

Catholic Schools Seeking Authenticity in a Secular & Pluralist Society

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

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Abstract

Contemporary research indicates that Catholic schools are no longer institutions for the converted. It would appear that their purposes are challenged by a modern demographic which finds no formal relationship with the institutional Church. Yet these schools still hold a strong enough attraction for parents to select them as their school of choice for their children. At a time when enrolments have never been higher identification with the institutional church in its various forms has never been lower. This reality poses a challenge to the authenticity of the Catholic school. This study will therefore explore how Catholic schools respond authentically to this reality.

...at a time when enrolments have never been higher

CLASSROOM DRIFT

GROWTH IN STUDENTS OVER PAST 10 YEARS

	GOVT (%)	NON-GOVT (%)
Australia	↑ 1.2	↑ 21.5
Victoria	↑ 3.7	↑ 13.2

SOURCE: ABS

AND IN 2006 ...



The Age, February 27 2007

And elsewhere.....

In the **ACT**, the number of children at government schools dropped by 12.3 per cent between 1996 and 2006, while **private school enrolments increased by 14.2 per cent.**

In **South Australia**, government school attendance fell by 7.7 per cent, compared with an **increase of 25.3 per cent to private schools**

....our formal relationship with the Church has never been lower

Catholic Student Teachers in Western Australia – research by Luke Saker, Edith Cowan University, WA (2005)

Category	%	Comments
Sunday Mass Attendance	12.8	National Church Life Survey (2001): 25-29 age group 5.6% 30-34 group 7.5% 35-39 it was 12.1%.
did not agree that missing Mass on Sunday was sinful, nor did they agree with the Church's teaching on Sunday Mass	62.4%	
Rarely participated in the Sacrament of Reconciliation	82%	This was described by Saker as the 'forgotten sacrament'

Attitudes to Church's moral teaching

Category	%	Comments
Catholic Church's teaching on marriage and divorce was not "relevant to today's world."	47.2	The Bachelor of Education students had all completed at least their final two years of secondary education in a Catholic school.
Disagreement that the use of contraception was sinful and that every sexual act must be open to procreation.	77.4	Most had spent their entire education until university level in the Catholic system and were currently in their first or second year of teaching studies at Edith Cowan University when surveyed, with a view to teaching in Catholic schools when they graduated.
Did not accept that sexual intercourse outside marriage was sinful	59.4	
Did not accept that homosexual acts were sinful.	66.2	
The majority of students agreed that the Pope has the power to make statements on behalf of the Church, but disagreed that when the Pope makes ex-cathedra statements he speaks infallibly.	67.7	

Relevance of Religious Education classes

Category	%	Comments
Strongly agreed or agreed that their RE classes aroused interest among senior students	52	Saker also found that students do not feel hostile to their experience of religious education and many feel that it enabled them to grow. They also report their experience of Catholic education as generally positive. Saker estimates that 90% of students emerging from the Catholic schools system in Western Australia are not practising their faith.
Did not see their classes as a waste of time.	58.6	
Strongly agreed they would attend if their RE classes were voluntary	35	
Strongly agreed or agreed that they gained a lot from their classes	52.7	
Strongly agreed or agreed that the classes were taken seriously by senior students	12.1	

...and then there is Generation Y!

the generation born between 1976 and 1990

The Spirit of Generation Y Project (2003 – 2006)

BELIEF	%	Comment
Believe in God	48	
Do not believe in God	20	Two-thirds of those in both these groups do believe in a 'higher being or life force'
Unsure	32	
SPIRITUALITY		
Christian	24	19% are actively involved in a church to the extent of attending religious services once a month or more. Religion is seen as a private matter, and there is a strong tide of movement away from previous involvement or identification with a church, and even from religious belief.

Eclectic	17	<p>Believing in two or more New Age, esoteric or Eastern beliefs (including belief in reincarnation, psychics and fortune tellers, ghosts, astrology) and perhaps engaging in one or more alternative spiritual practices (yoga, Tarot, tai-chi). Some of these people attend religious services but most do not. Such beliefs and practices are more common among young women than young men</p>
Humanist	31	<p>Rejecting the idea of God, although a few believe in a 'higher being'. Of these secular-minded young people, almost half believe that there is very little truth in religion, and less than a quarter believe in life after death. They also largely reject alternative spiritualities</p>
Influences		<p>The significant social forces shaping contemporary religion and spirituality – secularisation, the relativism of post-modernity, consumer capitalism, individualism</p>

Yet more research

“Catholics who have stopped going to Mass” *Pastoral Projects Office, Sydney. (Online Catholics, Dec 2006)*

2 major findings:

- 1. A large majority of participants believe that the Church is out of touch with the current world and is not relevant in their own lives.**
- 2. In general, participants’ alienation from the Church has been a gradual process in which changing attitudes to Church teaching have interacted with negative personal experiences of Church personnel and regulation.**

Regular Mass Attendance

1996 18% 2001 15.3% 2006 expected to be 12-13%

Those aged 25 – 34 drop in attendance is double the overall average with 6-7% attending regularly. The drop in number of women attending regularly is roughly equal to that of men.

The Catholic Community in Australia Robert E. Dixon, 2005

SECULAR

According to Gary Bouma (Australian Soul, 2006)

SECULAR does not equal irreligious, antireligious or lacking in spirituality: just look at Generation Y.

At the beginning of the 21st Century it has become clear that:

- 1. spirituality is not on the decline**
- 2. religion is growing in strength in most areas of the world**
- 3. religious belief and practice have moved towards the centre of many public policy issues in Australia.**

“Rather, in secular societies religion & spirituality have seeped out of the monopolistic control of the of formal organisations like churches....In this newly emerging context, sociologies of religion that focus on religious organisations – churches, mosques, synagogues and temples – are likely to miss much of the action, particularly if attention is paid to those that were prominent, mainstream and influential through much of the 20th century.” (p. 5)

It is in this sense that I wish to use the concept of SECULAR in this research.

Put simply, churches are emptying, schools are full or near full but people are still in search of meaning, spiritual meaning. This leads to some key questions for my research:

- 1. What sense can contemporary Catholic schools make of this phenomenon?**
- 2. If the authenticity of the Catholic school is grounded in the educational mission of the Church (Battams 2002 & 2006) then how is this to be configured?**
- 3. If Catholic schools are becoming the de facto parish or church for teachers, students and their families, then can their current structures manage this and if not, then how can they manage this situation? Are they, indeed, equipped to manage this situation?**

PLURALIST

Gen Y attests to the pluralism or diversity which now exists in Australian society. Bouma chooses to use the term DIVERSITY.

“As a result of rising diversity, increasing secularity and global movement of religious and spiritual ideas, beliefs and theologies, and spiritual technologies, such as meditation, liturgies and mega-churches, the ways religion and spirituality relate to social policy have shifted and the issues of concern are different. Diversity has brought some ideas and practices that challenge acceptability.” (Bouma, p. 7)

This affects Catholic schools no less than it affects the local church.

- 1. How can this diversity be understood and reflected in the way Catholic schools operate?**
- 2. How does this diversity in our schools sit alongside the officially stated purposes of the Catholic school and the schools' own mission statements?**

AUTHENTICITY

‘worthy of belief, because of precision or faithfulness to an original’ (Yourdictionary.com)

- **In this study I am using authenticity to refer to a consonance between the stated purposes of the contemporary Catholic school and the reality some of these schools find themselves in. The term authenticity in this context finds an echo in other research.**
- **‘A low level of religious practice among students parents and teachers’ (56%) and the perception that ‘the overall agenda of Catholic schools has little to do with partnership with the local parish’ were some of the reasons offered by members of the clergy for their negative attitudes toward Catholic secondary schools. (Tinsey, 1998, p. 67)**
- **The idea of authenticity also refers to a consonance (or lack thereof) of the purposes of the Catholic secondary school with the purposes of the local parish.**

The Catholic School: what the Documents say

- The Catholic school is charged with the **integration of Christian education into the whole pattern of human life**
- The Catholic school is a **genuine educational institution**
- The Catholic school is a **community**
- The Catholic school participates in the Church's mission of **evangelisation**
- The Catholic school is concerned with the **formation of the whole person**
- The Catholic school is concerned with the **synthesis of culture with faith and faith with life**

The Catholic School (1977)

Lay Catholics in schools: witnesses to faith (1982)

The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (1988)

The Catholic School on the Threshold of the third millennium (1997)

The work of Catholic education is grounded in the Church's mission

The Catholic school is both a sign and an instrument of the evangelising mission of the Catholic Church.

Catholic schools call upon young people to form values based upon a specifically Christian view of the world, which has Christ as its foundation.

Leadership in Catholic Schools p. 11 (2005)

Some implications of this research for Catholic schools.

- **Those born between 1989 & 1990 are currently in Year 12 or have just left school**
- **those who were born between 1980 – 1983 have just completed tertiary education and may be finding their way back into the Catholic education system as teachers.**

QUESTIONS

What impact do these attitudes and beliefs have on the integrity of religious education programs?

How do Catholic schools address their response to the Church's call to mission when their teachers, the students and their parents may not share the beliefs and values which shape the purposes of the school?

Yet more questions.....

If the local parish has ceased to be the locus of faith expression for many what is replacing this?

Our Catholic school enrolments are improving: is the school becoming the 'substitute parish'?

How are we as a community placed to face this challenge?

Do we bemoan the passing of the good old days or do we face this challenge afresh, invigorated with a passion for the Gospel?

Older forms are passing: do we have the courage to shape the newer forms which will give authenticity to what we do in our schools?

The question of authenticity: the consonance between goals and reality.

What does the Church say is a way forward?

We need to look again at how Catholic schools work. Why? Because this is where families are exposed to the work of the Mission of the Church and most especially if participation in a local church is not part of their practice.

One such lens is LAY ECCLESIAL MINISTRY

The ministry is *lay* because it is service done by lay persons. The ministry is *ecclesial* because it has a place within the community of the church.... it is *ministry* because it is participation in the threefold ministry of Christ, who is priest, prophet and king..... the Church's members continue the mission and ministry of Christ.....The application of 'ministry' to the laity is not something to be confused with ordained ministry. The lay ecclesial minister is called to service in the church and not necessarily to a lifelong commitment which happens in Ordination.

'Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord' (p. 12) US Bishops, 2005

WHY?

The Lay Catholic educator is a person who exercises a specific mission within the Church by living, in faith, a secular vocation in the communitarian structure of the school: with the best possible professional qualifications, with an apostolic intention inspired by faith, for the integral formation of the human person, in a communication of culture, in an exercise of that pedagogy which will give emphasis to direct and personal contact with students, giving spiritual inspiration to the educational community of which he or she is a member, as well as to all the different persons related to the educational community. To this lay person, as a member of this community, the family and the Church entrust the school's educational endeavour. Lay teachers must be profoundly convinced that they share in the sanctifying, and therefore educational mission of the Church; they cannot regard themselves as cut off from the ecclesial complex. (par. 24)

Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith, 1982

Catholic Schools at a Crossroads

Pastoral Letter of the Bishops of NSW & ACT, August 2007

‘invite reflection on the implications of our changing educational and cultural context, of the rising proportion of nominally-Catholic and other-than Catholic enrolments, and of the under-participation of students from poorer families.’ (p. 3)

‘they challenge all those involved to dedicate themselves to ensuring that our schools:

- + are truly Catholic in their identity and life
- + are centres of ‘the new evangelisation’
- + enable our students to achieve high levels of ‘Catholic religious literacy’ and practice
- + are led and staffed by people who will contribute to these goals’ (p.3)

Some have proposed that we should resist the pressure of demand for Catholic schooling, and downsize our school system to a scale at which we can choose students and staff who readily embrace the mission of the Catholic school. Alternatively, we can reaffirm our commitment to the essential elements of the Catholic school while recognising, and even embracing, changing enrolment patterns as ‘signs of the times’ and of a new mission for Catholic education. The Bishops of NSW-ACT believe that this second course is the better way forward, and we commit ourselves to it. (p. 8)

Critical Indicators of Progress

These might include:

- + the Catholic purpose of the school is clearly stated in each school's Mission Statement
- + all Principals, Assistant Principals and RECs are practising Catholics who understand and profess the Catholic faith, model it in their own lives, and can teach it effectively
- + progress towards an increase in the proportion of school staff – and especially of RE teachers – who are practising and knowledgeable Catholics
- + at application and appointment to a new position, and on other appropriate occasions, leaders and staff are reminded of the Catholic identity and mission of the school and of the expectation that they will commit themselves to that mission
- + progress towards an increase in the proportion of students in our schools who are Catholic
- + at application for enrolment, at admission, and on other appropriate occasions, parents and students are reminded of the Catholic identity and mission of the school and of the expectation that they will assist in that mission

- + the presence of distinctively Catholic symbols and practices as part of the daily life of the school**
- + efforts to connect with Catholic families and to maximise their participation in Catholic schools**
- + the provision, in conjunction with local parish(es) and diocese, of programs for students wishing to join the Catholic Church**
- + continued development and deployment of curriculum, methodologies and resources such as texts which promote high levels of Catholic religious literacy**
- + co-curricular activities aimed at further evangelising and catechising students and otherwise nourishing their spiritual life (eg retreats, Project Compassion, St Vincent de Paul groups)**
- + systematic external assessment of Catholic religious literacy**
- + maximum involvement by students and younger staff in religious events such as World Youth Days**
- + progress toward significantly increased attendance at Sunday Mass, and deeper involvement in the life of the local Church by students and ex-students**
- + progress towards an increase in the proportion of students in our schools who are from poorer families.**



Nazareth
CATHOLIC COMMUNITY



An initiative of the Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide

Nazareth Catholic Community

A Catholic Community based on the parish schools of Findon, Seaton and Flinders Park as well as Siena College, Findon.

Located on two sites, the one currently occupied by Nazareth Primary and Secondary Findon Campus and the recently purchased section of the old UniSA at Flinders Park.

Home

Vision

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The aim for the church, its schools, parishes and agencies is to collectively engage with today's Adelaide families to create communities of faith and well being. The Adelaide Church wants to connect across the lifespan of families from newborns to pre-schoolers, secondary students and beyond. It's about helping parents and grandparents to make their lives and that of their children happier and healthier as members of a wider, vibrant Catholic

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<http://www.nazareth.org.au/Frames/index.htm>

Conceptual Framework of the Literature Review

The Traditional Purposes of the Catholic School: from transmission and maintenance to holistic education and building community

Why these Purposes are not Working

School and Parish Dissonance

Potential Barriers to a New Vision

New Ways of Thinking about Catholic schools: schools as communities of meaning

(see handout)

The Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of some Catholic school communities who are seeking to implement the purposes of the Catholic school in a secular and pluralist society.

Research Questions

- How do some Australian Catholic schools understand and describe their purposes in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society?**
- How do schools arrange their work and program structures in a changing paradigm of Catholic school?**
- What are the implications of this for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and contemporary Catholic schools in general?**
- Based on this research how might it be possible to frame what constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school?**

Five Elements of Interpretive Research

Research Paradigm	Interpretivism
Epistemology	Social Constructionism
Theoretical Perspective	Symbolic Interactionism
Research Methodology	Multi-site Case Study
Methods	Textual analysis, Focus groups, participant observation, semi structured interviews
Data Analysis	Thematic or content analysis

Understanding the elements

Interpretivism: emphasizes social interaction as the basis of knowledge. 'The researcher uses his or her skills as a social being to try to understand how others understand their world. Knowledge, in this view, is constructed by mutual negotiation and is specific to the situation being investigated' (O'Donoghue, 2001, p. 9)

Social Constructionism: elicits the individual, personal and group constructions of what others see as constituting an authentic contemporary Catholic school

Symbolic Interactionism: the meaning of an authentic Catholic school may be constructed through the social interaction of the stakeholders, parents, students, teachers and others

Research Methodology: a multi-site case study is chosen because

- 1. 'a number of cases may be studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, and perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases' (Stake, 2005, pp. 445 - 446)**
- 2. 'the more cases included in a study, and the greater the variation across the cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be.....The inclusion of multiple cases is, in fact, a common strategy for enhancing the external validity or generalisability of your findings' (Merriam, 1998, p. 40)**

Data Analysis: constant comparative method (CCM) is being adopted.

Whilst generally associated with grounded theory (Haig, 1995) it aligns easily with qualitative analysis (Boeije, 2002) which is the basis of this multi-site case study. It lends itself to this multi-site case study because data comparisons will be able to be made both within one site and across the three sites chosen for the case study. This will provide a level of verifiability not always possible by limiting one's research to one site alone

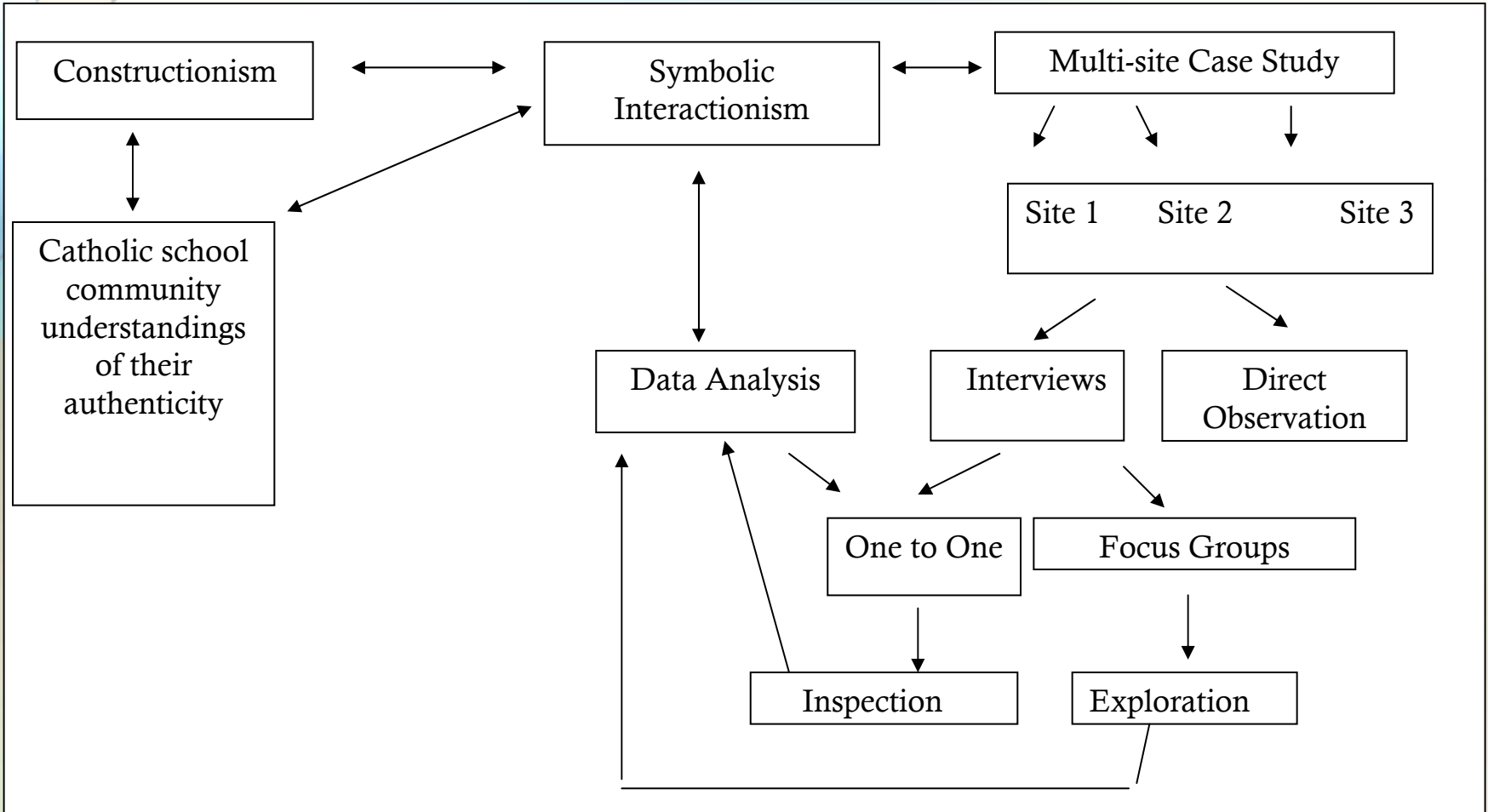
REFER TO HANDOUT FOR OUTLINE OF CCM STEPS

Overview of the Research Design

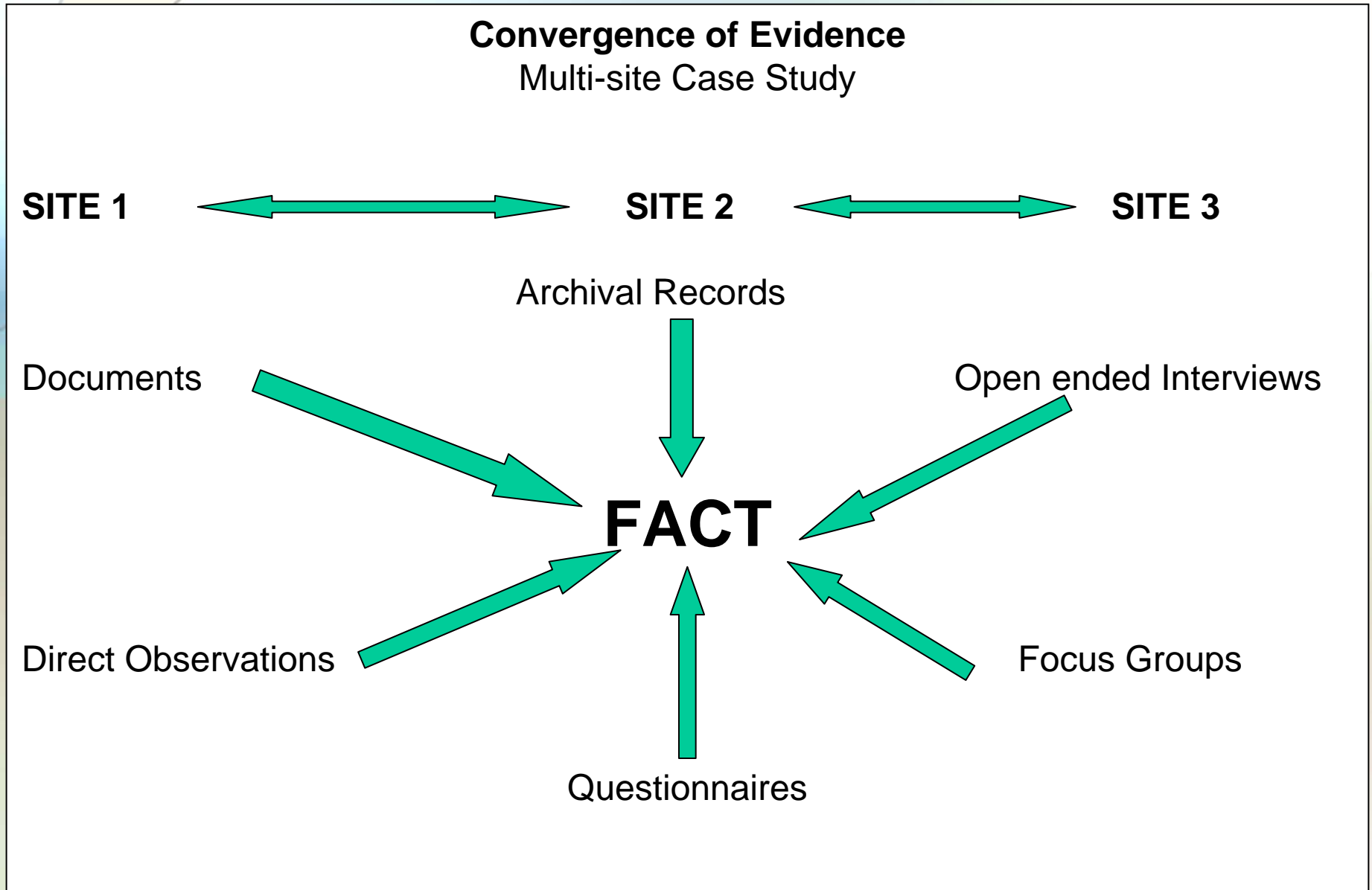
Epistemology

Theoretical Perspective

Methodology



Convergence of multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003, p. 100)



PARTICIPANTS

Participants	Criteria
Teachers and other staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•A selection of beginning and experienced teachers.•Other staff members with no formal teaching responsibility e.g. Development Officer, Community Liaison, Registrar, School Officers•The Principal•A selection of members of the senior leadership e.g. Curriculum Head, Deputy Principal, Religious Education Co-ordinator
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•A selection of members of the School Board•A selection of the Parents and Friends group where such exists.•Where possible, parents outside these groupings
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•A selection of senior students mainly in Years 11 & 12. In the case of Site 1, this will be students in Years 8 & 9.•A selection of students from the student council where such exists•Students involved in Religious Education classes and other faith related activities
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•The parish priest in Site 2•Select canonical administrators in Site 3•Those responsible for the formation and ongoing viability of Site 1

SITES

SITE 1:

a small school (20 enrolments max with focus on the edge of mainstream) situated on the outskirts of Melbourne's central business district but it takes students from across Melbourne.

SITE 2:

a Catholic primary school situated in Melbourne's north-east and located on the same site as the parish church

SITE 3:

a recently established archdiocesan P – 12 school. It is located in a rapidly growing area of Melbourne's north east.

***** in case site 3 is not possible then my back up site is a 7-12 Boys school in the north eastern suburbs of Melbourne**

Summary of the Research Design

PURPOSE: To explore how contemporary Catholic schools respond to the challenge of a secular and pluralist society: seeking authenticity.

Research questions	Stages of Research	Data gathering strategy	Sources of Data & Analysis	Timeline
1. How do some Australian Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society? 2. What impact, if any, have these changed circumstances had on the way these schools arrange their work structures? 3. What are the implications of this for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and contemporary Catholic schools in general? 4. Based on this research how might it be possible to frame what constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school?	Exploratory	Document Analysis including archival records and questionnaires	School documentation including mission statements. Thematic Analysis with aid of a software package	January to February 2008
	Exploratory	Obtaining data from focus group discussions with the various groups, direct observation & interviews at each site	Semi-structured Interviews, data triangulation and constant comparative method of data analysis Thematic Analysis with aid of a software package	February to June 2008
	Inspection	Obtaining data from further discussions, direct observation and interviews	In-depth one to one semi-structured interviews, data triangulation and constant comparative method of data analysis. Thematic Analysis with aid of a software package	July to November 2008