between teachers and students in secondary schools suggests that secondary school students are seeking a more mature relationship with their teachers than what they experienced when in primary school. As discussed earlier, further research with greater numbers of participants in different secondary school settings will assist in further understanding the views of these key educational stakeholders.

Such additional research will assist with confirming the status of the findings of this study.

Research also needs to be conducted on the application of the conceptual framework developed from this current study. Data from its empirical and practical use could significantly add to the knowledge of the development and maintenance of productive teacher-student relationships. For example, longitudinal studies could be conducted with initial teacher students to examine whether this assisted them in beginning and maintaining positive and productive teacher-student relationships once they began their careers in schools. Case study data which demonstrated improved student outcomes and improved teacher wellbeing as a result of the use of the framework in schools would also usefully add to the literature. Further exploration to deepen the views of key educational stakeholders to both replicate the findings and also to confirm the effectiveness of the findings could also be conducted.

6.5 CONCLUSION

Students in secondary schools still seek, and need, relationships with their teachers. An understanding of adult attachment seems best to explain this need, along with the type of relationship that can emerge. The teacher-student relationship is important for student and teacher wellbeing, and there is an expectation on teachers to develop this relationship. However, there is no framework of strategies for teachers to use to start and maintain these relationships from a secondary school perspective. This study has provided an opportunity for key educational stakeholders to share their opinion on the characteristics of a positive and productive teacher-student relationship and their views on how to start and maintain this relationship. The current research has also developed an original framework, the STARF, which identifies approaches and strategies for teachers based on the empirical findings of

this research. Overall, this thesis addresses a significant gap in the current literature and provides a useful framework for practice and further research.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Ethical Approval

Dear Prof Marilyn Campbell and Mr Mark Herriman

Project Title: The three R's, relationships, relationships, relationships: How can teacher-student relationships be more positive and productive in secondary schools

Ethics Category: Human - Low Risk
Approval Number: 1300000825
Approved Until: 29/03/2019 (subject to receipt of satisfactory progress reports)

We are pleased to advise that your application has been reviewed and confirmed as meeting the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

I can therefore confirm that your application is APPROVED. If you require a formal approval certificate please advise via reply email.

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL
Please ensure you and all other team members read through and understand all UHREC conditions of approval prior to commencing any data collection:
Standard: Please see attached or go to
www.research.qut.edu.au/ethics/humans/stdconditions.jsp
Specific: None apply

Decisions related to low risk ethical review are subject to ratification at the next available UHREC meeting. You will only be contacted again in relation to this matter if UHREC raises any additional questions or concerns.

Whilst the data collection of your project has received QUT ethical clearance, the decision to commence and authority to commence may be dependent on factors beyond the remit of the QUT ethics review process. For example, your research may need ethics clearance from other organisations or permissions from other organisations to access staff. Therefore the proposed data collection should not commence until you have satisfied these requirements.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any queries.

We wish you all the best with your research.

Kind regards

Janette Lamb on behalf of the Chair UHREC

Appendix B

Information for Prospective Participants

Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Information for Prospective Participants

The following research activity has been reviewed via QUT arrangements for the conduct of research involving human participation.
If you choose to participate, you will be provided with more detailed participant information, including who you can contact if you have any concerns.

The Three R's, relationships, relationships, relationships: How can teacher-student relationships be more positive and productive in secondary schools?

Research team contacts

Principal Researcher: Mark Herriman, PhD Student, Queensland University of Technology

Supervisors: Professor Marilyn Campbell; Dr Peter Boman

What is the purpose of the research?

The purpose of this research is to examine teachers, students, parents, counsellors, and school leadership teams' ideal teacher-student relationships and the actions they believe achieve this to inform an intervention to encourage positive and productive relationships to enhance student learning.

Are you looking for people like me?

The research team is looking for secondary school students and their parents, secondary school teachers, school counsellors and school leadership teams.

What will you ask me to do?

Your participation will involve small focus group and/or interviews to examine the actions that educational stakeholders believe contribute to a positive and productive teacher-student relationship.

Are there any risks for me in taking part?

The research team does not believe there are any risks beyond normal day-to-day living associated with your participation in this research. There is an element of inconvenience associated with this research in terms of the time required to participate in focus groups (60 minutes) and/or interviews (30 minutes). There may also be discomfort for participants within focus groups and interviews if they find that their views differ greatly from those of others.

Are there any benefits for me in taking part?

It is expected that this project will benefit future teachers, students and their families through participating in research to inform intervention strategies to encourage positive and productive teacher-student relationships to enhance student learning.

Will I be compensated for my time?

We would very much appreciate your participation in this research and a summary of relevant findings can be provided if requested.

Who is funding this research?

Nil

I am interested – what should I do next?

If you would like to participate in this study, please email Mark Herriman (m.herriman@student.qut.edu.au)

You will be provided with further information to ensure that your decision and consent to participate is fully informed.

Appendix C

Participant Information and Consent Form – Focus Groups

RESEARCH TEAM

Principal Researcher:	Mark Herriman, PhD Student, Queensland University of Technology
Supervisors:	Professor Marilyn Campbell; Dr Peter Boman

DESCRIPTION

This project is being undertaken as part of PhD for Mark Herriman.

The purpose of this project is to examine teachers, students, parents, counsellors, and school leadership teams' ideal teacher-student relationships and the actions they believe achieve this to inform an intervention to encourage positive and productive relationships to enhance student learning.

You are invited to participate in this project as you may have thoughts and opinions on the actions that lead to achieving a positive and productive teacher-student relationship. Questions will consider how you would define the teacher-student relationship, how you believe they are established, and your perception on how they are maintained.

PARTICIPATION

Participation will involve completing participating in a focus group interview. This focus group will be conducted for the duration of approximately 60 minutes.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you agree to participate you do not have to complete any question(s) you are uncomfortable answering. Your decision to participate or not participate will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with QUT. If you do agree to participate you can withdraw from the project without comment or penalty. Any identifiable information already obtained from you will be destroyed.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

It is expected that this project will benefit future teachers, students and their families through participating in research to inform intervention strategies to encourage positive and productive teacher-student relationships to enhance student learning.

RISKS

The research team does not believe there are any risks beyond normal day-to-day living associated with your participation in this research. There is also an element of inconvenience associated with this research in terms of the time required to participate in focus groups (60 minutes). There may also be discomfort for participants within focus groups if they find that their views differ greatly from those of others.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially unless required by law. The names of individual persons are not required in any of the responses.

The audio recording will be destroyed at the end of the project. The audio recording will not be used for any other purpose. Access to the audio recording will be by the researchers only.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

We would like to ask you to sign a written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate.

QUESTIONS / FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT

If have any questions or require further information please contact one of the research team members below.

Mark Herriman

Queensland University of Technology
0408240282
m.herriman@student.qut.edu.au

Professor Marilyn Campbell
School of Cultural and Professional Learning
Queensland University of Technology
(07) 3138 3806
ma.campbell@qut.edu.au

CONCERNS / COMPLAINTS REGARDING THE CONDUCT OF THE PROJECT

QUT is committed to research integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects. However, if you do have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the QUT Research Ethics Unit on (07) 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au. The QUT Research Ethics Unit is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an impartial manner.

Thank you for helping with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information

RESEARCH TEAM CONTACTS

Mark Herriman

Queensland University of Technology
0408240282
m.herriman@student.qut.edu.au

Professor Marilyn Campbell
School of Cultural and Professional Learning
Queensland University of Technology
(07) 3138 3806
ma.campbell@qut.edu.au

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information document regarding this project.
- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.
- Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team.
- Understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty.
- Understand that you can contact the Research Ethics Unit on (07) 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project.
- Understand that the project will undertake an audio recording.
- Agree to participate in the project.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....

STATEMENT OF PARENTAL CONSENT FOR CHILD'S PARTICIPATION

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information document regarding this project.
- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.
- Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team.
- Understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty.
- Understand that you can contact the Research Ethics Unit on (07) 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project.
- Have discussed the project with your child and what is required of them if participating.

- Understand that the project will undertake an audio recording.
- Agree to participate in the project.

Please tick the relevant box below:

☐ I agree for the focus group to be audio recorded.

☐ I do not agree for the focus group to be audio recorded.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....

Appendix D

Participant Information and Consent Form – Interviews

RESEARCH TEAM

Principal Researcher:	Mark Herriman, PhD Student, Queensland University of Technology
Supervisors:	Professor Marilyn Campbell; Dr Peter Boman

DESCRIPTION

This project is being undertaken as part of PhD for Mark Herriman.

The purpose of this project is to examine teachers, students, parents, counsellors, and school leadership teams' ideal teacher-student relationships and the actions they believe achieve this to inform an intervention to encourage positive and productive relationships to enhance student learning.

You are invited to participate in this project as you may have thoughts and opinions on the actions that lead to achieving a positive and productive teacher-student relationship. Questions will consider how you would define the teacher-student relationship, how you believe they are established, and your perception on how they are maintained.

PARTICIPATION

Participation will involve completing an audio recorded interview. This interview will be conducted for the duration of approximately 30 minutes.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you agree to participate you do not have to complete any question(s) you are uncomfortable answering. Your decision to participate or not participate will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with QUT. If you do agree to participate you can withdraw from the project without comment or penalty. Any identifiable information already obtained from you will be destroyed.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

It is expected that this project will benefit future teachers, students and their families through participating in research to inform intervention strategies to encourage positive and productive teacher-student relationships to enhance student learning.

RISKS

The research team does not believe there are any risks beyond normal day-to-day living associated with your participation in this research. There is also an element of inconvenience associated with this research in terms of the time required to participate in focus groups (60 minutes). There may also be discomfort for participants within focus groups if they find that their views differ greatly from those of others.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially unless required by law. The names of individual persons are not required in any of the responses.

The audio recording will be destroyed at the end of the project. The audio recording will not be used for any other purpose. Access to the audio recording will be by the researchers only.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

We would like to ask you to sign a written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate.

QUESTIONS / FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT

If have any questions or require further information please contact one of the research team members below.

Mark Herriman

Queensland University of Technology
0408240282
m.herriman@student.qut.edu.au

Professor Marilyn Campbell
School of Cultural and Professional Learning
Queensland University of Technology
(07) 3138 3806
ma.campbell@qut.edu.au

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Thank you for helping with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information

RESEARCH TEAM CONTACTS

Mark Herriman

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m.herriman@student.qut.edu.au

Professor Marilyn Campbell
School of Cultural and Professional Learning
Queensland University of Technology
(07) 3138 3806
ma.campbell@qut.edu.au

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information document regarding this project.
- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.
- Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team.
- Understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty.
- Understand that you can contact the Research Ethics Unit on (07) 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project.
- Understand that the project will undertake an audio recording.
- Agree to participate in the project.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....