Secondary school students' experiences of restorative practices

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Education

at

The University of Waikato

by

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2025

THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Abstract

Restorative practices in education have gained prominence as an alternative to traditional punitive disciplinary measures. This alternative aims to foster accountability, healing and relationships within the school community. Despite the increasing implementation, there is little attention or research given to voices and experiences of those most affected – the students themselves.

This study investigates the lived experiences of students and how students in Aotearoa New Zealand perceive and experience restorative practices. Using narrative inquiry and qualitative research methods, the study generates accounts of nine student's experiences of restorative practices. These accounts include the meanings they made of interactions with teachers, their peers and other aspects of the restorative processes that informed their experiences.

Drawing on individual semi-structured interviews with students, this research employed thematic analysis to identify five key themes. Particular discourses were identified that inform power relations in restorative practices, personal agency, communication and supportive relationships. The findings highlight participants' preferences for trust-based connections with staff and peers, and contexts that foster open and honest communication that address fear and exclude punitive approaches and consequences. The complexity of discursive power relations and how they are exercised in relationships between students and

teaching staff show that understanding discursive power and how to address its effects is important for schools to consider when engaging in restorative practices.

By focusing on the perspectives of students, this study contributes to an evolving social justice education discourse. Social justice in education fosters student agency, relational approaches to school disciplinary policies, and promotes educational, justice-based school communities. A social justice approach offers valuable insights for educators and policymakers seeking to enhance the effectiveness of restorative approaches within school communities. Working towards a more meaningful, equitable and impactful process for conflict resolution.

Acknowledgements

I want to offer a special thank you to my participants. Thank you for the time you took to talk to me, share your stories with me and talking about your hopes and dreams for your futures. I appreciate you entrusting me with your experiences, thoughts and your concerns. I hope I have given your stories a space to be heard, and that I have done them justice. I could not have completed this research without you.

To my lead supervisor, Dr. Wendy Talbot. Your time, energy and feedback are impressive. Thank you for always delivering feedback in a way that encourages me to do and be better. Your dedication to the students you supervise shows your commitment to care and support. As a student in your class, I was continuously inspired by your ability to listen, understand and develop the re-authoring of the story. I am beyond thankful for your time over the last year. Without you, this thesis would have never been finished.

To my second supervisor, Dr Paul Flanagan. You are an inspiration and a wealth of knowledge. Thank you for taking time out of your busy year to guide me on this journey. Thank you for your encouragement and patience towards this research.

To my mum, thank you sincerely. Mum, you have read chapters, you have discussed ideas and concepts with me, and you have been a sounding board when I

thought I was stuck. Your educational knowledge, years of teaching and understanding of restorative practices in New Zealand has pushed me to complete this research.

Thank you to the rest of my family. My dad, Tom, Jess, Christie and the kids. Thank you for believing I could complete this research, hand this thesis in and publish it. Christie, I won't make you read this, as I haven't read yours ☺. But I hope you all know I am incredibly thankful to you all for being present throughout this journey and for being a motivational force when I was in doubt.

To my loving and supportive partner, Dan. You inspire me to be a better version of myself daily. Thank you for always telling me how proud you are and continuing to support me even when I ignore your messages while I study. When I was doubting myself, or expressing my desire to give up, you were there to push me along and giving words of encouragement. Thank you for being my rock and know that I am so grateful for you and your love.

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Glossary of Māori terms

- Aroha – Love or affection
- Hoha – Annoying or nuisance
- Hui – Meeting or to meet and discuss
- Ka Hikitia – To be lifted up
- Karakia – Prayer or incantation
- Kaitiaki - Guardian
- Kete – Baskets or package
- Kotahitanga - Unity
- Mana – Individual strength, power, prestige, status or integrity
- Mana-enhancing – To enhance someone's power, strength or prestige
- Manaakitanga – To care or bless
- Matua – Male adult or teacher figure
- Matauranga – Knowledge, education, wisdom or informative
- Pākehā - European person
- Pōwhiri - Welcoming ceremony
- Pūmanawatanga - Talent, ability or intuitive
- Rangatahi – Youth or student
- Rangatiratanga – Sovereignty, ownership or freedom
- Tamariki - Children
- Te Tiriti ō Waitangi – The Treaty of Waitangi (Māori version)
- Te Whāriki - The blanket, to weave learning.
- Te Pakiaka Tangata – The human root, to weave the roots of education and skills
- Tikanga – Method, formality, meaning or accuracy
- Waiata – Song or to sing
- Wānanga - Seminar, course or institute
- Whānau - Family
- Whānaungatanga - Relationships and connection with family and friends
- Whakawhānaungatanga - To create relationships

All explanations are gifted from a kaitiaki colleague.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Throughout the last five years, I have found myself discussing restorative processes in education with a range of people and noticed a growing interest in this topic. As well as communicating with teaching staff and members of senior leadership teams, I also discussed this with my friends and family. Yet I was always left with a question – is it working for the students? I decided at this point that I wanted to continue my studies, learn more about supporting students and gaining a richer understanding of restorative practices in New Zealand. As I broadened my knowledge on narrative inquiry, educational research and post-structuralist theory I started to form my inspiration for a thesis.

Background and Context

Restorative practices in education have gained increasing attention as an alternative to traditional disciplinary methods (Thorsborne & Vinegrad, 2017). Rooted in the principles of relationship-building, accountability, and open conversation, these practices aim to create inclusive and supportive school environments (University of Waikato et al., 2003). This approach has been widely implemented in secondary schools in New Zealand to foster positive student relationships, enhance student engagement and create school culture. Finnis (2021) explains school culture and the sense of belonging as "social fabric of a school must

be formed from expanding everyone's sense of belonging, their palpable sense of feeling interconnected" (p. 32). A way that schools can encourage this sense of belonging and display the commitment towards this is by undertaking a strong commitment to all members of the school community and creating values, behaviours, systems and policies that work for all.

However, education research has examined the effectiveness and the implementation of restorative practices from the educator's perspective, but less attention has been given to the students lived experiences. Understanding how students perceive and experience this process is crucial in evaluating the impact on school participation, engagement and sense of belonging. Given that restorative practices aim to improve relationships and school culture, it is important to examine and review their effectiveness. This research seeks address that gap in literature by capturing student narratives and analysing their experiences through a narrative and post-structuralist lens.

With this intention of generating students' accounts of their experiences I have developed the following three research questions to guide my study.

Research Questions

1. What are students' experiences of restorative practices in schools?

2. How have these students' experiences affected their school participation and sense of belonging?

3. What might these experiences mean for schools and their approaches to restorative practices?

The focus of these research questions emerged not only from a review of existing research but also from what I have witnessed firsthand in classrooms and school communities. My experiences have highlighted the need to understand how students perceive restorative practices.

By bringing student voices to the forefront, this study will add to the literature of student voice and contribute to development of the implementation of restorative practices in secondary schools. The findings will provide insights for educators, school leaders and policymakers. The findings will also offer ways to refine and adapt current approaches to the facilitation of restorative practices (Riley, 2014; Sellman et al., 2013; University of Waikato et al., 2003) and to support student engagement and well-being. Furthermore, this research will add to the growing literature based on restorative practices in education.

1.2 My Researcher Position

I have been a secondary school teacher for ten years and a year level dean for six years. During this time, I have taught at a decile 1 school with a roll of 400 and 99% of those students were Māori. I then moved locations to teach at a decile 6 school with a roll of 1800. Within this roll of 1800 the school statistics indicate that 29% of rangatahi identify as Māori. The decile system in New Zealand ranked schools based on socio-economic background of their students. In 2023 this system was

replaced by the equity index (EQI). The systems are used to target funding to schools for areas with higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage but was criticised for not reflecting the needs of the students or schools (Ministry of Education, 2024). My experience in the first school has encouraged me to develop knowledge of matauranga Māori and tikanga. As a Pākehā woman, I will always be developing my understanding and knowledge of culture. Therefore, as part of this ongoing learning and development I regularly consult with kaitiaki in my school. As well as involving myself in pōwhiri, waiata, karakia and wānanga, I learn about cultural practices related to gender. Having this knowledge in my educational kete allows me to contribute to respectful and mana enhancing relationships and supports me to work towards a safer environment within my classroom.

Through professional development alongside other teaching colleagues I have learned about the practices of restorative approaches in a range of schools. As well as this learning, student feedback across all phases of restorative practices suggests that there are misunderstandings about the purpose of these conversations. Other restorative facilitators have also mentioned these misunderstandings. Together, we suggested that this may be due to insufficient time being allocated for participants to understand restorative practices or the process.

In my role as year-level dean, some students expressed that their engagement in restorative processes was out of respect for the facilitator or other party more-so than a willingness to participate to resolve the issue. After explaining the purpose of these restorative processes, these rangatahi said that if they had known about the purpose they may have participated more willingly. They also stated that they would approach the conversations differently if they were to

participate again. In response to this, I started to take more time during the preparatory phase to unpack their personal experiences. My hope was to gain more of an understanding of the wants, needs, and hopes of the students. This exploration and conversation created an opportunity for each person to discuss and communicate their intentions for the restorative conversation. When I conducted the first post-restorative conversations, all students expressed that they were more willing to participate when they understood the process. As I made this change in my own practice, I was surprised to observe the difference in engagement and overall willingness of students to participate in restorative processes. Following this change in approach to the preparatory phase, I noticed that students seemed more likely to uphold the commitments they made and the plan to follow up after the restorative meeting.

My determination to find ways to improve students' experiences is informed by particular education discourses I subscribe to. These discourses have shaped my teaching story, and this story has a family history which I now describe and reflect on.

1.3 Discourses I subscribe to

My mother has been a teacher since the late 1980s and is now an Associate Principal in the school I work. Her time in education has influenced the discursive positions I subscribe to within education. My mother has been a great supporter of my decision to become a teacher after university and then my interest to become a middle management leader (year level dean). When I approached my mother about the idea of completing my masters, she told me ‘Good luck’ with a laugh and has

since been at my side supporting this research. Within her job, my mother oversees the implementation and facilitation of restorative practices and the professional development of these teachers. With her support, I have gained access to the work of professionals such as Margaret Thorsborne (developer of resources for restorative processes) and other restorative practitioners.

I have taken my learning from these professional contexts into my practices as classroom teacher and dean. Through this learning I have come to subscribe to a range of discursive ideas and practices. These discourses include relational pedagogies and the use of restorative and social justice practices in education. For example, my experience growing up .as a child of a teacher, allowed me to see the stress, effort, and passion of a teacher who cares for their students and the loss and heartache when a relationship between student and teacher breaks down. This experience gave me an understanding of the importance of emotional connection when I decided to step into the teaching profession. With this knowledge I committed to dedicating my energy to create mana-enhancing relationships with students to address problematic effects that may undermine relationships. For me, mana enhancing relationships follow Huriwai and Baker (2016), by improving well-being and sense of self to strengthen relationships. I take this to mean that I can work with people to find ways to stand tall and proud, without demeaning or damaging their well-being or wairua. When I started my first teaching job, I found that creating respectful relationships was vital with Māori students and when creating positive working environments with colleagues. Drewery (2005) explains that Māori view relationships as,

> [a] primary mode of being; that respectful relationship is a primary value; that care for the other involves the preservation of his or her dignity or mana; that relationships are constituted and performed in speech and action; and that speech is an action in and on the world. (p. 310)

Drewery's ideas fit with my own and I seek to foster these kinds of respectful, reciprocal and mana enhancing relationships.

Part of my role as dean (middle management leader) taught me the process of restorative practices in schools and how to facilitate conversations with students to foster mana-enhancing relationships. As well as this restorative practice training, my time studying post-structuralist perspectives of counselling and restorative approaches at the University of Waikato had me extend my understanding of narrative approaches. As I developed my understanding and interest in discourses in society and the discursive positions that people can either subscribe to or reject, I found myself curious to the discourses and positions throughout my own classroom and the year level I support through deaning. This new curiosity and growing understanding of narrative approaches and discursive ideas supports my restorative facilitation. Placing an emphasis on helping parties to make meaning of conflict and therefore, invites me to listen more intentionally to the experience of the person.

My developing understanding of the discursive lenses and the positions they offer will help me to value the local knowledge of the participants. The narrative therapy position that draws from poststructuralism and the idea that experience is discursive explains that participants are experts in the stories of their lives, and their

knowledge is at the centre of my research (Besley, 2001; Johnson, 2002; Wright & Høyen, 2020). I aim to work alongside them as a researcher. I describe this approach more fully in Chapter 2.

As discourses are embedded in all social constructs, no person is outside of discourse, which means the participants of this study and I bring a vast range of discourses into view. These discourses and the discursive positions will then shape this study. Harré et al (1994) explain the discursive world and how it is used to employ the discursive presentation of oneself as a unique person, creating a 'sense of self'. This is a world of signs and symbols that are subject to normative constraints. This world comes into being through intentional and skilful human action, these skills are either manual (ways to manipulate material items) or discursive (used in symbolic interactions). The discursive or symbol world is organised by the norms and conventions of correct symbol use and the physical or material world is structured by processes. With the body in the material world, our language is the way to communicate and manage the world of symbols. In addition to this Harré et al mention "the relationship of a person and the world is to be understood through skilful action. A human can live in a world of symbols and intentional normative activity only through the skills they have acquired and thereby become and continue to be a person" (Harré et al., 1994, p. 99). Therefore, to have a sense of self, one must have sense of location in space, a point of view, a position within discourse. I will give further explanation about this concept in Chapter 2.

Winslade et al. (2008) gives detail about the stance of a mediator needing to be fully prepared to acknowledge their ethical, moral, and professional stance.

Speaking to how this stance will shape and influence the way conflict will be addressed. Mediators need to be mindful of each move they make in the session. In terms of this study, I will take up this stance before each interview, ready to acknowledge the discourses I subscribe to.

Before moving into Chapter 2 I want to outline the structure of this thesis. In Chapter 1, I have introduced myself, the discourses and discursive positions I subscribe to, the interest I have for restorative practices and have explained my research questions. Chapter 2 will explore and discuss the theoretical perspectives behind this study. I focus on post-structuralism and literature supporting ideas within my study. I spend time to discuss Michel Foucault and the ideas and concepts he created. I will then explain how these ideas influence my research in a discursive way. In Chapter 3, I look at the literature behind restorative practices, their implementation in Aotearoa New Zealand and the significance of relationships. I take another look at my research questions and outline the organisation of the following chapters. The methodology is described in Chapter 4. Here I outline qualitative research, and the reason I have chosen this method. I look at methods of inquiry, spending time to explain narrative inquiry and its influence on my research. I then move to discuss ethical considerations, data generation and methods of analysis. The findings are presented Chapter 5, where I explain five themes that are produced from the interviews and the interpretation and meaning of these themes. The thesis concludes with the discussion in Chapter 6. In this chapter I link the five themes to the three research questions and offer recommendations for any further study on this topic and ways that I can improve my own practice.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Perspectives

Within this chapter, I create three sections presenting a selection of post-structuralist theories.

The first section will identify three theorists whose work influence discourses on education and this research. These give an account of how identity and relationships are understood within societal interactions, describing how these inform restorative approaches within educational contexts.

The second section will see the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault's concepts of biopower, power/knowledge, and the shaping of human interaction and relationships through discourse serve as a foundation for poststructuralism and discursive theory (Burr, 2015). I use Foucault's concept of discourses and positioning to explore the effects of discourses for educational settings or institutions and the idea of power/knowledge.

Finally, in the third section of this chapter I examine the competing discourses that are at work calling teachers into positions of meeting institutional expectations and relational responsibilities. As I explore how societal shifts post-COVID-19 particularly regarding mental health, have increased the reliance on counsellors in education. With use of key literature from a variety of researchers and resources from the Ministry of Education I highlight the evolving institutional and relational discourses and their impact on student well-being and restorative approaches.

2.1 Post-structuralist theories

This next section introduces key poststructuralist literature and concepts from three of four theorists that inform this study and how they can be seen in education. In the second section of this chapter, I explain and describe how Michel Foucault and his ideas influence my research.

2.1.1 Background Literature

This section investigates and explains the rich theoretical foundations that underpin my study, weaving together the contributions of influential poststructuralist thinkers. Poststructuralist theory provides a lens to examine the complexities of teaching and learning in the context of restorative approaches. Deleuze's ideas on difference and repetition are also discussed to challenge ideas that identities are static. I also look at Derrida's concept of deconstruction which further emphasises the fluidity of meaning, encouraging educators to question traditional binaries and embrace complexity. Baudrillard's insights into the consumer society adds a layer of understanding about how symbolic meanings influence our interactions. These concepts together can support facilitators and teachers in restorative approaches, from the ideas of power relations, challenging static identities, questioning binaries and the symbolic meanings in interactions. If teachers and facilitators gain professional development in restorative processes influenced by these concepts, they will learn how these ideas shape and influence students' experiences and the practices of the educational institutions they teach in.

I make use of these theories to help illustrate how poststructuralism shifts the focus from universal truths to individual stories, creating a framework for

understanding multiple perspectives that are present within a classroom. Through this chapter, I position the teacher as a facilitator of dialogue and equity. This positioning emphasises the importance of disrupting power imbalances to foster a learning environment where every student's unique narrative shapes and enriches the collective experience.

Poststructuralism.

Combs and Freedman (2012) note that poststructuralism grew out of structuralism and is not anti-structuralism. Further they state that scholars of the time tried to classify finer levels of complex systems, encountering paradoxes. I go on to explain some of these paradoxes further in this section. These scholars became more interested in the local stories than the universally applicable generalisations that were presented in structuralism. Therefore, poststructuralists shifted the value of lives towards how individuals embody exceptions or uniqueness rather than how they fit general categories (Winslade, 2003).

Gilles Deleuze and difference and repetition.

Gilles Deleuze developed the concept of 'difference and repetition' which represents a fundamental critique of traditional western philosophy. He argued this was overly focused on identity and sameness rather than difference, liberating thought from static identities and embracing the transformative potential of difference (Williams, 2013). In schools, students are commonly measured against normative standards. Those who diverge may be framed as 'problematic'. However,

restorative practices centre the unique context and story of the individual, affirming difference as an assert rather than a disruption. This shift aligns the approach with inclusive pedagogy. Deleuze argued that true repetition generates new meaning and is transformative not static. Restorative practices encourage a cycle of accountability and reflection through repeated dialogue and engagement (Biesta, 2015). Inherently creating new meaning and individual growth through the seemingly repetitive process. Rejecting the discourse of fixed identities such as good/bad and successful/at risk restorative approaches invited fluidity. The identity of a student is not tied to an incident but is constantly being reshaped through relational processes. With the use of storytelling and active listening (White & Epston, 1990) students are seen as complex beings capable of growth, resonating with Deleuze's view of subjectivity as open and relational.

Jacques Derrida and deconstruction.

Jacques Derrida introduced a term 'deconstruction' in his work titled *Of Grammatology* (1976). This concept challenges the binary oppositions that underpin western metaphysical thinking – speech/writing, reason/emotion and presence/absence. He argued that meaning is not fixed or stable but instead constantly deferred. Deconstruction seeks to expose the assumptions underlying these binaries and reveal the instability of meaning. Within modern society the binaries that shape social norms can be seen as success/failure, order/chaos and authority/submission. To place this within the educational context we see good/bad students, right/wrong behaviour and the roles of student/teacher. These binaries

structure and influence how we assign value and understand identity, behaviour and belonging. Restorative approaches blur these binaries, shifting punishment/reward to harm/repair and from authority/imposed control to dialogue/shared understanding (Zehr, 2002). Derrida's ideas and concepts then disrupt the idea that teachers are solely knowledge-givers and students being passive recipients (Giroux & Giroux, 2007). Instead, both become co-constructors of accountability, knowledge and meaning.

Jean Baudrillard and the system of objects.

Consumer society is an idea developed by Jean Baudrillard in the 1960s. In his 1968 book titled *The system of objects*, he analyses how consumption in modern capitalist societies is not merely about the use of objects but also about the symbolic meaning attached to them. He suggested that objects are part of a system of signs and meanings, where people consume symbols and signs rather than just the material good (Baudrillard, 2005; Featherstone, 2007). Within an educational context school themselves have become symbols of discipline, success, failure and opportunity (Apple & Apple, 2018). While restorative practices reposition authority and justice, with the conversations through this process becoming signs of equity and inclusion. Their meaning extends beyond function, signalling belonging, mutual respect and placing student voice and perspectives at the forefront. Baudrillard critiques how objects and systems are naturalized through ideological discourse. The meanings assigned to objects often conceal the social constructs and power relations that uphold them. In education the traditional punitive discipline

systems are often perceived as “normal” or “natural” ways to maintain and establish order. Restorative approaches disrupt this by exposing how these punitive systems reflect the social power structures such as classism, racism, teacher as expert.

This poststructuralist idea that human identities shape and are shaped by culture and are communicated through the discursive norms and expectations (Winslade, 2003) that call on reflexivity to make their operations visible. Unless people are reflective and look for these at work in a school context, they can be invisible. These systems of practices and structures which express common ideas and structures (Hare-Mustin, 1994) are being produced and reproduced. Understanding these operations makes it possible to intervene in them. As all humans are not just present but participating within culture and inevitably participate in discourses, poststructuralists then recognise that to mean, no one is in a position to be an expert on someone else’s experience. From a perspective of Western hierarchal education discourses teachers have been and continue to be offered authoritative positions of holders of knowledge and students as recipients of knowledge. The hierarchy provides the authority for teachers to know better and to exercise the power relation in inequitable ways. However, over time, alternative discourses have emerged that have equity as their terms and challenge hierarchal ideas of teacher/student relations (Popkewitz, 1992). These discourses of teacher/student relations are dominant in their position calls, and teachers that subscribe to alternative discourses, such as critical pedagogy, relational and restorative approaches could offer students a discursive position of equity within the classroom and educational institutions.

These theorists' influence on education and restorative practices.

Teachers and restorative practice facilitators can reproduce discourses in the classroom or restorative conversations they are a part of. Therefore, teachers and restorative practitioners must work to expose discourses and power influences, working towards collaboration with students to pursue social justice and equity (Fendler, 2010). A classroom teacher who understands these discursive operations can appreciate the knowledge students hold about their lives and exercise power in ways that create space for more equitable relations. This understanding provides opportunity to address the position students take in power relations. Teachers will act on the terms of discourse they subscribe to and are familiar with. Knowledge helps them to determine which discourses they align with, whether they wish to take up different discursive positions and what this might mean for their teaching practice.

A "banking model of education" (Freire, 2015) critiques traditional teacher-as-expert frameworks and advocates for creating opportunities where students are active participants in knowledge construction. This model of critique aligns with Foucault's concept of power/knowledge and the discourses that are present within education. It is relevant for this research, as I take a Foucauldian lens towards the interviews, asking participants to be active and collaborative. Freire subscribed to discourses of emphasising problem-posing education, and the importance of critical consciousness in challenging oppressive structures. In *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (2015) he gives explanations on education focusing on helping individuals to develop their ability to critically understand the world and their place in it. He wrote about the importance of open and honest communication to build and create

understanding and learning. In addition, he highlighted how creating reciprocal relationships between teachers and students where both are learners and teachers. Studies by Lynch and Curtner-Smith (2019) demonstrate that when teachers exercise power in ways that offer students opportunity to exercise power more equitably and reciprocally. Such as allowing students to participate in decision-making and co-constructing learning activities. These students experience more empowerment and engagement, and it is possible through this process that they develop critical consciousness about structural inequalities.

Similarly, Robinson and Taylor (2013) highlight that addressing the inherent power relations in classrooms requires teachers to recognize and challenge entrenched norms and ideologies. They argue that fostering a democratic environment involves creating spaces where students contribute and have their contributions valued. Enabling meaningful discussions that can transcend institutional constraints produced by more hierarchal discourses in schools (p. 39). These insights show that when teachers consciously shift their role from authoritative experts to facilitators of inclusive dialogue, they contribute to the fostering of more equitable and socially just learning environments.

2.2 Foucauldian Theory

Michel Foucault, a French intellectual who's work spanned the latter half of the 20th century, illuminated the concept of Power and knowledge. His ideas on social control – using mechanisms of integration aimed at securing order and

stability at a societal level, relies on society to maintain social order through a high degree of consensus and social relationships (Deflem, 2015, p. 31).

2.2.1 Foucault's Ideas, Concepts and Theories in this study

Foucault's concept of 'archaeology of knowledge' refers to a method of analysing historical discourses to uncover underlying rules and structures that govern the production of knowledge. In *The archaeology of knowledge*, Foucault (1972) describes how discourses form and change over time, shifting the focus from individual thinkers to broader systems of thought. This concept provides a theoretical lens to understand how discourses are produced, regulated and disrupted within institutions such as schools. Central to his argument is the idea that knowledge is not neutral, and that historical narratives are shaped not by an objective truth but by systems of power that define what can and cannot be said. In educational contexts, restorative practices offer a space to resist and reframe entrenched colonial and hierarchical relations that are present within Aotearoa New Zealand. The curriculum in New Zealand schools has historically centred Pākehā perspectives, often at the expense of Māori knowledge systems, history and languages. Popkewitz (1992) discusses how historical education reforms are guided by specific discursive formations, which regulate both knowledge and the roles of teachers and students. Restorative process frameworks offer an opportunity to acknowledge these gaps and challenge colonising narratives, by creating inclusive spaces that validate the lived experiences of Māori and other marginalised students.

Restorative approaches can therefore act as a counter-discursive force, fostering relational approaches grounded in manaakitanga and whānaungatanga.

Power, in Foucault's thinking, circulates through discourse and institutions, creating the subjects it governs (Foucault, 1972). Within the educational system in New Zealand this is evident in how forms of assessment and structures of discipline maintain colonial hierarchies. These structures reinforce social control in classrooms through behavioural management systems which exist under the guise of care (Gillies, 2011). Morrison (2006) argues that restorative practices can disrupt these ideas and practices, but their transformative potential depends on a critical and culturally responsive implementation. Without attention to the practices of power/knowledge and the colonial structures in the classroom, restorative practices risk being placed in the same disciplinary framework they seek to critique (Morrison, 2006).

As Foucault mentions, discourses are always in flux (Foucault, 1972). This resonates with narrative inquiry's focus on subjectivity and the co-construction of meaning. This theorical alignment invites teachers to see students' identities as shaped through interactions with multiple and often conflicting discourses. Restorative practices aim to invite emergence of alternative narratives that resist the deficit-based views of students (Thorsborne & Vinegrad, 2022; Vaandering, 2014; White, 1999). In New Zealand, this includes valuing Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Māori perspectives, recognising the impact of colonisation on student experiences. The use of narrative inquiry and restorative approaches offers space to dismantle colonial power structures through relational, dialogic practices that honour diverse ways of knowing. Foucault's theories offer hope for transformation in educational

spaces, making room for multiple truths, diverse histories and culturally grounded forms of justice.

Foucault proceeded to develop the idea of the author within their work. This concept develops thinking of individuals as authors of their personal experiences and positions in life. Foucault challenges the absence of an author which was familiar with the structuralist position.

> If an individual were not an author, could we say that what he wrote, said, left behind or what was collected of his remarks could be called a 'work'? A theory of work does not exist, where does ones work finish? (Foucault, 1979, p. 143).

Foucault suggests that the author is just part of a larger discourse, a voice among many, contributing but not controlling the meaning of the text (Modir et al., 2014). In this understanding, meaning becomes fluid, shaped by multiple authors and readers, evolving as it interacts within different contexts. For instance, poststructuralist theory within a classroom invites the teacher to move past the idea of one truth and through reflection and practice, to see the multiple meanings in all interactions and experiences. This can be seen, for example, in a classroom of 30 students. They all have diverse backgrounds, cultures and moral values. Each person brings a difference in thought and personal stories to the environment. Teachers can then listen, unpack and grow these narratives. Johnson (2002) elaborates and shows how teachers both shape and are shaped by these stories. They can be complicit in the shaping of stories that the effects for rangatahi can range from meaningful and productive to detrimental.

2.2.2 Foucault's Theories in Schools

At this point, I continue to develop and investigate Michel Foucault's influential concepts of power, knowledge, and biopower, exploring their relevance within educational contexts, specifically restorative approaches. Through a Foucauldian lens, I give further detail and continue to unpack how power operates subtly yet pervasively in schools, shaping student identities and teacher roles. As mentioned above disciplinary mechanisms, surveillance, and institutional norms govern the behaviour and development of students, drawing connections between educational systems and other societal structures like prisons (Gore, 1997). By exploring the complex relationship between power and knowledge, I shed light on how these forces not only dictate what is taught but also shape the broader values and ideologies. This section highlights how educators navigate the binary of authority figure and subordinates within the hierarchical structure, exposing the dynamic and relational way the power plays out in classrooms. Overall, this analysis reflects on the taken-for-granted practices in education and consider ways in which power, ethics and truth come together to influence learning environments.

Similarly to Foucault's critique of systems of classification, Foucault, himself, often noted he did not wish to be subjected to classification. Although, he had been situated in most of the squares of the political checkerboard: as anarchist, leftist or liberal to name a few of the squares. Many academics have struggled to place him in any square neatly as his concepts spread across these squares.

Alongside this idea, the exercise of Power through techniques of disciplinary mechanisms, surveillance and control (Haugaard, 2022, p. 348) have inspired, perplexed and unsettled educational theorists for many years. Foucault

wove together his exploration of social control and the exercise of power to develop a concept termed “bio-power” how modern power creates and shapes subjects. This has been particularly influential in understanding the ways in which educational institutions operate (Ball, 2010; Marshall, 1996). This concept of bio-power is also referred to and explained by Winslade (2012) as schools in the modern world serve as a sorting function for society. This sorting is done by allocating identities to children that will serve as the basis for their becoming as social and economic beings such as good/bad and successful/at risk student. Therefore, students can ‘trade in’ what they have learnt at school for social recognition and then take their place in the professional world. While Foucault did not directly address the developing child; his work offered a lens through which examination can be made of the ways in which educational systems are complicit in creating structures that normalise and categorise individuals (Ball, 2010, p. 7). The concepts of social control, the exercise of power and bio-power are relevant to this research as all are operating in education and the way power is used as a management strategy within these institutions (Ball, 2010, p.6).

For example, in the classroom, students are being subjected to a network of rules, regulations, and procedures that govern time, behaviour, speech, and even the body. Foucault (1984) describes teachers as "technicians of behaviour" (p. 75), formed by disciplinary norms that they, in turn, impose upon their students. Through this Foucauldian lens, it becomes clear that students' identities are ‘made’ within the confines of these systems, where notions of freedom and agency may be little more than anthropocentric myths. Through Foucauldian perspectives, students adopt structural and institutional norms – such as wearing uniform, attending

classes, and behavioural expectations - which work by creating subjects (students) that may involve losing a sense of self or other aspects to the identity in order to fit in within the classroom. Herzog (2016) notes, "Foucault's writings show how social order, power relations, and subjugation are produced by humans' social actions and transformed into a relatively stable social structure" (p. 3). Following this structure, people may unknowingly subscribe to societal norms, viewing practices of discourse production, surveillance, or punishment as natural and inevitable. This can be seen when a student is late to school or unable to attend for a period of time. In this situation they may be given the opportunity to explain this absence before a consequence is enforced. Consequences through punitive systems can be detentions, phone calls home or conversations with members of staff. Students must complete the consequence before they are able to re-enter the classroom, or the consequence would be enforced by the staff member. As this is an expectation of the educational system students will either subscribe to this norm or refuse in some way. Refusal is one-way students can enforce power in the power relation but may not serve them well. For example, their refusal can be seen as actions classed as ‘defiant’ or ‘non-compliant’ (Scott, 2016) and have on-going effects for the reputation of the student.

The boundary of 'discipline of the individual' extends beyond the classroom and blurs into a term Foucault termed the 'control of life'. Foucault argues that creating structures of power within educational institutions has a widespread influence on a nation's power. As Leask (2012) suggests, "Power becomes biopower" (p. 59). Educational facilities are complicit in creating societies for future governments. This power relationship allows governments to use education

as a tool for implementing societal change or reinforcing dominant ideologies. For example, the review of the New Zealand high school curriculum, the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), illustrates how power operates within educational structures. One government has initiated the review after twenty-two years of implementation, and a change in government has now cast doubt on whether the review would be completed. The change in curriculum would see importance given to numeracy and literacy over individualised career pathways in future growth subjects such as digital design, business and arts. This uncertainty underscores Foucault's assertion that education is inextricably linked to power; what is taught, and how it is taught, often reflecting the interests of those in power.

Foucault's comparison of educational institutions with prisons further explains this point. As he famously notes, "prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals" (Foucault, 1979 cited in Leask, 2012, p. 59). All of these institutions, in their own way, have systems that control the individual to fit within the structures of power. By viewing education through the Foucauldian lens, it is possible we can start to question the taken-for-granted discursive practices that structure our educational systems.

2.2.3 Power Produces Knowledge

There is a phrase Foucault wove into his thinking and writing. This phrase reflects the subtle and invisible ways that institutions shape how people understand the world or shape their understanding of the world. "We should admit rather that power produces knowledge... that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of

knowledge" (Foucault, 1984). Mambrol (2016) explains that it is a relationship showing how certain knowledge is suppressed and other knowledge is produced through power. These social sanctioned structures of knowledge do more than educate; they produce and reproduce the relationships of power that exist between teachers and students. In the classroom, this dynamic surfaces as what Foucault would refer to as "constant policing", the consistent monitoring and tailoring of behaviour to achieve a desired outcome. The roles become clear; teacher as the expert, and the student as the learner. Here, power does not merely come with knowledge, it continues to produce it (Ball, 2010, p. 105).

In Foucault's exploration of schools, he identified three "aspects of experience" – truth, power, and ethics – these intertwine and reinforce one another. Truth in the context of education is not an abstract or neutral concept. It emerges from power and, in turn, shapes ethics. The ethics of a classroom then are not universal moral principles but constructs arising from truths defined by those in positions of power. Jones (1990) observes, teachers are expected to embody "self-regulation" and an "ethical regime" that reflects the roles they hold. To their students, they are figures of authority and care, offering guidance similar to a parental role. To their superiors, they must present as intelligent servants, serving the needs of the institution with professionalism and class (p. 62).

This duality positions teachers within a discursive framework that casts them as both "modern and moral" (Larsen, 2011, p. 102). In front of their students, they are experts in their knowledge of a subject. Yet in the presence of the Principal or Board of Trustees, they then become learners, subject to the powers above them. This consistent interplay of 'roles' (Larsen, 2011, p. 102), shifting between

authority and subordination, reflects the wider effects of power/knowledge that Foucault analysed. Davies and Harré (1990) explain these shifts in 'roles' and power as characters in a shared or known story. There is a conversation which is created by braided development of several story lines, such as cultural stereotypes like nurse/patient, mother/son or teacher/student, which may be called on as a resource for the position each person takes up (Davies & Harré, 1990; Laws & Davies, 2000). It is important to note that individuals may understand these cultural stereotypes differently and the position calls they make available (Drewery & Winslade, 2005).

In the next section, I shift focus to another aspect of discursive theory. I build upon Foucault's ideas, examining how language and narrative practices construct realities within educational settings. This section addresses how discourse shapes identities, relationships and possibilities for agency within classrooms and schools. This provides a critical lens to view the intersection of knowledge, power and communication.

2.3 Power/knowledge and identity

This section explores the impact of Foucault's power/knowledge concept on identity construction within educational institutions. It examines how power operates not only through structures of control but also in the ways individuals shape their identities through daily interactions (Fairclough, 2003; Hook, 2001). This section highlights how students' behaviours, relationships, and interactions with school counsellors serve as living examples of these power relations. School counsellors often are asked to either facilitate restorative conversations or to assist

in the process. After COVID-19 the role of the counsellor has changed, as students actively seek the support for mental health issues and support during restorative conversations. This shift is framed within the broader context of Foucault's ideas about the fluidity of identity and the complex relationship between power and knowledge.

2.3.1 Discursive Research

Ong et al. (2023) states that "Foucault's concept of 'power/knowledge' is a tightly woven thread, that is impossible to separate. This concept guides the way people navigate interactions, shaping how they self-regulate in a dance of power that unfolds in all social encounters" (p. 1393). Pollard (2019) describes the concept of power/knowledge suggesting that the exercise of power depends on a scaffold of knowledge that supports it. Pollard continues to state, claims to knowledge advance the interests and power of certain groups while marginalising others.

Identity, then, is not a fixed entity but a fluid creation, being created in each new interaction, discourse and small shift in relation to the balance of power. Foucault's understanding of the self wasn't static either, over time his thinking evolved, revealing that individuals are constantly in the process of becoming – forming themselves as ethical subjects through internal practices and the external influences of power (Gaddis et al., 2007). For Foucault, power was never just about repression or domination. Power is also productive, but it was about the way people shape themselves, their identities and their realities (Besley, 2007, p. 58).

These ideas play out vividly in the everyday interactions of students. How they communicate and navigate their social hierarchies (friend groups) of the school

are examples of operations of power. The sight of cliques is not just a social phenomenon but the display of a living discourse, a display of the stances the people take in relation to one another and the structures around them. For instance, the change of relationship between students and school counsellors. The social ideas of how counselling is perceived and attending counselling for support. Not long ago, seeking help might have been seen as a sign of weakness, a social mark that one is struggling and perceived as mental unwell. But that perception is shifting. This change could be linked to the evolving counselling discourses that shape how counselling roles are understood. This change may be associated with the effects of COVID-19 contributing towards the change in relationship between students and counsellors. The year 2021 saw students come back to school after extended country wide lock downs. A majority of these students were encountering effects of anxiety and emotional distress which impacted their willingness to be at school and performance within the classroom (Hopkins, 2021). The effects of the situation increased awareness and prevalence of mental health and made it an important topic in schools. This created a context in which students actively sought more support from a school counsellor or teacher. Student were seen to then seek a deeper relationship with them. These effects of changing relationships with students, teachers and counsellors are evident in the research report completed by the Education Review Office (ERO) New Zealand. The report mentions that students returning to school after COVID-19 lock downs created new concerns about learning progress, attendance and anxiety. ERO notes some key findings about this anxiety as learners were particularly worried about workload. The learner feedback states student enjoyment, connectedness and wellbeing has been improved due to

teacher relationships and having an adult at school that cares for them. ERO recommends having teachers and counselling staff that work together to create a multi-tiered, targeted and intensive support plan for students (Education Review Office, 2023, p. 49). This can be seen by counsellors facilitating and participating in the restorative processes within schools.

Besley (2001) emphasised that therapists and counsellors, are intricately implicated in the domains of power and knowledge. They cannot escape from these forces, but they can work to reveal and challenge them. In this light, when a student comes to see a counsellor, it is no longer about fixing a problem, but the counsellor is there to listen, guide and to help the student understand that they are the expert in their own life (Besley, 2001, p. 77). A study on young people's perspectives on school counselling found that students noted specifically they value having someone to talk to who would listen, understand them, creates room and opportunities for problem-solving and guidance (Crocket et al., 2015, p. 32-33). More recently, the Education Review Office (2024) completed a review and analysis of a COVID-period project, the counselling in schools' initiative. They made note that the change in students using services from 2016/17 (9%) has increased to 13% in 2022/23, explaining this increase may be related to the pandemic (p. 2). Within this study, reference is made to research that shows 80% of students now communicating with a school counsellor notes an improvement in their mental and psychological health (Education Review Office, 2024).

These two studies show that counsellors are participating and contributing to creating opportunities for students to problem-solve in a safe environment through restorative approaches. Some students who participated in Crocket et al.'s

(2015) study made comments similar to Besley (2007), that counsellors may use their knowledge to re-interpret and re-construct what a person says. This can help and uncover ideas and stories that were develop new to a person. Students expressed that, although a counsellor was 'experienced' in life, they were able to extend their thinking and new ideas or ways of tackling problems for the students.

Unequal power relations persist, especially in the context of education. Bishop (2003) highlights how, in Aotearoa New Zealand, these imbalances are a part of colonial dominance. The pattern is clear: teachers subscribe to a position of power; the student is discursively positioned as subordinate. This power relation is reproduced in classrooms around the world. Foucault's insights help to show that these relationships are more than just interactions; they are manifestations of the longstanding historical and social forces at play (Foucault, 1984).

2.4 Summary

In conclusion, this Chapter offered three sections. Each section exploring different literature that influences this research, poststructuralism and discourses in education.

The first section explored the theoretical landscape of poststructuralist thought, drawing on the works of Deleuze, Derrida and Baudrillard to build a framework for understanding the dynamics of power, knowledge, and meaning in educational settings. These theories have highlighted the importance of recognising the fluidity of meaning, the value in personal narratives and the need to question traditional educational practices, entrenched with assumptions and binaries.

Through this philosophical and theoretical position, the teacher's role can be reimagined and reshaped. Not as an expert but as a collaborator who nurtures inclusivity and equity by engaging with diverse perspectives that students bring into the classroom. By consciously challenging power imbalances and fostering dialogue, educators can create a transformative space where learning is not just about transmitting knowledge but about co-constructing it. These theoretical foundations set the stage for subsequent chapters that address the history and philosophies of school restorative processes, tell the story of how I went about undertaking the study and some of the conclusions I make from the stories participants told of their experiences.

The second section explored and delved into Michel Foucault's profound insights into power/knowledge, and biopower, illustrating how these concepts shape dynamics within the educational institution. By examining how schools operate as sites of surveillance, discipline, and normalisation I have shown how power structures influence not only the behaviour of students but also the roles and ethical positions of teachers. These systems, often taken for granted, reflect the broader societal values and hierarchical power structures, challenging us to rethink the ways education resists or accepts dominant ideas and concepts.

In the final section I illustrated how power relations that operate within school contexts are continually reshaped by the discourses and discursive positions students and teacher subscribe to. The evolving role of school counsellors, who now function more as guides helping students navigate their perceptions, experiences and positions, exemplifies the shifting nature of power relations in education. Drawing on key studies, this section underscores how these shifts reflect

broader societal changes, including the increased recognition of mental health and the role of education in responding to this concern. The persistence of power imbalances, particularly in colonial contexts such as Aotearoa New Zealand, is a reminder that these dynamics are not new but are influenced by longstanding historical and social forces. This discussion sets the stage for the next chapter, where I will explore restorative practices and how this approach influences the educational institutions in New Zealand.

The next chapter will give a detailed explanation of restorative practices, the creation and history of this approach and the significance of relationships through restorative approaches in education. Later in Chapter 3, I will give an overview of the research questions and give further details of the organisation of this thesis.

Chapter 3 Restorative Practices

Restorative practices have emerged as a transformative approach to building positive relationships, fostering community and addressing conflict while prioritising healing over punishment (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). Initially used in the justice system, restorative practices have been embraced in many countries as an alternative to traditional punitive approaches to behaviour. Over time, the principles of restorative practices have been adapted into other domains such as educational settings. This chapter will provide an overview of the historical and theoretical foundations of restorative practices, highlighting the journey from the justice system to educational facilities. I have given specific reference to Margaret Thorsborne and Lisa Cameron's work in the adoption of this practice in Australian and New Zealand schools.

Thorsborne's contributions have been pivotal in demonstrating how the principles of restorative justice, while originally developed to mediate criminal disputes, can be effectively applied to schools. Her work displays the shift from a punitive paradigm to one that has values in relationships, mutual respect, communication and the inclusion of all voices involved in the conflict. This shift has helped to reframe how schools approach discipline, student engagement, and community building. As New Zealand has a priority to uphold biculturalism and the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, restorative practices have become a key strategy to fostering equitable and inclusive school environments. The Ministry of Education has implemented the resource *Ka Hikitia* (2014) for secondary schools as a foundation towards improving school culture and community. This resource

focuses on culturally responsive practices and emphasises the importance of relationships for students' well-being.

A fundamental aspect of restorative practices is the communication of experiences of all people involved, and therefore the importance of understanding student voice and agency. By offering students an opportunity to actively participate in conversations about their learning, their experiences and relationships, creates a sense of ownership, agency and responsibility. Restorative practices encourage students to communicate with staff and whānau, therefore building foundational relationships to work towards a positive school culture where every individual is supported and respected. The restorative process includes three phases – preparatory conversation, restorative conversation or circle, and the post restorative check in. Restorative process typically includes proactive, preventative and restorative strategies and may include proactive circles (teachers lead structured group discussions), responsive circles (whole classrooms address issues that negatively impact the community), and restorative conferences to repair harm between two or more parties (Duong et al., 2019). This layout and combination of conversations forms the framework for restorative practices in schools. Further in this chapter I will touch on the connection between positive relationships and academic success for students. I give detail to how creating positive school climates is conducive to personal and academic success. Therefore, ensuring the wellbeing of the entire school community is considered in decision making process and the cultivation of a thriving school environment.

3.1 Restorative Practice (RP)

3.1.1 Background and History of RP

A significant transformation in Australian education started to take place in the early 90s as schools began to question the longstanding culture of use of harsh discipline within the institutions. This shift was initiated by Margaret Thorsborne and Lisa Cameron who modified the New Zealand family group conferencing model. This model was originally designed for the youth justice system in the school environment (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013) and was informed by Māori approaches and values. The Queensland Education Department supported Thorsborne and Blood as they commenced a two-year study and practice of school-based conferencing which raised the question of practices such as stand downs, withdrawal rooms and exclusions (Cameron & Thorsborne, 1999). These efforts sought to overturn the balance of oppression that were understood to be normal in educational contexts and systems that base its practices on punishment. These efforts align with Foucault's (1984) approach to power relations, and how power is produced through institutions. Power then positions people by means of discipline-oriented practices with the aim of instilling or perpetuating hierarchy. Thus, raising pertinent debates on how such approaches would affect students and the culture of the school in the long run.

A shift was made regarding the analysis of the Australian Studies Research Program in the end of the 90s. This shift saw punitive measures move towards accountability building practices such as relationship practices thanks to violence prevention programs (Blood & Thorsborne, 2005). These conclusions reflected the

critique made by Foucault regarding the inequalities which characterise the use of violence, and the methods employed in dealing with behaviour. Blood and Thorsborne (2005), stating restorative practices sought to dismantle the paradigm of control and authority over students in the teaching process, thus opening the possibility of a paradigm change towards a more reciprocal and equitable relationship.

New Zealand educators were also grappling with these challenges in dealing with the high rates of suspension and exclusion in schools. In the late 90s and early 2000s a group of researchers from the University of Waikato together with Ministry of Education collaborated to conduct an experimental project aimed at integrating restorative justice approaches in schools (University of Waikato et al., 2003). It came as an acknowledgment of systemic concerns about the disengagement and exclusion of youth as a result in some young people not being in school altogether (Drewery, 2014). Values and tikanga were of prime importance such as mana (dignity and respect), providing hospitality and having quality restorative conversations about relationships (Drewery, 2014; Ministry of education, 2017). The inclusion of these indigenous perspectives not only addressed behavioural issues but also reimagined what it means to create a supportive and inclusive educational environment.

The results of initiatives in both Australia and New Zealand revealed that restorative practices functioned not only as a strategy for behaviour management but also as a framework for developing more robust and resilient school communities. According to Winslade et al. (2014) and Thorsborne and Vinegard (2017), these practices promote essential values such as respect, accountability, and

personal agency, which are vital for the comprehensive well-being of students. These methodologies are rooted in theories of relational and social justice, alongside principles of emotional literacy and indigenous traditions. Māori concepts such as aroha (compassion), manaakitanga (care), and mana (prestige and integrity) resonate closely with the accountability, trust, and empathy principles upheld by First Peoples in Australia (Reimer, n.d.; University of Waikato et al., 2003).

Foucault's examination of disciplinary power provides a rich account of how these changes can be understood theoretically. His critique highlights the ways in which conventional punitive approaches sustain a control mechanism that marginalises individuals and exacerbates inequality. In contrast, restorative practices aim to reallocate power within educational settings, enabling both students and educators to collaboratively develop solutions and promote cultural transformation. Thorsborne's research illustrates that these practices extend beyond mere responses to behavioural challenges; they represent a dedication to fostering long-term emotional development and reshaping the culture of schools. Studies completed by Augustine et al. (2018), McCluskey et al. (2008) and Velez & Gavrielides (2022) confirm Thorsborne's concepts that long-term dedication towards restorative practices in schools foster individual identity of students and the overall well-being a student's creating a positive school culture focused on change.

The implementation of restorative justice in schools is seen not merely as a response to rule-breaking but as a transformative process that redefines relationships and power relations. As Cameron and Thorsborne (1999) emphasise,

this approach frames misconduct not as a violation of institutional rules but as a violation against people and relationships within the school community. This shift in perspective reconfigures the power relationships between students, teachers and the community. By facilitating restorative conversations, and engaging in a restorative school culture all students, staff and whānau are able to feel connected and considered. From this perspective of connection and mutual consideration, acts against this cultural understanding are considered as a violation of the trust built within that community. McCluskey et al. (2008) expand on this idea, noting that the restorative practice in education initiative aimed not only to reduce offending and bullying but also to foster a more robust engagement with the social and cultural dimensions of conflict.

As Bleaken (2012) observes, the respectful and reciprocal relationships that restorative practices seek to cultivate are essential for fostering academic success, resilience and student engagement. In this way restorative justice becomes a practice of democracy, a deliberate attempt to reconfigure the social fabric of the school community (Cameron & Thorsborne, 1999). Further research completed by Hattie (2003) underscores the importance of teachers' relationships with students, knowledge and actions, which plays a significant role in shaping the academic achievement of students (p. 2). New Zealand's early childhood education (ECE) sector has recently started to incorporate the same values, strategies and concepts into their curriculum in aims to scaffold the learning experiences and environments (Riley, 2014). Te Whāriki is the ECE curriculum and Xu and Ritchie (2024) explain the principles, which centre on relationships, care and community. This curriculum and the principles within it show the dedication of the Ministry of Education to

prioritising whānau relationships, links to the wider community and creating opportunities for children to develop connectedness and reciprocity in relationships. The principles of Te Whāriki align with secondary education in New Zealand by promoting whānaungatanga.

Despite the wealth of literature on restorative practices, a significant gap remains. This gap is the perspectives of students. While much has been written from the viewpoints of teachers, administrators and communities, the voices of the students are often marginalised. Some research such as Parker-Shandal (2022), Simpfenderfer et al. (2023) and Reda (2024) prioritise student voice, incorporating student experiences and perspectives of restorative practices into their research. Although, this perspective is quite recent and there needs more to be known about student perspectives. Therefore, my research seeks to continue addressing that gap, by including students and recognising student experiences and perspectives as crucial to understanding the full impact of restorative practices.

Ultimately, restorative practices in education are about more than just resolving conflict – they are about redefining relationships in schools, creating spaces where power is more equitable, and people are given the opportunity to repair harm and rebuild trust. Doing this offers a new way of thinking about justice, grounded in complexities of human relationships and the ever-shifting relations of power.

3.1.2 Reasons for Introducing RP into Schools

Restorative justice in schools views conflicts as acts of violations against the fabric of relationships to connect students, teacher and the broader community.

Although the facilitation of restorative practices in schools can vary, the underlying principles and concepts for restorative practices align with the violations against a community and the breakdown of trust within a relationship. Cameron and Thorsborne (1999) explain the restorative approach as underscoring that harm is not done to an institution but to individuals, to connections, to the relational network that defines a school. The implications of this perspective ripple across the educational landscape, changing the way educational facilitators understand discipline and justice within educational institutions. The adoption of restorative practice and approaches is optional within education in New Zealand. Some schools have chosen to stay with traditional behavioural management approaches. Schools that have decided to facilitate restorative practice are able to tailor this to fit their school culture and needs. Therefore, each school has a different view or approach to this practice.

In the United Kingdom, McCluskey et al. (2008) observes that the "restorative justice initiative was designed to address significant issues – offending, bullying and victimisation – while simultaneously striving to improve school attendance" (p. 407). On the other hand, New Zealand crafted its approach with a different vision, focusing on reducing suspensions and fostering the engagement of students. The uniqueness of New Zealand's approach lies in the dual lens of Māori views (storytelling and wānanga style learning) and academic success (University of Waikato et al., 2003). The New Zealand restorative practice resource created by University of Waikato et al. (2003) explains the importance of narrative approaches in the restorative process, by implementing three phases to the facilitation of restorative practices in education. In the preparatory phase, individual

conversations are completed with each participant to offer information and details about the conflict and how the restorative will be conducted. During the restorative conversation, each participant has an opportunity to express their experience and the harm that has impacted them. Finally, the third phase is a post restorative conversation check in, and involves regular conversations with each participant to review the plan towards repair of harm. New Zealand restorative practices offer a different approach to Australia and the UK by taking a Tikanga Māori lens, including a narrative approach, to unpack and undo the harm caused through conflict. These differing foundations show the fluid and contextual nature of restorative justice, a concept that shifts and adapts according to the needs and values of the community it serves.

Sellman et al. (2013) argue that restorative practices must be grounded in a broader view of conflict and justice, one that amplifies student voice and encourages active participation in resolving their own conflicts. This not only strengthens individual relationships but also promotes a culture of mutual respect and understanding within the school. This aligns with the literature and research from Kecskemeti et al. (2013), Vincent et al. (2021), University of Waikato et al. (2003) and Ministry of Education (2017). These papers express the importance of resolving conflicts with mutual respect, encouraging participation from all involved in conflict and spending time to create a storyline and investigate a way forward.

Hattie (2003) explores the critical role teachers play within the educational system. His research suggests that teachers influence 30% of students' achievements, placing their attitudes, knowledge and actions at the centre of the

educational process (p. 2), This statistic came from interviews of teachers and students and surveys. Hattie explains in this study the difference between an 'experienced' teacher and an 'expert' teacher, but all points mentioned are targeted to the specific academic success of a student, rather than the overall well-being of the student. Therefore, this position of the teacher, whether 'experienced' or 'expert', is rather static, and this research positions the teacher the expert in terms of knowledge. Conversely from a poststructuralist perspective, the teacher's role is not static but dynamic, intertwined with the shifting power relations and the discourses that determine an educational space. Teachers' influence is not just about delivering knowledge but about engaging and creating reciprocal relationships with students – which shapes both the teacher and the student.

Restorative practices are more than just policies or practice, but a living, breathing process that engages the complexities of relationships (Cooper & Miness, 2014). Challenging traditional hierarchies of power within schools and seeks to create spaces where all voices are heard and valued. Through this lens, restorative justice can be produced, not just as a response to harm but a proactive cultivation of a more just and caring educational environment.

3.1.3 Effectiveness of RP

The introduction of community conferencing in Australian schools in 1994 marks a pivotal moment in the evolution of restorative practices in education. This practice, adapted by Margaret Thorsborne and Lisa Cameron from New Zealand's model of the family group conferencing, was a procedural shift that ruptured the established discourse of discipline. Over a two-year study by the Queensland

Education Department, now known as Education Queensland, the school-based conferencing was examined, revealing its potential to destabilise traditional punitive approaches (Cameron & Thorsborne, 1999).

The power relations at play within these restorative practices are complex. Blood and Thorsborne (2005) illustrate that this approach is not just about addressing misconduct but about reconstituting the relationships that define school community and culture. These practices shift the locus of power from a top-down hierarchical model to one where the power is diffused and shared among all participants. In this way, restorative practices offer a counter-narrative to the prevailing discourses of punishment and control.

The literature that has since emerged from these initiatives paints a complex picture of restorative practices in educational contexts. These practices at their core, challenge the traditional power relations within educational institutions. They call on schools to move beyond their role as transmitters of knowledge to take on a responsibility of fostering respectful relationships and culture of care, displaying kindness, understanding and diversity (Drewery, 2014). Restorative practices, such as Katic et al. (2020) and Zehr (2002) redefine crimes and misconduct as harm done to people and communities, rather than a violation of rules and regulations. This shift in perspective places the emphasis on healing and accountability rather than punishment, yet the journey of restorative practices is not without challenges. The shadow of zero-tolerance policies, which have contributed to the school-to-prison pipeline, is still present in many educational institutions (Bartholomew, 2023). Winslade et al. (2014) argue that these policies, which can exacerbate rather than resolve conflicts, highlight the urgency of implementing restorative approaches in

schools which emphasise care, problem-solving and responsible collaborative citizenship (p. 14).

In this reimagined school environment, restorative practices serve as a framework for fostering holistic student wellbeing. As Winslade et al. (2014) suggest, these practices are empowering students to become responsible, engaged members of their communities. Thorsborne and Vinegard (2017) argue that this framework, grounded in values such as respect, accountability and honesty, offers a path toward creating more robust school climate. Kirkwood (2022) and Pranis (2006), outline what the values of respect and honesty look like, how they impact the process of restorative practices. Kirkwood explains that restorative justice is intended to assist people in sharing their honest accounts of experiences, not relying on the singular vision of 'truth' but the position of honesty to share, as opposed to constructing experiences or stories to 'win' their case (p. 3). According to Hansen (2003), all stories are representations of events, and their "accuracy" and "truth" are not questioned in therapy sessions, therefore, every person has their own versions of truth, which aligns with the concept that Kirkwood explains.

Pranis (2006) highlights that there is not a single definitive list of values required for restorative practices. However, honesty, respect, inclusion, listening and understanding are articulated by numerous researchers and philosophers to be essential. Dyson et al. (2022) emphasise that restorative practices (RP) empower students by teaching them to take responsibility for their actions and behaviour, highlighting the role of relationships in helping students navigate and repair harm when conflicts arise. This approach nurtures a sense of accountability and fosters meaningful connections within the school community. The literature mentioned

here states some key themes to improve and foster restorative practices and a healthy environment in schools are participation, empowerment and citizenship (Standing et al., 2012).

The implementation of a restorative conversation includes the preparatory conversation, facilitation of the restorative conversation and post restorative check-ins. Finnis (2021) highlights the importance of the preparatory phase and states “three words sum up the best restorative meetings: preparation, preparation, preparation” (p. 109). Finnis continues to explain that there is a difference in preparing to address low-level disruptions or breakdowns in relationships to high-level conflict-born disruptions. For low-level disruptions, the preparatory phase and post conversations may be shorter in length when the foundation of restorative practices within the school have been set. This means that if a student is involved in multiple disruptions, once they have completed their first restorative process, the preparatory phase may then become shorter.

3.1.4 The Significance of Relationships for Students

Humans are socially constructed to seek and develop relationships with each other to form communities and networks. This idea of a sense of belonging within communities, whanau and educational contexts displays how students have a drive to maintain relationships to build connection. Baumeister and Leary (1995) explain that "the belongingness hypothesis is that humans have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships" (p. 497). In schools, the importance of building relationships with students is paramount with literature highlighting this

idea and its effects (Bishop & Berryman, 2007; Hawk et al., 2002; Cooper & Miness, 2014; Sellman et al., 2013; Gregory et al., 2016; Vincent et al., 2021).

Matthews and Dollinger (2023) explore the importance of student representation and encouraging active citizenship in education, mentioning the importance for students having a voice and a platform for these voices to be heard. Further in this study Matthews and Dollinger state that "student representatives act as agents on the quality of learning experiences", and that "student representatives 'speak' and 'act' on behalf of the collective student body to communicate the experiences of students" (p. 560). This creates a platform for students to voice their concerns, thoughts and experiences, helps to encourage democracy but also to gather information about the culture, community and growth of an educational facility (Nelson, 2014). Sandretto and Davis (2023) mentioned that researchers have an opportunity to listen and respond to the voice of students when completing interviews, gathering important perspectives about projects that concern tamariki or rangatahi.

> The reality experienced by children in educational settings cannot be fully comprehended by inference and assumption. The meanings that students attach to experiences are not necessarily the meanings that their teachers would ascribe. The subcultures that children inhabit in classrooms are not always visible to adults. (Innes et al., 2001, p. 212)

Here, Innes et al. (2001) explain how students' experiences and perspectives are not always the same as the adult counterparts. As I have already explored, earlier in this thesis, discursive theory and how people position themselves within discourses mean that experiences will vary and the meaning someone ascribes to

situations are different. This statement made by Innes et al. (2001) therefore reconfirms the importance of student experiences being voiced within the classroom.

Students creating individual agency has been explored and explained by Charteris J. in her thesis - *Agency as dynamic and rhizomatic: An exploration of learner identities in two secondary classrooms* (2014). In this thesis, she explains that social resources enable learners to access a range of discourses, positionings in those discourses and therefore students can include personal knowledge, context and skills to exercise agency. Schweigert (1999) explains how restorative practices grants agency to individuals within communal spaces like classrooms, clarifying moral authority in social interactions. This perspective of personal agency underscores the critical role relationships play in creating a positive and ethical school climate, where students feel valued and empowered. Moreover, Wearmouth and Berryman (2012) underline how restorative practices harness the strengths of students, teachers, and whānau, enabling them to collaboratively address behavioural issues. This collective responsibility further reinforces the significance of relationship-building as a cornerstone for a supportive and inclusive school environment.

Overall, using the literature from Baumeister and Leary (1995), Charteris (2014), and Matthews and Dollinger (2023), it is clear that placing importance on student voice, agency and relationships within the classroom encourages restorative practices. More-so, placing the importance here helps to create opportunities for students to have their experiences heard, valued and appreciated.

3.2 Research Questions

This research investigates student experiences of restorative practices in schools and what this might offer schools as they adopt or revise their restorative practices. The objectives of the research were to interview nine students from three schools about their experiences and for these to contribute to the resources available to schools in shaping restorative practices.

Research about student experiences of restorative practices in schools holds significant importance contributing to the literature that advances understanding of these approaches, their impact, effectiveness and equity. Ultimately contributing to enhancing educational experiences and outcomes for students.

The research questions to achieve these objectives are:

- What are students' experiences of restorative practices in schools?
- How have these experiences affected their experience of school participation and sense of belonging?
- What might these experiences mean for schools and their approaches to restorative practices?

There are three key aspects to these questions. The first is the focus on students' experiences of restorative practices in school, as research about student experiences of restorative practices in schools is significant for several reasons. Drewery (2014) explains that restorative practices have gained recognition as a practical approach to addressing conflicts and promoting positive relationships in educational settings.

Restorative practices placing the understanding of student experiences to shed light on the effectiveness and impact of these interventions.

The second key aspect is what these restorative practices mean for students' experiences of belonging within their school context. According to Drewery (2016), students' experiences with restorative practices can provide valuable insights into their sense of belonging within the school community. Drewery claims that belonging is a crucial aspect of students' overall wellbeing and academic success. By examining how restorative practices contribute to students' sense of belonging, researchers can identify factors that enhance or hinder this sense of connection and inform the development of more inclusive and supportive school environments.

The third key aspect is what student experiences and effects for their belonging in the school community might offer schools when they introduce or revise their restorative practices. Research in this area can help identify disparities or inequities in the implementation and outcomes of restorative practices across different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds (Katic, 2017). This understanding can guide efforts to foster equitable, restorative practices and address diverse student needs and experiences.

Furthermore, research on student experiences of restorative practices can inform educational providers, policymakers, and practitioners about effective strategies, challenges, and areas for improvement in implementing restorative practices in schools (Ministry of Education, 2017). This knowledge can support

evidence-based decision-making and the development of best practices that promote positive school climates and student wellbeing.

3.3 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the background of restorative practices, tracing their evolution from the justice system to educational contexts. It has highlighted their effectiveness in fostering positive school cultures and communities. The significance of relationships among students, staff and whānau being part of the success of restorative practices in schools. In terms of student wellbeing and academic success. Additionally, this chapter has given the foundation for the research, outlining my research questions that drive this study and the structure I have followed. With this foundation now placed, the next chapter will look at the methods I have employed to investigate the student perspectives and experiences of restorative practices.

Chapter 4 Methodology

This chapter gives an account of the methodology and methods I drew on to guide my study, theoretically and practically. From preparing for ethical approval, development of the steps towards generating data, shaping the starter questions and which analysis approach I would take. In particular, it describes narrative inquiry which was an important data generation method to story the perspectives of participants and bring forward their lived experiences. An important aim for me in this study was to emphasise participant perspectives, and to generate rich and nuanced understanding of students' experiences with restorative practices in an educational setting. Qualitative research methods, such as interviews, provide a platform for identifying meaning in the stories that participants talk about their lives, offering insights into complex educational phenomena (Lichtman, 2010). The narrative inquiry lens offered further enrichment to this study. This enabled me to explore how students make sense of their experiences and how these narratives shape their identities within the school environment. Finally, I chose to use thematic analysis to unpack themes from the participant interviews and I have added individual summaries of the themes from each student and a short background on each student.

4.1. A Qualitative Methodology

This section explores the significance and application of qualitative research methods within the field of education. Qualitative research is a diverse collection of approaches to inquiry intended to generate knowledge, aimed to discover how

humans experience and interpret the social world (Sandelowski, 2004). Interviews, surveys and focus groups are often used to uncover themes and meanings attached to people's lives and interactions. Gathering information and stories helps to generate thick descriptions and experiences of participants. By unpacking the accounts of the experiences described by their participants, Meyer and Meissel (2023) offered invaluable insights into complex educational phenomena, such as teacher development, student engagement, and the effects of policy changes. Further, in this section I describe how qualitative methods have become integral to educational research, offering an effective approach which has helped to provide a means of inquiry and analysis that produce some understanding and interpretation of complex and dynamic educational environments that were relevant for this study.

4.1.1 Qualitative Research

I decided that a qualitative approach would best suit this study. One feature of this approach that stood out to me was valuing participants stories and the meanings they make as mentioned by Liamputtong (2012). Campbell et al. (2016) further explains that qualitative research is suitable when researchers want to understand the lived experience of respondents, and how it has shaped their perceptions of life or work, or service provision or service receipt. My aim was to investigate restorative practices in schools. A qualitative approach made possible the stories I wanted to generate of students who had participated in that process. Using interviews and spending time to listen to the participants gave space for the participants to develop their stories. I wanted readers, teachers and educational facilitators to see how restorative practices are working, can be reviewed and what

possible improvements could be made. It is important to note that each time we facilitate a restorative conversation we will explore and investigate new stories. The stories of each participant and the reason for the conflict is different but the continual growth and development in this process helps to offer a better chance of supporting our students. Therefore, I used qualitative research methods for its approach to generate rich data that can contribute to narratives of student experience and promoting growth and development of RP.

Qualitative research emphasises how there are multiple understandings to people' experiences, beliefs and perspectives (Capstone, 2003, p. 361). This approach to research typically involves methods such as interviews, surveys, and sample groups to create data themes, often completed by sociologists and psychologists. Generating data through the use of qualitative methods can create value in depth of meaning and peoples experiences. This approach may allow researchers a robust understanding of a topic and a way to unpack the meanings people attach to their lives, situations, relationships and activities (Leavy, 2017, p. 124).

Another reason I have chosen a qualitative approach is because of its long history in educational contexts. Bogdan (1982) was among the first to devote extensive work qualitative approaches within education. Throughout the 1980s, qualitative research methods were applied and gained traction, solidifying their place in education research (Lichtman, 2010). By the 21st century, qualitative methods became integral to studying classroom interactions, curriculum design, and policy implementation, offering insights into phenomena that were previously challenging to capture (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 52). For example, researchers

frequently use qualitative methods to explore how students experience equity and inclusion in diverse educational settings, providing descriptions that inform both theory and practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 28).

Moreover, qualitative research supports ideas of knowledge and language as constitutive by emphasising participant perspectives, as an essential component in education, where learners and educators can co-construct meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 12). When analysing complex issues like student engagement, teacher development, and policy impacts on learning environments, this perspective is particularly relevant. Through a qualitative approach, this style of research helps to illuminate the interplay between individual agency and structural factors in education, creating a richer understanding of how different contexts shape educational outcomes (Stake, 1995, p. 91). The qualitative method has been critical when addressing nuanced research questions that require more than numerical analysis.

4.2 Methods of Inquiry

Having decided on a qualitative research methodology as the overarching approach to this research, the next step was to consider which methods would inform the study. After consideration and investigation into a variety of methods of inquiry, I decided on narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry linked to my own experience of teaching and aligned with the discursive positions in education that I take up.

4.2.1 Narrative Inquiry

A narrative approach to inquiry about understanding human experiences emphasises the importance of stories as a way for people to make sense of their lives and social realities. “The telling of stories is a prevalent part of social life, through which people recall, recount and reflect on their lives” (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 130). This approach has inspired my daily living and professional practice. For example, as I work in my classroom or interact with friends and family, I now take time differently to hear their stories about their lived experiences. When a student retells their story of a conflict, which may differ from another student, I spend time to develop this particular or unique story with that student. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), as reviewed in Costantino (2001), narratives are not merely reflections of past events but are actively shaped by the social, cultural, and institutional contexts in which they are told. This means that people construct their identities and relationships through the stories they tell and the ways in which those stories are interpreted by others.

From a post-structuralist perspective, narratives are not fixed or singular. Rather, they are fluid, contingent, and often contested, reflecting the multiple and often competing discourses that circulate in society (Khan & MacEachen, 2021). Narratives humanise time, allowing each person to reflect on the effect of their actions, contemplate their choices, and even reauthor their lives based on new insights. This process, identified as "re-authoring" by White and Epston (1990) from a narrative therapy context, argues that people can separate dominant "problem-saturated descriptions" of their lives from other preferred stories. They

can then identify "unique outcomes" which are scaffolded to create alternative narratives (p. 16).

In educational settings, narrative inquiry offers a way to understand students' experiences in nuanced ways. Creswell (2017) suggests that narratives allow for the exploration of personal meaning within educational contexts, which can highlight the power dynamics, struggles, and successes that students encounter in school. By telling their stories, students can assert personal agency, challenge dominant discourses, and reshape their educational trajectories. Students have opportunities to communicate and retell their stories through use of a guidance team. The concept of guidance is used to include pastoral care as well as counselling, educational, vocational and individual learning programmes aimed at the individual development of the student (Webb, 1980). Although not every school will have a specific guidance team which involves a counsellor, some will provide a year level dean, a senior leadership team member or a form teacher. This guidance system is created and provided to offer students a safe person or people to relate to, communicate with and to find support throughout their education (Thompson & Thompson, 2012). As Chase (2005) asserts, narrative inquiry is not just about recollecting past experiences but also about making sense of those experiences in a meaningful and often transformative way (p. 65).

Incorporating this approach in New Zealand's educational context aligns with the emphasis on holistic and culturally responsive practices, especially within the framework of restorative justice in schools. Restorative practices in New Zealand schools reflect a recognition that students' voices and experiences are central to addressing conflicts and fostering emotional well-being. Through

narrative, students are empowered to participate actively in resolving conflicts, navigating power dynamics with authority figures, and reimagining their roles within the school community.

In summary, narrative inquiry, particularly when understood through a post-structural lens, enables people to reconstruct their experiences, challenge dominant societal narratives, and author new possibilities for their lives. This approach has profound implications for understanding education and student experiences, particularly in contexts that emphasise personal agency, emotional well-being, and restorative justice.

4.2.2 Ethical Considerations

Having selected the research methodology to guide this study, and the methods for data generation, a next step was to consider the research ethics this study would follow. This step included developing and applying for ethical approval. There are seven ethical considerations that were important to this study, these have been explained and highlighted in the University of Waikato Human Ethics Research Committee guidelines and considerations (University of Waikato, 2009). They include anonymity and confidentiality, potential harm to participants, the right to decline, producing a summary of the findings, conflict of interest, disputes and social considerations. To initiate this approval process, I first needed to consider how I would maintain confidentiality and anonymity of the participants.

In an aim to maintain anonymity and confidentiality I have used pseudonyms in this research from initial data generation to publishing. The staff

member from each school knows the participants but has had no access to information or data generated, although this staff member facilitated the location of interviews and initial meetings. To address this, I included information about the involvement of the staff member in all consent forms. This staff member's involvement ended at the point of interviews being arranged and confirmed (see Appendices B & E).

When conducting educational research, it is crucial to recognise and address potential harms that participants may experience. Potential harms can be related to inequitable power relations, vulnerability, and potential emotional distress. As this study focuses on students' experiences of restorative practices, the potential for these harms to be present is important to note. Some participants may experience residual emotions (emotions that are still present) linked to the restorative process they experienced and are being asked to recount in their research interview. These residual emotions may arise throughout the interview process or when the transcripts are returned. They may also experience a power imbalance through the interview process (Pessoa et al., 2019).

Power imbalances between researchers and participants can lead to potential harm. Researchers' authority and influence may inhibit participants from freely expressing their thoughts and experiences, compromising the authenticity of the research. Inequitable power relations can result in self-censorship or conformity, as participants may experience pressure to provide socially desirable responses. Educational institutions and school discursive contexts can affect students' ability

to speak freely or easily about their experiences, especially if these experiences have not been good.

Educational research participants, especially students or marginalised groups, may be vulnerable due to age, limited decision-making capacity, or historical disadvantages. Power imbalances can heighten their vulnerability, making them susceptible to exploitation, coercion, or harm. To acknowledge this, I have not included students I know as potential participants, and throughout the process, I communicated with participants about consent and confidentiality. Although the concept of neutrality can be difficult if not impossible to achieve (Mulcahy, 2001), having the aspiration to achieve neutrality means I could work towards this exchange of power.

Engaging in research discussions, particularly on sensitive topics, can elicit emotional distress among participants. When sharing personal experiences, accounts of trauma or challenging stories participants may experience anxiety, discomfort, or other expressions distress. Therefore, I provided information about how they could access to support services, such as counselling or debriefing sessions, to address any emotional distress or concerns.

In an aim to mitigate these potential harms, there were several steps I took. Firstly, obtaining informed consent from participants, providing them with as much information as possible to give an understanding of the research's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. I was guided by the idea that children must be allowed to make their own decision about participation, whether or not parents or

guardians had given consent, and they must understand that it is their right to withdraw from the study at any time (Gibson, 2012). Therefore, I needed to spend time explaining my interest in hearing their story, how their participation might contribute to helping other students in the future and where this research would be published. Potential participants also had the opportunity to ask questions about the research. The next step included protecting each participant's identity and confidentiality, to maintain their privacy and prevent any potential harm or stigmatisation. One way to do this was by using pseudonyms and carefully handle any information that might be identifying. Another was to remind the participants that the teacher who gave them the advertisement to participate and arrange for the meetings does not have any information about what was said in the recorded data generation conversations. My aim is to minimise any coercion or pressure participants may experience, as doing this helps to foster an environment that encourages open dialogue and respects participants' autonomy and boundaries.

Secondly, I engaged in continuous ethical reflection, seeking guidance from ethics committees and educational peers to maintain ethical conduct throughout the research process. The participant information sheet acknowledged the potential for harm (see Appendix A), outlining that participants would be asked to reflect on past experiences that may create distress and uncomfortable emotions. Before starting the interview process, I took steps to provide a community of care for each participant. This was done by asking them who they might talk to if they experience any form of distress. Another step I took was to remind participants of the school counselling service in regard to the community of care. A community of care is a support system within a school consisting of guidance counsellors, year level deans

and any medical staff. This community of care is used to offer students a variety of support and a wraparound effect to care for students' overall wellbeing. I also offered for the participants to bring a support person into the interview if they desired (only one student did this, and their support person was another participant in this study).

Participants had a right to decline and the right to withdraw from the research. Therefore, participants could withdraw by emailing me up until the generated finding summaries were approved by the participants. This provided clarity and created a written confirmation of withdrawal. Participants were reminded at various phases of the process that they could withdraw. I did this at the interview and again when I returned the transcripts to them for confirmation of accuracy. I also informed them that the withdrawal after the final date may mean some data cannot be removed. No participants asked to be removed or withdrawn.

Another step towards ethical approval was to provide the participants with an opportunity to review and alter their transcripts. Participants had a right to receive their transcripts from the interviews for approval, and a summary for the findings before publishing. After the interviews, I produced a brief summary and the complete transcript for each participant to review and approve. Participants were able to remove any data from this transcript or alter anything if they did not want this included in the study.

Participants were also informed that, once this research has been completed and published, I will produce a summary of the findings to provide a clear and

straightforward overview in digital form, to all participants who I am able to contact. I will also send an email link of this thesis to all participants, principals and liaison teachers when published.

Conflicts of interest are another point for ethical consideration. When planning my steps towards ethical approval I needed to identify if any were present between the participants and me. To my knowledge there was no conflict-of-interest present, with no prior relationship with any participant and all participants were unknown to me.

I then created a plan in the event that a participant might become troubled during an interview. In this plan I would respond to the immediate concern, and if the participant needed further support, the staff member or the school counsellor would then be notified if the participant gave permission. I have included this information into the consent form, but verbal consent would also be required. From this point, the school process for a community of care would take over, offering support by way of referral to outside providers where needed and appropriate. This plan was not actioned in this research as no issues of concern presented themselves.

This research did not have criteria for selection based on ethnicity, iwi, culture, gender, sexuality, religion ethical belief or disability. At the same time, the educational context of this study meant that participants would identify with a range of cultural experience. Also, in the bi-cultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand, I took care to engage in interviews in bi-culturally informed ways and with consideration for the potential range of cultural experience participants might

identify with. Whilst I did not ask the participants specifically for their cultural identities, some participants volunteered this information in their interview. As a way of taking culturally honouring steps I did ask if they had a preferred way to begin the interview such as, a karakia, waiata, prayer. All participants declined and some said they appreciated the offer.

In an aim to show respect to all participants during the research process, when facilitating interviews, I took care with how I dressed to lessen the risk of any potential offence through clothing that might be deemed inappropriate. When considering this, I took the teacher's code of conduct into account. I also took care to speak in ways that do not assume a person's gender or sexual orientation.

4.3 Data Generation

4.3.1 Recruitment

Process order.

Having received ethical approval by the University of Waikato Division of Education Research Ethics Committee, my first step in the recruitment process was to contact each school via the Principal. I initially contacted three schools; these schools were selected with particular criteria in mind. I wanted the research schools to be co-educational (all genders), public or state schools, and within the same geographical region. Therefore, I went through the schools in my area and highlighted the schools I could contact. There was limited response from the

schools in this area, so I extended the geographical reach to include another neighbouring region.

Once the schools had replied, and expressed interest, I arranged a meeting where I was able to give the information sheet and consent form (see Appendix A & C) to the Principal. Each of the principals then communicated with their Board of Trustees (BoT) before I was given consent to access the school, staff, and students.

Once the BoT approved my research, I was able to contact a staff member who was referred by the Principal. I made sure to include the information sheet, consent form, and potential participant advertisement (see appendices A, D & F). Each of the staff members then supplied potential participants with advertisements for research (see Appendix F). In many cases the Principal had already communicated with a member of staff and got their consent before this was returned to me. This step was only required for one of the three participating schools.

Potential participants then contacted me using the details in the advertisement for more information if required, and in one school, I was invited by the staff member to communicate with the potential students in person. For the other two schools I emailed potential participants and their guardians the information sheet and consent forms (see Appendices A, B & E). For the participants included in the initial in person conversation, all consents forms were signed in this meeting. This was possible because for these students they were of an age where guardian consent was not required. However, before the interviews took place these students

sent me a parental consent form signed, this was completed because the students wanted to make sure they followed the requirements of this research.

Once all participants had completed and handed back the consent forms, I arranged a meeting for the individual data generation interview (45 minutes). This consisted of one individual semi-structured interview, which was audio recorded and transcribed by Otter.AI. This allowed the students to communicate their experiences and thoughts about restorative practices in schools. I gave participants starter questions before we commence the interview to clarify and check (see Appendix G). After the interview, I sent the transcript to each participant to read, review and return. Participants were asked to return these transcripts within the week. All participants returned this within a day, expressed satisfaction with the transcript.

4.3.2 Participants

My hope was to generate stories of the experiences of restorative practices from students, because in current literature, student views and stories are currently limited. I believe as a teacher, that I work for my students, I foster a commitment to putting students' learning and wellbeing at the centre of my practice. This commitment informs how I interact with students, their whānau, colleagues and others in the school community. So, when I facilitate a restorative process, it is to try support their mana, well-being and their ability to manage conflict in the future. Therefore, it seemed appropriate for this research that I put the students' experiences at the centre of this study by talking with them as participants.

For the schools where the participants came from, the staff member was a part of the senior leadership team, and they all had access to the pastoral records to see if a student has participated in a restorative process. From this selection of students in each school, I had multiple students express their interest in participating. Towards the end of the recruitment process, I had too many students express their interest, with the last school offering more students than I had been granted ethical approval for. I decided at that point that I would accept the first students that returned their consent forms, and I informed all interested participants of the limited number of participants I could accept and the criteria for selection.

Nine students between 15 and 18 years of age consented to be participants. All students had participated in a restorative conversation within the previous two years. The students came from three different schools and expressed eagerness to add their voices to this research. Whilst the number of participants is fairly small, these participants came from diverse backgrounds, held different views on education, and have all experienced different versions of restorative conversations.

Individual student backgrounds and themes.

With the consent forms collected, each school allocated dates and times when the participants would be available for the interview. The interviews took a total of three weeks to complete, and I returned the transcripts to each participant within a day of the interview. Once the participants returned the approved transcripts and summaries, I was able to compile the data and start exploring the themes. To offer context to the themes I identify later in Chapter 5, I have included the summaries of each participant and their experience. Students have requested

specific pronouns, so to honour this, I have used their selected pronoun with the pseudonym they have approved.

Alex, a Pākehā student, is in the last year of secondary education. Alex has attended this school since year nine and through the lens of academic achievement discourses would be described as a high achieving student. Alex spoke about his participation in various extracurricular activities and is surrounded by a variety of supportive family and educational staff members. He has expressed a fondness for education and enjoys coming to school, seeing teachers and adults within the education sectors as authority for students to listen to and follow instructions. Alex recounted a restorative conversation with a dean, and a teacher following an incident.

Blake is in year 12 and identifies as Māori. They have attended this same school since year nine and described themself as a highly motivated student. This student is involved in student committees and leadership roles at their school. They expressed a fondness for education and enjoy coming to school and seeing teachers and adults within the education sectors as authority for students to listen to and follow instructions. Blake recounted an experience with managing a difficult friend group dynamic.

Cameron is a Māori student and in year 12, they take a very motivated and dedicated view on education. Cameron strives to succeed in all aspects of their schooling and believes that the teacher oversees the classroom, students' role is to listen and follow the instructions. Relationships between the teacher and student are important in maintaining a positive learning environment. Cameron recounted a conflict with their teacher, over lateness to class.

Dallas is in year 12, she identifies as Māori and is involved in Māori leadership within the school in which she provides support and vital student voice. Dallas spoke of enjoying school and her hopes to become a teacher in the future. She also described her eagerness to create school environments where all students are included and can gain autonomy. Dallas' experience of her restorative conversation involved what she called a traumatic experience with a teacher at a previous school.

Elliot is in year 10 and identifies as Māori. Elliot expressed dislike for school and identified lack of motivation towards academic studies. However, Elliot enjoys playing sport at school and continues to attend as a commitment to whānau who would like them to complete year 13. Elliot is looking forward to moving schools and discovering new passions and friendships. Elliot described a restorative meeting with girls who were causing drama and threats.

Finley is a year 10 student. Finley enjoys playing volleyball and mentioned currently lacking engagement and motivation towards school but has hopes to complete year 13. Finley is very compassionate and enjoys building relationships. Finley recounted a restorative conversation with three girls following an incident where she reacted physically due to their harassment.

Georgie is year 10, is highly creative and enjoys visual arts. Georgie states that school is enjoyable most of the time but can struggle to be motivated to attend. Georgie is looking to finish secondary school and continue with her education. Georgie discussed a restorative conversation following a conflict with a friend group.

Henley is in year 10, a keen sports player representing her school in Volleyball, loves school in all aspects and is currently holding a 90% attendance rate. Henley aspires to complete year 13 and has future goals of being a lawyer or exploring dramatic arts. Henley shared her experience of a restorative conversation involving their younger sister, who was being bullied.

Izzy is a year 11 student who identifies as Māori, loves Te Ao Haka, Māori history and sport. Izzy looks forward to school each day and is excited to complete year 13 and move forward to further education thanks to the relationships with teacher. Izzy recounted a restorative conversation with his teacher, after being caught vaping and witnessing friends steal a car.

4.3.3 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were an important method to collect data as I wanted to capture the stories, experiences and ideas of the participants. Completing surveys or answering specific set questions, appeared to be too strict and limited the amount of individual perspective I was looking to find for this research. Leavy (2017) states that "interview methods use conversation as a learning tool, as people are naturally accustomed to participating in conversations" (p. 139). As interview methods involve a range of structures from unstructured to highly structured, I have chosen alongside narrative inquiry to use a semi-structured interview style. This allows the participants to view the questions before we start but also understand that not all questions will be asked, and that depending on the narrative of the conversation that new ones may be added. These questions are open-ended and allows the participants a type of freedom to deviate from the original question to

create the narrative storying I am looking for in this study (Jones, 2021). Gibson (2012) explains that the interview runs more smoothly if children are eased into the process by answering a few easy questions that require only a brief response (p. 155). Therefore, I spent time before we started the interview recording, to discuss anything the participant wished. Most students asked about my day or asked me questions to deepen their understanding of why this research and if I enjoyed my job as a teacher. I found this made the process of interviewing calmer and the participants seem to relax.

As I am basing my research with a narrative inquiry lens, mentioned and explained earlier, active listening is crucial to a successful interview. Active listening is demonstrated by creating space for the participant to speak, asking questions relating to the train of thought and responding to the participant. Leavy (2017) mentions that "active listening can help researchers pick up on markers in the conversation that may be keys to vital information or narrative pathways" (p. 141). Using this method of interviews requires more time to the interview process and careful analysis of the transcript. I explained to each of the participants that the interview would be set more like a conversation, where they have the space to give detail and story their experience. I offered each participant time and space to think and understand the questions, before they and formed their answers without being pushed or led. I believe that narrative inquiry and semi-structured interviews supported participants to feel comfort, and to describe their perspectives well.

It is customary to transcribe all interviews to gather a wide range of themes and experiences for each person. I asked each participant for permission to use the Otter.AI application before we started the interview, all students consented. I came

across this application in my earlier studies, and found it to be easy, efficient and accurate when it came to longer conversations. Otter.AI registers the speakers' names (or given names) and then at the end produces a summary of the conversation to view. I made sure to change all names, register the correct audio with the transcript before sending the transcript back to the participants for review. Many students commented on the transcription process and explained that it was comfortable and discrete.

With these transcripts, I was then able to begin my analysis which I had selected before gaining ethical approval for this study and before undertaking the interviews.

4.4 Methods of Analysis

After consideration and investigation into a variety of analysis methods I decided on thematic analysis (Atkins & Wallace, 2012; Butler-Kisber, 2010). I first heard about thematic analysis in one of my education papers at the university. This paper was called ‘becoming a researcher: theory, ethics and methods, this paper explored the different research methods, how to apply ethics to your research project and influential researchers. While I studied this paper, I found that thematic analysis identifies patterns and themes within data. Therefore, I decided this analysis method would align with the experiences the participants storied.

4.4.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis allows for researchers to identify a broader range of data and therefore can be flexible with how it is used in research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis is an approach which requires the researcher to continually reflect and review the data. This approach may be slower and more involved, but this allows for the data with be rich with concepts and meaning (Ayre & McCaffery, 2022). As I am interested in Foucault's concept of discourses, and the development and exploration of lived experiences thematic analysis seemed appropriate to use in this research.

There is no clear start or end point to this analysis approach and there are no quality standards when creating or highlighting themes from data. However, themes can come out of the research or interview questions as topics, key words or perspectives. Some themes can overlap and cross over each other, making the reflection and review of themes important. Reflecting on the data often allows for the development of themes and key points. Ayre and McCaffery (2022) poses some starter questions when reflecting; "why might the participant have said that?", "what sections on the data stand out to me and why?" (p. 78). Asking these kinds of questions when reviewing that data allows for a thought process of unpacking the information. At this point it is important to review the transcripts and see how participants explain their perspective, reason and meaning of this topic. The theme comes from the voice of the participant, so combing through the transcript offers insight into those questions. I spent time carefully reading each one, highlighting, circling and underlining key words, and identifying concepts that emerge across the transcripts. Through this process, key themes emerged and developed.

The amount of effort and time spent on data analysis and innovativeness influences the quality of theme development (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). This involves back and forth movements between data, the prior knowledge of the

researcher and previous research on the topic to build understanding. As mentioned by Vaismoradi and Snelgrove (2019), some researchers have made an effort to produce a guide and practical steps to develop themes, although there is a lack of articulation about specific steps and instructions. Reliability is a greater concern for thematic analysis, more interpretation goes into the development and defining of themes and codes (Guest et al., 2012).

4.5 Summary

This section highlighted the significance of qualitative and narrative inquiry for this educational research, particularly when investigating sensitive topics such as restorative practices. By centring on the lived experiences of students, the study contributes to a richer understanding of how restorative processes influence students' perceptions and educational outcomes. The use of qualitative methods ensured that the voices of participants are heard in a meaningful way, while the narrative inquiry approach provides a framework for reimaging these experiences in a transformative light. Thematic analysis offering for rich understanding of lived experiences and the themes that are produced from the interview process to generate insights into student experiences of restorative practices. This research also reinforces the importance of creating space for student agency, emotional well-being and holistic learning environments in schools.

Chapter 5 Findings

5.1 Five Key Themes

This chapter presents five themes that were evident in the transcripts and have particular relevance for understanding the students' experiences of restorative practices they were involved with. The effects of these and the meanings these experiences may have for schools. I start this chapter by giving a concise explanation of the themes and their purpose; I then elaborate each of the five themes. Later in the chapter I provide an interpretation and meaning to the themes, giving links to the transcripts and referencing the experiences of participants. Chapter 6 will develop the links to the discourses that offer discursive positions in the experiences of participants.

Before I began the analysis process on the nine transcripts, I noticed that there were a few discourses and themes that I expected would appear in the participant stories. This is because of my personal experience working in the discursive contexts of secondary schools as a teacher and as a restorative practice facilitator. However, I was surprised to uncover five clear themes that presented in all nine interviews.

5.1.1 Themes

The work of identifying and presenting themes has an important purpose in qualitative and narrative inquiry. It aims to elicit the essence of the participants experience. Through the investigation of these themes the researcher can develop

in depth meaning (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). As mentioned earlier, discourse is produced through social interaction. There are a range of discourses available to people and, to some degree or other, they can determine how they take up or refuse the discursive position calls. As I used thematic analysis to investigate the transcripts and identify the different educational and other discourses that students can subscribe to, several key themes became visible.

I spent time reviewing transcripts and decided to focus on the five themes that were present throughout all nine interviews. Some themes that were initially found in my analysis, were not present in all interviews and therefore I decided not to include them in the key themes. However, as there are multiple discursive positions present in the experiences of the participants these themes are still present throughout my findings.

The five themes I present here include communication, agency and advocacy, power relations, supportive relationships and the implementation of restorative practices. These themes offer insights of interest to me that may also be of value to teachers or facilitators of restorative practices. The value may be the students' experiences within educational settings, particularly around conflict resolution, teacher-student dynamics, and the broader implications for restorative practices in schools. While the context and reason for the restorative conversations being facilitated were all different all students drew attention to the exercising of power between adult and student. With one participant experiencing a conflict between themself and a teacher, and a second participant experiencing conflict within a friend group and multiple participants experiencing bullying behaviour with other students.

As this chapter continues, I develop the five themes and weave excerpts of transcripts as a way of including participants voices and re-present some of the experiences they spoke of in their words.

Communication and its role in conflict resolution.

As I spoke with the participants, I could hear their hope for connection through communication, from their words and expressions, as they explained the breakdown in communication between themselves and the other person in the conflict. White and Epston, (1990) developed a narrative therapy concept called ‘double listening’. This concept involves the listener to pay attention to both the story of the problem and the story of the person’s response or values being expressed. It involves hearing the harm or distress and listening for signs of hope, resistance or intentions simultaneously. This concept aligns with restorative approaches and invites educators and facilitators to tune in to the unspoken values, hopes and desires of students.

The importance of effective communication in restorative conversations is identified by Green et al. (2013) “The kernel of restorative truth is communication and dialog” (p. 454), suggesting that communication breakdown is at the core of restorative harm. I used ‘double listening’ in the interview process to hear what students might have preferred as I listened to their concerns. This concept involves listening for what is absent but implicit in what is being said. This type of listening, is drawn from narrative therapy practice, is described by White (1999) with an idea called ‘absent but implicit’. This idea describes a specific way of listening for what is not said from what is said. Stating that ‘absent but implicit’ is informed by “the

understanding that expression, and the meaning that expression conveys, is not derived directly from the experience that the expression refers to" (p. 36).

Students frequently mentioned poor or inadequate communication during conflicts or difficult situations. Communication issues, as described in the narratives of Alex, Blake, and Cameron, show that collaborative and mutually beneficial communication is vital in resolving conflicts.

> I mean, that's kind of what happened. I was kind of given the memo of me having to apologise, and then I was just like, Yeah, I'm not going to do that. So now I just ended up walking out. I said, this isn't going anywhere. I just stood up and I just left. It wasn't a conversation; I just got told what to do – Alex

> We [group] kind of talk about it for maybe two weeks beforehand. We're like, I'm getting annoyed with them because of this, this and this. It's really annoying and draining to be around. Then at first it was like, we [group] should talk to them [another student]. But then we [group] realised that we all feel the same about them, and then we're like, we have to sit them down. They [group] appointed me to do the talking, because I brought it to them. - Blake

> Few of my other teachers care. They talk to you and like, [teachers] try and joke around with you, they get my jokes and stuff like that. You can just tell them stuff, and they [teacher] are a person that fully cares about their job, they care about the kids that they're teaching. - Cameron

A "communication perspective" (Paul & Borton, 2017) means that communication is more than a simple transmission over channels and people and involves negotiation and construction of meaning.

There were many examples where students expressed concern when communication was unclear or rushed. I read disapproval in Alex's words that the restorative conversation was a "tick-box exercise" rather than a meaningful interaction where mana was enhanced.

> It was that small pep talk on the way over, like [teacher thinks], oh, let's just get this over and done with that, that type of vibe. You know, I mean, first when we came into the Dean's room, the teacher wanted to do it then, but he had a meeting, so he was like, I'll sort it out at lunch. And then he came back and grabbed me at lunch. So yeah, it felt like [teacher thought]; shit, I just want to get this over and done with like. I got better stuff to do, you know. – Alex

Blake emphasised the importance of communicating in a professional way when their conflict resolution depended on effectively conveying their experience and the preferences for the relationship.

> So not all emotional. It's personal, yes but you can't make it personal. You must deliver it to them without any emotion, because the minute it's like, oh, you did this. And then the tone is off, and then you say it wrong, like, oh, she's such a bitch, or whatever, then it just becomes bad. You have to deliver it to them in a professional way. Say I don't like when you do this. Keep it calm. And then after you are friends. - Blake

In this next example Cameron was a part of a conversation with their teacher. This process was treated as a restorative conversation. However, as Cameron explained it was more a monologic conversation than mutual communication. This poor communication led to an experience of dismissal of her and her feelings.

> [Teacher] “Can I talk to you properly?” And I was like, “I guess so”. She takes me into a little room, and I sit down, and she just completely dismissed me and how I felt about it. I think I had a valid point though. I made an effort, and I said, “Sorry”, so I don't know why all that happened. And she just kept on repeating herself over and over again. - Cameron

Dallas explained how communication was affected from the outset due to a past relationship between the teacher and whānau.

> My mom, didn't want me to be anywhere near her, because when I was near her, I had so much hatred towards her, at the [previous] intermediate [school] I was a leader, and she wouldn't let me go to the Māori leadership stuff on a Friday [term four], and she wouldn't let me go to kapahaka at lunch. And then she came to [teach at] my [current] college, like the first three weeks of term one, we were fine, but then my table like we were known as the hoha kids, but we weren't. We were never that bad. And she would literally just tell us off and target us. I was talking to those kids afterwards like this year about it, and they had no clue. She was like, a whole different person to them. - Dallas

Elliot states that although communication through restorative processes at the school took place the process has left Elliot still feeling upset and the threatening behaviour was able to continue. Elliot saying that the conversation “fell on deaf ears”.

> After having the second restorative I still felt really upset. I walked out of that meeting just feeling like they didn't understand me, or the things I said. Like it all fell on deaf ears. So, I just moved on. The other persons behaviour and intimidation continued. I just gave up on snitching. - Elliot

Although, five participants spoke of experiencing problematic communication in their restorative conversations, four participants spoke about experiencing times when communication was productive and effective. Finley explains how from three individual restorative conversations, one produced an effective outcome. This conversation involved another student, where there was positive communication and a willingness to listen,

> Even though she's like, laughing and stuff, she wasn't like the others, she listened to the first part, and then apologised. We are okay now, but the other girls we are not friends at all. - Finley

Georgie mentioned that although the restorative conversation happened and the process was followed, the other student appeared to be present in the room and participated to a point, but the communication did not seem to go beyond talking about feelings or to sort out the issue.

> I didn't feel like the other girl was hearing me out for what I had to say. I thought it was fair because, I still got to talk about how it made me feel, and then the other girl to talk about how it made her feel. But I just wish it went a different way she wasn't really cooperative with, I guess, talking about it. And I don't think she really wanted to sort it out. So that's the only part that I was a bit like, that's not fair. That I want to sort it out, but you don't. She didn't have to be there, but she came because they said it would be a good idea and, but she wasn't really talking, or should say it's Yep, okay, I've got it. - Georgie

Henley spoke of the value of the post restorative conversation and communication that addressed progress in terms of the issue as well as ongoing wellbeing.

> The teachers that were in the room, have they had a post chat, check in with me and just double check that everything's all good and that I'm all good. They do that all the time. It's really good. It's a consistent check in; they didn't just have the chat and go "you're good" and move on. They just double check that the relationships are still happy. - Henley

Izzy's words show how he engaged in the conversation, was responsive to the questions asked of him and the effect for the other person. Through this dialogue the kind of closeness was produced that improved the relationship between parties and school attendance. My reading of this is that in terms of belonging, the effective communication seems to have contributed to more belonging in this relationship with the other party and in school.

> I was just talking to him. He was asking me, why? Like, why I've done that and that. He said that, like, he has to pick up his son from ages away, I seen the car seat in the back of the car, and said oh nah man, but I changed. Seeing him like that has made me close with Matua and I come to school more. We both opened up to each other aye, made it better. - Izzy

These examples show the importance of communication giving both parties an opportunity to speak and experience some understanding and appreciation for what they are communicating. They also show the importance of relations of power being attended to, particularly in institutions that subscribe to the hierarchal discourses,

such as education, that privilege teacher authority and position students with less authority. When these collaborative and even-handed approaches to communication are not fostered, there can be problematic effects that reproduce uneven power relations and exacerbates tensions, leaving students feeling unsupported whether in teacher-student interactions or peer group relationships. The above examples seem fitting with Hendry's (2009) point that "failing to recognise the subtle yet present power relation that takes place between student and teacher, and its associated emotional components, can both reduce the capacity for change and growth and fail to build on a potential key strength" (p. 128).

Alex explained above that there was a lack of clear communication in his restorative conversation, in contrast Blake emphasised the importance of clear communication in group dynamics. As Blake spent time before having the restorative conversation to communicate with the group of friends, collaborating and coming to a consensus before approaching another student to have a restorative conversation to communicate a friendship conflict. As Blake shows below,

> We [group] kind of talked about it for maybe two weeks beforehand. We were getting annoyed with her because of this, this and this. It's really annoying and draining to be around. Then at first it was like, we [group] should talk to her and we realised that we all feel the same about her, but we [group] realise that she won't change, based on what we can see, she don't really show any desire to change, just to stick to whatever. And so, we're [group] like, look, she needs to go from the group. It's not personal, but was with good intention, out of a place of love. And then we [group] sit her down, to have a restorative. They [group] appointed me to do the talking, because I raised it with them. - Blake

Unfortunately for Alex, Cameron and Dallas, there was no preparatory restorative conversation where time was given to make sure the student was aware of the process and offering a moment for the emotion of each student to be attended to before reviewing the conflict. For Alex, he mentioned that he did not have a preparatory restorative conversation, but a small conversation about why he was going to have a restorative conversation. This was rushed and then when the restorative conversation started, he experienced being ganged up on and did not believe that the process was equitable and fair. Therefore, Alex believed it was not completed appropriately or efficiently.

> Then later that day, the dean, comes grab me, and he brings me over, and we have a chat, which I guess in their eyes, was like a restorative thing. And it wasn't that great, to be honest, I feel like I kind of got ganged up on, you know, because it was like two fully grown men, and then I'm just sitting there, and I'm like, not a lawyer or anything. I don't know what I'm doing. So, I was just kind of sitting there, just waiting it out, yeah. Was not that good. - Alex

As Cameron and Dallas both reported having shorter restorative conversations and the time for a preparatory restorative conversation was not available. Therefore, both students went into the "mini chat" without warning or preparation, which left them feeling angry without a chance to communicate honestly. Both Cameron and Dallas mentioned they had not yet let go of the emotions tied to the situation, so they went into the restorative still experiencing frustration and hurt.

> I sat back down, and then, like, 10 minutes later I was still just fuming in my seat, like I was just so mad. Then she was like, Can I talk to you properly? - Cameron

> I was still really mad when they wanted to talk. I was really mad at that teacher – Dallas

Henley and Izzy mentioned the impact of the preparatory restorative and post-restorative conversations. They highlighted that they had some understanding of the process before entering the room. These students stated that having continual post restorative check ins continues to remind them of the agreement they decided on.

> Afterwards Miss [teacher] would check on me and my sister often, to see if we ok still. Now, as you can see outside, when my sister walks around, everyone says hi to her and the two boys, they give her a high fives and all just to just not be awkward themselves. So, they're all right now, and we're all friends - Henley

As I near the end of my discussion of the theme of communication, there are a number of points about communication that stand out. The examples shown that miscommunication can have the effect of exacerbating students' experiences of emotional vulnerability. Also, a lack of safety during conflict resolution, as highlighted in Elliot's and Georgie's narratives at the start of this section. This discussion shows when communication is not effective, students may feel emotionally unsupported, which undermines the restorative process.

Agency and advocacy.

Students like Alex and Dallas sought greater agency within restorative processes. Zehr (2004) states that restorative justice has a set of principles, one of these principles' states, that the "process is inclusive and collaborative to offer opportunity for individual agency of all participants" (p. 307). Participants in this study expressed their hopes for greater agency, highlighting a possible missed opportunity to collaborate within the restorative process effectively.

> Just want me to apologise and get this over and done with. Is pretty much what he [teacher] was saying. So, I just got the memo, like no conversation about it. I got lectured really. So that's what I was kind of trying to do, but then I still feel like, once I got in there, I kind of got like, attacked, you know, and ganged up on So, yeah. - Alex

Alex wanted more control over the process, advocating for preparatory conversation planning. The students' desire for more agency links to the discourse of institutional support. For restorative practices to be effective, students need ongoing encouragement and a sense of nurturance, as seen in Henley's and Izzy's experiences. The presence of supportive adults who advocate for student agency helps create a more balanced and empowering environment.

> I know that whenever there's things I need to talk about, I can just bring it to someone, a trusted adult or anyone to talk to. I just come to people in the school, the staff. It's not that hard to talk to them. You can just talk to them and then they'll they just, they understand you in a way cool, yeah. – Henley

> They engage with us, like Matua he talks to us, he talks to us like he's the same age as us. Makes fun of us and all that, he teases us. And they [teachers] talk like they want us to be

> engaged in work and stuff. They don't just hand you stuff to just do. They actually want you to do like the work. Want you to have a good job. Get you a good job. - Izzy

The achievement of agency is a result of the collaboration of individual efforts, resources, contextual and structural factors and the way they come together (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). The need for agency may also be a response to the power relation. Students like Alex felt disempowered by authority figures during restorative conversations. The desire for "backup" or an advocate to support their voices underscores the imbalance of power, revealing the need for more equitable processes that empower students to advocate for themselves.

> having someone on my end, having an advocate for me, you know, having a lawyer, I guess, for you (student), that type of thing. And probably, yeah, I think that probably the biggest thing, because then it would kind of level the playing field, because it's not two on one and it's two on two, I guess, but yeah, probably just having someone there to help speak for me. - Alex

Students seek greater agency in their interactions with authority figures. Whether through advocacy during restorative practices or turning personal trauma into professional aspiration. These students in this study demonstrate a desire for empowerment in their educational environments. All students that have participated in this research mentioned the importance of connection and support. Restorative practices evoke conversations and meetings to promote interpersonal connections, reinforcing the importance of working collaboratively for the benefit of the community present in the conversation (Daicoff, 2015). Alex expressed a desire for

an advocate to provide support during a difficult conversation. Similarly, Dallas' narrative underscores the importance of positive relationships with teachers and staff as a form of support, contrasting it with the lack of support they experienced previously.

> I have a learning centre person, who's helped me, and also one of the teachers came from another school, and she really helped me, because she got me into stuff and got me to do things. And because I need to be busy, I like cooking and like making sure everything's how it's meant to be. So, she gave me a lot of that, and it really helped me, because I got to keep busy, but I also got to be where I wanted to be. - Dallas

Blake had moments with other friends before the conversation to gain support and advocates for the conflict, whereas Cameron and Dallas were approached by the teacher either during the class or directly after the class, creating an overlap between the conflict and the hope for one party to resolve it. Cameron and Dallas had minimal to no time to collect their thoughts, emotions or prepare themselves for a conversation with a teacher they lacked a strong relationship to. Elliot, Finley and Georgie all mentioned they felt supported by whānau but missed this support through the school. Georgie specifically mentioned that although the counsellor was an advocate the lack of post restorative check ins made her feel as though the school saw the conflict repaired and that she did not require support.

> I guess I don't want to, like, bring it up again. Like, I definitely want it to be solved, but I feel like when I will talk to my dean, counsellor or my deputy principal about it, I feel like

> it just gets pushed to the side, like we don't just solve it. It's either like they just leave it or tell me to ignore it. - Georgie

Henley and Izzy expressed positive emotions when it came to support from their school, noting the wrap around from whānau to senior leadership in their school directly impacted their experience in the restorative conversations. Overall students seek greater agency in restorative processes, which aligns with discourses of power imbalance and the need for institutional care. Since this study has highlighted a mix of experiences in this theme, it has shown the impact of supportive adults, advocates and helping to achieve agency for students.

Perceptions of fairness and power relations.

The ideas about the experience of fairness are a recurring theme in student experiences. Both Alex and Blake expressed concerns about fairness during conflicts, whether through expressing the experience of being ganged up on (Alex) or having to manage complex decisions in peer relationships (Blake). Finley, Georgie and Izzy communicated that fairness was a big part in restoring conflicts, and their restorative processes highlighted communication time and agreements that they determined were fair and equal for all parties.

> I just had to apologise and I wanted them to like, apologise to me too, because it wasn't just me and for us just to be to go back to how it was like being friends. - Finley

> If there was a restorative between me and a teacher, I feel like it would be unfair, because most people will believe teachers, especially when it's between a student and a teacher. - Georgie

> The restorative was mean [good] as. He [teacher] made it easier, instead of it being hard. Because, when I used to have restoratives with the principal, it was just her telling me not to do that, not to do this they didn't let me talk, but he [teacher] listened to me, and I hear him. - Izzy

This theme directly aligns with hierarchal educational discourse and the terms of this authorise teachers in terms of knowledge and discipline. Students frequently experience disempowerment during conflicts, especially when communicating with people who take up dominating positions. Foucault argued that power is a relationship that is a reciprocal incitement and struggle; and less of a face-to-face confrontation (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 2016, p. 222). Alex's narrative, in particular, reflects a lack of fairness, as he sought an advocate to level the power relation during the restorative process.

> I probably just be like; I don't want to talk without like my parents or something like that. You know, just because my mom and dad are pretty good with that whole sort of stuff, that whole argumentative sort of stuff. - Alex

Dallas' spoke about how after the restorative they wanted to be a teacher, so that they could affect students differently than they experienced.

> It's partly the reason on why I want to be a teacher. Because I don't want anyone to feel like I did. Teachers have more effect on kids' lives than they think they do. - Dallas

In contrast to this Izzy mentioned that his conversation with a teacher was fair and just without the imbalance of power, even though the conversation was held with a senior leader, his teacher and himself. Izzy mentioned this was due to the relationship he had built with the teachers in the school and therefore it had a direct impact on the restorative experience and outcome.

> My teacher had a good relationship with me before all this. That's why I wanted to do the restorative, that's why it worked, because he listened, I listened, and we both cared. - Izzy

The theme of fairness is also tied to emotional safety. Students like Cameron, who did not experience safety in their interactions with teachers, demonstrate discourses that produce power imbalances not only affect fairness can also contribute to emotional distress and disengagement as Cameron's words show;

> I'm gonna get my class changed, and if I can't get changed, I don't care. I'm switching my classes. I just don't want to have her again. - Cameron

Georgie made a statement that she feels unsafe in school, and therefore she needs to be careful about what she says.

> It's impacted how I feel safe at school. I have to be careful of what I say at school around certain people. But yeah, I guess I'm scared. – Georgie

Henley mentioned that because she experienced positive relationships with her teachers, there was more safety in the conflict between students bullying her sister because of the teachers in the room and the way the teachers facilitated the meeting.

> Much easier, and it's greater now, yeah, because when I see the teachers, I say hi, and then we talk to each other and have normal conversations all the time. I do I feel confident in school and just walking around in the school. - Henley

Many students expressed they experienced disempowerment in their situations. Alex mentioned he experienced being unsupported through his statement "ganged up on", Cameron said they experienced dismissal and an unsafe environment in their teacher's class, and Dallas experienced bullying and mistreatment by a teacher. These feelings of disempowerment reflect a need for more balanced power dynamics in their interactions with authority figures. Alex spoke about the power between the teachers and himself in comparison to if another student was in the restorative with him.

> I think maybe more so just power and where they [teachers] stand. It's like, you know, I got a dean with me. I got a teacher here, you know, whereas if it was like a student, even if they were a couple years older than me, you know, at least we're still, you know, equals - Alex

Winslade and Monk (2006) expressed that in the relationship between a teacher and a student, what the teacher says about the student carries more weight than what the student says about the teacher (p. 77). The authority that stands behind every utterance by a teacher accrues from the whole history of teacher-student relations. It also capitalises on the knowledge in every student's mind that the teacher has the power to direct many day-to-day aspects of a child's life in school.

Although all students stated they saw teachers and members of staff having more power than themselves, they had hopes to be on a level playing field during these conversations.

> I'm respectful and I'm not going to act up just because I don't like her. Because she deserves respect too. Like, she doesn't deserve to be freaking hassled every day because she did one thing to me, like, yeah, I don't really like her, and what happened, but it's just like, I'm just here to get my mark. She doesn't really deserve that. She's a human being. - Cameron

Students wanting to have a "backup" or a lawyer present highlight the need for safety, fairness and collaboration within our restorative conversations, from the start of the process (pre-restorative to post-restorative check ins). McCluskey (2010) makes a clear statement about the power imbalance and the desire for shared power within restorative practices, "power sharing is difficult for schools where the traditional and tacit assumption is that their role is one of control of process and procedure" (p.23). Although students are expressing the desire for shared power within the restorative process, we can see that schools may be aware of this power

imbalance but within the educational discourse, they are also experiencing a struggle to maintain their role of control of process and procedure, dancing the fine line between punitive and restorative approaches to discipline.

The need for supportive relationships.

The presence of supportive relationships with teachers and peers plays a critical role in students' well-being. "Children need to experience relationships where there is love, trust and empathy – especially when encountering challenges and when emotions are running high" (Wallis, as cited in Barber, 2023). To further highlight this point Bleaken (2012) states that "teachers need to build relationships with students and families from the first day of meeting and deliver an interactive and collaborative learning programme" (p. 41). Experiences such as Henley, Izzy and Dallas' highlight how positive teacher-student relationships can help mitigate the long-term effects of negative experiences. While Cameron contrasts the supportive relationship they had with one teacher to the lack of safety with another.

> Miss S knows how I think, she's a good teacher because she knows how to connect with students a little bit more on a deeper level, because she used to be a naughty kid. So, she kind of, knows how to connect with kids in that type of way. And she's open minded. I think the other teacher is very black and white, in her thinking. She just pisses me off. She's not horrible, but she doesn't get me. - Cameron

This theme links to the discourse of institutional care and nurturance. Students who experience ongoing support from teachers and staff are more likely

to feel valued and connected. The study completed by Lester and Cross (2015) with secondary students, found that the significant predictor against anxiety and stress was feeling safe at school and school connectedness was the most significant protective factor against depression. For instance, Henley and Izzy's narratives emphasise the importance of check-ins and sustained encouragement, demonstrating how restorative practices are more successful when embedded in a supportive framework. This theme of security and safety also relates to the discourse of social connectivity, where restorative practices help rebuild trust and improve social bonds. Supportive teacher-student relationships contribute to social cohesion, enhancing not just conflict resolution but also broader social dynamics within the school.

The quality of relationships between students and teachers is critical to students' well-being and academic success. Kehoe et al. (2018) state that "students were astutely aware of the need to respect their teachers, believing if they treated their teacher with respect then their teacher would treat them in the same manner" (p. 199). Supportive and understanding relationships can counterbalance negative experiences and foster resilience. Some participants within this study experienced this resilience, expressing they have decided to continue to study, complete year 13, attend school more frequently and some explained they are becoming a leader in the school. Several participants emphasised the need for feeling safe and having positive relationships. Cameron highlighted feeling unsafe in class, contrasting it with a teacher who made them feel more connected. Dallas stressed the importance of positive relationships with teachers, which played a significant role in their academic improvement.

> I like school now, like, I hated it, but I only hated it because of one person who isn't even relevant to me anymore. So, once I sort of went past that, I was fine, so I had to be resilient. Now I am a leader and made it to year 13 - Dallas

Negative experiences have had a lasting impact on some of the participants in this study, leading to feelings of frustration, disengagement, and in some cases, severe consequences like bullying. However, as I have mentioned some participants expressed resilience and a desire to prevent such experiences for others, as demonstrated by Dallas' goal of becoming a teacher. Positive relationships with teachers and staff are essential for successful restorative outcomes, reflecting the importance of institutional nurturance.

Challenges in restorative practice implementation.

Many students pointed out the challenges in restorative practice implementation, particularly around the lack of preparation for difficult conversations. "The preparation phase lays the groundwork for action" (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 20). In this phase facilitators can establish the reasons for having a restorative, setting the protocols, environment and start to investigate how to put things right between the participants. Students like Alex, Cameron, and Dallas mentioned the absence of preparatory restorative conversations, leaving them feeling unprepared and, in some cases, attacked. This theme closely ties to the limitations in restorative justice. The lack of adequate facilitation and preparation hinders the effectiveness of restorative practices, especially when participants are caught off guard or feel

rushed into conflict resolution without proper emotional preparation. Thorsborne and Vinegrad, (2022) explain that prolonged angry and other strong emotions can interfere with the process of reconnection and healing which is necessary for the restorative process. This highlights the need for improved facilitation and process structuring in schools. The systemic challenges in implementing restorative practices highlight the need for better preparation and facilitation to ensure successful conflict resolution.

5.1.2 Interpretation and Meaning Making

These narratives underscore the complexities of school environments, where power relations, communication breakdowns, and relationship quality significantly impact students' experiences. The students' stories reveal a shared desire for fairness, support, and effective communication, highlighting the importance of relationship-building in educational settings. The narratives suggest that restorative practices, when implemented thoughtfully and equitably, have the potential to improve student outcomes. However, they also caution against approaches that lack authenticity or fail to address power imbalances.

When the student had a prior positive relationship with that teacher or student they expressed, they could restore the relationship with less intervention. Bishop (2003) notes the use of whakawhānaungatanga when establishing, restoring and fostering relationships in the classroom as being imperative to the restorative process. Cameron highlighted a contrast between two different teacher approaches

and relationship style, stating that the rigid, authoritarian style teaching made it difficult for Cameron to feel belonging and acceptance in the classroom. Although Cameron did state that this style of teaching was acceptable, as the teacher "deserves respect, mana and attention". Alex mentioned that his relationship with his dean was strong, relational and positive but that when during the restorative he felt that relationship was "flipped" and the teacher "switched on him" creating a firm, strained relationship.

> She still deserves my respect. She still has mana, you know, she still has mana as a teacher, as a person, and in her classroom. – Cameron

> I've had the dean for the past five years. He seems like the bro. So, I felt like pretty calm going into it, and then it just bro switched up on me. – Alex

All participants mentioned in the interview that more focus on the preparatory restorative conversation and more time given to this point of the process would have benefited all parties. In most cases the relationship between the two parties had been tight and difficult, therefore restoring the relationship and creating mana-enhancing experiences proved difficult. We are aware that the time constraint in education makes it hard for teachers, staff members and senior leadership members to allocate appropriate time to the entire process. Although some studies have shown that when the process is completed with time for preparatory and post

restorative conversations to happen the participants involved see a vast improvement in the relationship and dedication to the repair of harm (Kaveney, 2012; Thorsborne, 2017; University of Waikato et al., 2003).

This analysis aligns with broader literature on restorative practices and the significance of teacher-student relationships in fostering positive educational experiences (Cooper & Miness, 2014; Dressel, 2020; Drewery, 2014; Gill, 2021; Vincent et al., 2021). Gillard (2015) notes the importance of students being and feeling empowered in the restorative process. In his analysis he found that "when students felt included in the process, they had greater motivation to engage authentically in the conversation" (p. 56). This inclusion meant the choice to participate and the collaboration in solution finding. Placing the ownership in all stakeholders' hands when responding to harm can lead to an increased desire to be true to the solution and to follow through with the actions required to repair all harm. A sensitivity to student perspectives and individual voice accompanied by consistent and fair accountability has been mentioned to add to developing trusting teacher-student relationships and interactions (Gregory et al., 2016). By focusing on the lived experiences of students, this narrative analysis offers a nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to or hinder students' success in school environments.

Chapter 6 Discussion

This chapter has two parts. First, I discuss the themes, discourses and the findings of the study, beginning with a brief overview of these themes from students within three New Zealand secondary schools. I connect narratives on institutional power structures and cultural frameworks influencing educational systems in New Zealand. I link these frameworks to discourses and themes that were produced in the findings and relate these to the research questions. Finally, the chapter concludes with suggestions for further research and recommendations for developing these practices in schools. I discuss along with these suggestions, how this research has shaped my practice and further development I can make.

6.1 Discursive Themes and Frameworks

There were five themes identified in Chapter 5; communication, agency and advocacy, power relations, supportive relationships and challenges. In this section I weave these themes into three parts, 1. agency and advocacy with power relations, 2. communication with supportive relationships and 3. challenges.

Agency, Advocacy and Power Relations

A common hope expressed by participants was to experience emotional safety and to create secure environments, particularly in conflict resolution. However, as two participant's words reveal, some students are not experiencing the kind of safety they hope for. This indicates there may be some tensions for schools to meet the expectations of providing the kinds of security called for in restorative

process guidelines when these don't fit with the experiences identified by students. This suggests a gap between the policies restorative schools undertake to uphold and the restorative practices and processes they produce. This issue of bridging the gap between policy expectations and student experience is not limited to restorative processes and is a wider challenge of schools.

After discovering the expressed need for emotional safety, the participants gave details of their experience of the power imbalances produced in educational contexts. When a restorative process is led or facilitated by teaching staff and young people are the participants, the young people are often not positioned favourably in the power relation. For instance, a participant's narrative of feeling "ganged up on" by authority figures resonates with broader critiques of hierarchical power relations in education, especially for Māori students. These students may experience being marginalised within the dominant Pākehā schooling structures. Five of the nine participants of this study identified as Māori. Ka Hikitia and Te Pakiaka Tangata give specific details regarding cultural competency frameworks to support Māori learners in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2017). With a focus of trying to live and practice as Te Tiriti partners, I hope to respond to calls for partnership and equity, but the lived experiences of students in restorative practices often reflect the persistence of colonial power dynamics. Students' voices, as shown in this study, are not always recognised or understood, in terms of the discourse of authority within educational contexts (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 31).

While these dominant Western education discourses continue to operate, their operations were evident in research participants accounts of their experiences. All the interviews revealed discontent with the effects of unequitable power relations operating in their experiences of restorative processes and practices. Along with this discontent, a desire for more advocacy was also evident. For example, one participant mentioned he would have liked having a parent with him in the restorative conversation or another adult to support him. Therefore, allowing students to bring a support person with them into a restorative conversation may offer a way to cater to the desire for more advocacy throughout the process.

Bishop (2003) explains the importance of using cultural ideas from Māori such as whakawhānaungatanga and creating mana-enhancing conversations for restorative processes. Other counselling and therapy approaches such as relational therapy (relational-cultural therapy or relational psychotherapy), fit with Māori preferences that personal understanding, knowledge and awareness derive from outside the individual, not within. Māori culture looks towards connections with whānau and positive cultural relationships to take progressive steps towards building relationships (Durie, 1999, p. 21). The Ministry of Education (2017) use the relational approach to therapy that Durie (1999) outlined to describe five strategies for teachers to demonstrate effective classrooms practices. The strategies foster school culture focusing on wellbeing and belonging, connecting to the meaning of relational therapy - pūmanawatanga, whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, rangatiratanga and kotahitanga. Three of the five strategies - whanaungatanga, manaakitanga and kotahitanga - specifically state that the importance of

relationships, respectful communication and restorative approaches make an impact towards building positive school culture and wellbeing of the school (p. 45). This is also seen in the University of Waikato et al. (2003) where the restorative practices team express the ties to Māori views and approaches to conducting hui, which is fundamental for the implementation of effective restorative practices in education (p. 1).

The presence of power was expressed through the participants experiences. Participants in the study using language that reflected these discursive ideas which included "teacher as expert", "respecting your elders" and the "student as follower". All nine students noted their subscription to an educational hierarchy discourse that positions them less favourably in the power relation. One participant stated that they believed the teacher "still deserves my respect. She still has mana, as a teacher, as a person, and in her classroom". This was stated, although "she [teacher] didn't understand or respect me" in an equitable way. Another participant spoke about how he attended his restorative conversation experiencing pressure that he linked to the power imbalance of being a young person participating alongside two adult males. This pressure was exacerbated by an expectation that he was required to attend. The power relation did not offer him a position of wanting to or freely consenting to attend. A third participant spoke of being approached during class, where they "felt cornered". Furthermore, this participant referred to discursive ideas of respecting the teacher as an "expert and elder". She responded to this position call by following instructions and not talking back even when she experienced being "wronged" in the process.

Although the students that I have interviewed subscribed to the power relationship where the teacher holds ‘mana’ or ‘respect’ within the classroom. They made comments referring to “wanting to be heard, understood and treated with respect” arguing for a more equitable and reciprocal sharing of power, mana and respect. The findings from the interviews also highlighted that the students experienced the power relationship with the people who facilitated the restorative conversations. Moreover, a participant made note that he felt his facilitator “switched” on him (removed their support or backing) during the restorative conversation. This shift had the effect of this participant experiencing a lack of support and of being alone in the conversation. Alternatively, two participants’ (two names) spoke about their facilitator taking steps to build trust and supported their comments throughout the conversation, ending with both these students feeling supported and creating positive relationships. The differences in these experiences indicate the importance of taking time to build relationship, respect and trust with the participants before facilitating any restorative process.

The themes of agency, advocacy and power relations support my first research question. What are students' experiences of restorative practices in schools?

The findings suggest students are participating in restorative conversations for several reasons; but two particular reasons identified through the interviews include their respect and relationship with the other party (teacher or student) or their perception of power relationship with the facilitator. This first reason being heard through some participants stating that they felt they were required to attend

and complete the restorative because a dean asked them to. The second reason being heard with participants mentioning they attended and participated because they wanted a resolution and better relationship. Two participants' sharing experiences that display the reasons mentioned for example, one participant experiencing reason one, attending due to respect for the teacher asking, this participant states "I went, but only because they asked. If it was anyone else, I wouldn't. But you do as the dean asks out of respect". The second participant experiencing reason two, resolution and development for a relationship with the teacher involved "I wanted to have that conversation with him, because I like him and wanted to be closer to sir".

The students that participated for the first reason, explained their restorative conversation ended on negative note. Participants mentioned the relationship with the other person is either still displaying conflict (bullying) or it has broken altogether. A participant mentioned that the conflict she experienced is still present, saying "I need to watch what I say. I would be careful and stuff like that. I'm very cautious".

The students that experienced the first reason, their respect for the teacher, expressed the restorative conversation has left them isolated or targeted by the other person. These students mentioned they struggle with attendance some days but will continue to come to school just to pass NCEA. One of these students mentioned that they will be changing schools next year due to the continual conflict with the person they engaged in a restorative process with. This participant saying, "it's distracting me from my learning, and I just, I need to change schools"

The students who indicated that they participated and completed the restorative conversation for the second reason, found that they had a better conclusion with the other person. They explained they experienced a sense of calm and became at ease, comfortable and understood within the conversation. Mentioning that after the conversation was finished, they believed their relationship with the other person was stronger and still growing. One participant stated this positive relationship in her interview; “they're all right now, and we're all friends”.

These students mentioned that they find school better, although they struggle with attendance still, they now walk around the school with their head held high and know that at least one teacher has their back and is supporting them.

Communication and Supportive Relationships

The emotional vulnerability experienced by students, particularly in situations where communication breaks down, reveals a gap between the policy ideal and the reality experienced and voiced by some of the participants in this study. Thorsborne and Blood (2013) highlight potential risks of communication and how when a student or participant in a restorative conversation experiences something that produces emotional vulnerability for them. The restorative conversation stands a good chance of ending with dissatisfaction for some or all the participants. This leaves participants with experiences they describe as being unheard, unseen and therefore unsupported. They continue to describe how effective communication through the restorative process uses a balanced approach to talking, listening and working together to build and restore the relationship.

Whanaungatanga involves creating a supportive environment and network of care for all people. Placing emphasis on this Māori value within educational contexts reflects the importance of respectful relationships with students, teachers and the wider school community. Student engagement with sincerity, authenticity and communication in restorative practices is crucial for successful conflict resolution. This engagement also aligns with the cultural view of whanaungatanga in New Zealand's educational philosophy (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Although, the processes of restorative practices and the incorporation of Māori values within education contexts has been present over the last two decades some participants' experiences seem to be at odds with these approaches. When students met discursive practices that didn't seem to fit with their expectations of emotional care and wellbeing there were effects, such as disengagement and emotional harm. As discourses are produced through social interactions over time, people's actions are expressions of positions within the discourses they subscribe to. From this discursive perspective, teachers' actions are responses to the terms of the discourse which produce the effects. It then highlights quite a complex structural issue within educational institutions in which multiple discourses, often competing, intersect and operate. I comment further on this below when I discuss challenges.

Where students experienced apologies or resolutions as insincere, their sense was that it undermined the relational values that underpin restorative justice. In situations where communication and whanaungatanga were effective, one participant was inspired to take up leadership in the school. Conversely, two

participants whose experiences were not effective, were also motivated to become student leaders in their schools.

These themes of communication and supportive relationships help me to address my second research question: How have these experiences affected students' experience of school participation and sense of belonging?

The relationships between students and students, and students and teachers both impact a sense of relatedness and belonging. Some participants of this study said that their relationships with all teachers are not the same. In the research completed by Vincent et al. (2021), involving students and their experience of restorative conversations, the findings highlighted that students felt that good relationships with teachers meant they were given the benefit of the doubt. Vincent et al. (2021) went on to state that these relationships encouraged attendance and sense of belonging. Participants in my research also mentioned they have made connections and relationships with a few teachers rather than the wider school community. A participant saying although she had hopes for positive relationships with teachers, she only had a few of these relationships at the school. Similarly, in another study by Reimer (2019), participants agreed that, once a relationship was formed, students had confidence that teachers would aide in the resolution of conflict. Consequently, creating and fostering positive relationships with students through restorative processes opens opportunities for students to form a sense of belonging within their educational contexts and communities.

Literature on restorative practices highlights how the sense of belonging and experiencing positive relationships can add to the overall wellbeing of students.

This fits with a participant experiencing a sense of relatedness in the community and acceptance in the school since her restorative conversation. Participants' sense of connectedness aligns with Cooper and Miness (2014), who claim that a "sense of relatedness in the classroom is fundamental to students feeling a high level of engagement, motivation, and attachment to classrooms and schools, which in turn can foster high levels of persistence, achievement, and attainment" (p. 265).

A participant mentioned that when she is out in the community and sees the boys who participated in the restorative conversation with her, they smile and wave, and she feels connected to them. Before the restorative process this participant's family was new to the area and found connecting to others in the community to be somewhat difficult, but now she says, "I know four different families". She continued to say, "when I go out to sports or hang out with friends the other families are there."

Challenges

All students explained that the restorative process was "good". Although, participants found that some points of the facilitation were experienced as rushed, with key parts missed or that students required more balanced speaking time between the two people. Participants spoke about how sometimes the restorative process is rushed due to lack of time within the school day or due to teacher workload.

School policy might advocate for discursive ideas and practices of support and care; at the same time there might be competing discourses that privilege

classroom learning time over time spent on restorative practices. This can be seen and experienced where workloads or budgets don't have time and space available, or a teacher may subscribe to different discourses about the value of support and care.

All nine participants talk about wanting more time given to the post restorative check ins. Participants wanting the facilitator to come back and make sure the relationship is moving in the right direction and seeing if there is any further support required. The participants also explained they are aware this may have been missed in their school due to the workload of the facilitator and the expectation on teachers for managing students in the school. Participants suggested that they understood the teachers and facilitators were under some pressure to manage or care for the students at the school. One participant specifically mentioning that his dean was "looking after the entire year level as well as teaching".

Finally, I have found there is an effect of the range of discourses at work in educational contexts, these are seen to hinder effective implementation of restorative practices and processes that schools undertake. These challenges in implementation are critical in understanding how restorative practices, despite their potential, are often hindered by complex contextual and practical barriers. In New Zealand, there is a national commitment to restorative justice in schools (Drewery, 2016), but as students' narratives reveal, inconsistent facilitation and preparation can derail these processes. Although there is a commitment from the government, not all schools have elected to participate in restorative approaches. There are a variety of secondary schools in New Zealand (state, state integrated, private and

charter schools) which can have effects for the scope that the Ministry of Education and the Education Review Office have on monitoring this commitment.

In effect, this allows for some schools to withdraw from restorative practices, change and adapt the processes around restorative or fully commit to producing restorative approaches. This points to a systemic issue where well-intentioned policies are not fully realised due to resource constraints, lack of teacher training, or institutional inertia. Leaving students like the participants in this study experiencing a lack of support or unfair treatment. Although the literature about restorative practice is well known in education, and the Ministry of Education encourages schools to partake in restorative practices, each school has the ability to facilitate in their own way, creating their own 'spin' on the process. This can make the management and facilitation of restorative practices hard to regulate and difficult to be consistent across the country. Schools are trained in the facilitation and process of restorative practices, and as schools adjust, facilitators then can gain their own understanding of what a conversation can or should sound like, creating different outcomes. It may give some explanation to how a difference in the facilitation, conclusion and follow up of the restorative process happens for each of the participating schools.

The challenges identified inform how my third research question is addressed. What might these student experiences mean for schools and their approaches to restorative practices?

These nine stories of student experiences can offer rich opportunities for schools who wish to reflect and develop their restorative practices. The nine stories highlighting the importance of taking time to facilitate a restorative conversation. Taking time to complete both the preparatory phase and post conversation check ins thoroughly. Facilitators making a deliberate effort with all participants to be clear of the expectations of the conversation and the continual upkeep of the new relationship after its completion. With two participants commenting on the amount of time that was used for their preparatory phase and post conversation; one saying "we [the group] had a lot of time to sort it out". The second participant stating, "we were at a debrief, and everyone was really respectful in that conversation at the end".

Although, schools may struggle to find time for the person facilitating the conversation to give attention and time to all three phases. The preparatory phase, where facilitators give specific details, identify students hopes for the relationship and any expectations. The restorative conversation, where facilitators give time to listening, collaboration and building relationships. And the third phase post restorative check ins, where facilitators complete regular check ins on all parties from the restorative conversation to understand if the relationship is building or if conflict is still present. The importance of these three phases through the eyes and experiences of participants show, how completing the first and third phases is as important as the restorative conversation itself.

However, staffing is different for all schools and government funds are allocated differently across New Zealand, some schools may not be able to provide trained facilitators for restorative practices. Some restorative practice training

programmes or modules offered through different providers can cost anywhere between $80-$2000 and can take up to three days to complete. Schools may not be able to train staff in restorative process facilitation, with the training fee or relief costs for teachers attending too costly for some schools. Although the creation, upkeep and presence of a restorative practice team within schools has shown positive experiences for students. With all three schools participating in this study attending professional development regarding restorative practices yearly only one school currently has a specific restorative practice team. The students from this school displayed a richer understanding of restorative practices in education and the purpose of these. For example, one participant referred to her school having a restorative practice team and this team being easy to approach; “I just come to the restorative team in the school. It's not that hard to talk to them”.

Some schools from this study have a person in charge of the restorative conversations, and these students have found that to be beneficial. Some participants in this study that mentioned their person in charge of restorative conversations was their dean and one participant noted their workload; “He looked after everything for all of us. He was always busy”.

From the experiences shared by participants in the study, I believe having an assigned person or people facilitate restorative practices could provide the specific knowledge, attention and time required to allow students a positive and lasting experience of restorative practices. This person would then be available to allocate time to a comprehensive preparatory conversation that outlines the expectations of the process for participants and specific post restorative conversations check ins.

The managing of power relations within restorative conversations remains a tricky issue. Although a teacher may not intend for students to see them as an expert, it appears that discourses in schools and in society continue to invite students to subscribe to teachers as experts. Therefore, it may be possible for teachers to have further training in the concepts and process of restorative practices, involving the understanding of some of the discursive forces at work and how these inform and shape restorative processes. Wright and Høyen (2020) explains that people take up discursive practices, subscribing to discursive positions. Teachers with an idea of discourses and the discursive positions within their classrooms could then benefit from exploring the boundaries of discourses and the position the individual holds in the social order that comes with being a teacher (Wright & Høyen, 2020). This may offer an opportunity to challenge discursive positions and aim to offer equitable relationships.

Having a specific person or team in charge of the facilitation of restorative practices within the school may also have effects for teachers in terms of a power imbalance between the teachers. This may position teachers in a place of power over others and add to the workplace hierarchy and power relationship of staff. Therefore, providing training and professional development for these teams will become important, but finding ways to offer this training to all staff may offer equitable opportunities. Although discourses will always be operating within society, finding ways to manage these within interactions will hopefully provide a place where more equitable power relations are present. Therefore, school staff may then stand a better chance of making restorative practices in schools more effective.

To conclude, these themes seen within New Zealand education, when analysed through a post-structuralist lens, illustrate the complex interplay of power, culture, and institutional practice. They challenge traditional concepts of authority, equity, and relational care, revealing how students' experiences are shaped by broader socio-cultural discourses and the fluid nature of educational policies and practices.

6.2 Recommendations and Conclusions

As I reach the conclusion of this study, I can see opportunities for more research with the focus on student experiences of restorative practices. It could be beneficial to extend the range of educational contexts to include student experiences from a wider selection of educational providers, such as primary, intermediate and private secondary schools. Through utilising narrative inquiry and discursive theories to support studies, researchers could generate more understanding of student experiences of the preparatory phase of restorative processes. Providing an opportunity for ongoing reflection of the follow-up post restorative conversations. Continuing to reflect and generate information from the student's perspectives could implement changes in student sense of belonging, supportive relationships and the perceptions of power relationships and fairness. Consequently, the consistent review and reflection of restorative practices and the students' experiences of these would offer opportunities for the students ever changing discursive positions, ideas and views to have an impact on these processes.

I set out to gain some understanding of student experiences of restorative practices with hopes to find ways to improve the facilitation of restorative processes

for students. Having identified some of this understanding, a further hope was to generate some resources that could offer the prospect of improving these practices for educational institutions. I understand that further research could help to create opportunities to enhance understanding by extending the reach of student experiences as well as understanding the separate phases of restorative processes. This could offer students restorative process facilitators that are aware of the discourses at work within education, the importance of the three phases to the process, and how positive relationships impact overall wellbeing. However, one step I can take is to use my discussion to reflect on the practices within my own school having engaged in this study.

It is now clearer to me that I can take more intentional action in the relationships in the restorative processes I am facilitating and bring these to the forefront of the process. One way to do this is, I will use the preparatory phase to fully explore the ways the issues have affected the relationships between the parties. I would like to ask more about the student's perspective on this relationship and what their hopes and concerns are before moving toward the restorative conversation. A key learning for me as I go forward with restorative practices and processes in my school is the importance of building positive relationships from the outset of the process. For example, building a relationship with the student in the preparatory phase may help them to engage in the restorative process in ways that are not coercive and then create the possibility of them engaging more willingly and productively in a restorative conversation. The preparatory phase offers students opportunities to have greater agency within the conversation by spending more specific time looking at ways they have a voice in the collaborative process.

In conclusion, this thesis has explored nine students' experiences of restorative practices in three Aotearoa New Zealand secondary schools. Findings included the significance of communication, agency and advocacy, supportive relationships, power relations and the challenges of time. These themes highlight the complex interplay of discourses within education that shape how restorative practices are understood and enacted. Communication emerged as foundational, both as a restorative tool and as a means of empowerment. While agency and advocacy underscored the importance of student voice and participation. Supportive relationships were shown to foster a sense of belonging and trust, yet power dynamics and time constraints often challenged the sustainability and authenticity of restorative efforts. Reflecting on these findings has deepened my understanding of restorative processes and the potential within schools. It has also prompted critical reflection on my own practice. Emphasising the need to continually question dominant discourses, remain relational in approach, and advocate for systems that prioritise inclusion, equity and the lived experiences of students.

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Appendix A: Research information sheet

Secondary school students' experiences of restorative practices

My name is Abbey Yule, and I would like to invite you to participate in my research project as a volunteer. The research will contribute towards my qualification for a Master of Education (MEd) in Counselling Studies at the University of Waikato.

What is the purpose of this research?

This study investigates students' experiences of restorative practices in school and their effects, including their belonging to school, community, Hauora, and well-being. The New Zealand research data shows that secondary school students have successfully participated in restorative approaches for over ten years, although more research still needs to be completed. This highlights the students' ideas and perspectives on these practices.

This research intends to:

Provide participants with the opportunity to reflect on a restorative conversation that impacted their overall sense of Hauora and personal well-being within a school.

To provide data for teachers and management staff to improve the restorative approaches within schools.

The findings of this research will contribute towards my MEd and may be used for academic publications and presentations.

How was I identified, and why am I invited to participate in this research?

The number of participants required for this research is nine. You have indicated that you would like to communicate your experience of restorative conversations and that you are available for the duration of this research. The commitment is to participate in a 45-minute interview, which you will complete during school hours.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice), and whether you participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You can withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any data belonging to you will be removed. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

I will provide a guardian consent form if you are willing to participate in this research. This includes consent from yourself as the participant. Please return all forms to me within two weeks.

What will happen in this research?

This research examines whether participating in a restorative conversation affects a student's sense of belonging in school. The total length of the study is nine months, but your participation in a single interview will be conducted in the first three months.

What are the discomforts and risks?

Due to the research involving recollections of experiences, the interviews could be troubling. In this instance, your immediate concerns will be responded to, and the school's community of care will support you, involving the staff member or the school counsellor. You may also communicate with the interviewer anytime and remove yourself from the interview if you feel excessive discomfort.

What are the benefits?

The benefits of this programme are the following:

As a participant, you will express and reflect on your experiences with restorative approaches. You will be part of research that intends to contribute positively to others in supporting their connection and sense of belonging in their school.

How will my privacy be protected?

All transcripts, data, and final research publications will use pseudonyms to protect your privacy. Documents such as consent forms and paper copies of transcripts will be stored securely by my supervisor at The University of Waikato for five years and then destroyed. The interviewer will always be confidential in their interactions and the future use of any information gathered.

Participants can check the interview transcript before the information is used.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There is no financial cost involved in participating in this research. However, there is a time commitment.

Each participant will be involved in one 45-minute interview. These will be completed individually on school grounds during the school day.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You will be given two weeks to consider if you are willing to participate in this research.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

As a participant, you can access my findings via a one or two-page summary. Once this is complete, you will be notified and asked if you would like to receive this information.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this research should be notified in the first instance to the research supervisor, Wendy Talbot, wendytalbot@waikato.ac.nz,

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

If you require further information or clarification, the research supervisor, Dr. Wendy Talbot, is available via email at wendy.talbot@waikato.ac.nz

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Abbey Yule

aly2@student.waikato.ac.nz

Research Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr Wendy Talbot

wendy.talbot@waikato.ac.nz

This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 19 March 2024. Approval number: FEDU009/24

Appendix B: Guardian Consent Form

Project title: Secondary School Students' experiences of Restorative Practices

Researcher: ***Abbey Yule***

Research Supervisor: ***Dr Wendy Talbot***

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet
- I understand this research has received ethical approval from the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 19 March 2024. Approval number: FEDU009/24
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-recorded and transcribed.
- I understand that participating in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw my child/children from the study without being disadvantaged until one month after the data has been collected.
- I understand the confidentiality of the school, staff, and students will be maintained using pseudonyms.
- I understand that if I withdraw my child/children and/or myself from the study, any data identifiable as belonging to my child/children and/or myself will be removed. However, removing our data may only be possible once the findings have been produced.
- I agree with my child/children taking part in this research.
- I understand that my child can refuse to consent to participate in this research.

- I understand that the staff member supporting this research will know my child's identity and be present during the interview as per the school's policy. This staff member is bound by confidentiality through the school and this consent form.
- I understand that the researcher conducting this research could identify my child through the analysis of the transcript. This researcher is bound by confidentiality through The University of Waikato Ethics Committee, school and this consent form.
- I understand that the interviewer will supply a transcript after each interview for my child to review and that they have two weeks to respond before this information is given to the researcher to be used in the research.
- I understand that the research supervisor will securely hold all physical documents for five years and then destroy them.
- I understand that to withdraw from the research, my child needs to email the researcher, and the latest my child can withdraw is two months after the final transcript has been supplied.
- I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please circle one): Yes. No.

Child/children's name/s: .....

Guardian's signature: .....

Guardian's name:.....

Guardian's Contact Details (if appropriate): .....

Date:

Chief Supervisor contact details: Dr Wendy Talbot – wendy.talbot@waikato.ac.nz

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form. This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 19 March 2024. Approval number: FEDU009/24

Appendix C: Principal Consent Form

Project title: Secondary School Students' experiences of Restorative Practices

Researcher: Abbey Yule

Research Supervisor: Dr Wendy Talbot

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet.
- I understand this research has received ethical approval from the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 19 March 2024. Approval number: FEDU009/24
- I understand that the confidentiality of the school, staff, and students will be maintained using pseudonyms.
- I permit the researcher to undertake research within _____
- I permit for the researcher to access the staff/students of _____

Principal's signature: .....……

Principal's name: .....……

Principal's Contact Details (if appropriate):……

Date:

Chief Supervisor contact details: Dr Wendy Talbot – wendy.talbot@waikato.ac.nz

Note: The Principal should retain a copy of this form.

This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 19 March 2024. Approval number: FEDU009/24

Appendix D: Staff Member Agreement

Project title: Secondary School Students' experiences of Restorative Practices

Researcher: Abbey Yule

Research Supervisor: Dr Wendy Talbot

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet
- I understand this research has received ethical approval from the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 19 March 2024. Approval number: FEDU009/24
- I permit for the researcher to access the students
- I understand I will supply students with the research advertisement.
- I understand I will be required to organise a meeting place for interviews within school time.
- I understand this location needs to ensure the confidentiality of all participants.
- I understand all information and data collected from this research will not be shared with me.
- I understand the confidentiality of the school, staff, and students will be maintained using pseudonyms.

Staff members signature: .....……

Staff members name: .....……

Staff member's Contact Details (if appropriate):…….....

Date:

Chief Supervisor contact details: Dr Wendy Talbot – wendy.talbot@waikato.ac.nz

Note: The staff member should retain a copy of this form

This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 19 March. Approval number: FEDU009/24

Appendix E: Participant Consent Form

Project title: Secondary School Students' experiences of Restorative Practices

Researcher: Abbey Yule

Research Supervisor: Dr Wendy Talbot

- I have read and understood the information sheet, which tells me what will happen in this study and why it is important.
- I understand this research has received ethical approval from the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 19 March 2024. Approval number: FEDU009/24
- I have been able to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-recorded and transcribed.
- I understand that my identity, teachers and school are confidential, and I agree to keep this information confidential.
- I understand the confidentiality of the school, staff, and students will be maintained using pseudonyms.
- I understand that the staff member supporting this research will know my identity and be present during the interview as per the school's policy. This staff member is bound by confidentiality through the school and this consent form.

- I understand that the researcher conducting this research could identify me through the transcript. This researcher is bound by confidentiality through the University of Waikato Ethics Committee, the school, and this consent form.
- I understand that the interviewer will supply a transcript after the interview for me to review and that I have two weeks to respond before this information is given to the researcher to be used in the research.
- I understand that the research supervisor will securely hold all physical documents, such as consent forms and transcripts, for five years, which will be destroyed.
- I understand that I can stop being part of this study until one month after the final transcript has been supplied to me for review and that it is perfectly ok for me to do this.
- If I stop being part of the study, I understand that any information I supplied will be removed up until the above date. I understand that research results may have been written after this date, and information about me may not be able to be removed.
- I understand that to withdraw from the research, I must email this to the researcher before the above date.
- I agree to take part in this research.

Participant's name: .....

Participant's signature: .....

Participant Contact Details (if appropriate): .....

Date:

Chief Supervisor contact details: Dr Wendy Talbot – wendy.talbot@waikato.ac.nz

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form. This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 19/03/2024. Approval number: FEDU009/24

Appendix F: Participant advertisement

Appendix G: Starter interview questions

As the interviews are narrative and I want to generate information about the participant's experience, I have noted some starters to help guide the conversation when and if required.

- Can you reflect on your restorative conversation in the last two years? Is there anything that stands out to you?
- Can you please share a specific experience you've had with restorative practices in your school? Describe the situation, what happened and how it was resolved using restorative practices.
- What was your experience during this conversation?
- Can you explore the thoughts you have experienced since this restorative? Can you express the impact this conversation has had on you?
- Reflecting on your own experiences, what aspects of restorative practices do you find most effective in promoting understanding, empathy and accountability among students and staff?
- Have you observed any challenges of using restorative practices in your school? If so, what were they, and how do you think they could be addressed or improved?