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**Mates at the school gates:
Investigating peer relationships among rangatahi Māori**

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
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of
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Abstract

As a teacher, I have found that while some rangatahi feel connected to school, many others do not. In an attempt to reduce the gap between Māori and non-Māori educational achievement, there have been significant nationwide initiatives implemented into schools across New Zealand. These programmes have been centred mostly around improving school engagement. Despite these efforts, school attendance rates among Māori continue to decline. This thesis explores the role of peer relationships among rangatahi Māori, including how these relationships may influence various domains of engagement at school, such as participation, belonging and orientation to learning.

This research involves focus group interviews with six rangatahi Māori aged 17-18, and in Years 12 and 13 in a small-town New Zealand High School. The wāhine Māori who contributed to the study, had been identified by the school as successfully engaged through regular attendance and participation of school activities. The findings from this study identify some critical aspects to building strong peer relationships, including: having a social space to gather, practicing manaakitanga, recognising equity, maintaining connection with each other, and welcoming humour. The rangatahi in this study value their peers and social relationships and they freely access these resources as needed. In doing so they are able to collectively critique experiences of marginalisation and acquire a collective source of resilience. The participants in this study then draw on this collective resilience during challenging situations.

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Thank you to the six rangatahi wāhine involved in this study. You have all contributed so much value to this research. I know that you all shared hopes, that through this research you would in some way also speak on behalf of your peers and help enhance the educational journey for all rangatahi. I hold this gift close to my heart. Sorry for dropping your sushi that you had all waited so patiently for. Perhaps when you look at sushi, you will now laugh and be reminded of our time together.

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To my husband Robin. Thank you for encouraging me to do this and for putting up with the late nights and early mornings. I know we never got to go on that date, perhaps now we will have time. I love you more.

To our creator, our God, our Atua. Thank you for placing this kaupapa in my heart. I am forever grateful for the blessings I have. I promise to do my best to use these blessings to help others.

"My work is a haka for me; it's something that I do with a lot of passion, a lot of anger, a lot of joy. It's confrontational, but at the end of the haka there is a saying – 'This is us'."

Witi Ihimaera

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Chapter One – Introduction

Aotearoa

Ko Hikurangi tōku maunga

Ko Waiapu tōku awa

Ko Horouta tōku waka

Ko Hinerupe tōku marae

Ko Ngāti Porou tōku iwi

After living overseas for nearly seven years, my family recently moved back to Aotearoa, to be with our whānau and to once again feel the sands of Papatūānuku under our feet. As soon as we landed, the gentle breath of Tūwhirimātea welcomed us home. Although our tūrangawaewae can be felt in the lands of Ngāti Porou, we moved to the Mighty Waikato to be closer to whānau.

Garden Place

As we walked through Hamilton city in our first week back, I was filled with enthusiasm at the thought of starting our new Aotearoa life. Our five children were aged between one and six when we left for Australia, so the sights, sounds and smells of their return were quite new to them. As we walked through Garden Place, I noticed a lot more homelessness in the city and sadly the people I saw almost all looked to be of Māori or Pasifika descent. Right then and there my heart broke for my people. Why were there so many young adults aimlessly walking around with signs and pans requesting money? This was a pivotal moment for me, because in that very moment I had decided that I had to get back into the classroom.

In Australia I had a sport rehabilitation business and I had assumed I would simply start another one here. Little did I know that walking through the city that day would be the catalyst for a journey into research. I applied for a

teaching job soon after landing in New Zealand and then eventually I entered the world of Alternative Education and now research. All in the hopes of helping rangatahi find some means of achieving their own meaningful futures. My heart belongs to Aotearoa: the history, the people, the land, the sky and the future.

Rationale

My Interest in this research

I have been a primary school teacher and have taught on and off for several years since 1999; intermittently taking time off to raise my family and gain further education in the area of sport. I have taught in Ngāruawāhia, Christchurch, and Hamilton; primarily in Years 5-8. More recently I taught in the Secondary Tertiary Programme (STP), teaching level 2 National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) in the Sport and Recreation field. Here, the primary focus was teaching rangatahi who were, as identified by their school, as at risk of becoming disengaged from mainstream school. Students then attended our sports class in the hopes of achieving enough credits towards NCEA. Many rangatahi from our programme went on to graduate from high school, attend university or Wintec, or transitioned into fulltime employment. During this time, I also worked as Pastoral Support within Alternative Education (AE).

Having been exposed to both primary and secondary school in both mainstream and AE, I have found that while some rangatahi love and feel connected to school, many do not. Those who feel disconnected from education often express with fervour their distaste and hatred for their school. I find myself drawn to two questions, “Why is it that some rangatahi can be so happy and seemingly connected, while others are struggling to just get their feet through the school gates?” And “How influential are peer relationships and how can we tap into this rich resource?”

Reflections on my own education

Digging

Into

The sands of Papatūānuku

My nan and I walk

Searching

With hope

Desperately searching

Digging

Into

Our kura

I walk with my friends

Searching

With hope

Desperately searching

As rangatahi look for a place to dig in the sandy shores of their kura, I am reminded that I too once dug into those same sandy shores.

I imagine standing there at my tūrangawaewae. I press each foot into the grains, my toes sink even deeper into the cooler sands with each wiggle and turn. As I look across the stretched-out shore, other patterns and shapes can be seen. I look down as my own foot print digs in so deeply, as if Papatūānuku herself has embraced me and taken me in. I look across and see other prints which have cautiously skimmed along the surface, where feet have skated and hovered quickly over the hot sands, missing the kai below. Again I look down and feel the cooler sands below.

As I dig down I find some kaimoana sitting just below the top layer. Grasping it with my toes, I pull it to the surface, achieving success, success to feed not only myself but also my whānau and community. I see others frustratingly searching. They search alone, they search afar. As distant voices are rendered

to silence, I see them still reluctantly digging in the dry hot sands. As I hear their silent yet deafening voices, I examine why my foot print goes deeper into the wet sands, deeper towards the kai below. I see now as I hold the hands of my nan, my feet are able to snuggle into the prints she has made for me. I now make the same swirly patterns as hers, the same prints left behind from tipuna who once stood where we now stand.

I follow my nan, we hold hands laughing and skipping along the beaches of the East Coast. Instinctively she shows me where to dig and how to dig for pipi. My nan shares her Mātauranga Māori with me as we fill her woven kete, overflowing with sustenance for our whānau, I feel joy and aroha flow around me.

Now as I reflect on those treasured times of shared knowledge and aroha, I cry softly as I think of my nan now suffering from Alzheimer's. While she no longer walks physically with me, her spirit is present. Together with my own tamariki, we dig in the cool wet sands. We laugh, we hunt, and we play, digging for our kai. We plant our feet in the same prints left by my nan. We know where to dig. Firmly standing as whānau during tides both high and low, together we hold on tightly. We have discovered that we can collectively resist the onslaught of the high winds and unpredictable tides.

A metaphor for learning

Like digging for pipi, rangatahi dig for sustenance and nourishment within their schools. I don't dig alone, I dig with those who have gone, with those who are here, and for those yet to come. I have much to learn from my whakapapa and elders. While schools provide sustenance to rangatahi, as my nan taught me, we do not dig for pipi in isolation. I had privileged access to taonga such as my nan and I understand that this may not be easily accessible for some. I wonder if we could help each other dig and learn? Our kura, like the shores along our land, have rich wet sands where rich experience and learning lie, ready to be discovered and dug up, ready to feed and nourish us all.

Justification

Student attendance in school, especially secondary, has been an ongoing issue in New Zealand (Jacka, Sutherland, Peters, & Smith, 1997; Bruce, 2018). A recent report released by Education Data and Knowledge and Ministry of Education [EDK & MOE] (2019) showed an alarming decline in regular school attendance among Māori from primary through to year 13. The most startling data to come out of this survey is that only 50.4% of enrolled rangatahi Māori regularly attended school. Perhaps even more revealing is not the number itself, but that this percentage had steadily declined over the last decade. These statistics are especially critical considering the vast efforts made by the Ministry of Education (MOE) to improve Māori learning and achievement; implementing initiatives such as Te Kotahitanga and Ka Hikitia (MOE, 2018).

These strategies initially focussed on the need for culturally responsive teaching pedagogy. More recently, emphasis has been on community inclusive education and leadership reform. Berryman and Eley (2016) however bring to light the necessity for implementing widespread and systemic reform, rather than relying on leadership and pedagogical change alone. While culturally responsive teaching and leadership practices have been highlighted, there has been little emphasis on the role that peer relationships play in the implementation of these initiatives, and in supporting Māori student success at school.

Often peer group values and attitudes can influence student engagement and attendance (Cavanagh, 2011; Gray, 2012; Hakimzadeh, Besharat, Khaleghinezhad, Ghorban, 2016; and Lemon, 2017). EDK and MOE (2018) suggest that attendance appears to impact student achievement in National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). Willms (2003) suggests that attendance also has a direct impact on engagement and belonging. That is, when students attend school they are more likely to be involved and engaged in school activities. While some researchers suggest the disparity between Māori and non-Māori achievement might be lessening (Berryman, Eley, &

Copeland, 2017), the recent EDK and MOE (2019) report paints another scene in the educational landscape. There may be more to consider.

While attendance does not always equate to belonging and engagement as highlighted in Macfarlane, Glynn, Cavanagh, and Bateman's (2007) study. The progressively declining attendance needs attention as the gap between Māori and non-Māori attendance remains.

When using the term Māori, I remember that Māori are not a homogenous group (Jacka et al., 1997, A. Barnes, 2013). While this study provides new insights, it is important to remember that within Māori culture, while part of the same waka, members of this culture are diverse.

Research aim

The research aim is to explore the role of peer relationships among rangatahi Māori and investigate how influential these peer relationships are in the various domains of school engagement, and how this resource might be further strengthened and accessed?

- In what ways do positive peer relationships enhance the secondary school experiences of rangatahi?
- How influential are peer relationships in school engagement?
- When rangatahi encounter challenges both inside and outside the immediate school setting, in what ways do peer relationships play a role in buffering or facing those challenges?
- In what ways might peer relationships assist rangatahi in transitioning successfully through school from Year 9 to Year 13?

Chapter Two - Literature Review

In Aotearoa New Zealand, education is regarded as a right and this taonga is extended towards all rangatahi: “every person who is not an international student is entitled to free enrolment and free education at any state school during the period beginning on the person’s fifth birthday and ending on 1 January after the person’s 19th birthday” (Education Act, 1989, S3). School enrolment is required up until the age of 16 (Education Act 1989, Part 3, S20), although rangatahi are encouraged to stay in school right through to Year 13. For some rangatahi, education is not always seen in that same light; the offer is either perceived as something not for them or seen as a reluctant obligation. With this study’s focus on rangatahi, this literature review investigates the areas of belonging and school engagement and the role that peer relationships may play in school engagement.

Attendance and engagement

Measuring attendance

More than two decades ago Jacka et al. (1997) commenced a research study on the relationship between attendance and achievement of Māori students. During the research process the scope and aim needed to change. It became clear that in the absence of a centralised attendance database, sourcing reliable and consistent data within and across schools was difficult and Jacka et al. declared that accessing reliable data made their initial research aim of comparing attendance and achievement “virtually impossible” (p. 94). They therefore; strongly recommended the need for a more reliable centralised attendance database.

Although there is still no centralised database system where attendance information is stored, there is now a national Electronic Attendance Register (eAR). The eAR is a mandatory attendance recording system and, in an attempt to provide consistent attendance data across all New Zealand schools, was introduced by MOE in 2007 (MOE, February 2018).

Every year since 2001, the MOE has prepared and published a report on student attendance. This annual report is based on school surveys, and all schools in New Zealand are invited to take part, using data gathered from their eAR records. Schooling Analysis, Education, Information and Analysis, Ministry of Education [SAEIA, MOE] (2016) write that this survey has evolved over time, where initially data were gathered over only one week, and this was based on full day attendance. Now, data is gathered by each school over an entire term, and attendance is measured in half days.

In the most recent report by Education Data and knowledge [EDK] and MOE (2019), 86.6 percent of all schools in New Zealand participated in the survey, which represents 92.5 percent of all enrolled students in New Zealand. The EDK and MOE (2019) report showed a decline in attendance through to secondary school, and that the percentage of Māori who regularly attended school was considerably less than non-Māori. The term “*regularly*” refers to students completing more than 90% half-days at school. Further to this, chronic school absence among Māori was over double that of Pākehā (EDK & MOE, 2019). Chronic absence is measured as more than 15 days off school in one term. While the data is only a snapshot of time, the data is of significant concern.

Implications of measuring engagement

While current data on school attendance for Māori is disconcerting, equating engagement and consequent success only with attendance, may be a narrow and potentially unreliable approach. Engagement is more than being physically present in class, engagement involves connection to learning which is “expressed in students’ feelings that they belong in school” (Willms, 2003, p. 8). Due to the interconnecting aspects of attendance, engagement and belonging, measuring these aspects can be difficult as shown in Willms’ (2003) study.

Willms’ (2003) study, was conducted across 43 countries, but not including New Zealand, involving 315,000 students aged 15. A questionnaire was completed, that addressed two separate issues: participation (based on

attendance and work completion) and belonging (based on how well a child felt they fitted in). This study showed that that these two elements of engagement overlap and impact the other. While Willms' (2003) study showed that low attendance appeared to decrease a student's sense of belonging, Willms points out that this does not necessarily mean high attendance will increase a student's sense of belonging. While there is a close correlation between secondary school attendance and achievement (SAEI, MOE, 2016; Willms, 2003), there remains some uncertainty as to what *extent* attendance affects engagement and vice versa.

As reflected in Macfarlane et al. (2007) New Zealand study, attendance alone is not necessarily a valid source of measurement. In their study one rangatahi wahine who was recorded as having regular school attendance, also shared stories of feeling unengaged and disconnected from school. It turned out that one of the students in the study only felt connected to the school during kapahaka and every other time she felt like the "lights were turned off" (p. 74). Even though she had high attendance, she did not feel engaged. While the study by Willms, gleaned across several countries, New Zealand was excluded from that study. In New Zealand The Treaty of Waitangi is interwoven into the education system and encompasses many education and political policies. Therefore, it is difficult to determine to what extent the Willms study applies to Aotearoa.

Wellbeing, belonging and engagement

When investigating peer relationships, the multiple aspects and influences of engagement need to be considered, such as wellbeing and belonging. Roffey (2013) insists that a sense of belonging is a critical element to wellbeing, especially adolescent wellbeing. Ungar (2005) suggests that there are multiple understandings of wellbeing and these sit "side by side" (p. xvi). Therefore, it is necessary to look at engagement and belonging as multi-layered and contextual (Andrews & P. Bishop, 2012; Baydala et al., 2009; Bishop, 2009; Kahu, Stephens, Leach, & Zepke, 2015; Lourie, 2016; Roffey 2013; Sumsion & Wong, 2011; Tracey et al., 2016; Ungar, 2005). These authors further suggest

that these experiences of belonging and engagement for many students have the potential to further influence educational success.

Impacts on school engagement

Ethnic culture

Ethnic culture and school engagement are closely linked (O’Gorman, Salmon, and Murphy, 2016; O’Shea, Harwood, Kervin & Humphry, 2013; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Webber 2011, 2012, 2015; Webber, McKinnley and Hattie, 2013). Webber’s (2011) New Zealand study highlighted the significance of racial ethnic identity among year 9 Māori students. This study took place in five large highs schools and involved surveying 113 students across diverse cultures, as well as interviewing eight highly successful students of Māori descent. The study suggests that a positive sense of identity plays an important role in how students successfully get through school. This study showed that a positive sense of identity provided students with a sense of belonging and place. This strong sense of racial ethnic identity seemed to provide students with a source of resilience to get through some difficult times, which also influenced positive self-efficacy and self concept.

Baydala et al. (2009) believe positive self-perception and consequent belonging can be increased when language and ethnic culture are included as an everyday occurrence. In O’Gorman et al. (2016) United States study on the classroom environment, students shared that when their ethnic culture was displayed and illustrated openly and in a positive light, they felt more engaged and connected to the school. While O’Gorman et al. study explored the ethnic cultural influence on positive engagement, this study did not fully address the possible impacts and causes of *disengagement*.

When ethnic culture is ignored, engagement may be more difficult to achieve (Bishop 2003). “Cultural silence”, appears to lead to disengagement (Baydala et al., 2009; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Jacka et al., 1997; Lemon, 2017; O’Gorman et al., 2016). This is where the ethnic culture of students is regarded as unimportant or not valued. Jacka et al. (1997) referred to “cultural silence”

as a systemic issue and characterised this marginalisation as “institutional silence” where “subtle power relations silence Māori” (p14). Jacka et al. likened cultural silencing, the ignoring of culture, to racism.

The physical environment

Hynds, Averill, Hindle, and Meyer (2017) emphasise that the relationship between self-perception and student ethnic culture can be linked to the physical school environment. In O'Gorman et al. (2016) study of indigenous Canadians, the indigenous students expressed a sense of cultural pride. Their school environment visibly celebrated their culture through painted murals symbolic to their culture, which also included significant cultural role models. As the local community and students entered the school, the students and families shared that they felt instantly invited into the school. There may be some aspects relevant to New Zealand, since in both situations indigenous cultures have been affected by colonisation.

Some authors recognise that the physical environment can affect the approachability of a school. When entering school, the environment should be both inviting and welcoming, not only for students but for the whānau and community (Baydala et al., 2009; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Lemon, 2017; Prout & Biddle, 2017). These authors emphasise the need for schools to be approachable for all, in doing so, rapport and connection may be easier to achieve.

Community and whānau involvement

There is considerable consensus around the necessity to include community and whānau collaboration, in the education of students (Berryman et al., 2017; Berryman, Lawrence and Lamont, 2018; Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy, 2007; Cavanagh, 2011; M. Durie, 2013; Gray, 2012; Hynds et al., 2017; Hynds et al., 2015; Kukutai & Webber, 2011; Lemon, 2017; Macfarlane, Webber, Cookson-Cox, McRae 2014; Webber, 2011). When whānau and community are excluded from educational institutes or when there is a lack of relationship between whānau and school, whānau feel excluded and

consequently, as illustrated in Hynds et al. (2015) study, children can also feel excluded or “empty and lost” (p. 543).

Educational outcomes for students may be improved when regular ongoing contact is made with parents and whānau (Gray, 2012; Oyserman, Brickman & Rhodes, 2007). Oyserman et al. (2007) suggest parental involvement in school can affect school-focussed possible selves, such as “images of oneself passing or avoiding failing” (p. 481). They suggest that “when parents are involved in schools, children may come to see school as a safe and valued place where one would choose to spend time”, thereby school becomes a visible path for success (p. 488). In addition to enhancing possible selves through connection, Hynds et al. (2015) suggest that when schools consult and include whānau and community, students are more likely to “actively engage” (p. 453). While whānau involvement is critical to school engagement, Berryman et al. (2017) caution that it is not a case of simply meeting whānau, whānau connection needs to be meaningful and relevant.

Lemon’s (2017) study took place in an AE context. The school involved the whānau and community on their open days by providing social activities that were inclusive for the community to join. In doing so, a meaningful and inviting environment was created where whānau felt comfortable. While Lemon’s study could be considered subjective due to her close relationship with the school, another argument might be that her relationship gave her more privileged access to students and whānau due to her “insider” relationship.

Lemon’s study identified some specific strategies implemented by the AE school to make whānau and community collaboration meaningful. Even though Lemon’s study showed the link between student engagement and belonging, the context was based around AE, rather than mainstream education. While some strategies may not be directly relevant to mainstream education due to the transitional nature of high school, some strategies from Lemon’s study, such as incorporating whānau participation into school games and activities, might be adapted to suit.

School relationships

The shift in education away from deficit thinking, as described by Bishop (2003), is fundamental to changing negative stereotyping of Māori. Rather than students needing to change, schools could make a positive change (Hynds et al., 2017; Hynds et al., 2015; Sanders, Munford & Theron, 2016). One approach in bringing about positive change in schools is enhancing pedagogical relationships between school, teachers and students (Bishop, 2009; Bishop et al., 2007; Berryman & Eley, 2016; Gray, 2012; Hynds et al., 2016; Kahu et al., 2015). While there are several factors that affect Māori achievement and engagement, teacher pedagogy, Bishop et al. (2007) argue, is “the most easily alterable in the education system” (p. 113). Subsequently, however, Berryman and Eley (2016) argue there is need for more widespread reform rather than relying on teacher pedagogy or leadership reform alone.

While wider reform may be needed, there is need for schools to encourage teachers to develop meaningful relationships with students in and *beyond* the classroom (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Cavanagh, 2011; Gray, 2012; Hynds et al., 2017; Jacka et al., 1997; Lemon, 2017). While the students in Jacka et al. (1997) study expressed understanding that teachers were busy, they still desired their teachers to show interest in their lives outside of school. While it is important for teachers to spend more time with students outside of the classroom (Hynds et al., 2017; Lemon, 2017), other authors claim that it is more than time, it is about *how* the teacher engages with students. Ely, Ainley and Pearce (2013) believe that teachers need to “personally invest” in the students if they wish to enhance student engagement (p. 25), and in order to engage with students, teachers need to be seen by the students as not just doing a job (Lemon, 2017). In Gray’s (2012) study, students wanted teachers to see them as more than just students in a classroom; they desired to be seen in relation to interests, connections, hobbies and their life outside of school.

Educators are facing more demands within the current schooling system: increased administration work load, increased teacher workload, time constraints, extracurricular expectations and other external school demands (Hodgen & Wylie, 2018). While students seek genuine relationships with their

teachers, some teachers may perceive this as challenging. A strategy to enhance student-teacher relationship, as suggested in Gregory, Clawson, Davis, and Gerewitz (2016) study, may be restorative conversation. This is practised as a relational tool. Gregory et al. maintain that when teachers adopt a restorative practice approach to their teaching conversations, they are more likely to establish effective relationships with their students. This study showed teachers who practiced restorative conversation, established more positive relationships with their students compared to teachers who did not. In O'Gorman et al. (2016) study, when teachers used restorative conversation the environment felt safer and more engaging for students and teachers alike.

Another strategy for engagement between teachers and students is teaching to and with resources that are relevant and accessible to students interests and cultural background. Ely et al. (2013) suggest that when educators teach to students' interests "Positive feelings of happiness, pride, and excitement" are produced (p. 26). Kahu et al. (2015) maintain that students must be given opportunities that are not only interesting but also "connect life experiences to learning" (p. 494), thereby creating a more meaningful and purposeful education for students. While Kahu's study involved mature students, the results from their study are similar to others, where students desire to have their learning valued and relevant.

Education and learning should be relevant to not only learning preference but also to the learning ability of the individual (Bandura, 1993; Ely et al., 2013; Hakimzadeh, et al., 2016; Jacka et al., 1997; Kahu et al., 2015; Prout & Biddle, 2017). When school work is too easy students may feel bored, which may lead to disengagement and non-attendance, equally the same happens when work is perceived as too hard (Jacka et al., 1997). Iranian researchers, Hakimzadeh et al. (2016) argue that students need to feel satisfaction. They advise that tasks need to be challenging because the completion of challenging tasks can evoke a sense of satisfaction. Ely et al. (2013) add, when a task is challenging, a sense of pride is gained as pride is seen as "retrospective and is experienced when students reflect on something that has been completed successfully" (p. 25). While some of this research was conducted within the New Zealand

context, some of this research is based on overseas studies, so it may be difficult to generalise to New Zealand.

Socio-economic resources

While there has been emphasis in recent years on the ethnic cultural impact on school engagement and achievement of Māori, there may be other factors also closely linked to school engagement. While researchers emphasise the need for changing school culture, school reform and school policy in the hopes of enhancing student engagement, others argue there are other equal barriers to engagement such as socio-economic need. While cultural identity is seen as vital to student belonging and engagement, Lourie (2016) warns that when certain factors take the front seat, especially within the educational vehicle, other factors such as financial need can be masked. He stresses that the socio-economic and cultural needs of students should sit together.

“In 2018, chronic absence continued to be more prevalent in lower socio-economic schools”, as the rate of chronic absence is nearly four times higher in lower decile schools, compared to high decile schools (EDK, MOE, 2019, p. 1). A New Zealand 25 year longitudinal study conducted by Marie, Fergusson, and Boden (2008), indicated that the socio-economic background of participants, while growing up, played a pivotal role in their educational achievement in later years. By the time the participants reached 25 the effects of poverty experienced in childhood remained. The exposure to socio-economic disadvantage during childhood showed closer links to underachievement as adults, than other factors such as ethnic cultural need. This study showed the close link between financial barriers and educational achievement. While the cultural identity needs of rangatahi are vital to engagement and educational attainment, the socio-economic impacts need to be acknowledged.

Access to financial and employment resources, seems to have an impact on overall wellbeing. Another longitudinal New Zealand study, conducted by Sibley, Harré, Hoverd, and Houkamau (2011), compared the subjective wellbeing of Māori and non-Māori. This study was conducted over four to five

years and involved a subjective questionnaire based on wellbeing, one taken before the global financial crisis (GFC) in 2005, and then again in 2009 during the GFC. The data from non-Māori in both questionnaires resulted in near identical outcomes in their perceived overall wellbeing. The data from Māori in both questionnaires, showed a noticeable decline in perceived overall wellbeing. When taking the first questionnaire, the Māori participants already had reduced financial resources when compared to the non-Māori group. As a result of the GFC, those who were already at a financial disadvantage became even more disadvantaged. The non-Māori who already had a financial head start appeared to buffer out the challenges during financially stressful times. These authors argue that access to financial resource provides an advantage to wellbeing during times of crisis.

When communities have had their resources stripped, such as land, language and identity, the results are generational poverty, including: poverty of economics, poverty of spirit, poverty of nourishment and poverty of connection. The stripping of such resources is far-reaching, and this has been a well-known device of control. Woller (2016) describes the socioeconomic impacts of colonisation such as land and cultural confiscation, as widespread and ongoing. Woller argues that historical land confiscation leads to poverty through: unemployment, disconnection and isolation. It is critical that educators look at all the factors that encompass a student's education, including access to economic resources.

Peer relationships and engagement

While research identifies the teacher to student relationship as pivotal in achieving belonging and connection within school, peer relationships are also important and closely relate to student engagement and the school environment (Cavanagh, 2011; Connor & Buccahan, 2017; Gray, 2012; Hynds et al., 2015). Ungar (2005) suggests that personal relationships for adolescents, especially among peers are "vital" as they hinge on "social acceptance and approval" (p. 14). He notes that due to the significance of these

peer relationships, when youth experience adversity, the extent of the effects generally revolves around how youth navigate these social relationships.

In her (2012) New Zealand study, Gray interviewed ten students in year 13, who had successfully gained at least level 1 NCEA, and who all had previously been negatively labelled as “at risk”. All ten students in her study shared that they had secure peer relationships in school. For those students, their direct peer groups played a significant role in school attendance, even in the face of challenging situations. One student in Gray’s study, with the help of his peers, attended class despite a conflicting teacher relationship. Another student purposely changed her peer group as she believed that her previous friendship group led her to negatively change her behaviour.

Hakimzadeh et al. (2016) implies that while peer support can impact on behalf of positive engagement, likewise it can influence disengagement. They suggest the collective values held by a certain peer group can determine the attitudes of individuals within that group; if the group values education then the attitudes of the students also shift in that direction. New Zealand research such as Cavanagh (2011); Gray (2012); Hynds et al. (2015); Lemon (2017) also make similar claims.

Cavanagh (2011) maintains that teachers need to encourage positive peer relationships in order to improve school attendance. When opportunities for friendships and connections are made students are more likely to feel a sense belonging, and thus may be more inclined to freely and willingly go to school. These social connections can further enhance peer relationships and subsequent educational participation (O’Shea et al., 2013).

Belonging within a peer group at school has the power to increase engagement as well as strengthen a positive self-concept and possible resilience (Gray, 2017; Webber, 2012; Ungar, 2005). Picton, Nelson and Kahu (2017) however argue that the opposite has an equally if not more powerful impact, that is, a student with low self-concept may find it hard to engage with learning and

school and therefore the ability to find a sense of belonging with peers may become very difficult.

When students experience that sense of loss from friendships and peer groups, as a result of transitioning through school, a rupture of some sort may be experienced. Zittoun (2007) defines these ruptures as “turning points”, a place of no return (p. 194). Before a transition takes place, such as moving through high school, going to university or changing schools, a phase of liminality may be experienced (Meyer & Land, 2005). In this liminal stage students may be unsure of who their friends are or what is happening. These authors claim that a shift out of this phase may be accomplished with help from others. In Gray’s (2012) interviews of students who were previously labelled ‘at risk’, she asked students about the support they had received to shift away from the stigmatised label of being ‘at risk’. Every student in Gray’s study shifted from ‘at risk’ to successful with help from their friendship groups.

Tuakana-teina

During transition and liminal times, there may be need for student centred mentoring initiatives. In response to ruptures caused by transitions, many schools choose to implement mentoring programmes but there appears to be little research on such initiatives, including how they could be ideally implemented. Mentoring programmes may potentially smooth the path of transition as well as create openings for positive relationships outside of immediate friendships. Some of the principals in Bishop and Berryman’s (2006) study had attempted to develop mentoring or tuakana-teina programmes. These programmes emerged out of need and were adhoc in nature, with one of the principals commenting about accidentally implementing a tuakana-teina programme.

In O’Shea et al. (2013) study, social connections were enhanced through a mentoring programme called Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME). The students shared that their sense of belonging to their education and school had grown. The AIME programme was aimed at transitioning high school students of Aboriginal descent, from school into university. As a result

of this programme, there was increased engagement and retention of indigenous Australians within the university that had implemented the AIME programme. There was enhanced positive perception of academic belonging and the mentors also shared that they too had gained an enhanced sense of belonging and connection. Such programmes may benefit both mentors and mentees.

While there seems to be a large number of incidental mentoring type programmes being utilised in New Zealand there is little evidence around assessing the effectiveness of these programmes (Noonan, Bullen, & Farruggia, 2012). Noonan et al. (2012) argue that mentoring programmes such as STARS can improve student engagement, especially those students of Pasifika descent. The STARS mentoring programme is used throughout New Zealand in decile 1-3 schools.

Originally derived in the United States, STARS is a structured peer mentoring system set up to help transition year 9 students into high school. In this programme year 12 students are trained as mentors. Overseas models of school mentoring are predominantly based on more individualistic needs, whereas New Zealand culture is more collective in nature (Noonan et al., 2012). These authors advocate that this *adapted* (for New Zealand) STARS programme has had the added benefit of helping with transitions by encouraging friendships and social connections. STARS is delivered as a whole school approach so there is no negative stigma attached. Van der Meer, Wass, Scott and Kokaua (2017) caution that mentoring programmes should be implemented as prevention not intervention, in doing so, much of the potential stigma surrounding mentoring is avoided.

Conclusion

Research around belonging and engagement is varied, covering areas such as meaningful school relationships, enhanced pedagogical relationships, widespread systemic issues, cultural responsiveness, school environment and socio-economic factors. There is also research around pedagogical

relationships such as teacher to student and school to community and whānau relationships. While Webber's (2011) study discusses the area of ethnic racial identity and the effect of this on belonging, self-concept and achievement, there seems to be little research around the idiosyncrasies specific to peer relationships among rangatahi Māori. There appears to be little research around what makes these relationships effective, how they are accessed, and to what extent these relationships may influence belonging, wellbeing and achievement for 'all'.

While there are some peer mentoring or tuakana-teina programmes currently operating in New Zealand, there seems to be little research on how far-reaching these programmes might be and to what extent these programmes enhance attendance, engagement or achievement. While there is some research on the effects of developing peer relationships through mentoring in the context of moving out of high school (transitioning into higher education) or moving into high school (transitioning from year 8), there seems to be little research situated within and through the context of high school.

Peters' (2010) literature review on transitions in New Zealand schools, stressed that more research is "urgently needed" for groups such as Māori, in particular, around the "wider influences" (p. 4) of transition within education. This proposed research will explore the nature and interactions of peer relationships among rangatahi Māori as they transition *through* secondary school. This study will examine how these relationships might affect school engagement, participation, belonging and orientation to learning.

Chapter Three - Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter I provide the purpose and meaning of the research process. I have intentionally taken a qualitative research approach to gain more in-depth understanding around peer relationships. I stand firm in the position of having student voice as our central data collecting platform.

Capturing the dynamic expressions of rangatahi

In my time as an AE teacher, I often heard students express their concerns around feeling silenced within their mainstream schools. Countless times I sat with rangatahi trying to reaffirm them that their voice holds value. As I listened, sometimes they struggled to string their words together, or they were so hushed in volume that I had to listen closely. At other times I had to decipher exactly what they were trying to express, due to the numerous interjections of swear words. Even so, I stopped and listened. I learned, during those more intense dialogues, not to hurry their stories, not to correct their vocabulary, not to tell them to speak louder, and not to tell them to stop swearing; doing so only lead to silence. Jay (2009) points out that often using “taboo” words such as swear words, speakers can more readily access and communicate emotions such as frustration (p. 153). These hesitant expressions were often in response to feeling marginalised and having their words and use of language stifled by adults.

A window into how some rangatahi communicate in response to this marginalisation, is offered in a story in Waititi, Kotzé and Crocket (2017). One of their Masters of Counselling students, Vicki, witnessed within her school setting how some Māori students would react to feeling marginalised and to experiencing racism at school. Students communicated, in turn, with “a [silent] defiant response” (p.189), in resistance to being confined to a system that disrespected their culture and language.

Within my own educational context, I see how rangatahi are judged based on their use of language. According to Ting-Toomey (1999), we judge others' behaviours based on their "proper or improper" use of "habitual linguistic symbols" (p. 94), which in turn shapes our perceptions and expectations. Due to language acquisition, students might be perceived as either incapable or indifferent, or as confident and capable. Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2019) suggest that this judgement is a result of perceiving others through a "mindless ethnocentric lens" (p. 12), that is, the other culture is misunderstood and viewed as inferior. Such as what occurs in some educational settings when rangatahi encounter adults.

Reflecting on my own experiences, as well as Vicki's, I respect that expressions of communication for the rangatahi in this research are varied and dynamic. In the hopes of attaining a deeper understanding, a qualitative approach will likely be the most effective method to capture this.

Weaving kaupapa Māori

L.T. Smith (2015) states that "kaupapa Māori assumes the existence and validity of Māori knowledge, language and culture" (p. 48.). At first, I was unsure of this approach as I felt unqualified due to my lack of te reo Māori. However, Mahuika (2008) cautions that the idea that Māori researchers should speak Te Reo, "hold[s] the potential to dis-empower and disenfranchise" due to making Māori feel "not Māori enough" (p. 8). Mahuika points out that the issues are complex, when discussing aspects of kaupapa Māori. I was also uncertain about how to weave elements of kaupapa Māori appropriately. After reading L.T. Smith's (2015) paper on what Kaupapa Māori research might look like, I felt more at ease. Importantly L.T. Smith suggests kaupapa Māori "is not an absolute approach but the beginning of an exploration of what research means when the researcher and the researched are Māori" (p. 52). Both L.T. Smith's and Mahuika's writings resonate with me as a Māori researching with Māori. I have thus worked to incorporate aspects of kaupapa Māori into this research, to help strengthen the research process and to, as far as possible consider the historical effects of colonial impositions.

Colonial impositions

Bishop (2003) maintains that deficit theories apply when researchers perpetuate the negative effects of colonisation, by locating their research subjects as being deficient in some way. Bishop suggests that these researchers try to assimilate their subjects to be more like them and therefore try to 'fix' them. In doing so, the inherent power imbalances that exist within colonisation remain, and this power dominance gains further ground. This is not to take a position as anti-pākehā. Rather, I am, as O'Sullivan and Thomson (2015) state, in O'Sullivan's autobiography, "Pro-Māori" (p. 202). O'Sullivan sees first-hand the effects of colonisation in his practice as a doctor. Like O'Sullivan, I recognise and acknowledge the devastating effects colonisation has had on our people, including my own whānau; like O'Sullivan, and many others, I simply want to "try to find ways forward for our people" (p. 203). In resisting this dominance and honouring the "surviving strength" of kaupapa Māori, even in the face of "colonial impositions" (Pihama, 2012, p. 12), fundamental elements of kaupapa Māori are interlaced throughout this research study.

Practising kaupapa Māori research: Kai

In my first research meeting at the school, I was asked by Matua if I would be using Kaupapa Māori as my research approach. I replied that I would practice cultural competency and respect cultural aspects such as karakia, kai, whakapapa and tino rangatiratanga during the research process. Matua, the lead Te Reo teacher, gave his support to me by saying "If there is kai, there is Kaupapa Māori". T. Hoskins and Jones (2017) state that the sharing of kai during research conversations seals the relationship between both parties and takes away the tapu, as Mātauranga Māori is exchanged. Viriaere and Miller (2018) reiterate that food is both spiritually and physically very significant in Māori culture. Providing food during the research process, demonstrates manaakitanga as, food attends to the wellbeing and mana of all (Basil & Keane, 2013). Historically food has always been used to bring people together, to signify peace, to lift tapu and to show aroha through hospitality (Basil & Keane, 2013).

After receiving Matua's endorsement of my research approach, I felt reassured once again.

Te Haerenga

I was fortunate to have a connection into the school with one of the staff members, Te Haerenga. I was put in touch with Te Haerenga via my research supervisors. She then became the research liaison person and subsequently someone I can now call my friend. Te Haerenga herself is a very busy person both professionally and personally. Upholding her mana as a contributor integral to this research was and still is at the fore of my thinking. L.T. Smith (2015) reveals feelings of resentment she had at seeing her nannies and koro, local kaumātua, being treated as a "marginal consequence" (p. 51). That is, while they were often called upon for hui in Wellington, her nannies and koro were also taonga who held much mana. L.T. Smith implies that this mana was not always respected as it should have been. Her nannies and koro made great efforts to present well in the appropriate attire and arrive in a timely manner. Their contribution went further than simply showing up to fulfil a role. They gave a great portion of their time both spiritually and physically to serve. In much the same way, Te Haerenga gave up much of her time for this research.

A smooth path

Kukutai and Webber (2011) point out that with research involving Māori, Kaumātua are ideally involved as they are visible as the "point of reference and validation" (p. 14). These authors describe the kaumātua's role as smoothing the path for researchers who work with Māori communities.

While Te Haerenga is not a kaumātua by age, I suggest that her connections and relationships in and with the school, whānau, and community make aspects of her role in this research comparable. Te Haerenga's position as liaison person was endorsed by my research supervisors, her school, whānau and community. Te Haerenga's guidance was a great support in this research, through her contributions in liaising between the school staff, the students, the community, whānau and me. For example, she organised and opened up opportunities for meeting times that would both suit my own timetable, as

well as that of the participants. She certainly smoothed the path in this research study.

Support

Another advantage of having Te Haerenga involved in this research, was her position as a school counsellor. Vogt, Gardner, Haeffele (2012) emphasise the importance of having access to support for interviewees during research which involves social and emotional conversations. Te Haerenga, as a qualified and experienced counsellor, provided an emotional safeguard for the research and all involved, including the guidance she offered me.

Taken for granted practices of kaupapa Māori

L.T. Smith (2015) identifies the underlying principles of kaupapa Māori as acknowledging “whakapapa, Te Reo, Tikanga Māori, Rangatiratanga and Mana Wahine: Mana Tane” (p. 48). Within this study I selectively applied these principles in my research. For example, I opened up space for the speaking of Te Reo during our research korero and I strongly supported the rōpu in actively using our mother-tongue. I worked towards nurturing the research relationships by involving whānau, and respecting research guidance given by Te Haerenga and the school. I took great care to allow space for participant autonomy, to follow culturally appropriate meeting processes, and to respect and uphold the mana of Te Haerenga and each rangatahi wahine. I also positioned myself as a co-learner to foster ako during knowledge sharing. In doing so, the underpinning of this research was shaped and grew out of and into a “Māori conceptual framework” (L. T. Smith 2015, p. 50), that is Kaupapa Māori.

L. T. Smith further points out that Māori values, attitudes and beliefs “are part of the research process and methodologies which many Māori researchers simply take for granted and incorporate into their practices” (p. 51). After reading L. T. Smith’s (2015) writings, as a Māori researcher, I realise that I approached this research with the ethos of kaupapa Māori as an organic life giving “cultural process” (p. 51).

Method

Focus groups

Focus groups are an effective interview method for generating data with young people. In a focus group, the researcher acts as a moderator who facilitates free and open discussion where many voices are heard (Neuman, 2013). Neuman writes that participants may query one another during the focus group discussions. During the focus group discussions in this study, some of the rangatahi began to direct questions not only to each other, but also to me.

Ethics

Ethical application for this research was approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee. A minor adjustment to the research was sought shortly after the initial ethical application was approved. Te Haerenga asked for a slight amendment, that is, to include both Year 12 and Year 13 students, as opposed to only Year 12 students. This adjustment was approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee and we were then able to formally begin the research process.

Written consent was first sought from the school principal, via email (Appendix A) with attached information (Appendix B). Before any consent was sought to participate in research, I met with Te Haerenga to discuss the research and what school involvement might look like. After obtaining permission from the principal, she was then able to provide the relevant staff with the School Information Sheet (Appendix B). Te Haerenga then set up a time for me to meet with the relevant staff. At this meeting I introduced myself, my research and I offered to answer any potential questions. After this meeting, Te Haerenga was able to select and confirm six participants.

Participants

I was asked by the school about the selection of participants and who would be suitable for this research. I gave the school a list of criteria for selection:

students would be Year 12 or 13, have regular attendance, participate in school activities, and identify as Māori both personally and on the school roll. I was wary of selecting students based on the term “success”, the reflections from MacFarlane et al. (2007) study laid heavy in the back of my mind. In MacFarlane et al. study, staff selected students they thought were connected and engaged. It turned out that one student labelled as successful did not feel engaged to her school.

When I met Matua, Te Haerenga and other relevant senior teachers to discuss the research, I discovered that teachers had already discussed some possible student participants. This selection was based on the teachers’ thoughts about “educational success” rather than my focus of school engagement. On reflection, I think this teacher readiness illustrated the positive enthusiasm shown towards this research study. Some teachers immediately wanted to involve students who were seen to be ‘confident’ in their identity as Māori or ‘visibly’ Māori. When others place ethnic boundaries around our ethnic identity, this then affects how we give meaning to our own ethnicity (Nagel, 1994; Webber et al., 2013). L.T. Smith (2015) touches on this and expresses her objection to having her own Māori identity shaped by external measurements, which, she argues, is often set by the state, “in brief these external measurements of identity are significant at an ideological level because they become normative, they set the norm for what it means to be Māori” (p. 48).

Wāhine

Together Te Haerenga and Matua decided that a group of rangatahi wāhine would be ideal, rather than a mixed gender group. Te Haerenga felt that this might allow more opportunity for deeper conversation. Neuman (2013) suggests that where possible focus groups should be homogeneous so that there is more freedom for participants to share and contribute. In addition to this, having a single gender environment may help lessen the “social desirability effect”. Walter (2013) describes the “social desirability effect” as participants “slanting” their responses to give a particular impression of themselves (p. 244). Te Haerenga and Matua felt that a mixed gender group

might cause uneasiness to surface, especially if sensitive subjects were to arise. In respecting kaupapa Māori and valuing the contribution of Matua and Te Haerenga to this research, wāhine Māori were selected.

Ethnic markers

Despite other teachers' suggestions of who should be involved, Te Haerenga stood firm in her decision to look beyond "normative" ethnic markers of being Māori, and she chose to select a group of six 'diverse' Māori wāhine. Te Haerenga took a measured and considered approach to this selection process and selected participants from various backgrounds, economically, socially and culturally. Neuman (2013) advises that within a focus group environment, participant selection needs to be well thought out, as this could influence the overall outcome. Te Haerenga selected six rangatahi wāhine with varying understandings of their Māori identity. Some were fluent in Te Reo, others had strong whakapapa links, while others were still learning about their Māori identity.

Consent

Informed consent

Te Haerenga arranged to meet with each potential research participant to verbally invite them to a research discussion meeting. At this discussion meeting only Te Haerenga and the six potential participants were present. She gave each wāhine, Student Information Sheets (Appendix C), including Student Consent Forms (appendix D) and Whānau Information Sheets (appendix E). The Whānau Sheet gave opportunity for whānau and caregivers to discuss any questions that they may have had about the research and if the young people wanted to participate.

Kanohi ki te kanohi

At first, I offered to do a video to introduce myself. Te Haerenga, however thought that for the wāhine in this particular research, a meeting kanohi ki te kanohi would be a more appropriate method for introducing myself. O'Carroll (2013) states that when we engage physically in face to face interactions, we show that despite the busyness of life, we are devoted to that person. O'Carroll

maintains that this face to face practice upholds the mana of both parties. I agreed to meet *kanohi ki te kanohi*. At this meeting I came in with some Americana pizzas and the room buzzed with excitement, as many of them were trying an American sized pizza for the first time. I introduced myself, my family (through photos) and what my research was all about. They were encouraged to discuss and share the written information and consent forms (Appendix C, D and E) with their caregivers and *whānau*. Te Haerenga had provided these at an earlier meeting. Finally, a list of questions (Appendix F) for the focus group was sent to Te Haerenga before the first research interview.

Verbal consent

After written consent was received, I also asked for verbal consent and I offered verbal clarification to ensure that the information was understood. As, Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin, and Lowden (2011) suggest, additional questions were asked during the consent stage to ensure that there was full understanding. The *rangatahi* then signed the Student Consent Form (Appendix D) a second time. Once verbal and written consent were given, the focus group interview began. Consent was an ongoing process throughout the research.

Cultural broker

Each time I met with the research group, Te Haerenga our “cultural broker”, was the first face we would see to connect me as the outsider into the research context. Michie (2014) states that often “cultural brokers”, as “insiders” can act and relate to both “insiders” and “outsiders” (p. 88). That is, as part of the research context, Te Haerenga the research “insider” acted as the bridge for me the “outsider”. She was the link that connected me, the unfamiliar person who exists outside of their current school environment, into the school context. If needed, the participants were able to discuss research issues with Te Haerenga and I equally could, if needed, share any relevant matters with Te Haerenga.

Right to withdraw

I appreciated that as cultural broker, Te Haerenga, was able to switch roles between school counsellor and research liaison person. This may have helped

in making everyone feel more comfortable if someone needed to withdraw or decline participation. If there were any concerns or matters arising regarding research participation, contact could be made via email, verbally or by phone, to either Te Haerenga, the school, my research supervisors, or myself. These same communication methods were offered if they wished to withdraw from the research.

Unexpected responses

Waimarie had asked Te Haerenga for a one to one interview with me for the first meeting, as she was away for the first focus group meeting. At the beginning of the first focus group meeting, being considerate to Waimarie, the research group reminded me that Waimarie would like to be included. Her contribution was equally valuable. The unexpected benefit was that similar themes emerged in both the one to one and focus group meetings, even though both parties had not discussed the research until the second focus group interview. Waimarie participated in the second focus group meeting.

Before starting our first focus group interview, the participants expressed that they felt that there had been a mistake with having been selected as '*successful*'. They gave names of students who they thought might be more suitable. I then asked them what success looks like to them and they replied, someone who is always at the top of the class academically and someone who is always at the top for sports. Macfarlane et al. (2014) suggest that this narrow view of success within the New Zealand education system and failure to see success from a Māori perspective in its broadest terms, is in part, contributing to the lack of positive outcomes for Māori. I attempted to reassure them that they had in fact been selected correctly as successfully engaged Māori students.

Even though the research group were initially reluctant to accept being identified as successful, towards the end of the research conversations their narratives began to shift to confidently claiming the position as successful Māori wāhine.

Privacy and confidentiality

The privacy of the participants involved in this research is carefully guarded. Vogt et al. (2012), warn that a breach of privacy in an interview has the “*greatest potential for harm to the participant*” (p. 253). This is especially important in focus group situations. Therefore, before we commenced the first focus group meeting, the students were asked to protect and respect the privacy of all participants. This is part of the consent process is stated on the Student Consent Form (Appendix D). Expectations and responsibilities were clearly defined and mutually agreed on by all including, Te Haerenga and me.

I am mindful that it is difficult to give *full* assurance of confidentiality and privacy and I point this out both verbally and in writing on the Student Information Sheet (appendix C). Vogt et al. (2012) point out that “promises of privacy” should not be made to research participants within social research, because there is no legal foothold to sustain such a guarantee (p. 255). The researcher can only assure the participant that all possible measures are taken to protect privacy and confidentiality.

Rapport

As well as the initial face to face meetings, we ate together and chatted together informally before each focus group meeting. Bishop (2003) points out that the “chat phase” that occurs before interviews is an essential time, as it allows the ice to be broken and a relaxing atmosphere is established (p. 31). As a Māori researcher working with Māori participants, rapport seemed to come easy. Best and Kahn (2006) suggest that rapport is easier to achieve when “interviews are conducted by an interviewer of the same ethnicity” (p. 337). Rapport is vital, as the validity of the data collection is based predominantly on student responses and it is important that the answers and perceptions are authentic (McNeil & Chapman, 2005; Walter, 2013). I do not take this for granted, and I do not assume that rapport is guaranteed, as Megginson and Clutterbuck (2009) advise, rapport should be carefully considered because it is fundamental to fostering effective dialogue.

During the research meetings I made a measured effort to ensure that “social harmony” (Ruane, 2005, p. 147) was maintained so that the mana of each member of the research group was safely respected. To encourage thinking time and reflection I utilised wait time to allow respondents to think and talk for longer about responses (Wisker, 2001). Ruane (2005) identifies two key aspects that encourage a “warm talking environment”: the ability to actively listen and the way an interviewer reacts to “respondent silences” (p. 152). These consequently open up space for in-depth conversation. While I acknowledge that the environment and rapport are fundamental to the success of this research, I also understand that too much rapport may as, Walter (2013) describes, cause me to lose the ability to ask difficult questions, or the participants may give answers that are seen as the “*desired responses*” (p. 241). I am aware that as the researcher there are influences that I might have on the research environment, such as how I dress, act or speak. Neuman (2006) cautions research interviewers about the effects of their appearance, as this may impact the overall ambience and consequent responses of research participants.

Reading Neuman’s cautioning of appearance, reminds me of an incident that occurred in my classroom. My senior teaching supervisor, another Māori colleague, had come into my classroom to ask me a question. As he entered our class, I could see rangatahi rolling their eyes. I interpreted these responses as expressions of contempt. These reactions heightened as he meandered around looking and admiring their work. After his departure the class expressed their disapproval in him being in their space. I was surprised at their reaction, but not surprised at their reasoning. They mocked his perfectly shaped hair, shiny suit, and pointy polished shoes. According to the boys, he obviously thought he was better than them. While I tried to assure them that he is caring and even funny, in the absence of conversation and time, immediate rapport was difficult. Even though he was Māori and ‘brown’, just like the rangatahi in our classroom, his brief encounter meant rangatahi could only access what was in front of them. His work attire got in the way of rapport. They did not see the kind Māori man behind the suit, as I did.

Meaningful subjects not “objects”

Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity are reassured by eliminating any identifiable names or recognisable flags such as the school name, place names, participant names or names of other peers and teachers. As soon as I told the research group that there would be no real names used, they seemed disappointed. They promptly replied that they did not want to be referred to as a number, letter or code, they wanted a name. This idea corresponds with L.T. Smith’s (2015) argument that regardless of the research approach, the critical issue remains when researching Māori, and that is, to what extent are Māori still “objects” within the research, or “meaningful subjects” (p. 49). This group desire to be acknowledged as meaningful subjects within this research. At the end of the last session the group decided that they wanted to collectively choose the names for each other.

What is in a name

In response to wanting to be acknowledged as meaningful subjects, this group of wāhine, with much enthusiasm, started to play with ideas around possible research names. They quickly came up with random animal names, Tiger, Lion and so on. However, after much laughter and a brief deliberation, they decided that they wanted names that would mean something. Collectively they decided that those who had full English names would be assigned Māori names. This idea was received with much excitement. The names given for each wahine with an English name was Aroha and Waimarie. They then insisted, with great humour, that the names Chachu, Tiger and Lola needed to be included. While the name Lola replaced an existing English first name, this wahine did not feel the need for a Māori pseudonym. She has a strong sense of ethnic identity and has close whakapapa links with the local community. Finally, the last name Rerekohu was ascribed. They proudly presented me with their names all written down. I chuckled to myself as I noticed the original animal names still scribbled down on paper. This final collective expression of tino rangatiratanga, illustrates the value and importance that this research group place on names and consequently each other.

Data analysis

Immediate collation of data

Immediately following each interview full transcripts were written from the recorded conversations. Menter et al. (2011) state that this “immediate transcribing is essential” in transcribing research interviews (p. 214). Yin (2016) consider this data of recordings and transcripts as highly important and, as such, should be treated as priceless possessions. My supervisors have referred to this data as beautiful and spoke of it as holding gold nuggets of rich data.

Bridging document

After I transcribed the first meeting, a Bridging Document (appendix G) was prepared similar to the bridging document used in Morris’ (2015) doctoral thesis. The purpose of this bridging document was to clarify that the main ideas and statements that emerged from the first focus group were understood by me. This bridging document provided a brief summary from the first focus group meeting and was presented at the second focus group meeting. The research participants were then invited to amend any misunderstandings, clarify their own individual statements or ideas, and to add further ideas and thoughts to the research conversation.

Analysing focus group discussions

Although analysing focus groups of this nature, where open ended questions are used, can be time consuming, Wadsworth (2011) states that in more structured interviews respondents are not generally free to say anything outside of the researcher’s agenda. During the focus group meetings’, I was able to gain rich data around the ball, an unexpected topic. Not only could I analyse *what* was being discussed but I could also analyse *how* they were collectively discussing questions and interacting. Neuman (2013) explains that during focus groups researchers have the opportunity to view how participants talk about certain topics. It is unlikely that I would have had this window for viewing interactions, during a structured or one to one interview environment. While analysing a structured interview may be more straight-

forward, the trade-off is rich data from the research participants perspective (Suter, 2012).

Thematic analysis

To allow more scope beyond this study, detailed thematic analysis occurred during and after the data collection phase. Thematic analysis as Neuman (2011) describes is the process of data analysis as “pattern seeking” (p. 512). Tolich and Davidson (2011) emphasise the importance of organising the relevance and relationships of those “patterns”, in the collected data to relate back to the original question, “it is not about seeking patterns for the sake of it” (p. 198).

Even though this group was small, each wahine come from diverse backgrounds and associate with different peer groups. It is hoped that this increases the possibility to generalise further outside of this research context. Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun’s (2012) propose that even though qualitative researchers may face difficulty in generalising outside of their study context, researchers can take measures to allow readers to “assess applicability” (p. 11). In addition to thematic analysis, I incorporate written memos of observations, my thoughts and personal annotations. This additional data collection is taken onboard as a supplementary analysis. Yin (2016) suggests that this type of added data analysis helps the researcher avoid the danger of losing new ideas and concepts.

Discourse

I acknowledge that I approach this research with preconceived ideas and opinions, Tracy (2013) describes these thoughts as researcher’s “baggage” (p. 2). I deliberately acknowledge my own “baggage” and the inherent effect of my own values on the research process (Fraenkel et al., 2012) and that these values may have come into play during the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). I acknowledge that I operate within and around discourse and I attempted to examine the role this played, especially during the research analysis. As I asked myself of the influences of my own baggage during the research analysis stage, I was reminded that it is impossible to operate outside

of discourse. Sinclair and Monk (2004) maintain that “we speak from discourse, feel from discourse and behave from discourse” (p. 338).

Concluding our research relationship

Closure

At the conclusion of the last focus group meeting I thanked the rangatahi and this was followed by a brief thank you email to Te Haerenga. Again, Te Haerenga thanked our research group on my behalf. After I had completed “Eye Balling” the data, I created a Poster (Appendix H) and this poster was sent to Te Haerenga and she shared this poster with whānau and other relevant community members.

Often “Eye Balling” is the first step in data analysis, where the researcher looks at the wholeness and meaningful nature of the research (Willis, 2007). At this stage initial conclusions were starting to form. I chose to contact Te Haerenga at this stage, as the more detailed analysis stage was going to take some time. In respecting kaupapa Māori, it is important for a researcher to bring closure to research including sharing the findings, this does not however, denote closure to the relationship (L.T. Smith & Cram 2001, as cited in Rangahau, n.d.)

Continuing our relationship

A few months after our last research focus group, Te Haerenga and I shared breakfast together. We discussed the research, shared a laugh and talked about our hopes for our academic futures. I also shared my concerns for the possible vulnerabilities of the rangatahi wāhine who took part in this research. Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003) state that participants often see interviews as opportunities to voice opinions and “let off steam” (p. 63). My concern, for this group of young women, centred around whether they held any potential regret. As during our research conversations they discussed personal matters around whānau, teachers and peers, at times “letting off steam” in the process.

However, Te Haerenga reassured me that this research had not caused any apparent harm or stress to her, the school or the participants. She had touched base with each participant, including their whānau and school community. The

feedback received from each wahine was supportive of having participated, with each wahine expressing even more determination to reach their goals. Aroha has now been embraced into the kapahaka whānau and some of the rangatahi wāhine have now connected as friends as a result of having participated in the research. The effects of this research have not ended with me leaving the scene, it continues beyond the research context.

Structure

The Findings Chapter introduces the Picnic Table and what it represents, this then sets the scene for the next sections, which include Manaakitanga, Humour, Contribution and competition, and Ethnic cultural identity. Finally, the last section in the findings explores the conversation around The Ball. This last section demonstrates the strength of peer relationships in action.

Rōpu

As I wrote and discussed this research during the analysis stage, I started to refer to the research group as 'Rōpu' or 'rōpu', rather than research group, focus group or participant group. I also use the term 'wahine' or 'wāhine', and 'rangatahi' or both, rather than participant.

It all starts with poetry

Each chapter begins with poetry and I attempt to resonate together the voices of the rangatahi. I try to draw attention to the heart of the content within that chapter, through poetry using their words. Expression existed not only through verbal communication, but also body language, such as smiling, loud laughter, hand gestures, leaning in, nodding and so on. Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003) point out that the researcher can hear far more than what is said, such as observing body language and tone of voice. Chachu was very animated in her communication. She laughed with the others and agreed with her peers by nodding and using hand gestures or one-word comments such as "hard" or "yeah". Therefore, conveying together their statements through poetry allows space for equity, where single words and unspoken expressions might resonate equally to surrounding dialogues.

Chapter Four: Findings

The picnic table

Everyone greets each other

Everyone sees each other

We like to kick it

We have the same vocabulary

We have the same understanding

I have found people that I can call family

During the individual research conversation, Waimarie spoke about her special place and explained why it is special and what it means to her.

Waimarie: Probably this little picnic table out here [referring to her special place] because every morning that is where everyone greets each other... that is where everyone sees each other, so that's like the first place we see each other just before we go to hub.

Anthea: And why is that important to you?

Waimarie: I guess that's because that's a routine - we see everybody there... you know that's where we talk about what happened after school, what happened during the night I guess...

Waimarie: Um... I guess I couldn't imagine it [not having the picnic table], I guess it is just something that we do every day...

The visible picnic table initiates the first greeting for the day and this place of acknowledgement seems to serve this same purpose throughout the day. While many of Waimarie's friends from her immediate peer group do not share the same classes, the picnic table provides precious opportunity for reconnection. Hakiha (1997) maintains that "knowledge is gained from the relationship that people have with wider systems, it is through relationship with each other, whānau, the land, the sky" (p. 92). Waimarie asserts her appreciation for what the picnic table offers; this space seems to be interconnected within their relationships to it and each other.

During the research conversation, as we were discussing the bridging document, I disclosed to the others Waimarie's special place. The group all smiled and with surprise revealed their similar special place.

All: Yeah, the picnic table [referring to their own special place]

Aroha: Yup

Lola: Yup

Chachu: Yeah it is the area where we like kick it

Anthea: What is it that makes it special?

Tiger: I thought cause it was close to the canteen.

All: (loud laughter)

The picnic table had surfaced as a place where several groups gather. Some might liken this picnic table to tūrangawaewae, a space where rangatahi can instinctively plant their feet. Tūrangawaewae is a place of belonging where we can stand and perform our identity (Groot, Hodgetts, Nikora & Rua, 2010). Groot et al. (2010) further infer that this place can become a source of strength as well as responsibility. This space is where words, thoughts, and feelings are shared and acknowledged, a special place where rangatahi go to collectively fill their mauri tanks

Using the term "kick it" to describe what they do implies that this is a space for relaxation, comfort and perhaps frivolity. The picnic table could also allow freedom, for the members of the group, to express and show a more genuine version of themselves. They explain what this special place represents and what happens when others encroach on this almost 'untouchable' space.

Anthea: So, it's not the actual spot, it's the coming together?

Rerekahu: Yeah - cause we've changed spots so many times...

Chachu: Not many people used to be like there.

Rerekohu: Cause like everyone's spot changes, it depends... cause we used to like hang out in the shade [under the trees], and cause people did not know that was our spot, so we'll just find somewhere else to hang... it's not really the spot.

Whether the physical space is the shade under a tree, or a picnic table, much like a pou it serves the same purpose. This conversation or talk time provides the collective, a connective strength for the group. This relaxed conversation around the picnic table helps build their capacity to see each other on a deeper level.

Tiger: Yeah you know how like with most friendships you talk to them about stuff, but you don't actually feel like you can call them family...Yeah, I have found people that I can call like family

Chachu: Yup...(looking towards Rerekohu)

Rerekohu: Yup, just like you and I...

Seeing each other as whānau, as brothers and sisters has a much wider effect that goes beyond the school gates. Ting-Toomey and Dorgee (2019) liken language to an emblem of “groupness.” (p. 208). In speaking and conversing together, members signal their solidarity and connectedness to identities, both as individuals and as a collective.

Waimaire touched on this concept of friends as whānau.

Waimarie: I missed a few days of school and then for each death [of her horses]... and then.... I guess I was a bit distracted for a few days...

Anthea: And did your friends play a role in taking notes for you, or helping you, or supporting you?

Waimarie: Yeah like they'd always, they'd check up on me when I wasn't at school and they'd ask where I was. It took me a while to reply cause I didn't want to[talk]... um ... but they were really good you know, they'd send me pictures of notes that they had from class that day. So yeah, they were really supportive.

Much like a connected whānau, Waimarie's friends stretched their friendship beyond the school gates, by building a bridge between school and home. While other teachers or peers might have thought an animal death to be trivial, Waimarie's friends know her at a deeper level; her horses are more than pets

as they are an extension to childhood memories. In Māori all things have a mauri, including animals (Berryman, 2008; Patterson, 1994). Waimarie treasures the mauri of her animals, and this same feeling of receiving and giving aroha to loved ones can be seen in how she sees her animals. Perhaps in the absence of this treasured talk time around the picnic table, Waimarie may not have received the same empathy. This sense of friends as family between students, seems to enhance this empathetic and compassionate lens, through which they view each other and others beyond their peer group.

As this rōpu, much like a whānau shared the hopes for their futures with each other, I wondered if their friends, as whānau, shared similar desires.

Anthea: It seems like you've all thought about something about your future. Would you say your friends also think about their futures?

Tiger: Some do, and some don't...some think they're not capable of doing anything...

Anthea: Do you think they're not capable?

Lola: The push behind them

Lola: It is more like the stability

All: Mmhmm (all agreeing)

Rerekohu: For example, they might be like "my parents work in a meat works, so I am going to do that", so they label themselves as how they see their parents and what they do.

Others: Mmhhmm (all agreeing)

The wāhine in this rōpu view the behaviours of their friends as responses to circumstances outside of their control. Winslade and Monk (2008) point out that "powerful and repetitive" discourse can "blind" people from other ways of thinking (p. 111). Perhaps, as Rerekohu supposes, peers are not able to see past the "powerful" discourses around them. As a result of seeing through their compassionate lens, responsibility is directed towards "instability" and "incapability" as the culprits that potentially shape others' perceptions of their lives. Rerekohu also touches on this point.

*Rerekohu: Probably not [referring to her friends' possible desires to travel the world]. Probably just [thinking about] the now...maybe...(pause)
Or... they might think "I want to travel but I can't."*

At first Rerekohu thought her friends might not share her dreams of travel, after a slight pause, she rephrased her answer to view it as perception rather than desire. Bandura (1993) emphasises that often low self-efficacy, where we may dwell on personal deficiencies, leads us to "lose faith" (p. 93) in our capabilities. Similarly, Rerekohu theorises, that while the desire may be there, the self-efficacy to fulfil that desire may not. This rōpu clearly understand that not all rangatahi are privy to having a strong sense of self, as faith in abilities may be harder to achieve for some.

Lola demonstrates this same ability to see her peers on a deeper level.

Lola: I think it is also like the urge to want to do good...

Anthea: Where do you think that urge comes from?

Lola: Within yourself, cause like a group of my friends they are like you know ...drugs, and I don't really want to do that. I believe there is more to life than just you know... drugs...

Anthea: Actually, when you see your friends doing drugs...

Te Haerenga: What do you think it is?

Lola: I don't know... they are just vulnerable, that's all they see their life to be.

Lola refrains from labelling her friends and identifies drugs as a 'thing' that has the power to mask or blind the ability to see a hopeful future. Like a predator that preys on "vulnerability", she labels drugs as the problem not her peers. Drewery and Winslade (2005) emphasise the importance of separating a person from a problem they experience, as a practice in narrative therapy. Lola positions herself apart from drugs, as someone who is not 'vulnerable' as she can see her future self clearly without drugs clouding her vision. Even so, her empathy shows a genuine understanding towards her peers.

The rōpu share a mutual connection with one another and this weaved its way throughout the research conversations. Waimarie gives some of her rationale behind this mutual understanding.

Waimarie: I guess because, we have the same... I guess the same... As students, we have the same vocabulary, same understanding, um we've learnt to learn things a similar way... more than how they [teachers] understand it and they [teachers] portray it how they understand it.

As rangatahi move through high school, they appear to develop along a similar generational conceptual plane, where cognitively similar language and reasoning constructs emerge and develop not only through class, but also during times between classes. Perhaps, this youth landscape of connectivity strengthens through relational space, reinforcing their friendship. Bishop et al. (2007) urge that recognising how rangatahi learn and speak, is vital in their validation. While teachers might try to understand from a youth perspective, as illustrated in this discussion, rather than simulate this understanding from a teacher lens, perhaps the key is in recognising that the learning of youth is unique to them. In this respect, we validate the learning of rangatahi by allowing more space for peer collaboration and conversation both inside and outside of class.

In the same way that the participants in Gray's (2012) study expressed the need for a break-out space, the rōpu express how special their picnic table is. The picnic table is a space for free expression and connection to take place, where understanding, compassion and holding hope for themselves and others can grow.

Manaakitanga

Whānau

Papa, he inspires me

My koro took us all in

All seven of us.

Even though he gets tired out

He raises us as his own.

Mum she gives up her time.

I want to make my mum proud

And give back.

Nana has always done things

For our community

And she is always there.

Mum she goes out of her way

For everybody.

I want to show my siblings

There is more to life

Beyond those four walls.

As each wahine in the rōpu spoke of their loved ones, like a golden thread, manaakitanga wove in to the tapestry of their stories. Manaakitanga can be defined as a “reciprocal and unqualified” belief that is “based on respect and kindness, as a duty of care” (Macfarlane et al., 2007, p. 67). This traditional and treasured practice, while greatly respected and honoured, in many ways is simply seen as a normal way of being. Wiata and Crocket (2017) go further to describe manaaki as perhaps “unseen” acts, such as a nannie reading to her moko, or a rangatahi pushing their nannie in her wheelchair (p. 18). This everyday expression of aroha is not only given and received freely as a living loving taonga, it also remains at the core of relationships.

Rerekohu shares openly with the others in the rōpu her story, her papa's story.

Rerekohu: My papa - my koro I call him Papa. Yeah, he inspires me.

Anthea: Why does he inspire you?

Rerekohu: Well because he was like still old and he did not really interact with us when we were little. But then when we were taken off my parents, the only way that we could all actually stay together was to move in with him otherwise we would be like... me and my siblings would be all over NZ and we wouldn't have contact with anyone, so my koro took us in, all seven of us and then he raised us as his own, and then um... like even to this day cause like my nan is sick. Cause like she has had four strokes, heart attacks and stuff like that and he is sick himself. He still pushes through and looks after my nan and looks after my younger siblings, three of my younger sisters, and I've got an aunty and uncle living with him and their five kids and he still tries and cooks tea for them still tries to get my nana up ready for what she has to do and like showers her and everything even though he tires himself out.

While Rerekohu spoke of going to live with her 'Papa', there were no interjections of humour, no interruptions, only compassionate listening to their peer. Respect was shown and given to a Māori sister who was unpacking some of the intricate circumstances of her childhood. This remained a space in our research conversation where a group of wāhine sisters simply listened to the life story of one of their own. Using a form of "compassionate witnessing" (Weingarten 2003, p. 195) they listened closely to Rerekohu's story, recognised her circumstances and chose to be "fully present" in learning about her experiences.

As she explains it, Rerekohu's Papa seems to find strength to "push through", to free his mokopuna from potential separation and suffering. This reminds me of the well-known Māori legend of Papatūānuku the Earth Mother and Ranginui the Sky Father. These two were once united in a tight embrace and

between them remained their sons, trapped in an eternity of darkness. One of the trapped brothers wanted to take the life of their parents so he could have life. However, one of the sons Tāne-Mahuta in honour of his parents convinced his brothers to, instead, separate them. So Tāne-Mahuta gathered all of his strength, and as strong as a kauri tree he managed to push apart the sky from the earth. In accomplishing this he saved his parents, and he freed his siblings from further suffering in the darkness (Cowan, 1987). Using kauri strength, Tāne-Mahuta gave his brothers life, and Rerekohu's papa using his own kauri strength has given life to his mokopuna.

Waimarie related Rerekohu's story of her papa to her own mother's show of manaakitanga.

Waimarie: I guess she gives up her own time - she gives up her own time, her personal time for us - like every weekend.

Lola refers to her own mother as well.

Lola: Yeah I can relate to that...I wouldn't say she inspires me but more motivation to make her proud and give back to what she has given to us, her time, her money, her everything, her all, her love...um... cause she's had to get up you know early in the morning just to make ends meet...my mum and dad. So, I just want to give back to them.

Lola beams with pride as she describes her mother's love and act of giving "her everything, her all". In the genuine spirit of manaakitanga, Lola expresses her desire to honour her mother, by giving back to her parents. For Lola, making her parents proud seems to give her a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction. For Māori wellbeing is closely related to our family networks (E. Durie, 2000).

Aroha explains to the group why her nana inspires her.

Aroha: I would say my nan, because she has always done things for our community and we have been in this town for a very long time. It's like she's only just given up community work to help out with my cousins and all that...and cause my aunty owns a farm and all that it's always my cousin staying the night there, and her [Aroha's nana] cooking for them [her aunty and cousins] and nearly being their mother almost. It's like she's always been there whenever we need anything even though she's looking after the cousins as well. She is always there when we need an emergency bake thing for a bake sale, just anything... a ride home, she is always there for us.

Aroha reflects with admiration her nana's acts of service to not only whānau but also the local community. As community can often be a source of strength for rangatahi (Webber, 2012), her nana's faithful service to her community in turn will strengthen her moko. Educational success for our rangatahi is closely linked to whānau and community connection (Cavanagh, 2011; Hynds et al., 2015; Lemon, 2017; O'Gorman et al., 2016; Webber, 2012). Again, manaakitanga weaves delicately through whānau and community.

Like Aroha, Tiger looks to her mother as a source of inspiration.

Tiger: ...she is just like the person in our family that if anybody needs anything, she is who everyone goes to, regardless. She'd bring anyone into our house if they needed someone and she goes out of her way for everybody and she's always taught me to be like that for people as well...even if they take you for granted... you just got to get over that.

Tiger shows how much she values her mother's commitment to the wellbeing of others, by replicating those same characteristics into her own life. Rerekohu, too, links this concept of responsibility to her own life, by reflecting on her responsibilities as an older sibling.

Rerekohu: I only think I'm doing well because my older siblings dropped out even though they were like ten times smarter than me. Like they dropped out and they didn't go back to school till like three years later and even my younger brother who's like twenty times smarter than me has dropped out, but he's not even going to... he's not even planning on going back to school...

I am going to go straight through...

...cause like I don't live with any of my siblings, so um, it's like showing the younger siblings, there is more to life just beyond those four walls...

Tiger: Like a role model?

Rerekohu: Yeah

Tiger: That's cool

Rerekohu hopes to motivate and inspire her younger siblings to reach their potential by showing them what a meaningful future could look like. This depiction of tuakana-teina of older siblings mentoring younger siblings, is a traditional Māori practice, Glynn (2015) emphasises that:

From a Māori perspective the tuakana-teina relationship carries with it more than just the connotation of peer tutoring or buddy support. It also carries cultural meanings to do with the relationship of an elder sibling towards a younger sibling, and the rights and responsibilities that each has towards the other within a kinship whānau. (p. 108)

As Rerekohu expressed her desire to get through school, she held herself as partly accountable for the future of her siblings. While her older brother was unable to do this, she has declared that she is going “straight through” to Year 13. She wants to show her siblings, both older and younger, a life outside “those four walls”. Davis, Crocket and Kotzé (2017) describe tuakana-teina in their context of counselling as showing “relational responsibility for younger or less experienced” (p. 156). In this respect, age is not necessarily the determinant of who is the teina and who is the tuakana. This concept is

illustrated in Rerekohu's aroha and compassion shown towards her older siblings, in wanting to help them also.

Much like her papa, Rerekohu shares manaakitanga with her whānau. Rerekohu's drive to succeed, is expressed in determination to show her siblings a hopeful future. Rossiter (2009) claims that we all have a version of our future self, and this is revealed in our hopes and desires. Rossiter adds that this future self or imagined future version of ourselves can be shaped through mentoring. In an attempt to influence the potential imaginings of her siblings, Rerekohu attempts to step into the position of "role model". She undertakes this role, by giving her siblings visual space to witness their possible future vicariously through her.

Lola also identifies with the concept of responsibility to whānau.

Lola: I feel like I do that with my little cousins...

Anthea: If you saw them... misbehaving... what would you say?

Lola: Oh I would tell them! I would tell them!

Stepping in as a leader, like a big sister inside the school gates, Lola's role of responsibility within the school setting is similar to Rerekohu's responsibility towards her siblings. Both Lola and Rerekohu act as mentors to their whānau, through offering inspiration and support.

Manaakitanga seems to manifest itself not only in how it is practised, but also in what it provides.

Lola: I don't know... it's just up to yourself whether you can prove them wrong [teachers who would criticise] you know. Like from my experience, I have done it... but I have broken away from it type of thing [broken away from drugs and school absence] - so I don't know - you just keep on you know...

...Um yeah - I believe that I am going through [to the end of school] because there is more to me, more to me than just you know... just

a stat...just a statistic... you know, and that I can go and prove people wrong, cause they've said heaps of stuff like I'm going to be pregnant by the time I dadadah... look at me now! I have no kids you know. Just living life... yeah trying to get to my goal.

The presence of manaakitanga in Lola's relationships may have provided a source of resilience. While Lola pulls strength from within, the original source could have been the strength of her relationships and manaaki shown to her from her mother, as she earlier mentioned. While negative stereotypes may influence school engagement, some Māori are able to resist those identity narratives, by pulling from other resources outside of school, such as family and community (Webber, 2012).

During our conversations Lola often spoke of wanting to make her parents proud, and she draws strength from this desire. Lola confidently faces these negative stereotypes square on with determination and purpose. Lola specifically spoke of wanting to prove her teachers wrong and, in relation to this, she specifically asked to have this statement written into the research thesis, "Matua you were wrong". Lola identifies Matua as a teacher that had wrongly labelled her in the past. This desire to succeed comes from her desire to want to respect her whānau, as well as the internal want of "proving others [teachers] wrong" and of knowing herself to be capable of more than what some teachers have been able to see.

Whānau has come up as an important source of strength for this rōpu. With each wahine identifying their older family members as their source of inspiration, we are reminded that our elderly whānau members are taonga. For many Māori a community is reflected in the mana of their elders, and without our older generation, we are deprived of richness (E. Durie, 2000, p. 102). These wāhine represent our future, and with each of them manaakitanga remains as the strength to their being. Jones, Brigg and Bleiker (2011) remind us that our future generations are the living faces of our ancestors. If this is so, then the strength of our past continues strong into the future.

Friendship

Friends

Who try to help.

Friends

Who encourage.

Friends

Who accept.

Friends

Who show.

The rōpu told stories of friendships and relationships enhanced through manaakitanga. Te Kete Ipurangi (2011) identify four elements of manaakitanga as: “integrity, trust, sincerity and equity”. This seems to come to light as the rōpu speak with compassion about peers caught up in the allure of drugs and school truancy.

Lola: I accept them... just being honest.

Chachu: Yeah same

Rerekohu: Well I accept them but I like drop little hints to them.... like “there is something better than that”.

Aroha: If they are trying to like make you do it with them - you just say “No I don't want to do that I am not that type of person.”

Waimarie: Like if they keep peer pressuring you, then I guess it would probably be time to leave the situation maybe..

Anthea: That makes sense...Tiger what do you think about that?

Tiger: I think there is only like a certain point that you can like try to help people

All: Mmm yeah

Tiger: ... like there is nowhere to say that you have to stay if it's not okay for you!... but like if you want to stay with certain people, even if you don't agree with some of things they do, that's alright as well..

More significance is placed on acceptance and inclusion rather than judgement and rejection. While as friends they would like to show an alternative and

perhaps “better” way of being, they also acknowledge that this is not always easily achieved. There is the suggestion that “hints” can be given, as a gentle guide to making better decisions rather than outright judgement and labelling. Pio Terei a renown Māori entertainer, recently visited my daughters’ school, and in his presentation he used an analogy of the lift. As friends you can either take your friends down with you, or even better, you can take your friends up with you to the better view. Peers can affect and influence each other both negatively and positively (Barbaranelli, Paciello, Biagioli, Fida & Tramontano, 2018; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2015; Zimmerman, 2000). Like Pio’s analogy, the rangatahi in this rōpu attempt to lift their friends up.

Waimarie also externalises the negativity as a “situation” rather than internalising it directly to her peers. Winslade, Monk and Cotter (1998) suggest that in the course of externalising conversation, we realign ourselves. In this respect, Waimarie aligns her peers as being separate from the problem situation. If she chooses to walk away, it is not her peers she is rejecting but the external environment or “situation”.

Often support from peers can be called upon and this may be especially needed in times of ambivalence about school attendance.

Tiger: I reckon half of it is, if you're the type of person who doesn't feel like going to school, if you're into a group of friends who encourage you to school then you go, but if you don't [have a group who encourage you to go to school] then you'll be like - shall we just wag...

Tiger demonstrates that care and concern can and does operate positively within the domain of peer pressure, where the best interests of each peer can be shaped within the group, by the group. Friendships in particular, can have a positive effect on relationships and positive behaviour (Baydala et al., 2009). During our research conversations, genuine care is shown to one another, and in trusting the manaakitanga that was present within the rōpu, the mana of each participant was carefully respected.

It is interesting to note that before our research commenced, Tiger and Lola were not on speaking terms. Initially it was suggested, by some school staff, that the combination of these two students might cause the focus group to be unworkable. Thankfully Te Haerenga, as 'cultural broker' held the belief that this group of wāhine could and would work together. Consequently, through manaakitanga, this rōpu showed respect to the research, me and each other by doing the mahi together. As manaakitanga had been woven into the being of each participant, an honest and enjoyable conversation was easily achieved. This space of open and honest conversation appeared to foster the trust among the rōpu. This is similar to Gray's (2012) study, where she noted that understanding and acceptance of each other's differences grew as the conversations continued.

Tiger and Lola give an example of the tension and raruraru that had existed in their relationship.

Tiger: Yeah...kakahaka was a lot of drama in year 10 and then a lot of rumours were made about me

Chachu: Only cause...

All: (silence)

*Lola: Yeah cause we **used to** be best friends...*

All: laughter

This past situation of rumours and a lost friendship had troubled the relationship between Lola and Tiger, and this had caused much angst among their direct peers and in their classrooms. This raruraru, while noticeable in our first meet and greet, quickly eased and progressively dissipated as our research conversations continued. While at the conclusion of our research, both Tiger and Lola had mutually decided that they would not rekindle their close friendship, in respect for each other and in honouring manaakitanga, they recognised that they could now accept each other's differences.

This rōpu show much care, respect and support for one another through practising manaakitanga. Connor and Buccahan's (2017) research report on leadership through peer mediation (LtPM), where the main aim of LtPM is "to empower students as 'ambassadors of social justice'..." (p. 2) through peer mediation, showed that student mediators were able to effectively practise taught resolution skills "to help their peers resolve conflicts in peaceful, respectful ways" (p. 10). Likewise, this rōpu show similar relational skills of being able to gently and respectfully help their peers, during times of conflict or adversity by encouraging, showing, and accepting one another.

Teachers

The teacher is meant to be

supporting you.

It doesn't start off negative

you feel like they are gonna try and help

but then they...

They have the intent

of trying to help

they are supposed to be

our role models

like supporting

and encouraging us

to do better.

They start talking to you

about your future,

and how to get you there,

but then they...

Bishop et al. (2007) suggest that manaakitanga can be practised within the school classroom when "the teachers are able to build and nurture a supportive and loving environment where Māori and all students can be themselves" (p. 29). In this way a classroom is built on care and a culture of

reciprocal respect. While manaakitanga is central within whānau, and fundamental within peer relationships, this living practice also has a place within the school context.

For this research group manaakitanga within the school and classroom, as described by Bishop et al. (2007), seems to be absent.

Tiger: I feel like if they could see if someone might want to talk. Sometimes they don't really ask like what is going on at home or like, what's going with you, why? They just get mad at people, they don't go beyond or go deeper like why they're acting like they're acting. They think they are just being silly or that they are just slacking off. They don't try to see why and try and help them.

Rerekohu: Like for example if someone is like late or they might have just they've slept in... That person could have been at home trying to get their siblings ready cause their parents aren't home and stuff like that

Chachu: Yah aye

Rerekohu: Teachers just automatically think you should have gone to bed earlier cause you're yawning and stuff like that.

When teachers “don’t try to see” what is happening outside of school in the home, beyond the school gates, meaningful relationships between student and teacher can become increasingly challenging. Therefore, when teachers look at students, it should be in relation to their “back life”. Sanders et al. (2016) describe the term “back life” as the complex “challenges and vulnerabilities” that students face at home (p. 162). The rōpu discuss what happens when this back life is ignored and how this can affect perception and perhaps even perpetuate negative stereotypes into action.

The explanation that Rerekohu provides, pictures another peer, not as an isolated individual, but as someone belonging within a whānau. The relationship between this student and teacher has developed at surface level only. Macfarlane et al. (2014) explain that trust and mutual respect can be

gained more easily, when teachers get to know student as individuals, and each student gets to know their teachers. In saying this it is important to remember that within the Māori worldview the meaning of personhood is in relation to others. Consequently, the teacher has labelled a student as an unorganised, lazy individual, rather than recognising them as a diligent older sibling who contributes to a hardworking whānau. Hynds et al. (2016) point out that teachers who implement culturally responsive pedagogies are connected to students' interests and lives outside of the classroom.

The one-dimensional relationship that sometimes exists between teachers and students not only affects student to teacher rapport, but also seems to have a detrimental effect on how students engage with their teacher and their learning.

Anthea: So then at what stage are you allowed to talk to your friends? or do you have to sit and listen?

Waimarie: No, we have to listen! So we go on our phones most of the time we just hide them...

Both: (laughter)

Waimarie: So, she is just like talking to a dead audience, cause nobody is really listening. I mean there's probably some people who are listening, like we'll stop occasionally and try and listen and we'll be like oh I get that now... but then she starts talking about something else and then you lose....

Waimarie paints a scene of death in the classroom, where disconnection and disengagement are present and ako is absent. Bishop et al. (2007) describe ako as learning and teaching together, it can be seen in the classroom when “teachers use strategies that promote effective teaching interactions and relationships with their learners” (p. 26). Bishop et al. reiterate that ako is not simply learning and teaching together, it goes deeper, where each respect and affirm *how* each other makes sense of knowledge.

In the absence of ako, students then turn to their phones for comfort and switch off from listening. Fletcher and Nicholas (2017) urge that there needs to be a shift from teacher control to a more dynamic and democratic classroom environment. They argue that there needs to be opportunities for youth to collaboratively listen and contribute to varying opinions, in the hopes that rich and more meaningful understanding can be gained.

While schools often measure student engagement through attendance, in Waimarie's example, there is a classroom filled with unengaged students. Often one of the limitations of adopting this simplistic measuring tool of marking attendance is that students who are absent from class may still feel engaged, just as students who are present in class, may feel disengaged (Willms, 2003). Waimarie's example illustrates that determining engagement is far more complex than simply measuring student attendance alone.

Waimarie then tries to explain why she does not always attempt to ask questions in the school environment.

Waimarie *Yeah... ha ha but you kind of like get afraid that if you ask them [the teacher] a question they're going to start talking a whole lot more... you know...and you don't want to do that, cause you don't want to be sitting there for like another 10 minutes... talking to them. They have already been talking for half an hour, where they are just going to repeat it or switch a few words around. It doesn't make a difference, you still can't understand..*

Although it is presumed that students are 'free' to ask questions, in Waimarie's classroom often they withhold questions for the sake of the classroom collective; students are therefore rendered silent. Berryman et al. (2017) explain that a reciprocal dialogic classroom for rangatahi is:

Bringing their own experiences to the learning, through active social engagement with others, requires determined opportunities for dialogue to occur throughout the learning. Contexts such as these

allowed learners the opportunity to both seek advice and ask questions of other students without fear of embarrassment or reprimand. Thus, all of the expertise in the class was activated instead of relying solely upon the expertise of the teacher. (p. 483)

This “reciprocal dialogical” environment appears to be what this rōpu desire. While in Waimarie’s classroom all students are expected to listen, this solitary approach to teaching makes engaged learning seem almost impossible.

Rerekohu: Yeah...I reckon. Like when you get the teachers who tell you what to do and then they just expect you to do it when they haven't actually...

Aroha: ...they expect you to know how to do it...

Rerekohu: Yeah they haven't actually explained it to you, and they are just like sitting on their laptop doing other things or on their phone.

This rōpu, through a critically analytical lens, can immediately identify appropriate teaching pedagogical practices from inappropriate ones, and just as teachers expect their students to learn, students expect their teachers to fulfil their teaching obligations. Berryman et al. (2017) reiterate this sentiment of students’ expectations of teachers. In their review of Māori perspectives in education, which spanned across 15 years, they found that:

When rangatahi Māori believed that teachers were not fulfilling their professional responsibilities, they were likely to reciprocate similarly. Sometimes, they did not attend the classes of these teachers on a regular basis and, when they did, they lacked any real effort. (p. 481)

Another example of this disconnect in teaching and learning, is when teachers are seen to be oblivious to the needs of their students. The rōpu members ascribe this to the generational gap.

Rerekohu: I reckon it's kind of... it's kind of like even Stevens [with peers] cause the teacher is actually meant to be there supporting you -

not like trying to put you down or label you - and like with your mates, like with other people, it's sort of a normal thing because they're your age, but a teacher is like... can be like 20 years older than you and still tryn to get involved.

This generational gap seems to emerge as a hurdle for teachers. Berryman et al. (2018) suggest:

Respect and courage are needed when entering into an ako relationship with someone who we perceive as other. It involves listening beyond the words and responding to the person in front of us rather than responding to our assumptions of who they might be. (p. 6)

Although labels can come from students, these labels are viewed as being imposed by equals. Whereas, labels placed on students by teachers are seen to “put you down”. Students too, have expectations that teachers, are meant to be teachers as well as pillars of encouragement and support.

Rerekohu: That is like their job

Tiger: They are supposed to be our role models

Waimarie: Like supporting and encouraging us to do better

This rōpu show manaakitanga to their teachers through the respect and compassion shown to the “role” or “job” of teaching. While they acknowledge that a teacher’s intent generally comes from a genuine place, they also identify the lack of strategy to put intent into practice.

Tiger: I just think that teachers will have the intent of trying to help people, I just think it is the way they approach it sometimes is wrong.

While teachers are positioned as caring, they accept that sometimes teachers make mistakes, especially in their approach to communication. T. Hoskins (2012) states that extending manaakitanga is tika, it is the right thing to do and

is never asked to be “returned or acknowledged” (p. 92). Coincidentally, some teachers may be unaware that this manaakitanga has been extended towards them, so it may go unnoticed.

Tiger: Cause like some of them kind of like start off like they are talking to you about like your future and stuff, and how to get you there, but then they just start bashing you about it..

Tiger tells a story of concerned teachers attempting to help their students, but just not knowing how to support appropriately. She goes further to describe this transition from intent and care to assault and harm, as a shift that gradually moves along a continuum.

Tiger: I just think sometimes for some of them [students] the push that they get from the teachers they don't see as like support they [students] see it as the nagging. And like because some of them, some of the teachers if they [students] are like falling behind or if they have had to miss some days off of school they [teachers] don't like try to support them nicely. They [teachers] kind of like hit them [students] with some threats kind of like if you don't do this by this date then you're not taking this class next year. "I am not going to have you" or they [teachers] are like "I am going to do this and this"... like just to intimidate you.

Tiger: Like it doesn't start off negative right away you feel like they are gonna try and help but then they just like ... it turns and they just start saying things like that.

Tiger describes this offense, using relatively harmful verbs, such as “hit”, “bash”, “nag”, “threat” and “intimidate”. It is feasible that students may thus experience personal attacks. While, in Tiger’s example, the teacher seems to be inviting the student in, the approach of using a threatening ultimatum, in effect, is counterproductive as the student is unlikely to take the invitation up, and the teacher is positioning themselves as the authority. Rather than speaking in a place of power, Drewery (2016) argues that “for most people

being spoken to as if one is a sovereign agent of one's own life, or being called in such a position, is preferable to being spoken to in a demeaning or subordinating way" (p. 198). Perhaps if the teachers were to consistently speak to students as knowledgeable capable beings, the message may be given and received differently.

As well as intentional language, the act and purpose of how language is used, is also raised.

Rerekohu: It's more like the sneaky words

Tiger: Like when they [teachers] talk to you

Rerekohu could not identify any specific words teachers use, as rather than the actual word it is the intention that makes it "sneaky". Tiger implies that it is often the way in which words are spoken that make them sneaky, such as tone and meaning. When we talk or make utterances, we call upon discursive meaning, and the speaker and listener are both making meaning (Winslade, 2003). An utterance could be one word, or an entire sentence, and could be subtle. Either way, Winslade argues that utterances can give support to whole frameworks of meaning.

The power of words

Not long after our research conversations had taken place, Hamilton's Fraser High School appeared in the media. On September, 24th at the morning assembly, the school principal, while well meaning, began to deliver a speech to her school, about the dangers of truancy. Much like how this research group described with their own teachers, the Fraser High School principal started off encouraging. However, her speech soon moved along the continuum, that Tiger described, towards negativity. She moved along from caring to then judgement and harm. She made parallels between rape, domestic violence and truancy. "Every student who walks out of the gate to truant is already a statistic of the worst kind, [They are] highly likely to go to prison, to commit domestic violence or be a victim of domestic violence, be illiterate, be a rape victim, be a suicide victim, be unemployed for the majority of their lives, have a major

health problem or problems, die at an early age, have an addiction - drugs, gambling, alcohol or smoking....That's another loser, that's another wannabe who will go crying to their parents with some lame, sad story...they don't want to see the world" (Nyika, 2018, p. A1). What followed after the Fraser High speech was weeks of debate and discussion on social media, the papers and schools.

Reading this article, I am reminded of this research and the power of judgement and how words painfully reinforce negative, deficit narratives. I am equally reminded that while words can cause pain, they do not always reflect intent. Like Tiger, I acknowledge that while the principal's "intent" was likely from a place of aroha and may be in response to personal experience, her "approach" was "wrong". Rather than abusive words of harm, this rōpu crave encouraging words and they desire teachers as role models, not authoritarians. This preference for encouragement rather than judgement can be seen in their peer relationships. Manaakitanga, a constant companion, guards wellbeing and moves like a breathing current running through, within and around us. When manaakitanga is shared and reciprocated within whānau and school, as described by this rōpu, compassion and understanding thrive.

Humour

Very. Very. Important.

I reckon you learn faster.

Otherwise

it is too boring,

and

we can't

concentrate.

you can

sit

there

bored as.

This rōpu value humour and argue that there is a need for it to be used and included within the school learning and social environments. This research group assert that an environment without humour can be uninspiring and draining. It would appear that a learning space without an element of humour, is where disconnection and boredom thrive. Strickson-Pua (2013) claims that for Pasifika and Māori, humour is almost inherent, and he reminds us that using humour can open up space for connection and sharing. As humour experts, the wāhine in this rōpu cleverly and naturally wove humour into and throughout our research conversations.

The rōpu illustrate their skill in using humour, by appropriately injecting it to positively adjust or shape the mood and tone of our conversation. Added snippets of humour and laughter seem to: allow space for thinking, ease any tension, or show their awahi and tautoko for one another. Humour appeared to change the flow of our research conversations, and this change in mood and demeanour may be in part due to the active engagement of all the senses. Humour, simply put, can be “... just an interruption of breath that distinguishes laughter from smiling” (Critchley 2002, p. 8). Critchley suggests that this interruption, enhances and awakens our senses as a full bodily expression.

While retelling some personal stories and events, humour was cleverly utilised to capture the engagement and attention of the rōpu. The value placed on humour can be reflected in how these wāhine would like to experience their own learning environments.

Rerekohu: I reckon you learn faster and learn more, and when you're into it and everyone is into it... like cracking jokes every now and then, you know, stuff like that, otherwise it becomes too serious and you know, no one wants to talk about it [what is being taught in class].

Humour, for this rōpu, is a tool that teachers might use as a way to enhance learning through increasing concentration and effective engagement. While humour is seen as a vital means for connection, the rōpu also acknowledge that there could be potential for brief disruption.

- Anthea: ...when you're in the class how do you go along without distracting others?*
- Waimarie: Don't think you can?*
- All: (Laughter) yeah*
- Waimarie: Especially if you're joking around you're going to be loud so...*
- Anthea: So, you can still joke in relation to the topic?*
- Rerekohu: Like yeah... cause teachers think that we're not on topic...like we do this [add humour] at home and at church... like we are the loudest bunch, and everyone looks at us. Like even when we are out having lunch we're still talking about things that we were learning about and stuff like that. Like this [humour] is in our family - we are like the loudest.*
- Tiger: It is important, cause like things get boring and like things get too serious and you just need to like go away from that [the seriousness] a bit sometimes as well or else your life is just sad.*

Even though this rōpu agree that humour might distract some, they imply that the potential benefits would outweigh any potential disadvantages. In fact, humour was seen as a necessary element in the classroom environment. Not only does humour possibly reduce potential emotional stress, but it can be used as a strategy to boost optimism and confidence, a way to “get away” from the “seriousness” that is sometimes experienced in schools. Similarly, Crocket (2002) shares how humour specific to his sport, Ultimate Frisbee, while often misinterpreted as sledging, is in reality welcomed and needed as it takes away the seriousness of the game.

While some teachers might on the face of it, see humour as a distraction from learning, the reality is that humour, for many rangatahi, is a fundamental and naturally occurring phenomenon that enhances learning, thus, creating a rich and fulfilling learning experience. Humour may be challenging as it crosses ethnic cultural domains (Holmes & Hay, 1997; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2019). In much the same way, teachers looking into the humour of rangatahi, may misinterpret humour as a disruption to learning, when for the students this

same humour helps to enhance engagement. As Crocket (2002) explains, humour in his sport helps in creating solidarity not only between players, but also between spectator and players. In this respect, humour may be used in a classroom setting to create solidarity, not only between rangatahi, but perhaps between teacher and rangatahi.

In addition to enhancing engagement, Tiger seems to associate humour with protection, like adding an extra layer to the learning armour, that shields her in those harder times. Strickson-Pua (2013) retells stories of his own childhood, where humour was used as a buffer in those difficult moments and he maintains that humour is a shared “blessing for healing” (p. 268). Critchley (2006) talks of humour as a physical means for relieving tension. Humour is more than a mere occurrence: it is an interruption mechanism that is called upon to provide a snippet of breathing space.

Contribution and competition

You never get shown unless you win a competition.

They only call out the top teams [at assembly].

I don't have a chance.

When you attach winning to something, people just shy away from it...

even if they really want to do it.

The cultural awards, literally no one is there. It is like they don't care.

Yeah, it's just not important.

It's not really much of a celebration of Māori.

It is like they don't care...

As much.

As (excessive) competition filters its way through the classroom, the staffroom and school assemblies, it brings with it the air of unfairness and bias. This rōpu express the hurt they feel when they see the mana of others and each other trampled on. The desire for acknowledgement that we all have something to

contribute was evident throughout our research conversations. Glynn (2015) succinctly defines mana as “legitimation and authority” (p. 108). In this respect, when the mana of students is respected we legitimise their identity and tino rangatiratanga. While mana does not require acknowledgement or recognition (E. Durie, 2000; T. Hoskins, 2012), we are all born with mana (Woller, 2016). As this mana comes from the gods (Jones et al., 2011) and our ancestors (T. Hoskins & Jones, 2017; Thode-Arora, 2018) mana reflects the historical, spiritual and physical source of who we are.

The wāhine in this rōpu expressed a sense of loss and feeling undervalued.

Tiger: Sometimes it's like they feel...like they only care about the sports...

Rerekohu: And it's like the same people over and over again, and then those people are also academic as well. So, it's like them always being on top. Whereas just getting by is like... yeah...

All: (nodding) yeah yeah...

Tiger: Yeah you never get shown unless you win a competition.

Rerekohu: ...You're the top

When schools continually position the same students at the “top”, other students may perceive this as “caring” only for the more valued members of school. Through these practices, schools unintentionally position other students who are “just getting by” as less worthy, and less valuable to the school. Berryman et al. (2018) stress that:

...we must resist the privileging of attaining standardised credentials as the single marker of success. We must also resist unconsciously creating a hierarchy of success in which academic achievement is of most value. Instead, we must broaden our thinking to encompass the cultural, spiritual, and physical wellbeing of our Māori students as potential future leaders in our bicultural nation. (p. 9)

When we narrowly view success, a “hierarchy” is maintained, leaving those at the perceived bottom feeling unnoticed and uncared for.

Lola, an outstanding netballer and notable sportswoman within the school, also raises concern around this concept of favoritism which leaves others feeling neglected.

Lola: Nah I think that it's true because um... no we won't say names... because yeah like some people are like way up there because of their sporting achievements and like they're so clever and whatnot, like everyone just notices them.

Clearly there is a need to be “noticed” and recognised as valuable members of the school, a want for all to be “shown” as vital members of the school whānau, and move away from this competitive environment, where success is experienced through a single lens. Macfarlane et al. (2014) claim that the challenge remains for schools to include and adapt educational models that address both individual and collective aspirations of success for Māori.

As this conversation around competition continued, the group expressed resentment and annoyance.

Tiger: Cause even then [for netball] they only call out the top team scores, like the ones [assembly] coming on Thursdays. It's like they [other netball teams] didn't do anything they don't actually call out their scores or anything. They don't care they only care about...

Chachu: ...yeah like the A team and the B team

Tiger: Yeah, they only call out like the open A team

In response, Rerekohu then gives an example of how one of her teachers easily achieves inclusion during Form Time.

Rerekohu: Yeah, I think what's cool about Form is how Matua actually goes around and says “Oh yeah who does this sport?” and then he asks “How that sports went.” “How about that team?” and then he'll move on the next one.

Rerekohu's Form teacher tries to ensure that the sporting achievements at all levels are acknowledged.

Waimarie discusses her thoughts on the unfair weighting given to certain areas of school over other areas such as the Arts.

Waimarie: They are really good at doing it [celebrating success] in sports like they...we are really quite a sports orientated school. We are really academic as well, but I guess not so... not so much cultural. I guess...so not like drama, the Arts, um...

Anthea: Would you like to see more of that?

*Waimarie: Yeah... I think so, I think that it would be really good for the students who do it [Arts and Drama]. Like I don't do it myself, but...
... Yeah, I could imagine like if it's their passion...*

Anthea: Just seeing as the school, as you said is quite a... what did you say...?

Waimarie: Yeah...sports-orientated... well it seems that way anyway, cause they are always you know. They have sports reports every assembly instead of like Art reports, seeing how... I guess we don't really have weekend plays but you know...

Waimarie would like to see more equity across other areas of school. Waimarie proposes the idea of finding ways to tap into students' "passions".

Tiger emphasises that success can be measured in other ways.

Anthea: ... "Tiger you said you never get shown, unless you win a competition" what did you mean by that?

Tiger: Like unless you've done something where you've won a competition you don't get any recognition for the good things you do, unless there is a prize attached to it...that you got that [prize] and the school can show off this person from our school who won this and this. Instead of like someone doing something nice for

someone else, like that is NEVER talked about at school...it's all "they won this and they came first in this".

Tiger points out that success does not necessarily mean winning, it could be for "doing something nice for someone else". Webber's (2015) study, which surveyed high-achieving Māori students, in year 11–13, showed that connection, relationship, culture and roles within the community were more important than individualism.

This group suggested that having an open Mike (microphone) night might provide some light to shine on other areas of success and perhaps offset some of the emphasis placed mostly on sports and academic performance. They discussed, with excitement, the prospect of such an evening where students could come together and share their talents in poetry, oratory, music, roleplays and maybe some standup comedy. This open Mike night invokes similar pre-colonial times as described by Hokowhitu (2007). Hokowhitu talks of a time before colonists settled in New Zealand, a time when men would express themselves through stories, humour and colourful displays of expression. The rōpu became excited at the thought of such an evening.

The rangatahi wāhine then went on to defend why such an evening should not be connected to assessment or winning.

Tiger: Yeah you feel like so much pressure when they say compulsory and credits are attached to it, but you can't do what you want to do, because you have to just follow strict guidelines for it.

Anthea: And the competition aspect?

Rerekohu: Cause if it's a competition then it would be all judgemental...and they'll expect only certain people to do it and those people are like yeah – "I can take this out!"

Tiger: I feel like also if it was a competition a lot of people would not go to it? because they'd be like "oh I don't have a chance or anything". Like when you attach winning to something, like people just shy away from it... even if they really want to do it.

Competition is seen as a divisive mechanism and as a 'thing' that can cause dissonance and even avoidance. When discussing the implications of competition, this rōpu associate feelings of "judgement", "shying away", and "taking out the competition". This reflects Bandura's (1993) assertion that sometimes people shy away from difficult tasks that they perceive as threatening. Bandura insists that only those with high self-efficacy will feel confident to face those same threatening situations. This rōpu imply that attaching too much competition to something creates even more inequity.

Another concern around inequity is raised,

Rerekohu: The only time we actually do stuff like that [celebrating Māori culture] is when we have our Māori celebration evening and we just have a night for like, songs, recognising like the Māori achievements.

Tiger: Yeah but that is not in front of the whole school like...

Rerekohu: Yeah, it's just not important

Anthea: Would you like it in front of the whole school?

All: Yes

Tiger: And like yeah, we have a cultural evening at the end of the year, like the cultural awards and sporting awards. The sporting awards you've got to pay five dollars to get in and they like deck the whole hall out, and they get like a flash-as guest speaker. Whereas like the cultural awards, it's like literally - no one is there. It is like they don't care as much about it like even kapahaka performs there, but they don't promote that either...

Rerekohu: It is only recently that they have started to make the school sing... one song.

Tiger: Yeah, they have been like trying since like...

Rerekohu: ...since I was about year 10 or 11.

Anthea: So, would you like to promote that [The Cultural Awards] to the whole school

Tiger: Well they try... to do it and then they kind of like just... give up.

The wāhine in this rōpu raise concern that an effect of the school's over-emphasis on sporting and academic achievement is the lost value in their own ethnic culture. Webber (2011) reminds us that often a culture can be lost simply by what is surrounding it. It would seem that this is the case in the experience of this rōpu. On one hand the school has a notable Sports evening with a "flash-as speaker", and a hall all "decked out", and on the other, a lacklustre cultural awards evening. Having special guest speakers at the Māori evening could potentially encourage rangatahi to attend. Role models can play a part in shaping the perceptions of our youth (O'Gorman et al., 2016; Webber, 2012). The contrasting depiction of the two evenings reveals the stark realities that many rangatahi Māori see, feel and experience. Despite this, the rōpu show compassion to their school in recognizing that at least the school tries: "they try...and then they...just give up".

As each wahine spoke, comparing the sporting and academic evening as a lavish event, and the Māori awards evening as a non-event, where "hardly anyone turns up", their voices became louder, not in volume but in resonance and authority. This swift and prominent adjustment in audibility gave space for each to navigate their critical thinking along the same planes of defiance.

Rerekohu: ...and because the only time that anyone outside of Whānau Form hears about Te Reo is Māori, is language week where the teachers help the other teachers pronounce our names properly. Like we had one little saying in the newsletters notices and stuff like that.

Tiger: Don't you think that's kind of weird though that that's like the only week that like the teachers... crack down on how to say your guys names right?

Rerekohu: Yup!

Tiger: Like it shouldn't just take that week for them to be told that this is how you say your name. Like I just think that's kind of weird though that, that is what happens

Chachu: Weird to do that though eh?

All: Yeah.

- Lola: Like it's just really weird to me that you guys have to wait for this week...*
- Anthea: Do you mean the Māori week?*
- Rerekohuu: (nodding yes) Like that is the ONLY time of the WHOLE year*
- Lola: Even then it's not really... not that much of a celebration of Māori.*

As well as feeling a loss of cultural value, they shared their thoughts around the seemingly superficial approach to incorporating te reo Māori into the school environment. According to Webber (2011), language can exemplify a shared culture. Webber (2012) suggests that, for Māori, celebrating educational success could be achieved through promoting and acknowledging cultural identity. Webber (2011) cautions that often in schools with multiple cultural needs, culture is either highlighted, celebrated, or made invisible. Unfortunately, the latter seems to be the reality for this rōpu.

Language should be treated as a treasure that is passed down through the generations (Macfarlane, 2014), rather than a tokenistic gesture, as implied in the above research discussion. Perhaps Te Reo could be given as much care and attention as sports and academics, rather than an obligation that is only adhered to once a year.

In response to the school's approach to success, collectively this rōpu confront and resist being positioned as less important, by making their case for acknowledging all areas of success, such as cultural achievement, service to others, and creative expression. They were content to celebrate the achievements of others, they just thought there needed to be more balance of what is valued as success. Interestingly, there was no outward opposition towards competition, perse, more the culturally narrow view that student success is all about "winning" and striving to be the "top" student. Waimarie said "I like competition, not to be better than anyone else, I just want to be a better version of myself". This desire to still be competitive to better herself, where rivalry, judgement and conflict between people retreat into the periphery, is quite different to the competition she witnesses around her.

Ethnic cultural identity

I always wondered...

How was I Māori?

Together...

being able to talk

being open

we feel connected

we feel accepted here.

Cultural identity can often be judged, initially, at face value, such as hair style, or external features such as skin colour (Verkuyten, 2004). In addition to physical appearance the language or vocabulary that we use can also give clues to which ethnic group we belong to. During our research conversations, Aroha revealed that she had only recently discovered that she was of Māori descent. Consequently, the group showed quite a bit of interest in Aroha's ethnic identity, and Tiger probed further into Aroha's account of her journey.

Tiger: Did you always know you were Māori or did you find out like...like did you know growing up?

Aroha: I always wondered why I was listed Māori... listed Māori on the roll, like how was I Māori? I didn't know the history until like my great uncle dies and he had done all the research on my nan and that.

Tiger: Like how did it feel when you could understand and why you were down as...?

Aroha: Once I knew the history I was like ah okay now I get why I am enlisted as Māori and how it's come through my family history and its... weird to have a new identity as Māori.

Tiger: So, would you like consider doing kapahaka?

All: laughter...

Tiger: No... ha ha... cause I am like if you ever want to... feel like you can be more accepted as a Māori, like we can... our group even accepts non-Māori...

As Tiger questioned Aroha's uncertainty about being Māori, Tiger carefully and respectfully aligned herself alongside her peer, her new Māori sister. In this step Tiger offered Aroha the gift of belonging. By 'inviting' Aroha into the kapahaka group, Tiger showed her a visible and accessible path into her new identity. Tiger immediately cemented Aroha's position as Māori, by uttering the words "our group *'even'* accepts non-Māori". H. Barnes (2010) reminds us "that young people need particular forms of cultural connections to promote their health and identity" (p. 29), as illustrated in this conversation. Aroha's reservations about the validity of her ethnic identity, are revealed through the comparisons she makes with herself and that of her sisters and peers.

Aroha: Like I don't look Māori as such... my sisters do but I don't...

Rerekohu: Just like my family!

Aroha: My sisters are like tanned

All: (loud laughter...)

Rerekohu, herself a light skinned Māori, with bright green almost blue eyes, had also aligned herself alongside Aroha as a comparable light skinned Māori, who could relate. When Rerekohu started to make parallels to Aroha's story of differing skin tones within her own family, a sense of unity formed. Much like Tiger, Rerekohu showed tautoko for her Māori sister through connection and relationship. Aroha started laughing alongside her Māori peers, even sharing a joke about her sisters being "tanned". Throughout our discussion, it seemed that there was a shift in Aroha's search for belonging, which shifted from self-consciousness and uncertainty, to that of acceptance and happiness.

Anthea: So, do you feel the support by your Māori sisters here?

Aroha: Yeah... it' kind of nice to be recognised as Māori, but it's... it's...because there is no like thing... this is different to what you would see to the high academic high sporting non-Māori people getting together. Like it would be different topics whereas - I find this easier to talk... like with my peers and all that, rather than me

not being a sporty person or not doing like high excellence high academic type thing.... its... I feel accepted here.

All: Ooooo...(murmurs of support)

Tiger: We would not have even known you were Māori

Chachu: Yeah hard

All: We're glad that we know

Anthea: Isn't it great that you, that you've done this for Aroha that she has just said I feel more accepted

All: (Nods yes)

Anthea: How does it make you feel knowing that...?

All: Connected...

Aroha: There is not a lot of...there is either the very Māori girls or the ones that did not know their history...

Others: Yeah... hard...

Aroha: I was one of the ones who did not know their history, but I was enrolled as Māori. So, I'm like okay it kind of influenced who I hung out with cause like. Once I found out, I was like who do I hang out with? because like Māori girls who hung out together at my old town were seen as bullies almost. They would be tougher, hang out with Māori guys, and they would be seen as tough as well.

Chachu: Aye?

Aroha: Yeah...

Tiger: Not our boys... well we don't think they are tough

All: (Loud laughter)

The rōpu said that they felt more connected, a sisterhood had started to develop. Cultural identity for Māori goes beyond language and tikanga, it goes deeper. Borell (2005) suggests that Māori identity is highlighted through community and connection, and this can be seen in communities that are distanced from their tribal homelands. Likewise, this rōpu show that there are other ways to claim Māori identity. Even though Tiger had offered Kapahaka to Aroha, Māori identity can also be experienced in other ways. The wāhine in this rōpu illustrate their Māori identity through encouraging connection, extending manaakitanga and embracing whānaungatanga.

In our second focus group Aroha shared with the rōpu the personal effects of having participated in this research.

Aroha: I am actually going to kapahaka.

Chachu: Good stuff

All: (cheers and clapping)

Aroha: One of the boys Wiremu?

All: ah yeah?

Aroha: Every time he walks past me he is like you're doing kapahaka next year. I'm like yeah. I am trying to get one of my friends to join me

Tiger: You 're off to regionals!

Māori need whānaungatanga, that is, strong family like relationships of kinship (Berryman, 2008; Macfarlane et al., 2014). This group was starting to bond and this process of sharing and connecting may have played a significant role in this. As well as Aroha having strengthened her ethnic identity through connection and acceptance, each wahine shared what they had gained from participating in this research.

Rerekohu: I reckon being open with each other, because we don't' really hang out that much...

All: Mmm... yeah (all nodding yes)

Rerekohu: Being able to talk about these things together...

Lola: Yeah probably relinking friendships and making new friendships.

Aroha: ...and being invited to kapahaka type of thing, it's like being invited to make new friends...

From these responses it seems that this rōpu appreciated the opportunity to come together as a group of Māori wāhine where the beginnings of a 'sisterhood' developed. Webber (2008) shares a similar story to Aroha where others around her cannot "quite place her" due to her fair skin and slight facial features. Like Webber, who can show her identity through korero te reo Māori

and whakapapa, in the absence of obvious visible ethnic markers Aroha too can now claim her identity through kapahaka and connection.

The Ball

I had to work.

I did want to go....but then I changed my mind and said nah...

It was boring

It was so boring

As the research conversation changed focus, towards their school ball, Rerekohu sat there quietly. She had earlier told the rōpu that she had not attended the ball. This did not seem to immediately register, as the wāhine continued discussing the afterballs. Rerekohu's change in demeanour caught my attention and I began to wonder why she had not attended the ball. Out of curiosity I asked the group as a whole, so as to not focus in on any one individual, "so who here attended the ball?" Rerekohu, seemingly unconcerned, quickly and confidently replied.

Rerekohu: I had to work.

Anthea: Did you want to go to the ball?

Rerekohu: I did...but then I changed my mind and said nah...

Rerekohu: I saved [money]...

Others: ...A LOT! (laughter)

While initially Rerekohu had shown a brief desire to attend the school ball, after some consideration she made the firm decision not to attend. With all the promises that a school ball makes to youth culture, such as glamour, glitz and increasing social capital, often the reality of what a school ball can truly deliver leaves many disappointed. Rerekohu's utterance of not attending seemed to go unnoticed as perhaps inconsequential. However, after hearing that Rerekohu had to work on the same night that they all went to the ball, the language began to change.

Tiger: It was so boring!
All: Yeah
Chachu: It was soooo boring!
Anthea: Was it?
All: Yeah...yeah...yeah
Rerekohu: Yeah... yeah, cause like when I came back, when school came back they were like "far what did you do?" I just like went to work and went home and watched movies and fell asleep, had a fat feed. They were like "far that sounds like way more fun..."

In Tinson and Nuttall's (2011) United Kingdom study on school proms, the main reason for disappointment for students was lack of personalisation and ownership in what the ball serves. Rerekohu's willpower to choose "work" over going to the school ball, exemplifies what a savvy economic wahine she is. Perhaps if there was scope in the school ball to make it economically accessible and relevant to all students, there may have been more satisfaction. Tinson and Nuttall (2011) insist that youth are dynamic and creative, therefore such consumerist events, like the school ball should be determined by the students who attend. However, in their study, the ball committees were made up predominantly senior leaders and were seemingly hegemonic in nature.

This ball 'business' often captures and entices many rangatahi. Whether or not they can afford it does not seem to deter them, even when they are facing financial constraints. Many students and whānau spend hundreds, sometimes thousands of dollars on ball tickets, outfits, personal grooming and special ball transport, all in the hopes of achieving the 'perfect' ball night. Zlatunich (2009) a United States researcher, argues that it is difficult to resist the allure of the school prom [ball], due to magazines selling the ball as offering perfection. While in New Zealand prom magazines may not be as prevalent as they are in the United States, media such as facebook and retail outlets still offer this same discourse around perfection. The promise of perfect hair ups and the perfect dress is sold to our youth. This consumerist event leads many students and

whānau into a whirlwind of promises of perfection. Rerekohu challenged this and remained steadfast in not being seduced by promises of perfection. While, for some, the allure of perfection can be difficult to resist, L. Smith (2014) points out that youth culture in New Zealand is not necessarily prone to the same discourse around the ball as the youth in other countries. This reflects in the attitudes explored in this rōpu.

In the face of lines of power as described by Winslade (2009), in this case the power of the collective that all wāhine must attend the ball, Rerekohu resisted this line of power, and changed the trajectory to fit her own needs. As Rerekohu spoke, the shift in discourse from 'must go' to 'why should we go?' began to surface for the others as well. Rerekohu's response to this shift brought to light that they too could choose their flight path. Perhaps if Rerekohu had gone, the outcome may have been economic loss and conforming to powerful discourse.

Each wahine contributed to the ball conversation as they started to question the benefits of attending. This group began questioning the dominant discourse around the 'ball' and what it requires. At this stage the value of whānaungatanga became more obvious, and the collective command of critique began to arise. Hook, Waaka and Raumati (2007) define whānaungatanga as "being part of the greater whole and knowing that you are not alone" (p. 6). This concept of whānaungatanga was being played out: by moving into Rerekohu's space of resistance against the ball, this group were demonstrating that Rerekohu was not going to remain alone in that space.

As Rerekohu confidently shared her contrasting story of earning money being at home safe with her whānau, having her "fat feed", there was much laughter and tautoko for her choice and they began to make fun of their own choice to attend. Critchley (2006) compares humour to an anti-depressant, where we can openly make fun of our own ego, as a way to get through.

Together this group confidently challenge the colonising practice of the ball, where the dominant power of the economically privileged get to retain their

status, that is the richer prevail, and those with less financial resource diminish their financial resources even further. They began to call it out as a fake, a folly, a crook.

As the focus group discussed the ball and the negative impacts of attending, they also reflected on the other aspects of the evening, and what follows.

Lola: I got invited [to the After-ball] but I didn't go.

Aroha: I got invited but like I couldn't go cause I was sick

Chachu: They are so late though...

Anthea: Why do you think there was more than one?

Rerekohu: Cause of the different groups.

Chachu: Cause it's a sad thing

Chachu: My mother says they are "no good"

This group seems to demonstrate collective resilience as they attempt to question the importance of attending the After-ball. What seems to be an invite-only affair seemed to cause this group to resist attending, perhaps due to the exclusionary and "no good" environment that such after-balls espouse. L. Smith (2014) suggests that the negative perspective on after-parties is due to the binge drinking culture that New Zealand currently has. She suggests there is a lot of pressure for males in particular to exert their masculinity through this drinking culture. The wāhine in this group simply did not want to attend.

In the face of peer pressure where, upon receiving an invitation, students might be expected to attend, this group called on peer solidarity and together shared how they had rejected going. Ingram (2018) talks about the pressures of the ball, pressure to attend, pressure to get ready, pressure to lose weight, pressure to take a date, with much of this due the expectations of their peer group, or the need to conform to unity and judgement of their peers. Questioning and disrupting the divisive nature of what both the ball and the after-balls seemed to offer, appeared to be a comfortable position for this

group to eventually take up. In in doing so a seed of collective resistance had been planted.

My own Ball

Hearing this story made me reflect me on my own ball experience both bad and good. I remember spending money on that elusive ball ticket, I had organised a special dress custom made, and I paid an exorbitant amount of money to get my hair done at the hairdresser. Unlike Rerekohu, I spent all of my money and unlike the wāhine in this rōpu, I attended one of those after-balls. I walked into that ball wondering what I would gain. What I ended up with was a night in hospital, after having consumed too much alcohol. This was devastating both on a social level, and economically. I was scheduled to work the next day but my employer at the time caught wind of what happened and found a replacement. While I did not lose my job, I feel that I lost respect from my boss, and I was not contacted to work the extra hours, as I had been before this incident.

Although the allure of the ball had hijacked my desires for an evening of dazzle, I was invited to another ball the following fortnight. A young man, who was the friend of a friend had asked me to his school ball, as his girlfriend at the time was back home in Sweden. He had spoken with his parents and the family had wanted to give me another perspective on what a ball could be, and he had paid for everything from the ticket to the limo. As I walked into his home, his parents greeted me with warm smiles, and he promptly placed a corsage on my wrist. I did not even know what a corsage was. It was here that I learned that a corsage is a flower worn on the wrist to match the one pinned to your partners suit. I was then lead into another room where a small group of my peers were waiting for me. They smiled and made me feel instantly included.

Despite my trepidation and worry of judgement, this was soon a distant memory. Here I was among my peers, wearing a dress from my last ball, hair done up myself, with a compassionate peer who wanted to redefine my ball experience. I made it *'my'* ball, with the help of some peers. Perhaps if I had taken a more collective critical perspective, like the wāhine in this research

group, my first ball experience may have been more positive. In the absence of collectively critiquing, I was blinded by the allure of temptation to spend more and conform.

As I listened to stories of solidarity, compassion, connection and “kicking it” around the picnic table, where expressing manaakitanga came easy, I witnessed these same elements brought to life within our research space. In this space whānaungatanga and solidarity grew, and compassion remained. Collectively the wāhine in this rōpu were able to come together, laugh, listen, critically analyse, and celebrate their Māori culture. In doing so, they were able to collect collective resilience.

Chapter Five: Discussion

From there...

No one will notice me anyway

I don't really do school

I don't want to end up a statistic

Why bother trying, I don't have a chance

They only care about the top students

They don't even know my name

I feel so much pressure

I feel afraid to ask

I just can't see how I can do it

...to here

I have found friends that I can call family

They have my back

We can kick it, have a laugh and get away for a bit

I want to make my whānau proud

I want to show my siblings there is more to life

I am off to Uni

I want to travel the world

There is more to me, I am going to prove them wrong

I feel accepted here

Introduction

Upon meeting this rōpu for the first time, I was met with laughter and chitter chatter. Together this rōpu hummed with eagerness and excitement. At first, they seemed a little nervous at having this strange person in front of them, not enough to draw concern, but enough for me to notice. Nevertheless, I introduced myself through mihi and photos, and this nervousness soon dissipated. When Māori meet, kawa is usually practiced where connection with each other is made through identifying family connections, common relatives and where one grew up (Pacific Education Resources Trust, 1996).

As each rangatahi wahine sat there, they seemed to hang on to every one of my words. I shared with them who I was, where I was from and lastly, why I was there and to ask the ultimate question “would you like to be involved?” As I watched them look to each other as if to seek silent peer approval, I was reminded of why we were doing this research. How influential are peer relationships in the various domains of school engagement, and how might this resource be further strengthened and accessed?

As soon as Rerekohu proclaimed that she was absolutely going to be involved, the snowball effect began with the others also vocally keen to participate. Of course, in following a proper ethical process, I encouraged them, saying that before committing, going home and thinking it over with whānau would be a good idea. Involving whānau and community before commencing this research was crucial because “there is lingering suspicion within Māori communities about being the “objects” of research, particularly if there are no obvious tangible benefits for them or the community” (Kukutai & Webber, 2011, p. 8). In addition to offering reassurance, involving whānau also acknowledges the Māori view that individuality is relative rather than absolute (Bishop, 2009) that is, we do not stand in isolation, we are part of a bigger picture (Jones et al., 2011). Taking this into consideration, whānau involvement is both ethical and culturally appropriate.

As the rangatahi wāhine sat there eating their pizza, they discussed friends and family, their mock exams and what was currently happening at school. Witnessing such enthusiasm, and candid talk about their school life, made me once again think about the motivation behind this research. Why is it that some of our rangatahi can be so happy and seemingly connected, while others are struggling to just get their feet through the school gates?

So what has changed?

In Bishop and Berryman's (2006) study on cultural relationships in the classroom, rangatahi shared stories of marginalisation and discrimination. I was saddened to hear some of those same stories repeated in this research study. Over a decade later some issues seem to remain unchanged. While the rōpu in this study shared similar experiences of ethnic discrimination, these six wāhine shared other stories of cultural discrimination.

...culture is seen in terms of both its visible and invisible elements. The visible are the signs, images and iconography that are immediately recognisable as representing that culture and that theoretically create an appropriate context for learning. The invisible are the values, morals, modes of communication and decision making and problem-solving processes along with the world views and knowledge - producing processes that assists individuals and groups with meaning and sense-making. (Bishop et al. 2007, p. 31)

Cultural marginalisation

While the results in this study, much like Bishop and Berryman's (2006) study highlight the effects of ethnic discrimination towards Māori, this study's findings show a cultural bias that spreads wider than ethnicity. Inequity crosses over to other cultural areas such as economic, social and academic. While these wāhine shared experiences of having their culture dismissed and disrespected, they are equally vexed by marginalisation and injustice when it occurs in all domains - ethnic, economic and social. Lourie (2016) points out that socio-economic bias can at times be masked by ethnic cultural bias, for this rōpu discrimination is discrimination, all cultural needs sit side by side, neither hides the other.

Perhaps the impacts are more intensified when they are "all" experienced. For example, a student who is Māori and living in a low income household may not be able to afford the sporting fees and may have to work to help the family get food on the table and therefore school attendance may be low. EDK and MOE

(2019) write that while chronic absence is higher in low decile schools, many rangatahi in those low decile schools are enrolled as Māori. EDK suggest that “further analysis is needed to fully understand why this might be occurring” (p. 7). Perhaps marginalisation and discrimination are heightened, when rangatahi Māori do not have the same access to resilience resources such as financial, cultural or social support.

Inequity

This research study suggests that the magnitude of inequity might be seen more in how it affects student wellbeing and belonging. The barriers to student belonging are multifaceted (Sumsion & Wong, 2011). Given that discrimination can cross several cultural backgrounds, as illustrated in the school awards evenings, assemblies, learning environments and school events such as the ball or sports events, it may be difficult to escape. Such discrimination may not be isolated to the school in this research context, as Aroha shared similar stories regarding her previous high school. This indicates that this could be a systemic educational issue.

How we find our strength

We can tap into tangible resources

Mere Berryman, a Māori scholar who I have much respect for, has devoted much of her time to improving the positive educational outcomes of rangatahi. She, along with other notable Māori scholars such as Russell Bishop, have worked to bring change to our education system. Most notable is the development of school wide initiatives such as Ka Hikitia and Te Kotahitanga. I recently attended one of Berryman’s workshops, and I could feel and see the passion and dedication she has for our youth, not only Māori but all youth. Equally, I could sense her frustration at seeing some of these programmes halted, due to lack of resources and funding. Part of my motivation for doing this research has been the desire to look into other ‘*accessible*’ resources that can be developed to work ‘*alongside*’ other initiatives.

As the members in this rōpu shared their frustrations around seeing and experiencing inequity, I was also able to observe the ways in which they gave

support. The rangatahi wāhine in this rōpu were able to tap into the resource most tangibly available to them, that is each other. This research study offered me privileged access to knowledge, stories and ideas. I witnessed the strength of peer relationships in action.

I felt privileged and humbled to have met with this group of wāhine as part of this research study. I knew at the outset that this rōpu was something special. Together the rangatahi wāhine in this rōpu seemed to come alive and as their trust for one another, including me, grew, they brought to light some subjects that they had not previously spoken about. They thanked me for the opportunity to have had this safe space for honest conversation, and that they had not had this opportunity before. This had been a unique experience for this rōpu and each wahine had felt grateful for the opportunity to offer some knowledge, and to also receive. Understanding Māori knowledge is about enhancing our understandings and strengthening our knowledge base in ways which will help us and others (L.T. Smith, 2015). Thus, for many, the receiving is in the giving: ako in action.

We can help each other to find a better way

Lola wants her friends to see beyond drugs and Rerekohu wants her siblings to see beyond their present. A glimmer of hope is offered to others by showing a “better way” or trying to “encourage” others. Tiger and Lola picked up on this as they admitted to using collective peer pressure to get others and themselves to school. Meyer and Land (2005) discuss that in times of uncertainty, we can use others to help shift perspective. While Sanders et al. (2016) suggest that professional adults can help change narratives, the wāhine in this rōpu suggest that peers can help “encourage” a change in narratives. Tiger and Lola not only use this peer pressure (encouragement) to help others, they also call on it to help themselves. While Cavanagh (2011) suggests that the primary motivation for students to attend school, is to be with their friends, for the wāhine in this rōpu, motivations for attending school seem to be more complex.

Future possibilities

The wāhine in this rōpu shared other reasons for their school attendance such as wanting to attend University, wanting to travel, giving back to whānau, and showing their peers and whānau alternative possibilities. The rōpu expressed a distinctive dislike for drugs, and Lola was visibly annoyed at the extent to which drugs had afflicted her friends lives. She saw how it affected their ability to see beyond, to see that there “is more to life”. Lola touched on her motivation that she would not become a “statistic”, “pregnant” or “factory worker” and Rerekohu declared she had to “go straight through” to Year 13. Oyserman et al. (2007) identify that possible selves such as “school-focussed” and “feared off-track” possible selves can affect school engagement. A student’s “feared off-track possible selves are possible selves focused on avoiding outcomes like becoming pregnant, hooked on drugs, or involved in crime that can have a derailing effect on school and other future possibilities” (p. 481). These possible selves are a motivating factor for not only Lola and Rerekohu but for the other rangatahi wāhine in this rōpu. They showed this through nodding and body gestures of support.

Manaakitanga exists within and around us

Throughout their schooling the wāhine in this rōpu have seen and experienced some difficult challenges both in and out of school. Whānau and friends came up as a source of strength and each of these girls had at least one significant other family member that they respected and regarded as pivotal to their success. Some strengths and resources available to students are family, community and culture (Ungar, 2005; Webber, 2012). This admiration towards their loved ones, seemed to stem from the practice of manaakitanga that they experienced and observed.

The generational practice of manaakitanga was brought to life throughout this research study, both in stories and in actions. This cultural practice seems to be, for each of these rangatahi, deeply valued within their own lives. The qualities and values admired in others, appeared to be the very same as the ones they seek for themselves. Māori determine purpose and destiny in relation to others (Bishop, 2009). This rōpu look to the values that epitomise

the spirit of manaakitanga, which they then extend towards their school, teachers, community and peers, through compassion and aroha.

We kick it in unison around the gathering pou

Walking into the school I came across a quad or courtyard in the centre. On the large paved concrete area, to filter in the sun and keep out the rain, a shade sail sits high sheltering the picnic tables. The scattered picnic tables remind me of a pou on a marae beckoning the rangatahi to gather, laugh, enjoy kai, sing and play. As the bell chimes declaring that break time is finally here, I witness rangatahi gathering around their tables. Like beehives the picnic tables gather their bees to make sweet honey and become a buzzing hum of life.

The picnic table, made of wood, once served as a tree. I imagine this tree would have been home to birds and insects, a place to gather, nest and shelter. Part of that tree, now living in the picnic table, is again serving, providing nourishment and shelter. The birds and insects have returned to their tree in the shape of rangatahi. Singing and laughter can still be heard and a tree that once stood tall in the forest is now in the centre of the school grounds, where it serves as a gathering pou in the form of a picnic table. Surrounding this table, rangatahi take up its calling and meet and greet each other and individual and collective identity are strengthened and nurtured. These traditional practices of meeting and greeting at a pou are reclaimed by rangatahi Māori. H. Barnes (2010) acknowledges that connection and identity are varied and diverse. J. Hoskins (2007) reminds us that when we find a place to belong to, this is not necessarily confined to physicality, as belonging is as much a social concept as it is physical. This picnic table not only provides a visible physical pou to connect to, this pou also becomes a social space of belonging.

As each bell chimes again, this time alerting the students that break time has ended, slowly they meander back to their classrooms, perhaps eagerly awaiting the next bell calling.

Coming together in a relaxed environment where collective chitchat and banter effortlessly emerge, creates a space for connection. The relationship of the rōpu developed and strengthened, and a sisterhood ensued. These wāhine rangatahi shared with fondness the “special place” of their picnic table, a communal space where they can “kick it”. If times are hard in class or at home, the picnic table becomes a sanctuary and a time to let go, laugh and escape. Strickson-Pua (2013) states that laughter is important because it “causes us to forget for a moment the hardships of poverty, discrimination, and limitations, and welcomes hope” (p. 279). This is their gathering pou, a place welcoming them in. Each rangatahi gathers around, filling their mauri tank, in a place where they have a sense of belonging and connection. T. Hoskins and Jones (2017) encourage us not to take inanimate bodies for granted, and point out that these “objects can speak, act, and have effects independently of human thought and will” (p. 3). And so, the tree becomes a picnic table and speaks and acts into active interconnectedness in the lives of these wāhine rangatahi.

We know how to laugh

Humour is held in high regard within this rōpu. The wāhine spoke of its significance not only in their social networks, but also in their learning environment. From the outset, infectious laughter would weave in and out of our meetings, and I welcomed this. Within my immediate whānau, I am well known as the family tease and I like to say that this quality was passed on to me by my uncles and aunties. Humour has a whakapapa and this quality of teasing and loving banter can now be seen in my own children. Where others might see our humour as inappropriate, in my whānau we use humour as a way to express our aroha for one another. In Steven Adams’ recent (2018) autobiography, he discusses how laughter for him and his siblings, all of Pasifika and/or Māori descent, is fundamental to being an ‘Adams’. Adams describes how loud laughter at his Dad’s passing and then at his Dad’s funeral seemed to help him cope. He writes “I don’t know if it’s a brown thing, but if you’re not laughing at the hospital, no matter what the situation, you’re doing it wrong” (Adams & Chapman, 2018, p. 43).

I could not imagine our research conversations without laughter. Along with laughter came depth and candid honesty. Humour arose in many ways, for example, I brought along some sushi to one of our meetings. As I entered our meeting room, I managed to trip and spill some of it onto the carpet. At first, the wāhine rangatahi looked as if they were going to crack up laughing, but upon seeing the disappointment on my face, they quickly changed tack and said slowly with loving yet cool words, “Miss - You’re **all** good”. They then sat down, smiled and without a sound waited to say karakia. This lost food did not seem to bother the rōpu, and if it had I would never have known. As soon as we had eaten, and were ready to start recording our research korero, a quick joke was made about my sushi entrance. We all replied with laughter. This scenario, while admittedly a little embarrassing, demonstrates the clever discernment of these girls to know when to use humour, and when to restrain from humour.

We look to our elders

As Rerekohu shared her admiration for her koro, ‘Papa’, the man who inspires her, the saving force who kept his whānau together, I was able to reflect on my own whānau, and those who have inspired me. As I listened, I experienced a sense of longing and nostalgia for my own koro. While my koro was not my biological grandfather, he treated me like his own, I was and am his own. As my own father was absent from my childhood, my koro, a living example of manaakitanga, would often step in with a simple phone call to gently guide me into making better decisions. I pictured Rerekohu’s papa, like my koro, a loving chief, caring for and protecting whānau through thick and thin. Hokowhitu (2007) brings to light how the silencing of precolonial masculine identities has afflicted Māori, confining them into limited masculine positions, as aggressive and staunch or as humble. Hokowhitu describes historic photos and writings from the missionaries, which depict notions of Māori men as loving and expressive. These precolonial descriptions align with Rerekohu’s koro and my own koro, both caring and nurturing men, who embrace their whānau and express easily through love and caring.

Collective resilience

By collaborating through conversation and questioning dominant discourses, new sights of authority occur and together the rangatahi in this rōpu seem to be able to, as Winslade (2009) states, “bend the line of power as an act of resistance” (p. 388), which can lead to different outcomes. It appears that together these wāhine rangatahi can interrupt and give visibility to these lines, in doing so, they can adjust the trajectory as an act of resistance.

Wāhine at the window

This rōpu expressed with sadness their frustration at experiencing and seeing the silencing of Māori success. Webber (2015) maintains that Māori student success is “reliant” on a school’s ability to respond to the needs and “aspirations of Māori students, their whānau and wider community” (p. 153).

The rōpu told a story of two contrasting scenes of success. I can picture the wāhine rangatahi peering through the glass at the sports and academic prize giving. There they see a “decked out hall” with a “flash as speaker”. The wāhine at the window see only a few brown faces among the sea of white wash receiving their awards for success. In the ‘sold out’ hall they see every seat occupied, proud teachers and parents applauding the success of those who receive their accolades. The room is alive with excitement and anticipation. The only time they see their brown sisters and brothers is during the kapahaka welcoming. Much like L.T Smith’s (2015) description of being “a marginal consequence”, after their performance the kapahaka group are quickly whisked away into the back rooms, so that the awards evening can begin.

The wāhine at the window, then turn to walk across the foyer to peer into the glass of the Māori achievement event, a small hall that echoes with only whispers. Again, they see very few brown faces, and those who do turn up, look out across to a hall of with empty seats, wondering why “no one is there”.

This silencing of success was seen in other cultural areas such as the arts and service. As these absences were brought to light, the girls recognised that they were not alone, and this sense of whānaungatanga seemed to give strength to the rōpu. Berryman et al. (2018) maintain that stronger connections can be made in whānaungatanga family type relationships, where there are shared responsibilities. When stories of marginalisation and discrimination were told, these wāhine forged together and strengthened as a unit. This collective resilience seems fluid and lucid as it is used, called upon and given.

While in Berryman, et al. (2017) study:

...the strongest message from rangatahi was that to be successful as Māori within the school system, they had to be able to resist and overcome other people's low expectations and *negative stereotypes about them being Māori*. Many articulated this as an area where adults and non-Māori could and should be supporting them. (p. 489)

The strongest message from the rangatahi in this research rōpu, is that they too had to be able to resist being pigeon-holed. However, rather than relying on adult help, the rangatahi in this research study "*want*" to step in and help each other. They attempt this by showing compassion to their teachers and peers, either through encouragement and/or vicariously through their own actions. Whether it is through: "proving others [teachers] wrong", "showing others [peers and whānau] a better life" or "encouraging others [peers] using encouraging words", the wāhine in this rōpu feel the effort is worth the undertaking. There is capacity for building collective peer resilience.

Ko wai au?

This one sentence encapsulates the journey of ethnic identity that many rangatahi Māori take, especially during teenage years. Webber et al. (2013) study on racial ethnic identity among Year 9 students illustrates that an adolescent's sense of belonging and affinity to a collective can affect their ethnic racial Identity. They state that this sense of belonging to a collective is "positively influenced by "family", "friends", and "living in our own country" (p.

50). When adolescents are confident in their ethnic identity, they are able to take that with them into other social groups and use it as a source of resilience (Ungar, 2005; Webber, 2012). Webber (2012) calls this ability to confidently move in and through more than one cultural group “cultural flexibility”. This point was highlighted in our research conversations, as we witnessed Aroha’s growth in her racial ethnic identity. She shared with the rōpu, the confusion she had felt after receiving the knowledge that she was of Māori descent.

At the beginning of our focus group conversations Aroha shared that “she was trying to stick it through to year 13” because she did not really “do school”. However, her narrative began to change as she felt the immediate acceptance and celebration for being Māori. Consequently, as a result of the research conversations, I understand that Aroha is now keen to return in year 13 and has now been embraced collectively by the school’s kapahaka group. Enhancing ethnic cultural connection has many benefits (H. Barnes, 2010; O’Gorman et al., 2016; O’Shea et al., 2003; Webber, 2012; Woller, 2016). Aroha now has hopes to enter school as a Year 13. Armed with this new source of collective resilience, her strengthened racial ethnic identity and enhanced sense of belonging has helped build her “culturally flexibility” and collective resilience.

How this research has shaped my identity

Grieving the loss of Te Reo

According to Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2019), “Language is the key to the heart of culture” (p. viii). For me this is true, and in saying this I would argue that the essentialising of Māori, in terms of Te Reo, has been a massive barrier for me. I have been continually faced with Māori and non-Māori, trying to define for me how I as a Māori should speak, act and behave. For Māori, Māori centred essentialism can render many to silence (Borell, 2005; Kukutai & Webber, 2011). Kukutai and Webber (2011) argue that this practice of requiring Māori to meet particular standards of performing Māoriness “simply visits upon Māori another form of disempowerment” (p. 18).

As I listened to Chachu opening our research meetings with karakia, I was moved by the beauty and confidence she showed. I also witnessed Chachu compassionately offering the opening role to another peer, Rerekohu, who perhaps could only speak English. As Rerekohu recited our karakia beautifully in English, I could feel and see the collective aroha within the rōpu. As I watched the wāhine rangatahi accept each other as Māori, regardless of language ability, I began to reflect on my own experiences. Recently, after being asked, I opened up a School Board of Trustees meeting in English. As I opened my eyes after saying karakia, I saw eyes of disappointment and judgement, fleeting around the room. I heard sighs, then someone said, “It does not sound as nice in English”. I did not disagree, and while I understood that being the only Māori, I was expected to use Te Reo, I simply could not; H. Barnes (2010) points out that Te Reo is one of the more traditional markers of Māori, so perhaps the perception that I can speak it, stems from that belief.

Mike, who normally says the karakia was absent that evening and after I had expressed my frustration at my lack of Te Reo, Mike showed me compassion. As a pākehā man who has Māori sons, Mike has taken it upon himself to learn the language for his whānau. Shortly after our discussion, Mike then proposed to the board the idea of karakia being recited collectively. Karakia is now recited by the entire board. While Mike may not have judged me for saying karakia in English, I was invited to judge myself.

Reclaiming Te Reo

I acknowledge that my lost language is without doubt a result of colonisation. Gay and Kotzé (2017) share stories of marginalisation caused by colonisation, where speaking Te Reo was prohibited. This permeated through the schools, where speaking in Māori carried hefty punishment, into the home where “privacy and silencing of Te Reo was a given” (Gay & Kotzé, 2017, p. 114). This language grievance is not isolated to only Aotearoa, as indigenous cultures across the world have had their native knowledge, languages and identities suppressed due to colonisation (Woller, 2016). My recent desire to regain Te Reo, has been heightened, in part, due to the recent te reo Māori revival movement among my pākehā friends and colleagues, but for the most part it

has been as a result of this research. Due to Māori centred essentialism, I had initially resisted learning Te Reo. Now I will reclaim Te Reo as a birth right, and for many generations to come. I have enrolled to study Te Reo in an immersion class for 2019. The rangatahi in this research have shown me that 'we' can determine and shape a brighter future not only for ourselves, but also for those around us; even in the face of marginalisation and inequity.

Finding my Māori identity through connection

In the absence of Te Reo, I have found my connection and acceptance of being Māori in other ways. While H. Barnes (2010) identifies the more traditional signs of being Māori, she does recognise that the ethnic markers of Māori are multi-layered, especially in these post-colonial times. I have recently connected with another local Māori mother, Jo, and while her knowledge of te reo Māori and tikanga far surpasses my own, just like Chachu with Rerekohu, she does not consider my lack of either as a deficit. Rather, much like Tiger towards Aroha, this perhaps compels her to embrace me even more.

Much like the sisterhood that had occurred within this rōpu, Jo and I, are also part of a collective, our school whānau group. This is a small group of parents, caregivers, koro and kuia that I can call whānau. Our stories are not too dissimilar to the stories that this research rōpu shared, and it is not uncommon for us to sit around a table of kai, where we can share our experiences with each other, both negative and positive. Swann, Swann and Crocket (2017) share a similar story, where during counselling encounters "a sense of solidarity" was formed as "knowledge about and lived experience of the oppression of racism and colonisation" were shared (p. 32). In our whānau rōpu, while we have our own stories of injustice, we also have stories of laughter, success and hope. Webber (2012) maintains that ethnic identity can strengthen and enhance our resilience. Like the research rōpu, our school whānau rōpu solidifies my identity as a Māori and without this, I may not have had enough resolve to overcome some recent challenges of discrimination in my own life.

Resilience in the face of discrimination

Much like Hokowhitu's (2004) journey into becoming a researcher, I too have experienced judgments, where I have had to defend my position as an educated woman. Hokowhitu writes of being judged based on his appearance as "a physically large Māori man" (p. 261). I too have had to, as he describes "confront the socially inculcated doctrines associated with being Māori" (p. 261), in my case, that of being a Māori woman. Being the mother to five children many stereotypes surface, such as a "poor Māori lady" with her large family. One time I was asked at school by another adult, "what do you do other than being at home with all your babies?", I found myself defending my bona fide academic background that, yes, I had gone to a university and, yes, I was a teacher. A common assumption, upon hearing that I am a teacher is that I must be a Te Reo teacher. I am Māori and I am a teacher, but a Te Reo teacher, unfortunately not. Another time I was told how lucky I am to be Māori with all "those 'mouwry' scholarships out there". And yet, here I am a Māori without a "mouwry" scholarship, paying the full fees to do a total immersion course, to learn a language that was taken from me in the first place.

As I read Wiata and Crocket (2017) share a story of racism of one of the wāhine in their counselling groups, I am reminded of these many experiences of racism. The wahine in Wiata's counselling group spoke of being denied accommodation in a hotel, even though the hotel had advertised a vacancy. In Wiata and Crocket (2017), Wiata emphasises that these "painful experiences of exclusion" experienced by the wahine in her counselling group "were not stories readily entrusted to others" (p. 75). I too can relate to this, as sharing these experiences is not an easy task, as I fear judgement from my pākehā friends who might think it is "only" my perception. In response to this I ask, why is it that when I walk out of a store with my pākehā husband, carrying the same bags, that I am the one that is searched by security and not my husband? My husband has never been stopped, searched, followed or chased. I cannot say the same. These many experiences of racism are exhausting.

My strength to get through those times has been tested during my Masters research journey, especially as others, including myself, have queried my

academic legitimacy. However, with the collective strength from peers, my supervisors and whānau I am able to get through. Like the young wāhine in this study, I have found ways to persist those negative stereotypes. Just as the wāhine in this study want to go to University, I want a Masters in Education. Just as this research rōpu work hard to get through, I too work hard to get through.

Effects of a deficit narrative

Due to deficit theorising affecting how Māori are viewed (Bishop, 2003; Gray, 2012; L.T Smith, 2015; Macfarlane et al., 2014), as a child my mother would often, inadvertently, portray being Māori as a liability. She went so far as unenrolling me from te reo Māori at school. She also bought me a blond, blue eyed baby doll after I had requested the black one. Without realising it, she was communicating that being Māori was inconvenient, and perhaps on another level visibly unattractive. A. Barnes, Taiapa, Borell and McCreanor (2013) suggest that a sign of “internalised racism at the individual level” is when “Māori inferiority” is reinforced through “personal feelings of ‘shame’...” (p. 68). As a result of internalised racism, I craved fairer skin, a smaller nose and straight hair, all in the hopes of appearing less Māori. Yet, as an adult I now cling on to my dark skin, wide nose and frizzy hair as “acceptance” markers, that I am Māori. Nagel (1994) discusses how we negotiate the ethnic boundaries around us, describing that identity as changing and adaptable:

As the individual (or group) moves through daily life, ethnicity can change according to variations in the situations and audiences encountered. Ethnic identity, then, is the result of a dialectical process involving internal and external opinions and processes, as well as the individual's self-identification and outsiders' ethnic designations-i.e., what *you* think your ethnicity is, versus what *they* think your ethnicity is. (p. 154)

Feelings of inadequacy have turned upside down for me as I now seek this “outsiders” affirmation of my Māori identity, especially as I grapple with what I think my ethnicity is in the context of what “they” think my ethnicity is.

Transitioning into a researcher

As I first stepped onto this research journey, I felt awkward trying to walk into the research world, as a researcher. Historically, Māori have been the “researched” rather than the “researcher” (L.T. Smith, 2015, p. 50). Here, I found myself struggling to transition into becoming a researcher, as being the researched seemed like a more comfortable position to take up. A colonial history and presence of inequality and marginalisation shaped and manipulated my sense of possibilities of becoming a researcher. I struggled to let go of self-defeating narratives of inadequacy, particularly in the context of higher education, at the Masters level. As I struggled on my own Masters journey, I reflected that perhaps similar narratives of inadequacy plague other Māori. I thought back to the young Māori adults I saw in Garden Place sitting alone with their pans and signs. I thought back to the rangatahi in our AE class who had struggled to get their feet through those school gates. I wonder is there space to help rangatahi change those narratives, in order to live out other possibilities.

Much like the wāhine in this study, who questioned the validity of their selection, I too questioned myself “did I belong in this research world as researcher?” The wāhine in this research study reached the end of our research conversations with strengthened tino rangatiratanga and solidarity. Their narratives began to shift from inadequacy and uncertainty to then calling on other possibilities such as confidence and self-assurance. I too, have responded to a call to other possibilities, such as the value this research may have in making a scholarly contribution for our people. I may not have yet reached the point of having the term Māori scholar added to my think bank, but researcher, that identity is certainly strengthening, and feels almost comfortable. My confidence in my identity as a Māori researcher has grown, through the process of this Masters journey.

Opportunities for future research

The purpose of this research was to investigate peer relationships and how these might affect belonging, in the hopes of encouraging more involved and enthusiastic school engagement.

The rangatahi in this rōpu value their peer relationships and they freely access this resource as needed. In doing so they acquire collective resilience. This study shows that the critical aspects of strong peer relationships include having a space to gather, manaakitanga, equity, connection, humour and synergy. While only two of the six participants were involved in the same peer group, the wāhine in this rōpu over the period of this research have strengthened both collectively and individually. In this respect, there is a need for further research into how rangatahi might be able to create and design 'intentional' relational spaces within their schools, using the concepts identified in this study. This planned and intentional approach may help to enhance identity and sense of belonging with school.

While intentional mentoring programmes have been implemented in Aotearoa in an attempt to enhance "relational spaces" (see Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2015; O'Shea et al., 2013; Sanders et al., 2016). These programmes are all based around adult to student relationships or are one on one mentoring programmes that exist in higher education settings. While there is the STARS programme (Noonan et al, 2012), this is a United States model which is only *adapted* to fit our collective culture and only caters for year nine students in mid to low decile schools. There is need for more research into what a student led mentoring programme might look like, when it is created and designed by rangatahi Māori for 'all' rangatahi of Aotearoa.

Conclusion

The school which these wāhine attend has a motto where the literal written words of service and integrity are written into it. These values are highlighted in big bold letters, adorn the walls of the school and greet you as you enter the

front foyer. These students expect those same core values to be upheld, and embedded through the fabric of the school culture, not simply embroidered in rhetoric onto the fabric of their school jersey. Throughout our conversations these wāhine rangatahi shared, with much conviction, their desire and need to have ‘their’ values of inclusion, diversity and equity, seen within the school. As you walk into the foyer of their school, you will see pictures and images along the walls of past principals, all white elderly men. O’Gorman et al. (2016) talk of schools with murals painted on external walls depicting significantly cultural and ethnic role models, and schools filled with cultural pride. I imagine a school with sounds and sights of laughter, pride and collective identity. I ask, what is the result of an education system where success is measured along the lines of predetermined patterns of individualism? Can we build the capability to succeed by giving rangatahi space to authentically and creatively collaborate together without judgement? Finally, I ask what kind of education system do we want to shape and be shaped by?

In the wake of a changing and dynamic world, our education system needs to keep up with our future generations. Connection is, arguably one of the cornerstones to humanity, as highlighted in this rōpu. Perhaps if our rangatahi were given a space to freely express, where meaningful social relationships can be forged, the capacity to creatively critique and endure might grow, especially when adversity presents itself.

M. Durie (2013) talks of a hopeful future filled with “future makers”. More specifically he states that “future makers... are keen to identify the trends, grasp the tools available to them, and then create the type of future they prefer” (p. 13). The rangatahi in this rōpu, undeniably, forge ‘together’ as “future makers”. Rangatahi are well ahead in demonstrating that collectively they are a willing, open and rich resource, who live out and bring to life manaakitanga, laughter, compassion, and equity. The wāhine in this rōpu show that through socially responsible relationships with whānau, community and school, together they can build strength to create a meaningful and hopeful future.

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Appendix A - Email Invite

Principal

XXXXX XX School

Tēnā Koe,

I am writing to invite (*name of school*) to participate in a Masters of Education (MEd) research project. I am a registered school teacher, having taught both high school and primary school students and I am currently a trustee on the XXX High School Board of Trustees. My research is part of a Masters thesis at The University of Waikato.

My name is Anthea Knowles and I am originally from Turanganui a kiwa, Gisborne and I now reside in Cambridge.

This study will investigate the role of peer relationships among rangatahi Māori and how these relationships positively influence various domains of engagement at school, such as participation, belonging, and orientation to learning.

Attached is some information about the research and what is involved. Please contact me or my university supervisors. I would like to come in and discuss this research with you.

Anthea Knowles

XX XXXXX Street

Cambridge

02218XXXXX

XXX@gmail.com

Appendix B - School Information Sheet

Title: Mates at the school gate: Investigating peer relationships among rangatahi Māori.

Invitation: Please take time to read this information. If you would like more information please contact me or (*Liaison person name*)

Research Aim:

We will investigate what role peer relationships play in school engagement. We want to learn from you what encourages you to come to school and what encourages you to feel a sense of belonging. It is hoped that we may be able to use some of those strategies to help others also engage in school.

- In what ways can peer relationships influence a student's sense of belonging?
- When students encounter challenges both inside and outside of the immediate school setting, in what ways do peer relationships play a role in buffering or facing those challenges?
- To what extent do school friendships affect orientation to learning and school life?
- To what extent do peers outside of a student's friendship circle affect orientation to learning and school life? Such as peer leaders, class peers, older and younger peer groups, or school constructed groups (school clubs, plays, sports etc...)
- In what ways might peer relationships assist students in transitioning more easily through school, especially from year 10 through to year 12.

Research Involvement:

The research will involve up to six students, who will participate in a focus group interview. They will attend one focus group and will repeat the process three weeks later, in a second focus group meeting, as outlined below.

First focus group:

1. I will ask students questions and from here I will ask students to also bounce questions back to each other.

This has been approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 28 July, 2018.

Approval number: FEDU059/18

2. After this I will email the students a bridging document. A bridging document summarises the groups ideas and highlights any questions or ideas that may have emerged from the first focus group discussion.

Second Focus group:

1. At our second and final focus group discussion we will discuss this bridging document and extend student ideas.
2. I will ask students questions which will have emerged from our first focus group discussion.

I will record and transcribe the focus group discussions. Only my supervisors and me will have access to this. The only people present in these focus groups will be the students and me.

Student selection

I ask your school to choose up to six students who identify as Māori, both on the school roll and personally. I will ask the school to select students who are seen as engaged in school as defined by the OECD (that is students who participate in school activities and have at least 90% attendance).

Student and whānau consultation

I will give information about the research which may be shared with whānau. Students will also be given information on consent and a consent for. Whānau will be involved by way of information and opportunities to discuss this project, via meetings, email or phone, will be provided. Throughout the research process, students will be reminded that participation in this research is voluntary and they are welcome to withdraw up until one week after they receive the bridging document.

I will ask the students to protect and respect the privacy of all focus group participants. Before the focus groups commence, guidelines around respect and manākitanga will be set by the students. I will guide this process so that expectations and responsibilities are clearly defined and understood.

While every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality and privacy, this cannot be guaranteed.

Anthea Knowles
02218XXXXX
XXX@gmail.com

Supervisor
Elmarie Kotzé

Supervisor
Kathie Crocket

Appendix C - Student Information Sheet

Title:

Mates at the school gate: Investigating peer relationships among rangatahi Māori.

Invitation:

Please take time to read this information to decide if you wish to take part. You are welcome to discuss this with your whānau. If you would like more information please contact me or (*Liaison person name*)

What is this all about...?

The school has been asked to select students who: identify as Māori, actively participate in school activities, are engaged in school and regularly attend school.

We will investigate what role peer relationships play in school engagement. We want to learn from you what encourages you to come to school and what encourages you to feel a sense of belonging. It is hoped that we may be able to use some of those strategies to help others also engage in school.

Research Information:

- A small group of students will take part in a focus group interview (we come together as a group, and you may answer some questions and share some of your experiences)
- You have the right to refuse to answer any questions
- Joining this group is voluntary and you are free to refuse to take part or withdraw
- The focus group will be audio recorded and transcribed for my research project
- We will meet at lunchtime so that it does not interfere with your classes
- We will meet twice, with a three week break between each meeting
- Each group meeting should take 50 minutes.

This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 28 July, 2018. Approval number: FEDU059/18

- Because it will be at lunch time I will provide pizza for us to eat during each meeting
- After the first focus group meeting, I will send the group an email to summarise and clarify any ideas or questions that may have come about. These will be discussed further in the second focus group meeting.
- You can review and amend your individual contributions, from the first focus group, in the bridging document at the second focus group meeting.
- You can contact me, (*liaison person*), or my supervisors if you wish to withdraw.
- Pseudonyms (false names), will be used to protect yours and the school's privacy and all data will be kept in a locked container. Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality, this cannot be fully guaranteed.

The research findings:

An electronic copy of this thesis will become widely available, in the university's digital repository: Research Commons.

Contact for further information:

| Researcher | Supervisor | Supervisor |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|
| Anthea Knowles: 02218XXXXX XXX@gmail.com | Kathie Crocket | Elmarie Kotzé |

Appendix D - Student Consent Form

Title:

Mates at the school gate: Investigating peer relationships among rangatahi.

Consent to take part in this research:

I _____ (*Name*)

- o I understand what participating in this research involves
- o I have had the opportunity to ask questions and had them answered
- o I agree to the focus group interview being audi-recorded
- o As a focus group member, I agree to treat with respect what other participants say and to protect their privacy both inside and outside the group.
- o I understand that data gathered in this study may be stored anonymously and securely for five years.
- o I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, up until the end of the second focus group meeting.
- o I understand that I am free to contact Anthea or (*name of liaison person*) or Anthea's university supervisors, if I have any questions.
- o I agree to take part in this study

Student signature:

Date:

o *I have given verbal confirmation that I understand the information for consent, after discussion with Anthea.*

Student signature:

Date:

Appendix E - Whānau Information Sheet

Tēnā Koutou kātoa

My name is Anthea Knowles, I affiliate to Ngāti Porou, Rongowhākata Te Whānau ā Apanui and Te Arawa. I grew up in Tūranganui a Kiwa, Gisborne and I now reside in Cambridge. I am a registered primary school teacher, having taught both high school and primary school students. I am currently completing a Masters in Education at The University of Waikato. I will be completing research as part of a Masters thesis, where I hope to hear and understand some of the experiences of students who are thriving at school. I plan to investigate what role peer relationships play in school engagement.

I have asked the school to invite a small group of students who identify as Māori, both on the school roll and personally, to participate in this research project. The school has selected students who have regular attendance and are seen as engaged in school. I will meet with a group of about 6 students, during lunchtime.

I want to learn from students what encourages their sense of belonging at school. It is hoped that schools might be able to foster and develop some of those strategies, to help other students also engage in school.

Before deciding whether or not to participate, please feel free to either contact me or my university supervisors. I am happy to discuss this project with you and your whānau.

Anthea Knowles

XXX@gmail.com

02218XXXXX

(Photo of me and my whānau)

What is involved

- Up to six students are asked to participate in a focus group interview (students come together as a group, and answer some questions and share some of their experiences).
- Our focus group will meet twice, with a three week break between each meeting.
- Each focus group meeting will take 50 minutes and to minimise lost learning time, will take place during lunchtime (I will provide pizza for lunch).
- The focus groups will be audio recorded. I will listen to the recording but no one else will hear it.
- The only people present in these focus groups will be the students and me

Confidentiality

Pseudonyms (false names) will be used to protect the privacy of the school and all students involved in this research. All identifiable information will be kept private in a password locked computer with a locked password. School and student identities will be protected and every effort will be made to ensure the privacy of participants.

Students rights

Students may withdraw their contribution to the study.

Information

An electronic copy of this thesis will be available, in the university's digital repository: Research Commons.

If you would like to discuss this or have any questions please contact me.

Anthea Knowles

02218XXXXX

XXX@gmail.com

Appendix F - Questions:

1. Tell us a bit about your experiences with school when you first came to high school in year 9 and 10? What about last year and this year - how does that compare to what you are experiencing now?
2. What do your friends think and/or say about school? What do you think about what they say about school? What about some other students in your classes? What do you think about what they say about school?
3. Do you and your friends help each other out sometimes in school?
 - a) If so, what are some ways you all do this? Do you enjoy supporting each other? Why?
 - b) If not, why do think that is? Would you like you and your friends to help each other out? Why?
4. If you could describe a special place at school for “you” - where would that be? Why is it special to you? Do you get many opportunities to go there?
5. Thinking about different classes, do you think about where you sit or do you just sit wherever? Is it the same for every class? Why or why not?
6. What activities are you involved with at school? Tell me a bit about those? What is it about (*name of specific activities*) that you enjoy?

Appendix G - The Bridging Document

This is a summary of our discussion from our first meeting. This document will help us clarify any thoughts, ideas or questions that were discussed in our group. This also provides an opportunity to correct and/or add to our group contributions. As this document is written from my perspective, I would like to get your take as well.

Kia ora koutou,

Thank you all for meeting in our first focus group. As promised, I have for you all a summary of our discussion from our first meeting.

1. Labels and Perceptions

I noticed that it seems to be normal for students to label students, which often comes about, through rumours, peer group, relationship breakdowns, personal character, behaviour or one off incidents. The label that most stood out to me was “snobby”. When I questioned what it meant to be snobby, the group described it as someone who is shy or quiet. It was also interesting how this label has not only the potential to affect how students feel about themselves, but how students are perceived by other students, including how their friendship groups are perceived, socially.

XX used the word snobby to describe her younger self, and XX and XX had been described as “snobby” by their peers, with XX having shared her experiences of not being invited to parties, because of how others perceived her and her “quiet” group. Sometimes those unwarranted labels, stay with you throughout highschool. When XX was asked if she was shy, she quickly claimed that she was not shy. XX also comfortably called herself a big mouth, I am guessing this is opposite to how someone who is snobby acts. Is it better to be labelled as “loud” or a “big mouth” rather than snobby?

Direct quotes:

- “People still say you are a snob if you’re shy. Like if you are not comfortable with talking to people, you immediately get labelled something” XX
- “ I was legit snobby back then...” XX. When I asked what it meant to be snobby XX answered...”I was always the one at the back of the class quiet...”
- “I was in the quiet group I was never...I never actually got invited” (referring to be invited to parties) XX
- “Anyone – like you do something and you get labelled for it forever...”XX
- “you cry you get called a sook...” XX
- “I started losing all the friends that I grew up with...” XX. This was following rumours and a relationship break up with a boy.
- “ because the Māori girls at XX College were seen as bullies almost. They would be tougher, hang out with Māori guys, and they would be seen as tough” XX This is when XX was sharing her experiences from a previous school, where XX was contemplating associating with different friendship groups.

Rejecting the labels and perceptions

Although the group identify that labelling was a part of the student culture, many of the group also choose to reject some of these labels, especially if the labels are given by teachers, the school or society. Why do you think teachers judge you based on your friendship groups? I ask this because although you may seem similar to your peers, some of you choose different behaviours. Do you think your teachers box you or pigeon hole you?

Direct quotes:

- “I proved you wrong boy...Look at me now” XX
- “ I am more than a statistic...you know I can go and prove people wrong”. XX
- “ like a group of my friends they are like... you know drugs, and I don’t really want to do that. I believe there is more to life than just you know drugs”.XX

- “probably not... probably just the now...maybe... or they might think – I want to travel.... but can’t” XX (this was where XX shared her dreams of traveling the world, and when I asked her “ Do you think your friends will see that in their future?” XX thought they might want to, but maybe they were not be able to see that as a possibility.)
- “you just grow up and kind of grow more mature...and learn to put up with peoples shit...you ...know” XX

2. Caring culture

Among this group, there is much care towards each other, and students in this group can see each other at a deeper level. This was evident throughout our focus group meeting as well as the 1-1 interview with XX.

Care for peers as more than students:

When talking about peers, this group can see beyond what is happening on the surface. This group value their peers as part of a bigger picture, part of a family - they see each other as daughters, sons, cousins, siblings and so on. Whether it is lateness, absence, drugs, truancy, or academic non-achievement, what is interesting is that the students in this group have the ability to see beyond the behaviour, unlike many teachers.

- “They just get mad at people and don’t like... go beyond or deeper like why they’re acting like they’re acting” XX (referring to teachers)
- “like for example if someone is like late or they might have just...they’ve slept in... that person could have been at home trying to get their siblings ready cause their parents aren’t home and stuff like that...teachers just automatically think you should have gone to bed earlier cause you’re yawning and stuff like that” XX
- “I don’t know... they are just vulnerable, that’s all they see their life to be”. XX. (referring to the role of drugs in her friends lives and her choice to abstain).
- “like my friends are pretty good at helping me through with stuff...” XX
- “Like they’d check up on me when I wasn’t at school and they’d ask where I was” XX
- “As students, I guess we have the same vocabulary, same understanding, um we’ve learnt to learn things in a similar way” XX

- “So she is just like talking to a dead audience, cause nobody is really listening” XX (referring to teachers who teach to the class, rather than with)

Care for correct pronunciation of names

The students both in the focus group and in the 1-1 meeting touched on the importance of pronouncing students names and acknowledging culture. When referring to the school and Te wiki o te reo Māori, the students mentioned the word weird to describe how they felt about this week. It is also clear that this group believe that “attempting” to correctly pronounce names shows respect, as it is an extension of that person’s culture.

- “don’t you think that it’s kind of weird...” XX (referring to teachers cracking down on pronunciation for only 1 week of the year)
- “Weird to do that aye” XX
- “like it is weird to me... that you guys have to wait for this week” XX
- “You know what I get mad about?...is their pronunciation” XX
- “Cause like they’ll say it wrong and then I’ll correct them and they’ll be like you know I only say it to annoy you...and I’m like nah you don’t do that” XX. (referring to some other peers)
- “as long as they try but like if you’re purposely trying to do that to our language you know, it’s just like... I just think it’s kind of rude...”XX
- “I guess if people don’t pronounce their name right then they feel like a part of them is lost... but like they’re not as worthy as somebody else that has a name that is easy to pronounce...”XX
- “Other students deliberately pronounce peoples... other names just to like get a reaction of them” XX
- “it hurts me to see them get hurt”. XX (referring to her peers from other countries such as Nepal, having to hear their names being purposely mispronounced)
 - Why do you think your peers want a reaction? Do they try to be humourous or do they want to hurt?

Care for a more inclusive culture

While they agreed that sports was important, it was expressed that other areas of success should also be valued. Sports tends to overshadow other areas such as Kapahaka or the Arts. XX thought that if other areas of success were acknowledged then those students might feel their own personal success. The group felt that students might feel more valued if they could express themselves and their abilities in a non competitive environment, without fear of judgement. It seems that to be noticed at school and valued, that students have to be super sports stars and/or super clever.

- “Sometimes it feels like they only care about sports...” XX
- “In sports...yeah, you’re more noticed rather than from a smaller town like XX...” XX
- “...yeah, it’s just not important” XX (in response to how kapahaka and Māori culture are celebrated when compared to the Sports Awards evening)
- “ because some people are like way up there because of their sporting achievements and like they’re so clever and whatnot, Yeah like everyone just notices them” XX.
- “yeah you never get shown unless you win a competition” XX
- “you’re the top” XX
- “freedom...freedom of speech” XX (referring to her justification for having an open Mike night)
- “and it’s not compulsory...it’s not all for credits: XX
- “If it’s a competition then its all judgemental” XX
- “...like if it is their passion, like it being portrayed”XX (XX thought that students would feel more successful if their passions were shown rather than only sports)
- “I thrive on a challenge...” (When I asked XX if she was a team competitor as opposed to an individual competitor).
- She answered that when she competes it is not to be better than anyone else, it was only for herself, XX went further to say that she wanted “to be a better version of myself”.

3. Having people to inspire to

The group mentioned the affect rolemodels can have on success, by providing elements such as stability, wisdom and encouragement. It became clear that some of the girls Mums in this group were important figures in their lives. Not only did this group see others being role models, but some members saw themselves as being role models to others.

- “you’re mum is right about everything, it all gets better...so” XX (referring to what she would say to herself in year 9)
- XX also shared within our group that her mum really wants her to get to the end of her schooling
- “she has worked really hard... you know she made some decisions like that she gave up”XX (referring to the influence fo her Mum)
- “it’s like showing the younger siblings, there is more to life than just beyond those four walls” XX (referring to her influence on her brothers and sisters) XX asked if that was like being a role model and XX respnded yes.
- “I think sometimes for some of them the push they get from teachers, they don’t see as like support they see it as nagging” XX (referring to teachers who try to encourage, by pushing students but perhaps it is the manner in which they approach the students that makes this attempt ineffective)

Final thought

Meeting with this group of incredible Waahine Maaori, has had an effect on me that I did not foresee. In particular the conversation that happened towards the end of our focus group. I found it interesting that while XX was sharing with us a little bit about her new identity as a Māori, as a group you all embraced her. XX and XX both hand signalled tautoko for her when she identified her Iwi, and XX encouraged her to join kapahaka as a way of connecting. After this XX expressed how accepted she felt within this group - “I feel accepted here...”. As a group you all acknowledged that connection. I realised at the moment, how vital connection is in terms of human need. This simple scenario of honest

sharing and connection, has the potential to positively affect our sense of belonging and possibly resilience. (Do you mind if I share a little bit about how this relates to my own journey in my Masters?)

Questions emerging from our discussions:

- How could we replicate this feeling of acceptance and connection for other students? Students who are not feeling that sense of acceptance or belonging. Why do you think this is important?
- As I was transcribing I noticed a lot of laughter among this group, including coming from XXX and myself, How important is this humour do you think? What do you think it does?
- I know some of you talked about the importance of rolemodels, What other people inspire us in our lives, school, home, media, society, history? What role do these people have in our own journeys?
 - XXX talked about school being the best times of your life...is this something you've been told?
 - Some of you mentioned that teachers are not always the best person for this role. Do you think that you and some of your peers might be able to step into this role, like what XX is doing for her siblings? Older or same age – perhaps something similar to what we are doing now...because you have actually inspired me...(relate to scenario above)
- So if your friends are doing different things from you, like drugs or wagging - do you just accept those differences, do you say see ya later, I am off to find a different group, or are you able to help encourage them to make better choices And is this easier to do in year 12 or 13, as opposed to year 9? How can we help year 9's and 10's to be more like that in year 12 or 13?
- Now moving forward with what we have dicussed, what have you enjoyed about this experience, I have shared what great knowledge I have learned from you, what have some of us gained from this?

What kind of things make it easier to get through?

Appendix H - Poster

Mates At The School Gates

Investigating Peer Relationships Among Rangatahi Māori

Opportunities

Listening to the voices whispering through the alarm bells of absenteeism

- We aim to seek knowledge from our 'engaged' rangatahi Māori, on how their peer relationships may influence various domains of engagement at school, such as participation and a sense of belonging. We hope to learn from these students, to help revitalise school experiences and attendance.

Regaining that sense of whānau

- The education rollercoaster, for many, can be a jarring and lonely ride. We want to replicate the sense of whānau often felt in primary schools (1), into our Secondary Schools, potentially through enhancing peer relationships.

Creating buffers to face the onslaught

- Challenges can often be paralyzing and seem beyond our individual capacity, especially when faced alone (2). Together our youth may be able to create a collective buffer to tackle these face on.
- Supportive peer groups can often increase our ability to show resilience (3).

Findings

Equality
Same Vocab
Same understanding
We learn in a similar way
We're on the same level
We're Even Stevens

Care
They'd check up on me
They're just vulnerable
Show them a better way
Help me through stuff
It hurts me to see them get hurt

Talktime
Everyone sees each other
That's our Spot to talk
Coming together
Where we like to kick it
Everyone Greet each other

Humour
Easier to talk about learning
laughter fun
Takes you away for a bit
Easier to learn

Collective Resistance

The scene

The landscape of Education

- While some recent research suggests that the disparity between Māori and Non-Māori achievement is lessening (4), the Ministry of Education's latest statistics on attendance (5) seems to paint an extra scene into the landscape of education; there is a missing piece in the bigger school picture.

Impact on student engagement is multifaceted

- Much research and literature around student engagement acknowledges that the impacts are multifaceted, with no one factor sitting alone (6).

Sitting side by side

- Perhaps there is a space for unique NZ systems, based on strengthening peer relationships, to sit alongside the recent MOE initiatives being implemented into schools (7).

Methodology and Participants

- Group of six 'successful' Yr 12-13 Māori students, identified by the school as having regular attendance and seen as engaged in school activities.
- Participation in focus groups and 1-1 interviews.
- As the researcher I consider myself to work within the Interpretive paradigm (8) while weaving in threads of Kaupapa Māori (9) into the fabric.
- Student perspective and voice is regarded as central to our findings.

Research Questions

- In what ways can peer relationships influence a student's sense of belonging?
- When students encounter challenges both inside and outside of the immediate school setting, in what ways do peer relationships play a role in buffering or facing those challenges?
- To what extent do school friendships affect orientation to learning and school life?
- In what ways might peer relationships assist students in transitioning more easily through school, especially from year 10 through to year 12.

Anthea Knowles

(1) Andrews and Bishop (2012)
(2) Meyer and Land (2005)
(3) Unger (2005)
(4) Berryman, Eley and Copeland (2017)

(5) SAEIA, MOE (2018)
(6) Bishop (2009)
(7) Berryman and Eley (2016)
(8) Willis (2007)
(9) Bishop (2006)