

**“DESPITE EVERYTHING IT’S THE
BEST JOB I’VE EVER HAD”:
THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST IN VICTORIAN
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**

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ABSTRACT

School psychologists are employed in positions that entail working in a variety of professional roles as part of their day-to-day work within schools. In this complex environment, a number of issues are found to influence school psychologists' roles and their ability to perform their day-to-day work, such as competing demands of stakeholders, and conflicts between actual and ideal duties. Despite these issues, many school psychologists remain in their jobs and derive satisfaction from it. However, previous research is only suggestive of why school psychologists remain in their jobs. The utilisation of quantitative methods may be a contributing factor, as they do not permit an in-depth understanding of school psychologists' multifaceted roles. To date, few qualitative studies have explored school psychologists' lived experience. Therefore, this research asks school psychologists themselves about their experience of working within the Victorian government education system in Australia.

Nine participants were recruited, one from each Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD, or *Department*) region in Victoria. Participants engaged in a tape-recorded semi-structured in-depth interview with transcripts analysed utilising Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The method was a distinctive way of delving into the richness of school psychologists' experience that previous studies have not achieved.

Results indicate that despite feeling overwhelmed, participants enjoyed making a difference in others' lives. Findings are encapsulated in four superordinate themes: *The joy of being able to make a difference; Navigating the*

system; Wanting to be able to contribute to the wellbeing of the school community, and *Feeling the pressure of workload and reaching my limit.* Most participants identified that there was greater scope for increased recognition of and utilisation of their skills in relation to education and the wellbeing of the school community. Implications of the present study include the need to foster a common understanding between school psychologists and the educational community.

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or part from a thesis submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

The thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

The Faculty of Human Ethics Committee of La Trobe University (FHEC 07/95) and the Department of Education (SOS003622) approved all research procedures reported in the thesis.

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Dearest Dave: “I smash you!” ☺

Never let anyone steal your mojo.

PROLOGUE

As a qualitative researcher, I believe that it is important to acknowledge all experiences, beliefs and potential biases related to potential issues prior to engaging in a study; therefore, a summary is outlined in this prologue.

My professional training history and professional experiences has been diverse. My university training includes a Bachelor of Arts, Honours (Disability Studies), Master of Psychology (Counselling Psychology) and a professional doctorate (current). I had commenced a Master of School Psychology, however at the time did not enjoy the training program and withdrew to work fulltime. I have not completed any qualifications in education, and often felt as though this left a gap in my knowledge, skills and experience I needed to work in the profession.

When I was younger, my career choices varied and I did not decide that I wanted to be a psychologist until I completed my Masters, realising that I enjoyed what I was doing. I “fell” into the profession of school psychology early in my career, lured by the opportunity to work with young people and the flexibility of not working in the school holidays. It took several years for me to secure a fulltime ongoing position, and on several occasions, I left the profession in order to “test the waters” elsewhere. However, something always lured me back and I have worked consistently in the profession for the last six and a half years. For the past three years, I have worked as a network coordinator, providing line management for an allied health team.

Working as a school psychologist on and off for over a decade has been a rollercoaster ride. I have worked in four of the nine DEECD regions in Victoria,

Australia (Barwon South Western, Northern Metropolitan, Western Metropolitan, and Eastern Metropolitan). In my experience, whilst each region is part of the *Department*, they all have their own idiosyncrasies in the way that they work, for example, in how they employ staff, support them, or interpret and implement policy.

When researching a topic for my thesis, I was curious to know about the experience of other school psychologists across the state, and if differences exist across regions. As I began to delve into the research literature, I realised that there was a paucity of qualitative research in relation to what it was like to work as a school psychologist worldwide and specifically in Victoria, Australia. It was the perfect opportunity to give the profession a voice and hear their stories. The rich descriptions given by the participants were fascinating and gave me an insight into the profession that I would not have known if I had not undertaken this research. For example, undertaking this thesis has enlightened my understanding of the broader implications of working in a systemic organisation and the impacts on school psychologists. In addition, I have come away with an increased understanding of how the macro and microorganisms are inextricably linked. Furthermore, I appreciate the need to work at both levels to improve the future outcomes of the profession.

I am passionate about the profession and strongly believe it is one to be proud of. Sir Frances Bacon coined the phrase “knowledge is power” in 1597, and I hope that by making the unknown known, others will also hear, see, feel, understand and appreciate what makes up the unique profession of being a school psychologist, and point to ways to enhance the professional experience.

CHAPTER 1 - LITERATURE REVIEW
THE ROLES OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS AND ISSUES
AFFECTING THEIR ROLES

1.1 Introduction - Definitions of the roles of school psychologists

A number of professional associations have defined the roles of school psychologists. However, only definitions by organisations from the United States and Australia are provided for the purposes of this thesis. This is due to the bulk of research relating to school psychologists originating from the United States and participants from this thesis being based in Victoria, Australia. The definitions that relate to the role of school psychologists indicate that school psychologists in countries such as Australia and the United States provide similar services (Oakland & Cunningham, 1997; Idsoe, 2003).

The role and definitions of school psychologists and school counsellors in the United States are comparable (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012; National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2012). For example, both professions help all students in areas such as academic achievement, and personal/social development (ASCA, 2012, NASP, 2012). Additionally, depending on state registration, both professions generally require teaching experience and qualifications (ASCA, 2012; NASP, 2012). According to the NASP (2012), the main differences between the two professions are that school counselling does not include training or work with special education populations, and school psychologists generally require three years of graduate

school training and a 1,200 hour internship (versus Master's degree and 600 hours internship).

In Australia, the terms 'guidance officer' and 'school psychologist' are used (Faulkner, 2007a). Whilst these terms are often used interchangeably, there is no current consistent use of professional title in Australia (Faulkner, 2007a). Historically, guidance officers had double certification as teachers and psychologists. Over the past 20 years, this trend has been changing in states such as Western Australia, New South Wales, and Victoria (Faulkner, 2007a). Beginning school psychologists now enter the profession after approximately six years of university study in psychology. Accompanying these changes, and reflecting a global trend, the term 'school psychologist' has become the most widely accepted professional designation for specialist-trained psychologists working in education systems (Faulkner, 2007a). Given the similarities between school psychologists, school counsellors and guidance officers, and considering the global trend, the term 'school psychologist' will be used throughout this study when referring to the profession. The term 'educational psychologist' is consistent with the profession in the United Kingdom and New Zealand (Faulkner, 2007a). The terms 'school counselor' or 'educational psychologist' are only used in this thesis when referring to studies that utilised participants from this profession.

School psychologists are employed to apply their psychological and educational expertise to assist individuals, parents, teachers, and school administrators. The aim of these interactions is to improve the educational achievement, and social and emotional development, of students (Student

Wellbeing Division [SWD], 2010). Clients may present with a range of issues and assistance may be provided through tailored interventions. Whilst the roles, functions, and responsibilities of school psychologists can vary considerably, both within and across States and countries, a comparative review of Australian public-sector school psychology services (Armstrong et al., 2000) identified the common major professional responsibilities across schooling systems. Furthermore, these responsibilities can be broken into four main areas – direct service, indirect service, whole school service and systems service (Australian Psychological Society [APS], 2008). A summary of some of the service delivery responsibilities are included in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1

Summary of service delivery responsibilities for school psychologists (APS, 2008, p. 6).

Direct Service

- assessment of student's cognitive, academic, social-emotional or behavioural functioning
- development, implementation and evaluation of individual/group interventions (counselling, behaviour modification, whole school programs)
- developing procedures and providing support to the school community during/ following a critical incident

Indirect Service

- advice and consultation with teachers, parents and other stakeholders
- consultation and training with staff to address individual behaviour or learning difficulties
- development of a whole school approach to behaviour management and wellbeing

Whole School Service

- prevention, intervention and post-vention practices such as parent information sessions, implementation of programs or strategies or referral to appropriate external services

Systems Service

- coordination of teachers, parents/carers, external agencies to address the psychological needs of a student
 - assist with policy and practices in developing relationships with external personnel such as mental health professionals
-

Other responsibilities may include advocacy, in-house teamwork with other professionals, and participation in specially funded innovative projects with a small number of schools, wellness promotion, research, program development, professional learning, and organisational development (APS, 2000; Faulkner, 2007a; NASP, 2007; NASP, 2012).

Despite similar role definitions for school psychologists in Australia and the United States, there appears to be a mismatch between these definitions and actual practice (Idsoe, 2003). Areas of contention include ideal service delivery, what research has identified as best practice, and competing perspectives of stakeholders (Culbreth et al., 2005; Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005; Leuwerke, Walker, & Shi, 2009; Lieberman, 2004; Merrell et al., 2006). For example, the identity of the school psychologist has traditionally included assessment roles (Bramston & Rice, 2000; Natasi, 2000). Whilst a range of studies confirms that school psychologists engage in a range of activities, assessment continues to be a major component of the school psychologists' duties. On average, assessment activities take up 40 to 60% of school psychologists' time, however, this figure may be as high as 75% (Bramlett, Murphy, Johnson, Wallingsford, & Hall, 2002; Corkum, French, & Dorey, 2007; Farrell, 2010; Harris & Joy, 2010; Idsoe, 2006; Jordan, Hindes, & Saklofske, 2009; Magi & Kikas, 2009; Martin, 2001; Reschly, 2000).

In addition, teachers and Principals, operating from different philosophical and methodological guidelines, have their own agendas and typically have little knowledge of the role of the school psychologist (Paisley, 2001). Therefore, role definition continues to be a significant challenge for school psychologists due to

the expectations that are defined and applied by the individual, and the influence of others within and outside of the school system (Clemens, Milsom, & Cashwell, 2009; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008).

1.2 Defining the roles of school psychologists through the lived experience

Whilst the general professional definitions of school psychology are important and have a broad impact on how the profession is perceived internally and externally, it only gives a snapshot of what school psychologists do in their day-to-day work (McCarthy et al., 2010; Merrell et al., 2006). Furthermore, definitions cannot capture the diversity of roles that school psychologists fill, sufficiently express how each school psychologist practices in the range of settings, nor articulate their unique perspective on the field (Kratochwill & Stoiber, 2000; Natasi, 2000). The definitions of the role of the school psychologists:

... cannot possibly convey the wealth of experience, passion, and personal commitment that individual school psychologists bring to their work.

Perhaps a better way to illustrate what school psychology looks like at the point of actual practice is to catch a glimpse of what professional life is like for several school psychologists (Merrell et al., 2006, p. 5).

Despite this recommendation, little research to date has examined the day-to-day lived experience of the role of the school psychologist from within the education system. In addition, most research articles have originated from the United States utilising school counsellors and quantitative approaches,

demonstrating that the depth and breadth of investigations into the experience of Victorian government school psychologists is lacking.

Five authors have described their lived experience of working as a school psychologist (Brelsford, 2010; Holowiak-Urquhart & Taylor, 2005; Lambert, 2000; Merrell et al., 2006; Williamson, 1999). All authors except Williamson (1999) originate from the United States. All authors are school psychologists except Holowiak-Urquhart and Taylor (2005). Whilst all authors described their day-to-day lived experience from their own interpretive framework, the focus of each article was different. For example, Holowiak-Urquhart and Taylor (2005) examined a school counsellor's log and identified three qualities of an effective counsellor: the ability to remain flexible, to build relationships, and to remain objective when dealing with the many demands on time and energy. Holowiak-Urquhart and Taylor (2005) argued that educators, policy makers, and administrators needed to experience what counsellors actually do in schools in order to understand trends in student, administrative, teacher, and community needs and adjust to education, standards, and policy. Lambert (2000) described her experience of being a school psychologist through six short stories. Merrell et al. (2006) interviewed six school psychologists who agreed to talk about their professional experiences and views, with the vignettes included in a book. Williamson (1999) described his experience on an exchange program to Australia.

Although these articles highlight the range of personal and professional experiences of some school psychologists and school counsellors in the United States and Canada (Brelsford, 2010; Holowiak-Urquhart & Taylor, 2005; Lambert; 2000; Merrell et al., 2006; Williamson, 1999), their brevity does not

capture the true essence of the lived experience of school psychologists. Whilst some researchers have argued that the role of the school psychologist in the United States and Canada is similar to Australia, others suggest that these studies may not readily translate to the Australian context (Oakland, Faulkner, & Annan, 2005; Thielking, 2006a). Furthermore, Williamson argued that: “At times, it was difficult to work in a system different to my own ... there is not always a right or wrong way to do to things” (Williamson, 1999, p. 193). In other words, some experiences of these authors might apply to participants in this thesis, although contextual differences are also expected. Merrell et al. (2006) highlight the importance of understanding the individual nature of school psychologists’ experience:

Although tied together by a collective professional identity and associations, every school psychologist has a unique story, makes unique contributions, and follows a unique path. And yet, there is a commonality among them that ties them together and that reflects the shared vision and unique identity that defines school psychology ... this vision and identity stem [s] from a focus on affecting the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional problems of children and youths in educational settings through the effective use of psychological principles and procedures and through the medium of ‘school psychology’. This vision is also clearly tied to the personal commitment and idealism of those individuals who choose to join the field of school psychology. Although school psychologists have differing backgrounds, job descriptions, expectations, and professional ambitions, as a group they share a collective desire to positively influence

the lives of children, adolescents, and their families. It is the incredible power of this collective idealism that fuels the impact and potential of the field (Merrell et al., 2006, p. 13).

Only six known studies have examined the lived experience of school psychologists from within a qualitative framework, and these are presented in Appendix A, Table 1.2. Five of these studies involved school counsellors (Christianson & Everall, 2008; Christianson & Everall, 2009; Evans & Payne, 2008; Harris, 2009; Wood, 2010). The study conducted by Miller, Witt, and Finley (1981) included school psychologists. Christianson and Everall's two reports appear to have used the same sample of participants, therefore, are interpreted as one study. All studies utilised the method of in-depth interviews, therefore, this information is not presented in Table 1.2. For ease of reference, all tables are presented in the appendices, starting with Table 1.2 in Appendix A.

A critical review of the studies presented in Table 1.2 indicates that school counsellors in New Zealand and the United States revered the professional relationships that they experienced with students (Christianson & Everall, 2008; Christianson & Everall, 2009; Evans & Payne, 2008; Miller et al., 1981; Wood, 2010). Whilst participants remained hopeful that student's lives would improve, they acknowledged the personal and professional impact that student issues had on them (Christianson & Everall, 2009). Subsequently, the need for self-care and professional support was recognised. Professional support included collegial support from schools and supervision (Evans & Payne, 2008; Miller et al., 1981; Wood, 2010). Despite the pleasure that school counsellor's experienced in helping others, they experienced workload stress and burnout and pressure

through unrealistic expectations placed on them by others in schools (Christianson & Everall, 2008; Christianson & Everall, 2009; Miller et al., 1981).

The studies presented in Table 1.2 highlight that school counsellors are able to articulate their experiences of their professional lives via qualitative methods that contrast objective assessments of quantifiable aspects such as workload and office space (Christianson & Everall, 2008; Christianson & Everall, 2009; Harris, 2009). For example, some of the role challenges that Harris (2009) found for her participants were symbolised by the physical space, workload expectations and resources provided for their work. One school counsellor reported that “... *there’s not enough money into it, there’s not enough time, not enough space, just not enough for what we know we can do*” (Harris, 2009, p. 176). Similarly, Miller et al. (1981) reported “*There are too many kids with too many needs and we are spread too thin; there is not enough time for in depth psychotherapy and counselling; I’m burned out and drained emotionally from solving everyone’s problems*” (Miller et al., 1981, p. 1).

School counsellors and school psychologists have also articulated how challenging their relationship with the education system can be and the effect this has on them (Christianson & Everall, 2008; Christianson & Everall, 2009; Harris, 2009; Miller et al., 1981). For some school counsellors, working across a number of schools each week made their roles more challenging. For example, participants reported:

The bureaucracy is inflexible; The procedures don’t fit what we need to do ...; I feel like a step child or an appendage; It is difficult having to relate to so many different people in so many different schools; Teachers’ and

Principals' expectations are not realistic in terms of what psychologists can and cannot do; I dislike being evaluated by someone who does not know about or understand the work of psychologists (Miller et al., 1981, p. 2).

Perhaps compounded by being an 'outsider', school counsellors also felt as though their ability to control and influence school leadership was limited (Christianson & Everall, 2008; Christianson & Everall, 2009; Harris, 2009). This was demonstrated through a lack of appreciation for the work of school counsellors and what can be termed 'institutional insensitivity' (Harris, 2009). Institutional insensitivity can be perceived as an external challenge jeopardising the practice of the profession for school psychologists (Jimerson et al., 2007). One participant was distressed that the lack of appreciation continued through to her last day at work:

I didn't get a leaving card. I didn't get any acknowledgement in assembly. I just left ... The head didn't even say goodbye to me. One or two of the teachers bought me a little gift and one teacher in particular; her class made me a card. It was all done slightly surreptitiously. And I'd worked there for five years in total. So it was a really painful ending actually (Harris, 2009, p. 178).

In similar findings, Christianson and Everall (2009) report that as participants' feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness increased so did their desire for control. Further research is required to determine whether other school psychologists feel less satisfied with their jobs when they perceive a lack of control over their job functioning.

School counsellors' experience of challenging student issues can often be processed individually (Christianson & Everall, 2008; Christianson & Everall, 2009; Evans & Payne (2008). For example, some participants described their personal journey and the need to compartmentalise their experiences so they could continue with their work (Christianson & Everall, 2009). Other participants were able to incorporate their experience into a life lesson and applied this to their future work with clients.

The concept of remaining in the profession despite the challenges faced have been reported in qualitative and quantitative studies, with some studies to be critically reviewed later in this thesis (Harris, 2009; Jimerson et al., 2007; Levinson, 1990; Miller et al., 1981). For example, most school psychologists enjoy the flexibility in working in the education system, and working with young people to make a difference. Some school psychologists have reported, "*We are allowed a lot of flexibility in defining our roles and organizing our work; [and] My work provides me with an opportunity for me to feel I'm helping others*" (Miller et al., 1981, p. 1). However, if school psychologists feel unsupported, and their roles become more difficult and less satisfying, they are more likely to leave the profession (Evans & Payne, 2008). Despite the experience of school counsellors making its way into the research literature, there has been little investigation into the personal impact that student issues such as client suicide has on this group of professionals (Christianson & Everall, 2008; Christianson & Everall, 2009; Evans & Payne, 2008; Harris, 2009). This thesis aims to contribute to this gap in existing knowledge.

1.3 Perceived issues that affect the role of school psychologists

School psychologists are employed in positions that entail working in a variety of professional roles as part of their day-to-day work within school systems (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). Whilst most school psychologists report that they enjoy their job, a growing number report that they are becoming increasingly dissatisfied (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; DeMato & Curcio, 2004; Evans & Payne, 2008; McCarthy, Van Horn Kerne, Calfa, Lambert, & Guzman, 2010; Rayle, 2006). In contemporary life, educational reform has resulted in increased demands and expectations on school psychologists (Bryant & Constantine, 2006; Culbreth, Scarborough, Banks-Johnson, & Solomon, 2005; Sears & Navin, 2001). Despite this, many school psychologists report wanting to expand their role (Idsoe, 2006; Tharinger & Palomares, 2004). However, different perspectives between school psychologists and Principals and teachers regarding the appropriate roles and duties of school psychologists compound the issue (Leuwerke, Walker, & Shi, 2009).

Consequently, many school psychologists have reported higher stress levels (McCarthy et al., 2010; Pierson-Hubney & Archambault, 1987). High stress can cause emotional and physical problems leaving school psychologists more vulnerable to burnout (Huebner & Huberty, 1988; Levinson, 1991; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006; Young & Lambie, 2007). In turn, burnout can not only lead to ineffective service delivery, but it can influence retention and impact on those with whom school psychologists' work (Curtis, Grier, & Hunley, 2003; Evans & Payne, 2008; Low, 2009). In order to promote school psychologists'

wellbeing and enhance positive collaboration with teachers and Principals, there is a need for increased understanding of the experiences of school psychologists (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Leuwerke, Walker, & Shi, 2009; McCarthy et al., 2010; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000; Thielking, 2006a).

This thesis addressed the need for increased understanding of the experiences of school psychologists by asking school psychologists themselves about their 'lived experience' in their professional roles. Giving the profession a voice via a method that has not been undertaken with Australian school psychologists will add another dimension to the quantitative research data. Previous research has focussed on quantitative methods with school psychologists or school counsellors largely in the United States, with many findings now dated (McCarthy et al., 2010). The qualitative method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) will contribute to a greater understanding of how school psychologists experience their role within a public service organisation.

Computer searches on electronic databases yielded studies for this literature review. The databases of ProQuest, Ovid, PsychINFO and PsychArticles were the most prolific. The key words identified for this thesis included (school psycholog*) OR (school counsel*) AND (professional roles) OR (role conflict) OR (impact of role) OR (system*) OR (experience) OR (self-perception) OR (job satisfaction) OR (stress) OR (burnout) OR (wellbeing) AND (qualitative). The search was not limited by date in order to capture all possible relevant articles on the topics. Dissertations were included in the search;

however, pursuit of them was limited due to the cost of accessing most theses from overseas.

A number of studies have sought to determine the issues that affect the role of school psychologists around the world and their ability to perform their day-to-day tasks (Jimerson, Oakland, & Farrell, 2006). These complex challenges are present across cultures and countries and can be categorised into four distinct domains. These include *internal*, *external*, *systems*, and *person* (Low, 2009). These domains are conceptualised as interacting, with the degree of match or mismatch defining school psychologists' level of wellness, professional identity and daily roles (Bryan & Griffin, 2010; Maslach, 2001). Supportive environments include elements such as respect and appreciation. Negative characteristics, such as bureaucracy and administrative interference, are minimised (Lambie, 2006).

Figure 1.1 presents the interactions between the four domains.

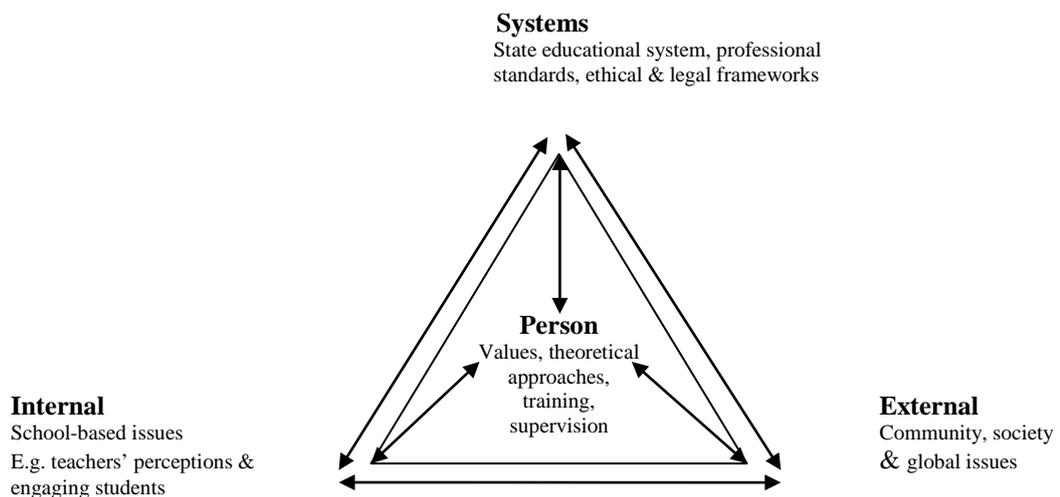


Figure 1.1. Triangle of interactions (Low, 2009, p 77).

Research into these domains has contributed to our understanding of how the profession has evolved and been affected by issues such as changing role definitions, student populations, and school environments (Moe & Perera-Diltz, 2009). The following section will critically review the previous research that has examined these domains that affect the role of the school psychologist. Particular reference is made to key findings that are of potential interest to this thesis.

1.4 Internal Challenges

Internal challenges may include role clarity, increasing workload, a lack of research and evaluation, lack of professional standards governing services, teachers' and Principals' attitudes towards school psychologists, students' willingness to seek support, and lack of leadership in the profession (Bunce & Willower, 2001; Jimerson et al., 2007; Low, 2009; Paisley, 2001).

A number of studies have examined the range of internal challenges that school psychologists face working in the education system. Five prominent studies are presented in Appendix B, Table 1.3.

A critical analysis of the studies presented in Table 1.3 suggests that school counsellors and school psychologists derived most of their rewards at work through their therapeutic work with students. However, their sense of professional identity and belonging was affected by their level of integration within the school (Cromarty & Richards, 2009; Harris, 2009; Low, 2009; Trombetta et al., 2009). For example, school counsellors employed on a contract or who worked part-time felt like 'outsiders' (Harris, 2009). School counsellors

employed by the school or working full-time felt like ‘insiders’ (Harris, 2009). Subsequently, ‘outsiders’ felt more vulnerable to pressure from school leadership, whereas ‘insiders’ felt that they were able to contribute effectively and influence leadership (Harris, 2009). The concept that school psychologists who work part-time or in multiple schools feel a different sense of connection when compared to those who service one school, have been reported elsewhere (Gade & Houdek, 1993; Thielking, 2006a).

Other challenges identified by school counsellors include the difficulty in establishing a professional role in the school and time for building professional relationships. Additionally, working with other professionals in schools, sharing student information with teachers, and balancing their preferred practice with the needs of students have been identified as challenges (Cromarty & Richards, 2009). School psychologists have also argued that they would like to be further integrated into their schools, be considered more useful to the school, and be appreciated for what they do in the school (Trombetta et al., 2009). If school psychologists are poorly integrated into schools, professional practice can become highly subjective and dependent on the theoretical orientation and work ethic of the psychologist (Harris, 2009; Trombetta et al., 2009). Whilst Trombetta et al. interviewed a large sample of Italian school psychologists, extrapolating the findings to Victorian school psychologists should be done with caution due to local differences between Italian and Australian school psychology. However, Jimerson et al. (2007) suggest that there are more similarities than differences between school psychologists in countries such as Australia and Italy.

In a dated yet relevant study, Bramston and Rice (2000) studied the perspectives of 155 Queensland school psychologists in relation to their role. The survey examined a range of aspects including the difficult parts of the job and the job demands for which they felt inadequately trained (Bramston & Rice, 2000). Environmental constraints were rated by this sample of school psychologists as lower priorities than student concerns. Environmental constraints included administration and workplace issues such as writing reports, supervising others, and computer literacy. In other words, school psychologists in this study were more challenged by the issues students presented with, rather than systems issues (Low, 2009). This study provides background context relating to an Australian sample of school psychologists and assists in understanding challenges that have shaped the development of school psychologists in Queensland. However, due to age of the study and location of participants, the findings should be interpreted with caution, as they may not apply to Victorian school psychologists.

In a recent study, Jimerson et al. (2007) investigated the perceptions of school psychologists in relation to a range of role factors. Whilst a number of countries were sampled, findings from only the Australian participants ($n = 212$) are reviewed in this thesis. When interpreting the findings from this study, the limitations need to be taken into consideration including the lack of clarity around the selection process and spread of the sample. Therefore, generalisability to all school psychologists in Australia should be done with caution. For example, the study suggests that Victorian school psychologists had an average of six years teaching experience, which is no longer applicable in Victoria, and school psychologists now only require post-graduate qualifications in psychology and

full registration as a psychologist, and do not require any teaching experience (Armstrong et al., 2000; Faulkner, 1999; SWD, 2010).

Despite these limitations, Jimerson et al.'s (2007) study provides current information that contributes to the understanding of the challenges that face Australian school psychologists in working in the educational system. Results from this study suggest that Australian school psychologists most enjoy working with children, families, and teachers. Effecting positive changes, making a difference, the variety of tasks, and flexibility of the role follows (Jimerson et al., 2007). School psychologists from the United States in this study also reported similar areas of satisfaction. This may be due to the similarities between these countries. Similarities include population mix, economies, developed public school systems, democratic governments, English as a first language, establishment of school psychology, and values. These similarities may influence the acceptance and practice of the profession in both countries (Oakland, 2000; Oakland et al., 2005; Thielking, 2006a).

Australian school psychologists reported a number of undesirable aspects of the role. These aspects include administrative burden/paperwork, overwhelming work/caseload, low salary and status, and limited time for prevention and interventions (Jimerson et al., 2007). However, these findings were not consistent across countries. For example, only Russian and Australian school psychologists ranked low salary and status as dissatisfactions. Furthermore, only Albanian and Australian school psychologists agreed that limited time for prevention and interventions was a least favoured aspect. Similarly, only Australian, German and Italian school psychologists agreed that

they spent more time counselling and testing students than on any other tasks.

Whilst there are some similarities across countries, findings demonstrate that local differences exist which reflect each nation's priorities and values (Oakland et al., 2005). Other studies have also reported mixed findings around aspects such as salary and job security, with some school counsellors reporting them as issues but not in others (DeMato & Curcio, 2004; Kolodinsky et al., 2009).

In summary, the studies critically reviewed in this section reveal that school psychologists face a number of unique challenges when working in the education system. These challenges include the diversity of the profession, different environmental demands, and multiple role definers. The general character and structure of school psychology services and growing incidence of issues facing young people and their families are also challenges. Working in the public service can be difficult as there are multiple clients and stakeholders. The public service environment can also encompass bureaucratic policies that guide services, specific levels of accountability, and particular expectations of service delivery. Compounding these challenges are the professional legal guidelines, ethical guidelines, registration requirements, and the number of professional expectations. These challenges have the ability to influence school psychologists' opinion of their roles. Despite the limitations identified in the studies summarised in Table 1.3, findings provide information about the views of school counsellors and school psychologists. In addition, findings provide a context and basis for critically examining the lived experience of participants in this thesis. Further exploration is required to examine current attitudes and perceptions and preferred professional realities of school psychologists in Victoria in order to determine if

there are any state-by-state differences. If so, the future development of the profession in Victoria can be tailored to local needs.

1.4.1 Role clarity

Role “denotes a set of expectations placed on an individual occupying a particular position (e.g. school counselor) in an organization (e.g. school)” (Culbreth et al., 2005, p. 58). However, limited understanding and a lack of clarity regarding the role of school psychologists has been highly visible and problematic for many years (Harrison, 2009; Lieberman, 2004). In conjunction with expectations, limited understanding and a lack of role clarity, school psychologists have their own viewpoints about the professional roles and functions of the profession. Subsequently, there is potential for school psychologists to experience a professional climate of increasing role stress (Culbreth et al., 2005; Evans & Payne, 2008). A number of definitions relate to school psychologists’ roles including the Australian Psychological Society [APS] (2000) and National Association of School Psychologists [NASP] (2007). These definitions may contribute to the different perspectives that Principals and teachers have from those of school psychologists. However, a number of other factors may influence the areas of agreement and disagreement between these groups. Potential influences include changes within the setting itself, such as increased levels of depression in students (Greenberg et al., 2003; Sawyer et al., 2001). Other potential influences include spending increasing time on administrative duties, pressure from teachers and parents to ‘fix’ problems

quickly, and working within the context of escalating burnout (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Rayle, 2006).

1.4.2 Increasing workload

There is a widely held view among school psychologists, teachers, Principals, parents and professionals who work for other support services about the chronic shortage of school psychologists (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Farrell, 2010). The psychologist-to-student ratio has been argued to influence the increasing workload of school psychologists (Fagan, 2004). Furthermore, there has never been a time when there have been sufficient personnel, and the demand for school psychologists is greater than can be accommodated on a one-to-one basis (Bradley-Johnson & Dean, 2000; Crespi & Politikos, 2004; Symonds, 1933). The shortage of school psychologists in the United States has been consistently forecast since the late 1980s, and was estimated to peak in 2010 (Curtis et al., 2004; Davis et al., 2004; Jimerson et al., 2007; McIntosh, 2004; Tharinger & Palomares, 2004; Worrell, Skaggs, & Brown, 2006). It is unclear whether further investigation into this phenomenon has occurred in the United States or in other countries across the world. However, the potential implications and adverse consequences for schools are severe with the types and quality of services delivered by school psychologists being affected (Fagan, 1988; Tharinger & Palomares, 2004).

High or low student numbers affect the delivery and strength of services (Curtis et al., 2004; Faulkner, 2007a, 2007b). Furthermore, shortages of school

psychologists can narrow the school psychologists' role and can potentially affect job satisfaction (Farrell, 2010; Sheridan & D'Amato, 2004). In other words, if most school psychologists are too busy, their ability to provide an effective range of services that reduce psychopathology and improve children's outcomes is limited (Davis et al., 2004). In addition, introducing new work for school psychologists can be difficult if they already carry large caseloads (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010). For instance, the ratio of one psychologist to 1,500 students or less has been associated with more desirable intervention-based services such as individual counselling rather than assessment services (Curtis et al., 2002; Smith, 1984).

The shortage of school psychologists also affects the perception that teachers have of school psychologists' value and contribution (Gilman & Gabriel, 2004). For example, whilst many teachers report that they value the work of school psychologists, they would like to see more of them. Additionally, teachers would like to see school psychologists carrying out tasks other than assessment services (Farrell et al., 2006).

In Australia, the psychologist-to-student ratios are comparable, at approximately one psychologist for every 1,600 students (Faulkner, 2007c). For example, the ratio in Queensland is 1:1250, in Tasmania 1:1600, in Western Australia 1:1057-1:1912, and in Victoria 1:1000-1:2000 (Faulkner, 2007c). This is suggestive of potential narrowing of the school psychologists' role and impact on job satisfaction (Farrell, 2010; Sheridan & D'Amato, 2004). However, there are no known studies that have explored state-based differences in psychologist-

to-student ratios in Australia and if it influences school psychologists' experience of their role and workload issues.

Addressing the shortage of school psychologists is a critical issue with no simple solution (Davis et al., 2004; McIntosh, 2004). Factors such as legislation, budget cutbacks, downsizing, service parameters, and outsourcing services to non-school professionals who are psychologists compound the issue (Bartell, 2001). A lack of information on the supply of personnel and extent of job demand also exists (Curtis et al., 2004; Fagan, 2004). Calculating demand can be a speculative exercise because of the uncertainties that can influence public education.

1.4.3 Teachers and Principals' attitudes towards school psychologists

The literature search identified seven prominent studies that have examined the attitudes that teachers and Principals have towards school psychologists and their roles. These comprise six quantitative studies and one qualitative study. One study that also examined the attitudes of school psychologists is included in order to compare all stakeholders' views. Key findings from these studies are presented in Appendix C, Table 1.4. Studies with similar participants are clustered in order to guide the analysis that follows.

The studies critically examined in this section demonstrate some interesting findings between and across all three groups of stakeholders. Findings suggest that there are common roles that school psychologists, Principals and teachers want school psychologists to undertake. For example, most teachers rank the most frequently performed role undertaken by school psychologists as

individual counselling and cognitive assessments (Bernes & Witko, 2009; Farrell et al., 2005; Watkins et al., 2001). Other common roles include consultation, school-community liaison, staff development, crisis intervention, behaviour management, and parent education (Watkins et al., 2001). In Victoria, a sample of school psychologists, Principals and teachers across government, Catholic and independent schools, also agreed that school psychologists should undertake counselling and assessments (Thielking & Jimerson, 2006). These roles are aligned with the definitions of the roles of school psychologists that have been previously identified in this thesis. Furthermore, many teachers report that school psychologists' roles include traditional, child-centred tasks (Farrell et al., 2005; Leach, 1989). In addition, school psychologists, Principals and teachers agreed that school psychologists should organise programs for students and workshops for teachers and keep up-to-date with relevant research (Thielking & Jimerson, 2006).

Whilst there was broad agreement in relation to what school psychologists should do, there was also consensus about the roles that school psychologists should not undertake. For example, the majority of school psychologists, Principals and teachers in Victoria, Australia, agreed that school psychologists should not undertake roles such as administer discipline to students, teach subjects, and 'fudge' test results (Thielking & Jimerson, 2006). In Canada, school superintendants reported that school psychologists are not hired or responsible for a range of roles. These include developing curriculum-based measures, conducting student-needs assessment research, designing program evaluation, delivering drug or health education, or acting as a curriculum specialist (Bernes

&Witko, 2009). Findings from this study are in contrast to other studies that indicate research is a role that school psychologists do undertake (Thielking & Jimerson, 2006). Similarly, teachers across eight countries ranked roles such as teacher training, curriculum advice, vocational advice, and working with groups of parents as less frequently undertaken by school psychologists (Farrell et al., 2005).

Some studies investigated school staff perceptions of the importance of school psychological service roles. In a study conducted in the United States, personnel in administrative, regular education, special education and support positions were surveyed in relation to the role of school psychologists (Watkins et al., 2001). All school staff believed that each of the five service roles listed were important, however, ranked them according to order of importance. For example, personnel ranked roles such as assessment, special education input, consultation, counselling, and crisis intervention and behaviour management as ‘very important’, with a median score of one. Roles such as school-community liaison and parent education were ranked as ‘fairly important’, with a median of two. Staff development was ranked as ‘somewhat important’, with a median of three (Watkins et al., 2001). Despite this, most ratings in this study were highly skewed, with school staff wanting more, not different services. These findings are reported elsewhere, with many teachers wanting not only school psychologists to keep doing their traditional tasks but also wanting more non-traditional, or systems-centred tasks included such as influencing system policy (Farrell et al., 2005; Leach, 1989). Whilst Principals wanted school psychologists to undertake more tasks that are non-traditional, they believed that many school psychologists

did not want to (Bernes & Witko, 2009; Leach, 1989). However, some findings indicated that school counsellors believed that they did not do enough traditional tasks such as counselling (Nelson et al., 2008).

Not surprisingly, some studies found that the more time school psychologists spent in schools, the more satisfied that teachers were about the quality of services provided (Farrell et al., 2005; Leach, 1989; Watkins et al., 2001). Additionally, administrators and teachers want to see school psychologists on a daily basis in their schools (Watkins et al., 2001). Yet, despite apparent higher levels of agreement between teachers and school psychologists, teachers were reportedly less satisfied than Principals were (Gilman & Gabriel, 2004). The rationale for why teachers were less satisfied than Principals is unclear. Low levels of satisfaction reported by teachers may be due to internal and external challenges such as student issues and resourcing constraints (Low, 2009). The range of challenges will be critiqued throughout this literature review.

It appears that the attitude of different groups of stakeholders towards school psychologists and preferred roles depended on their own interests (Thielking & Jimerson, 2006). For example, in one study, teachers wanted more crisis intervention, yet administrators wanted more in-service training (Gilman & Gabriel, 2004). These differences, in part, may be due to Principals having a more global perspective of education, or a whole-school vision (Zalaquett, 2005). Further differences may be partially attributed to cultural differences between countries or the relationship between school psychologists and the education system (Jimerson et al., 2007). It also appears that a lack of consensus even exists within the profession itself (Thielking & Jimerson, 2006).

In summary, key findings from the studies summarised in Appendix C, Table 1.4 demonstrates that there is broad agreement around the roles that school psychologists should do. For example, counselling, assessment, and consultation are commonly listed as key roles. However, there continue to be many areas of disagreement between school psychologists and key stakeholders such as the prioritisation of these roles. Findings highlight some of the challenges that school psychologists face working in the education system. This includes the complexities surrounding school psychologists' preferred way of working in contrast to stakeholder views. These competing attitudes can influence the satisfaction stakeholders have with the school psychology service. Whilst school psychologists themselves may contribute to the complex and competing attitudes towards their own service delivery, there are often other internal, external, and systems challenges. Additional research is needed to understand and explain the differences in attitudes of teachers, Principals and school psychologists towards the role of school psychologists. It is important to understand the areas of agreement and disagreement, and their contribution towards considering the challenges that may face the participants in this thesis.

1.4.4 Students' mental health needs and willingness to seek support

Research has not only shown that students' mental health needs have intensified in recent years, the unmet need for services is as high now as it was over 20 years ago (Hatzichristou, 2002; Huang et al., 2005; Tharinger & Palomares, 2004; Tolan & Dodge, 2005). Despite the prevalence of mental health

problems in youth aged 16 to 24 years, only 10 to 20 per cent report seeking help for a mental health related problem, which represents an apparent decline in the identification, referral, or uptake of services (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2007; Boston Consulting Group [BCG], 2006; Mellin, 2009; Ringel & Sturm, 2001; Sawyer et al., 2001; Segool, Mathiason, Majewicz-Hefley, & Carlson, 2009). These factors present challenges for school psychologists and affect their ability to deliver effective service (Ehrhardt-Padgett et al., 2004).

The origins of many health and social problems are identified during people's formative years, with approximately 1 in 5 children having a diagnosable mental health disorder, and 1 in 10 youths having a serious emotional or behavioural disorder (Friedman et al., 1996; Mellin, 2009; Nehmy, 2010; Ross, Powell, & Elias, 2002; Sawyer et al., 2001; Segool et al., 2009). These figures have not changed in 30 years (Long, 1986). In the United States and Australia, 10-20% of youth under the age of 18 years are affected by a mental health problem in any 12-month period (Greenberg et al., 2003; Sawyer et al., 2001; Segool et al., 2009). In Australia, this equates to approximately one million Victorians (ABS, 2007; Department of Human Services [DHS], 2009). The rate of child and adolescent suicide is the third leading cause of death in England and the United States, and accounts for 16 per cent of all deaths of young people aged 15-19 in Australia (Christianson & Everall, 2008; Christianson & Everall, 2009; Goldsmith et al., 2002; Keller et al., 2009; SANE Australia, 2004).

Adolescence is recognised as a period of vulnerability, with young people more likely to engage in a range of risky behaviours such as sex, violence, truancy, drink driving, and substance use (Greenberg et al., 2003;

Merrell et al., 2006). The estimated cost of mental health problems in Victoria is \$5.4 billion a year (BCG, 2006). Mental health disorders also contribute to the global burden of disease and to a range of future serious outcomes (BCG, 2006; Begg et al., 2007; Manion, 2010). These include health, educational and social problems, long-term impairment, reduced quality of life, severely diminished future productivity, and negative intergenerational consequences (Barwick, 2000; Huang et al., 2005; Kolbe, Collins & Cortese, 1997; NASP, 2003; Tharinger & Palomares, 2004).

Whilst many children meet the clinical criteria for a diagnosable mental health disorder, many more students do not (Kazdin, 2004). A number of other concerns have been identified that impact on children and youth. They include intellectual disability, learning difficulties, conduct, motivation and concentration, speech and language issues, concentration, disengagement, and autism (Bramlett et al., 2002; Bramston & Rice, 2000; Thielking, 2006a).

Because the mental health needs of students are so vast and access to services is limited, schools provide unique opportunities to target children's mental health, their academic performance, and the interplay between the two (Baskin et al., 2010; Christianson & Everall, 2008; Crespi & Politikos, 2004; Kratochwill, 2007; Merrell et al., 2006; Thielking, 2006a). School psychologists are in a position to focus on prevention at multiple levels and with multiple targets (Kratochwill, 2006; Kratochwill, Albers & Shernoff, 2004; Romer & McIntosh, 2005). However, some researchers have found that the time that school psychologists spend in direct mental health service provision is small in comparison to the time they spend on other job roles and functions (Bramlett et

al., 2002; Reschly & Ysseldyke, 2002; Segool et al, 2009). Furthermore, many school psychologists feel unprepared for a range of student and workplace issues (Bramston & Rice, 2000).

Despite the range of student issues identified and the unique position of the school psychologist to ameliorate these problems, the impacts that these issues have on school psychologists is unclear. There is a lack of recent Australian research, as many studies are dated and based in Queensland (Barletta, 1997; Bramston & Rice, 2000). However, overseas research, particularly emanating from the United States, may translate to Australian school psychologists' experience (Christianson & Everall, 2008; Oakland et al., 2005; Thielking, 2006a).

1.5 External Challenges

External challenges may include social-economic changes beyond the school such as popular culture, globalisation and societal trends, a lack of money to fund services, low salaries for school psychology specialists, low status of school psychology, lack of public support for education, and low status of education (Jimerson et al., 2007; Low, 2009). Given the research aim of this thesis is to better understand the role of school psychologists within the education system, emphasis is not given to external challenges in this literature review. Furthermore, there is limited research that has examined this aspect, particularly with school psychologists in Australia (Faulkner, 1999).

1.5.1 Globalisation and public sector reform

From the 1970s, Australian governments were affected by globalisation, with the country becoming predisposed towards conservative economic and political thought. Restructuring and downsizing of public sector organisations was characteristic of this period, and the shift to a decentralised, deregulated structure was diametrically opposed to the traditional administrative method of a centralised service (Robinson, 2005). Public sector reform followed globalisation, with the objectives including effective client service and economic efficiency (Faulkner, 1999; OGSE, 2008; Robinson, 2005). Within education, emphasis is on better accountability for student outcomes and school improvement (Dahir & Stone, 2009; Gysbers, 2004; OGSE, 2008).

Despite positive elements of public sector reform, there are concerns about the effects of reform on the public interest and wellbeing of public sector employees (Faulkner, 1999; Huebner, 1992; Huebner & Huberty, 1988; Whitla et al., 1992). Some researchers argue that the push for economic efficiency has resulted in additional stress for public sector employees, including school psychologists. This includes longer work hours, reduced service standards, and increased paperwork and red tape. In turn, many public sector employees report low morale, and feeling disempowered, undervalued, overburdened, and unsupported in performing their roles (Faulkner 1999; Goldfinch, 1998; Hoff & Buchholz, 1996; Huebner, 1992; Huebner & Huberty, 1988; Rees & Rodley, 1995; Whitla et al., 1992). Downsizing and restructuring can be costly, exacerbate employment insecurity, and damage relationships (Robinson, 2005).

The nature of organisational change appears to be a significant stressor for school psychologists. Economic and political pressures within the education system, paired with the perception that the organisation does not value or use the skills psychologists have, are likely to undermine school psychologists' personal and professional wellbeing (Thomas & Grimes, 1995). If school psychologists resign and are not replaced, service provision become stretched and services are more likely to remain reactive (Faulkner, 1993; Gutow, Rynkewitz, & Reicher, 2009; Ross et al., 2002).

With rapid and steady organisational change within the public sector, school psychologists may not be given sufficient opportunity to mourn the restructuring, re-location and/or staff downsizing in organisational life (Faulkner, 1999). Whilst understanding globalisation and public sector reform may appear overwhelming or irrelevant for school psychologists, some researchers argue that they are important concepts to appreciate (Faulkner, 1999). For example, school psychologists have the potential to influence more systemically if they are able to understand the context in which they work. Therefore, appreciating the changes that have occurred in the Victorian education system and their impacts on the role of school psychologists provides a foundation to understanding the current practice of school psychology in Victoria and forms the basis for further exploration in this thesis.

1.6 Systems Challenges

School psychologists do not work in isolation, but are involved in a number of systems (Clemens, Milsom, & Cashwell, 2009; Dahir & Stone, 2009; Walsh, Barrett, & DePaul, 2007). These include the education system, professional bodies, community and social services, healthcare and the legal system (Low, 2009). Systems challenges may include aspects such as guidelines for practice in schools, resource planning, managing networks and links with professional bodies (McCarthy et al., 2010; Merrell et al., 2006). It is important to better understand the environments that school psychologists work in as researchers have shown that school psychologists and systemic organisations such as education departments are inextricably linked (Faulkner, 1993). This chapter aims to contribute to this understanding by critically reviewing the literature in relation to systemic and organisational factors and their impact on school psychologists. Particular emphasis is placed on aspects that may be of potential interest to participants in this thesis.

1.6.1 Policy development and educational reform

The profession of school psychology is intertwined with the education system. Subsequently, the profession is influenced by transformations that occur across time in educational philosophy, organisational restructuring, and policy and funding shifts (Faulkner, 1999; Oakland et al., 2005; Whitla et al., 1992). A number of current policies influence the direction of school psychologists in

Victoria. It is therefore important to understand how policy development and education reform have potentially affected school psychologists. For example, depending on the government of the day, the authority, accountability and responsibility of school psychologists has moved back and forth from the *Department* to schools. In addition to constant policy and budget changes, local variation has affected school psychologists in various ways, creating perceptions of inequity across the state (SWD, 2010). However, school psychologists are expected to support the policy directions through the provision of the Student Support Services Program [SSSP] (SWD, 2010).

The SSSP was established to support the wellbeing of students with additional learning or welfare needs (SWD, 2010). In 1998, the *Department* redirected the SSSP to align with devolution of authority and responsibility to schools (SWD, 2010). Service delivery was provided through partnerships between schools, school clusters and service providers. This reform affected school psychologists, as they were required to work within local service delivery arrangements that allocated SSSP resources to meet identified needs. In practice, school psychologists' experience was dependent on the region and network in which they were located. For example, some regions and networks directed their funding towards the purchase of services from private providers (SWD, 2010).

In the ensuing decade, the SSSP was subject to review. Many schools and school psychologists argued that the model was inefficient, ineffective and inequitable (OGSE, 2008). Additionally, significant changes occurred within the government schooling system and broader policy environment (SWD, 2010). Key policies, actions and initiatives have particularly affected the context in which the

SSSP operated. For example, outsourcing of student assessment services reshaped the way that school psychologists were able to support schools in that it enabled school psychologists to concentrate on delivery of other services to students (OGSE, 2008).

However, there has been little analysis of the impact that such reforms have had on school psychologists (Faulkner, 1999). It is therefore essential to understand how the organisational structures, processes and stressors have historically shaped the workplace culture for the profession (Robinson, 2005; Thielking, 2006a). Understanding the systemic origins of school psychology in Victoria is pertinent as it not only provides an understanding of the forces that have led to the current system of school psychological services, but it can reveal the organisational stressors which may impact on the morale and occupational health and wellbeing of participants in this thesis.

1.6.2 Managing networks and interaction with external systems

Assessment appears to be a major component of school psychologists' duties. However, several studies have identified that school psychologists would like to do less of it (Corkum et al., 2007; Harris & Joy, 2010; Jordan, Hindes, & Saklofske, 2009). Instead, many school psychologists report wanting to work more preventatively at a systems level (Burns & Coolong-Chaffin, 2006; Conoley & Gutkin, 1995; Dwyer & Bernstein, 1998; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010; Farrell, Jimerson, & Oakland, 2006; Gutow et al., 2009; Idsoe, 2003; Lasser, 2005;

Mautone, Manz, Martin, & White, 2009; Quinn & McDougal, 1998; Tharinger & Palomares, 2004; Ysseldyke et al., 2006).

Despite several studies identifying that school psychologists would like to do less assessment and spend more time undertaking other tasks such as counselling or working more broadly doing system-based work, the somewhat vexed issue of role definition of school psychologists remains unclear. For example, the literature has not clearly defined what “spending more time” or “counselling” actually means in this context. This issue raises further unanswered questions about how much time is there for counselling in schools. How many sessions are available per child? If limited sessions are available, is there a need to look at therapeutic change processes within the context of only “brief counselling”? Previous researchers have only articulated the percentages of time that assessment activities form as part of their role and argued that school psychologists would like to undertake other tasks instead (Bramlett, Murphy, Johnson, Wallingsford, & Hall, 2002; Bramston & Rice, 2000; Corkum, French, & Dorey, 2007; Farrell, 2010; Harris & Joy, 2010; Idsoe, 2006; Jordan, Hindes, & Saklofske, 2009; Magi & Kikas, 2009; Martin, 2001; Natasi, 2000; Reschly, 2000). School psychologists’ move towards undertaking other roles as per the definition of the role of school psychologists (International School Psychology Association [ISPA], 2012) will be referred to as the call to expand the role in this thesis.

A critical review of the literature suggests that the call to expand the role of the school psychologist spans over 50 years (Bernes & Witko, 2009; Bradley-Johnson & Dean, 2000; Farrell, 2010; Idsoe, 2003; Idsoe, Hagtvvet, Bru,

Midthassel, & Knardahl, 2008; Magi & Kikas, 2009; Margison & Shore, 2009; Natasi, 2000; Power, 2000; Reschly, 1998; Sheridan & D'Amato, 2004; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000). This indicates that the concept continues to be an issue for the profession (Reschly, 2004; Reschly & Ysseldyke, 2002; Ysseldyke et al., 2006). An increasing number of studies support the idea that a systematic level approach may be a more effective way to provide school psychology services (Idsoe et al., 2008).

A number of theoretical models have been proposed to address the expansion of the role of school psychologists, including *paradigm shift*, *consultative*, *advocacy*, *change agent*, *health-care provider*, and *full-service schools*. However, only three of the models presented in this thesis are based on empirical studies (Gutow et al., 2009; Peterson, 2001; Shriberg, 2007). It is unclear what research has been conducted into the other proposed theoretical models. An overview of the six models is critically examined below.

The models of *paradigm shift*, *consultative*, *advocacy*, and *change agent* require the school psychologist to move beyond their traditional role and change the existing culture (Bemak & Chung, 2008; Brelsford, 2010; Gutow et al., 2009; Kratochwill, 2007; Shriberg, 2007). Authors of these models argue that working as a consultant or advocate results in the achievement gap between students closing. Subsequently, students who are academically more capable are more emotionally competent, engaged with their learning, and less likely to engage in at-risk behaviour (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Ross et al., 2002).

The *health-care provider* model suggests that, in order for school psychologists to remain relevant in contemporary society, they should become

part of a comprehensive model of school health programs (Bemak & Chung, 2005; 2008; Christenson, 2000; Crespi & Politikos, 2004; Gersch, 2009; Kratochwill, 2007; Natasi, 2000; Nelson et al, 2008; Power, 2000; Reeder & Maccow, 1997; Ross et al., 2002). The aim of this model is to integrate services and provide a continuum of care through a community focus and emphasis on capacity building. Aspects such as school health services and school nutrition services are included in addition to traditional commonly provided services such as counselling.

The model of *full-service schools* integrates educational, medical, mental health, and social/human services on school grounds (Dryfoos, 1994). Home and school collaboration is emphasised and contact with medical and safety personnel (Reeder et al., 1997).

Whilst the terminology varies slightly, the main concept of the six models is essentially the same in that they advocate for school psychologists to expand or modify their current roles. The models of *paradigm shift*, *consultative*, *advocacy*, and *change agent* emphasise for school psychologists to change existing culture, whereas *health-care provider* and *full-service schools* models promote that school psychologists become part of a broad health and wellbeing framework within schools.

The proposed models demonstrate the range of alternative options for future practice. The concept of key stakeholders and school psychologists working together to solve the problems of today's students appears to be a practical suggestion (Tharinger & Palomares, 2004; Shriberg, 2001).

Furthermore, adopting a systemic-organisational approach may not only mitigate

issues such as insufficient budget, time, and other resources, but also expand and promote school psychology and enhance school psychologists' ability to practice as social change agents and providers of valuable services (Bemak & Chung, 2008; Moe & Perera-Diltz, 2009).

However, this shift in conceptual and ideological framework comes with inherent challenges. These challenges include the school psychologists needing to individually and collectively re-examine their professional identity and defined roles, and expand and develop professional competencies (Kratochwill & Stoiber, 2000). Many school psychologists may take on the role of the non-change agent and be unwilling to be active in political and change processes (Clemens, Milsom, & Cashwell, 2009; Magi & Kikas, 2009; Trevisan & Hubert, 2001; Walsh et al., 2007). Implementing best-practice ideals and changing to the role of advocate in the day-to-day context is not easy: "... Because the role of the school counselor has been consistent for the past 40 years, the expectations ... of what the school counselor does are well established in school systems" (Bemak & Chung, 2005, p. 197). Furthermore, aspects such as time constraints, workload and perceived expectations from schools may influence the ability to implement intervention and prevention programs (Bryan & Griffin, 2010; Idsoe et al., 2008; Shriberg, 2007).

Some researchers argue:

... it is one thing to advocate that school psychologists should serve as change agents. It is quite another for an individual to actually carry out a change role in the often turbulent political settings within which school psychologists operate (Peterson, 2001, p. 292).

Therefore, challenging the system may not be as easy as it seems. For example, implementing a role change entails the implementation of a radically different position and continues to present as a challenge for school psychologists themselves (Sheridan & D'Amato, 2004). There is potential for personal and professional repercussions including professional paralysis, resistance, dealing with administrative edicts, and concerns about job security (Bemak & Chung, 2008). For example, whilst these models emphasise the importance of a good working relationship with administrators, adopting the advocate role may result in school psychologists feeling caught between supporting students and schools. In turn, school psychologists may deem the risk too great (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Chata & Loesch, 2007).

There is a paucity of research to support the efficacy of most of these models. For example, Gutow et al. (2009) analysed the implementation of a consultative model with school psychologists in the United States. Positive aspects to utilising a consultative approach were identified, including encouraging participants to share their knowledge, ideas and experiences, exposing school psychologists to working with others and increasing school psychologists' understanding of how to build successful partnerships that extend to the community. However, limitations identified in this study include the potential for different understandings and expectations by participants and researchers, and participants' engagement in the study limiting the researcher's ability to collect data. These limitations and the fact that the application of the role expansion has not been widespread is noteworthy (Allensworth & Kolbe, 1987; Shaw et al., 1996). For example, there is no evidence that the *full-service school* model is in

operation anywhere in Australia. Therefore, the ability to apply this model to the Australian context should be done with prudence. Further investigation into the concept of full-service schools is warranted. Findings may develop understanding of this approach and determine its viability in the Australian context.

In summary, there have been repeated calls for a paradigm shift for over 50 years; however, expanding the role of the school psychologist has proven difficult to implement. Many school psychologists adhere to traditional paradigms, possibly due to the shortage of school psychologists, workload constraints, systems-level factors, and perceived control over tasks. A systems model of service delivery challenges the traditional view of commonly performed roles. Expanding the role of school psychologists may serve students more effectively, increase capacity amongst stakeholders in working with students, and engage multiple people to work on solutions. In an era of evidence-based practice and accountability, schools and school psychologists are increasingly expected to do more to address the needs of students' academic, social-emotional and mental health despite diminishing resources. Whilst alternative models of practice may be a solution to this problem, there are inherent challenges, which raise doubt as to whether or not a paradigm shift can realistically be achieved. Continuing research into this area is warranted, particularly if greater generalisation to the Australian context is to occur.

1.7 Person Challenges

Person challenges may include professional development and training, professional supervision and support, and individual issues such as values, self-awareness, and attitudes of school psychologists towards school systems (Bunce & Willower, 2001; McMahon & Patton, 2008). For the purposes of this thesis, the constructs of job satisfaction and burnout are considered as person challenges. This is due to their potential to impact on school psychologists both personally and professionally.

1.7.1 Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction can be defined as the degree to which people like their jobs and how they feel about different aspects of their jobs (Spector, 1997). Research has shown that individuals who are satisfied at work lead happier and healthier lives (Brown, Hardison, Bolen, & Walcott, 2006). Moreover, factors such as motivation, performance, productivity, absenteeism, turnover, task success, and professional attitude are associated with job satisfaction (Brown, Hohenshil, & Brown, 1998; Idsoe, 2006; Levinson, Fetchkan, & Hohenshil, 1988; Reschly & Wilson, 1995; VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006; Young & Lambie, 2007).

Studies into the job satisfaction of school psychologists emerged in the 1980s when Vensel (1981) reported that nearly half of school psychologists in the United States planned to leave the profession within the next five years. Job

satisfaction has developed into an important area of investigation due to the direct impact on the quality and quantity of school psychological services to children (Brown et al, 1998). Appendix D, Table 1.5, summarises the key findings for job satisfaction studies.

Most of the studies in Table 1.5 emanate from the United States, with only three studies originating from other countries (Male & Male, 2003; Thielking & Moore, 2005a; Thielking et al., 2006). The two studies by Thielking appear to have used the same sample of participants, therefore are interpreted as the one study (Thielking & Moore, 2005a; Thielking et al., 2006). This also applies to the three studies by Levinson (Levinson, 1990, 1991; 1989 in VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006).

In a critical review of findings in Table 1.5, some noteworthy findings emerge. For example, most school psychologists and school counsellors (approximately 85%) were satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Brown et al., 1998; DeMato & Curcio, 2004; Kolodinsky et al., 2009; Levinson et al., 1988; VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006). The areas of satisfaction include working directly with students, working with like-minded colleagues, and the chance to help others. Other areas of satisfaction include having a high degree of responsibility and flexibility associated with the role (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Kolodinsky et al., 2009). These findings have also been reported elsewhere (Connolly & Myers, 2003; Jimerson et al., 2004; Jimerson et al., 2007; Miller et al., 1998; Rayle, 2006; Wilczenski, 2007).

In a study conducted in England, Male and Male (2003) examined the workload, job satisfaction, and perceptions of role preparation of educational

psychologists. Whilst the overall job satisfaction in this sample was slightly lower than other studies, at approximately 75%, respondents reported some similar satisfactions in their role (Brown et al., 1998; Levinson et al., 1988; VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006). This study found some evidence that less experienced psychologists were more satisfied with certain aspects of their work than more experienced psychologists were. This included less experienced psychologists being more positive about the nature of change and feeling better prepared for certain aspects of their work. These findings may be attributed to societal and generational changes, and the degree of time spent in the role and subsequent exposure to change, stress and burnout. Since this study did not examine these constructs, further investigation into possible correlates is warranted.

Male and Male (2003) found male school psychologists (57%) were more likely to find the job more stressful than female psychologists. However, no rationale is provided for these findings. Additionally, findings differ from other studies that suggest that there are more females in the profession than males. Furthermore, female professionals reportedly experience more role discrepancy than male professionals do, with the majority of female employees frequently experiencing lower pay and lower perceived status (Agresta, 2004; Bryant & Constantine, 2006; Yoder, 2003). Conversely, the majority of previous research has indicated that demographic factors such as sex, age, marital status, or grade level have little impact on school psychologists' job satisfaction (Brown et al., 2006; Kolodinsky et al., 2009; Levinson et al., 1988; McCarthy et al., 2010; Worrell, Skaggs, & Brown, 2006). The mixed findings suggest that further

exploration is required of possible gender differences in the experience of the role of a school psychologist. The present study, whilst not pre-empting gender differences in its sample of participants, remained open to the possibility of the influence of this variable.

Despite the high level of satisfaction reported by school psychologists, approximately 15% of school psychologists are dissatisfied with their jobs (Worrell, Skaggs, & Brown, 2006). Dissatisfactions include school system policies, practices and procedures, limited opportunities for advancement, lower salaries, time pressure and stress from serving large numbers of children, and large amounts of paperwork (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Evans & Payne, 2008; Kolodinsky et al., 2009; Levinson, 1991; Male & Male, 2003; VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006; Worrell, Skaggs, & Brown, 2006).

Consequently, many school psychologists find the job overwhelming and more difficult, with up to 50% of school psychologists reporting moderate levels of job stress (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Brown et al., 1998; DeMato & Curcio, 2004; Evans & Payne, 2008; Kolodinsky et al., 2009; Levinson et al., 1988; McCarthy et al., 2010; Miller et al., 1981; Rayle, 2006; Sears & Navin, 2001). DeMato and Curcio (2004) found that the dissatisfaction of school counsellors from the United States rose from 3.7% to 9.1% over 16 years; Baggerly (2002) also found that school counsellors from the United States who perceived their job as “much more stressful” or “somewhat more stressful” over the past 2 years constituted between 87% and 92% of elementary, middle, and high school counsellors. Furthermore, 11% were planning to retire or quit, and 13% were undecided in their career commitment.

Research has shown that where school psychologists were situated can influence their level of job satisfaction (Harris, 2009; Proctor & Steadman, 2003). For example, school psychologists in England and the United States who were located within schools (internally) reported higher rates of perceived effectiveness, and lower rates of burnout than school psychologists who were located outside of schools (externally). Further to this, school psychologists located internally were more likely to be satisfied than externally located school psychologists in relation to a range of factors such as job diversity, having a manageable caseload, the ability to make their job more diverse, integration into school activities, the school's familiarity with the school psychologist, and administrators' knowledge about the school psychologists' capabilities (Proctor & Steadman, 2003). Findings indicated that school psychologists who service one school were more satisfied than those who serviced two or more schools (Harris, 2009).

However, the ability to generalise the findings from these studies to school psychologists in Australia may be restricted by the different ways in which a country's education systems is set up (Harris, 2009; Proctor & Steadman, 2003). For example, under the current service delivery model in Victoria, school psychologists are located externally to schools and service the traditional method of multiple schools rather than being located internally and servicing one school (OGSE, 2008). However, the current service delivery model does not take account of schools directly employing a school psychologist. It is unknown if any DEECD school psychologist is currently employed to work in one school. Consequently, in the Victorian state education system, it may not be feasible to

compare school psychologists who are located internally with those who are located externally.

In an Australian-based study, Catholic, independent and government school psychologists were surveyed in relation to their perspectives of their role (Thielking & Moore, 2005a; Thielking et al., 2006). Results indicated that school psychologists were generally satisfied with the nature and variety of activities that make up their role. When comparing the three groups, government school psychologists were significantly less satisfied across a range of areas including office space, security of files, technological and psychological resources, budget allocation, and supervision arrangements. Nonetheless, findings should be interpreted with caution and generalised claims cannot be made based on one Australian-based study.

It should be noted that a number of limitations exist for Thielking's studies including the representativeness of her sample due to small sample sizes (Thielking & Moore, 2005a; Thielking et al., 2006). For example, the participants asked to participate in these studies were members of the Australian Psychological Society (APS, 2007). Not all school psychologists are members of the APS. Whilst the sample consisted of participants from Victoria, Australia, the 30-33 participants from government schools may not necessarily represent all state school psychologists (Faulkner, 2007a). Therefore, the ability to generalise should be done with caution. Furthermore, the study refers to qualitative data, however, the information was not provided in the article (Thielking & Moore, 2005a; Thielking et al., 2006). Regardless, the paucity of Victorian-based research point toward the requirement for further research in order to achieve

greater understanding of professional issues associated with the role of Australian school psychologists that work in the public sector.

With multiple challenges that affect school psychologists' job satisfaction, increasing research is emerging around the need for school psychologists to monitor and protect their wellbeing. This includes engaging in a realistic appraisal of accomplishments, maintaining high levels of self-esteem, participating in supervision and being part of a supportive team (Evans & Payne, 2008; Miller et al., 1981). In addition, training in leadership and systems change may contribute to systemic resolution of these problems. If school psychologists see administrators, legislation, and the education system as the source of problems, then increasing their perceived control over being able to enact change may result in increased job satisfaction (Christianson & Everall, 2008; Levinson, 1991; Male & Male, 2003; Moe & Perera-Diltz, 2009; Peterson, 2001). The concept of perceived control or autonomy has been found in earlier studies to be associated with higher levels of job satisfaction, organisational commitment, job involvement and overall wellbeing (Spector, 1997).

In summary, the construct of job satisfaction is not new and has long been associated with a range of factors. These include fatigue, self-esteem, adjustment issues, physical and mental health problems, professional attitudes, absenteeism, job commitment, and turnover. Most studies have found that school psychologists generally like their job and find it rewarding. Factors attributed to job satisfaction include flexibility and autonomy in their role, helping others, interacting with competent colleagues, and the challenge, variety, and importance of their work. Despite their overall satisfaction, school psychologists find the job challenging

and stressful. Approximately 15% of school psychologists report dissatisfaction with aspects such as system policies, practices and procedures, serving large numbers of children, and large amounts of administration and meetings. Job dissatisfaction may contribute to stress and burnout, and impact on the professional wellbeing of school psychologists. However, there has been little research conducted with school psychologists in Australia, and none from within a qualitative methodology.

The present study therefore aims to ameliorate the gap in existing knowledge. Job satisfaction studies will continue to be important in monitoring the effects of internal, external, systems, and personal changes on practising school psychologists, particularly in the current climate of data-driven and accountability-based models. Further research is likely to facilitate a better understanding of the evolution of the profession in light of changing expectations, and gauge whether school psychologists who report greater job satisfaction are actually more skilled at influencing academic achievement within their schools.

1.7.2 Stress and burnout

The term *burnout* describes the state of being emotionally and physically exhausted (Hiebert, 2006). Stress results from a perceived imbalance between demands and coping resources and occurs gradually (Hiebert, 2006). Conversely, burnout results from being in a state of chronic over demand and is more often a threshold experience due to role overload. Understanding that stress and burnout

are qualitatively different constructs may assist people to notice early warning signals and take preventative action (Hiebert, 2006).

A review of the literature reveals that a number of significant interpersonal, intrapersonal and organisational factors contribute to school psychologist stress, and subsequently, to potential burnout (Nelson et al., 2008; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006; Young & Lambie, 2007). Interpersonal factors include the quality of support systems available, such as supervisors and peers. Intrapersonal factors include personality traits (Huebner, 1993). Organisational factors include the quality and quantity of organisational resources. For school psychologists this may incorporate availability of testing materials, secretarial help, supervision, promotion opportunities, psychologist-to-student ratios and role stress (Mills & Huebner, 1996; Pierson-Hubney & Archambault, 1987; Young & Lambie, 2007). Factors such as role conflict, role ambiguity, and role incongruence affect role stress for school psychologists (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Coll & Freeman, 1997; DeMato & Curcio, 2004; Nelson et al., 2008; Pierson-Hubney & Archambault, 1987; Rayle, 2006; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006).

A growing number of studies have examined the construct of burnout with school psychologists. However, most have concentrated on organisational factors associated with burnout, with interpersonal and intrapersonal factors receiving little research attention (Huebner & Huberty, 1988; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). Historically, there is relatively little data available on perceived stress by school psychologists and a full understanding of the occupational wellbeing of school psychologists is largely unknown (Burden, 1988; Huebner, 1993; Mills & Huebner, 1996; Young & Lambie, 2007). The consequences of burnout can be

serious and far-reaching. Burnout may lead to job dissatisfaction, impaired physical and emotional health, impaired interpersonal relations, and deterioration of service provision and unproductive work behaviours (Coll & Freeman, 1997; Culbreth et al., 2005; Huebner, 1993; Rayle, 2006). Given that school psychologists work with a number of stakeholders, the consequences may be extensive. Therefore, improving one's own wellness and coping skills is vital in avoiding impairment (Young & Lambie, 2007). A summary of key studies that have examined the construct of burnout is presented in Appendix E, Table 1.6. Studies are grouped by participants to aid the analysis that follows. Additionally, all studies in Table 1.6 are quantitative survey studies.

Key findings demonstrate that school psychologists reported similar levels of overall stress, which was in the moderate range. However, the source of stress may be different depending on the country of origin for school psychologists. For example, Burden (1988) compared the levels and sources of stress in school psychologists from England, Australia, and the United States. A number of common factors were identified as highly stressful for this group of school psychologists including time pressures and uncooperative Principals and other administrators. Some differences were also found between the three groups. For example, school psychologists in Australia reported meetings with resistant parents and teachers, in-service workshops and public speaking engagements as more stressful than their colleagues in the United States and England. Differences between school psychologists from different countries may be due to the socio-political, economic, and legislative factors operating in the United States, England and Australia (Miller et al., 1981).

Despite the contribution of Burden's (1988) study to the literature, a number of limitations need to be considered. These include the age of the study, and sample. This study examined the stress of school psychologists only in Queensland, so findings may not translate to the Victorian context. Furthermore, the assessment tool may be unable to evaluate the true degree of stress under which school psychologists' work. For example, it cannot explain how occasional events compare with daily or weekly events (Burden, 1988). It is evident that further research into sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction of school psychologists in different cultural contexts is warranted. This thesis aims to add to the existing research base by examining the concept of burnout with a small sample of Victorian school psychologists.

Other researchers have shown that intrapersonal factors such as locus of control and personal coping styles are also significantly related to burnout for school psychologists (Huebner & Mills, 1994; Lambie, 2006; Mills & Huebner, 1998; Sandoval, 1993; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). For example, those who deal with stressors and problems by focussing on the feelings associated with them are at greater risk of developing symptoms of burnout (Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). Findings suggest that there may be a stronger emotional component to burnout than what is represented in the research literature (Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006).

Mixed findings have been reported in relation to the degree of stress that school psychologists' experience when compared to other educator groups. For example, Mills & Huebner (1998) argued that school psychologists' stress was higher than other occupational groups. In comparison, Pierson-Hubney and Archambault (1987) suggested that the role stress of school psychologists was low

to moderate. Moderate levels of role stress were at similar levels to classroom teachers, social workers, guidance counsellors and reading specialists. Yet Wilkerson (2009) argued that school counsellors reported higher than average levels of emotional exhaustion when compared with other mental health professionals.

Despite differences in samples, assessment tools, and degree of role stress, these studies indicate that many school psychologists experience some form of burnout. Continuing research, including qualitative studies may refine and elaborate the factors that contribute to perceptions of stress and burnout of school psychologists. Indeed, concepts such as role stress, personality variables and perceived burnout have not been examined in any known Australian studies.

Butler and Constantine (2005) conducted one of the first studies to examine collective self-esteem and burnout of school counsellors. Collective self-esteem has four dimensions: private, public, membership, and importance to identity. Findings from this study indicated that school counsellors experienced moderate emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation and high levels of personal accomplishment. Aspects that make up collective self-esteem did not explain the burnout that school counsellors experienced. However, findings point to school counsellors' inner positive views of their profession as contributing more towards their ability to achieve personal success. In other words, school counsellors who saw their profession in a positive light were more likely to feel successful in their role. Similar findings in other studies indicate that despite experiencing some symptoms of burnout, this sample of school counsellors derive a positive sense of

professional pride and accomplishment in the workplace (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Pierson-Hubney & Archambault, 1987).

In summary, stress and burnout continue to be prevalent problems for school psychologists and counsellors in these studies. Whilst the research conducted into the construct of burnout has produced mixed findings in relation to school psychologists, the need for coping strategies to deal with increasing job stress is widely acknowledged. However, there are many situational variables outside school psychologists' control. These variables may subsequently become challenges or frustrations for those who work within systemic organisations. The outcomes of stress for school psychologists and impact on their roles has the potential for serious, real world implications for the profession and the recipients of their services. School psychologists, who are coping well in comparison to their colleagues, are more likely to be in a better position to undertake the daily task of working with others. Enhanced client care ultimately leads to improved outcomes for the students, parents, teachers, and Principals with whom school psychologists work. Additional research into the construct of burnout for school psychologists in Australia may increase the understanding of this issue and determine the extent and applicability locally.

1.8 Summary of Chapter 1

Most research into the role of school psychologists and the issues affecting their roles have been quantitative studies based in the United States. Research into the four domains that influence the role of school psychologists has

demonstrated that despite the positive elements to working in the profession, many school psychologists report moderate levels of job stress. In turn, increased stress and burnout may lead to ineffective service delivery and emotional exhaustion for school psychologists. Additionally, there can be negative consequences for the clients that school psychologists work with. However, there is limited understanding about the professional impact of these constructs on their role from a day-to-day experience. In addition, the multitude of studies from the United States may not translate into the Australian context due to different levels of acceptance of the profession. Furthermore, the limited Australian-based studies have generally utilised Queensland school psychologists. Recent Victorian studies have examined school psychologists' experience in relation to supervision and job satisfaction from a predominantly quantitative methodology. There are no known studies that have explored the experience of working as a school psychologist in Victoria from within a qualitative framework. This thesis aims to contribute to the research literature and ameliorate this gap in existing knowledge.

1.9 Research Aim

The aim of this study is to examine the lived experience of school psychologists employed in government schools in their day-to-day work within the broader organisational culture of the *Department*.

1.10 Research Question

The present study therefore aimed to explore the following research question:

What are the lived experiences of school psychologists in relation to their work roles in Victorian government schools, Australia?

Whilst not pre-empting their experience, it is anticipated that issues such as workload, roles, satisfactions and dissatisfactions, would be explored, as these are concepts highlighted in this literature review.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

A qualitative research design was applied to explore in-depth the lived experiences of school psychologists employed by the DEECD in Victoria, Australia. Qualitative research focuses on the different experiences of participants from their point of view (Flick, 2006; McLeod, 2001). Additionally, qualitative research is interested in exploring the meaning and uniqueness of the individual's experience (Flick, 2006). Since the research aim was to explore the lived experience of school psychologists, a qualitative approach was deemed the best fit. Furthermore, phenomenology focuses on the “meanings through which people construct their realities” (McLeod, 2001, p. 2). Subsequently, since this study also wanted to understand the meaning of school psychologists' experiences, a descriptive qualitative interview design was applied as the method best suited to achieve this aim. More specifically, the method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is used, as an in-depth understanding of the lived experience was sought. Further explanation of these methods is detailed later in this chapter.

2.2 Theoretical perspective

2.2.1 Phenomenology

One of the leading recent writers of phenomenological research, the late Michael Crotty (Crotty, 1998), argued that there are two phenomenologies. The first phenomenology is more traditional and is referred to as *classical, descriptive, mainstream, or transcendental* phenomenology (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Willig, 2001; Willis, 2001). Husserl (1970) introduced the phenomenological approach to qualitative research and it was taken up in psychology by May (May, Angel, & Ellenberger, 1958) and Giorgi (1975). Husserl (1970) believed that subjective information should be important to researchers 'seeking to understand human motivation because human actions are influenced by what people perceive to be real' (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 727).

The traditional approach to phenomenology is concerned with how the world presents itself to us as humans within particular contexts at particular times, rather than in abstract terms about the world in general. In other words, traditional phenomenology aims to clarify how people experience, perceive, and makes sense of particular events (Patton, 2002). The researcher aims to immerse him or herself fully in the topic under investigation, which facilitates a full understanding and appreciation of the experience itself. Traditional phenomenology stipulates that the researcher must willingly lay aside (also known as *bracketing*) existing beliefs in the attempt to understand the essence of the lived

experience of participants being studied (Lopez & Willis, 2004). To this end, some researchers argue that the traditional phenomenologist should not conduct a detailed literature review prior to commencing the study. Furthermore, it is not desirable to have predetermined research questions, other than to describe the lived experience of participants in relation to the topic under investigation (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

Another assumption underlying this approach is that there are features to any lived experience that are common to all persons who have the experience (Lopez & Willis, 2004). After identifying commonalities of the experience of participants, generalised descriptions are then possible, with the essences representing the true nature of the phenomenon being studied. In this view, reality is considered objective and independent of history and context.

The traditional methodological approach has often been criticised as having substantial limitations including the challenge of achieving the *epoche* (McLeod, 2001; Willig, 2001). According to Langdrige (2007), *epoche* refers to ‘the process by which we attempt to abstain from our presuppositions, those preconceived ideas we might have about the things we are investigating’ (p. 17).

The second phenomenology is the new empirical phenomenology, also referred to as *empathetic* or *hermeneutic* phenomenology (Crotty, 1998). The new phenomenology was developed in the 1960s and is often used in psychology and health research across a range of topics (McLeod, 2001). Empathetic phenomenology developed out of the traditional phenomenology, with Heidegger, a student of Husserl’s, challenging his assumptions about phenomenology guiding

meaningful inquiry (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Heidegger's ideas comprise of the interpretative or hermeneutic research tradition.

The word *hermeneutic* derives from the Greek God Hermes, who was responsible for making clear, or interpreting, messages between gods (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Hermeneutics is a process or method that brings out and makes apparent what is normally hidden in human experience. In other words, hermeneutics goes beyond describing core concepts or essences and looks for meanings embedded in common life practices. Hermeneutics is linked to the IPA method in that meanings are not always apparent to the participants themselves, but can be gathered from the analysis or interpretation of the narratives that are produced by them. Hermeneutics subsequently focuses on what humans experience rather than what they consciously know. In this view, individuals' realities are influenced by the world in which they live.

Traditional phenomenology and new phenomenology are therefore quite different, with the new phenomenology abandoning the stance of *epoche* and delving into the meanings embedded in common life practices (Barker, Pistrang, & Elliott, 1994). In fact, the researcher's prior knowledge and biases becomes a "valuable guide to inquiry" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 729). This process, known as *reflexivity*, allows the researcher to attempt to bracket his or her assumptions whilst engaging in a critical examination of his or her usual ways of knowing the event (Patton, 2002). In other words, whilst the researcher pays introspective attention to his or her own experience, the main aim is to get inside someone's experience based on that person's description. Furthermore, emphasis is on the meaning and significance a person places on their actual experience. Despite this

emphasis, when the meanings are not apparent to the participants themselves, the researcher can complement participants' understanding of their experience through a deeper analysis or interpretation of the narratives that are produced by them.

Since this study was interested in how school psychologists understand and make sense of their day-to-day professional experience, a phenomenological approach was applied and represented via in-depth interviews. More specifically, the researcher wanted to get inside the experience of other school psychologists and understand the similarities and differences that may exist in comparison to her own experience. The new phenomenology was deemed the most suitable methodology that would enable the researcher to best get inside someone's experience. Additionally, the researcher's philosophy was aligned with the concepts of the new phenomenology in abandoning the state of *epoché*, engaging in the process of reflexivity, and delving into participants' experience. In combination, these factors led to the determination that the phenomenological method, particularly the new phenomenology, was the most appropriate methodology to choose.

2.2.2 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA is a version of the new phenomenological method, and shares the aims of other phenomenological approaches in that it aims to capture the "quality and texture of individual experience" (Willig, 2001, p. 53). In other words, IPA aims to understand lived experience and how participants make sense of their

experience (Barker et al., 1994). IPA is a recent qualitative approach developed specifically for psychology by Jonathan Smith (Smith, 2007). IPA “recognizes that different people perceive the world in very different ways, dependent on their personalities, prior life experiences and motivations” (Smith & Osborn, 2004, p. 229).

According to Smith (2004), IPA can be described as having three broad elements. For example, IPA represents an epistemological position, offers a set of guidelines for conducting research, and describes a body of empirical research (Smith, 2004). In relation to the theoretical stance of IPA, researchers aim to conduct a detailed exploration of how participants make sense of their individual and personal lived experience. It is phenomenological because it is concerned with participants’ individual perceptions of an object or event (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). However, IPA is also interpretative, recognising the central role of the researcher in making sense of the individual’s personal experience. Thus, IPA is strongly connected to the interpretative or hermeneutic tradition (Smith, 2004).

For IPA, human research involves a double hermeneutic (Smith, 2004). In other words, participants are trying to make sense of their personal and social world, and the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world.

The characteristic features of IPA are three-fold and include, idiographic, inductive, and interrogative. IPA is idiographic in the sense that it begins with the detailed analysis of case studies before cautiously moving to more general statements about groups of individuals (Smith, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2004; Willig, 2001). Studies are usually conducted with small groups of between six

and fifteen participants (Smith, 2008). This allows not only for a more intimate portrayal of individual experience but also minimises the possibility of the researcher being overwhelmed by the data.

IPA is inductive, in that researchers employ techniques that are flexible enough to allow for unanticipated themes or topics to emerge during the analysis. Additionally, flexible data collection techniques give participants the room to provide detailed accounts of their experience in their own words. IPA researchers do not attempt to verify or negate specific hypotheses based on existing literature. Instead, research questions are broad, allowing for the collection of extensive data.

IPA is also interrogative, in that it aims to contribute to psychology through interrogating or illuminating existing research. In other words, whilst IPA typically involves an in-depth analysis of a set of case studies, results from these studies cannot stand alone and need to be discussed in relation to the existing psychological literature.

IPA uses a form of purposive sampling given the small numbers of participants. Participants are usually a homogenous sample of those most suited to the research question; for example, in the present study *Department* school psychologists and their day-to-day professional lived experience. However, the homogeneity of the sample means that a boundary is drawn around the claims to generalisability that the researcher can make.

IPA researchers usually engage in semi-structured interviews (Smith & Osborn, 2004; Willig, 2001). Researchers then work with the text, or transcripts,

generated by participants, which are analysed one by one.

Since an in-depth knowledge of the lived experiences of school psychologists was sought, a qualitative study based on phenomenology and utilising the IPA method and interview design was used in this thesis. IPA was determined to be the best phenomenological method for this study because the analysis is idiographic in nature, and the method promotes the use of flexible data collection techniques. More specifically, the researcher did not want to be overwhelmed by analysing large numbers of participants and wanted to use a method that allowed for a more in-depth portrayal of individuals' experience in their own words. Additionally, the researcher viewed the IPA method and qualitative interview design as unique ways of delving into the richness of experience that other methods previously used in the research literature have not been able to achieve. IPA is "particularly suitable where the topic under investigation is novel or under-researched, where the issues are complex or ambiguous and where one is concerned to understand something about process and change" (Smith & Osborn, 2004). Subsequently, IPA and the interview design were chosen as they best aligned with the researcher's philosophy and research aim.

2.3 Research methods

The present study used a descriptive qualitative interview design (Barker et al., 1994). The rationale for using a descriptive design is that it becomes a tool in understanding the phenomena of interest, namely the lived experience of a

small sample of school psychologists in Victoria, Australia.

2.3.1 Sample

The *Department* has nine regions that cover the state of Victoria. The four Melbourne Metropolitan Regions include Northern Metropolitan, Southern Metropolitan, Eastern Metropolitan, and Western Metropolitan. The five rural regions include Barwon South Western, Loddon Mallee, Hume, Gippsland, and Grampians. Figure 2.1 outlines the nine geographical DEECD regions (DEECD, 2007a).

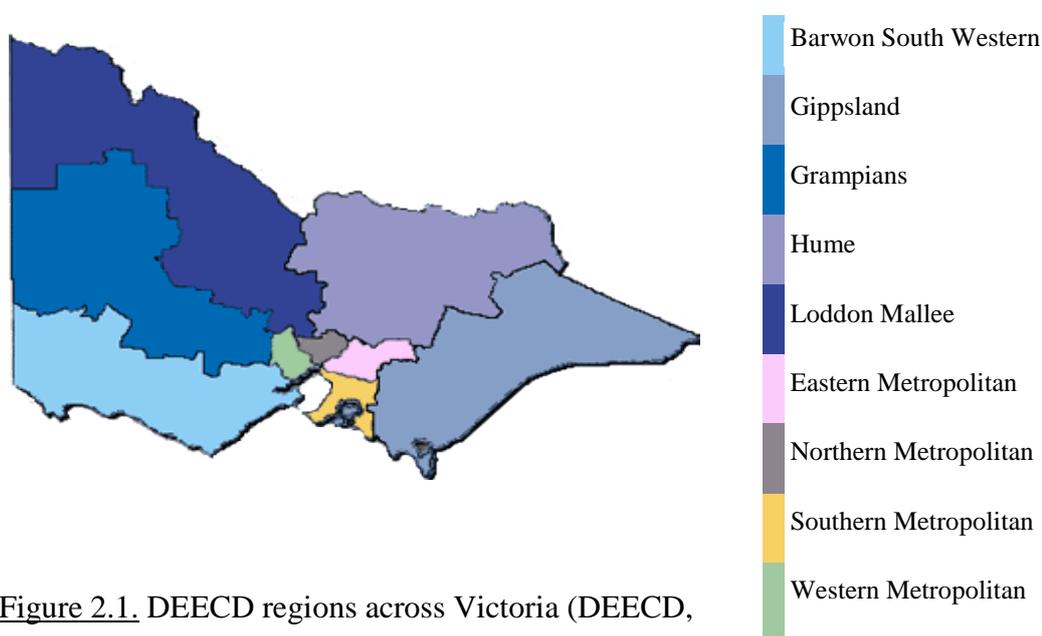


Figure 2.1. DEECD regions across Victoria (DEECD, 2007a).

The aim was to recruit one school psychologist from each of the nine regions to ensure a spread of participants across the *Department*. One participant

per region was randomly selected from the *Department* staff directory, with one directory available per region. For each region, potential participants' names were cut out of the directory and put in a hat, with one participant from each region selected. Eight psychologists who responded gave permission to be included in the research. When one participant did not respond within the allocated timeframe of two weeks, a new participant was invited to participate from the region that had not completed an interview. Serial sampling occurred to allow for reflection from earlier interviews to be incorporated into the researcher's awareness of the phenomenon being examined.

The purposive sampling criteria were that psychologists needed to be directly employed by the DEECD in a psychologist/guidance officer position (not employed by schools) with full registration as a psychologist in the state of Victoria. In each region, age, gender, and level of experience were not prerequisites *a priori*. However, these details were taken into consideration and used in the analyses if the information related to noteworthy themes that emerged during the transcription and analysis of subsequent notes.

2.4 Procedure

2.4.1 Recruitment

Once permission/ethical approval was obtained from La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee and the DEECD research division, the researcher

commenced recruitment. The DEECD research division requested that each DEECD Regional Director be informed about the research. A letter containing copies of La Trobe University and DEECD ethics approval forms went to the nine Regional Directors just prior to the Principal letters being posted. Regional Directors were not required to take any action; however, two returned correspondence acknowledging receipt of the researcher's courtesy letter.

The researcher then made contact by post with the Principal in which the participant's base room office was located. Principals received a copy of the information letter to Principals, and La Trobe University and DEECD ethics approval letters. Principals were asked to sign their consent form indicating that they gave permission (or did not give permission) for the researcher to interview the psychologist in their office. All Principals consented to the researcher contacting the psychologist located at their school. No further involvement was required of the Principals.

Once consent was received by base school Principals for their psychologist to be interviewed, information sheets and consent forms were sent to the psychologists, asking them to participate. Postal address details were obtained from the publicly available DEECD Regional Staff Directories (www.education.vic.gov.au). Principal and Psychologist letters contained stamped self-addressed envelopes in order to facilitate return of the consent forms. Psychologist information sheet and consent forms can be found in Appendix F and G. Psychologists were asked to return the consent form, indicating their decision to consent or decline participation in a one-on-one audiotaped interview, to the researcher's base school office within two weeks. If consent was not

received after two weeks, the researcher randomly selected another potential participant from that region. Participation in the research was voluntary with privacy and confidentiality preserved at all times. The researcher liaised directly with individual psychologists once consent was obtained.

2.4.2 Data Collection

Once consent was obtained, psychologists were approached by telephone and a mutually convenient time and place was arranged to conduct the interview. Eight participants were interviewed at their base room office and one participant elected to be interviewed at La Trobe University. Each psychologist was interviewed once with the option of a follow-up interview if required. In addition, interviews were completed sequentially in line with the IPA method, which allows the researcher to build up her knowledge about the phenomena without being overwhelmed by the data. No participant was interviewed a second time, with researcher and participant agreeing on this outcome at the conclusion of the first interview. No interviews were terminated, as the researcher did not observe any adverse consequences in any participant. In addition, no participant raised any concerns with the researcher during or after the interview.

During the interviews, the interview schedule was used as a loose guide. Participants did not view the guiding questions prior to the interview. A potential advantage of this option was that it did not predetermine participants' answers, instead allowing participants to discuss what immediately came to mind. Conversely, potential disadvantages include limiting participants' ability to delve

deeply into their experiences and reflect over time. Overall, the researcher decided not to allow participants to view the guiding questions, as a relaxed, natural interview was desired.

The researcher provided a verbal summary of each interview to participants at the conclusion of the interview. This provided the opportunity for a final check-in and confirmation or clarification of issues raised. Most interviews went for approximately one hour.

2.4.3 Interview method

Interviewing is one of the most common and powerful tools used to try to understand one another (Breakwell, 2006; Rapley, 2001). Researchers tend to use semi-structured interviews when they want to describe the beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and opinions that are unknown and provide detailed accounts of particular topics (Ritchie, 2001; Smith, 1995). The semi-structured interview naturally fits with qualitative analysis and IPA due to its theoretical premise of documenting the reality of tangible patterns of human existence (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2004).

With semi-structured interviews, the researcher has a set of questions on an interview schedule. Since interview schedules guide semi-structured interviews, the ordering of questions is less important than for the structured interview (Smith & Osborn, 2004). Having a loose structure leaves the researcher free to probe and follow interesting, new, or unexpected areas that arise during the

interview. Additionally, researchers are able to move the order of questions in the schedule, or eliminate them, depending on what the participant has said. Despite the flexibility of the interview schedule, it is still important for the researcher to produce one in advance because it encourages the researcher to be clear about what they want to cover in the interview (Smith & Osborn, 2004). Specifically, an interview schedule enables the researcher to consider potential complications such as wording of questions. Clarifying interview questions and having a sound interview schedule subsequently allows the researcher to focus on what the participant says during the interview. Questions posed to participants in semi-structured interviews are open-ended and non-directive, with specific questions only used when the researcher wants participants to elaborate on responses (Hein & Austin, 2001; Willig, 2001).

In order to ensure a robust interview schedule, the question/interview format and method was workshopped and refined, with the quality and content of the interview schedule pre-tested over two practice interviews. The first practice interview took place on 23rd April 2007 with the researcher playing the role of participant and the co-supervisor playing the role of interviewer. Feedback was given, with recommendations incorporated into the second practice interview. For example, the depth of questioning in the interview, types of questions asked and length of interview. This information was used to refine the interview method so the experience was rewarding and fruitful as possible for the researcher and participants. Any anecdotal feedback that was gained from participants about the interview method was used to amend the interview schedule where necessary for subsequent interviews. The second practice interview was conducted on 8th May

2007, with the researcher playing the role of interviewer and a work colleague acting as the participant. The researcher transcribed the tape-recorded second interview and made preliminary notes. Feedback was obtained from the research supervisors and used to improve the interview process. Theme titles and notes for the second interview can be found in Appendix H.

2.4.4 Interview schedule

The key questions that comprised the interview schedule are included in Table 2.1 below. Prompts are included in bracketed italics and reminders to the researcher are included in bold type.

Table 2.1

Interview Schedule

-
1. How was your day?
 2. Tell me about your week.
[Prompt - What range of tasks do you perform in your job?]
 3. I am going to invite you to talk about your experience of being a school psychologist in schools. Firstly, before we start, can I ask; Are you comfortable? Would you like a drink? I would also like to remind you that we are going to talk for about an hour, so finishing up around X. If you find down the track there is something you would like to add you can always contact me and we can meet again. **[Reminder - Confirm demographic information such as region, level of experience, therapeutic approach if required.]** To preserve your privacy, could you provide an alias for me to call you during the interview?
 4. Can you describe to me in your own words, what it is like being a school psychologist?
 5. Can you describe your workload and how you cope with it?
-

Interview Schedule (Cont.)

-
6. What is it like doing school counselling? [*Prompts - What are the most satisfying (rewarding) aspects of being a school psychologist? What are the key challenges of being a school psychologist?*)]
 7. Can you tell me about the types of issues adolescents present with to the school psychologist? [*Prompt - Can you notice any discernible trends over time?*)]
 8. Can you describe for me an experience that comes to mind about a specific incident when you think about your work?
 9. What recommendations could you make about what is needed to improve the school welfare system and student outcomes?
 10. Is there anything you wish to add?
 11. Well X, we had better wrap up there. Thanks very much for your time. As I mentioned at the start, if you have any questions, concerns or anything to add, feel free to contact me and we can meet up again.
-

Most research questions aimed to elicit a rich description of participants' lived experience, from within the context of the phenomenon in question (of being a school psychologist). As a researcher, I was mindful of my aim to obtain a thorough description of the lived experience from all participants in order to search for the "essential features of the phenomenon being studied" (McLeod, 2001, p. 47).

Many of the key questions were not asked during the interviews as participants determined the direction, pace and content of the interview. For example, with the first participant I slightly reworded but mirrored the first key question in order to remain true to the proposed intention of the interview:

(R1) This is just a free discussion about your experience of being a psychologist within the Department. I have a couple of question to facilitate, if you're stuck on a point. It's a qualitative study, so I'm interested in your personal experience.

(B1) *Okay.*

(R2) *To get the ball rolling, and today coming from that [meeting] you were saying, is probably a good example how your day has been?*

This process remained consistent through the remainder of the interviews. The initial exchange with the second participant, Emily, highlights the fluid nature of the interviews and flexibility of key questions:

(R1) *Where would you like to start? Do you want to talk about your week or what your day has been like?*

(E1) *I've had a wonderful day. I like being here. I think your environment makes an enormous difference to how you work. I work in four schools. Are you interested in my whole experience?*

(R2) *Yes, your whole experience.*

As the interviews progressed, they evolved to follow the participant's lead. Questions were framed in a manner that reflected the tone of the interview with each participant. The commencement of the interview with Scott is provided, with most of the interview transcript quoted in order to highlight how the key interview questions were weaved into the interview:

(R1) *Most of the interviews I have done have gone for about one hour. It depends on how much you have to say and how passionate you get I guess!*

(S1) *I am quite passionate but not very optimistic about the profession. I have been in it a long time now.*

(R2) *Did you want to start there?*

(S2) *I am coming from a history of it [identifying information removed; describes the Guidance Officer training program] it was absolutely idyllic.*

Now there is no Centre and no central training and outsourcing. The whole profession has been degraded I think.

(R3) What are your thoughts on that, your experience of that from the past to now?

(S3) Well some people, a lot of people find it quite depressing and I guess I do to a certain extent in that it was recognised as a high status profession. Now I think that the status is not there and it is dependent on the individual relationship in the schools now ...

In the first line, the researcher set the scene by giving background information about the previous interviews conducted. Analysis of the transcript revealed that Scott noticed the word *passionate*, which led into his initial comment about the status of the profession. In the second exchange, the researcher clarified if Scott wanted to start with that aspect of his experience. Scott again followed on from the researcher's final comment about the direction of the interview and explained the context for his statement. The researcher then centred on this aspect, asked Scott to give further details to describe his experience of the history, and lowered status of the profession. This process was followed throughout all interviews.

2.5 Data coding and analysis

The researcher first applied an idiographic approach to the analysis. This involved looking at one interview in detail before beginning to incorporate others and working up slowly to more general categories (Heron, 1996; McLeod, 2001;

Moustakas, 1994; Smith & Osborn, 2004; Smith et al., 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; van Manen, 1990; Willis, 2001; Willig, 2001). The researcher personally transcribed the nine in-depth interviews in order to remain immersed in the data. Reflection in between interviews also enabled the researcher to consider lines of inquiry for future interviews. Additionally, reflection enabled the researcher to determine if further information or points for clarification were required in a possible follow-up interview. Reading the transcripts several times allowed the researcher to refine any summarising, association, or connections that came to mind.

For the purposes of this thesis, the four stages of IPA are reviewed with a worked example to highlight the key aspects of the analysis. The stages are primarily based on the format set by Willig (2001), including the researcher's initial encounters with the text, identification of themes, clustering of themes, and the production of a summary table. The edited example provided is part of an exchange with Graham, the third participant to be interviewed. Some of the researcher's questions are included for reference.

Stage 1: The researcher's initial encounter with the text

During the first stage of IPA analysis, the researcher read the transcripts a number of times. At this stage, the researcher produced wide-ranging and unfocused notes that reflected her initial thoughts, observations and issues in response to her initial encounter with the transcript. Preliminary notes were

recorded in the left column of the transcript and completed for the entire interview. During the first stage, the researcher treated the entire transcript as potential data and did not attempt to omit or select particular passages for special attention. For each section of the transcript, the researcher noted key words, phrases and concepts. The researcher's initial encounter with the text for Graham is included in Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2

Stage 1: Data coding and analysis

Line #	Initial Reading for Meaning (Notes)	Graham – Participant 3
R40		What parts of the job do you enjoy?
GRA40	Upon initial reading, I was struck by the way in which Graham makes light of the enjoyable parts of the job. Does he feel cynical about enjoying the job? Guilty? Why did he laugh?	Oh, are we meant to do that?! [Laughs]
GRA41	Graham relaxes and answers the question, using more concrete terminology such as 'how they function'. Graham attempts to make sense of his experience by referring to more conceptual terminology such as 'Rhodes Scholars'. What is it about forming relationships and seeing change that excites him?	What do I enjoy? I enjoy forming a relationship with the families and seeing a change in how they function. That really excites me. Um, I enjoy, I enjoy recognising kids who have had troubles and then seeing them, seeing them come out of the other end, yeah. Don't have to be Rhodes Scholars; Don't have to be anything like that, but just a bit happier with whom they are.
GRA56	Graham provides some concrete examples of how students have improved. He derived great pride and a sense of achievement when he persisted through a problem and saw them change.	A girl that I didn't really understand. She'd come in here, seem to get on pretty well and then turn off. You weren't the white knight that, I don't know what you promised with your friendly attitude; oh, I was so confused with this girl. Cutting herself up, all of that, and then lo and behold, my first case of borderline personality disorder and I was thinking errrrr...but going a lot better. I really love that. I love seeing someone pass on from that.
GRA58	Graham confirms that seeing change and growth in students is integral to his identity.	Yep. I need to see change, not to be told about it.

Line #	Initial Reading for Meaning (Notes)	Graham – Participant 3
GRA63	When the researcher asks Graham if anything that stands out as good or bad or a growing experience, he brings it back to helping students through change. He again uses emotional words such as 'exciting' as he makes sense of his experience.	Sometimes when you find that the penny finally drops then you find out a reason for a kids behaviour or the fact that they're not functioning as well as expected, then you're able to pursue that and it's right then you can move them on. That is exciting.

Stage 2: Identification of themes

The second stage of analysis involved the researcher moving on to a more systematic reading of the text and identifying and labelling abstract themes that characterise each section of the transcript. The abstract themes were recorded in the right column, capturing the essential qualities of what was represented by the text. This heading was labelled *initial* theme. The researcher included a further column to the right of the initial abstract theme as part of the refinement process. This heading was labelled *emerging theme*. For example, phrases were used to represent theme titles and incorporate key words to capture the essential quality of what was found in the transcript. The researcher's identification of themes for Graham is included in Table 2.3 below.

Table 2.3

Stage 2: Data coding and analysis

Line #	Reading for Meaning (Notes)	Graham – Participant 3	Initial Theme	Emerging Theme
R40		What parts of the job do you enjoy?		
GRA 40	Does Graham feel cynical about enjoying the job? Guilty? Why did he laugh?	Oh, are we meant to do that?! [Laughs]		
GRA 41	Graham believes that relationships and seeing people change is important. What is it about this that excites him?	What do I enjoy? I enjoy forming a relationship with the families and seeing a change in how they function. That really excites me. Um, I enjoy, I enjoy recognising kids who have had troubles and then seeing them, seeing them come out of the other end, yeah. Don't have to be Rhodes Scholars; don't have to be anything like that, but just a bit happier with whom they are.	I enjoy forming relationships and seeing change	Relationships and change

Stage 3: Clustering of themes

The third stage involved the researcher introducing structure into the analysis and naming the essential themes. The researcher listed the themes identified in stage two on a separate piece of paper and thought about how they related to one another. Some themes formed natural clusters and were given labels to capture their essence. The researcher used brief quotes by participants themselves or descriptive labels for these emerging superordinate themes depending on how well they fitted with the original transcript. The researcher's clustering of themes for Graham is included in Table 2.4 below.

Table 2.4

Stage 3: Data coding and analysis

<i>The joy of seeing change & getting to know students</i>	
GRA41	Relationships and change
GRA58	I need to see change, not be told about it
GRA59	Like being involved in their lives
GRA61	I like to get feedback
GRA63	Exciting when you find a reason for their behaviour and they move on
GRA73	Significant periods when students come back, so good they weren't lost
GRA94	Enjoy getting to know kids

Stage 4: Production of a summary table

The fourth stage involved the production of a master list or table of themes, with quotes or summarised sections of text that best illustrated each theme. Since the summary table only included themes that captured the essence of the participant's experience, the researcher refined themes several times to achieve best fit with the transcript. The researcher's production of a summary table for Graham is included in Table 2.5 below.

Table 2.5

Stage 4: Data coding and analysis

<i>Line #</i>	<i>GRAHAM: PARTICIPANT 3</i>
<i>Feeling frustrated at my lack of knowledge</i>	
GRA32	Find greater clinical part to job than when I first started
GRA22	I was underprepared and frustrated at my lack of knowledge. Felt as though I was not doing the job properly
GRA25	Decided to do something (study) which has made a big difference to how feel about the job

<i>I like feeling part of the community</i>	
GRA116	Living in community where I work has been hard on my kids. Whilst it's been good working in area and be known, it might be better to be located in another area. Part of it but bit of barrier
GRA122	Lonely times when have knowledge you can't pass on, it's like trying to maintain thematically sealed jar don't want to leak, devastating in small community
<i>I struggle with how the system wants me to deliver services</i>	
GRA14	I am being pulled further away from the way that I prefer to deliver psych services
GRA15	I struggle with that system
GRA127	Things are changing, working this way is being pulled away and viewed with suspicion by colleagues
<i>I really enjoy getting to know students and get excited when I see change</i>	
GRA41	I enjoy forming relationships and seeing change
GRA58	I need to see change not be told about it
GRA61	I like to get feedback
GRA63	It's exciting when you find a reason for their behaviour and they move on
GRA73	There are significant periods when students come back, so good they weren't lost
GRA91	I enjoy getting to know kids

The researcher had the option of using the master-theme list for the first interview to begin analysis of the second interview, or the process could be used anew. The decision was made to start each process anew as the researcher found it impossible to bracket off the themes for each participant when trying to add each participant to the first participant's master list. The master lists from each separately analysed interview were then read together and a consolidated list of master themes for the group was produced. This process was also refined in order to achieve a best fit with the transcripts, capture the essence of participant's experience, and be as representative as possible across the nine participants. The superordinate themes for participants' individual table of themes became sub-themes in the final master list. Participant sub-themes were clustered together and given a superordinate theme label. For example, Graham's theme of *I really enjoy getting to know students and get excited when I see change* became a sub-

theme under the superordinate theme of *The joy of being able to make a difference*.

2.6 Research Rigour

Quantitative methods have traditionally evaluated research with standards such as reliability and validity (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002; Schuetz, 2011). In contrast, qualitative research is evaluated using five-phases (Ritchie, 2001; Yardley, 2000). The phases include openness, replicability, grounding, verification methods and uncovering (or self-evidence) (Barker et al., 1994; Daly et al., 2007; Stiles, 1993). Successful application of these concepts can be used to determine the *trustworthiness* of the research and subsequently, qualitative rigour (Morse et al., 2002). The five-phases will now be described with examples linking to the current study provided.

The first guideline relates to *openness*, which involves the researcher clearly describing their theoretical orientation or biases. For the current study, this was achieved through the researcher stating her theoretical orientation and biases in the prologue and epilogue.

The second guideline relates to *replicability*, which involved the researcher describing her data collection method in enough detail to allow others to replicate the work (such as the interview schedule used). For the current study, a full description of the methodology was provided in this thesis. This included transparency of methods and data presentation such as the interview schedule and samples of the IPA coding and analysis.

The third phase relates to *grounding*, which involves the researcher providing enough examples of the raw data to illustrate the themes or categories obtained and to allow the reader to evaluate the findings. For the current study, the researcher has provided samples of quotes for the nine participants via case studies and combined analysis of results.

The fourth phase relates to *verification methods*, which involves the researcher using methods for checking the validity of results such as analytic auditing, triangulation, or testimonial validity. Analytic auditing incorporates using multiple researchers or an additional person who checks results against the data. Triangulation incorporates examining the phenomenon from multiple, varied perspectives. Testimonial validity incorporates checking the results with the original informants or similar others. In relation to the current study, the researcher used all three methods of verification. For example, the researcher's supervisor provided analytical auditing of the transcripts and corresponding themes. Triangulation was achieved through the researcher interviewing multiple participants and checking with individuals during the interview that the researcher understood what they have said. Further credibility was achieved through researcher triangulation, whereby the principal supervisor read the transcripts, made suggestions to refine themes or highlighted discrepancies. Other evidence of triangulation includes having the co-supervisor act as researcher, and researcher act as participant in the first practice interview, and having a colleague act as participant in the practice interview.

Whilst testimonial validity was attempted, it was only partially achieved, as the researcher was able to have only one participant review their transcript and

analysis of themes. This limited the researcher's ability to determine the level of participant's agreement with the identified themes. However, member checking can be difficult to achieve and often results in poor response rates, broad agreement with the themes identified, or difficulty in reengaging with the participants (Crouch & Wright, 2004; Rubin, 2004; Warwick, Stephen, Cordle & Ashworth, 2004; Whittington & Burns, 2005). For example, in relation to the current study, five participants did not respond to the invitation and one participant indicated that they trusted the researcher's assessment and subsequently did not need to engage in member checking. Only three out of the nine participants indicated that they would like to review their results. Despite this, one participant resigned and the second participant could no longer be located via the *Department* directory. The third participant received a copy of the section of the results chapter that was written in relation to their interview and was invited to review this section and provide feedback. This participant indicated broad agreement in relation to the themes that the researcher identified (Warwick et al., 2004).

The fifth phase involves *uncovering*, which involves the reader seeing the results as believable as well as enabling them to make sense of, or grasp the phenomenon. For the current study, this was achieved through the researcher's engagement in a thorough consideration of the literature, immersion in an in-depth and prolonged engagement with the topic, engagement in a constant and continual reflection and review of themes and provision of multiple thesis drafts until the themes were well represented.

2.7 Ethical Issues

No broad significant ethical issues were identified and the potential for harm, emotional distress, and shame was minimised for participants. Despite this, the fact that the DEECD in Western and subsequently Eastern Metropolitan Region employed the researcher during the course of the study as a school psychologist may have adversely influenced participants' responses. For example, the researcher knew one participant as they worked in the same region during the data collection phase of the study. This may have influenced how this participant responded during their interview. In addition, even though the other participants did not know the researcher, they were informed that the researcher was a school psychologist employed by the DEECD. Whilst the aim was to utilise this position to facilitate rapport due to the researcher's potential empathy with the topic, participants may have viewed it as an ethical boundary issue. Every attempt was made to ensure that participants felt as comfortable as possible, by informing them in the information sheet and before the interview commenced, that if they refused to participate in the study it would not affect their employment in any way. Participants were also informed that their confidentiality was assured, through use of a pseudonym and de-identifying information.

The aim of having direct contact with participants was to ensure that participants' privacy and confidentiality was maintained at all times. Despite this, potential still remained for participants to be identified through description of case studies and presentation and discussion of results. Given the low numbers of psychologists in the current study, participants may have been concerned about

being identified through examples provided. In order to protect the identity of participants, allay potential concerns and minimise this potential ethical issue, pseudonyms were used in the transcripts and this thesis. Additionally, other identifying information such as school names and *Department* regions, were omitted or modified.

2.8 Potential methodological limitations

A qualitative approach was chosen to achieve a rich understanding and description of the lived experiences of psychologists, and the phenomenological methodology was deemed the best fit. However, a number of methodological limitations may exist. For example, the phenomenological approach is not intended for generalisation. Determining saturation of information during the interview process can be difficult to achieve and is not the aim of this method. Furthermore, the method cannot be truly replicated even with the most thorough and stringent recording of procedures. Thematic analysis can often be mistaken for a conceptual rather than phenomenological exercise (Willis, 2001), and the nature of the interviews (individual in-depth) can be very time-consuming and cumbersome (Barker et al., 1994). Alternative qualitative methods such as focus groups, or quantitative methods such as questionnaires, may obtain similar information in a shorter period although this would potentially sacrifice richness of data. Despite the potential limitations of phenomenology, wide generalisations are not an aim of this research, therefore the negative impacts are deemed

minimal.

According to Smith and Osborn (2004), IPA is seen as a dynamic process where the researcher plays an active role. Whilst the insider's perspective can be viewed as a strength of IPA, it can also be a limitation. For example, a complete perspective may not be possible, and the researcher's prior knowledge and biases may cloud the level of interpretation. Le Vasseur (2003) suggested that Husserl's original definition of bracketing was misinterpreted, and it is more helpful to consider bracketing as a "temporary suspension of our theories and prior knowledge, not a permanent denial of them" (p. 417). In other words, as a researcher I try to remain curious and be open to possible restructuring of the experience.

Articulating and applying the phenomenological attitude can be a difficult exercise in practice. Some researchers have argued that maintaining the phenomenological attitude is akin to a dance, where:

...researchers must wage a continuous, iterative struggle to become aware of, and then manage, pre-understandings and habitualities that inevitability linger. Persistence will reward the researcher with special, if fleeting, moments of disclosure in which the phenomenon reveals something of itself in a fresh way (Finlay, 2008, p. 1).

Part of this dance incorporates being critically self-aware as a researcher of how my own subjectivity, vested interests, background, predilections, assumptions, positioning and behaviour impact on the research process and findings during and after the event, and specifically how these may close down avenues of understanding (Finlay, 2008). Whilst this process is generally applied

during the data gathering or analysis phase, the researcher integrated this stance throughout the write-up of this thesis. For example, the researcher continually reflected during the write-up of the thesis about the true essence of the experience of working as a school psychologist in Victorian government schools.

After in-depth engagement with the topic, it became evident that the researcher had become too focussed on the difficulties and ambiguities of the school psychologists' role, and was less open to positive aspects. For example, the researcher initially failed to notice participants explaining why they kept doing the work. In effect, the researcher had closed down her avenues of understanding and was only confirming what was already known in the literature. This component of participants' experience became lost in the dance between reduction and reflexivity. As such, the aspect of *making a difference* then became the unique contribution of this thesis.

The tone of the thesis was subsequently transformed from being overly critical and negative of the DEECD and school psychologists' experience, to reframing and refocussing the experience in a more constructive and balanced way. For example, the researcher had focussed on complaints and the negative aspects of working in the *Department*. Additionally, it was contrasted with strong positives such as making a difference. However, participants' experience was neither positive nor negative, or black and white per se, but more shades of grey. In other words, the thesis was re-written to reflect the balanced experiences of participants.

The skill of the interviewer may be potentially limiting, with results affected by level of experience and training. Every person is different and

different qualitative phenomenological researchers may elicit quite different information if the study were to be replicated (Stiles, 1993). In addition, the new phenomenology has a different emphasis. Rather than bracketing, the researcher is encouraged to focus on the subjective experience, which can make it challenging to be mindful of the researcher's potential biases and assumptions. Whilst it is important to adopt an attentive and contemplative phenomenological stance when drawing out themes, it was impossible for the researcher to suspend personal beliefs and biases during the data analysis phase (van Manen, 1990). It was more important to acknowledge these potential biases and deal with them rather than pretending they are not there and of some influence. IPA recognises the dependency and complication of the researcher's own conceptions and that these are required in order to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity (Smith et al., 2008). Larkin, Watts, and Clifton (2006) argued that:

... it is not actually possible – even if it might be desirable – to remove ourselves, our thoughts and our meaning systems from the world, in order to find out how things ‘really are’ in some definitive sense (p. 106).

2.9 Potential methodological strengths

Despite the possible or known methodological limitations, there were potential benefits for participants. The research project aimed to facilitate a better understanding of the experiences of school psychologists. The present study also

aimed to encourage the *Department* to reflect on the demands that psychologists face when providing service to schools in Victoria and possibly recommend ways to enhance service delivery or policy development. A secondary aim was to give participants the chance to engage in self-exploration of their role within schools and encourage them to reflect on their experience.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

The chapter commences with an overview of participants in a case study format in order to situate the reader. The combined analysis of participants and subsequent superordinate themes follows. Limited demographic and regional location information has been included in order to protect identities of participants, and pseudonyms have been allocated to participants. The use of locations gave context within a broad frame of reference and protected the identity of participants. For example, Bill worked in a rural region of Victoria and Emily worked in a metropolitan region. To facilitate reading participants' experiences and give meaning to the data, case studies start with participants who had a more positive overall experience through to those who found their experiences to be more challenging.

3.2 Summary of individual participants

Bill: You've picked someone who is reasonably happy with his job

Bill had trained and worked as a teacher for several years and then completed further on-the-job training and tertiary studies to become a guidance officer. At the time of the interview, Bill worked in a rural region of

the *Department* as a psychologist. Four themes were identified for Bill: (1) *I like the collegiate support that the current service delivery model provides*, (2) *I prefer the traditional guidance officer training program over contemporary education*, (3) *There are aspects of the job that contribute to my enjoyment of working as a school psychologist*, and (4) *I now have a more pragmatic approach to my caseload*.

Bill had worked under different service delivery models over his career as a teacher, guidance officer and psychologist. He compared his experiences of the systems environment working in each of these roles, and used this comparison to make sense of his experiences. Overall, Bill preferred the current model of service delivery for several reasons. Some aspects were practical such as sharing of professional knowledge or expertise or pooling of professional resources. Other aspects were deeper phenomenological experiences such as buffering against the sense of isolation that comes from working on your own, and the subsequent reassurance and security that collegiate support provided:

...lack of collegiate support, inefficient use of your time because you'd have to be going back to different places for files or tests. An inability to share with colleagues...having originally experienced a school support structure and then the more spread out, non co-located situation, and coming back to where we were all co-located...I'm very happy with the structure we've got here...that's a lot better than people feeling quite isolated and vulnerable to the pressures that Principals can put on workers (Bill, 10).

Paradoxically, whilst Bill favoured the current service delivery model of co-location, he preferred the traditional method of training school psychologists under the guidance officer training program. The guidance officer training program trained qualified teachers to become school psychologists. In Bill's experience, this method of training was more effective than the current method, where school psychologists became fully qualified through tertiary education programs. The guidance officer training program gave Bill a sense of confidence in his ability to perform his professional duties: "*That's gold star training ... it really did equip the guidance officers with the skills to go out and be more effective ... that model of training is great. Very fortunate to have that* (Bill, 52)".

There were a range of factors that influenced why Bill remained in the profession, such as feeling as though he was not tied to schools and enjoying the variety of work. He saw these factors as appealing benefits because there was a liberating sense of autonomy and variety of the role: "*... there's a fair bit of freedom in terms of going where you want ... you're mixing with different people, travelling to different places, helping people ... I find that attractive* (Bill, 55)". Whilst these factors generated a sense of satisfaction in working as a school psychologist, more importantly, he most enjoyed working with students as it left him feeling personally and professionally fulfilled: "*It's just satisfying having a kid who's on the point of being expelled ... then you can intervene ... and keep the kid at school ... subsequently they might be much better off* (Bill, 53)".

Although Bill derived a sense of fulfilment around working individually with students, he believed that he had become more pragmatic in

his approach to his caseload. In his view, the systems environment influenced his experience, competing for his attention:

It's the only way to operate really. Sometimes I have the luxury of one or two long-term counselling cases (Bill, 33) ... it depends on who your clients are... I see the client as being both the school and the student, and the teachers sometimes, so when you're aware of that balance you just say, "Okay, I'm going to have to do short-term work and that's the reality" (Bill, 35).

In summary, whilst there were elements of former service delivery models that Bill preferred, such as the traditional guidance officer training program, overall he preferred the current model of service delivery. Bill believed that co-location of colleagues buffered against the sense of isolation and provided reassurance and security. He was practical in his current view of how he worked as a school psychologist. He saw that he had modified the way he viewed cases within the systemic constraints of his workload. Despite these constraints, Bill derived a sense of personal and professional fulfilment in working with students. He also derived a sense of satisfaction from other appealing benefits, which he attributed to a liberating sense of autonomy and role variety. The title of *You've picked someone who is reasonably happy with their job* encapsulates Bill's overall experience of working as a school psychologist in the *Department*.

Emily: Despite everything, it is the best job I've had

Emily had almost a decade's experience as a psychologist in a metropolitan region of the *Department*. Five themes were identified for Emily: (1) *I like having an impact on young people's lives*, (2) *I'm exhausted by being everything to everybody*, (3) *I want schools to recognise that cases have an impact on me too*, (4) *I'm tired of being socially isolated*, and (5) *I want to be acknowledged and accepted as being useful to the wellbeing of the school community*.

Overall, Emily gained a sense of accomplishment in her experiences of working as a school psychologist in the *Department*. This was mainly because she felt potent in her ability to affect positive changes in the lives of the students she worked with. Being able to influence a student's life and facilitate change was the reason why Emily entered the profession and why she stayed: "*It's a magical job ... it's the best job I've had because you're working with young people and you can impact on young people's lives much more than older dudes like me* [Laughs] (Emily, 126)".

Despite the sense of accomplishment that helping students gave her, Emily felt exhausted by spreading herself so thinly. This sense of being everything to everybody was influenced by Emily's experience of boundary issues, which left her feeling fatigued and frustrated. However, Emily recognised that the way she currently operated was not sustainable, and that she would benefit from modifying the way she worked: "*One mistake I've made is I was available, pretty much all*

the time ... I've not had really clear boundaries, so I've learnt that. I'm much more cautious about that now (Emily, 44)".

On a broad level, Emily articulated a decreased capacity to cope with the demands of working with complex student issues in a systemic environment. Additionally, Emily also found it difficult to work cooperatively with external agencies. In this situation, Emily felt a sense of reluctance in working with external agencies as it felt like an onerous task. Furthermore, these experiences often resulted in relinquishing control over the outcomes for students: *"Working with the X [other Government Department] that's a diabolical experience for me. Just so fraught with crap, with not working cooperatively; from my perspective I really, really struggle (Emily, 95)".* Emily subsequently wanted schools to recognise that cases had an impact on her, both personally and professionally, and the need for her to work through the emotional effect of working as a school psychologist:

...recommendation that there might be some kind of awareness about the emotional stuff we carry, the impact it has, the need for respite and reflection and for professional meetings and all the things that we'd like to do (Emily, 98).

In Emily's experience, she understood her sense of social isolation and lack of belonging in working as a school psychologist:

I'd much rather be in one school and participate in things such as morning teas and birthday celebrations and conversations with staff and peers. I'm sort of tired of being so socially isolated (Emily, 15)".

This sense of isolation contributed to the stress Emily was experiencing, and she recognised the constructive contributions that social connectedness and belonging could potentially bring.

Emily also felt that whilst schools appreciated what she did to contribute to the wellbeing of the school community, they did not overtly demonstrate their appreciation. She was left feeling as though her work as a school psychologist was not good enough. Emily wanted schools to demonstrate their appreciation not just in their words but also in their actions:

To remember that you're there and can be useful. Because if you were to ring any of them [schools] up, they would say, 'Yes, she is fantastic' ... but to do that one step further ... (Emily, 101) Actually act it, not just say it. 'Words are cheap'; people say all the time (Emily, 102).

In summary, Emily gained a sense of accomplishment in working in the *Department* as a school psychologist. She felt potent in her ability to affect positive changes in the lives of the students she worked with. However, Emily was exhausted by spreading herself so thinly and recognised that she needed to modify the way in which she worked. Emily wanted schools to recognise that cases affected her, both personally and professionally. She was tired of feeling socially isolated, and recognised the constructive contributions of social connectedness and belonging. Emily also wanted overt recognition of her ability to contribute to the wellbeing of the school community. Despite these challenges, Emily believed that working in the role of a school psychologist was *magical* and the title of *Despite everything, it is the best job I've had* encapsulates the essence of her experience.

Naomi: I still enjoy the type of work that I do

Naomi initially trained and worked as a teacher before becoming a guidance officer. At the time of the interview, she worked as a psychologist in a metropolitan region of the *Department*. Four themes were identified for Naomi: (1) *Establishing your authority in the system*, (2) *Fighting to progress through the system as a psychologist*, (3) *The challenge of being thinly spread* and (4) *I still enjoy the type of work that I do*.

In Naomi's experience, she found it challenging to learn to work within the education system as a psychologist and to establish her authority. Whilst she had previously worked as a teacher, in comparison, her experience of working as a psychologist was more difficult because she felt like an outsider. As a school psychologist, Naomi found the culture of the education system to be idiosyncratic and it took her a while to secure an ongoing position. Even though she initially had contracted positions, this made her feel as though she did not belong, that she was unable to voice her opinions, and had to fight with her colleagues for extra responsibilities. Once Naomi secured ongoing employment, she felt a sense of protection and believed that her ongoing employment status granted her permission to have an opinion. In turn, Naomi felt comfort in being able to be herself:

Some of that authority can only get to you once you're permanent. Once you've become permanent you're safe to have an opinion, to tread on toes ... while you're on contract you have to be careful ... (Naomi, 38)".

Despite the security that an ongoing position provided, Naomi felt as though her experience was of fighting to progress through the system as a psychologist. In particular, she believed that the different pay grades for school psychologists (allied health 3 and 4) was illogical, which created jealousies, competition and interpersonal difficulties between colleagues:

When you're trying to get these different areas of responsibility you've got to fight to get them and causing work relationships to be strained because of it (Naomi, 29).

Naomi felt uncomfortable with the tension that the situation caused as it created disharmony within the team. Nonetheless, being on a higher pay grade represented appreciation and acknowledgment for her experience and the level of work she undertook. As such, Naomi felt that the pay grades were a paradoxical problem in that everyone should progress through the system, however, needed to earn this right.

Working in a number of schools every week made Naomi feel thinly spread. She subsequently experienced work overload, which resulted in her feeling stressed. In Naomi's experience, she thought that she was not being as effective in her service delivery as she would like, which left her feeling discontented:

The actual job itself, it's just that we're just too thinly spread. To go to different schools everyday means that you're so snowed under at the next school that things have to wait ... [it] is a hard part of the job ... keeps you busy and active, but it just means skimming the top and not being able to help people as much as we would like to (Naomi, 22).

Naomi enjoyed a number of aspects of working as a school psychologist. This included her perception that the role came with an inherent responsibility. Naomi also enjoyed the variety of work she was able to do such as projects and consultancy. In particular, it was working with parents and students and making a difference in their lives that generated a sense of purpose and fulfilment:

I still enjoy the type of work that I do, the individual work, talking to the parents and hearing what's really going on for their children ... you do make a difference and teachers appreciate you're being there (Naomi, 20).

In summary, the title, *I still enjoy the work that I do*, encapsulates the overall experience for Naomi. Naomi experienced several challenges in becoming a school psychologist with the *Department*. These included securing ongoing employment, fighting to progress through the system, and feeling thinly spread. Despite these challenges, she particularly derived a sense of purpose and fulfilment in making a difference in student's lives. Being able to work mitigated any frustrations she experienced in her role and she was able to keep them in perspective.

Jim: I am superman because I do make major changes in the lives of students

Jim was a psychologist who worked in a rural region of the *Department*. He had previously worked in metropolitan regions, however, made the 'sea change' in order to accept his current position. Jim also worked in private practice. Five themes were identified for Jim: (1) *Fighting the lack of autonomy*

and control in the system, (2) I am unable to meet school's expectations, (3) My workload has become a numbers' game, (4) I want the opportunity to use my untapped skills in schools, and (5) It's rewarding and a privilege to have an impact on someone's life.

Jim found that he lacked control and autonomy working in the public service as a school psychologist. He believed that he was a qualified and experienced professional, and felt disillusioned that he was not able to act independently. Paradoxically, he experienced a lack of boundaries and adherence to ethics and ethical procedures. Jim was left feeling confused by this discrepancy and morally and ethically compromised. Consequently, Jim tried to make sense of the confusion, but felt stuck between wanting to work within the system, and fighting it:

... there are ethical issues that you know of, but because you've got expectations and pressure to do things the Department's way, then sometimes our ethical guidelines go out the window (Jim, 19).

In Jim's experience, he found that schools generally had high expectations of him when working with students. For example, Jim felt that schools expected him to see as many students as possible each day and that their school was his highest priority. This experience left him feeling impotent, as he was unable to meet what he interpreted as unrealistic expectations. Jim tried to make sense of his experience and believed that he needed the strength of Superman to deal with influential Principals:

I feel that I'm superman because I've got a heavy workload and I've got to do all of those unrealistic things and I need a magic wand for lots of people (Jim, 58).

Working in this way made Jim feel deprived of time and he interpreted that his experience of workload was like a numbers' game. In Jim's words, it felt like "*Bums on seats*" (Jim, 28), or churning through the individual work with students. Jim felt pressured to focus all of his time on direct work with students, which made him feel as though he was not dedicating enough time to being adequately prepared. Jim tried to make sense of his experience by comparing his familiarity with his work in private practice. In private practice, Jim believed that he had more time to prepare for cases and undertake professional reading and learning. Jim interpreted his experience through an analogy of a man spinning plates in the circus. Similarly, to the man spinning plates in the circus, Jim had multiple things to concentrate on, which made him feel as though he lacked control:

... I've got X schools and I'm spinning X different plates and if I spend too much time on this, this, or this one, then the other ones get neglected and it's very hard to keep everyone happy (Jim, 26).

Jim wanted the opportunity to use his untapped skills in schools. However, in his experience, he believed that schools did not trust school psychologists to work independently or appreciate the skills that they had. Jim felt a sense of disillusionment as he tried to understand why schools only expected traditional tasks such as counselling and assessments. This made Jim feel impotent as he was unable to work in other ways such as on projects and

programs. Jim wanted more control and the opportunity to utilise his range of skills, however, felt that it would be unappreciated:

There's a lot of untapped skills that psychologists have and we don't have the opportunity to use them ... We want to do this sort of work [projects and programs] but we are bogged down with the casework and so you don't mention it. You've got bright ideas. I would write them down on a bit of paper but they'll just file it (Jim, 31).

Working with students was not only interpreted by Jim to be a reward, but was also seen as a privilege. This sense of privilege was associated with Jim feeling as though he was able to be a part of their lives and see them change. Jim appreciated the influence he had on students as it gave him a sense of purpose and fulfilment: *"They look up to me and I know that ... I must have had an impact on them and helped them in their life ... He listened to everything I said ... (Jim, 33)"*.

In summary, Jim found it challenging to work in the system as he experienced a lack of control and autonomy and felt impotent in being able to meet what he interpreted as unrealistic expectations placed upon him. Jim felt deprived of time and pressured to focus all of his time on direct work with students. He experienced a sense of disillusionment in not being able to utilise his skills in schools the way he wanted. Jim tried to make sense of his experience of working as a school psychologist and used the analogies of Superman and a circus man to assist him. In one way, he felt powerful because he was able to make major changes in the lives of students and impact on them. However, he also felt that he lacked control to work in the way that he wanted. Overall, Jim derived a

sense of privilege in working with students as it left him feeling fulfilled.

Subsequently, the title *I am superman because I do make major changes in the lives of students* captures the essence of Jim's experience.

Graham: I'm doing my job the way that it should be done

Graham had trained and worked as a teacher before becoming a psychologist in a rural region of the *Department*. Graham was now working in another rural region of the *Department*. Four themes were identified for Graham: (1) *Feeling frustrated at my lack of knowledge*, (2) *I like feeling part of the community*, (3) *I struggle with how the system wants me to deliver services*, and (4) *I really enjoy getting to know students and get excited when I see change*.

When Graham started in the profession, he felt frustrated at his own lack of knowledge and experience around mental health issues. He tried to make sense of his experience and interpreted that he was underprepared to work with students and address the significant concerns they presented with. At the time, Graham was frustrated at his ignorance and embarrassed at his level of competence:

I was really under-prepared for that. I was really frustrated at my lack of knowledge, I'm not doing this job properly, I'm a charlatan, and how dare I call myself a psychologist and work in this field [Laughs] (Graham, 22).

However, Graham undertook further studies, which made him feel more confident in his ability to identify issues and support students more effectively. This confidence renewed the sense of satisfaction and fulfilment that Graham derived

from his work as he felt that he was “*doing the right thing by kids*” (Graham, 128).

When comparing his experience of working in two different rural regions, Graham preferred and liked working where he currently was located because he felt part of the small community in which he lived and worked. In Graham’s experience, being able to live and work in the same community enabled him to work more intimately with students and fostered a sense of connection. Additionally, Graham felt as though this connection with the community bought him more respect. However, living and working in the same community sometimes made Graham feel ethically compromised and professionally isolated: “*There are times where so much has happened that you would like to just say, ‘Hey! You’d never guess what ...’ [Laughs] but you can’t do that sort of stuff*” (Graham, 122)”.

Graham struggled with how the regional and network-based staff wanted him to deliver services. In his experience, he preferred the autonomy of working on his own in a finite number of schools, however, felt that regional staff and colleagues wanted him to work in a systemic way. He interpreted that regional staff and colleagues were suspicious of the way he worked because they could not see what he was doing. Furthermore, Graham felt concerned that his current experience of living and working in a small community was at risk of being aligned with regional policy:

It’s changing, being pulled away and viewed with suspicion by colleagues.

‘What are you doing over there? Are you working as hard as us?’ There’s

that element which, I don't know, it will win out in the end (Graham, 127).

Overall, Graham enjoyed working with students and families and developing relationships with them. He derived a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment when students and families would change. Graham understood his experience as excitement and elation because he was able to make a difference in the lives of those with whom he worked:

... when you find that the penny finally drops, and then you find out a reason ... you're able to pursue that and it's right then you can move them on. That's exciting (Graham, 63).

Graham's ability to form relationships with students and families and help them achieve change was one of the key motivating factors that kept him working as a school psychologist and located in his community.

In summary, Graham experienced some challenges in his work as a school psychologist in a rural community including his struggle to deliver services the way he wanted. However, he currently derived a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment in being able to work with others and make a difference in their lives. Overall, Graham enjoyed the autonomy, respect and intimate connection to his students and the schools in which he worked. However, the elation and excitement that Graham experienced when forming relationships with students and families and seeing them change was what kept him working as a school psychologist in his community. The title *I'm doing my job the way that it should be done* captures how Graham currently felt about his work.

Scott: I'm quite passionate but not very optimistic about the profession

Scott was an experienced psychologist who worked in a metropolitan region of the *Department*. He had completed the guidance officer training program. Most of Scott's career as a psychologist had been with the *Department*. Four themes were identified for Scott: (1) *I like the independence and variety of the job*, (2) *Sadness at the loss of status of the profession*, (3) *It's difficult trying to influence change in some parents and teachers*, and (4) *This job suits me*.

Scott described himself as quite passionate about the profession and he enjoyed the independence and variety of the job. In his experience, one of the major benefits of working as a school psychologist was the consultation and support he could provide to teachers and Principals. He derived a sense of fulfilment in and control in being able to set his own agenda:

I still think it's a really good job. One of the positive things you do have is lots of independence I don't think people who haven't worked in other jobs [realise]. In this [job], you can go off and set your own agenda within a broad framework so I really like that aspect of it (Scott, 14).

Scott also enjoyed the variety of issues that he faced each day in his role. He interpreted this variation as a motivating factor that kept him energised:

You can be playing games with a kindergarten kid one day and talking to a VCE student about philosophy or something the next day, or talking to a parent about child behaviour or talking to teachers about reading. That variation, very nice [Laughs]. A good part of the job (Scott, 33).

Scott felt that the job was still a great one with lots of benefits. However, he believed that the status of the profession had been lost during his career. He interpreted this loss of status with a sense of sadness:

... it was a recognised high status profession and now I think the status isn't there and it's dependent on the individual's relationships in the schools now. How well they are received. And that can vary (Scott, 3).

Although Scott was disappointed at the loss of status of the profession, he appeared to have accepted that this was the current systems culture. However, he interpreted that many of his colleagues were still troubled by this sense of loss:

I know lots of people ... get really upset by it, what the Department does in terms of not acknowledging our input or skills and the lowering of status. A lot of people just leave ... (Scott, 8).

There were many challenges that Scott faced when working with parents, students and teachers including trying to influence change when working with families or teachers. Scott often experienced a sense of helplessness when trying to effect real change when working with dysfunctional families or teachers who would not implement programs that he had suggested:

No hope trying to change the parents, that's very difficult I find. That's been a major issue. Another one is teachers that aren't too good and not coping or negative ... when you meet it, it's always hard ... (Scott, 22).

Despite the doubt Scott encountered, he still derived enjoyment from the job and liked supporting teachers with the difficult students they had in their classes. He also believed that the work that he did with students and schools was “*very important*” (Scott, 14) and “*it's a job to be done well*” (Scott, 33).

Working as a school psychologist suited Scott and he felt content with how his role fit within the system. Scott tried to make sense of his experience and interpreted that his lack of interest in career progression was consistent with him feeling comfortable with his role: “*I’m not ambitious in the career sense. If you wanted to get up into the echelons this is not the place you do it ... quite happy to stay where I am* (Scott, 17)”.

In summary, Scott remained quite passionate about working in schools as a psychologist. There was a range of aspects that made his job enjoyable including supporting teachers and Principals, and experiencing the independence and variety in his work. Whilst Scott was disappointed at how the status of the profession had reduced during his career, he was pragmatic in his outlook. This included him feeling comfortable with his role and not wanting to progress his career any further. The title *I’m quite passionate but not very optimistic about the profession* captured how Scott felt about the role of school psychologists in that he still enjoyed what he did but felt that it had changed.

Liam: I’m at the point of saying well, I’d rather grow vegies!

Liam had initially trained as a teacher before completing the guidance officer training program. He was an experienced psychologist working in a rural region of the *Department*. Liam resigned his position soon after the interview for this study. Five themes were identified for Liam: (1) *Downgrading of the status of the profession*, (2) *Frustration of poor work practices and lack of professionalism*, (3) *I don’t feel adequately prepared or supported to continue*

dealing with critical incidents and student issues, (4) The pleasure of the job has always been around working with students and making a difference, and (5) There is a need to know and feel like you belong or have a contribution to a school.

In Liam's experience as a school psychologist, he believed that the status of school psychologists had been downgraded over his career. He interpreted that school psychologists were no longer valued in the organisation. He tried to make sense of his experience, and reasoned that part of the devaluing of the profession could be attributed to school psychologists no longer being trained as educators:

*... being valued as an educator is something that has changed over time
... a shift from seeing people that have got teaching experience as being able to contribute to discussions about learning or organisational or effective practices within a school ... (Liam, 28).*

Another way that Liam thought that the profession had been downgraded was in the change to the allied health pay structure. To Liam, the change of pay structure also represented a downgrading of the profession. Liam reasoned that many experienced staff were not remunerated for what he believed reflected their level of experience. This left him feeling disheartened and as though the profession was not respected for its professional expertise anymore.

Liam experienced a sense of helplessness and frustration at a number of perceived poor work practices and a lack of professionalism in the education system. The systems and environmental aspects included a lack of private meeting areas in schools, lack of accountability, lack of career options, and colleagues being spread out across different locations. Liam tried to make sense of his experience and believed that these issues may appear to be practical,

however, represented a lack of respect for his need for a professional working environment:

I have to go hunting for a space in the existing schools. You can meet in the common room but you might also have a worker coming in who is putting in a projector screen or someone who has lost property over in the corner. Colleagues will also say this, that there's probably not one school in our whole area that actually gives you a private area on a permanent basis so you can actually come in and out of there ... (Liam, 39).

On the one hand, Liam was able to reflect on his experience and understood that these aspects might not be resolved. Despite this, he wanted acknowledgment that they were problems experienced by many of his colleagues. To Liam, acknowledgement equated to professional respect for the role:

... the alternative to that is having the clinical setting or something where people come into. It is not desirable to my way of thinking but it would be a good acknowledgement that you might have privacy or a pleasant place for people to step into (Liam, 40).

The effects and impacts of dealing with critical incidents and complex student issues were issues for Liam. Upon reflection, he appreciated that he no longer felt prepared or supported to work with these aspects. It was Liam's experiences with several serious critical incidents that particularly generated a sense of self-doubt in his ability to continue in the profession: "*A sense about feeling competent ... I don't feel adequately prepared or supported to be able to do this stuff anymore [critical incidents] ... (Liam, 24)*". Additionally, Liam felt

powerless in the sense that he could not always ameliorate the situation for many students. Subsequently, Liam was left feeling fatigued:

It takes a lot out of you if you're thinking and feeling a lot about what's been going on in a school for kids ... a lot of the stuff that we deal with is just intractable. We can't make the changes that we might want to see happen ... (Liam, 31).

Overall, Liam derived a sense of gratification in working as a school psychologist, and felt the most pleasure when he was working with students, parents and teachers, and making a difference in their lives:

The pleasure of the job has always been around about dealing with students...there's always been fascination about students, their learning, and their behaviour. That plus on some occasions where you feel like you've maybe made a difference to a school or the outcome for a student or the outcome for a family or an outcome for teachers. There are points of great satisfaction about that (Liam, 19).

Other aspects to the role that Liam experienced gratification included choosing the cases and projects he wanted to work. Liam tried to make sense of his experience, and believed that being able to choose his areas of work interest equalled role flexibility and professional autonomy: “*You do have choices to a large extent about how you go with cases and also about which projects you choose to take on board ... (Liam, 19)*”.

In Liam's experience, working in a team generated feelings of belonging. However, he interpreted that he often felt as though he did not belong or that his ability to contribute to schools was recognised. This caused some disillusionment

that schools did not view school psychologists as being able to contribute to improving outcomes for students:

There is a need to know and feel like you belong or have a contribution to a school. Something that is remarkable about schools is that not many of them that include you as a member of their staff...just that acknowledgement that you are a member of their team is fairly remarkable in some circumstances and in others they wouldn't know who you are if you walked down the corridor (Liam, 30).

Liam was on the cusp of retiring which may have influenced his interview. For example, towards the end of the interview, Liam interpreted that he was fatigued by the role and could not see beyond his need for an immediate recovery period:

I've been toying with the idea of [doing private work] but I'm actually very tired at the moment. I'm actually ready to have a recovery period...I'm not even sure if I want to do this any further. I'm at the point where I'm saying well, I'd rather grow vegies! (Laughs) (Liam, 48).

In summary, whilst Liam experienced several challenges and frustrations in the role, such as poor work practices and lack of professionalism, he derived a sense of gratification in working with students, parents and teachers and making a difference. Liam was fatigued by working with critical incidents and complex student issues and looked forward to retiring. Therefore, the title *I'm at the point of saying well, I'd rather grow vegies!* was used to capture the essence of where Liam was at in terms of his role as a school psychologist.

Hugo: Although it's been a long haul and it's been difficult, there are a lot of good things to come out of that

Hugo had originally worked as a teacher before completing the guidance officer training program. He currently worked as a psychologist in a rural region of the *Department*. Not long after the interview, Hugo resigned from the *Department*. Five themes were identified for Hugo: (1) *Working in the Department as a school psychologist was not what I expected*, (2) *I felt that sense of isolation and responsibility pretty quickly*, (3) *No recognition from the Department made me feel undervalued*, (4) *I don't think I could go another 12 months flat out*, and (5) *I'm talking about a lot of negative things but there's been a lot of good things as well*.

In Hugo's initial experience of working in the *Department* as a school psychologist, he interpreted that it was not what he expected. Hugo had almost ten years teaching experience in the private school system, and he tried to use this experience to make sense of his current role of school psychologist. This mismatch between past and present roles left him feeling unprepared for his experience of being a school psychologist in the public school system. Feeling unprepared also generated a deeper sense of inadequacy and vulnerability:

In some cases you're going into these government schools, the environments weren't that crash hot! I was a little bit surprised by it and there was kind of a chaotic air to these schools ... It was fairly different to what I've been used to (Hugo, 9).

Hugo's immediate experience as a school psychologist in a rural region was a deep sense of isolation. A number of factors contributed to this sense of isolation including the distance of his office from the regional office and colleagues and a lack of external support services in the area. Subsequently, Hugo felt pressured to fill gaps in service and a deep sense of responsibility to deliver services. He interpreted that he therefore needed to be an expert across many areas:

... I'd be driving along ... just no one around but me ... I did feel that sense of isolation pretty quickly ... and a sense of responsibility too ... They [schools] saw me as pretty much, you know, a real expert. So I felt that (Hugo, 10).

Paradoxically, Hugo did not feel as though he got any professional credibility and recognition from the staff at the regional office. He subsequently felt that, not only was the hard work he was putting in to his job not being valued, but he was being isolated from the region and colleagues. Additionally, Hugo was completing additional tertiary studies, which he believed the *Department* should support. With all these aspects combined, Hugo experienced a deep sense of disappointment that the responsibility for professional recognition was self-generated, rather than coming from his employer:

I didn't feel as though there was any interest from the Department in terms of saying, 'Well you're doing a good job down there ...' Here I am slaving away ... no recognition from them. I felt really undervalued to be honest (Hugo, 32).

These experiences over the past four years combined to make Hugo feel, at times, hurt, angry and disappointed. He tried to make sense of his experience, yet after reflection, believed that he could not, nor wanted to, work this way beyond another 12 months. Hugo came to the realisation for the first time, that the current changes regional staff were undertaking to include school psychologists was too late because in his mind he had moved beyond the job. Hugo believed that he was at a turning point in his career as he weighed up the possibility of working outside of the *Department*:

I'm at the point in my career where I'm at a bit of a crossroads. Do I stay and hang on to this value-based choice profession...Or do I launch out? I know that I am quite capable...I've always thought that the helping work you do is more valuable if it's helping the people that need it most...I'm at the point where I am challenging that... (Hugo, 56).

Hugo was able to reflect on his experience of the role, and had the self-awareness to acknowledge that despite discussing many negative aspects, there were many positive aspects to the job:

...when I think about it, and I know I'm talking about a lot of the negative things here but I also remember the fact that, I've got a lot of autonomy and [items such as a phone and laptop]...Although it's been a long haul and it's been difficult, there's a lot of good things to come out of it (Hugo, 37).

Hugo interpreted his experience as unique and interesting and he derived a sense of fulfilment from the autonomy and independence he had to make his own

decisions about the way he worked: *“I’m learning and growing in the job, so that was a real positive (Hugo, 40)”*.

Additionally, Hugo now held a pragmatic view about school psychologists’ role in the *Department* and learnt to accept that educators held different views about *Department* priorities. Whilst he initially took this view personally, he realised that the *Department* had a broader agenda. Subsequently, Hugo had almost come to a sense of peace in relation to the agenda of the education system:

We are a profession where [human issues are] fundamental to the way we work ... That’s not necessarily the way that management works. They work with bureaucracy, numbers, nuts and bolts, systems, be more efficient, fiscal priorities. We’re seen as something not really on the agenda (Hugo, 52) ... One thing I’ve learnt is how important people’s core business is ... for the Department its numeracy and literacy ... social and emotional outcomes are incidental ... (Hugo, 53).

In summary, Hugo’s experience of working as a school psychologist included many challenges including working in a rural region and struggling for professional credibility and recognition. Despite these challenges, Hugo derived a sense of fulfilment from the autonomy and independence he had to make his own decisions about the way he worked. Hugo had come to a point where he was left with a pragmatic view of how school psychologists contributed to the *Department’s* education priorities. Overall, Hugo had moved beyond the job, and had subsequently commenced the process of leaving the *Department*. Therefore, the title *Although it’s been a long haul and it’s been difficult, there’s a lot of good*

things to come out of that best captured Hugo's overall journey as a school psychologist with the *Department*.

Wendy: The most rewarding thing is making those connections with some of those kids

Wendy had a family before completing tertiary studies and commencing work as a psychologist. At the time of the interview, she had approximately five years' experience in a metropolitan region of the *Department*. Three themes were identified for Wendy: (1) *It is rewarding because the kids are great*, (2) *I think that is probably my biggest lesson, to learn to say no*, and (3) *As far as the Department goes you do not feel very important at all*.

In Wendy's experience as a school psychologist, she derived a sense of fulfilment from several aspects including the variety of the role. However, it was working with students and teachers that she was most passionate about. Wendy experienced a deep sense of connection to the students she worked with. As she made sense of her experience, she realised that the connections she made provide her with feedback that she was making a difference. This left her feeling rewarded: "*The most rewarding thing is making those connections with some of those kids and you know they know you care and that's good*" (Wendy, 13). She found that the relationships she formed with students and that they appreciated seeing her made her feel rewarded: "*It is rewarding because the kids are great when you see them. That's the times when you really, really enjoy it ...*" (Wendy, 41)".

There was a sense of frustration experienced by Wendy as she encountered bureaucratic red tape. She took these situations personally and in trying to understand her experience, was left questioning her ability to help students:

... a lot of red tape, phone calls, pushing and you wonder where it's all going to go. Is it going to make any difference? In the meantime, can anybody really help? I don't know, very frustrating (Wendy, 1).

Wendy was experiencing work overload and experienced a sense of overwhelming pressure. She reflected on this experience and concluded that the biggest lesson she learnt from working as a school psychologist for the *Department* was that she needed to learn to say 'no' and not contribute to her work overload. Wendy was left feeling that her efforts were not recognised or appreciated, and her enthusiasm for the job turned to a deeper sense of resentment:

... why am I bothering? It really doesn't make any difference. I'm just wearing myself out and I'm getting very stressed and tired and exhausted...I do have to learn self-management skills and I think that's probably my biggest lesson, to learn to say no and to learn to relax and not try to do it all (Wendy, 3).

The hurt and disappointment at feeling as though she had been let down or taken advantage of by schools was not only making her question how hard she was working, but also her future direction with the *Department*: “*In fact I don't know what I need anymore. I need a break ... (Wendy, 14)*”.

Although Wendy enjoyed working as a school psychologist with the *Department*, she did not feel that the *Department* considered the role of school

psychologists to be important. In Wendy's experience, aspects such as working conditions (including having a confidential workspace) demonstrated that the *Department* did not care about what school psychologists did in schools: "As far as the *Department* goes you don't feel very important at all. Do they have any idea what we do? Do they even care? I do not think so! (Wendy, 36)". Wendy subsequently held strong opinions about the *Department* and their priorities. For example, Wendy was incensed when the Government cut funding to education: "Did you hear how [the Government] cut how many million dollars to education? It's disgusting. Nobody cares. It's like putting bandaids on after an accident! (Wendy, 42)".

In summary, Wendy derived a sense of gratification in her experiences of working with students and teachers. Being able to form relationships with students and make a difference in their lives left her feeling fulfilled. However, aspects such as bureaucratic red tape made her feel stressed. Whilst Wendy contributed to her work overload, she felt unappreciated by the *Department*, which frustrated her. Wendy was unsure where she was heading in terms of her career but knew she needed to learn to say 'no' and set some personal and professional boundaries. The title *The most rewarding thing is making those connections with some of those kids* encapsulated what Wendy held as the most valued aspect of working in the *Department* as a school psychologist.

3.3 Summary of individual themes

A summary of themes identified for each participant is presented in Table

3.1.

Table 3.1

Clustering of individual themes of all participants

Participant & Individual Themes

1: You've picked someone who is reasonably happy with his job

1. I like the collegiate support that the current service delivery model provides
 2. I prefer the traditional guidance officer training program over contemporary education
 3. There are aspects of the job that contribute to my enjoyment of working as a school psychologist
 4. I now have a more pragmatic approach to my caseload
-

2: Despite everything, it is the best job I've had

1. I like having an impact on young people's lives
 2. I'm exhausted by being everything to everybody
 3. I want schools to recognise that cases have an impact on me too
 4. I'm tired of being socially isolated
 5. I want to be acknowledged and accepted as being useful to the wellbeing of the school Community
-

3: I'm doing my job the way that it should be done

1. Feeling frustrated at my lack of knowledge
 2. I like feeling part of the community
 3. I struggle with how the system wants me to deliver services
 4. I really enjoy getting to know students and get excited when I see change
-

4: The most rewarding thing is making those connections with some of those kids

1. It is rewarding because the kids are great
 2. I think that is probably my biggest lesson, to learn to say no
 3. As far as the *Department* goes you do not feel very important at all
-

5: I'm quite passionate but not very optimistic about the profession

1. I like the independence and variety of the job
 2. Sadness at the loss of status of the profession
 3. It's difficult trying to influence change in some parents and teachers
 4. This job suits me
-

6: I am superman because I do make major changes in the lives of students

1. Fighting the lack of autonomy and control in the system
 2. I am unable to meet school's expectations
 3. My workload has become a numbers' game
 4. I want the opportunity to use my untapped skills in schools
 5. It's rewarding and a privilege to have an impact on someone's life
-

7: I'm at the point of saying well, I'd rather grow veggies!

1. Downgrading of the status of the profession
 2. Frustration of poor work practices and lack of professionalism
 3. I don't feel adequately prepared or supported to continue dealing with critical incidents and student issues
-

Participant & Individual Themes

4. The pleasure of the job has always been around working with students and making a difference
5. There is a need to know and feel like you belong or have a contribution to a school

8: *Although it's been a long haul and it's been difficult, there's a lot of good things to come out of that*

1. Working in the *Department* as a school psychologist was not what I expected
 2. I felt that sense of isolation and responsibility pretty quickly
 3. No recognition from the *Department* made me feel undervalued
 4. I don't think I could go another 12 months flat out
 5. I'm talking about a lot of negative things but there's been a lot of good things as well
-

9: *I still enjoy the type of work that I do*

1. Establishing your authority in the system
 2. Fighting to progress through the system as a psychologist
 3. The challenge of being thinly spread
 4. I still enjoy the type of work that I do
-

3.4 Analysis of superordinate themes

This section presents the analysis of common themes across the nine participants, commencing with the presentation and subsequent analysis of the four superordinate themes that are presented in Table 3.2. The superordinate themes are *The joy of being able to make a difference*, *Finding my way within a unique system and culture*, *Feeling the pressure of workload and reaching my limit*, and *Wanting to be able to contribute to the wellbeing of the school community*. Individual themes are located as sub-themes dependent upon their fit with the superordinate theme. Participant numbers are related to each theme identified in order to aid the analysis and subsequent discussion chapter that follows.

Table 3.2

Superordinate themes identified for all participants

Superordinate Theme	Participant	Sub-Themes
<i>The joy of being able to make a difference</i>	2	I like having an impact on young people's lives
	3	I really enjoy getting to know students and get excited when I see change
	4	It is rewarding because the kids are great
	5	It's difficult trying to influence change in some parents and teachers
	6	It's rewarding and a privilege to have an impact on someone's life
	7	The pleasure of the job has always been around working with students and making a difference
	9	I still enjoy the type of work that I do
<i>Wanting to be able to contribute to the wellbeing of the school community</i>	2	I want to be acknowledged and accepted as being useful to the wellbeing of the school community
	2	I'm tired of being socially isolated
	3	Feeling frustrated at my lack of knowledge
	3	I like feeling part of the community
	3	I struggle with how the system wants me to deliver services
	4	As far as the <i>Department</i> goes you do not feel very important at all
	6	I want the opportunity to use my untapped skills in schools
7	There is a need to know and feel like you belong or have a contribution to a school	
<i>Navigating the system</i>	1	I like the collegiate support that the current service delivery model provides
	1	I prefer the traditional guidance officer training program over contemporary education
	1	There are aspects of the job that contribute to my enjoyment of working as a school psychologist
	5	I like the independence and variety of the job
	5	Sadness at the loss of status of the profession
	5	This job suits me
	6	Fighting the lack of autonomy and control in the system
	7	Downgrading of the status of the profession
	7	Frustration of poor work practices and lack of professionalism
	8	Working in the <i>Department</i> as a school psychologist was not what I expected
	8	I felt that sense of isolation and responsibility pretty quickly
	8	No recognition from the <i>Department</i> made me feel undervalued
	8	I'm talking about a lot of negative things but there's been a lot of good things as well

Superordinate Theme	Participant	Sub-Themes
	9	Establishing your authority in the system
	9	Fighting to progress through the system as a psychologist
<i>Feeling the pressure of workload and reaching my limit</i>	1	I now have a more pragmatic approach to my caseload
	2	I'm exhausted by being everything to everybody
	2	I want schools to recognise that cases have an impact on me too
	4	I think that is probably my biggest lesson, to learn to say no
	6	I am unable to meet school's expectations
	6	My workload has become a numbers' game
	7	I don't feel adequately prepared or supported to continue dealing with critical incidents and student issues
	8	I don't think I could go another 12 months flat out
	9	The challenge of being thinly spread

Superordinate themes were presented in a sequential flow that best tells the story. For example, the participants enjoy working in the profession and making a difference in the lives of the students with whom they work (*the joy of being able to make a difference*). However, they also saw that they could contribute to the wellbeing of the school community in more effective ways (*wanting to be able to contribute to the wellbeing of the school community*). Participants' navigation through the bureaucracy of the *Department* was an individual experience with a range of highs and lows (*navigating the system*). However, participants felt unable to meet school's workload demands and were thinly spread, with many subsequently experiencing exhausted and unable to continue working at such a fast pace (*feeling the pressure of workload and reaching my limit*).

3.4.1 The joy of being able to make a difference

In the initial combined analysis of participants' individual themes, the researcher was caught up by the apparent dominance of the range of challenges and frustrations that faced most of these school psychologists. However, after a lengthy process of reflection and continual analysis, it was the ability to make a difference in people's lives that was seen as the most significant superordinate theme. Being able to make a difference was what brought most participants into the profession and kept them motivated to continue working in the *Department*. Subsequently, the core of this superordinate theme centred on the fulfilment that this sample of school psychologists derived from helping others. Despite this, some participants experienced despondency when they were faced with complex student problems:

One of the awkward things is that I've missed a lot of sleep over the years with children and their problems... (Wendy, 1) it is challenging especially when kids are in such terrible families that they cut their wrists in front of class members and try to hang themselves and then they are taken back to the same families. Just awful ... (Wendy, 2).

Situations such as these also became a source of frustration, as participants experienced a sense of helplessness when they were unable to control whether parents or teachers followed through with recommendations, or students' problems were not easily resolved. In trying to make sense of their experience, participants assumed a burden of responsibility, which subsequently placed additional strain on their relationships with schools: *"Everyone wants you to find*

out what's wrong but they want you to wave the magic wand to make the child better. And this is very often the teachers and the parents, without them making an effort (Wendy: 15)''. The pressure to fix any problem as quickly as possible was not only tiring but also meant that participants were often not able to spend a lot of time on a particular problem:

... to be a Jack-of-all-trades in some ways is good but to be honest ... I'm at the stage where I have had enough of the band-aid job ... That gets tiresome. You only get to see very tiny steps to get change (Hugo, 46).

Despite the challenges that these school psychologists experienced in the pursuit of helping others, there were several reasons why they derived fulfilment from working in their roles. These reasons include enjoying getting to know students, working individually with students, working with students who are appreciative of the support provided, being able to have an impact on students' lives, and seeing how student's lives or outcomes had changed.

Some participants enjoyed the challenge of getting to know students, particularly those who were known within schools to be 'difficult' or 'challenging'. Being able to establish rapport with these students improved the likelihood of success. When a relationship was achieved, participants experienced a sense of pride and personal and professional fulfilment in their success:

I enjoy the boys who don't want to go to a counsellor. I haven't had any students, maybe one girl that I couldn't build rapport with. I find that a challenge but I enjoy students who don't like counselling and won't open up, don't know how to open up and never had any counselling. I have a way of getting them to open up which I am quite proud of. There are kids that

have seen 10 counsellors and they won't say a word... (Jim, 52) I've had other boys like that who've never spoken about their feelings like that before, never had an opportunity, and I can help with that...I kept at it and I didn't give up (Jim, 53).

Some participants believed that rapport building with students was the most important aspect of making a difference. In their experience, this often occurred over several sessions and many months. Other participants also enjoyed forming relationships with families and parents. Being able to support parents not only increased the chances of success for the family but also for their children, which in turn, generated the deep sense of pride and fulfilment in being able to make a difference:

There has been elation and times when you have sat down with a Dad and you have had a cry because it has finally hit home. Not the fact that, I do not care that, the tears do not worry you. That is not what you get excited about. You get excited about the integrity that is behind the tears...This is the truth and the first time that you have been able to say it to anyone and that is a significant thing for that person. There has been those moments of elation when you have seen that which has been great (Graham, 121).

Being able to work individually with students was what many of these school psychologists continued to enjoy. In trying to make sense of their experience, participants were aware that they could not always fix the problems that students and families presented with. What was more important to them was the sense of satisfaction that they gained around being supportive and someone with whom parents and teachers could talk to:

I still enjoy the type of work that I do, the individual work, talking to the parents and hearing what's really going on for their children and that you're not going to get a great deal of success with. However, you do make a difference and teachers appreciate you being there that day (Naomi, 20).

Other participants gained a sense of satisfaction and reward when working with students who were appreciative of the support that was provided: *"It's very rewarding when you do something right... Other kids are happy and it's wonderful to see their happy faces, so the connections with the kids are great* (Wendy, 13)".

When looking at participants' experience of their roles, there were aspects of the profession that they enjoyed, such as autonomy and role flexibility. However, it was the ability to facilitate change in those with whom they worked that generated the most reward, fulfilment, and satisfaction. Overall, having an impact on students' lives became one of the most significant aspects of making a difference in the lives of others. Making a difference motivated these participants to work in the profession: *"The pleasure of the job's always been around about dealing with students ... you feel like you've maybe made a difference to a school or the outcome for a student [or family or teachers]; there are points of great satisfaction about that* (Liam, 19)".

For some participants, working with people and making a difference had a powerful personal impact on them. For example, Jim compared his experience with the superhero Superman, which provided a benchmark that indicated how much he helped young people: *"... I am Superman because I do make major changes in the lives of students and I feel like I am impacting upon them* (Jim, 58)".

Some participants believed that young people were more likely to change than adults would, therefore working with students as a school psychologist created greater opportunities to make a difference: “... *I wanted a change, move to a level where I could impact, make change in a person’s life ... (Emily, 7)*”. These participants tried to make sense of their experience, and rationalised that students were less likely to have entrenched patterns of behaviour. Subsequently, this sample of school psychologists interpreted that students were more likely to engage in support strategies, which supported their need to make a difference:

... I used to counsel adults and I prefer children because they are flexible and the younger they are the more they will follow what I say ... Whereas if that was an adult they wouldn’t do what I said and it would take them months and months to change (Jim, 33).

Another rationale that, in some participants’ experience, parents of students in primary school were more likely to be involved in supporting their children: “*And my experience in general is in ... primary school’s there’s far more likelihood that there will be change because parents are far more likely to be involved in solutions ... (Emily, 7)*”.

It was also important for participants to feel as though the work that they were doing was worthwhile and purposeful. For example, being able to identify and move a young person through the presenting issue, even in a small way, provided justification for why they were working in the helping profession: “... *we do like what we do because we keep doing it. There’s great people, great kids, trying to help and when you feel like you have helped in some little way it’s all sort of worth it (Wendy, 43)*”.

Literally seeing how students' or families' lives or outcomes had changed was important to many participants as it provided tangible evidence that they were making a difference in the lives of others. Seeing change was also more instantly gratifying and personally rewarding, which reinforced participants' core need to make a difference: "*I enjoy forming a relationship with the families and seeing a change in how they function. That really excites me. I enjoy recognising kids who have had troubles and then seeing them come out of the other end (Graham, 52)*". Receiving positive feedback was appreciated and acknowledged as evidence of making a difference: "*... it's a privilege to be a part of their life for a small period of time. It's good to get the feedback because we don't always ... hearing about their life now and how it's changed (Jim, 37)*".

Sometimes the rewards of seeing happy children and appreciative parents or teachers was not seen at the time of the intervention, however, when participants saw or heard about the changes later on, this still generated a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment that they were making a difference:

There are still young people that I look back on now and recognise that we may not have known that we made a difference at the time but it seems to me it has turned out okay in the long run, for whatever reason... So that's been satisfying (Liam, 19).

For some participants, not seeing change was a concept that was not palatable or an acceptable part of their experience. In trying to make sense of their experience, these participants acknowledged that not seeing more immediate change had an impact on them. For example, some participants saw this as a failure on their part, and subsequently internalised that they were not skilled or

competent enough: "... you see a young person and you say things that they're not ready to hear. You don't see them again, and you feel, 'I didn't do that very well'. *Lost that kid* (Graham, 73)".

In summary, the first superordinate theme captured the essence of participants' experience in that they derived pride and fulfilment in being able to make a difference. Forming a relationship and building rapport with students, parents and teachers was seen as important, generating a sense of accomplishment in participants. Participants experienced pleasure in being able to make a difference and having an impact on others' lives. Most participants appreciated feedback and needed to know that they were making a difference. However, some participants in this sample needed to see more immediate change as this was evidence of their success. Working with students and seeing them improve their outcomes reinforced why they worked in the profession. Memorable situations of being able to make a difference were what participants drew upon to remind themselves of the essential reason why they enjoyed working as school psychologists in the *Department*.

3.4.2 Wanting to be able to contribute to the wellbeing of the school community

The second superordinate theme represented for many participants, a strong desire for a greater contribution to the schools that they worked in. Participants experienced a range of aspects that were identified as part of this theme including feeling tired of social isolation and not feeling very important to the *Department*.

Whilst some participants currently enjoyed the feeling of being part of the school community, many others wanted to experience this feeling. Part of the desire to be part of the school community involved this group of participants wanting schools to acknowledge, accept and utilise the untapped skills that they possessed as school psychologists. Some participants experienced a sense of resistance in relation to how they interpreted that the *Department* wanted them to deliver services. Instead, this group of school psychologists wanted to work more intimately with, and subsequently more connected to, the school community.

This group of participants felt that Principals, teachers, and regional office staff did not understand the role of school psychologists, or if they did, their professional knowledge and expertise was being disregarded. Participants tried to make sense of their experience, and interpreted that if their skills were not recognised, this represented rejection and subsequent insignificance of their role. Whilst this experience was hurtful, this rationalisation explained what they saw as a general lack of awareness of the role of school psychologists: “...*Schools don't know what we do in schools. A lot of them don't really know. And what we shouldn't do* (Wendy, 37)”.

Some participants tried to make sense of their experience through comparing themselves with external workers to the school. Participants interpreted that they were not treated as colleagues who had something to offer. Subsequently, participants experienced this poor reception as a lack of gratitude, which was a hurtful message:

The message that you get there is that you are the people who work for us.

You are one of the workers. You are treated as someone who works [for

us] *rather than an appreciation... It is that lack of appreciation for the service that is being provided* (Naomi, 19).

Experiences such as these were not only taken personally but were also perceived as an affront on the profession. In participants' experience, these underlying insults inspired them to want to change people's perceptions of the profession:

... when people find out that I am a school psychologist...90 percent of people say something like, "You're far too good to be a school psychologist". That's actually really hurtful for me. What are you doing just as a school psychologist? (Emily, 122).

Expanding or changing their role in order to contribute more to schools was acknowledged as a difficult task if school psychologists only attended a school once a week. However, in participants' experience, most sought after a greater connection to schools, through either physical location or working at schools more regularly. Participants interpreted that this would not only put them in a position to be able to contribute, but also increased the likelihood of their acceptance. In turn, participants believed that increased acceptance would flow on to increased social connection, greater role fulfilment, subsequently reducing their feelings of isolation. Some participants compared their experience with the social interactions that they saw unfold in school staffrooms. Subsequently, they sought after feeling appreciated and valued as part of the school team:

... it was interesting that ... my base school Principal brought in four bunches of flowers, and gave one to each of the integration people. Strictly speaking, I could be one of those. It would have been just an extra

bunch. It's not about the money, not about the money. I don't even want flowers, I like living plants, but, but the point is to, well, just think ...

(Emily, 100).

Delivery of professional learning to teachers and parents were tangible examples of how these participants felt that they could contribute more to the wellbeing of the school community. In a few participants' experience, some schools would pay for a guest speaker, but not ask the school psychologist. Participants interpreted that schools did not consider them, and experiences such as these reinforced their desire for more awareness and acceptance as to how school psychologists can contribute:

Another idea is that we use our skills. For example, some of us can do lectures ... That might increase our profile and our acceptance, I think that would be a useful thing ... to be acknowledged as being able to engage in a conversation with staff about pretty much anything ... you know kinds of things that we get speakers in and pay a thousand dollars

(Emily, 105).

Yet in many participants' experience, they felt as though no one was listening to what they had to say about their role and place within the system. In their interpretation, schools did not care about their needs or opinions. Participants subsequently experienced a sense of annoyance and disappointment, as they believed that their suggestions were not worth voicing:

... [colleagues] are frustrated about we're not respected, our qualifications as professionals and our opinions on the way we provide the service ... we should be treated as professionals who know what they are

doing and we're responsible to do it ... we can improve the service because we know how to run the service the best way rather than [Principals] telling us ... This is how we want our piece of meat, I guess in a way they want, there's only one of me and everyone wants a piece of me and that can be frustrating ... (Jim, 25).

In summary, many participants experienced a sense of annoyance and disappointment that their professional needs were being ignored. They subsequently believed that they could contribute in more ways to the wellbeing of the school community than they were currently in their role. Several participants in this sample believed that their professional opinion did not matter. However, many participants believed that if they were given more opportunities to contribute to the wellbeing of the school community, they would feel more valued. Feeling valued would also create a positive environment where participants would feel more connected, experience a greater sense of fulfilment in their role, and reduce their feelings of isolation.

3.4.3 Navigating the system

The third superordinate theme relates to the journey of working as a school psychologist in the *Department*. Whilst every participant experienced their journey as a school psychologist individually, the education system is a complex environment and there were common challenges. Challenges included entering the profession, the sense of frustration in understanding the culture, navigating their way through the system, and accepting their role in the *Department*.

In many participants' experience, getting a job as a school psychologist in the *Department* was confusing. In an effort to make sense of their current experience, participants reflected on their previous experience of working outside of the *Department*. Whilst these comparisons provided some level of context for participants, their preconceived ideas were challenged when their interpretation of their lived experience was different:

I didn't know how it all worked. They have a unique way in the Department of doing things and I thought that you had to be loyal to your employer. At the end of the contract I applied for my own job and I didn't get it ... I was then told that I should have gone for all the jobs ... but I didn't realise how it all worked in the system ... I didn't know that there's no loyalty, no one's faithful ... I didn't want to have to apply for jobs at the end of the year every year. I wanted an ongoing secure job ... (Jim, 10).

In trying to make sense of their experience, participants compared their experience of getting a job in the *Department* as akin to 'breaking in'. Subsequently, participants felt as though they were outsiders, with preferential treatment given to those already in the organisation. These participants experienced an initial sense of disbelief that this culture existed:

... There's that little bit of looking after people who are in the system. You have to find yourself a place. I couldn't believe it... Obviously, people were working in a position, their contract comes up and they would get it. I'd come in, I'd be the second person ... that's the system ... you just get in the door first, get accepted (Naomi, 13).

Once participants had successfully broken into the system, they interpreted that they had rightfully earned their place. Some saw their ability to secure ongoing employment as analogous to a rite of passage, and subsequently believed that if they had to experience this situation, then others should also go through the process: “... *I had to break through that. It took a couple of years though to get there. Therefore, I knew how unfair it was... I took that favour because I felt I'd earned it*” (Naomi, 73).

Understanding the culture of the organisation was also a challenging situation for many participants. Several participants did not know how to make sense of the role of a school psychologist in the organisation. Some participants used their previous teaching experience as a way to try to understand the system. They interpreted that this gave them a head start in understanding how schools operated:

I didn't feel foreign to the school environment so I felt comfortable with schools. I felt as though I could have an opinion and I had a lot of knowledge, like cultural knowledge of how schools operated and that helped me no end ... (Hugo, 8).

Paradoxically, other participants believed that previous teaching experience made their experience more confusing. They interpreted a stronger sense of belonging as a teacher and rationalised that connections were easier to establish with colleagues with whom they worked every day. In comparison, they compared their experience as a school psychologist who was based in small co-located teams working in different schools each day:

... it's a different sense of belonging that you're a member of a staff of fifty or sixty teachers in one school who are all under the same sort of pressures. It creates a certain sort of bonding that is unique. When you're part of a group of ten people who can often be like ships in the night, working one-to-one with a kid, coming and going out of the school, it probably takes a lot longer to build up that sense of belonging (Bill, 29).

Working in rural regional areas also compounded the experience of disconnection for some participants. Participants who experienced these situations interpreted that rural areas were more challenging and frustrating. They subsequently rationalised that this was due to the differences in culture between metropolitan and rural schools. They saw rural regions as often a lonely and confronting experience: *"Going into some of these government schools ... They seem to be kind of just running by the seat of their pants a lot of the time ... its way out and there's kind of nothing around (Hugo, 9)"*.

Many participants described affirming aspects such as the independence and variety of the work. Conversely, unconstructive experiences included a lack of autonomy and control, poor work practices and a lack of professionalism. In participants' experience, they interpreted that the understanding they developed as school psychologists of working in the *Department* was dependent on the relationships they developed with schools: *"...it's dependent on the individual relationships in the schools now. How well they are received... and that can vary... (Scott, 3)"*. These relationships were diverse and their individual experience was dependent upon their interpretation:

I know psychs that have had terrible experiences in certain schools and great experiences in other schools ... at the end of the day it depends on the people they're working with and the structures they've got set up in place (Wendy, 37).

As participants tried to make sense of how the system worked, they were either able to integrate their experience or found the system unpalatable. Some participants weighed up the pros and cons of working in the public service, came to terms with it, and decided to stay and make it work for them: “... *there are definitely positives in the job. I'm still doing the job! [Laughs] I think it's a good job. Suits me* (Scott, 16)”.

Participants whose experience was that they could not accept how their role fitted into the *Department* left the system. In trying to make sense of their experience, they rationalised that they were not receiving the support that they felt they deserved as allied health professionals:

... I'm sort of planning to move on from that position and I don't feel any kind of loyalty or affinity to the region because I've felt as though I've been left to my own devices and had very little support for so long ... for 4 years I had to slug it out ...(Hugo, 21).

In summary, once participants had ‘broken into’ the system they tried to make sense of how the organisation worked. Those who felt they understood the system, experienced a sense of belonging, or accepted their role within the Department, were able to reconcile remaining in the organisation. Subsequently, the title of *Navigating the system* encapsulates the essence of participants’ lived

experience. Participants who were unable or unwilling to embrace the role of the school psychologist in the *Department* ended up leaving the organisation.

3.4.4 Feeling the pressure of workload and reaching my limit

The fourth superordinate theme was identified for most participants and comprises two components. The first component related to this sample of school psychologists' experience of feeling pressured to keep up with workload demands. The second component of this superordinate theme related to how participants' subsequently felt about these situations.

Several participants described their experience of workload, which they interpreted as constant and never ending: "... *it's a bit overwhelming and it's endless. There doesn't seem to be an end to the workload ...* (Wendy, 3)".

In trying to make sense of their experience, these participants interpreted their workload as predominantly individual work with students. Working in these situations subsequently left them feeling as though they had little or no opportunity to complete any job functions. For example, many participants would undertake tasks such as professional learning in their own time. Trying to fit other job functions into a work day would only exacerbate the pressure to get through individual cases: "... *if you go do it then you get behind in your workload ... you have to do it in your own time because you're just flat out doing the work* (Jim, 27)".

Most participants were self-aware of the impact this had on them currently, and the likely consequences if they continued to work while feeling

thinly spread. They interpreted their lived experience of their role in the *Department*, and believed that they operated in a reactive environment.

Subsequently, they were concerned about the influence that this environment had on their workload, that they felt compromised and were mirroring this behaviour:

“It puts us in a very difficult position with when things go wrong because we haven’t been able to work really solidly on really difficult cases ... It leaves us wide open when we can only work on such a limited level (Naomi, 23)”.

Participants in rural areas also experienced a sense of pressure in relation to their workload, although their lived experience was interpreted differently. These participants perceived an additional burden of responsibility due to the limited availability of external services. As a result, this group of participants experienced a sense of isolation and felt pressured to be knowledgeable on any topic. Some of these participants were able to modify their expectations, be pragmatic about the effort they put into their workload, and acknowledge that the pressure of workload had always existed in this professional environment:

... Over the years, I have probably reduced in my mind what is possible. I’m probably less optimistic or starry eyed about what is possible when you pick up a case ... if nothing is happening I’m just as likely to refer on and not lose too much sleep over the fact that I hadn’t made any change because I’m aware that there’s more cases coming through that have a higher priority. So sure, there’s an element of churning there but that’s the reality ... (Bill, 32).

Paradoxically, on other occasions, some participants were cognisant of the high expectations placed on them. Furthermore, their perception that teachers and

Principals believed that school psychologists were not working unless they were seeing students not only created irritation but disappointment that misperceptions existed in relation to their role. In trying to make sense of their experience, some used descriptive phrases such as ‘numbers game’ and ‘bums on seats’ to communicate their feelings:

Challenging is the time factor and the workload that it turns into a numbers game ... Bums on seats in the minds of Principals ... They don't seem to know our work very well and think it's work if you're seeing a kid...the expectation that you're a good worker if you see lists of students, just see as many as you can... (Jim, 19).

A number of factors appeared to contribute towards many participants' levels of fatigue and burnout including personality traits and a lack of supervision. Some female participants made themselves too available for the students they saw and the schools they serviced which left them experiencing a sense of weariness and disappointment in themselves. Whilst these participants knew they were not maintaining appropriate boundaries, they tried to rationalise their experience, believing that it was more important to help others: *“I've given a number of students my mobile number and some people actually don't use that appropriately. But I don't tell them ‘You shouldn't have called me’ so that's my fault as well (Emily, 44)”*. This oversight of their work in conjunction with a lack of supervision, maintained these sorts of difficulties for these participants. For example, these participants initially believed that being available made it easier to assist young people. However, when their lived experience was of their

availability being taken advantage of, they felt unappreciated and resentful that this was not acknowledged by others:

... at the end of the day there's no difference between the person who just takes their time and the person that works too hard, nobody ever says how good the person who works really hard is. There's no recognition...

(Wendy, 26).

Other factors that were identified in this group of participants that contributed to their levels of burnout included the quality and quantity of organisational resources such as supervision and debriefing after critical incidents.

In participants' experience, these aspects were deficient in the *Department*:

"We've struggled here in terms of trying to put together something that's, we've got permission this last year for something that's called peer supervision but in fact there's nothing particularly professional about it (Liam, 14)".

Participants were able to reflect on their experience, and appreciated that their experience of workload as a school psychologist was stressful and took its toll. For example, several participants experienced a sense of fatigue, with some using descriptive terms such as 'being everything to everybody' to describe their feelings around their lived experience:

... what I'm experiencing is fatigue. I'm actually exhausted by being everything to everybody. I'm exhausted by walking into a school community and being, "Oh, can you see so-and-so?" or "What do you think about this?", or "Oh good. This parent asked me to ask you about dah dah dah". Now I look at teachers and say, "And how are you today?" [Laughs] (Emily, 8).

When looking at their experience of working as a school psychologist for the *Department* these participants felt as though people needed to work inside the system in order to understand their experience of workload and its impact on them. Participants interpreted that this placed others in the best position to appreciate their role:

If you're talking to someone about it you know being in that circumstance ... you know what it's like to be in the school or you know what it's like to be among staff members so you've got a sense of the culture, you've actually experienced it. Schools are such a foreign environment, what is unique about schools you kind of have to be in it to know what it feels like (Liam, 43).

Conversely, participants believed that there was a lack of awareness about their experience of workload and its impact inside the *Department*. Participants desired to increase this understanding as they interpreted that this was likely to improve their working conditions and reduce the pressure they felt: “... *they did not know what to do. They didn't understand the traumatic effects upon us (Liam, 21)*”. Many participants felt tired of working in the system and were fatigued by the constant and endless exposure to other people's issues and critical incidents. Some participants felt so worn down that they left the *Department* or considered leaving.

In summary, some participants described, as part of their experience of being a school psychologist, the pressure of workload and subsequent feelings associated with this experience. Some were irritated, stressed and fatigued by their lived experience and found it challenging to cope with. Others were able to

adjust to the environment and modified their expectations accordingly. Whilst some of the workload pressures came from schools and their high expectations, many participants contributed to their experiences through situations such as a lack of boundaries. Either way, participants wanted some acknowledgment of the workload pressures they experienced in their role and the impact that working with students, parents and teachers had on them.

3.5 Summary of superordinate themes

Four superordinate themes were identified from the nine participants interviewed. The first theme related to the pleasure participants felt when they made a difference in people's lives. Participants described a strong sense of wanting to see change in the students they worked with or they wanted to get positive feedback from teachers or parents. Participants felt rewarded when they could see that they had an impact on the students' lives and many felt personally and professionally reinforced when they were able to form relationships and establish rapport with students. When participants were able to facilitate change they not only felt a sense of fulfilment and joy that a student's outcomes were improved but also were encouraged to remain in the profession. For most participants, the joy in being able to make a difference was their fundamental rationale for entering or remaining in the profession and gave them a sense of self-worth.

The second theme related to participants' wanting to be able to contribute more to the wellbeing of the school community. Despite having opinions about

how to improve the system, many participants wondered if their opinions were considered important. Participants believed there was a general lack of awareness about how school psychologists could contribute to school improvement and the skills they had in which to do so. Participants were cynical that internal and systems challenges would shift and thought that improvements to work conditions were unlikely. For those participants who thought that they could contribute more to the wellbeing of the school community, there was a sense of frustration and sadness that their needs were not seen as a priority. Some were pragmatic in their outlook however at times it was challenging to feel a second priority to education.

The third theme related to how participants' navigated the system of the *Department* as a school psychologist. Participants often found their experience frustrating and challenging. Some participants found it difficult to understand how to break into the system. Once participants managed to find job security, their next challenge was to feel as though they belonged and understand how the system worked. For many this was an impossible challenge. For others there were mixed experiences in relation to their sense of belonging. There did not appear to be any gender-based differences associated with this theme. Some participants felt supported in their experience and connected to their workplace yet the overriding sense was of feeling disconnected and isolated, which led to feeling let down by the *Department*.

The fourth theme related to participants' experience of workload and the impact this had on them. Many participants were frustrated by internal, external and system challenges, such as downgrading of the profession over time and work overload. In fact, many participants were unable to accept how the system

worked, with three participants leaving the *Department* post-interview with the researcher. Whilst some participants contributed to their own stress level by not maintaining appropriate boundaries, this aspect cannot be accounted for by gender-based differences or rurality. Although rural participants appeared to be more challenged by work overload than their metropolitan colleagues due to physical and geographical isolation, gender did not appear to be the rationale for their experience. In addition to wanting the role of school psychologists to be better understood, participants wanted greater awareness of the impact the work had on those in the profession. Despite these challenges, some participants were able to make the most of working in the system and were not caught up in the stressors of the job. The following section will discuss the four superordinate themes in comparison to the literature.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings from the nine Victorian school psychologists interviewed in the present study. Four superordinate themes were identified during the IPA phase: *The joy of being able to make a difference*, *Wanting to be able to contribute to the wellbeing of the school community*, *Navigating the system*, and *Feeling the pressure of workload and reaching my limit*.

On the surface, participants' initial overall experience appeared to be that they were weighed down by rapid policy changes and complexity of the system. Beneath their day-to-day experience of skimming the surface, their core phenomenological experience was the pleasure that they got from forming relationships with students and making a difference in their lives. It was experiences such as these that motivated people to not only join the profession, but also to remain passionate about their work. Therefore, in itself, this thesis has been an exercise in 'navigation' and seeing that despite the challenges and frustrations of working in the organisation, most school psychologists love working with people and effecting positive change. In other words, participants' experiences were neither positive nor negative but individual shades of grey.

Whilst previous research has defined aspects of most themes, such as job satisfaction, workload and burnout, this thesis highlights that the lived experience

of working as a school psychologist is unique and individual. The themes of *The joy of being able to make a difference* and *Wanting to be able to contribute to the wellbeing of the school community* are phenomenological or experiential themes and relate to the role of the school psychologist. *Feeling the pressure of workload and reaching my limit* is essentially a phenomenological theme, however, the framework for this theme is based on more tangible constructs such as policy and systems issues. *Navigating the system* is predominantly a policy or system theme although participants' experience in navigating the system was phenomenological in nature. The four superordinate themes are presented and discussed in relation to the research literature. Policy recommendations are proposed, strengths and limitations of the current study are raised and implications for future research are critically reviewed.

4.2 The joy of being able to make a difference

Being able to make a difference in another's life and engender true positive changes is an altruistic yet powerful motivation that drives many of those in the helping professions (Jimerson et al., 2004; Jimerson et al., 2007; Miller et al., 1981). A number of satisfactions have been reported by school psychologists, such as flexibility and freedom in planning their time and activities, interacting with competent colleagues, and the challenge, variety, and importance of their work. Additionally, other aspects included supportive and professional supervisors, in-service and professional development, and being treated as a professional (Faulkner, 2007a; Miller et al., 1981). Previous research has shown

that the concept of helping others is one of the most frequently reported areas of job satisfaction for school psychologists (Burden, 1988; Miller et al., 1981; VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006). The present study contributes to the research literature by highlighting that being able to make a difference in another's life is what drives most school psychologists to enter the profession, keeps them passionate about their role, and keeps them working in the *Department*. This aspect seems to buffer the black and white experiences participants have of their role to be more like a shade of grey.

Despite the range of satisfactions reported by school psychologists, some researchers argue that these aspects do not appear to outweigh the major dissatisfactions (Miller et al., 2001). If the concept of helping others is one of the only key motivating factors keeping school psychologists in the organisation, some researchers question how long this will sustain them (Shriberg, 2007). Conversely, in this thesis, it was the concept of *making a difference* that presented as a strong motivation for most participants. Not only did participants enjoy making a difference in people's lives, but they also enjoyed forming relationships with students, parents and teachers. *Being able to make a difference* not only motivated people to join the profession but also influenced their passion for the role. Previous studies have confirmed that Australian school psychologists most like working with children, families and teachers, particularly when they could affect positive changes (Faulkner, 2007a; Jimerson et al., 2007). In fact, wanting to make a difference in the lives of others also influenced the other superordinate themes in this thesis. For example, many participants who wanted to make a difference also wanted to contribute more to the wellbeing of the school

community, found that the system often created barriers to them helping, and sometimes meant that they would take on more work than they should.

The concept of helping others and making a difference is the focus of the first superordinate theme in this thesis as it resonated with most of the participants interviewed. In particular, it was the joy, pleasure, or happiness that participants gained from helping others and making a difference that was the most prominent positive aspect. For example, six out of nine participants described excitement when it came to being able to support a young person through a challenging part of their life, or planting the seeds for change. Descriptions included being able to *'have an impact'*, *'make a difference'*, experience the *'joy of seeing change'*, *'getting to know students'*, and *'feeling fulfilled'*. Previous Australian research has found similar results, with Victorian school psychologists enjoying their work because of the personal reward that they gained from making a difference in the lives of students (Jimerson et al., 2007; Thielking, 2006a).

School psychologists often display strong preferences to spend most of their time working with children in individual therapy, counselling their parents, and to some extent, consulting with teachers (Raviv et al., 2002). The importance of forming relationships with students has been highlighted as a positive aspect of working as a school counsellor in previous studies (Evans & Payne, 2008; Wood, 2010). The relationship that school psychologists were able to form with students, parents and teachers formed part of this experience for the school psychologists in the current study. Forming relationships with students enabled social connections as well as provided the basis for direct

feedback to participants about student progress. Additionally, the concept of forming relationships with students, parents and teachers and being able to make a difference may partially explain why school psychologists report wanting to spend more time counselling or undertaking systems-level tasks than assessment activities with students. However, these concepts were not specifically articulated or interpreted by the researcher, and further investigation into these aspects is required.

Some school psychologists perceived systemic internal and external barriers to helping students including bureaucratic policies and procedures. These findings have been reported elsewhere, with critics of public and education sector reform arguing that school psychologists work longer hours, have reduced service standards, and increased paperwork and red tape (Faulkner 1999; Faulkner, 2007a; Hoff & Buchholz, 1996; Robinson, 2005; Whitla et al., 1992). However, this sample of participants described how their ability to make a difference in a student's life strongly motivated them to remain in the profession. Previous studies have also found that aspects such as helping others not only increases job satisfaction and influences job retention, but positively impacts on those with whom school psychologists work (Brown et al., 1998; Curtis, Grier, & Hunley, 2003; Evans & Payne, 2008; Jimerson et al., 2007; Low, 2009).

Participants displayed a strong desire to see change in those with whom they worked. This aspect was not expected and was not identified in the literature review. However, empirical research has shown that the therapeutic relationship is central to the process of psychotherapy and client change (Hubble, Duncan, &

Miller, 2005). Yet few studies have examined the *client-therapist interactional process*, and there are no known studies from the perspectives of school psychologists (Hubble et al., 2005). The *client-therapist interactional process* refers to how the relationship between client-therapist influences or changes one another's behaviour. The need to see change provides feedback to school psychologists and may reinforce the relationship that they have with the students they work with. The power of being able to make a difference and the need to see change are strong driving factors that do not appear to be understood by all stakeholders and should be further explored.

Several participants in this thesis described a preference for working with younger people compared with adults. For example, participants believed that younger people were more likely to listen to them, were more amenable to change, and subsequently be more likely to follow the school psychologists' recommendations. Other participants believed in early intervention and felt that they were more likely to achieve success if they worked with this population, rather than adults who were more entrenched in their patterns of behaviour. Whilst the empirical literature on school-based change is quite broad, school psychologists in the United States have contributed to the empirical research on concepts such as school consultation (Bramlett & Murphy, 1998). Despite this, there appears to be a gap in the research literature in relation to why school psychologists believe young people are more likely to change and why school psychologists prefer working with young people. Further research is required to understand those aspects of school psychologists' experiences. It may be this group of school psychologists were able to accept, acknowledge and

accommodate the unique ideas and resources of young people. In turn, this may have contributed to the success of individual casework with students.

4.3 Wanting to be able to contribute to the wellbeing of the school community

Many participants described a strong need for recognition of their professional skills and their ability to contribute to the broader wellbeing of the school community. Participants felt that they struggled for this recognition and believed they were not using the full range of their skills. By not feeling as though they were contributing to schools in terms of roles such as consultation, strategic projects and programs, participants believed that the *Department* and schools saw their opinions as not important. Some participants wanted recognition of the full range of skills they possessed and others wanted to expand their role beyond traditional tasks such as assessments and counselling. Previous studies have suggested that if school psychologists undertook less counselling than their present rate, there would be lower rates of burnout (Burden, 1988). In addition, participating in a wider range of activities linked school psychologists with other professionals, increased role variety, and reduced isolation and crisis driven work (Thielking, 2006a). In turn, this may result in more direct and observable positive outcomes for the school psychologists and students with whom they work (Thielking, 2006a).

Results suggest that participants perceived that their role and level of contribution to the broader wellbeing of the school community was undervalued.

If school psychologists feel that they are misunderstood in relation to the work that they do, this can create anger, frustration and confusion (Faulkner, 1999; Whitla et al., 1992). Feelings of continuing disaffection, continual change and a lack of ability to influence these processes have been found to leave members of the profession feeling frustrated, uncomfortable and impotent (Robinson, 2005; Ross et al., 2002).

Different opinions on the role of the school psychologist can also influence how professionals view their ability to be able to contribute to the school community. For example, misperceptions by the community, school staff and school psychologists themselves in relation to role and job functions can lead to ethical dilemmas, stress and burnout for school psychologists (Oakland & Cunningham, 1992). However, if school psychologists were involved in decision-making processes of their schools, it is likely that their sense of personal accomplishment would increase (Wilkerson, 2009). Without the ability to contribute more broadly to the wellbeing of the school community, school psychologists are more likely to face “chronically confusing job expectations (Wilkerson, 2009, p. 436)”, which has been associated with higher rates of burnout. Research conducted in the United States has shown that collaboration and teamwork between school psychologists, teachers and parents is important (Tatar & Bekerman, 2009). The aim of these interactions is not only the facilitation of an optimal learning environment, but also improving the value of school psychologists as part of a school’s organisational culture.

Many participants felt that they could contribute to school improvement and student outcomes in a variety of ways, in addition to seeing individual

students for counselling or assessment. For example, previous research has demonstrated that more systems-based tasks including consultation, intervention, and influencing system policy were desired by not only school psychologists, but also by some Principals (Bernes & Witko, 2009; Farrell et al., 2005; Leach, 1989). However, in the present study, some Principals did not believe participants were working if they were not seeing students. Despite participants feeling as though they could value-add to the wellbeing of the school community, many were concerned that they were unable to influence change or shift the perception of schools.

Previous studies suggest that Principals support a more consultative and systemic approach by school psychologists (Bernes & Witko, 2009; Thielking, 2006a). Whilst the present study did not interview Principals, school psychologists believed their opinion did not matter on a range of issues, particularly if they were working in a contract position. This suggests that, even if Principals were supportive, the perception of this sample of school psychologists is that they did not perceive this to be the case. There are limited recent studies that have examined a range of perspectives about the school psychologists' roles in Victoria, Australia (Thielking & Jimerson, 2006). However, the study did not specifically examine how supportive Principals were of school psychologists expanding their role. Some researchers argue that while the scope of effective school psychology work is much more varied than its historical roots in psychometric functions:

...some employing bodies as well as teachers can have difficulty appreciating such possibilities. Achieving a balance between updating and

re-framing teacher knowledge and respecting domain-specific wisdoms that derive from teachers' occupational world views is for psychologists always a delicate exercise, and inevitably, an ongoing process (Faulkner, 2007a, p. 12).

Other Australian researchers have also argued that the ability to engage in other job functions such as consultation with teachers is an area of concern for school psychologists (Dickinson, 1995). It appears that further work needs to occur in this area, as there has been little research conducted, particularly with Australian or Victorian-based participants. The studies conducted to date have found that it is important to work towards a common understanding of school psychologists' responsibilities (Thielking & Jimerson, 2007). This includes modification of class teachers' attitudes about the diversification of roles (Dean, 1980; Watkins et al., 2001). Additionally, achieving a common understanding of school psychologists' roles would decrease competition and interference, and ease teacher resentment, frustration, and misinterpretation (Shapiro, 2000). Moreover, cooperation between professions should improve, school psychologists' role should diversify, and confusion about roles and anxiety for school psychologists and educators should reduce (Agresta, 2004; Ashton & Roberts, 2006; Hosie, 1997; Kelly & Gray, 2000; Nikopoulou & Oakland, 1990; Poulou, 2002).

The present study did not examine the perceptions of the public or school community. However, participants argued that schools failed to recognise ways in which the profession could contribute to school improvement and student outcomes. Previous studies have found that teachers and Principals tended to request specialist services for individual students, whereas Government priorities

emphasised different areas of need (Whitla et al., 1992). Areas of need include provision for students with special needs, behaviour management, counselling, consultation, development and preventative work, and educational and psychological assessment. Additionally, special education needs coordinators and school psychologists may differ in what they perceive to be important (Ashton & Roberts, 2006). Yet a recent study utilising Victorian participants found that school psychologists are not out of sight but are often in staffrooms, discussing issues with teachers, or having meetings with parents (Thielking, 2006). It is evident that further research and education needs to occur, otherwise it is likely that misperceptions and disagreements about the role of school psychologists' will continue (Gilman & Gabriel, 2004; Hosp & Reschly, 2002; Watkins et al., 2001).

Six out of nine participants identified concerns about the general lack of awareness of what psychologists did in schools. This is a worldwide phenomenon encountered by those in the profession for many years (Merrell et al., 2006). For example, school psychologists globally undertake tasks such as assessment, consultation and intervention. A comparative review of Australian public-sector school psychology services by Armstrong et al. (2000) identified the common major professional responsibilities across school systems to be counselling of students and parents, psychoeducational assessments, consultancy, liaison and critical incident management. Despite the similar roles and functions of school psychologists around the world, researchers suggest that there is a disparity between the amount of time school psychologists report engaging in these activities and the time they would like to spend engaged in these activities (Curtis et al., 2002; Jimerson et al., 2004).

Whilst promoting awareness of roles could occur on many levels, it appears that the profession has done little to educate the public about their role in schools and the community (Cobb, 1999; Natasi, 2000). In turn, some researchers have suggested that school psychologists need to be more proactive in being a change agent (Brelsford, 2010; Reschly & Ysseldyke, 2002). A possible reason for the lack of progression in the profession is that school psychologists continue to engage in a number of traditional tasks, therefore, are not seen as providers of more comprehensive services (Bernes & Witko, 2009; Merrell et al., 2006). Conversely, some researchers suggest that school psychologists do not want to move beyond the 'test them then tell them' philosophy and prefer to continue with traditional assessment and counselling roles (Bernes & Witko, 2009). However, there is a growing body of research that indicates that school psychologists would like to do less assessments and work more preventatively at a systems-level (Burns & Coolong-Chaffin, 2006; Corkum et al., 2007; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010; Farrell, Jimerson, & Oakland, 2006; Gutow et al., 2009; Harris & Joy, 2010; Idsoe et al., 2008; Jordan, Hindes, & Saklofske, 2009; Lasser, 2005; Mautone, Manz, Martin, & White, 2009; Miller, George, & Fogt, 2005; Tharinger & Palomares, 2004; Ysseldyke et al., 2006). Whilst expanding the role of the school psychologist may be a more effective way to provide school psychology services, Australian school psychology is:

...a low-incidence profession in school sector organisations...[and is] influenced by periodic transformations in educational philosophy, the eternally restless organisational restructuring that inevitably accompany

these changes, and the funding shift following new policy initiatives (Faulkner, 2007a, p. 12).

The key question of why school psychologists continue to perform traditional roles such as counselling and assessment and not systems work is a question that does not seem to be adequately answered by the research literature. Whilst further research is required, it seems as though this may be a perennial argument.

Another factor is that some school psychologists may not be confident or skilled in working strategically. Modifying tertiary training and education for the profession may improve school psychologists' confidence. In conjunction, the *Department* could develop a systemic and consistent statewide induction program to improve professional skill development in line with current student support services guidelines (SWD, 2010). If school psychologists around the world consistently report that they desire to provide more comprehensive services than they do currently, then the profession is likely to benefit from continuing advocacy for the expansion of their roles (Conoley & Gutkin, 1995; Jimerson et al., 2004; Merrell et al., 2006). Despite this awareness, the profession continues to struggle to gain acceptance of the applicability of all of their skills in the school context (Bradley-Johnson & Dean, 2000; Tharinger & Palomares, 2004).

4.4 Navigating the system

The third superordinate theme relates to participants' navigation through the *Department* as a school psychologist. Participants experienced a range of

positive and negative challenges and frustrations in their journey. For that reason, the title *navigating the system* was used to encapsulate this theme. Research has shown that school psychologists, who could not come to terms with the ‘least liked’ aspects of the profession, were more likely to leave (Faulkner, 2007a; Jimerson et al., 2007). Least liked aspects include the administrative burden, overwhelming workload, limited time available for prevention and intervention work, and perceived low salary and professional status. Some of this sample of participants was pragmatic in their approach to the profession. Whilst there were often several aspects of the job that participants did not like, some remained hopeful that they were able to contribute to school improvement.

Many participants felt unprepared for their role as a school psychologist and it was not what they expected. For some, they struggled to establish their identity and authority. Previous research has found that school psychologists’ sense of professional identity can be affected by their level of integration within the school in which they worked (Harris, 2009). For example, school counsellors who were directly employed by schools or who worked full-time felt like ‘insiders’ and able to positively contribute to schools and influence leadership (Harris, 2009). The *Department* directly employs all *Department* school psychologists who are generally co-located in an office base and travel out to their allocated schools. Psychologists employed directly by schools, are located in the schools in which they work. Similarly, to school psychologists in the study conducted by Harris (2009), some of this sample of participants felt like outsiders and vulnerable to pressure from school leadership. It would be interesting to compare the experiences of psychologists directly employed by the school

(insiders) with *Department* psychologists (outsiders) to determine if differences exist in the level of connection to the school/s in which they work as well as the ability to influence leadership and contribute effectively to a school's well-being agenda (Faulkner, 1999; Gade & Houdek, 1993; Thielking, 2006a).

Once participants were in the system, most found it a challenge in getting used to understanding how the organisation worked. Many believed that the *Department* was a unique system with an idiosyncratic culture. This includes the perpetual organisation redesign and funding shifts that follow new policy initiatives (Faulkner, 1999; Faulkner, 2007a; Ritchie, 1985). Organisational changes to student services over the past 20 years include school support centres, locating individuals in base schools, and the current co-located service delivery model. Researchers have argued that many school psychologists in Victoria have experienced feelings of continuing disaffection, an inability to cope with the rapid changes, and organisational change fatigue (Faulkner, 1993; Faulkner, 1999; Faulkner, 2007a; Jimerson et al., 2007; Robinson, 2005; Whitla et al., 1992).

Previous studies have examined the challenges that influence school psychology internationally (Jimerson et al., 2004; Jimerson et al., 2006; Jimerson et al., 2008). External challenges such as a lack of money to properly fund services, low salaries for school psychology specialists, low status of school psychology, lack of public support for education, and low status of education may influence the profession's acceptance over time. Research into issues that affect professional practice has contributed to our understanding of how the profession has evolved and been affected by these issues. Previous studies have found that 17% of school psychologists would like to be considered more useful and be

appreciated for what they do in their schools (Trombetta et al., 2009). Some participants in the present study were disappointed with what they saw as the downgrading of the profession over time. Whilst it appears that the perceived loss of status is an issue for the profession, it is unclear how school psychologists have experienced it (Faulkner, 1999; Faulkner, 2007a; Jimerson et al., 2007). Findings from this sample contributes to the literature by highlighting that these issues remain of concern, however, further clarification is required.

Whilst some participants found it difficult to deal with how the system operated, others came to accept the way that the system worked and were content with their career. These participants managed to find strategies to help them adapt and developed resilient attitudes such as flexible, adaptable and accepting. Previous findings suggest that approximately 85 percent of school psychologists were happy with their jobs (Brown et al., 1998; Levinson et al., 1988; Miller et al., 1981; Thielking, 2006a; VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006). In turn, further analysis and reflection indicated that most participants were, in fact, happy with their jobs. Aspects such as developing relationships with students and effecting positive change have already been discussed in this thesis. Other aspects such as flexibility and autonomy of the work were also especially valued. These findings have also been reported elsewhere (Faulkner, 2007a; Jimerson et al., 2007).

Many participants described their experience of working in the system with a sense of feeling disconnected. School psychologists appeared to have a different sense of belonging to the *Department*, which may relate to the different role and job functions when compared to the teaching profession. If school psychologists feel connected to their environment and work with colleagues, they

are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs (Brown et al., 1998; Levinson, 1991; Reschly & Wilson, 1995).

The present study has generated qualitative data that not only support but also complement previous quantitative research findings. Whilst previous research found that the professional status and identity of school counsellors in Queensland, Australia was continuing to solidify and public identity was growing in recognition and respect (Barletta, 1997), this statement may not translate to the more recent Victorian context. For example, studies utilising Victorian-based school psychologists found that Government school psychologists were significantly dissatisfied with a range of issues when compared with their Catholic or Independent school counterparts (Thielking & Moore, 2005b; Thielking et al., 2006). Areas of dissatisfaction included office space, security of files, technological resources, psychological resources, supervision arrangements and budget allocation.

In summary, many participants described their journey of becoming and remaining a school psychologist in the *Department* as a challenge. However, a range of positive and negative experiences was described by participants in this thesis. These include enjoying the flexibility and autonomy that the job brings and trying to understand the system. Participants who were able to make the system work for them generally stayed in the job, whereas those who were unable to come to terms with the way that school psychologists could contribute to school improvement left the organisation. Findings indicate that working in the *Department* brings with it many challenges, but also many benefits. Findings from this superordinate theme generally originate from an empirical or systems

approach. However, participants' experience of navigating the system is a unique contribution of this thesis. Several issues come out of the findings for the present study that require further exploration. These include the need to understand the level of connection school psychologists experience when they are insiders or outsiders and what aspects of the role contribute to people 'making the job work for them'.

4.5 Feeling the pressure of workload and reaching my limit

Participants felt the pressure of workload and many experienced stress and/or burnout. Aspects that contributed to participants feeling as though they were experiencing excessive workloads include high student-to-psychologist ratios and the challenge of working with challenging cases and critical incidents (Fagan, 2004; Greenberg et al., 2003; Jimerson et al., 2007; Thielking, 2006a). These school psychologists described being '*tired of being everything to everybody*', '*unable to set boundaries and say no*', and feeling as though '*there was not enough time to get through the workload each day*'. Subsequently, the individual work with students became '*a numbers game*', with most participants feeling '*thinly spread*'. Previous Australian and Victorian-based research has reported the influence of excessive workload on school psychologists (Miller et al., 1981; Thielking, 2006a). However, further research is required to determine the extent of the influence of excessive workload for *Department* school psychologists in Victoria.

Previous research has indicated that the higher the counselling load, the more clinical issues school psychologists face, and the less variety school psychologists had in their work (Thielking, 2006a). In turn, this may influence the amount of time available to participants to engage in other tasks. Not being able to broaden the scope of school psychologists' work may also contribute to their feelings of job satisfaction and levels of personal accomplishment. There appears to be empirical support for modifying the traditional model of service delivery dominated by counselling and assessment activities to include more systems-level activities (Thielking, 2006a). Many participants in this sample were tired of being spread so thinly and wanted to work in a more balanced way.

Many of these school psychologists felt worn down by the exposure to students' issues and critical incidents and wanted the *Department* to understand the vicarious traumatisation school psychologists often experience working in the organisation. There was a sense of wanting more acknowledgements about the degree that cases influenced school psychologists, on a personal and professional level. For example, some participants considered leaving the *Department* or left after the interview phase. Whilst the present study did not specifically set out to examine the issue of burnout, participants in their interviews consistently raised aspects of this construct. This construct has been thoroughly explored in the research literature, although features less prominently in Australian-based studies (Burden, 1988; Jimerson et al., 2007; VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006).

It appears that there is a person and environment component to the concept of burnout, with certain personality types being more likely to experience burnout or vicarious traumatisation (Mills & Huebner, 1996). For example, people with a

high degree of agreeableness or flexibility in their personality structure are more able to depersonalise their experience resulting in less stress. Participants who presented as being pragmatic in their approach did not seem to worry about external factors out of their control (Burden, 1988). However, additional research into sources of satisfaction of school psychologists in different cultural contexts is required, particularly in relation to the prevention of burnout. This includes additional research into the effects of vicarious traumatisation for school psychologists and the influence of personality variables on the construct of burnout.

The present study did not specifically aim to explore how the issues of supervision, debriefing, and lack of professional learning opportunities influenced the overall work experience of school psychologists. However, many participants reported that the *Department's* lack of support around these issues was evident. The recent introduction of a statewide service delivery model and student support services guidelines may have partially alleviated the issue of supervision (SWD, 2010). Previous research indicates that professional supervision and support are often left to the individual or outside agencies (Faulkner, 2007a). For regions or school systems with under-developed supportive professional structures and practices, low morale problems may exist among some school psychologists (Thielking, 2006b). Whilst some participants took part in supervision and professional support, it appeared that the process was not managed professionally and was dependent on the region in which they were located. Previous studies have found that more than a third of Victorian school psychologists did not participate in supervision, more experienced school psychologists participated in

supervision less than less experienced school psychologists, and for those who participated in supervision did so infrequently (Jimerson et al., 2004; Thielking, 2006a).

The reasons why school psychologists feel so strongly that professional supervision should be provided by the *Department* remains unclear and needs further exploration. For example, there is no evidence to suggest that all psychologists in other fields automatically get supervision provided as part of their professional work. In fact, psychologists who work in private practice are required to provide their own supervision and personal indemnity insurance. Professional liability covers school psychologists who work for the *Department* who act in good faith (J. Rosewarne, personal communication, December 12, 2010). Additionally, it may be that there is a blurring over the debate about the value of supervision provided by employers and the supervision provided by line management.

This sample of school psychologists were so busy with individual caseloads and subsequently felt as though they had no time to undertake professional learning during their workday. Previous researchers have reported similar findings that indicate that Victorian school psychologists participate in professional development activities once every three months (Thielking, 2006a). As a result, participants felt as though they were not learning new skills and developing in their careers. For many participants this created a sense of frustration and resentment that their professional development was a lower priority than the school's priorities for direct work with individual students.

Participants believed that the pressure to progress through cases as quickly

as possible contributed to them feeling as though they had reached their limit. These findings have been reported elsewhere, with previous researchers suggesting that not being able to participate in professional learning may impact on the professionals ability to network, discuss professional issues and receive specific information, learn new skills, and gain new contacts in relation to colleagues and referral services (Kaczmarek, 2000; Shapiro, 2000; Thielking, 2006a). This aspect requires further investigation, as there appears to be little research conducted in this area particularly relating to school psychologists.

4.6 Discussion and implications of results

Despite the range of challenges that face school psychologists, most report that working with students, families and teachers were the most enjoyable aspects of their work, particularly when they can effect change (Faulkner, 2007a). Whilst there were other enjoyable aspects to the role, such as flexibility of the work and autonomy, the relationships that school psychologists developed and their ability to make a difference in someone else's life was the most powerful motivator. In the present study, policy, systems and negative aspects of the role almost blinded the researcher. However, reflection and further analysis revealed that beneath the day-to-day busyness of the work, the core phenomenological experience for the school psychologists in this thesis was the joy of making a difference.

Working in the public service means that school psychologists live in an era of evidence-based practice and accountability. As a result, there are expectations of school psychologists to do more to address the academic, social-

emotional, and mental health needs of students. Whilst increasingly more resources are required to match the growing issues in school settings, there are often finite resources available for the efforts recommended (Jimerson et al., 2007; Merrell et al., 2006). All of these rapid changes influence schools and school psychologists. In the current systems environment, many school psychologists find it impossible to meet these challenges.

Participants described high levels of burnout and workplace stress. Previous studies have shown that issues such as time pressures, stress stemming from serving large numbers of children, boredom with testing and burnout can influence job satisfaction (Levinson, 1990; Jimerson et al., 2010; Miller et al., 1981; VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006). One third of this sample of school psychologists left the *Department* after the interview phase. Whilst the reason for leaving the profession for one participant was unknown, two indicated during the interview phase that they were dissatisfied with the *Department* and intended to leave. If school psychologists are leaving the profession because they are dissatisfied, it may be beneficial to address the factors that influence their retention. With personnel shortages for the profession predicted to be at crisis point at around 2010, skilled professionals may be difficult to replace (Curtis et al., 2004; Tharinger & Palomares, 2004).

Previous studies have shown that school psychologists not only have a role to play in working with an increasingly diverse and challenging population, but also in facilitating systems change (Faulkner, 2007a; Greenberg et al., 2003; Merrell et al., 2006). In Victoria, systems-level work does not appear to feature prominently. Instead, therapeutic and assessment-driven work with individual

students' dominated participants' roles. Whilst the present study did not specifically set out to explore school psychologists' ideal or preferred level of systems work, the *Strengthening Networks and School Communities: Guidelines for Student Support Services* document outlines the move towards a more strategic and targeted level of service delivery (SWD, 2010). However, participants' desire to facilitate systems change (*wanting to be able to contribute to the wellbeing of the school community*) is partially supported by previous findings, which indicate that school psychologists want to spend more time undertaking counselling and systems-level work as opposed to assessment activities (Bramlett, Murphy, Johnson, Wallingsford, & Hall, 2002; Bramston & Rice, 2000; Corkum, French, & Dorey, 2007; Farrell, 2010; Harris & Joy, 2010; Idsoe, 2006; Jordan, Hindes, & Saklofske, 2009; Magi & Kikas, 2009; Martin, 2001; Natası, 2000; Reschly, 2000).

Whilst understanding the macro forces that drive public sector and education reform may appear overwhelming or irrelevant for school psychologists, some researchers argue that it is an important concept to grasp for the profession (Faulkner, 1999). In other words, "the work of school psychologists does not occur in a vacuum or in isolation. School psychologists play a role in school systems. Thus their work influences and is influenced by the systems in which they work" (Merrell et al., 2006, p. 238).

Within the *Department's* school accountability and improvement framework, there are three broad elements of student outcomes that support schools, namely student learning (numeracy and literacy), student pathways and transitions, and student engagement and wellbeing (DEECD, 2012). Currently

school psychologists appear embedded in only one area, being student engagement and wellbeing. If school psychologists can complement the other two central elements of student learning and student pathways and transitions, they may be able to sustain and expand the profession's relevance in contemporary society (Reeder et al., 1997; Ross et al., 2002). In other words, these areas are not distinct and independent tasks, but student engagement and wellbeing is interconnected with teaching and learning within schools (DEECD, 2012). If students' mental health needs are addressed, researchers suggest that students are more likely to learn. Conversely, if students have high student achievement, they are more likely to be engaged at school, have higher rates of attendance, and are less likely to exhibit anti-social behaviours or mental health issues (Merrell et al., 2006).

Whilst previous studies suggest that school psychologists are reluctant to move beyond the traditional tasks of assessment and counselling, this did not appear to be true for this sample (Bernes & Witko, 2009; Thielking & Jimerson, 2006). However, internal, external, and systems factors such as student-to-psychologist ratio and public sector financial pressure may continue to restrict the ability of school psychologists who are willing to engage in systems-level interventions (Curtis et al., 2003; Fagan, 2004). Participants believed that human and physical resourcing of the profession continued to be an issue for school psychologists. This is in spite of previous research indicating that the role of the profession will continue to grow and increasing numbers of students will be deemed to be at-risk (Kratochwill, 2006; Kratochwill, 2007).

There appears to be confusion and disagreement between most stakeholders and school psychologists around recognition of roles and responsibilities of the profession (Ashton & Roberts, 2006; Gibson, 1990; Watkins et al., 2001; Whitla et al., 1992). For participants in the current study, many reported that stakeholders such as teachers, Principals, and parents were not clear about the role of school psychologists. Whilst the position description of an Allied Health Grade 3 psychologist in Victoria has remained unchanged for many years, the *Strengthening Networks and School Communities: Guidelines for Student Support Services* document outlines the move towards a broader emphasis of work priorities (DEECD, 2007b; SWD, 2010). Findings from the current study indicate that confusion around roles and responsibilities of the profession still exist in Victoria. It appears that further clarification, education, research and evaluation of school psychologists' roles is required.

In summary, findings suggest that the many professional practice issues that have historically existed for school psychologists remain. Most school psychologists enjoy the variety, autonomy and flexibility that the job provides. For this sample, the ability to make a difference in the lives of those with whom they work was the strongest motivation that kept them in the organisation. However, the attitudes around professional practice issues such as recognition of roles and responsibilities, professional contribution to the school community, and the pressure and impact of workload were less constructive. In order to address these issues, it is important that a range of stakeholders work together towards a solution. The next section presents a range of policy recommendations based on

suggestions by participants and through observations made by the researcher during the present study.

4.7 Policy recommendations

This sample of school psychologists experienced a blended range of challenges and benefits in their roles. In order to enhance school psychologists' experience and influence retention and recruitment, it may be helpful to sustain what is working. However, it may also be helpful to improve on things that are not going so well. The researcher subsequently asked participants to make suggestions based on their interpretation of their experience of working in the *Department* as a school psychologist. Consideration of these aspects may provide possible solutions to problems, contribute to policy development, or encourage internal stakeholders within the *Department* to incorporate as part of their thinking. Additionally, the following suggestions may provide useful data for external stakeholders to consider. The external stakeholders may include professional associations such as the NASP, APS and the Australian Guidance and Counselling Association (AGCA). Recommendations are presented in order of feasibility, and by micro-level issues, through to more macro-level ones that would require substantial system changes.

1. Participants want to feel valued as part of the school community. Small, yet simple tasks could be implemented to facilitate a more valuing environment, such as morning teas, certificates of appreciation, or a SSSO week similar to the 'education support' week that is currently in place. Other more

formal considerations could be achieved through employing more school psychologists in leadership roles at regional office or Central office. This may streamline communication and provide greater advocacy for the profession and its needs. Tangible considerations such as these are likely to form indicators of appreciation and may assist in improving staff culture.

2. Participants wanted co-location of allied health professionals to be retained as part of any future service delivery model. Participants described the range of benefits of co-location, including shared resources and collegiate support and saw this as an essential part of their jobs in terms of looking after their health and wellbeing.

3. Whilst school psychologists could potentially work across any school in their network under the current service delivery model, participants wanted to work in a set number of schools each week. This aspect of service delivery has been implemented in previous service delivery models. Perceived benefits of working in a finite number of schools include the ability to build stronger relationships with students and school staff, reduced travel, and an increased capacity to understand their school's environment.

4. Participants recommended the promotion of greater awareness about how working as a school psychologist influenced them personally and professionally, as part of a consistent statewide policy for supporting school psychologists. Participants wanted this awareness raised for a range of people including teaching staff, regional office staff and people external to the *Department*. In particular, some participants wanted acknowledgment that psychologists' needed time for reflection. Consistent statewide approaches may

include supervision or debriefing after critical incidents. Additionally, aspects such as increasing school psychologists' budget and time allocation for school psychologists to attend professional meetings or professional learning as part of their development. Promotion of greater work-life balance could occur through facilitating accessibility of staff wellbeing programs such as EduWell.

5. Participants wanted the Central office of the *Department* to better promote the role of school psychologists including endorsement that part of the service may be referring to external services or determining the most appropriate service provider.

6. Participants were concerned that key stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and Principals, held misperceptions that school psychologists can see every student referred to the service. Promotion of the role of school psychologists could be facilitated through brochures, speaking at Principal Forums, and electronic information such as emails, bulletins and intranet information.

7. Participants wanted the communication between regional office staff and school psychologists in networks to improve, including clarification of roles between network staff and regional office staff. Some participants believed that roles were often duplicated, which created role confusion and frustration. In part, inclusion of network staff in some of the briefings at regional offices may improve communication between regional office and network staff. This may include the launching of new policy initiatives or changes to organisation design. In turn, this may alleviate the feeling that school psychologists were the last to know what was happening.

8. Participants recommended improvements to communication with external stakeholders through individual secondary consultation, and through greater promotion through regional development initiatives or networks. Inductions for agencies and stakeholders or through promotion of roles in inter-agency meeting groups are possible solutions.

9. Some participants recommended the return of a consistent statewide training program for school psychologists, such as the former *guidance officer training program*. Those who had experienced this program described it as positive, as it gave them the knowledge and skills to feel prepared to do the roles required. Incorporated into this training package for school psychologists could be additional or more tailored work on change management, setting and maintaining professional boundaries and managing their time more efficiently. This may better prepare the profession for the inevitable changes that occur due to being part of a public service organisation. Alternatively, modifying school psychology training at University, particularly in relation to consultation skills and strategic planning may be addressed in this forum.

10. The tenth policy recommendation is to develop a centrally developed induction package for teachers and Principals. Increasing and improving teachers' skills and awareness of school psychologists' roles may also provide greater teacher capacity to deal with student issues, improve student outcomes, and enhance the relationship between school psychologists and teachers. Whilst individual school psychologists may be able to consult with the schools that they work in the effectiveness of this strategy may be dependent on the school psychologist-principal relationship. Therefore, implementing consultation and

liaison skills as part of the principal induction package may partially address the skills required for healthy relationships between these stakeholders. Additionally, introduction of this training may promote greater awareness of school psychologists, their potential skill set, and the ways in which Principals can best utilise this service.

11. The eleventh policy recommendation is for the *Department* to consider a consistent statewide approach to career progression and remuneration of their role. This may be achieved through a review of the Allied Health pay structure in comparison with psychologists in other fields and in line with the standard of living. Participants believed that there were inadequacies in relation to career structure, remuneration of their role, and their ability to undertake further study. Other suggestions include implementation of payment and/or support for school psychologists to undertake further study and extend their skill set, as is provided to teachers and Principals. Implementation of these factors is more likely to promote staff retention and engagement in the profession.

12. Participants wanted adequate financial resourcing. Many participants in the current study believed that school psychologists did not have adequate resources to work effectively in schools. Resources included materials, a professional library, and professional and private working environments. Participants believed that a lack of resources demonstrated a lack of respect and disregarded their need to be a professional in their role.

13. Given the range of unanswered questions in relation to the vexed issue of role clarity, including the call to expand the role of school psychologists, further localised research with DEECD school psychologists may partially clarify

this issue. The ongoing debate about counselling and/or assessment versus systems-level intervention requires further examination, with findings possibly being incorporated into statewide policy recommendations or guidelines. This would require increased support by the DEECD for research to be conducted, and greater liaison with tertiary institutions.

4.8 Strengths and limitations of the present study

A number of strengths and limitations were identified during the course of the present study. The primary aim of this thesis was to generate a deeper understanding of the experiences of being a school psychologist in Victoria, Australia. The primary aim was achieved using the methodology of IPA to enable the voices and stories of the participants to be heard with a richness and depth that cannot be replicated in larger quantitative studies.

An additional strength included eliciting information about systemic and regional issues as well as local and personal issues. Participants were given the opportunity to 'have their say' at a level not previously undertaken. Whilst school psychologists are able to articulate their opinion in staff surveys, or are able to have their views represented by various groups such as the union, the personal nature of these interactions may be lost in translation. One-on-one interviews may be the first opportunity for these participants to voice their opinion and make suggestions that will be promulgated internally and externally to the *Department*.

Other methodological strengths included the sampling across geographical regions and mix of other demographics such as gender, level of experience, and

previous teaching experience. For example, each of the nine DEECD regions was represented, which enabled the researcher to gather a range of experiences and promote the richness of school psychologists' experiences of working in the *Department*.

As with all research studies, there are not only strengths but also limitations to consider. These limitations include personal limitations on the part of the researcher, methodological limitations, and possible oversights in the scope of the study. Subsequently, the limitations identified may form part of the recommendations for further study.

In relation to the researcher's personal limitations, mastery of the IPA method could be viewed as a potential limitation. For example, whilst the researcher had utilised IPA for her Master's degree, she still considers herself a relative novice, and at times found it challenging. Mastery of this particular method requires prolonged engagement with the topic in question. Larkin et al. (2006) argue that:

... IPA can be easy to do badly, and difficult to do well: it demands that a number of rather testing 'balancing acts' are maintained by the researcher. For the novice, these balancing acts are not always easily judged in the wider context of qualitative psychology's complex epistemological field. Indeed, some other qualitative methods offer greater methodological prescription and epistemological certainty, and their circumscribed territories may actually provide a safer option for the novice researcher to explore (p. 103).

In other words, some researchers may view the use of the IPA method as a limitation in itself. For example, IPA, as part of the new phenomenology, does not require biases and previous experiences to be bracketed. Instead, biases and previous experiences are identified and named. However, despite naming the process, the researcher was initially closed off to avenues of inquiry, which restricted engagement with the topic, predetermined findings and was confirming what was already in the literature or the researcher's own experience. The researcher argues that this presented as the biggest limitation, as much of the focus in this thesis has been on concrete system and practical issues rather than phenomenological issues and experiences. See the epilogue at the end of this thesis, which articulates how the researcher worked through this process to reduce the potential for bias.

Whilst naming biases and previous experiences may be viewed as a strength, the use of a single method may not have introduced a high enough level of rigour required. According to Kincheloe (2001), single methods for qualitative studies are insufficient to investigate the complexity and heterogeneity of human experience, and as such, it may have been more fruitful to introduce other forms of rigour in the research process. For example, interviewing more participants or re-interviewing the nine participants may have allowed for another layer of member checking. Triangulation of results beyond the researcher and supervisor may improve the verification of the data (Barker et al., 1994; Stiles, 1993). Testimonial validity may also have been improved by incorporating the checking of results with the original informants or similar others such as independent colleagues who did not form part of the study. However, having sensitivity to the

context in which participants were situated, and maintaining the characteristics of good qualitative research, this has been made transparent (Ritchie, 2001; Yardley, 2000).

Whilst the present study did not seek to be representative, the sample of participants may not have been selected from the widest field possible. For example, participants formed a purposive sample, with one participant randomly selected from the Regional Phone Directories from each of the nine *Departmental* regions across the state. The regional directories of all *Department* school psychologists are not always accurate or up-to-date, and therefore may not have captured all potential participants. Due to the purposive sampling method and a procedural restriction placed on the study by the University Ethics Committee, the researcher was only able to contact participants who indicated consent. Therefore, the reason why one participant did not respond is unknown.

In relation to timing, data collection and submission of the thesis may be viewed as a potential limitation. For example, participants were interviewed prior to the implementation of a *Department*-wide student support services service delivery model. It may have been useful to examine participants' experiences after its implementation. Whilst the aim of the thesis did not specifically examine participants' experiences of the service delivery model, the researcher noticed that some participants articulated their opinion about different service delivery models over time. Given that, the interviews were conducted just prior to the implementation of a service delivery model and submission of the thesis just prior to a further change in 2012, a longitudinal study may have given a broader understanding of participants' experiences to these changing policies.

Additionally, a longitudinal study may determine whether the new service delivery model had any impact on the professional practice issues identified in this study (Barletta, 1996; Burden, 1988; Harris, 2009; Jimerson et al., 2007; Levinson, 1991; Wilkerson, 2009).

The fact that teachers and Principals were not interviewed may also be viewed as an oversight in the scope of the study and potential limitation. For example, previous studies such as Thielking and Jimerson (2006) have compared school psychologists' opinions of their role with Principals and teachers. As the primary aim of the present study was for the researcher to gain greater awareness of the experiences of school psychologists in Victoria, interviewing teachers and Principals may have contributed to a greater awareness of how the professional practice issues for school psychologists were viewed by other stakeholders.

4.9 Recommendations for future research

A number of recommendations for future research were identified. The present study listed only one primary research question: What are the experiences of DEECD school psychologists in Victoria, Australia? Whilst not pre-empting any components of experience, it was anticipated that issues such as workload, roles, satisfactions and dissatisfactions, would be explored, as these are concepts highlighted in this literature review. Future studies may therefore examine specific research questions such as, "What is the experience of feeling like an outsider as a school psychologist?" alternatively, "What is your experience of making a difference and effecting positive change in students?"

Future studies may benefit from implementing multiple methods such as interviewing additional participants or re-interviewing current participants.

Interviewing a broader number of school psychologists across the state including more females, rural regional personnel, and a wider age-range of participants may capture broader and more positive experiences within the *Department*.

Additionally, interviewing other school psychologists from around the country via the IPA qualitative method, may not only provide further evidence of the impact of professional practice issues for colleagues, but also determine if the issues identified in this thesis are applicable to school psychologists across Australia.

Interviewing other key stakeholders such as teachers and Principals may ensure a greater awareness and understanding of school psychologists' experience of working for the *Department* in Victoria. For example, it may improve existing knowledge of these groups and enable comparisons to be drawn with school psychologists. Additionally, teachers and Principals' views may vary; therefore, consideration of both viewpoints may generate further recommendations or courses of action. Key stakeholders' views can also be compared with previous studies and add to the research literature, particularly given the lack of qualitative research with school psychologists from Victoria.

Most importantly, the difficulty the researcher had in being influenced by potential biases may be addressed through further distance of the researcher from the topic. Additionally, potentially leading questions or closed avenues of inquiry could be addressed in future studies by emphasising a more positive study of experience. This could be achieved through the focus group method or through more specific questioning of participants.

Unfortunately, in the study, participants were interviewed prior to the implementation of the current service delivery model. Conducting a longitudinal study may not only capture participants' experiences over a longer period of time, but may be able to determine if the implementation of the service delivery model had any specific impact on participants. Additionally, given that another statewide service delivery model is to be implemented on the 1st of July 2012, it is recommended that school psychologists' experiences be explored in relation to the current student support services structure and compared with future models to determine if any changes in cultural attitude have occurred over time. The longitudinal perspectives of school psychologists towards change process and service delivery models over time may determine the extent to which school psychologists report negative experiences.

The *triangle of interactions* model critically examined in the literature review of this thesis may provide guidance to future researchers (Low, 2009). Whilst the model was not identified until after the data collection had been completed it was used to restructure the literature review. Subsequently, the shift in focus from a phenomenological emphasis to a more empirical model may provide some structure or specific questions around the *internal, external, systems* and *personal* factors that make up the experience of school psychologists. For example, a quantitative study may list all factors and ask participants to indicate on a Likert scale, the degree to which aspects of these factors influence school psychologists' practice. Alternatively, a qualitative study may also specifically examine how the four factors utilising semi-structured interviews to allow participants' experiences to come out naturally.

4.10 Conclusion

Professional practice issues have been explored in relation to school psychologists across the world. However, there has been little qualitative research conducted in this area, and there are no known studies utilising Victorian-based school psychologists. Whilst there is a plethora of studies from the United States, they may not always translate into the Australian context due to different levels of acceptance of the profession. The present study provides a much needed Australian and Victorian contribution to the school psychology literature in relation to the lived experiences of this profession. This includes more specifically, information on professional practice issues such as workload and burnout, the need for personal and professional acknowledgment, and recognition of their skills and abilities. More specifically, the unique contribution of this thesis is that the day-to-day busyness of schools means that school psychologists often feel as though they are ‘skimming the surface’. However, the core experience for participants in this thesis was their ability to make a difference and effect change. Not only did their experiences of making a difference motivate them to join the profession, but also influenced their passion for the role. Findings not only increased participants and the researcher’s awareness of these issues, but with publication, the aim is to also increase the awareness of the wider research community about school psychologists and their experience of working within the education system.

Findings imply that there is a perennial need to increase the understanding about the roles and experiences of school psychologists. There is also a need for

the findings to be disseminated to the *Department* in order to influence student support services policy and guidelines. In particular, in the wake of the existing and next service delivery model, there are potential implications for the future retention of staff and their ongoing health and wellbeing.

Most notably, the majority of school psychologists report that they enjoy the work that they do, particularly effecting changes in students, parents and teachers. These aspects should be further promoted, particularly in an era of rapid change and organisation redesign. It is important not to lose sight of why people joined the profession in the first place, and why they keep doing the work. If some of the recommendations suggested in this thesis are implemented, then this is likely to have a significant influence on the retention high quality staff and sustainment and promotion of a more positive culture. Working as a school psychologist is a great profession and for many the best job they have ever had.

Epilogue - My research experience

My research experience has been a challenging, yet interesting journey. My initial intention was to learn more about others' experiences of working in the *Department* as a school psychologist, and I achieved this aim. The richness of participants' experiences was something that could not be achieved through a quantitative study or gained during the busyness of day-to-day working life. In addition to understanding more about the lived experiences of school psychologists, I also learnt more about the qualitative methodology of IPA and experienced the challenge of balancing reduction and reflexivity. However, it is what I learnt about myself as a researcher that resonates with me most strongly. For example, whilst I aimed to suspend my judgments, beliefs and experiences as a school psychologist, my focus became too narrow and I was closed off to a range of avenues of inquiry. I initially saw my own experiences as an initial advantage over someone who did not work in the profession. In reality, I was too close to the topic, which inadvertently drew my focus towards a predominantly negative view of the *Department*. It was not until I had written several drafts of my thesis that I came to appreciate that I had been closed off to the more positive aspects of working in the profession. Specifically, this was what kept school psychologists doing the work – working with students and effecting positive changes in their lives.

Upon reflection, my way of thinking about the profession has been changed by my findings. For example, I have gained a greater appreciation of the challenges that face the profession in the form of professional practice issues. These include my interpretation that school psychologists generally want to

contribute more to the wellbeing of the school community but often feel bogged down in the day-to-day chaotic nature of schools.

Additionally, I have come away with a reinforced view that school psychologists generally believe that the profession is a great one, where students, teachers and families can be supported to improve and change their lives. Other positive practical aspects that have been found in the research literature were confirmed, which include job flexibility and professional autonomy. However, the underlying need of the participants in the present study to improve their overall experiences of working as a school psychologist in the *Department* does not seem widely understood. Not only do the negative experiences of the profession appear to cloud the good work that is being done by school psychologists, I was guilty of forming the same views. Whilst improvements to working conditions and greater investment into human resources would enhance the profession, recognising school psychologists' skills and valuing the profession's opinions and contributions to the education community is what this sample seemed to want the most.

For me, I have come away with this enhanced knowledge and applied it to my current role as a network student support services coordinator. For example, understanding and appreciating the workload pressures facing my team have meant that I am able to consider this when allocating work to my school psychologists. In other words, I consider the culture of individual schools, how they value the role of the school psychologist, and the personality of individual staff members when placing them into schools. A particular challenge is to support staff through the many organisational and service delivery changes that

have occurred, which have influenced organisational change fatigue. With potential changes looming as part of the current Government's *Plan for Education* (Liberal Nationals Coalition, 2010), this continues to be an issue of concern.

Despite these challenges, I see the benefits that can be gained in improving the experiences of school psychologists, particularly in the areas of staff retention and engagement. Whilst I have come to appreciate that it is helping others that keeps school psychologists engaged in the profession, other positive aspects could be improved to enhance the experience. Further to this, reducing the negative aspects will also assist in enhancing a positive culture. The thesis has been a wonderful learning experience, opening up my eyes to the diversity of experiences in the profession and the hope that exists in the profession. I am optimistic that my research can make a difference, just as school psychologists aim to do with the students, parents, and teachers whom they support every day in schools.

APPENDIX A

Table 1.2 Qualitative studies that describe the lived experience of school psychologists & school counsellors

Author/Year	Country	Methodology	Key Findings
Christianson & Everall (2008)	Canada	Grounded theory	Three themes were identified regarding school counsellors' experience of suicide: <i>training & practice standards, support resources, self-care.</i>
Christianson & Everall (2009)	Canada	Grounded theory	Four themes were identified regarding school counsellors' experience of suicide: <i>control, significance of the personal experiences participants had within their professional contexts, importance of processing the personal & emotional experience of client suicide, hopefulness expressed by participants.</i>
Evans & Payne (2008)	New Zealand	Narrative	Three sub-themes were identified for the two superordinate themes: <i>Self-Care and support in the work setting (Self-care on the job, Collegial support: schools, Collegial support: supervision) and The work-home interface (influence of work on home life, influence of home on work life, Holistic Self-Care).</i>
Harris (2009)	England	IPA	Five master themes were identified that related to professional identity, although only one master theme was presented: <i>Counselling is a profession in search of an identity within the English school system.</i>
Miller et al. (1981)	America	Not listed	Satisfaction areas include flexibility & freedom in planning time & activities, helping others, associating & interacting with colleagues, & the challenge, variety, & importance of their work. Dissatisfactions include time pressure, stress stemming from serving large numbers of children, & burnout, obtaining services, & unrealistic expectations of others in schools.
Wood (2010)	America	Phenomenology	Eight major themes were identified in working with gifted students: <i>the counselling relationship, experience with gifted traits, challenge & rigour, beliefs & philosophy, identification and services, collaborative relationships, concerns and constraints, and training & knowledge.</i>

APPENDIX B

Table 1.3 Challenges school psychologists face working in the education system

Author/Year	Methodology	Country	Participants	Method	Key findings
Bramston & Rice (2000)	Quantitative	Australia	School psychologists	Survey	A number of student issues are faced including mental illness, emotional problems, behavioural problems and family trauma. Workplace stress and bureaucratic issues were also challenges reported by participants. Participants felt unprepared for a range of student and workplace issues.
Cromarty & Richards (2009)	Qualitative	England Scotland	School counsellors	Focus groups	A range of issues/facilitating factors were identified in their work: establishing a professional role in school, time for building professional relationships, working with other professionals in schools and sharing information. The quality of communication between school counsellors and senior staff has a direct impact on establishment of services; a lack of time made it difficult to carry out the full tasks of the role; good working relationships with other professionals was enjoyable; the importance placed on professionals within and external to the school varied; information sharing could be difficult.

Author/Year	Methodology	Country	Participants	Method	Key findings
Harris (2009)	Qualitative	England	School counsellors	In-depth interviews	Most derive reward from their therapeutic work with children; their sense of professional identity was affected by their position in schools; those with dual roles saw themselves as 'insiders'; those who worked part-time/contracted felt like 'outsiders'.
Jimerson et al. (2007)	Quantitative	Albania America, Australia, China, Cyprus, England, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Russia	School psychologists	Survey	Respondents from all countries reported working with students, teachers, & families as one of their favourite aspects of working in the profession. Professional autonomy was also ranked highly. Administration and overwhelming workload demands were the least favoured roles. Psychoeducational evaluations, counselling students, providing primary prevention programs, activities and consultation with teachers and staff was the most favoured roles.
Trombetta et al. (2009)	Quantitative	Italy	Principals & school psychologists	Survey	The longer the psychologist is known within a school, the more cohesive & enduring the relationship; most psychologists did not work individually with students; financial reimbursement of their work in schools was a delicate issue; psychologists have positive regard of their work in schools, however want national recognition, stable and continuous employment and professional regulation of pay.

APPENDIX C

Table 1.4 *Teacher and principal attitudes towards school psychologists*

Author/Year	Country	Sample	Methodology	Method	Key findings
Farrell, Jimerson, Kalambouka, & Benoit (2005)	Cyprus, Denmark, England, Estonia, Greece, South Africa, Turkey, America	Teachers	Quantitative	Survey	Teachers did not want school psychologists spending more time undertaking the work they do most frequently, but on other activities. Findings suggest that there is a relationship between the amount of time school psychologists spend in schools & teacher's views about whether this is enough.
Bernes & Witko (2009)	Canada	Superintendant	Qualitative	Interview	70% of participants indicated that school psychologists were completing all of the tasks that they would like them to be responsible for. 60% reported that school psychologists should be responsible for more tasks including program planning/follow-up, consultation, intervention, more comprehensive assessments, and influencing system policy. The majority of participants would like to see school psychologists expand their roles but feel that school psychologists are reluctant to.
Leach (1989)	Australia	Teachers & Principals	Quantitative	Survey	Traditional child-centred activities occurred more frequently than system-centred ones. Consensus that activities were rarely system-centred, influenced whole-schools, or involved applied research in schools. There were significant differences in the perception of quantity & quality of services provided/received between teachers, Principals, and those with the most/least contact.

Author/Year	Country	Sample	Methodology	Method	Key findings
Watkins, Crosby, & Pearson (2001)	America	Teachers & administrators	Quantitative	Survey	Participants wanted a school psychologist to be available on a daily basis at their school. Teachers and administrators wanted school psychologists to continue assessment activities at their current intensity as well as providing a wide range of additional services.
Nelson, Robles-Pina, & Nichter (2008)	America	School counsellors	Quantitative	Survey	Participants reported that they actually engage in less counselling, consultation, curriculum, and coordination activities than they would prefer. Counsellors with more than 10-20 years of experience reported more counselling activities than those with less.
Gilman & Gabriel (2004)	America	Psychologists Teachers, & Administrators	Quantitative	Survey	There were areas of agreement and areas of disagreement around what stakeholders wanted school psychologists' roles to look like. For example, teachers wanted more crisis intervention but school psychologists wanted it to stay the same. Teachers and administrators wanted curriculum development to stay the same but school psychologists wanted to do more. Teachers wanted in-service training to remain the same but administrators wanted more of it. School psychologists, teachers and administrators wanted special education assessment to remain the same. Teachers reported significantly lower satisfaction ratings than school administrators.

Author/Year	Country	Sample	Methodology	Method	Key findings
Thielking & Jimerson (2006)	Australia	Principals, teachers & school psychologists	Quantitative	Survey	Participants agreed that psychologists should counsel students, conduct psychological testing, develop and implement group programs and workshops; should not administer discipline to students, teach subjects and counsel and alter test results in order to receive funding for students. There were significant differences between the groups in relation to role boundaries, dual relationships, confidentiality and informed consent. Despite similar opinions about the school psychologist's role, there are some significant differences, including mixed opinions amongst school psychologists themselves.

APPENDIX D

Table 1.5 *Job satisfaction studies*

Author/Year	Country	Sample	Methodology	Key findings
Baggerly & Osborn (2006)	America	School counsellors	Quantitative	Positive predictors of career satisfaction included appropriate duties, high self-efficacy and district and peer supervision. Negative predictors were inappropriate duties & stress. The only positive predictor of career commitment was appropriate counselling duties. The only negative predictor was stress.
Brown, Hohenshil, & Brown (1998)	America	School psychologists	Quantitative	86% of school psychologists were satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs; 14% were dissatisfied. School psychologists were most satisfied with independence, a chance to do important work that fits with one's values, and congenial colleagues with whom they work. Dissatisfactions included school system policies and procedures & opportunities for advancement.
DeMato & Curcio (2004)	America	School counsellors	Quantitative	Counsellors were satisfied or mostly satisfied with their jobs (>90.4%) between 1988-2001, however, those who are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied increased from 3.1-9.1%. Significant impediments to the way they would prefer to do their jobs include taking on roles that detract from counselling.
Kolodinsky, Draves, Schroder, Lindsey, & Zlatev (2009)	America	School counsellors	Quantitative	Elementary, middle, & high school counsellors were all similarly satisfied; respondents who had been teachers prior to entering the field were no more or less pleased with their work than those with no prior teaching experience; the majority of respondents reported having high levels of satisfaction with teachers and vice Principals, and lower levels of satisfaction with school administrators; working with students directly was associated with job satisfaction; the feeling of being overwhelmed by duties was the most common frustration.
Levinson, Fetchkan, & Hohenshil (1988)	America	School psychologists	Quantitative	Approximately 84% of school psychologists were satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs, 16% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. School psychologists were satisfied or very satisfied with 18 out of 20 sub-factors of their jobs; two scales (school system policies & practices, & advancement) fell within the dissatisfied range.

Author/Year	Country	Sample	Methodology	Key findings
Levinson (1990)	America	School psychologists	Quantitative	The discrepancy between actual and desired role functioning and perceived control over role functioning were found to be significantly associated with job satisfaction. Four role function variables emerged as significant predictors of job satisfaction: discrepancy between actual & desired time spent in assessment, discrepancy between actual & desired time spent in clerical activities, actual time spent in research, and discrepancy between actual & desired time spent in research.
Levinson (1991)	America	School psychologists	Quantitative	Six variables were significant predictors of satisfaction with system policies & practices: perceived control, certification as a school psychologist (positively related), discrepancy between used actual & desired time spent in clerical activities, absenteeism, total discrepancy between actual & desired time spent in role function areas, and number of co-workers (negatively related). Five variables were significant predictors of satisfaction with advancement opportunities: certification as a guidance counsellor, salary (positively related), discrepancy between actual & desired time spent in research, number of co-workers, & discrepancy between actual & desired time spent in consultation (negatively related).
Male & Male (2003)	England	Educational psychologists	Quantitative	Educational psychologists express overall satisfaction with the job, with almost ¾ being satisfied or very satisfied. Areas of satisfaction include quality of administrative support available, role clarity, career advancement, & professional development opportunities. Psychologists were less satisfied with current salary, quality of work accommodation, financial resources, number of psychologists in service, time to carry out a range of administrative/managerial/whole school functions. Psychologists were satisfied/very satisfied with the degree of status/autonomy. Challenges include funding, change, recruitment/retention, resources, demands, and peer relations. Psychologists felt adequately/well prepared for psychology matters but less prepared for all other specified work activities. 24% of psychologists commented on the pressures of work, current/future changes to the role of psychologists and service delivery, & lack of support &/or induction into the role.

Author/Year	Country	Sample	Methodology	Key findings
McCarthy, Van Horne, Kerne, Calfa, Lambert, & Guzman (2010)	America	School counsellors	Quantitative	Paperwork requirements and size of caseload were rated the most demanding aspects of the job, and other counsellors were rated as the most helpful resource. Participants classified in the higher-demand group reported having higher perceived stress, being less likely to remain in the profession, and having higher caseload percentages of students with disabilities, lower academic performance and poor attendance.
Miller et al. (1981)	America	School psychologists	Qualitative	Satisfaction areas include flexibility & freedom in planning time & activities, helping others, associating & interacting with colleagues, & the challenge, variety, & importance of their work. Dissatisfactions include time pressure & stress stemming from serving large numbers of children, boredom with testing, burnout, the requirement for children to be labelled prior to placement, obtaining services, being itinerant & in a helping profession, unrealistic expectations of others in schools concerning the roles & functions of school psychologists, & current supervision & evaluation procedures.
Proctor & Steadman (2003)	America	School psychologists	Quantitative	In-house school psychologists reported higher rates of satisfaction & perceived effectiveness & lower rates of burnout than the traditional group. Job diversity, caseload, others' familiarity with school psychologists, school psychologists' integration into school activities, & administrators knowledge about school psychologists' capabilities distinguished the two groups.
Rayle (2006)	America	School counsellors	Quantitative	Mattering to others at work & job-related stress accounted for 35% of the variance in effectiveness & job satisfaction rating for the total sample of school counsellors, however, mattering did not moderate the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction; elementary school counsellors experienced the greatest job satisfaction and lowest levels of job-related stress, and high school counsellors experienced the greatest job dissatisfaction & greatest levels of job-related stress.

Author/Year	Country	Sample	Methodology	Key findings
Sears & Navin (2001)	America	School counsellors	Quantitative	14.8% rated their profession as “very stressful”, 50.4% rated their job as “moderately stressful”. No relationship was found between school counsellor’s stress and biographic characteristics. Most frequent sources of stress were, in order, not having enough time to see students, too much paperwork, not enough time to do their job, too large a caseload, and too many non-counselling guidance duties.
Thielking & Moore (2005)	Australia	School psychologists	Quantitative	School psychologists were generally satisfied with the activities that make up their role, however, government school psychologists were less satisfied than their Catholic & independent colleagues.
Thielking, Moore, & Jimerson (2006)	Australia	School psychologists	Quantitative	Results indicated that school psychologists were generally happy with the activities that make up their role, however, government school psychologists were less satisfied than their Catholic & independent colleagues.
VanVoorhis & Levinson (2006)	America	School psychologists	Quantitative	Meta-analysis of 8 studies. Results indicated that 85% of school psychologists are satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs. Areas include relationships with co-workers, opportunity to stay busy on the job, opportunity to work independently, and the opportunity to be of service to others. Dissatisfaction areas include compensation, school policies & practices, & advancement. Results indicated some evidence that overall job satisfaction may be related to the opportunity to expand and influence the role of the school psychologist.
Worrell, Skaggs, & Brown (2006)	America	School psychologists	Quantitative	School psychologists continue to be most satisfied with the social service, independence and values. Satisfaction with job security, compensation and working conditions improved the most over the 20-22-year time span. Opportunities for advancement and school system policies and practices remain sources of job dissatisfaction.

APPENDIX E

Table 1.6 *Burnout Studies*

Author/Year	Country	Participants	Key Findings
Butler & Constantine (2005)	America	School counsellors	Higher collective self-esteem was generally associated with lower professional burnout. Participants working in urban environments reported significantly higher levels of burnout than did their peers working in other environments. Those who worked for 20 years or more reported higher levels of burnout than colleagues working less than 10 years.
Culbreth et al. (2005)	America	School counsellors	Elementary school counsellors had lower levels of role conflict/role incongruence than high school counsellors. Job perception match appears to play a significant part in school counsellors' perceptions of role stress; participation in peer consultation and supervision was also a significant predictor of role stress.
Wilkerson (2009)	America	School counsellors	School counsellors report higher than average emotional exhaustion when compared with other mental health professionals & a higher than normal sense of personal accomplishment. Overall scores on depersonalisation fell below the norm.
Wilkerson & Bellini (2006)	America	School counsellors	Demographic variables, intrapersonal and organisational variables together account for a significant amount of the variation in burnout among school counsellors. The emotion-oriented coping variable was found to be statistically significant across the three models.
Burden (1988)	America Australia England	School psychologists	Reported similar levels of stress; however, there were differences in the identified sources of stress.

Author/Year	Country	Participants	Key Findings
Huebner & Mills (1994)	America	School psychologists	Personality characteristics (high competitiveness/egocentricity & low conscientiousness/extraversion related significantly to burnout. Participants who reported higher levels of burnout indicated greater dissatisfaction with their professional roles.
Mills & Huebner (1998)	America	School psychologists	40% of participants reported high levels of emotional exhaustion, 10% depersonalisation, 19% reduced sense of personal accomplishment at Time 1. Personality variables related to burnout reports over & above stressful occupational events. Burnout reports from Time 1 to 2 demonstrated moderate to high levels of stability.
Pierson-Hubney & Archambault (1987)	America	School psychologists Teachers Social workers Guidance counsellors Reading specialists	Reported midrange perceptions on emotional exhaustion & personal accomplishment dimensions & second lowest level for depersonalisation. School psychologists reported the second highest level of role conflict and highest level of role ambiguity.

APPENDIX F

School of Public Health
Faculty of Health Sciences

Information Sheet for Psychologist Participants

*Doctor of Clinical Science Research Project:
The experience of school counselling services: Psychologists' Perspectives.*

Thank-you for your interest in this research study, which aims to explore psychologists' understanding of their experience in working in secondary school counselling services.

My name is Sharon Marston and I am conducting this study for the award of Doctor of Clinical Science (Counselling and Psychotherapy) at LaTrobe University, Melbourne, under the supervision of Professor Margot Schofield and Dr Jean Rumbold.

Involvement for Psychologists.

If you decide to participate in the study, you would be asked to participate in an interview about working in a secondary school counselling service. This would take about one hour and will be audiotaped then transcribed for analysis. Interview time and location will be mutually convenient.

Confidentiality and Privacy:

All information will be identified only by a pseudonym. It will remain strictly confidential and only accessible to my supervisors and me. The audiotapes and transcripts will be kept secure by the researchers in locked cabinets and destroyed after five years. You will not be identifiable in any research reports or publications that may result from the research. A summary report can be provided upon request.

Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent at any time with no adverse consequences. I am more than happy to answer any questions or concerns you might have.

It is unlikely that this process will raise any difficulties or emotional issues for you, but if this occurs, it is advised that you discuss these with your supervisor (if you have one) or contact your Employee Assistance Program provider (OSA Group) on 1300 361 008.

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Questions concerning this research project can be directed to me or alternatively, you may contact my Principal Supervisor, Professor Margot Schofield via email: m.schofield@latrobe.vic.edu.au, or phone: 9479 3702.

The Faculty Human Ethics Committee (FHEC) of LaTrobe University (Approval No.: FHEC07/95, Valid to :.....) and the Department of Education Ethics Committee (Approval No.....) has approved the project.

If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, or the manner in which this research is conducted, you may contact the Secretary, Faculty Human Ethics Committee at: Faculty of Health Sciences, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Victoria, 3086, Ph 03 9479 3583

Thank-you for considering your participation in this study.

Yours sincerely,

Sharon Marston
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DClinSci Candidate
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APPENDIX G



School of Public Health
Faculty of Health Sciences

Psychologist Consent Form

I,, have read the information contained in the Information Sheet for Psychologists, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this project, realising that I may withdraw this permission at any time. I agree that information collected during the project may be included in a thesis, presented at conferences and published in journals, on condition that I cannot be identified.

I agree to participate in an in-depth interview YES
NO

I agree for the interview to be audiotaped YES
NO

(Whatever your decision, please return the consent form so the researcher is aware of your intentions.)

NAME:.....

Signature:.....

DATE:.....

Phone number:.....

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Appendix H
Theme Titles and Notes from Practice Interview

Theme Title	Notes
Enjoyable Aspects	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When see change in student 2. Being regularly on site 3. Autonomy 4. Big projects
Workload	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Time to engage 2. Time to do clinical work (skills) 3. Additional tasks 4. One day per week senior secondary/300 students (◆) 5. No more than 1.5 days per school 6. Too many tasks (including teacher support) 7. Follow-ups take more time than used to (●) 8. Less student welfare in primary schools 9. Delegate tasks to SWC in secondary (cope) 10. Counselling – no room for program work
Tasks/Job Functions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Counselling 2. Project work 3. Follow-up referrals/case management (●)
Student Issues	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anxiety - easiest 2. Depression - easiest 3. Social/family 4. Community/systemic 5. Co-morbid (early psychosis/ID or masked with anger) 6. Sexual assault 7. Suicidal ideation 8. Self-harm 9. Parental suicide 10. Severe anxiety 11. Possible psychosis 12. Issues similar to adults but different presentation (behavioural/academic)
Barriers to Help Seeking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leave school 2. Time, travel, issue prevents engagement 3. Limited time (senior secondary) to engage (▲) 4. Money (stay at school) 5. Absenteeism 6. Students not there on one day psych there 7. Don't want to miss class/study/exams etc (times cannot see) 8. Long-term issues (▲) 9. Power differential (MH service off-site)

Challenges

1. Clinical skills
2. No support (MH service) or short-term (secondary consultant)
3. Boundaries (cannot keep one day in schools) (◆)
4. Not enough time to do tasks
5. No room for program work
6. Limited time (◆)
7. Who deals with severe cases?
8. Referrals bounce back
9. No feedback/follow-up/change in students (MH service)
10. Retention (connection) Vs Exit (problems) (■)
11. Doing counselling in schools (go there?) (■)
12. Long-term issues – termination of counselling (time to engage) (▲)
13. Miss class/balance educational & personal needs (■)
14. No support in place (office space/counselling rooms)
15. Not enough time for professional tasks (supervision etc)

Role Expectations Vs Reality

1. Dealing with clinical issues
2. Not careers counselling
3. Lack of understanding of role (psych & others)

Recommendations

1. MH on-site (& other services)
2. MH provide supervision service
3. Multi-disciplinary team approach (regular meeting/support)
4. More resources (SWC & Psych time)
5. Case management processes

Note: Connections are in brackets with symbols.

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