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Responding to the writing of children in a Health School:

Developing an appreciative approach

A thesis
submitted partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
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Abstract

Responding to writing is a crucial component of writing pedagogy, with teachers frequently engaging in this as part of their daily teaching practice. However, extensive research indicates that teachers' feedback is often framed in terms of deficits, emphasising what is lacking in students' writing or what needs improvement. Students who are perceived to be at risk of failing or struggling to meet predetermined writing standards typically experience responses to their writing that focus on surface features and include marginal comments and empty praise. Underpinned by sociocultural, critical theories and qualitative research methods, this study investigated teachers' experiences in a New Zealand Health School as they inquired into an approach that mitigates the narrow and predominantly negative responses some students previously received.

This research followed five Health School teachers who inquired into and adopted appreciative pedagogical practices and focused on responding to their students' writing through an asset-based lens. Through this lens, diversity is valued and encompassed as a resource. All students, irrespective of their health condition or other dimensions of diversity, are positioned as capable and knowledgeable writers. The Health School teachers collaboratively inquired into appreciatively informed strategies, implemented these while discussing shared samples of students' writing, and adopted the new strategies when they responding to the writing of their Health School students (aged 5-19).

Evidence was drawn from focus groups, learning inquiry group sessions, and individual interviews, and analysed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that when teachers collaborate to reflect on the perspectives that inform education policies and practices, particularly those around standardised assessments, they become more aware of how these factors may lead them to inadvertently reproduce harmful responses. When teachers employed appreciative strength-based strategies, they became less focused on predetermined standards and surface-level features (e.g., spelling,

grammar and punctuation), instead looking at how students integrated literacy knowledge they had learnt outside of school into their writing. Teachers became curious about students' writing and asked students more questions about their writing processes. As a result, participants' response practices became more student-centred, allowing students to maintain authority over their writing.

Findings suggest that high-stakes assessments have a powerful effect on how teachers view themselves as teachers and their students as learners. However, talking appreciatively about students and their writing was infectious; when teachers collaboratively discussed student writing strengths, participants stopped looking for conformity in students' writing and instead began considering differences in students' writing as assets. This research contributes to the body of literature aimed at shifting discourses that position students in deficit ways towards more appreciative stances. Further, with limited past research looking into writing teachers' experiences during times of curricular and assessment change in New Zealand and practices of Health School teachers in general, this study provides a valuable contribution to the literature. Implications for teachers and educators are discussed.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Responding to students' writing is a complex process. Teachers' assessments and responses to students' writing are influenced by historical and social understandings of writing and framed by dominant cultural ideas about writing and learning to write (Ivanič', 2004). In New Zealand, writing in Standard English is privileged. This works to both shape what teachers think about writing and to reinforce prevailing ideologies about language and writing. These ideologies are evident in, and reinforced within writing curricula and assessment policies, such as the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) (Ministry of Education, 2007), the Learning Progressions Framework (LPF) (Ministry of Education, 2010) and assessment policies such as the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). These frameworks invoke a conceptualisation of learning to write as a process of acquiring skills to conform to predetermined writing requirements, in a linear, developmental progression.

Assessment and curricular frameworks shape how teachers view their students as writers, and these views are inextricably linked to how teachers respond to their students' writing. Teachers use these frameworks, which are shaped by socially constructed language ideologies, such as Standard English, which Metz (2023) refers to as a "mythical idea of a pure and correct form of English" (p. 446), and standardised literacy norms, to assess students' adherence to predetermined writing criteria. This is evident in teachers' use of rubrics, criteria, learning progression frameworks and criteria from standardised assessments. When teachers read students' writing within these contexts, students' writing is often viewed through a negative lens. When deficit thinking is applied in writing classrooms, learners whose writing does not fit into the "monocultural and monolingual" category (Paris, 2012, p.95) and deviates from established conventions are often marginalised as being at risk of failing and labelled as struggling writers.

Students who are positioned as at risk and struggling typically receive responses to their writing that are ineffectual, overly corrective, nonspecific, and disengaging (Bishop et al., 2009; Davila, 2012; Dinnen et al., 2009; Graham & Perin,

2007; Sabti et al., 2019). For example, rather than being constructive and optimistic, these responses often focus on low-level technical concerns, what is lacking in students' writing and what needs to be improved (Graham & Perin, 2007). This approach is of significant concern, a substantial body of literature provides compelling evidence suggesting effective feedback is crucial for students' success as writers (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) because comments made by teachers about their writing send students messages about what kind of writers they are (Warrington, 2016). Additionally, because "language can deeply wound and leave lasting scars" (Fletcher, 2006, p.109), often, writing responses framed in deficits are harmful. Such responses can prevent students from forming positive writing identities and leave lasting scars, potentially resulting in low writing self-efficacy and a lifelong avoidance of writing (Pajares et al., 2007; Sabti et al., 2019). Given the harmful effects of traditional response practices, particularly on the writing self-efficacy of students from diverse backgrounds, and the increasingly heterogeneous nature of writing classrooms, there is a pressing need to reconceptualise assessment and response practices. Central to this reconceptualisation is the implementation of strategies that foster all students' confidence and support their growth as capable and confident writers irrespective of their diversity (Calkins, 1994).

This research investigates teachers' experiences as they inquire into and adopt a strength-based approach to viewing and responding to students' writing that mitigates deficit-framed approaches. This qualitative multi-case study took place in one unit of a co-educational New Zealand Health School. Health Schools provide community and hospital-based teaching to students from five to 19 years old who are too unwell to attend their regular school. The students who attend this school come from varied economic and social backgrounds and have been diagnosed with a diverse range of health conditions. Students in this context are often labelled at risk and struggling due to their fractured attendance at school.

This introductory chapter provides background to this research. It briefly describes the context, design, theoretical frameworks and the rationale for the study.

1.1 Background - Increasing Diversity and Standardisation

The way writing is taught and assessed in New Zealand schools is becoming increasingly standardised, while learners in New Zealand classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse (Education Review Office, 2018). Due to concerns about a perceived decline in literacy and numeracy, the document guiding teachers' instruction, the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) (Ministry of Education, 2007), is being revised. New policies, standards, and instructional programmes have been implemented. Consequently, the way educators teach writing is undergoing a series of changes. Teachers must dedicate an average of one hour each day to teaching writing, and schools must implement structured literacy approaches in their writing classrooms, particularly in Years 0-3.

From 2026, teachers in New Zealand schools will be required to assess and report on students' writing progress to the Ministry of Education (MoE) using differing standardised testing tools, depending on the age of the students. The MoE is exploring new assessment tools to assess student writing progress in Years 0 – 8 (Ministry of Education, n.d.). In the interim, teachers of Years 0 - 8 are encouraged to use the Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning (e-asTTle). This test requires students to complete a writing task based on a prompt developed by the MoE, which is evaluated by teachers using a standardised rubric. The results are entered into the e-asTTle online forum to compare individual writing performance with that of students across New Zealand.

In the last three years of secondary school (Years 11–13), students engage with an external qualification system based on standards, the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), which includes internally and externally assessed components (Irving et al., 2011; Parr & Jeffery, 2021). In NCEA, students complete a variety of writing assessments across different subject disciplines and levels. The first year of NCEA, Level 1, became optional in 2024, and in 2025, one in five schools opted out of assessing students' knowledge using NCEA Level 1 (Education Review Office, 2025). This means some schools are placing more emphasis on learning, while others are choosing alternative assessment methods to evaluate their students. From 2028, it will become compulsory for post-primary students to demonstrate their writing ability by completing national standardised tests called

Common Assessment Activities (CAAs). The CAAs are co-requisites for NCEA. Regardless of how well they do in their other subjects, students must achieve the three CAAs — writing, reading, and numeracy — to be awarded their NCEA qualification (Ministry of Education, n.d.). The positioning of the CAAs as gatekeepers to students being awarded their NCEA qualification, which enables them to access tertiary education both in New Zealand and internationally, makes the CAAs high-stakes.

The diversity of writing classrooms in New Zealand is increasing. Learners in New Zealand classrooms come from a range of backgrounds and bring a range of experiences with them. For example, New Zealand's largest city, Auckland, is home to over 100 ethnicities, and more than 150 languages are spoken daily (Education Review Office, 2018). This means teachers in New Zealand are being challenged to work in an environment implementing increased standardisation while having to view and respond to writing that is likely to reflect the lived experiences of students from different cultural, social and economic backgrounds. This paradox means there is a need for further research on approaches to teaching that can negotiate high-stakes assessments while honouring the experiences and knowledge of a diverse range of students.

1.2 My Interest

During my schooling, I experienced high absenteeism due to chronic childhood asthma. As a child, this meant less time on the sports field and more time with my head buried in a book or writing. I remember spending countless hours writing letters, journal entries, poems, and articles for fictitious magazines. I still recall the moment when the joy I felt in writing was extinguished. It was at school. My writing, which I enthusiastically and proudly crafted, was continually returned with Fs, and littered with red markings and negative comments such as, "You need to work on your spelling" and "You've used no punctuation". These responses to my writing, influenced by deficit discourses (Paris, 2012; Valencia, 1997), have resulted in a lifetime of uncertainty about my writing. They have shaped my identity as a writer and an educator (Dix, 2012).

Over nearly two decades in education, I have taught writing across multiple subject disciplines: English, English as a second language, social studies, classical studies, history, and drama. Throughout this time, I have worked with numerous students who have been marginalised as at risk or struggling writers for various reasons. Many students I have worked with prefaced writing lessons with “I can’t write“. When they discussed their feelings, I often heard responses such as, “my spelling is bad”, and “I can’t write essays“. The responses students mostly received focused on how to remediate deficiencies in their writing; very few of them recalled positive feedback.

I was already beginning to reflect on the pervasiveness of deficit perceptions of students' writing abilities when my eldest child, Charlie, started school. Even at five, Charlie was a prolific writer at home. However, according to his first school report, he was “below the standard“. I began questioning the adequacy of predetermined standards for measuring students’ learning. This was not the first time I noticed that predetermined standards did not always accurately reflect students’ writing abilities. However, this prompted a critical examination of the influence predetermined criteria exerted on my own assessment of students' writing proficiency. Additionally, I began to wonder in what other ways my perceptions about writing and writing practice were being influenced by educational and societal contexts (Bakhtin, 1981). How were these perceptions and beliefs shaping my responses to students’ writing and impacting upon their writing identities? I developed an awareness that multiple discourses were playing a part in structuring how teachers viewed and responded to students’ writing.

This, coupled with my childhood writing experiences, made me question if there were alternatives to how teachers respond to writing. How could we alter deficit perspectives about students’ writing abilities (Paris, 2012; Valencia, 1997)? How could we honour students’ beliefs and experiences in their writing and improve their enjoyment of writing whilst working within the confines of standardisation? I became determined to shift the deficit rhetoric surrounding students and their writing (Paris, 2012; Valencia, 1997). This drive underpins my research topic.

1.3 Research Focus

Students who are considered at risk and struggling can be marginalised and will typically experience responses to their writing that include marginal comments, such as “add more here”, empty praise, and a heavy focus on surface features (Bishop et al., 2009; Graham & Perin, 2007; Hillocks, 2002). Learners with complex health conditions often experience high absenteeism, diminished energy levels and lower levels of concentration. These factors contribute to this group of students being marginalised as at risk and too unwell to learn. Often, teachers believe that offering these learners a narrow curriculum, along with responses such as empty praise to their writing, will help alleviate students’ stress. However, this approach may negatively impact students’ faith in their abilities and can contribute towards them constructing identities of deficiency (Paris, 2012; Valencia, 1997).

This study investigates teachers' experiences in a New Zealand Health School setting as they inquire into an approach mitigating the narrow and ineffective responses some students, particularly those perceived as at risk and struggling, receive. This study follows five Health School teachers who inquire into and adopt appreciative pedagogical practices, focusing on responding to their students’ writing through an asset-based lens (K. Bomer, 2010; R. Bomer, 2011). Through this lens, diversity is valued and encompassed as a resource (Paris, 2012), and all students, irrespective of their health condition or other dimensions of diversity, are positioned as capable and knowledgeable writers.

Additionally, this research has been conducted during a period of curricular and assessment change in New Zealand. This research examines teachers' experiences in a Health School as they implement the new CAA writing assessment policy, introduced in New Zealand in 2021, as outlined above, becoming mandatory in 2028. Preparing students to sit one-size-fits-all, high-stakes writing assessments can potentially drive teaching in an unfortunate direction. The pressure to prepare students for the tests often results in teachers adopting more formulaic approaches to teaching writing. Rubrics, criteria and assessment standards could increasingly influence teachers' responses to students’ writing. This study invited Health School teachers to navigate difficulties encountered from changes to their teaching/learning environment by adopting appreciative assessment and response practices. These

practices aim to balance the current high-stakes approach of standardised literacy teaching and testing models with ones supporting individual students' needs.

1.4 Appreciative Pedagogical Approaches

Health School teachers participating in this study were asked to consider approaches to writing assessments and responses which offer appreciative rather than deficit perspectives (Paris, 2012; Valencia, 1997), in other words, focusing on what students can rather than what they cannot do. R. Bomer (2011) defines an appreciative stance as "acknowledging [students'] already-existing interests, experiences, knowledge, and skill in order to build upon them" (p.22). In her oft-cited text, Hidden Gems: Naming and Teaching from the Brilliance in Every Student's Writing, Katherine Bomer (2010) suggests protocols that teachers can use when reading writing to enable them to focus on and value students' strengths. These protocols include responding to what the text initially says to you, pointing to a place where the writing is good and describing what the writer is doing (Bomer, 2010). Additionally, Bomer (2010) offers examples and suggestions for noticing and naming how students use voice, vocabulary and word choice, and organisation. This study encouraged teachers to consider Bomer's (2010) concepts when viewing and responding to Health School students' writing.

Instead of undervaluing students' abilities and diversities, appreciative approaches to assessment and response recognise and appreciate learners' unique funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and multiliteracies (Cazden et al., 1996). Teachers view students' processes and approximations as signs of growth, focusing on developing the writer rather than correcting the writing (Bomer, 2010; Simon, 2013). Responding to students' writing through this lens requires teachers to view all students as "authors with intentionality and purpose" (Simon, 2013, p. 115) and to notice a "surplus of possibilities rather than a collection of deficits" (Simon, 2013, p. 140). This research aims to contribute to the body of literature focused on shifting discourses and practices that position students in deficit ways (Paris, 2012; Valencia, 1997) towards more appreciative stances (K. Bomer, 2010; R. Bomer, 2011; Warrington, 2016).

1.5 Theoretical / Conceptual Framing

Two theoretical frameworks, Bakhtin's (1981) dialogic theory and Ivanič's (2004) discourses of writing, as outlined below, guided this study. These lenses, alongside engagement with current educational practices and literature exploring writing response pedagogies and high-stakes assessment, provide a framework to help understand how teachers' pedagogical practices, including their assessment and response to students' writing, are socially constructed within the context of this research as well as the broader educational environment. These theoretical frameworks also helped me understand literacy as a social practice and how sharing knowledge and meaning is formed through the dialogic space.

1.5.1 Positioning Learning as Socially Constructed - Bakhtin's Theory of Dialogue and Identity

The epistemological assumption guiding this research is that knowledge and reality are socially constructed. From this perspective, learning is primarily a social process, and meaning is formed within social contexts shaped by broader frameworks (Warrington, 2016; Lave & Wenger, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). Socio-cultural theories grew from the work of Lev Vygotsky, who opposed theories of behaviourism, which located learning within the individual and viewed knowledge as being disseminated and deposited (Land, 2019). Many scholars advocate for social-cultural practices (e.g., Gee, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1990; Moje et al., 2009; Moll et al., 1992); however, this research primarily draws on the work of the Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin and his dialogic theory of language, learning, and identity.

Bakhtin theorised dialogue as the relationship between utterances and the "circumstances and conditions" that must be met before people speak (Shirkhani et al., 2015, p.154). He defined utterance as "the real unit of speech communion" (Bakhtin, 1987, p.67). He suggested that rather than being static, utterances evolve, are contextually located and are "populated and or overpopulated with the intentions of others" (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 293 - 294). According to Bakhtin, identity is linked to dialogue. He stated, "I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another" (1987, p.287). In Bakhtin's (1981) view, identities are collaboratively formed through a

continuous exchange of spoken and written communication. Regarding education, Bakhtin's notion of dialogue and identity illustrates how teachers can engage with each other and with students to alter the interpretation of meaning during the teaching and learning process. This highlights the role teachers' utterances play in the construction of both their teaching identities and their students' learning identities. It rejects deficit discourses that locate the failure or success of students within the individual, instead focusing the responsibility on the social construction of knowledge (Paris, 2012; Valencia, 1997).

This research focused on opening a dialogic space for meaning to be co-constructed through utterances and allowed for a critical analysis of the relationship between culture, power, and language to understand how teachers' responses to students about their writing are often "populated or overpopulated by the intention of others" (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 293 - 294).

1.5.2 Ivanič's Discourses of Writing

When viewing and responding to students' writing, teachers draw on discourses that circulate in and beyond their teaching contexts. Foucault (1970) described discourse as the use of written or spoken communication to construct knowledge and truth. In the domain of writing, Ivanič (2004) describes discourses as "constellations of beliefs about writing, beliefs about learning to write, ways of talking about writing, and the sorts of approaches to teaching and assessment which are likely to be associated with these beliefs" (p.224). She identified six discourses of writing: (1) a skills discourse of writing, (2) a creativity discourse of writing, (3) a process discourse of writing, (4) a genre discourse of writing, (5) a social practices discourse of writing, and (6) a social political discourse (Ivanič, 2004). Ivanič (2004) outlines how these discourses shape teachers' pedagogical practices, including their approaches to writing assessment (see Figure 1).

During this research, Ivanič's framework provided a lens for understanding the discourses teachers draw on in their writing instructions, how these impact their views of their students' writing, and how they respond to writing. Moreover, Ivanič's Discourses of Writing framework also provided an avenue for understanding how

schools are “political sites involved in the construction and control of discourse” (Giroux, 2001, p. 46) through education policies, such as mandated assessments. Drawing on Bakhtin’s ideas about language and Ivanič’s Discourses of Writing framework, a broader and more complex understanding was revealed about how language, in the form of discourses, can perpetuate a form of regulation and domination, particularly for groups of students positioned at the margins of the educational milieu.

Figure 1 Ivanic’s Framework of Discourses of Writing and Learning to Write

Discourses	*Layer in the comprehsive view of language*	*Beliefs about writing*	*Beliefs about learning to write*	*Approaches to the teaching of writing*	*Assessment criteria*
1. A SKILLS DISCOURSE	THE WRITTEN TEXT	Writing consists of applying knowledge of sound–symbol relationships and syntactic patterns to construct a text.	Learning to write involves learning sound–symbol relationships and syntactic patterns.	SKILLS APPROACHES *Explicit teaching* ‘phonics’	accuracy
2. A CREATIVITY DISCOURSE	THE MENTAL PROCESSES OF WRITING	Writing is the product of the author’s creativity.	You learn to write by writing on topics which interest you.	CREATIVE SELF-EXPRESSION *Implicit teaching* ‘whole language’ ‘language experience’	interesting content and style
3. A PROCESS DISCOURSE		Writing consists of composing processes in the writer’s mind, and their practical realization.	Learning to write includes learning both the mental processes and the practical processes involved in composing a text.	THE PROCESS APPROACH *Explicit teaching*	?
4. A GENRE DISCOURSE	THE WRITING EVENT	Writing is a set of text-types, shaped by social context.	Learning to write involves learning the characteristics of different types of writing which serve specific purposes in specific contexts.	THE GENRE APPROACH *Explicit teaching*	appropriacy
5. A SOCIAL PRACTICES DISCOURSE		Writing is purpose-driven communication in a social context.	You learn to write by writing in real-life contexts, with real purposes for writing.	FUNCTIONAL APPROACHES *Explicit teaching* PURPOSEFUL COMMUNICATION *Implicit teaching* ‘communicative language teaching’ LEARNERS AS ETHNOGRAPHERS *Learning from research*	effectiveness for purpose
6. A SOCIOPOLITICAL DISCOURSE	THE SOCIOCULTURAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF WRITING	Writing is a sociopolitically constructed practice, has consequences for identity, and is open to contestation and change.	Learning to write includes understanding why different types of writing are the way they are, and taking a position among alternatives.	CRITICAL LITERACY *Explicit teaching* ‘Critical Language Awareness’	social responsibility?

Source: Ivanič (2004, p. 225)

1.6 Significance of Research

How teachers respond to students’ writing impacts the way in which students see themselves as writers. Teachers' words can be the crucial missing ingredient that helps learners make a breakthrough in their writing (Fletcher, 2006). However, students often receive vague, ineffective, and harmful responses to their writing. When students' writing is read through a deficit lens and assessed against predetermined standards, it can inhibit teachers from being responsive to a diverse range of students. It is therefore highly relevant to research effective writing response strategies that mitigate responses framed as deficits. It is also important to

investigate how response strategies can contribute to the way teachers view and respond to the diversity in students' writing and, more significantly, improve the writing experiences for learners, including those who have been historically marginalised as at risk and struggling. A key point of difference from other research on response strategies, both in New Zealand and internationally, is that the evidence in this research is generated from the experiences of teachers who work in a Health School. The Health School provides community and hospital-based teaching to school-aged students aged 5-19 years who are too unwell to attend their regular schools.

Investigating participants' experiences as they consider an alternative way to view and respond to students' writing of Health School students has the potential to provide an understanding of how teachers can respond to students writing in a way that honours students' diverse experiences and realities (such as their health condition(s), the effect of school attendance interrupted by absence, their age, social and cultural background and so on) while also fostering positive writing identities and a love for writing. To date, how teachers view and respond to the writing of students whose complex health needs prevent them from attending school on a full-time basis remains largely unexplored.

Furthermore, this study aimed to investigate teachers' pedagogical practices during a period of curricular and assessment change in New Zealand. Conducting this study during the early stages of newly mandated assessment policies provides insight into how these policies are being implemented in writing lessons and captures the experiences of those involved before they become commonplace. It is hoped this study will encourage a critical analysis of mandated assessment policies and the way students are categorised through a deficit lens when their writing is assessed against predetermined standards.

Although the primary focus of this research is on teachers in a Health School context, it has potential relevance beyond this setting. This research will inform the project of appreciating students' many dimensions of difference. This is pertinent as today's classrooms are typified by diversity. Additionally, advances in medical treatments and the improved survival rates of children with chronic medical

conditions means it is increasingly likely that teachers will encounter students with long-term illnesses in their classrooms.

1.7 Research Questions

This study explores teachers' experiences as they inquire into appreciative approaches and adopt this stance when viewing and responding to the writing of Health School students. This research also aims to gain a deeper understanding of how appreciative framing influences Health School teachers' responses to their students' writing. This research investigates:

1. What do Health School teachers negotiate when adopting an appreciative stance?
2. What do Health School teachers notice when they read students' writing through a lens of appreciation?
3. How does viewing students and their writing through this lens impact Health School teachers' responses to writing authored by Health School students?

1.8 Chapter Summaries

The following chapter reviews the relevant literature framing this research in three main sections: first, it surveys the literature on writing assessments and its impact on writing pedagogy; second, it provides an overview of the literature on writing responses; and third, it examines the literature on appreciative pedagogical approaches.

In Chapter Three, the methodology and design behind this research are outlined, including an explanation of the rationale behind using a multi-case study design, an overview of the research participants, a description of the research methods used to generate evidence (focus groups, guided inquiry groups, and semi-structured interviews), analysis methodology, and unexpected challenges and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four presents participants' experiences as they inquired into an appreciative approach to viewing and responding to students’ writing. These results

are represented by four themes generated through reflexive analysis, participant reflections before and after appreciative framing, noticing and responding to what is in students' writing, noticing and negotiating appreciative practices while also considering discourses of standardisation.

Chapter Five draws on the literature reviewed together with Bakhtin (1981) and Ivanič's (2004) conceptual frameworks to describe how appreciative approaches to writing can be used to contest current pedagogical practices. It also offers insight into alternative ways teachers can respond to students' writing.

Chapter Six summarises the key findings. It reflects on the limitations of this research, highlights potential directions for further research, and discusses implications for future teaching practices and professional development.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature informing and orientating this study. The review begins by focusing on literature that explores how writing assessment in New Zealand and internationally influences teachers' perceptions of their students' writing. The second section surveys research on the pedagogical practice of response; these studies highlight practices primarily shaped by deficit discourses that focus on what is missing in students' writing. The third section outlines research whereby teachers employed writing assessment and instructional approaches informed by appreciative discourses to counter didactic methods positioning students and their writing abilities as deficient (Valencia, 1997). I conclude by locating my research within this literature and explaining how this study builds upon and extends research on appreciative writing pedagogy.

2.2 Research on Writing Assessment

Literature demonstrating how high-takes assessments have a significant influence on writing curriculums and teachers' perceptions of students' writing is discussed in this section. These studies highlight that when students' writing is viewed through an assessment lens, teachers often look for what is lacking in students' writing, and students' abilities are described in terms of deficits. The reviewed studies, as described below, provide the rationale for my research focus on appreciative approaches (R. Bomer, 2011) towards writing assessments (K. Bomer, 2010) and responses that extend rather than frame students' existing writing practices as deficient.

2.2.1 Writing Assessments Influence Writing Instruction

Research indicates high-stakes assessments often narrow curriculum and influence instructional practices (Apple, 2007; Au, 2007). This includes teachers' evaluation of students' writing and how they view and respond to students about their writing (Hillocks, 2002; Land, 2019; Simon, 2013). Research directly exploring

the impact of high-stakes assessments on teachers' writing assessment and response in New Zealand is sparse. However, some New Zealand-based literature (e.g. Dymoke, 2012; Hipkins, 2013; Hipkins et al., 2016; Irving et al., 2011; Locke, 2001; Locke, 2008) addresses the impact that NCEA is having on the New Zealand curriculum and teachers' pedagogical practice in both junior and senior classrooms.

In his 2001 article, released shortly before the new Secondary School qualifications framework, the NCEA, was implemented, Locke expressed concern that NCEA achievement criteria would become “a powerful influence in shaping the way a subject is constructed in classrooms” (p. 104). The results from a national survey on parents' and educators' beliefs about NCEA, released by Hipkins (2013) a decade after its implementation, validated Locke’s early fears. According to Hipkins' (2013) report, New Zealand teachers tailored their instruction to meet the demands of high-stakes assessments. Forty-eight percent of teachers and 47% of principals believed NCEA influenced the curriculum across senior and junior classrooms in secondary school. While this report did not directly examine teachers' beliefs about how NCEA influenced their writing curricula and instruction, it did highlight the impact of high-stakes assessments on their teaching practices. This suggests NCEA is shaping the types of writing teachers’ emphasis in their classrooms as well as their perceptions of their students as writers.

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In one of the few studies examining New Zealand teachers’ perceptions of assessment and feedback, Irving et al. (2011) found dominant discourses from writing assessments circulate and influence instruction, even when New Zealand teachers do not use high-stakes assessments in their classrooms. According to Irving et al. (2011), the “tension between improvement and accountability purposes for assessment” (p. 413), even in the lower-stakes first two years of secondary school (years 9 and 10), resulted in teachers using NCEA assessment criteria to assess their younger students. For example, this study found teachers' feedback to year 9 and 10 students often included NCEA grading terminology (e.g., Not Achieved, Achieved, Merit and Excellence). The findings of this research illustrate the pervasive nature of high-stakes assessment discourses and their significant effect on teachers' assessment and response practices, even for students who have not yet encountered any high-stakes assessments in secondary school (Irving et al.,

2011). However, further research is needed to explore how mandated assessments impact teachers' views of their students' writing in New Zealand and to what extent these views shape teachers' response practices

2.2.2 Writing Assessments Influence How Writing is Viewed

International research also suggests high-stakes assessment approaches are prevalent overseas; similarly guiding instruction in teachers' writing classrooms and impacting the way in which teachers assess and respond to their students' writing (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Irving et al., 2011; Simon, 2013). Because assessments have significant potential consequences for students, it is likely teachers want to concentrate on preparing students for these, therefore it is a common occurrence for high-stakes assessments "to become the theory upon which teachers base their teaching of writing" (Hillocks, 2002, p.198). Evidence across disciplines has highlighted that in high-stakes assessment environments, teachers often rely on preprinted worksheets and workbooks for instructional purposes and use rubrics and standardised criteria for assessment and feedback (Au, 2007; Comber, 2012; Farvis & Hay, 2020; Kohn, 2006). When writing is read through this lens, the reading is often superficial, and teachers tend to focus on punctuation, grammatical and spelling mistakes (Spence, 2010b).

Studies directly exploring how standardised rubrics and assessment criteria influence teachers' perceptions of their students' writing in New Zealand are scarce. However, a study by Hawe et al. (2008) found New Zealand primary school teachers used success criteria as a point of reference when assessing and responding to students' writing. Little detail was provided about where the information in the success criteria came from, but it was noted the criteria were used as "competency based check lists" or "fix it lists" (Hawe et al., 2008, p.53). Findings of this research confirm international studies (e.g., Comber, 2012; Hillocks, 2002; Kearns, 2016), which often show students' writing is assessed based on an ability to meet predetermined standards. This can result in a deficit view of students' writing abilities, where their experiences may not be considered, and their nuanced writing strengths remain unnoticed (Kohn, 2006).

Research suggests assessing students' writing against predetermined standards can have dire consequences for students whose language does not adhere to the language that the developers of those standards value (Kohn, 2006; Spence, 2010a). In research conducted in the United States, Spence (2010a) observed two teachers who had immigrated to the United States (both fluent in Spanish and English) as they used a writing rubric to assess a student's writing. Despite having extensive teaching experience and language acquisition knowledge, both teachers "placed more emphasis on the rubric than on their knowledge and experience" (Spence, 2010a, p. 342). Additionally, Spence (2010a) noted that due to the rubrics' "artificial separation of the traits" (p. 342), the teachers appeared mainly drawn to negative aspects of the student's writing, such as incorrect wording and spelling. The classifications compromised the teachers' ability to recognise positive aspects of the student's writing. Spence concluded that the unique writing abilities of diverse students were often overlooked; students whose language adhered to the language valued in the standard were more likely to be rewarded. This suggests rubrics are limiting, and if teachers are unaware of this, there is potential for their perception of students' writing to be deficit oriented.

In her qualitative study of five Californian high school teachers' writing instruction, Wahleithner (2018) noted teachers with a less developed understanding of writing instruction were more likely to believe that for writing to be effective, it must align with genres present in high-stakes assessment. Additionally, the less experienced teachers in Wahleithner's (2018) study turned to standardised formulas and templates, such as the five-paragraph essay and standardised rubrics, to guide their instruction. For example, one participant described using "a template for writing a summary," which required students to "fill in the blanks" (Wahleithner, 2018, p. 16). When teachers focus on formulaic approaches, their instruction becomes product-driven, with less time spent on teaching and understanding the writing process (Land, 2019; Wahleithner, 2018). This research highlighted how standardised criteria and formulaic approaches to writing instructions shaped the way teachers viewed students' writing. This can be detrimental for learners from diverse backgrounds because rubric, standardised criteria, and templates associated with high-stakes assessments leave little room for teachers to consider or understand differences within the writing of such students.

2.2.3 Writing Assessments, Standard English and Diverse Learners

Researchers critical of high-stakes assessments describe how standardised writing assessments lead to students' writing being interpreted through a narrow lens of literacy defined by dominant cultural norms (e.g., Ballock et al., 2018; Hattie et al., 2016; Heron-Hruby et al., 2020; Land, 2019; Sherry, 2017; Simon, 2013). In a Canadian study, Kearns (2016) demonstrated how students were perceived as illiterate based on their results in the mandated Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT). She argued, “good students are shown to be literate successful standardized test takers; whereas those who fail are deficient, illiterate, flawed, and in need of remedy, remediation, and transformation” and noted that ethnicity matters in mandated assessments (p.122). For participants in this study, who were often “shocked” to find they lacked the literacy skills demanded by the system, failing the OSSLT meant being enrolled in remedial classes, where their writing abilities were viewed as deficient, and where they were offered narrow forms of writing instruction.

Davila’s (2012) research examined how language ideologies shaped the perspectives of 12 college writing instructors regarding their students’ writing. Her study, based in the United States, revealed well-meaning White writing instructors often made racial associations when commenting on anonymised student papers. When the papers included nonstandard language, they were associated with African American students, presumed to be from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In contrast, White middle- to upper-middle-class students were linked with standard language. Davila (2012) concluded these views were driven by a perspective underestimating the writing abilities of culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Similarly, Bacon (2017) found pre-service teachers read linguistically diverse writing through a Standard English lens, subconsciously believing there is a “definable, agreed-upon set of conventions for ‘proper’ spoken and written English” (p. 343). When asked to answer questions in a survey about a poem that differed in language and style from Standard English conventions, 76% of participants responded they would give the poem a lower grade, despite the writing being that of a famous poet, which was unknown to them at the time. These studies highlight a relationship between standard ideologies, which are embedded in high-stakes assessments, and

how teachers perceive students' writing. However, more research is needed to understand how teachers can address negative perceptions of the writing of diverse students, whose work may differ from the standards set by predetermined criteria.

2.3 Research on Responding to Writing

Literature indicates teachers frequently scrutinise students' writing to identify omissions and errors. Consequently, teachers' responses to students' writing often include comments focusing on how students can rectify mistakes that have been identified. These studies highlight that teachers may be still responding in the same teacher-centered monologic ways that they experienced in their childhood. Teachers offer guidance on enhancing students' writing skills, and students are anticipated to adhere to these recommendations.

2.3.1 Responses Focused on Errors and What is Missing in Students' Writing.

Several research meta-analyses on feedback surmise that responding to students is an essential teaching practice that significantly impacts students' learning outcomes (e.g. Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Wisniewski et al., 2020). Researchers also note that some forms of feedback are more effective in fostering student learning than others and that certain types of feedback can inhibit learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). The effectiveness of teachers' responses determines how students receive and interact with feedback and how they perceive themselves as writers (K. Bomer, 2010; Hall, 2016; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). When teachers respond to students about their writing, their words can be "the crucial missing ingredient" (Fletcher, 2006, p. 109) that fosters students' growth as writers. However, the language teachers use can also negatively impact students' self-esteem (Tunstall & Gsipps, 1996) and writing self-efficacy (Pajares et al., 2007). As a result, students who receive negative comments can develop adverse feelings towards writing (Sabti et al., 2019) and develop an expectation that feedback will likely be unfavourable (Zumbrunn et al., 2016).

Despite decades of research highlighting concerns about teachers responding negatively to students' writing (e.g. Andrews et al., 2006; Bardine et al., 2000; Connors & Lunsford, 1993; Ferris, 1999; Lee, 2007) evidence suggests educators

are still focusing their assessments of students' writing on accurate application of spelling, punctuation, grammar, and structure (Bardine et al., 2000; Graham & Perin, 2007; Truscott, 1996; Sommers, 1982). Informing students about such errors is done by circling or underlining the incorrect features and writing comments on students' final drafts (Connors & Lunsford, 1993).

Connor and Lunsford (1993) found in their analysis of 300 teacher comments on North American college students' essays, that fewer than 9% of the comments were positive. Building on this research, almost two decades later, Lunsford and Lunsford (2008) expressed their shock at "how little some things have changed" in terms of teachers' feedback practices (p.793). The most common way teachers responded to students' writing was by marking grammatical errors and writing vague and unhelpful comments on students' final drafts. Similarly, Rysdam and Johnson-Shull (2016), who analysed the written comments on 1000 college-level papers in 2006 and followed this up by studying response types in 2010, found teachers frequently wrote unhelpful comments, such as "huh?" and "confusing" (p. 77) and hurtful comments such as "this is boring" (p. 69), on students' writing. Rysdam and Johnson-Shull (2016) contended that teachers tend to focus on what is missing in students' writing, leading to writing assessment practices that are "stuck in a rut of negativity and correction" (p. 760). These studies point to response practices that are framed in deficits. Although these studies are relevant in helping conceptualise the prevalence of negative evaluative approaches, they provide little explanation of why teachers continue to assess and respond to students' writing through a critical lens.

In research examining why teachers often respond negatively to students' writing, Sherry (2017), whose study was conducted in the United States, analysed 14 pre-service teachers' discussion forum posts and comments on the writing of seventh- and eighth-grade English language learners. Sherry (2017) noticed a trend in the 137 responses to students' writing; most were negative or lacked specificity; for example, the pre-service teachers made comments such as, "You need a little more support/details. You are getting your point across, just a little more development" (p. 358). Sherry (2017) concluded that the limited experience of pre-service secondary English teachers' in responding to students' writing, especially in ways that are sensitive to cultural and linguistic differences, led them to instinctively

apply a traditional, authoritative style of response they experienced in their own schooling. Sherry (2017) cites Bakhtin's theories about language and learning to explain how feedback is "externally authoritative" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.346). In other words, teachers have become so accustomed to this type of approach that, despite their best intentions, they often revert to traditional methods when responding to their students' writing.

2.3.2 Response Approaches – Teacher Centered

A range of research conducted in New Zealand and overseas suggests for feedback to be effective, both teachers and students should be actively engaged in the response process (e.g., Hattie et al., 2016; van der Kleij et al., 2019). When students participate in dialogic classrooms, they can explain the experiences they have drawn upon in their writing, and teachers can legitimise students' writing choices and be more sensitive to cultural and linguistic differences (Metz, 2023; Simon, 2013). However, research points to teacher practices that often contradict this ideal, because students' voices are frequently missing from the feedback process (e.g., Bardine et al., 2000; Jones & Beck, 2020; Sommers, 2006). Feedback is often conceptualised as a one-way process by both students and teachers (Jesson & Cockle, 2016). In this view, teachers respond to students' writing, and students act as passive recipients who follow teachers' suggestions. Teachers are positioned as the authority on writing, which leads students to make revisions mirroring the teacher's viewpoint rather than their own, preventing students from constructing their own writing identities (Jones & Beck, 2020; Sommers, 2006).

In their analysis of 193 New Zealand primary and secondary students, Harris et al. (2014) found that, "despite New Zealand's strong commitment to student-centred Assessment for Learning practices," students described feedback practices that were mainly delivered in a "traditional, teacher-centric fashion" (p. 126). Another study conducted in New Zealand by Jeson and Cockle (2016) validated this tendency for primary school teachers in New Zealand to primarily employ "monologic pedagogical practices" in classroom teaching (p. 612). Jesson and Cockle (2016) investigated the opportunities 14 Year 4–6 primary school students in two New Zealand schools were given to build on their existing expertise in. They noted

teachers' monologic practice restricted students' ability to explain the choices they made in their writing and their ability to draw on their prior knowledge. The small size of Jesson and Cockle's (2016) study makes it difficult to generalise their results. However, they assumed their findings were likely common practice across many New Zealand classrooms. How teachers can create environments where students' existing expertise is valued and built upon in writing instruction would benefit from further investigation, particularly studies asking more nuanced questions about the role of teachers in the classroom, including their role in responding practices

2.3.3 Responding to Students Who Are Perceived as Struggling Writers

When students' writing does not conform to language practices valued through standardised language ideologies, and teachers perceive that students are not developing their writing skills according to the chronological sequences proposed by predetermined standards, concerns arise. These students are often labelled as at risk of failing and of being struggling writers. Research suggests students who are marginalised as at risk and struggling writers typically experience higher rates of responses from teachers that include marginal comments, empty praise, as well as a heavy focus on surface features (Bishop et al., 2009; Davila, 2012; Dinnen et al., 2009; Graham & Perin, 2007). In their study of teachers in a suburban school in the United States, Dinnen et al. (2009) found teachers gave students they believed were struggling writers with 35% more negative comments than they did to students considered to be strong writers. The strong writers received over 50% more positive feedback. Examples of comments on strong writers' writing included "good" or "nice job" (p. 245). In contrast, students considered weak writers received negative comments about their word choice, sentence fluency and writing conventions. Dinnen et al. (2009) suggested this practice is justified because weaker writers require more support with their writing. However, such beliefs reinforce the dominant conception that writers who do not reach a particular development stage simultaneously with their peers are therefore at risk and struggling. This viewpoint encourages a deficit view of some students' writing abilities.

These studies highlight how students are frequently judged by errors in their writing rather than by their achievements because writing response pedagogies are

framed in terms of deficits. When teachers focus primarily on specific surface elements of writing, such as grammar, form, and spelling, which are often associated with the standard form of English, the language practices of diverse students can be devalued, thereby undermining the writing potential of these students. Further research is needed to investigate how teachers can mitigate these practices and bring writing responses out of the “rut of negativity and correction" (Rysdam & Johnson-Shull, 2016, p. 760).

2.4 Research Exploring Appreciative Practices

This section reviews research focused on educators' appreciative approaches to assessment and response (K. Bomer, 2010; R. Bomer, 2011). These studies shed light on alternative approaches to writing assessments. The teachers in this research countered the deficit-based practice of reading and responding to students’ writing by using strengths-based approaches (Warrington, 2016) that view all students as capable and knowledgeable.

2.4.1 Appreciating the Funds of Knowledge Students Bring into Their Writing

Students bring diverse literacy practices they have learnt from beyond school into writing classrooms and their writing. Recognising that students have valuable insights and incorporating these funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) into their writing can foster more inclusive learning environments and affirm students’ diverse identities. Researchers have employed resource teaching frameworks (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moll et al., 1992; Paris, 2012; Skerrett & Bomer, 2013; Skerrett et al., 2018) and multiliteracies pedagogy (Cazden et al., 1996) to leverage “students own strengths” as a basis for writing instruction (Carini, 1986, p.14) to investigate how educators can learn to value a diverse range of student experiences and funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992). From these researchers' point of view, multilingualism and diversity in writing classrooms are not an issue. The issue is the absence of pedagogical practices that leverage students' unique experiences, strengths and insights.

A number of researchers have explored how teachers leverage students’ experiences with other literacies to support their development as writers in the classroom (Durán, 2017; Harman, 2013). In her case study conducted in one fifth-

grade elementary classroom in the United States, Harman (2013) reported on how a teacher supported English language learners with their writing. The teacher encouraged students to “borrow and play with the language from their favourite novels” and explicitly modelled how to do this (p. 132). This helped students enhance their knowledge about language use and writing. Harman (2013) observed how one of the students in the study, an eleven-year-old Puerto Rican student, drew on knowledge he had gained from a boarding school pamphlet and the way he then incorporated this into his narrative. His teacher explained how this student researched the school on-line and used the architectural design of the classroom displayed on the website for the setting of his story. This study supported the idea that writing is socially situated (Bakhtin, 1982) as opposed to being a set of mechanical skills; students draw on intertextual knowledge when writing, and this highlights how teachers can build on these funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) in writing instruction.

In her qualitative design-based study conducted in a first-grade classroom in Texas, Durán (2017) explored ways teachers can “see difference in language, not as a barrier to overcome, or as a problem to manage, but as a resource for producing meaning in writing, speaking, readings and listening” (Horner et al., 2011, p.303). Durán (2017) observed how bilingual students in one classroom drew on their translingual knowledge of languages and literacy experiences from outside of the classroom. She observed, for example, that one student, a bilingual elementary writer, wove together terms and symbols, such as “creepers” and “base” and boxy square-headed drawings, from his knowledge of the popular computer game Minecraft (p.104). He purposefully included these forms in his writing to appeal to the intended audience of his texts, his classmates. Durán (2017) contended that when teachers expand their notion of texts and literacy practices, they are more likely to become aware of how students integrate literacy knowledge they have learnt outside of school into their writing. Teachers can draw on these experiences to build more equitable writing instruction.

Other studies have explored how close and sustained reading of students' writing enables teachers to notice strengths and facilitate responses to students’ writing that validate the experiences students bring to their writing (e.g., K. Bomer,

2010; Donahue, 2008; Simon, 2013; Spence, 2010b; Spence et al., 2017; Taylor, 2018). These researchers also suggested students' essays should be treated as legitimate pieces of writing which deserve to be studied, just like any other literary text written by an experienced author (Donahue, 2008). In short, "building on students' strengths means, first, acknowledging that students have significant experiences, insights, and talents to bring to their learning, and second, finding ways to use them in the classroom" (Nieto, 1999, p. 109).

In her case study, Spence (2010b) examined the effects of using generous reading as a writing assessment method in a third-grade classroom in the southwestern United States. Spence's generous reading approach required teachers to read students' writing, focusing on how students drew upon all their resources to communicate meaning through writing. Spence (2010b) suggested students brought "varied contexts into their writing and until their context is recognised, assessing their writing using predetermined criteria is counter-productive and discouraging" (p. 635). Spence (2010b) found that because the teacher in her research did not expect her students to write in a "prescribed way" (p. 640), she developed a deeper understanding of her students as people together with a sense of how students drew on their languages and literacies to "communicate meaning through writing" (p. 636). This research focused on the way in which students who speak more than one language incorporate their multilingual experiences into their writing; further research exploring how students bring other dimensions of diversity into their writing is warranted.

2.4.2 Appreciative Approaches to Writing Assessment and Response

In her oft-cited practitioner-focused book, *Hidden Gems* (2010), Katherine Bomer explains how teachers can counter deficit assessment and response practices by adopting strategies focused on noticing strengths in students' writing and then discussing on a one-to-one basis with students about their writing and writing processes. Several researchers suggest that the current way students' writing is assessed should be challenged, as it is often framed by deficit discourses that position students' writing abilities negatively (e.g., Durán, 2017; Neville, 2023; Spence, 2010b). Writing assessment should be aligned with instructional practices that recognise students' individual strengths and the diverse funds of knowledge they

bring to their writing (Moll et al., 1992). Rather than emphasising mastery of technical writing skills alone, assessment should prioritise students’ writing processes, creativity, and developmental growth. In her United States based study, Warrington (2016) formed an inquiry group comprising three secondary school English teachers to explore their experiences as they collaboratively redesigned writing instruction and assessment, drawing on appreciative discourses. This included focusing on student-led writing instruction, where students co-designed writing assessments that concentrated on writing processes rather than the product. Warrington (2016) found writing assessments concentrating on students' writing processes provided teachers with information they could use in future instruction, suggesting they may not have learnt this information just from assessing a final written product. The teachers in this study also noted that when students' growth through the writing process was assessed rather than their final product, they were less worried about their final grade and took more risks in their writing.

Other researchers who have explored appreciative approaches towards writing instruction suggest responses are most effective when collaborative discussions about ideas and use of language occur between teachers and students (Leekeenan & Warrington, 2024). Asking authentic questions during the response process also helps shift a power balance that is usually maintained by monologic practices (Land, 2019; Pedersen, 2018; Simon, 2013). When teachers respond verbally as part of conversations about writing, it provides them with insights into students' internal writing processes in a way that writing comments on a final written draft is unable to do (Jones & Beck, 2020). In her qualitative content analysis of teachers' writing feedback, Pedersen (2018) encouraged eight pre-service teachers to consider high-school students as “authors with intentionality and purpose” (pp. 185–186) and to focus on dialogic response practices. She aimed to move teachers away from monologic response practices that often concentrate on correcting the mechanics in students’ writing by encouraging pre-service teachers to incorporate “questioning, clarification, and illustration strategies” into their instruction methods and feedback (Pedersen, 2018, p. 187). For example, Pedersen (2018) observed one of her pre-service teacher participants asking one of his students, power affirming questions such as “You talk about how everyone seems happy, but how do they seem happy? What happens to prove that?” (p. 191). The teacher created

space for the student to interact with the text on his own terms and, ultimately, writing another paragraph to illustrate the points he was making. Additionally, Pedersen (2018) suggests dialogic response practices negate the “single voice of the dominant culture” which pervade standardisation and high-stakes testing contexts by allowing the voice of the students into the writing process (p. 192).

Simon (2013) employed a collaborative inquiry method in his qualitative study exploring student teachers' investigation of issues related to the teaching of writing, including how they responded to and assessed student work. He found using a descriptive review process when viewing students' writing allowed eight Canadian pre-service teachers to approach students’ writing with “gentleness and generosity’” and “suspend quick judgment” of students’ work (Simon, 2013, pp. 113-117). The pre-service teachers in Simons’ research practiced an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) when reading students' writing. Simon (2013) found when teachers regarded “students as authors with intentionality and purpose” and redirected their attention away from what was missing in students' writing, it allowed teachers to explore students writing for “meaning and intentionally” (p.116). Working together and discussing writing enabled participants in Simon’s (2013) study to develop a critical inquiry-based approach to teaching writing. It encouraged them to question ideas about teaching writing that are socially constructed inside and outside the classroom. Simon’s research highlights that when teachers change their perspectives on writing and question standardised approaches to writing, they are more likely to notice strengths in students’ writing rather than deficiencies.

In their study conducted in five primary school classrooms in New Zealand, Glasswell and Parr (2009) explored the most effective writing practices of academically diverse students. They observed how one teacher, Eleanor, used writing conferences (Calkins, 1994) to understand her students' writing and as a formative assessment (Glasswell and Parr 2009). Glasswell and Parr’s (2009) transcript of Eleanor’s conversation with her student, Charlie, highlights her appreciatively framed approach. For example, when Charlie shares his writing with Eleanor, she asks him to point out the strengths in his writing. “What letters did you get right here?” Charlie points to some letters he knows he has written correctly in the word “hurt”. Eleanor confirms his choices, adding “the /h/ and the /t/! Pretty good

eh?" (p.357). Instead of correcting what was wrong in Charlie's writing, Eleanor engaged Charlie in a conversation about his composition, giving him a chance to reflect on his writing and providing her a deeper understanding of his writing process. Although this research highlighted the practices of one teacher, as part of a larger case study, it does detail how appreciative approaches can impact students' learning and lead to instructional opportunities.

2.5 Summary

The above studies highlight how students' writing is frequently evaluated from a deficit perspective. Responses to writing often reflect this stance by focusing on what is absent in students' writing and commenting on how students should fix mechanical errors. This review also evidenced work aiming to counter deficit discourses by encouraging educators to examine their beliefs about writing and writing instruction, by generously reading students writing (Spence, 2010b), by viewing students as capable agentive writers and appreciating the funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) they bring into the classroom, and by responding to students through a lens of appreciation.

Most of the research in this review was conducted in higher education contexts, such as pre-service teacher programmes. Further research is needed in primary and high school contexts where teachers respond daily to students' writing. This may provide insights relevant to both primary and secondary education, enhancing our understanding of how appreciative pedagogies can influence teachers' writing approaches in the classroom. Additionally, the above research considers responsive teaching for students whose language and culture differ from the dominant cultural norms. Additional studies are necessary to explore responsive teaching with other dimensions of diversity, such as students with complex health conditions, who may have different funds of knowledge compared to other student populations (Moll, et al., 1992). There is also a need to further examine how teachers negotiate the complexity of newly mandated assessment policies while teaching diverse students who are, at times, marginalised as at risk and struggling due to their health conditions. The research presented in this thesis aims to fill this gap and may be the first research in New Zealand to include the voices and experiences of Health School teachers.

Chapter 3 Methodological Framework and Research Design

3.1 Introduction

Qualitative research methodology was used to explore my research questions, I utilised a critical research paradigm (Cohen et al., 2018) and a multiple-case study design (Yin, 2014). In this chapter, I begin by briefly discussing my ontological and epistemological positioning. I then introduce the context in which this research occurred. This includes an introduction to the research participants and a discussion of my position in the study. An outline of the methods used to generate evidence is provided, which included initial framing focus groups, inquiry groups and individual interviews. This chapter concludes with an outline of how evidence was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021. This approach allowed me to continually reflect on my positionality and assumptions by practicing reflexivity and recursive engagement with the evidence (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3.2 Theoretical Framework

3.2.1 Positioning this Research in a Critical Paradigm

All researchers position themselves, consciously or unconsciously, within a fundamental set of beliefs. Consequently, these beliefs and assumptions provide the 'architecture' for how researchers perceive the world and produce knowledge (Guba, 1990, as cited in Collins & Stockton, 2018, p. 2). These assumptions, values and beliefs guide researchers' actions during the research process (Willis et al., 2007). Throughout this study, I continually reflected on my ontological and epistemological beliefs, as well as my research paradigm. These orientations informed all procedural decisions made, including research purpose, research design, and my understanding of the research phenomenon. This research is grounded within the critical paradigm. Critical researchers strive to identify, question, and challenge the status quo of systemic inequalities, transforming socially unjust beliefs, policies, practices, and social structures (Taylor & Medina, 2011).

My adoption of a critical paradigm is influenced by Paulo Freire's (1970) conceptualisation of critical pedagogy. Drawing on critical theory, Freire redefined

education as an exercise of freedom and an opportunity to break free from oppression (Giroux, 2010). He asserted that raising the oppressed's critical consciousness by making them aware of the dominant patterns perpetuating their social situation is only possible through dialogue and language. Freire (1970) terms this rise in consciousness as 'conscientisation'. It is therefore argued that educators require an awareness of school practices and policies which systematically oppress certain groups of students through the perpetuation of inequalities. Freire (1970) calls for educators to participate in "reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed" (p.179). In this study, the inquiry groups provided a space for participants to reflect on how Standard English ideologies and normative standards influenced their beliefs and assumptions and impacted their views and responses towards their students' writing.

The use of critical theory provided a framework as the participants and I worked together to raise our critical consciousness (Brookfield, 2000) by opening a dialogic space to discuss and reflect on how students, especially those marginalised within the education system, might benefit from a more humanising approach to writing pedagogy. Furthermore, critical theory contributed to a fuller understanding of the policies, practices and discourses perpetuating the deficit framing of students (Paris, 2012; Valencia, 1997), highlighting the importance of deconstructing deficit thinking (Valencia, 2010) and repositioning students as knowledgeable, resourceful, capable and agentive writers (R. Bomer, 2011).

3.2.2 A Critical Realist Ontology

Together, ontological and epistemological perspectives "provide insight into what the researcher believes to be the nature of truth, the nature of the world, and ways of being in that world; together, they describe the world view of the researcher" (Berryman, 2019, p. 272). Employing a critical realist ontology meant I aligned myself with a perspective that "the way we perceive facts, particularly in the social realm, depends partly upon our beliefs and expectations" (Bunge, 1993, p. 231). I believed I could not sit outside the meaning, knowledge and social reality that I became aware of throughout this study (Pilgram, 2014), nor could I detach how my involvement and

position were embedded in and contributed to the knowledge interpreted and new meaning constructed during this research (Cohen et al., 2018; Madill et al., 2000).

3.3 The Research Context

There are three Sate-run co-educational Health Schools in New Zealand. These Health Schools are comprised of smaller units in different geographical areas. This research was conducted in a unit at of one of those Health Schools. This setting differs from mainstream education in New Zealand, as it provides educational support for students, five to 19 years old, who are too unwell to attend their regular school full-time. Students who attend the Health School have diverse, complex, and often chronic health conditions, for example, cancer and severe mental health conditions. Health School students have frequently experienced interrupted learning and extended absences. At the time of this research, there were 17 teachers at this Health School unit and 152 students. The average time students stay on the Health School roll is 19 weeks. The Health School philosophy is that every student is entitled to have access to high-quality teaching, irrespective of their health condition or where they live. This philosophy is reflected in teaching practices prioritising student voice, choice, and individual learning needs.

All the teachers at the Health School have secondary or primary school teaching degrees or diplomas in various subject disciplines. Some teachers hold postgraduate diplomas in education and master's qualifications. To accommodate the wide-ranging educational needs of students, teachers at the Health School are frequently expected to teach outside their areas of training, including subject disciplines and age ranges. As well as being responsible for their students' learning, Health School teachers are involved in the pastoral care of their students; this involves keeping in close contact with families and caregivers, students' regular school, students' medical teams and other agencies supporting students.

Teachers in Health Schools are each responsible for delivering the revised New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2023). Students' learning programmes are personalised and co-constructed by students, families and medical teams. Typically, each student receives two hours a week of one-on-one educational support from their Health School teacher until their health improves to a level where

they can transition back into their regular school. Students' learning programs are delivered at flexible locations based on their health needs. These locations can include the Health School unit, local high schools, local primary schools, hospitals, libraries and students' homes. Student programmes are regularly adapted as the students often move between the Health School, home, hospital and other educational settings.

A school-wide focus on writing began in 2020 to build teachers' collective self-efficacy in teaching writing and to elevate students' self-belief in their own writing. Many Health School unit teachers attended professional development sessions on improving student confidence in writing and accelerating students' learning. These sessions were guided by the work of Murray Gadd and his text *Under-achievement Is NOT Inevitable.* Aside from this focus on writing, student programmes can include multiple subject disciplines, and teachers are responsible for preparing senior health school students for NCEA and CAA assessments and examinations.

I am a teacher at the Health School, chosen for this research. My roles over the past nine years have included English Curriculum Leader, Head of the Department of English, and Head of the Department of Social Sciences. These roles involved supporting Health School teachers across the North Island of New Zealand with their English and social science pedagogy, helping teachers with their writing practice and navigating the changes to NCEA and the curriculum refresh (2023). This was achieved by working collaboratively with the curriculum leadership team and providing professional development at various geographical Health School units, as well as online. These experiences helped me maintain ethical professionalism using "reflexivity as a resource" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

3.3.1 Positioning Myself in this Research

Like most New Zealand teachers, I am female and a representative of the dominant Pakeha culture. I know this may limit my understanding of people who do not share a similar background. I am aware my lived experiences, beliefs, assumptions and values have no doubt influenced my approach to this research, including my observations and interpretation (Bochner & Ellis, 2016), and therefore I was committed to being "thoughtful" and "situated" (Joy et al., 2023) about my subjectivity throughout this research.

When I began teaching in 2003, I lacked understanding and awareness about the resources and experiences learners brought into my classes and their writing. My interest in learning teaching strategies that appreciated and incorporated students' experiences and capabilities grew over my 20 years of experience in education. These experiences include teaching English, drama, English as a second language, and classical studies in secondary schools. For nearly nine years, and in my current role at the Health School, I have taught students aged between six to 18 years old whose complex health needs prevent them from attending their regular schools full-time. As mentioned previously, I have also held leadership positions as curriculum leader of literacy, English and social studies. During these experiences, over the years, I have found deep contention regarding growing students as writers and thinkers while preparing them for the rigours of high-stakes assessment. I bring a critical view of education into this research and believe teachers have a responsibility to focus on ways to ensure education can be more socially just. I also believe all students are capable of being knowledgeable and resourceful writers, and it is therefore incumbent on teachers to be mindful of students' strengths and honour the different experiences they bring into their writing.

As this is insider research, a primary ethical consideration was to mitigate the risk of harm to individuals, participants, students, working relationships, and/or “insider friendships” (Taylor, 2011, p.6). At all stages of the research, caution was continually taken to not “trample over the mana of people” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2000, p.24). I reflected often on power dynamics, ethics, and proximity to the research throughout all stages. I had regular conversations about this with my research supervisor.

3.3.1 Multi-Case Study

This study was guided by the following research questions: What do Health School teachers negotiate when adopting an appreciative stance? What do Health School teachers notice when they read students' writing through a lens of appreciation? And how does viewing students and their writing through this lens impact Health School teachers' responses to writing authored by Health School students? As this research was exploring the "messy complexity” (Dyson & Genishi,

2005, p. 3) of participants' experiences, a multi-case study method (Yin, 2014) was used. This method enabled me to examine how a particular phenomenon (adopting appreciative pedagogical approaches when viewing and responding to students' writing) operates across cases (Yin, 2014). Specifically, this approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of how Health School teachers in this research shaped their realities and interpreted their distinct experiences within specific contexts; it also equipped me with an understanding of the significance of these encounters (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995; Stenhouse, 1978; Yin, 2014).

The multiple-case study design (Yin, 2014) also enabled an investigation into the phenomenon of the different evidence collection stages, including focus groups, inquiry groups, and individual interviews. The study's research participants represented each case, and the geographical location of the Health School unit bounded the study area. This approach provided a deeper understanding of teachers' multiple perspectives as we collaboratively learnt to reframe our writing assessment and response practices, thereby better understanding the pedagogical implications of this approach.

3.3.2 Participants

This study engaged a group of five purposively selected Health School teachers. These participants were, as Cohen et al. (2018) describe, carefully selected based on the "particular characteristics being sought" (p. 115). My "particular characteristics being sought" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 115) were formulated with regard to ethical considerations: (1) teachers who had been at the Health School for at least one year. This ensured no additional pressure was added to the workloads of new teachers learning new systems in the unique Health School context, (2) teachers who did not hold leadership roles so they felt safe to talk freely during the research stages, (3) teachers who were on permanent teaching contracts which meant they were likely to remain at the school for the duration of the research. Due to the fluctuation of student numbers on the Health School roll, some Health School teachers are on fixed-term contracts and stay with the Health School for a short period. (4) teachers who were teaching students writing, and (5) teachers who had students who would remain on the Health School role for an extended period,

i.e.: more than two school terms, meaning teachers would have time to respond to students' writing.

Because of my position as an insider researcher, I initially discussed the research in detail with seven potential participants who I had an existing relationship with. During these conversations, the teachers were able to ask questions about the research. A formal, in-depth letter was also emailed to each potential participant, explaining time commitments, details of potential harm, and ethical considerations. This included an explanation that despite assigning pseudonyms to protect participants' identities, maintaining the anonymity of participants would be challenging as the Heath School is easily identifiable. Informed consent was obtained, both verbally and in writing, from the participants, the Health School unit leader, and the school board of trustees (see Appendices A, B, and C). Seven teachers met the sampling criteria; one participant declined, and one who initially consented withdrew when she assumed a leadership position before the research began. Information about participants is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1 Overview of Case Study Participants

Participants (all names' pseudonyms)	Ethnicity	Qualification	Years of teaching experience	Current Students' Year Level (At Time of Study)	Years of Experience at Health School
Hazel	New Zealand European	Post Graduate Diploma in Education, Teaching Diploma, Bachelor of Education, and Certificate of the Arts	28 years of teaching	Years 3 - 11	3 years
Rudy	New Zealand European	Master \ in Education Leadership, Diploma of Teaching, Bachelor of Education, and Certificate in	30 years	Years 7 - 11	3 years

		English Language Teaching to Adults			
Ash	South African	Bachelor of Education, Diploma in Exercise Science	16 years	6 - 17 years	3 years
Paul	New Zealand European	Bachelor of Teaching	14 years	7 - 16	4 years
Stella	New Zealand European	Diploma in Education, Teaching Diploma and Bachelor of Education	28 years	5 -16 years	4 years

3.3.3 Phases and Methods of Evidence Generation

Qualitative research methods were employed to gain an understanding of participants' interpretations, values, beliefs, and experiences as they adopted an appreciative approach to viewing and responding to students' writing. The methods chosen aligned with my understanding of learning, language and literacy as a social practice (Gee, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978). The study consisted of three methods of evidence generation: focus groups, guided inquiry groups, and interviews.

3.3.3.1 Focus Groups

To understand what participants needed to navigate when adopting and implementing assessment and response practices grounded in appreciative perspectives, it was first necessary to explore their existing beliefs, assumptions, and experiences related to writing and learning to write. This initial phase was essential for identifying a baseline understanding of the perspectives that teachers bring to their practice and informed the kinds of negotiations and shifts they might encounter when engaging with new approaches to viewing and responding to students' writing. To investigate this, focus groups were the first method used. Participants were invited to participate in a focus group to discuss their beliefs and experiences related to writing, learning to write, and responding to writing. This method was chosen because focus groups are likely to create an environment which reduces pressure on

individuals to perform as no one person is the centre of attention, thereby creating a more relaxed atmosphere, allowing participants to discuss topics together (Morgan, 2012). Focus groups can empower participants by giving them control over the interview process, allowing them to exercise agency and autonomy (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). They also create a dialogic space to promote memory and facilitate the exchange of ideas through group interactions, allowing participants to enhance and build upon one another's thoughts (Cohen et al., 2018; Dyson & Genishi, 2005).

The original plan was to hold one focus group with all five participants. However, this changed due to participants' availability, with the initial conversation being held in two groups. All five participants who consented to participate in this research joined the focus groups, two in one group and three in the other. Care was taken before each focus group commenced, as well as before each subsequent inquiry group and interview, to ensure that participation was voluntary, to assure participants' confidentiality, and to prevent coercion. An outline of focus group times was presented in the consent and information letters prior to the outset of the focus groups. When two participants were unable to attend the initial focus groups, they collaboratively decided on a new time. The focus groups were held at the Health School in a meeting room to minimise extra stress for participants by ensuring they did not have to meet elsewhere.

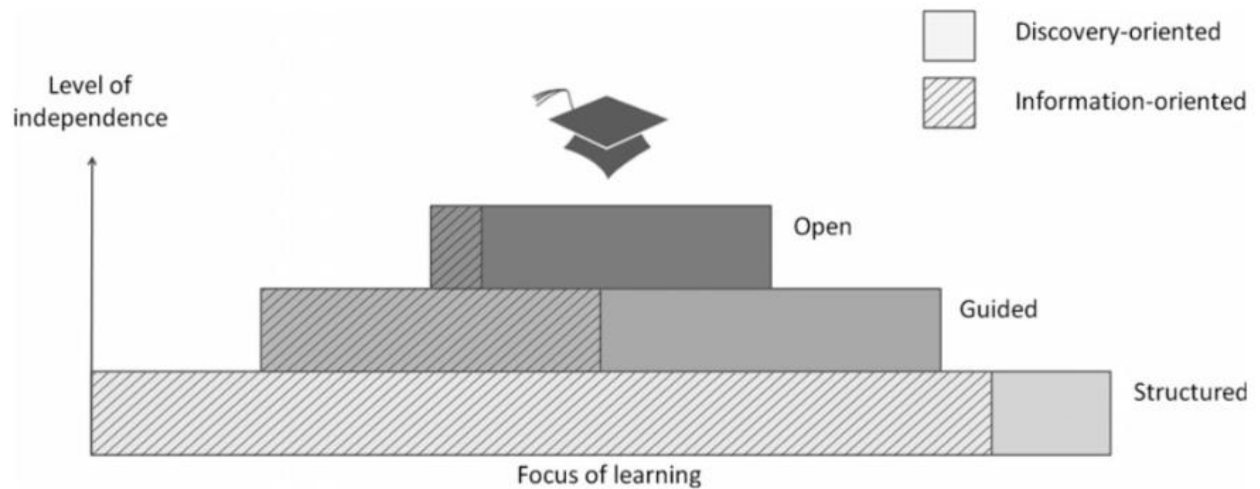
As researcher, my role was to act as facilitator and moderator. This meant I guided the focus group process, ensuring topics were discussed in a relaxed manner, without judgment, and that all participants were given an opportunity to share their experiences (Menter, 2011). Each focus group started in the same manner and with the same questions. Questions were divided into two sections: beliefs about writing and beliefs about responding to writing (see Appendix A). Responses to these questions and participants' in-depth conversations suggest that the questions helped participants to reconstruct personal experiences and past learning experiences while extending each other's thinking. The groups provided a nuanced understanding of the resources each participant brought to their practice and the research. Evidence was collected from these focus groups through audio recordings and field notes.

3.3.3.2 Guided-Learning Inquiry Groups

Shortly after the focus groups were held, the second stage of this research commenced with guided-learning inquiry groups. These were conducted to reveal participants' experiences as they collaboratively inquired into assessment and response practices that are influenced by appreciative perspectives. The inquiry nature of the guided-learning inquiry group sessions and the collaborative discussion about shared samples of students' writing allowed for a deeper insight into the question, what do Health School teachers notice when they read students' writing through a lens of appreciation. As I was inquiring into appreciative approaches with the participants, guided-learning inquiry groups allowed me to participate in the phenomena under study. Guided-learning inquiry approach was selected because research has shown that teachers' pedagogical skills increase when they work collaboratively (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Guiding-learning inquiry is an approach in which the researcher designs and implements the study, but participants are self-directed in exploring the topics and suggested questions (O'Steen & Spronken-Smith, 2012). This differs from other inquiry approaches, such as structured inquiry, where participants' input is limited, and open inquiry, where both the research design and the group discussion are collaborative. Each inquiry model included different levels of information and participant independence (see Figure 3.1). During the research, resources and questions guided the learning inquiry group sessions. The sessions were cooperative and flexible, facilitating a more active role for study participants (Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003). Participants guided their learning outside the group sessions. After the guided-learning inquiry groups concluded, participants reported that they undertook further research about appreciative inquiry. Participants continued their learning independently by conducting unguided open inquiry for the remainder of 2024. They continued to practice approaches informed by appreciation and discussed their practices together.

Figure 2 Conceptual Model of Framing and Inquiry.



Source: O'Steen and Spronken-Smith (2012).

The guided-learning inquiry approach created a dialogic space in which participants could draw on each other's strengths and 'funds of knowledge' (Lee, 2012; Moll et al., 1992). This has potential to raise their critical consciousness about policies and school structures that limit learning opportunities for diverse learners (Giroux, 2001) and to become agents of change during their writing lessons (Warrington, 2016).

Guided-learning inquiry groups on appreciative assessment and response practices began in the February 2024 school year. All five participants who had attended the focus groups also participated in the guided-learning inquiry groups. The participants and researcher met once a fortnight during the first school term and then again for one learning session in Term Two. During these inquiry sessions, questions and resources were provided to stimulate a critical reflective inquiry into the effects of deficit framing (Paris, 2012; Valencia, 1997) and to build new thinking around appreciative discourses (Bomer, 2011), writing assessments and responses (Bomer, 2010). Before each session, teachers read chapters from Katherine Bomer's (2010) *Hidden Gems: Naming and Teaching from the Brilliance in Every Student's Writing* and a chapter from Peter Johnston's (2004) *Choice Words.* Teachers also shared samples of their students' writing for collaborative reading and discussion. Table 3.1 presents the focus and topic of each guided-learning session.

Table 2 2024 Guided Inquiry Group Meetings

Meeting Number	Topic	Discussion
Meeting One	*Introduction to Appreciative Framing*	*Introduction to Appreciative Framing* *Discuss: Let’s Get Curious! Using Appreciative Inquiry in the Classroom (* *Hidden Gems, Chapter 1*
Meeting Two	*Our histories with writing responses*	*Hidden Gems Chapter 2 - Discussion of shared students' reading*
Meeting Three	*Noticing and Naming Strengths*	*Hidden Gems Chapter 3 - Discussion of shared student writing’*
Meeting Four	*Responding to Writing*	*Choice Words Chapter 1 - Discussion of shared student writing*

The four guided-learning inquiry group sessions followed a similar format; this included a karakia, a reiteration of ethical considerations - including participants’ right to withdraw throughout the research, a discussion familiarising the participants with the reading they had completed, a careful reading of shared samples of students writing together, a conversation about the strengths and possibilities in that writing, and a general discussion. Each guided inquiry group lasted one hour. My role was that of a fellow inquirer and facilitator, ensuring conversations remained focused on the topic at hand. Throughout the guided-learning inquiry group sessions, reflexivity was used as a resource (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004) to continually reflect on power dynamics, ethics, and my proximity to the research. The conversations in the guided-learning inquiry group sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed and checked by participants.

3.33.3 Semi-structured Interviews

To explore the question of how viewing students and their writing through an appreciative lens impacts Health School teachers' responses to writing authored by Health School students, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted. These interviews were held at the conclusion of the guided-learning inquiry group sessions, after participants had been able to apply the learning from the collaborative sessions

in their writing lessons with students. These interviews began a few weeks after the guided-learning inquiry groups concluded. All five participants who attended the focus and learning inquiry groups were invited to and attended interviews. This method was chosen because interviews allow for “an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest” (Kvale, 1996, p. 506). A semi-structured interview method was used to guide the interviews, ensuring that key topics, including views on writing, assessing writing, and responding to writing, were thoroughly discussed. The questions were open-ended to invite the participants “to voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher” (Creswell, 2008, p. 225) and to provide an opportunity for participants to articulate their perspectives in their own words, essentially allowing them to share their stories, insights and the experiences they felt were important (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The interview questions prompted participants to reflect on their practice since inquiring into appreciative approaches (see Appendix C). Although the questions were semi-structured, conversations were generally guided by what the researcher perceived as of interest to the participant. Interviews lasted between 50 and 60 minutes. Three interviews were conducted in a meeting room at the Health School, and two utilised the digital platform Zoom. Each interview was audio recorded, transcribed and checked by participants.

3.4 Challenges and Unexpected Changes

A limitation of focus groups and inquiry groups is that conversations can be dominated by more confident participants (Nagle & Williams, 2013). This issue arose in the first focus group when one participant answered two questions consecutively and at length, speaking over other participants. This was quickly addressed by acknowledging the participants' input and redirecting the question in another participant’s direction. To encourage inclusiveness, I invited each participant to share their experiences and thoughts on each question. The small size of the group allowed for this. Participants quickly gained confidence in speaking and sharing their experiences within the groups. Interestingly, the confident participant also reflected on her responses and vocalised her intention to be more conscious of letting others share their opinions and experiences during the learning inquiry sessions.

Additionally, two of the five interviews had to be moved to a safe location due to the Health School's COVID-19 protocols. They were transferred to the digital conferencing platform Zoom. This made it more challenging to interpret body language (Kähäri & Edelman, 2024) and meant the interviews were more susceptible to unexpected interruptions. For example, during one interview, the participant's pet dog required attention, and the interview had to be temporarily paused. However, on return, it was apparent this participant was more relaxed and seemed happy to share their experiences in the comfort of their home.

3.5 Analysis

This study was situated within a qualitative research methodology, underpinned by a social constructionist orientation and positioned within a critical paradigm. Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive approach to thematic analysis was used. This approach was used to uncover and develop an understanding of the complexities of participants' experiences. The research questions were pivotal in seeking out information about how teachers negotiated the adoption of instructional frameworks informed by appreciative approaches. The questions also sought to find out what teachers noticed in students' writing when they employed these approaches, and how they influenced responses to their students' writing.

The Reflexive Thematic Analysis approach means "researcher subjectivity as not just valid but a resource" (Braun et al., 2019, p.849) and enables researchers to reflect on how their assumptions, beliefs, and position not only informed their interpretation of meaning but also how they contributed to the construction of knowledge during the study (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The aim of reflexive thematic analysis is to identify meaning-based patterns or themes across evidence sets (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Research evidence was generated over four months and involved multiple data sources and analysis began before the data set was complete. Each focus group, inquiry group and interview were recorded, and the dialogue transcribed following each session. I made field notes during each phase, noting matters of significance. After each evidence collection stage, I expanded my observational field notes, commenting and reflecting on how my assumptions, experiences, and social

positioning might impose on my methodology and interpretive process. I began the first phase of thematic analysis by listening to all audio recordings and undertaking an immersive reading of each transcript to familiarise myself with the data, as Braun and Clarke (2021) suggest.

I then systematically read through each data script, attaching semantic-coded labels across the datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The transcripts were coded at a descriptive level (e.g., "looking for errors," "assessment"," using rubrics', "comments on finished product", 'naming students' strengths") and at an implicit level (e.g., "constrained by standardised assessment", "students are empty vessels", "health conditions as a resource"). I attached these to data segments that were meaningful, interesting, and relevant to my research questions. A reflective journal along with analytical notes were also kept throughout this process.

After examining the codes further across all transcripts, I began to re-read theory alongside my data and to read theory and data through one another. This involved Ivanič's (2004) Discourses of Writing Framework, and I paid particular attention to the participants' language to help me understand the complexities informing participants' beliefs about what writing should or should not be (Locke, 2005), as well as the challenges they negotiated when adopting an appreciative approach. More implicit codes were then attached to the transcripts where participants had evidenced Ivanič's six discourses of writing: (1) skills discourse, (2) creativity discourse, (3) process discourse, (4) genre discourse, (5) social practices, and (6) socio-political discourse (Ivanič, 2004). This was particularly interesting as there was a notable decrease in skills discourse codes in the later inquiry group and interview transcripts.

An essential component of my analysis was spending plenty of time familiarising myself with the research literature to avoid misrepresenting participants' meanings or applying any unexamined assumptions to their understanding. As a sociocultural theory also underpinned this research after reading the transcript alongside Ivanic's (2004) Discourses of Writing Framework, I re-read the transcripts whilst simultaneously revisiting Mikhail Bakhtin's (1987) theory of "dialogism". This allowed me to reflect on the social nature of language and to contextualise the

participants’ experiences, which were produced through utterances in the sociocultural learning setting of this study and within broader social interactions (Clarke & Halliwell, 2014, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Initial themes were developed following this further examination of codes. This was done by grouping codes and data from the focus groups, inquiry groups and interviews into “clusters of meaning” (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 855). For example, codes were clustered under ‘negotiating discourses of assessment’ and ‘negotiating discourses that categorise writers. As I moved through this process, which “took multiple reviews” (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and engaged with relevant literature to apply insights, similarities and differences between the initial focus groups and the final interviews became apparent from participant conversations. Often, participants talked in terms of “the writing”, “the end product”, and “students” in the initial focus groups. However, by comparison, during interviews, participants tended to use language such as “growing the writer”, “the author” and “student writers”. These conversations highlighted the shifts in teachers' ideologies as they drew on work from the learning inquiry groups.

Following the generation of a series of general themes, I constructed a data wall featuring comprehensive lists of themes and subthemes, and I attached quotes from participants under each heading and subheading. This process was continuously refined, and I began to collapse and merge themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was an iterative process, and the phases of analysis were recursive. Throughout the analysis, I continually moved across and through each phase until I felt comfortable that I could provide an in-depth description of participants’ experiences (Nowell et al., 2017). I found the themes began to tell a story of participants' experiences in negotiating what they had to consider, what they noticed, and how their response practices shifted when adopting an appreciative view of students and their writing.

This chapter has set out the theoretical framework for this research, described the research context, how data was collected, and explained the analysis process. The following chapter will highlight and explore the themes that were generated through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the study's central question: how does adopting an appreciative approach inform teachers' responses to students' writing in a Health School context? The following description of participants' experiences is based on evidence collected through three methods: focus groups, inquiry groups, and individual interviews, which spanned a four-month period. In the initial focus groups, participants shared their past experiences with writing, including learning to write and teaching others to write. During the inquiry group sessions, participants built a shared understanding of appreciative framing and confronted deficit perspectives of students and their writing. In participants interviews, they shared their experiences about adopting appreciative framing and how it had impacted their response practice. Throughout the later inquiry group sessions and participant interviews, it was noticeable they, to varying degrees, discussed changes in their approach to teaching writers and began referring to their practices in terms of "before" and "after". This shift in perspective supported the view of themselves as writing teachers, which was evident in their increased emphasis on the joy of learning to write and their teaching practices. Findings from these discussions are presented and collated according to the following themes.

1. Participant perspectives about their students as writers and themselves as writing teachers shifted, emphasising joy.

2. Participants noticed and responded to students' writing capabilities, and the out-of-school experiences their students brought into their writing.

3. Participants noticed and confronted challenges when adopting an appreciative assessment and response approach.

4.2 The Shift in Participant Perceptions of Students as Writers and Themselves as Writing Teachers

This section outlines participant discussions about their students as learners and themselves as educators. In early evidence collected from the initial focus groups before the learning inquiry groups began, participants talked about their views on writing, learning to write and responding to writing. During the learning inquiry group sessions, participants expressed challenges with education policies and practices framing students' diversity in their writing as deficient. As participants confronted these challenges throughout the study, they began to develop appreciative views of their students and their writing. How participants talked about students as learners and themselves as teachers shifted, in varying degrees. Findings presented in this section are primarily drawn from participant conversations during the initial focus groups and the four learning inquiry groups that followed.

4.2.1 Challenges with Education Policies and Practices that Frame Students and the Diversity in their Writing as Deficient

Early evidence collected during the initial focus groups highlighted participants beliefs that effective writing involves mastering conventional writing norms and achieving this is based on individual skill (Ivanič, 2004). During a discussion about what effective writing and teaching of writing looks like, all participants expressed similar views that effective writing instruction should be scaffolded, and that spelling, punctuation and grammar should be explicitly taught. Rudy, a Health School teacher with nearly 30 years of experience in education, stated when students begin school, they require a "scaffolded approach, starting from point zero, where you are assuming they don't know an awful lot". Although Hazel disagreed that students enter school with no knowledge, "they've [students] had five years, they know more than we give them credit for", she did agree that students require scaffolded assistance. Hazel believed spelling was an essential part of students' learning to write, "because if they cannot spell, they can't do anything". She believed that effective writing instruction should include scaffolding the technical skill of spelling. These conversations highlight that participants believed their role as writing teachers is to teach students how to write according to a predetermined set of norms and that students' writing abilities develop in a linear fashion.

With these views of how students learn and how teachers teach writing in mind, and once the initial focus groups had concluded, participants engaged in four learning inquiry groups held over a three-month period. During these sessions, participants inquired into writing assessment and response practices informed by appreciative perspectives. Before the first inquiry group session, participants were invited to read the blog post, Let's *Get Curious! Using Appreciative Inquiry in the Classroom* (Koutrakos, 2022) as an introduction to appreciative instructional approaches in the classroom. During the first inquiry group session, when discussing this blog post, participants were particularly drawn to the comments on deficit practices in the article such as "in a world where language like "struggling," "low," and "learning loss" are all too prevalent can lead educators to focus on perceived deficits" (Koutrakos, 2022, para. 1). This facilitated a conversation and brainstorming session about education policies and practices that participants believed were framed in deficit terms. All participants recognised deficit practices in "school policies and procedures," "educational practices (including in classrooms), "society," and at the "Health School". A table was collaboratively created to outline the practices that participants believed were founded on deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997) about students' abilities (see Figure 2.1). It did not escape participants' attention that the deficit discourses surrounding Health School learners are pervasive and deeply embedded in social practice. Ash, who had been teaching at the Health School for four years at the time of this research, described this as a "deficit thinking world". This discussion served as a baseline, and in subsequent inquiry groups, participants revisited and reflected on these deficit policies and practices, analysing how they influenced their views of their students' writing and response pedagogies.

Figure 3 Participants' Notes on Deficit Views

Where do we see deficit views in school practices and procedures?

School policies and procedures	Educational practices (including in classrooms)
• Exam procedures • Reporting procedures • Data boards • "Well below, below, at, above" • Standardised Testing • Structured Literacy • Assessments	↔ CAA – achieve/fail Individual teachers Teacher talk re: students Streaming Grouping Literacy tasks - low level - marginalise by culture etc
Society	**Health School**
• Deficit views in media • League Tables • Media reports	Medical jargon Teacher responses "Too unwell to learn"

Drawing on information from the blog post, Let's *Get Curious! Using Appreciative Inquiry in the Classroom* (Koutrakos, 2022), participants started to reflect on the way they viewed and responded to students' writing and noted how deficit views may have influenced some of their practices. Participants agreed they may have unintentionally viewed students' writing through a deficit lens and recalled commenting on the errors or what was missing in students' writing. Ash, who has experience teaching in New Zealand and South Africa, recalled circling students' errors with a green pen and suggested that although she previously believed her comments were "positive at the time, they were not appreciative or as in-depth as they could have been".

Participants often spoke of structures they believe influenced their response practice. These structures included using predetermined criteria, exemplars, models and rubrics to assess students' writing, and then responding to students' ability to adhere to these. Hazel asserted that some of her past responses to students "were likely deficit". She believed her experiences teaching under the shadow of National Standards, an assessment mandate in New Zealand from 2010 -2018, contributed to a negative mindset when viewing students' writing. National Standards required teachers to report whether students' writing abilities were above, below or at the standard. Hazel claimed viewing students through this lens "was hard to break".

During a discussion in the first inquiry group about deficit practices, some participants expressed their belief that Health School student writers are often considered deficient compared to "typical learners". Participants shared concerns that students were required to meet predetermined writing criteria at the same developmental stages as other learners, even though their schooling had been interrupted due to health conditions. When learners writing abilities do not develop at the same rate as other learners, they are often labelled by educators as "at risk, "underachieving," or "struggling". Hazel suggested when assessing Health School learners' writing, the lens used is, for example, "where a typical year three should be according to someone in the Ministry who has decided this is what a typical year three looks like", and she suggested "typical learners are well, healthy, non-colonised" and come from "middle-class families". Participant comments highlighted an awareness that teachers' views of their students and writing abilities are influenced by predetermined ideas about successful writing, which is often inherent in bias.

During this first learning group, some participants mentioned school practices such as ability grouping, classroom streaming and teachers' practices such as negative comments on writing, are sending messages to students implying their writing abilities are deficient and consequently impacting students' writing self-efficacy. Hazel shared how visible this was in a school she had previously taught in, stating, "the kids would see exactly where they were, the students knew if they were 'below, at, or above" the curriculum level and "so did everyone else". She said you can "call them [groups] any names you like, students still knew where they were in

the pecking order”. Paul reasoned this could be why many students have a “bleak attitude about their writing”. The group claimed students often arrived at the Health School with what Paul referred to as “writing trauma”; as Stella noted, they frequently prefaced writing lessons with “I am not a good writer, and I do not like writing”, which impacts their learning. These conversations indicated participants were consciously aware of their teaching context and the connection between deficit discourses and negative writing identities.

4.2.2 Developing Appreciative Views of Students and Their Writing

During the portion of each inquiry group where participants collaboratively read and discussed shared samples of students’ writing it was noticed that they were practicing the strategies suggested in both Katherine Bomer’s (2010) text *Naming and Teaching from the Brilliance in Every Student’s Writing* and Peter Johnston’s (2004) *Choice Words.* Although there was no explicit instruction to do so, participants naturally adopted appreciative language, consistently focusing on students’ strengths. After the conclusion of the learning inquiry group sessions, during their interviews, four out of five participants stated how exploring appreciative approaches had changed their perspective on their students’ writing abilities. They were fascinated by the experiences students brought into their writing. Participants claimed that as a result, they found reading their students' writing more enjoyable. The evidence discussed in this section is primarily drawn from discussions about students’ writing which occurred during the learning inquiry group sessions and participant interviews.

As participants shared their students’ work with the inquiry groups, they often adopted appreciative discourses when introducing their students’ writing. All participants explained aspects of students' writing in positive ways. During the third inquiry group session, participants read through three samples of student writing supplied by Hazel, Paul and Stella. Hazel introduced her students as someone who “loves reading” and is “an accomplished writer” and explained that “writing is her favourite thing to do”. Paul described his student as “enthusiastic” and a “great writer”. Similarly, Stella said she believed her student was an “excellent writer”. This appreciative view was also evident when participants pointed to aspects of students’ writing where they believed the students had done well. For example, when reading

through Stella's students' writing, Hazel noted, "I can see that she has used technical language throughout the piece, which strengthens the writing".

During the same inquiry group session, participants discussed how the students had intentionally incorporated different language choices into their writing. Paul noted Stella's student's use of language was "purposeful" in the dystopian piece of writing she produced. Rudy also noticed the student's intentionality in the same piece of writing. He commented on the student's intentional use of "juxtaposition" and how she described the 'stillness in her mind", but "the world was crazy around her". This piece of writing was discussed at length, and each group member found a different meaning within the writing. Stella, who knew the student well, clarified some questions to help the group understand the writing. This led Hazel to stress the importance of "knowing your writers well" when reading their writing, and the group stated it would be great to ask these students questions about their writing.

In later conversations, during the participant interviews, the significance of asking students questions about their writing resurfaced. Participants described having conversations with their students to gain more knowledge about the students' writing processes and help them understand the choices students made when writing. Rather than reading students' drafts in isolation and writing corrective comments on those for students to review, the participants described sitting alongside their students and engaging in conversations with them about their writing. Ash claimed she was "asking students open-ended questions" and "researching something together". Paul claimed he had begun asking students about their writing to help him understand their work, noting that students' writing moves were not accidental; they had "done everything for a purpose".

During discussions about students' writing in the four learning inquiry group sessions and during their interviews, participants discussed their experiences using approaches informed by appreciative discourses, and it was noticeable that participants began to change how they referred to their students. In initial conversations in the first early focus groups, teachers referred to Health School writers as "students" and conversations were heavily focused on "the writing". For example, during conversation in an early inquiry group about whether it was more important to develop students as writers of the written product, Hazel stated, "it's the

finished product that's going to get them the achieved or not achieved [in NCEA assessments], not growing them as a writer”. Despite this early reluctance to focus on growing the writer rather than growing the writing (Calkins, 1994), in her interview, Hazel, continually referred to her students as writers and in response to the questions ‘what do you think the purpose of responding to students writing is?’, she stated t it is to “build writers' confidence” and for students to see “themselves as being successful”. She expressed her wish “to let them [students] know that I see the beauty in their work”. Paul and Ash used similar language during their interviews; they constantly referred to their students as writers and Paul expressed hope that his “students also see themselves as writers”.

During the learning inquiry groups, participants read through and discussed shared samples of students’ work, then, throughout their interviews, they outlined situations where they had read writing alongside their students. It was notable in their conversations that there was little mention of technical errors and predetermined standards. Instead, discussions often focused on aspects of students’ writing that brought participants’ joy. Ash said, “the writing and illustration make me smile; it makes my imagination run wild”, Hazel augmented Ash’s comments, saying, “I want to read more,” and Rudy exclaimed, “I love this part!” Participant comments suggest they genuinely appreciated their students as writers, including the choices students made in their writing. Participants were free to read students’ writing without the pressure of comparing it to predetermined criteria. After one of the discussions about a student’s writing, Hazel commented, “isn’t it nice to read students’ writing for its strengths?”.

Participants described their experiences reading students’ writing in the initial focus groups and in their final interviews. In early conversations during the initial focus groups, when participants reflected on reading students' writing for its accuracy, they stated reading students’ writing for errors was “boring,” “tedious, “unenjoyable,” and “something you dread’. In later interview conversations, which took place after the inquiry group session had concluded and participants had practised the strategies they learnt with their students, participants reported how reading students’ writing was more enjoyable. During his interview, Paul claimed an appreciative approach had encouraged him to read his students’ writing carefully and

that reading writing “less as a teacher” and “more as a reader” had increased his enjoyment. He described feeling “less pressure” now that he was no longer reading students' writing “to pull it apart.” Paul summarised this experience by noting that part of this enjoyment stemmed from learning more about his students. He claimed appreciative framing had allowed him to notice students’ voices in their writing, and he welcomed this opportunity “to see who they [his writers] are and what they are trying to do with their writing”.

During their interviews, participants reported emphasising students' writing strengths was more effective in building students' self-efficacy than focusing on their errors, as it fostered a sense of optimism and confidence in students regarding their writing abilities. Three out of the five participants directly attributed their students' increased writing engagement with receiving responses to their writing influenced by appreciative discourses. In her interview Stella described how acknowledging a student’s strengths in her writing created a more joyful experience for both her and her student, “you know, it was really rewarding for them to hear what they've done well, and you know, they’ve got a smile on their face”. Stella described how the student changed from “almost crying” to being “enthusiastic” about her writing. When asked to elaborate on why she believed her student’s engagement had increased, Stella explained that omitting the “deficit conversation” when discussing students' work “changes the narrative or the relationship to writing for that student…[it] sets a child up in a safe space…[and] “they would take more risks “.

Participants talked about being more sensitive to the experiences students brought into their writing. They described how they named these as “resources” and “purposeful” during discussions with students about their work. This legitimised the choices students made in their writing, which appeared to increase students’ writing enjoyment and engagement. During her interview, Ash described how she was now responding to “what the students brought into their writing” and how, "I felt like I was jumping on the trampoline with them,” her student beaming with enthusiasm and being motivated to write more. Similarly, in his interview, Paul relayed that when he described what his student was doing with his writing by saying, "I really like this part here; it reminds me of...," his student appeared more engaged. Paul and Ash concluded this approach led to their students producing more extensive writing

pieces. They also observed the environment became more relaxed for students and teachers. These comments suggest participants believe responding appreciatively to students' writing positively impacts students' writing identity, leading to higher engagement and enthusiasm for writing.

During his interview, Paul also attributed students' increased engagement and writing output to trust. He felt using approaches informed by appreciative perspectives resulted in a more trusting relationship between him and his student because the student appeared less fearful their writing would be received negatively when viewed by him. He believed his students were now confident their writing would be positively received, and as a result, claimed the students were “happier to share their writing.” Expressing his delight, “I love that the students I've been working on this [appreciative responses] with have been engaged in their writing”, Paul also said some students he had been working with “now see themselves as writers”. Paul’s comments suggest acknowledging students’ strengths helped him create a trusting environment where his students felt able to express themselves, and this strengthened their writing identities.

4.3 Noticing What is Missing and What is Present in Students’ Writing

In this section, I discuss aspects participants noticed in students' writing throughout the study and what they claimed they noticed when reading students’ writing in their previous practice. In early conversations, participants talked about noticing errors and what was missing in students’ writing. In later meetings of the study group and participants' interviews, participants described noticing strengths and possibilities in students’ writing. Evidence from this section is mostly drawn from conversations from the four learning inquiry group sessions and participant interviews.

4.3.1 Noticing Errors or What is Lacking in Students’ Writing

During the second of four inquiry group sessions, participants were invited to think back on their experiences with writing assessment and feedback, both in their roles as educators and during their formative educational years. Alongside evoking recollections about receiving teacher feedback during childhood, participants reflected on writing assessment and response approaches in their teaching practice.

Participants drew on their extensive experience across various educational roles and institutions, both within New Zealand and internationally. When responding to writing, teachers prioritise correcting the mechanical aspects of writing, such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors. This was reflected in participants' conversations about their own experiences, both as students and teachers.

During these discussions, all participants recollected that during their own childhoods their writing was meticulously scrutinised for errors, with teachers marking mistakes with a red pen and making marginal and negative comments on final drafts. There was some laughter at the irony of one of Ash’s stories. During her teaching career, she recalled being instructed to use a "green pen," which was seen to be more positive, even though “you were still circling errors”. Hazel recounted the trauma of being told by her primary school teacher, "you have got the worst handwriting I’ve ever seen." This led to a discussion about the importance of choosing language carefully when responding to students. As Ash pointed out, "language can break us, and we remember the negative forever." Rudy added to this conversation by commenting on responses that were not necessarily hurtful but, in his words, "unhelpful." He described being confused by the comment "you need to work harder" and what working harder actually looked like for a young student. The participant conversations highlighted the lasting impact feedback can have on students when it focuses on students mastering the technical skills of writing and includes negative or vague comments.

Alongside reflecting on their childhood experiences, participants outlined their own assessment and response approaches during their teaching careers. They relayed numerous stories about classroom practices that were overwhelmingly focused on using formulaic methods to locate errors and respond to students so they could ‘fix’ their writing. This was evident in their descriptions of approaches, such as “two ticks move forward,” “one positive and then a next step,” the “hamburger model,” and “working with checklists”. For example, in the first focus group, Rudy explained “checking the spelling and grammar” in students’ writing and then informing students if they “went overboard with the adjectives,” instructing them “to take out or add a few more”. Participant descriptions of their own assessment and

response practices suggests they employed the same teacher-centric pedagogical strategies they were exposed to in their childhood.

4.3.2 Participants Noticed and Responded to Strengths, not Technical Errors

During the learning inquiry group sessions, participants became familiar with Katherine Bomer's (2010) suggested strategies for highlighting the hidden gems in students' writing. These include responding initially to what students' writing reveals, pointing out where the writing is effective, and describing what the writer is doing (Bomer, 2010). The group then applied these ideas while reading shared samples of students' writing. Using these strategies participants stopped looking for conformity in students' writing and instead began to consider differences in students' writing as assets.

As participants practised the strategies, they had read in Katherine Bomers' *Hidden Gems* (2010) by carefully reading and discussing students' writing, the conversations became upbeat and lively. The focus was consistently on students' strengths and what they were achieving with their writing. One aspect that caught the participants' attention was how students incorporated literacies they engaged with outside of school into their writing. This was evident in several conversations about students' work. For example, during the second of four learning inquiry groups, Hazel noticed the student's techniques resembled those in the *Geronimo Stilton* series, such as using different fonts to emphasise particular words and writing words in capitals. This student's teacher confirmed the student had mentioned reading this series at home. Hazel recognised intentionality in the student's writing, pointing out the techniques were "not random; they were purposeful." If participants had evaluated this writing against predetermined standards, the mismatched font sizes and fully capitalised words might have been perceived as errors rather than intentionally incorporated techniques.

In the next learning inquiry group session, participants read through more students' writing samples and their conversations again turned to the literacy practices students were engaged with outside of school. The discussion included books students read, television series and films they watched, and video games played. For example, after the group read through Hazel's student's writing, Hazel

informed them her student “watches a lot of Netflix, zombie apocalyptic [shows].” She highlighted the student's phrases, such as “all those rotting things will get me” and “what room what roamed the earth was me and whatever was left well of mankind.” Hazel’s knowledge of her students' literacy practices outside of school helped the group understand the meaning of as well as the intentional moves she used when writing.

Participants also noticed how Health School students incorporated aspects of their personal experiences with their health diagnoses into their work. During a discussion about a piece of writing Stella shared in the fourth inquiry group session, Rudy pointed out a change in the writing's pace. In response, Stella drew the group's attention to the student's health diagnosis. She emphasised the shift in her student’s emotions, caused by her health condition, was evident in the varying pace of her writing, which transitioned from "tranquil" to "frantic" and then back to “tranquil” again. It became apparent during these discussions participants were drawing on each other’s knowledge rather than turning to predetermined criteria.

In a later conversation, while discussing a student’s writing in his interview, Rudy noticed "how sympathetic and empathetic" his student’s writing was and wondered if this potentially reflected other people's empathy with him while he managed his depression. Ash spoke of students confined to their homes for an extended period due to health conditions, which led them to draw on plots from television shows such as *Shortland Street* and *Heartstopper* because this was their "world at the moment". Participant descriptions indicated using an appreciative lens enabled them to connect more deeply with their students and their writing by recognising and valuing the unique elements Health School students brought into their work. Paul described this as "the ability to notice personal voice". He did not elaborate on this further. However, he commented appreciative framing had given him the language to respond to his students about their voice in their writing, something he had found "quite hard to respond to and to talk about [in the past]".

In the final interviews, which began a few weeks after the learning inquiry groups concluded, participants shared stories about how they responded to students to acknowledge the literacies they had drawn on and deliberately incorporated into their writing. For example, in his interview, Paul recalled noticing his student had

creatively brought his Star Wars knowledge into his writing. Paul responded by saying, "I was saying how it sounded like it was a movie, and I could see the trailer in my head like *Star Wars*, and the teacher [Teacher Aide] was like, 'Oh, that is exactly what I said to him.'" Paul explained his student's emotional response to his comments: "The kid was just buzzing; that was what he was trying to do. [Making] title cards kind of flicking forward, setting the scene for his audience".

4.4 Participants Noticed and Confronted Challenges

Participants agreed that emphasising students' strengths and responding appreciatively could be an effective strategy to counteract deficit approaches, which typically highlight deficiencies in students' writing and suggest corrective measures. However, participants acknowledged that implementing this approach also presented challenges. These included navigating the pressures of high-stakes assessment. The evidence presented in this section is drawn from all evidence collection phases, the focus groups, learning inquiry groups, and interviews.

4.4.1 Negotiating Appreciative Framing and Assessment Discourses

All participants in this group shared concerns about implementing appreciatively framed approaches and the pressure to prepare students for the newly mandated writing CAA. Discussion about the pressures of high-stakes assessment came up in all but a few of the participants' conversations throughout the focus groups, inquiry groups, and interviews. Inquiry group participants grappled with the complexities of standardised testing assessment practices, which often mandate that teachers evaluate and respond to students' writing based on predetermined criteria. Participants were challenged by the balancing of these requirements with the principles of appreciative approaches, necessitating a nuanced negotiation between adhering to standardised benchmarks and fostering a strengths-based, supportive response environment.

During inquiry group sessions, the writing CAA was discussed at length. It was generally agreed high-stakes assessments can send negative messages to some students about their abilities, and teachers negotiated this during their writing instruction. as Stella, who was teaching students ranging between 5 – 16 years at the time of this study, stated, “it’s a real barrier” to some students' enjoyment in

writing. The barriers discussed involved the categorisation of students regarding their ability to achieve the writing CAA, the inability of the CAAs to connect to some students' identities, and the messages high-stakes assessments sent to teachers about what should be prioritised in their teaching.

During the second inquiry group session, participants discussed the first two chapters of Katherine Bomer's (2010) *Hidden Gems: Naming and Teaching from the Brilliance in Every Student's Writing*, Rudy questioned whether New Zealand teachers experienced the same pressure of high-stakes testing as teachers in the United States. Comments on the pressures CAAs place on teachers led the group to agree that assessments are driving what teachers are teaching, including a heavy focus on language conventions. Stella noted that because of high-stakes assessments in secondary schools, students are "still judged by their correct use of technical skills". Hazel suggested "every standardised test" in New Zealand created this. She drew the group's attention to the analytical rubric used in the writing e-asTTle. In a later conversation, during the same inquiry group session, Hazel shared her concerns that assessing students against predetermined criteria was "all about pigeonholing a kid and sticking them into a category".

Participants felt part of their role as writing teachers is to negotiate the damage caused to students' writing identities by being assessed against predetermined standards. Participants noticed that some Health School students were not successful in their first attempt at sitting the writing CAA. During the third inquiry group, Stella questioned the consequences on their writing identity for students repeatedly re-sitting the CAAs, often for a third or fourth time. To help students develop some confidence with their writing skills, teachers needed to get students over the "mental block" caused by repeatedly failing. Stella questioned whether appreciatively framing responses to writing would work for these students. She felt these students "wouldn't believe me" if she suggested they possessed writing strengths.

The group were also concerned with the content in the writing CAA and its inability to connect to all learners' identities. The CAA calls for on-demand writing, where students receive a prompt or task focused on a specific topic and audience and are asked to write about that topic. In a discussion during the last of the four

inquiry groups, participants expressed concerns that their students were finding the writing prompts challenging to relate to and this disadvantaged them in test situations. Stella, who believed her student was a “great writer”, imagined she would not share the same view. Stella attributed the student's low self-esteem to the "absolute hurdle" she faced when choosing a writing prompt that did not resonate with her. Participants suggested this barrier meant assessments did not accurately measure students' writing ability. Ash indicated, “they might be amazing writers but just not interested in that genre that they've been presented with”. Examples of prompts students were asked to write about over the past two years were discussed, examples included “newspaper advertisement for a carpet cleaning factory” and “writing a letter to the mayor”. The group felt high-stakes assessment placed a considerable added stress on Health School students who were often diagnosed with significant levels of anxiety This led Hazel to hypothesise, “if we [the education system] got rid of pass or fail, you’d probably have way more relaxed writers out there”.

Participants also recognised other ways students’ abilities might be misrepresented. These included, “students were feeling unwell on the day of the test”, students’ inability to craft writing fitting the writing criteria - such as “students’ inability to stick to the word limits”, and that the markers of the CAA did not know the students whose writing they were assessing. Rudy was concerned about the subjectivity of marking the CAAs, which are carried out by an external body. During her interview, Stella expanded on this further. She suggested exam markers are “taking their own personal experiences and viewpoints and making that assumption that that is where the students’ writing is from”. For this reason, Stella also cautioned against teachers forming assumptions about students’ writing ability “based on previous grades and assessments.”. Rudy and Stella’s comments suggest insight into teachers’ views of students’ writing which may be influenced by their own beliefs and experiences. This can be problematic when reading work written by students whom you do not know and emphasises the need for teachers to build relationships with their students to better understand their writing.

Despite this insight, the pervasiveness of talk around assessments, even among a group dedicated to focusing on students' strengths and capabilities, often

resulted in participants unconsciously classifying their students based on assumptions regarding their students' ability to pass examinations. In one inquiry group, participants categorised students saying, “I'd be surprised if they passed the CAA's, “I'd be obviously gutted and gobsmacked if she didn't pass”, “I don't have to worry about her passing the writing CAA”. Furthermore, participants often unintentionally affixed labels to students, for example “really great writer”, “an accomplished writer” and “struggling writer”. Participant conversations revealed that they classified learners in accordance with their performance in standardised assessment. This is despite earlier revealing a distrust in the likelihood of high-stakes assessments to represent their students' writing abilities accurately. They also noted the harm created when categorising students in this way.

When adopting approaches to writing instruction, participants also negotiated the messages high-stakes assessments send teachers about what they should focus on in writing instruction. Despite a mistrust in the ability of the high-stakes assessments to accurately represent their students' writing ability and concerns about how this impacted their students' writing identity, participants' conversations evidenced they felt preparing students for tests was essential and failing to do so would disadvantage their students' chance at success. Participants working with students who were unsuccessful in earlier attempts in the writing CAA felt pressured to help their students achieve different outcomes. When discussing her students who had not managed to pass the writing CAA in two attempts, Stella explained her sole focus for the “whole term” was on helping prepare students for the types of writing the writing CAA called for.

There was general concern expressed by this group that some students were primarily learning to write in response to the writing CAA. Participants felt powerless and constrained by high-stakes assessments, although paradoxically believed passing the test would benefit students' well-being and future outcomes. During a discussion about high-stakes assessments in the second inquiry group meeting (14/03/2024), Paul explicitly stated, “the CAA and externals are out of our control”. All participants spoke of the stress they experienced preparing their students for the writing CAA. In his interview, Rudy, the newest member of the Health School, described pressure he felt coming from a primary school background and having to

prepare secondary school students for these tests, “I don't want to stop them [from achieving] and stuff them up”. In her interview, Stella also talked about feeling powerless when preparing writing lessons for students. She said she felt compelled to teach to the test even though “you don’t want to be constantly preparing for the test”. She explained it felt imperative to do so to ensure students were as well prepared as they could for the tests. Hazel shared similar concerns comparing writing for high-stakes tests within a secondary school context to playing a game. She noted students are required to write in predetermined ways for secondary school tests to ‘play and win the game’, and then, as they move onto university, said that is “a whole different ball game”. These conversations suggest participants found high-stakes assessments intrusive but felt compelled to prepare students for them, even though they had reservations about this practice and did not believe they provided a realistic insight into students' writing ability. Participants negotiated this pressure whilst inquiring into and adopting appreciative practices contradicting messages implicit in high-stakes assessment processes.

4.4.2 Participants Described a Shift in Mindset

Participants agreed focusing on students’ strengths and responding appreciatively was a practical approach to counter deficit approaches focusing on what is missing in students' writing and commenting on potential remedies. However, throughout the inquiry groups and interviews, participants were constantly mindful that adopting this approach would be challenging and require a “change in mindset.”

Participants often spoke about mindset shifts necessary to transition from deficit thinking to recognising and valuing the strengths in students’ writing, frequently using terms such as “breaking old habits” and “relearning” how to respond. Hazel explained the change in mindset was “going to take [her] a long time”. She attributed this to the years she spent teaching primary school students under National Standards, a previous assessment system in New Zealand that was abandoned in 2010. Hazel frequently expressed frustration when negotiating deficit thinking, often stating, “ah, that’s still deficit thinking”, and at one point, she jokingly enquired “is there a middle ground?”. Stella expressed similar sentiments, noting that adopting this approach was “a huge shift for me, professionally”; she described experiencing a few “light-bulb moments” during the study. In his interview, Rudy

expressed being “uncomfortable” with some of Katherine Bomers' (2010) suggestions for responding to students, for example, the idea teachers could respond with something like “your writing wants me to get up and jive”. Despite this, he could see the benefit of responses focused on students’ strengths. He suggested responding this way constantly “needs a lot of practice”.

Despite these challenges, the increased enjoyment experienced by participants and their students encouraged them to continue practising this approach in writing sessions and within the general teacher environment. Ash, Paul and Stella described the knowledge gained as a catalyst for exploring how appreciative framing could be used in math, across other disciplines, and even with their own children. Participants raised concerns about the pressures of preparing students for high-stakes assessments and implementing future initiatives and how this might create time constraints, making them revert to "old habits". But with some concentration, it could become, as Paul envisioned, “a mindset that we can bring to all that we do”.

4.5 Summary

This section presented findings from the focus groups, inquiry groups, and interviews. Qualitative analysis revealed participants worked hard to overcome deficit discourses because they negatively label and categorise students. The use of high-stakes assessments was also questioned, particularly their effect on students with diverse health problems. Evidence pointed to ways in which participants viewed their own teacher identities and in doing so gradually shifted their conceptualisation of how to respond to students’ writing. As a consequence, teachers built trusting relationships with their students. This increased students’ enjoyment levels and made reading students’ writing more enjoyable. The following section discusses these findings in relation to existing literature.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5. 1 Introduction

This research investigated teachers' experiences as they enquired into and implemented pedagogical practices underpinned by an appreciative stance (R. Bomer, 2011) when viewing and responding to the writing of Health School learners. The research questions set out below sought to gain insight into how adopting assessment approaches (K. Bomer, 2010) influenced participants' experiences of reading students' writing, and how it reframed their responses to that writing.

What do Health School teachers negotiate when adopting an appreciative stance?
What do Health School teachers notice when they read students' writing through a lens of appreciation?
How does viewing students and their writing through this lens impact teachers' responses to writing authored by Health School students?

To answer these questions data was collected and analysed from three evidence collection methods: focus groups, inquiry groups, and individual interviews. The evidence was examined using Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis (2021) and interpreted and discussed in the context of the theoretical framework and existing literature.

In this chapter, I will discuss the themes derived from an analysis of the transcripts and field notes from each evidence collection method. I revisit the outcomes of analysis alongside the literature discussed in Chapter Two and the findings in Chapter Four. When considering what Health School teachers must negotiate when adopting appreciative writing pedagogies, I drew on Bakhtin's (1981) conceptual framework of dialogism, language and identity. The second question is discussed within Ivanič's (2004) Discourses of Writing framework. Both Bakhtin (1981) and Ivanič (2004) provided the conceptual framework for examining the final

research question: how does viewing students and their writing through this lens impact teachers' responses to writing authored by Health School students?

5.2 Negotiating Appreciative Framing with Authoritative Discourses

Evidence from this research suggests that teachers find themselves negotiating and questioning the effectiveness of authoritative discourses which compare students to other learners in a high-stakes assessment environment when they engage with appreciatively framed assessment and response approaches (K. Bomer, 2010; R. Bomer, 2011). When participants in this research reflected on education policies and practices shaping their view of students and their writing, they realised that students' writing abilities were often judged in comparison to other students and predetermined standards. These comparative and assessment discourses viewed difference as a deficit (Paris, 2012; Valencia, 1997). They were commonplace, visible in "classroom and teachers' practices" and often went unchallenged (Bakhtin, 1981). This section outlines the comparative and assessment discourses that participants encountered and how they negotiated these with counter, appreciative approaches that value the individuality and diversity in students' writing.

5.2.1 Negotiating with Socially Constructed Comparative Discourses

Teachers' understanding of the influence that comparative discourses had on their knowledge about and perceptions of students (Foucault, 1970; Gee, 2012) developed through collaborative dialogue and analysis. In the first inquiry group session, participants recognised that Health School students' writing was often compared to the writing of other students and predetermined standards set by the Ministry of Education. Teachers noted that comparative discourses are embedded in social practices and circulated in the "media", "education policies", and "teachers' instructional practice". When participants discussed education policies that are influenced by comparative discourses such as "ability grouping" and year group "ability streaming" they recognised that comparisons are frequent in educational discourses and by comparing students to one another as well as predetermined standards, a deficit analysis of students' writing was subconsciously invoked (Valencia, 1997).

Evidence from this research suggests teachers have an understanding that students' writing is read through a comparative gaze where a monologic voice of correctness is privileged (Bakhtin, 1981) and this fails to capture the writing abilities of those who do not fit the dominant culture norms (Bacon, 2017; Cushing, 2023; Kearns, 2016). Participants felt it was unjust to compare Health School students, whose complex health conditions often result in significant absenteeism, reduced energy levels, and decreased concentration abilities, with "typical learners". They observed that Health School students are often labelled as at risk and struggling when their writing abilities are compared to 'typical' learners who are, as one participant described, "well, healthy, non-colonised" and are from "middle to higher income" families. Participants struggled with the knowledge that students who are unwell, from outside the dominant culture or from lower socioeconomic groups are disadvantaged by these comparative discourses.

Participants developed an understanding of how predetermined standards function as tools of normalisation, maintained and enforced through institutional and policy driven mechanisms (Bacon, 2017; Cushing, 2023; Kearns, 2016). A critical analysis of comparative discourses supported this, such as those found in discourses about power (Foucault, 1970) and how its authoritative nature (Bakhtin, 1981) operates to maintain certain hierarchies. For example, participants observed that curriculum policies mandating the use of standardised assessment rubrics and writing prompts often disadvantage students from non-dominant cultural backgrounds. These students may find it challenging to engage with prompts that reflect experiences and values unfamiliar or irrelevant to their own lives, thereby reinforcing cultural exclusion.

When participants critically analysed ways students were categorised, and their writing abilities were compared to predetermined writing standards, they started to question the government's legitimacy in deciding, for example, "where a typical Year 3 student should be" and then comparing students against this. Two participants expressed concern about how the criteria for students' writing that students are assessed against shift, "depending on what the government at the time wants". One participant commented, "you teach what the government wants at the

time”. Participants comments signaled an awareness that governments use predetermined literacy criteria to enforce a type of conformity (Bacon, 2017; Giroux, 2001; Kearns, 2016) and they felt powerless to change this.

Significantly, participants brought the legitimacy of authoritative comparative discourses into question by challenging their assumed truth (Bakhtin, 1981). Participants critically examined educational policies, practices, and the often-unquestioned discourses that shape them (Bakhtin, 1981). In doing so, they became more aware of their instinct to compare students to dominant norms. As a result, rather than comparing students’ writing abilities to others and predetermined standards, most of the participants began to approach students’ work in ways that appreciated and responded to students’ individual strengths and ideas (K. Bomer, 2010; R. Bomer, 2011). These findings suggest that discussing education discourses and their impact on education policies, teachers practices and students learning can disrupt the authoritative nature of those discourses (Bakhtin, 1981). This may challenge the influence that comparative discourses have on teachers’ assessment and response practice and enable teachers to see difference as a resource rather than a deficit, leading to more inclusive pedagogical practices.

In most school settings, conversations about the use of appreciative practices are unlikely to occur. This means discourses which frame students with complex health conditions as deficient when compared to “typical” students, continue to predominate. Participants concerns aligned with those expressed by other researchers (e.g. R. Bomer, 2011; Cushing, 2023; Kearns, 2016; Kelly, 2019; Land, 2019; Lippi-Green, 2012; Valencia, 1997; Warrington, 2016) who sought to determine how linguistically and culturally diverse students were positioned as deficit and labelled as at risk and struggling when a comparative analysis of their writing abilities was conducted. The findings in this current research suggests more research is required to understand the impact of deficit discourses and framing upon students experiencing other dimensions of diversity, such as those who have complex health needs.

5.2.2 Negotiating with Assessment Discourses

It was evident in this research that participants navigated and negotiated deeply ingrained authoritative discourses embedded in assessment practices (Bakhtin, 1981) by drawing on approaches associated with appreciative pedagogies (R. Bomer, 2011). In early conversations, participants were clear that preparing for high-stakes writing assessments dominated their thinking, planning and instruction. Participants worried that the perception of writing standards required for high-stakes assessments, in tandem with deficit discourses, had contributed to feelings of inadequacy and anxiety amongst students (Valencia, 1997). One participant referred to this as "writing trauma". All participants questioned "how this could be fixed" and concurred with Hazel's statement "If we [the education system] got rid of pass or fail, you'd probably have way more relaxed writers out there". Participants imagined alternative possibilities for what schools could be. Through critical reflection and inquiry, they began to consider how they might implement practices that affirmed students' unique strengths by way of responses which were mindful of "writing trauma" experiences. Both these factors are central to appreciative pedagogies (R. Bomer, 2011).

Participants' recognition that mandated assessments prioritise uniformity, thereby limiting their ability to evaluate the diversity in students' writing accurately, was deepened through an inquiry into assessment and response practices informed by appreciative perspectives (K. Bomer, 2010). During this research, participants revealed many Health School students had been diagnosed with learning differences such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). These students often have unique writing skills, but their abilities and voices are not always captured within the narrow confines of the assessment regime. Participants' concerns signaled an awareness that assessments reinforced a monologic perspective on language because they emphasise a single viewpoint and stress conformity to a standard, thereby suppressing diverse voices (Bacon, 2017; Bakhtin, 1987; Kearns, 2016; Kohn, 2006). Participants were aware that high-stakes assessments had the potential to obscure and silence the voices of their Health School students, thereby disadvantaging them in mandated writing assessments. Adopting appreciative assessment and response approaches requires teachers to navigate the tension between the deficit narratives reinforced by students' underperformance in

standardised writing assessments (Kearns, 2016; Valencia, 1997) and their own strength-oriented understandings of students' capabilities.

Evidence from this research highlights that "authoritative discourse demands that we acknowledge it" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342). Assessment discourses are pervasive and complex to ignore completely. Participants revealed that although they had critically analysed the impact of high-stakes assessment on their students' writing identities, they "acknowledged" that subconsciously assessment discourses still influenced their approach to teaching. Despite participants' concerns that mandated assessments silenced Health School students' voices, they still felt significant pressure to adequately prepare students for these assessments, in order to avoid "disadvantaging them". Many of the early group discussions focused on the newly mandated CAA writing assessments. Participants described reorganising their teaching methods and priorities (Comber, 2012; Farvis & Hay, 2020). This included abandoning work in other disciplines to focus on test preparation, especially for students "likely to fail". Participants discussed the importance of acknowledging and hearing all students' voices in their writing. However, they inadvertently suppressed students' alternative perspectives by focusing on test preparation that emphasised compliance with the single voice of the dominant culture norms (Cushing, 2023; Kearns, 2016). Participants in this study were certainly caught up in the struggle required to negotiate the divergent approaches of appreciative and high-stakes assessment practices.

Participants were surrounded by deficit discourses that categorised students in terms of their ability to meet predetermined standards, making it hard to disrupt the status quo. Participants unintentionally replicated the "thousands of living dialogic threads [discourses]" that describe students' abilities in deficit ways, even though they did not hold these views of students (Bakhtin, 1981, p.276). Although participants in this study shared a common goal, which was to counter the deficit framing of students' writing abilities (Valencia, 1997), close analysis of the inquiry group session conversations, revealed that assessment discourses were so powerful that at times participants described students in terms of their ability to perform in the writing CAA, thereby unintentionally dividing students into those who would pass and those who may fail. However, participants pointed to systemic failures, such as

inequitable government and education policies and school practices for students' inability to pass the tests, rather than perceived internal deficits such as "limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, [and] lack of motivation to learn" (Valencia, 1997, p.2). Although participants expressed affirming beliefs about their students' abilities, they nonetheless tended to categorise them based on their perceived likelihood of meeting writing assessment standards. This reveals how assessment discourses continue to exert authority, even amongst teachers committed to challenging them.

5.2.3 Collaborating to Negotiate Authoritative Discourses

Evidence from this research suggests that teachers' understanding of the lack of neutrality in assessment and response to students' writing is supported by shared critical reflection (Bakhtin, 1987). During collaborative discussions, participants became aware of authoritative discourses and how their responses may be inadvertently reproducing deficit ideals. Participants began by examining education practices and policies influenced by deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997) and considered the impact these had on students. All participants contributed several ideas to this conversation, pointing out the role and consequences of government, education, classroom and social policies. One teacher concluded that it is "a deficit thinking world". The depth of this conversations unsurprisingly aligned with other researchers' findings, such as Comber and Kamler (2004) who asserted that deficit discourses are "pervasive" and "one of the most damning failures" in education (p.293). As research participants alluded to, it is also one of the most damning failures of society in general. The knowledge teachers gained and built together early in the study helped them to not only critically reflect on their own assessment and response practices but also to question power structures in later inquiry group sessions.

To varying degrees, all participants disrupted the authoritative nature of assessment and comparative discourses, a process enabled through collaborative discussion and critical reflection. Participants drew on their new knowledge about appreciative practices to critically engage with educational policies and practices, including those they themselves enacted. During their "dialogic interactions" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 101) in the inquiry groups, participants frequently examined their own assumptions, perspectives, and use of language, revealing a high level of

reflexivity and professional self-awareness. Often, participants questioned if their own practices were still framed in deficits and to what extent assessment mandates shaped their perspectives. Authoritative discourses typically maintain power because their legitimacy remains uncontested (Bakhtin, 1981; Foucault, 1970). This research found that by collaboratively discussing how they could redesign their assessment and response approaches, participants negotiated assessment and comparative discourses, thereby reducing the power they held over their pedagogical decisions.

Had the participants been entirely influenced by the dominant discourses of comparison and assessment during their discussions of student writing samples, they would have evaluated the work by referencing predetermined standards or by comparing students against one another. However, this was not the case. During the portion of the inquiry groups where participants shared samples of students' writing, there was a notable absence of comparison or talk about assessments. The discussions about shared samples of students' writing, which started in the second inquiry group session, were always positive. Participants were proud of their students' writing and quick to appropriate appreciative discourses describing students as "capable", "knowledgeable", and "resourceful". This was infectious among the group. In their research on teachers' writing assessment practices, Simon (2013) and Warrington (2016) found that collaboratively discussing pedagogical approaches was highly beneficial. This process helped build a shared repertoire of positive language to use when talking about students' writing. When teachers engaged in these discussions while reading and reflecting on students' writing, they were better able to look beyond dominant assessment and comparative discourses. Findings from this research support their assertions

By critically analysing how comparative and assessment discourses perpetuate deficit views of students, participants negated the "single voice of the dominant culture" (Pedersen, 2018, p. 193) that standardised assessments prioritise. According to the participants, carefully reading shared samples of students' writing as a group allowed them to, as Paul posited, "notice [students'] personal voice" in their writing. During these sessions, participants highlighted the effective language choices students used and stated how they were "intentionally" and "purposely" incorporated to convey ideas and meaning in their writing. These comments indicate

that when participants read and discussed students' writing together, using a stance of appreciation (R. Bomer, 2011), they drew on approaches akin to the generous reading strategies employed by other composition scholars (e.g. Donahue, 2008; Simon, 2013; Spence, 2010b). By noticing the “effective functioning” in students writing, participants were reading students’ work “as writing that is, as legitimate text, with the assumption that it does make sense, carries its own internal logic, is justifiably studied as any other text, literary or expository” (Donahue, 2008, p. 323). This meant that rather than drawing on predetermined criteria which often propose a single view of what counts as effective writing (Bakhtin, 1981), participants were engaging with students’ personal voices in the text. These findings suggest that when teachers collaboratively and generously engage with students’ texts, through shared reading and discussion, they enter multiple perspectives into a dialogic relationship with the text (Bakhtin, 1981), thereby creating space for student voices that might otherwise be marginalised or silenced by conventional assessment practices.

Evidence from this study suggests a more equitable and inclusive interpretation of student writing is supported by collaboratively discussing students’ writing through an appreciative lens. Participants engaged in a form of multi-voiced text analysis (Bakhtin, 1981). They ‘heard’ the voices of students who are often marginalised or silenced within the uniformed types of writing that dominant cultural and educational discourses demand (Kearns, 2016). The knowledge participants had about their students’ health conditions and the influence this had on their writing was one of the most significant aspects revealed during their collaborative inquiry group sessions. Participants said their students’ health was often uniquely reflected through aspects such as “the pace of their writing”, “the topics that they had chosen to write about”, and “the tone” of writing. Participants eschewed the idea that deviation from predetermined criteria favouring a uniform approach to writing was a deficiency; they considered the writing choices Health School students made as assets. The reality of how Health School students dealt with their health problems was seen by participants as contributing to their funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992). It gave legitimacy to their writing, foregrounding perspectives typically overlooked in traditional high-stakes assessment contexts.

Collaboratively reading and discussing students' writing brought multiple teachers' perspectives into the conversation, and this enabled participants to co-construct writing knowledge through dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981). Consistent with the findings of Spence (2010b), Warrington (2016) and Simon (2013), this present study found that when participants discussed students' writing together, rather than aligning their knowledge with externally imposed assessment norms embedded in assessment criteria and rubrics, participants engaged with new insights about writing that their peers shared in the group. In doing so, participants built a more nuanced understanding of writing. The range of perspectives and experiences participants brought into the discussions enabled them to share different insights about what students were doing well. They often remarked that they "would not have noticed" or "thought of that". One participant, Stella, commented how "different readers noticed different aspects in writing". This illustrated her understanding of the many interpretive possibilities in students' writing. These insights, combined with the lack of emphasis on high-stakes writing assessments, indicated that participants were utilising each other's content knowledge of writing rather than invoking parameters advocated within assessment discourses.

To summarise, this research revealed when teachers viewed their students and their writing through an appreciative lens (K. Bomer, 2010) and collaboratively discussed students' writing together, they pushed back against authoritative discourses that often perpetuate a deficit analysis of students' writing (Valencia, 1997). This meant participants expanded their perceptions of writing, recognising how students' backgrounds and experiences were reflected in their work (Moll et al., 1992). These findings suggest adopting appreciative approaches and working together to notice strengths in students' writing may help teachers assimilate the words of others (Bakhtin, 1981), bringing diverse students' voices into the dialogue, countering authoritative discourses and viewing students' writing in different ways.

5.3 Drawing on Wider Discourses to Notice What is in Students' Writing

A second consideration of this research was to understand if adopting an appreciative approach shifted what teachers noticed in students' writing. What teachers notice in writing is driven by their beliefs about writing and learning to write

and shaped by writing discourses they engage with (Ivanič, 1998; Ivanič, 2004). Ivanič (2004) identified six key writing discourses; (1) a skills discourse of writing, (2) a creativity discourse of writing, (3) a process discourse of writing, (4) a genre discourse of writing, (5) a social practices discourse of writing, and (6) a social-political discourse. She suggests a comprehensive writing programme should integrate elements from all six of these. It was evident during this research that as teachers adopted approaches influenced by appreciative discourses, a wider range of options became available to them. This impacted on their "particular forms of situated action" (Ivanič, 2004, p.220), including how they talked about writing, learning to write and responding to it (Ivanič, 1998). This section outlines the dominant discourses, specifically the creative and process discourses participants drew on when they engaged in a dialogic interpretation of students' texts (Bakhtin, 1981) and viewed their students' writing through a lens of appreciation.

5.3.1 Drawing on Creative and Process Discourses

Evidence from this research suggests participants drew upon alternative discourses of writing that extended beyond a narrow focus on skill when they engaged with students' writing through appreciative assessment methods (K. Bomer, 2010). During the initial focus group meetings held at the outset of this study, participants discussed their experiences about learning to write and responding to writing. These discussions revealed how, during their own childhood education, all participants primarily received feedback about their writing based around a skills discourse (Ivanič, 2004). For example, they often received comments about their writing pointing out mechanical errors, such as grammar, spelling and punctuation. Teachers acknowledged they had found this approach "hurtful" but confessed that, at times, they replicated this when responding to their own students' writing. Participants' stories about their teaching practice highlighted the way in which they evaluated students' writing against predetermined standards requiring a level of mechanical correctness. These findings were not surprising because decades of research indicate these types of responses to students' writing remain commonplace (Connors & Lunsford, 1993; Hillocks, 2002; Rysdam & Johnson-Shull, 2016; Simon, 2013).

If participants had not engaged in a collective inquiry into appreciative assessment approaches (K. Bomer, 2010), they may not have moved beyond the skills-based assessment of students' writing that predetermined standards and mandated writing assessments often require. In contrast to their initial discussions about assessing and responding to students' writing, this study found that when teachers collaborated to explore appreciative approaches and used Katherine Bomer's (2010) suggested strategies to identifying the hidden gems in students' writing, they began to focus less on the technical aspects of writing and instead valued students' originality and self-expression (Ivanič, 2004). For example, during one conversation about a sample of student writing, participants noted how the student had experimented with different font sizes, capitalisation and font colour, to highlight important words and phrases which helped the reader understand key points in his story. Rather than focusing on linguistic style and adherence to conventional writing skills (Ivanič, 2004), participants were more aware of the content and style in the students' writing. This suggests participants were drawing on alternative discourses of writing, in this case creative discourses (Ivanič, 2004), which foregrounded the way in which the student had incorporated creative aspects to "communicate meaning through writing" (Spence, 2010b, p. 636).

Had teachers not employed appreciative assessment approaches (K. Bomer, 2010), participants may have been less likely to draw on creative discourse, potentially overlooking how students borrowed and blended voices from various sources in nuanced ways (Bakhtin, 1981; Durán, 2017; Harman, 2013). Drawing on creative discourses enabled participants to notice how students appropriated techniques and combined aspects of television shows, video games and other literature they were reading outside of school into their writing. For example, in his interview, Paul described how he noticed that his student had used ascending words at the start of his writing, similar to those in the Star Wars films. He explicitly stated if he had been evaluating the student's writing for correctness, he would have viewed this as an error. Using appreciative assessment approaches and drawing on different discourses of writing expanded Paul's conception of writing. This coupled with being attuned to his student, enabled Paul to notice how gifted his student was as opposed to deficient (Durán, 2017).

Findings from this research suggest teachers are more likely to notice the dialogic relationship between students' writing and broader cultural texts (Bakhtin, 1981) when their conceptualisation of writing is expanded by drawing on appreciative writing assessment approaches (K. Bomer, 2010). Often, students create heteroglossic compositions (Bakhtin, 1981), borrowing and appropriating voices from other texts, such as media, and incorporating them into their writing. When writing teachers disrupt the notion that writing must adhere to predetermined standards and utilise multiple discourses of writing (Ivanič, 2004), they are more likely to notice and affirm the multimodal writing techniques and skills students possess. During discussions about students' writing, participants noticed how students had creatively combined images, including the change in font styles, capitalisation and bordered words in their writing to communicate ideas (Ivanič, 2004). This challenges the notions, as other researchers have (e.g. Durán, 2017; Harman, 2013), that writing is a uniformed practice and that differences in students' writing equate to deficits. In today's complex online world, writing looks different. Students are learning from multimodal composition and acquiring the ability to incorporate various styles, language and art into their writing to express themselves (Durán, 2017). Teachers need to draw on wider discourses of writing (Ivanič, 2004) to increase their awareness of this; appreciative assessment approaches can support this (K. Bomer, 2010).

If participants had focused on students' adherence to predetermined writing skills (Ivanič, 2004) when assessing their writing, they may not have realised or understood the importance, context or feasibility of their students' use of intertextuality. Participants in this study frequently noticed and discussed the language patterns students were utilising from literary texts they were reading outside of the classroom (Harman, 2013). For example, participants talked about students' use of language gained from published texts in their writing such as *Geronimo Stilton* and *Hairy Maclary*. This meant that participants were using their knowledge of students' literate worlds outside of school to help them understand the choices they made about their writing (Moll et al., 1992). Participants noted that building relationships with students was important and the more knowledge they had about students' literacy practices outside of the classroom, for example the books they were reading, together with the funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) students

gained from their daily lives, the better they understood students' writing. When participants drew from a broader range of writing discourses (Ivanič, 2004), their views about difference in students' writing changed from seeing this in terms of deficiency, to having value. Their appreciation of the diversity of student backgrounds and experiences provided them with a more in-depth understanding of their students as authors.

Participants promoted equity for students from diverse backgrounds whose writing may not align with conventional standards of accuracy. This was supported by employing appreciative framing and drawing on a wider range of writing discourses (K. Bomer, 2010; Ivanič, 2004). Health School students incorporated their experiences with and of their health conditions into their writing. This often meant that their writing was unique and did not adhere to predetermined standards. Referring to assessment approaches informed by appreciative perspectives (K. Bomer, 2010), Stella explained how a student's health condition resulted in mood fluctuations. She pointed out how her student had drawn on this experience and purposely incorporated it into her dystopian writing to convey a sense of confusion. This suggests that appreciative framing enabled Stella to draw on creative discourses to notice different aspects in her students' writing (Carini & Himley, 2009). Her student's unique angle, such as the contradictory tone in her writing, may have been viewed as deficient if Stella had utilised a skills discourse of writing when reading her work (Ivanič, 2004). By drawing on wider discourses of writing Stella perceived the difference in her students' writing as a strength (Moll et al.,1992). She validated her student's identity and created an equitable writing experience for a student who may have been marginalised by dominant standards.

Participants' focus on students' writing processes, rather than solely on final products, was enabled by appreciative assessment approaches (K. Bomer, 2010; Warrington, 2016). It may be the case that when teachers read and discuss writing together, without the pressure of predetermined standards as well as utilising an appreciative lens, they focus less on the mechanics of writing and more on students' writing processes. During early collaborative discussions, participants were challenged to consider whether it was more important for teachers to enhance students' writing processes or focus on improving the end product of students'

writing. To begin with and in line with ideas present in a skills discourse of writing (Ivanič, 2004), the group concluded prioritising the final product was essential, because students need this to be successful in high-stakes assessments. However, as the study progressed and participants adopted appreciative approaches when reading their students' writing, they placed more emphasis on the processes involved in composing rather than on the final product. During discussions, participants noted how students had "'intentionally incorporated aspects" into their writing. They reflected more on the strategies students had used such as textual scaffolding, revision and word choice. Overall, these findings suggest that focusing on students' strengths and potential can lead to a broader range of writing discourses being available to teachers (Ivanič, 2004). Teachers' responses are deeply influenced by what they notice in students' writing. The next section of this thesis discusses how viewing Health School students' writing through an appreciative lens impacted upon teachers' response practice.

5.4 Responding to Writing Through an Appreciative Lens

Evidence from this research suggests collaboratively inquiring into appreciative pedagogical approaches (R. Bomer, 2011) supported a shift in how teachers responded to students' writing. Inquiring into assessment and response practices informed by appreciative approaches deepened participants' understanding that their responses to students' writing are never neutral; they are "populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293). Participants critically reflected on what influenced their response practice and focused on repopulating their responses with asset-based language, responding to diversity rather than deficits. Additionally, when participants viewed students' writing through an appreciative lens it fostered curiosity about their students' writing and prompted them to ask students authentic questions as part of their response process. This opened a dialogic space for students to discuss their writing (Bakhtin,1981), legitimising students' voices in the response process. As a result, participants' response practices became more student-centered, allowing students to retain ownership over their writing decisions and increasing students' confidence that their work would be received supportively rather than critically.

5.4.1 Creating Appreciative Dialogic Response Practices

Writing assessment approaches that focus on appreciating what students are doing well in their writing transforms conventional response practices that prioritise error correction and remediation (Durán, 2017; Harman, 2013; Sherry, 2017; Simon, 2013). When participants reflected on the responses they received from teachers during their own childhood, they recalled their writing being scrutinised for errors and returned with red markings highlighting errors as well as comments written in the margins pointing out what was lacking, such as “more detail needed”. This research highlighted that even though participants had experienced negatively focused feedback during their own childhood, their conversations revealed they too used similar practices. This supports Rysdam and Johnson-Shull’s (2016) argument that teachers' feedback often mirrors the types of feedback they received in their childhood, and that responses to writing are “stuck in a rut of negativity and correction” (p. 760).

Evidence from this research suggests that appreciative framing increases teachers’ curiosity about students’ writing, and this moderates the temptation to focus on and respond to errors in students’ work. Participants broke the habit of responding negatively to students’ writing by employing assessment and response approaches that are informed by appreciative perspectives (K. Bomer; R. Bomer, 2011). Participants reported that shifting their assessment lens changed what they noticed in students' writing (Carini, 1986) and this resulted in response strategies that focused on strengths in students' work. They described looking for “what is in” students’ writing, verbally responding to what the students’ writing reminded them of, pointing to aspects of students’ writing they believed were effective and asking students questions about their writing choices.

Participants interview conversations suggested that rather than relying on the traditional authoritative monological response practices they described earlier (Bakhtin, 1981; Pedersen, 2018), participants drew on dialogic response approaches when responding to their students’ writing (Bakhtin, 1981; Glasswell & Parr, 2009; Pedersen, 2018). This was supported by employing appreciative assessment approaches (K. Bomer, 2010), which fostered curiosity in students’ writing and writing choices. Participant recollections of teachers’ responses to writing during their

own childhood suggest they experienced monologic response practices whereby teachers predominantly disseminate feedback allowing for minimal interaction or dialogue with learners (Bakhtin, 1981). This method typically positions teachers as the sole authority, imparting information and corrections, while students passively absorb feedback. Participants' experiences align with Jesson and Cockle's (2016) assertions that monologic response processes are "typical across New Zealand classrooms" (p. 612).

In shifting their practice from monologic responses to dialogic responses (Bakhtin, 1981) participants mitigated the marginal comments, empty praise and heavy focus on surface features that students who are marginalised as at risk and struggling writers typically receive (Bishop et al., 2009; Davila, 2012; Dinnen et al., 2009; Graham & Perin, 2007). As Pedersen (2018) articulates, "dialogic response practices run counter to a climate of standardization and high-stakes testing", that emphasise teachers must judge students' writing for its correctness (p.192). Participants did not focus on students' adherence to predetermined standards in their responses. Nor did they expect students to take "up the teacher's voice as a single, unified perspective" by changing their writing to match their suggestions (Pedersen, 2018, p. 185). Instead, participants employed response practices that invited students' diverse voices into the response processes and legitimised all students as knowledgeable and capable authors (K. Bomer, 2010; Simon, 2013; Warrington, 2016) in command of their own writing decisions. In doing so they challenged deficit ideologies (Paris, 2012; Valencia, 1997) framing students who do not adhere to normative standards as lacking.

5.4.2 Responses Foregrounded in Joy

When teachers see reading students' writing as a joyful activity, their responses to students' writing reflect this enjoyment. This research found that employing appreciatively framed assessment and response approaches (K. Bomer, 2010) increased teachers' enjoyment in reading students' writing. Participants reported that, "focusing on strengths rather than what students can't do" was a "more enjoyable process". Although participants acknowledged appreciative practices required a "change in mindset" and would take "continual practice", there was a

sense of relief that they no longer had to judge students' writing through a corrective lens.

Inquiring into appreciative pedagogical approaches deepened teachers' understanding of writing as a social and dialogic process, an evolving activity shaped by interaction, reflection, and revision (Bakhtin, 1981; Gee; 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). This shift in perspective reduced the pressure to focus solely on final products and provide written evaluations, allowing teachers to engage more meaningfully with students during the writing process. Participants expressed greater satisfaction in using dialogical response strategies (Bakhtin, 1981; Pedersen, 2018) which not only enriched their understanding of students' experiences but also how their writing abilities are connected to identity culture and context (Gee, 1996). This strengthened participants connections with students. They found renewed purpose and enjoyment in learning about their students through their writing.

Evidence from this research suggests that when teachers respond in ways that reposition the teacher-student relationship as collaborative rather than hierarchical, teachers feel less pressure to be the authority on writing. Three of the five participants explicitly stated that "responding during the writing process" was more enjoyable as students could maintain authority over their own writing. This allowed participants to notice how students incorporated their 'real life' experiences into their writing; participants were fascinated by this. Participants enjoyed crafting their responses by drawing on appreciative assessment discourses (K. Bomer, 2010) and their knowledge of students' experiences (Moll et al., 1992).

When teachers responded to students using appreciative response strategies (K. Bomer, 2010) it is likely students' enjoyment increased because they felt more confident that their experiences and writing material were valued and had less fear of reprisal (K. Bomer, 2010; Comber & Kamler, 2004; R. Bomer, 2011). In addition to participants claiming they felt less pleasure reading and responding to students' writing when using an appreciative lens, four out of five participants reported that this responsive approach also fostered more joyful learning experiences for their Health School students. They noted that students were "more engaged", "more comfortable sharing their writing" and "writing more". One participant described how one of her

student's transitioned from nearly crying during writing tasks to becoming happily and actively involved in the writing process. These findings are consistent with Comber and Kamler (2004), who observed that when teachers shifted their focus away from correctness in student work, they became more engaged in writing. Similarly, Moll et al. (1992) emphasised by 'gathering information about the lives of students,' educators can build stronger connections and design instruction that is more relevant and engaging (p.133). It is possible that by responding in ways to reduce pressure on students to conform to the dominant norms implicit within predetermined standards (Kearns, 2016; Pedersen, 2018), a stronger connection with students is fostered and a more enjoyable learning experience for students is achieved.

In summary, these findings suggest when teachers adopt appreciative approaches (K. Bomer, 2010; R. Bomer, 2011), they are more likely to abandon monologic response practices and create dialogic spaces (Bakhtin, 1981) where students and teachers co-inquire into language practices. This fosters a more culturally responsive learning environment. Utilising an appreciative lens disrupts the status quo, as teachers move away from focusing on correctness according to predetermined standards underpinned by uniformity, instead viewing differences as assets. This new approach helps avoid replicating the harmful and unmotivating feedback practices participants experienced during their childhood. In doing so, the feedback process becomes more enjoyable for students and teachers. This may alleviate some of the "writing trauma" displayed by Health School students.

The next chapter begins with a summary of the key findings. It then discusses limitations of the research, outlines directions for future inquiry, and identifies implications for writing teachers' practice and professional development. It will conclude with final remarks.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

The study was designed to provide participants with opportunities to discuss the challenges and successes they encountered while adopting and implementing an appreciative approach. All participants embraced the inquiry mindset during this research and were collectively eager to engage in new learning. They were enthusiastic and committed to challenging and deconstructing deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997) and repositioning students as knowledgeable, resourceful, capable and agentive writers (R. Bomer, 2011).

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

This research investigated teachers' experiences in a New Zealand Health School setting as they explored and adopted assessment and response approaches that are influenced by appreciative discourses (K. Bomer, 2010; R. Bomer, 2011). Additionally, it sought to understand how adopting this approach impacts teachers' responses to writing authored by Health School students.

First, this study found that when teachers adopted appreciative assessment practices (K. Bomer, 2010; R. Bomer, 2011), they encountered tensions between their evolving perspectives and dominant deficit-based discourses (Valencia, 1997) that shape how student writing is typically evaluated and responded to. Through collaborative dialogue and critical reflection, participants examined the constraints imposed by standardised assessments and comparative practices on both teaching and learning. This process disrupted the authoritative nature of assessment and comparative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) on teachers’ professional perceptions and pedagogical decisions. Subsequently, when reading samples of students’ writing, teachers resisted authoritative voices that prioritised predetermined standards and comparison of their students to others (Bakhtin, 1981). Teachers fostered internally persuasive discourses (Bakhtin, 1981) that valued the unique voice of students and the way in which their experiences contributed to their writing (Moll et al., 1992). This helped counteract and modify deficit-based interpretations of students' writing and fostered reading assessment and response practices that were more responsive to a

diverse range of students, including those who are often marginalised as inherently "at risk" or struggling (Paris, 2012; Valencia, 1997).

Second, this study demonstrated that employing appreciative discourses (R. Bomer, 2011) and writing assessment approaches (K. Bomer, 2010) expanded the repertoire of available writing discourses for teachers (Ivanič, 2004). Teachers moved beyond skills-based discourses which prioritises an evaluation of students' writing for its uniformity, spelling, punctuation, and grammatical accuracy (Land, 2019; Sherry, 2017; Simon, 2013). This practice often suppresses students' voices in their writing as it privileges a monologic view of writing (Bakhtin, 1981; Jesson & Cockle, 2016; Pedersen, 2018) by reproducing standard language ideologies (Bacon, 2017; Cushing, 2023; Kearns, 2016). Drawing on a range of discourses encouraged a generous reading (Spence, 2010b) of students' writing, where teachers were more attentive to students' strengths and viewed the diversity in Health School students' writing as an asset (Land, 2019; Moll et al., 1992; Sherry, 2017; Simon, 2013). Teachers noticed the intertextual capabilities of Health School students, how they incorporated their experiences with literature into their writing and used other modalities to express their ideas (Durán, 2017; Harman, 2013). Teachers also noticed how students had creatively incorporated their personal experiences with health conditions into their writing (Moll et al., 1992). Looking for strengths in their students' writing enabled teachers to see the way multiple voices together with the use of other texts and experiences were used. This enabled teachers to foster culturally responsive practice, emphasising inclusivity and diversity over standardisation and conformity.

Third, this research found that when teachers adopted approaches informed by appreciative perspectives (K. Bomer, 2010; R. Bomer, 2011), they developed new ways of responding to students' work that transcended the constraints imposed by high-stakes assessment. Teachers' responses were grounded in what students were doing well (K. Bomer, 2010; Simon, 2013). Rather than employing monologic response practices, which do not give students opportunities to build on existing expertise (Jesson & Cockle, 2016), teachers engaged students in a dialogic response process (Bakhtin, 1981; Pedersen, 2018). This student-centred, dialogical approach shifted teachers away from being the sole authority on students' writing. It

ensured that teachers' voices did not dominate the response process and that students actively engaged with feedback rather than simply complying with teachers' suggestions. Additionally, rather than employing an end-product approach, teachers responded during the writing process, focusing on developing the writer, not perfecting the writing (Calkins, 1994). This reinforced the understanding among students that writing is a social and dialogic process, an evolving, dynamic activity in which meaning is constructed through interaction, reflection, and revision (Bakhtin, 1981).

Finally, the strength-based nature of appreciative framing (K. Bomer, 2010) and response practices in this research offered an alternative to the deficit discourses that continue to marginalise some learners (Valencia, 1997). This research demonstrated how appreciative framing can negotiate and counter these discourses. However, changing established pedagogical habits can be a complex process. Participants in this study reported that adopting an appreciative lens when viewing and responding to student writing enhanced the experience for both teachers and learners. They believed that this positive approach should be applied not only in literacy but across other areas of teaching as well. Despite these benefits, participants also expressed concern that the ongoing pressures and demands of teaching might cause them to revert to "old habits," highlighting the institutional power that high-stakes assessments have on teachers' work and the challenge that teachers face in negotiating this. However, findings in this research show that much can be gained from having conversations about doing things differently and this illustrates possibilities for change.

6.2 Limitations and Directions for Further Research

This section addresses limitations of this research. These include limitations related to the social construction of knowledge, my positionality as a researcher and the small sample size from which evidence was collected. This section also suggests how future research may address the limitations, where possible.

This research is grounded in the understanding that our realities are socially constructed and that we construct our understanding through language and

interactions with others (Bakhtin, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978). This lens was used to analyse and understand the participants' experiences in this study. Given this foundation, I recognised that meaning was formed within a specific social context and shaped by broader frameworks (Warrington, 2016; Lave & Wenger, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, the knowledge generated from this research is highly context-specific and may be challenging to replicate in other contexts and situations.

My position as an insider researcher with “insider friendships” (Taylor, 2011, p.6) had the potential to limit the knowledge and meaning that was co-constructed during this research. I am passionate about disrupting discourses that position certain groups of students in deficit ways and the benefits of appreciative pedagogical practices. Therefore, my passion may have influenced the research participants. I attempted to mitigate this by maintaining ethical professionalism, utilising “reflexivity as a resource” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). I continually reflected on the power dynamics, ethics, and my proximity to the research throughout all stages of this research to ensure this positionality did not unfairly impact the research design, research participants and the outcomes of this research.

Although participants in this research drew on years of education and life experiences, the small number of participants meant that a broader range of perspectives was not available. It could be argued that the small sample size of five teachers in such a unique educational setting compromises the degree to which generalisations can be made. I acknowledge this, and the aim of this study was not to make generalisations but to focus on sharing the experiences of these teachers as they adopted appreciative pedagogical approaches and to improve their experiences when reading and responding to students (K. Bomer, 2010; R. Bomer, 2011). However, there is scope for further studies exploring appreciative instructional approaches on a broader scale. These studies could investigate the experiences of teachers working in both primary and secondary school contexts, in other disciplines such as mathematics, and in settings where students are often marginalised as at risk and struggling writers, for example, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classrooms.

Participants agreed reframing how they view and respond to students' writing required a significant "mind shift" that will need to be continually practiced over time. However, the timeframe allocated for this research means this "mind shift" may not have been fully embedded, and therefore my understanding of teachers' continual appreciative practice is constrained. It could also be argued that the timeframe of this study limited its ability to disrupt deficit practices. Had time constraints allowed, I could have interviewed the participants again to see if they had sustained this practice. Future research might address this by conducting a longitudinal study involving teachers' ongoing experiences as they inquire into and implement appreciative approaches. Including students' perspectives to understand how this approach impacts their self-efficacy in writing, would be also be valuable.

Additionally, as indicated in Chapter Two, there do not appear to be any studies in New Zealand on the impacts of the newly mandated CAA writing assessment on teaching or students' experiences with learning to write. Thus, there are many opportunities to add to this body of research.

6.3 Implications

As stated above, this research was conducted under the assumption that knowledge and meaning are socially constructed (Bakhtin, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978). Due to the theoretical underpinning of these findings, they may not offer universally applicable or directly generalisable implications. Instead, the recommendations I suggest in this section are my interpretations of what this research might offer for writing instruction and professional development. These are outlined in this section.

6.3.1 Implications for Writing Teachers' Practice

As highlighted in Chapter 2, it is common for teachers to assess students' writing for errors and deficiencies. Often, when teachers respond to students' writing, they include comments highlighting inadequacies in students' writing (Bardine et al., 2000; Connors & Lunsford, 1993; Graham & Perin, 2007; Truscott, 1996; Sommers, 1982). This practice is often guided by comparing students' writing to predetermined standards influenced by standard language ideologies and framed by deficit perspectives of what students can and cannot do (Paris, 2012; Valencia, 1997). This

research shows possible assessment and response practices that counter these deficit-based approaches.

Implications for teachers could involve teachers reflecting on how their responses may reinforce harmful ideas about students' writing abilities and then using alternative methods for assessing students' writing. For example, replacing the practice of comparing students' writing to predetermined standards, rubrics and criteria with appreciatively framed assessment that focuses on the strengths and potential in students' writing (K. Bomer, 2010). This would require teachers to look beyond superficial errors in students' writing and read students' writing as any legitimate text would be read, for its purpose and meaning (Carini & Himley, 2009). Teachers should explore how students incorporate funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) into their work as this acknowledges students' diversity in writing as a positive attribute (Paris, 2012), rather than a deficiency. This may see teachers responding to writing in a more culturally sensitive manner.

Additionally, findings in this research suggest teachers would benefit from moving away from monological response practices, such as noting errors and writing marginal comments on students' writing. Opening dialogic spaces (Bakhtin, 1981) where teachers incorporate "questioning, clarification, and illustration strategies" into their response practice (Pedersen, 2018, p. 187) will encourage students to talk about their writing and writing processes. This positions the students as capable authors, allows students to have a voice in the response process, and maintain authority over their writing.

Therefore, implications from this study for enacting appreciative pedagogical approaches during teaching practice are as follows:

Teachers enabled to:

Create a learning environment that accommodates one-on-one discussions with students about their writing so they can share their ideas and be supported with the writing process.

(a) When viewing a student's writing, focus on what the student is doing well. Initially, respond to what the text is saying, what it reminds the teacher of, what it makes them think about, and what is enjoyable to read. Identify a place where the writing is particularly strong and describe what the writer is doing with their writing (K. Bomer, 2010).

(b) Continually focus on readjusting their perspective by asking themselves, "Am I viewing this student and their writing through a deficit lens?" (Valencia, 1997).

(c) Take time to talk with students about their lives and their writing, because through dialogue, teachers get to know their students and the funds of knowledge they bring into the classroom and their writing (Moll et al., 1992).

6.3.2 Implications for Teachers' Professional Development

This study highlights the importance of teachers learning in collaboration with each other. Based on the findings from this study, I recommend that school leaders support teachers to engage in inquiry groups to discuss writing pedagogy and students' writing. One of the most significant implications of the collaborative nature of the inquiry group in this study was that teachers had an opportunity to critically analyse existing practices and policies in writing pedagogy (Giroux, 1985). In doing so teachers involved in this research began to develop a critical awareness of language ideologies and how these are maintained through predetermined standards, criteria, and rubrics which shape teacher assessments and responses to writing (Bacon, 2017; Cushing, 2023; Kearns, 2016). Schools may benefit from encouraging teams of teachers to meet and discuss writing pedagogy, including writing assessments and responses. This would facilitate the opportunity for teachers to build knowledge from a range of perspectives and encourage them to reflect on their practice.

My analysis of the interactions which occurred within the learning inquiry group sessions indicates collaborative engagement provided participants with an opportunity to deepen their content knowledge of writing. This included examining

students' writing techniques, literacy practices used by authors, and how to appreciatively notice and respond to aspects of students' writing (K. Bomer, 2010). This highlights the importance for teachers to be given the chance to participate in professional development that involves collaborative engagement aimed at enhancing teachers' abilities to respond to writing.

One of the most encouraging findings from this research was that by looking closely at students' writing and collaboratively discussing students' writing, teachers were encouraged to regard diversity in students' writing as an asset. This expanded teachers' perceptions of Health School students' writing and in doing so they found more enjoyment in the feedback process and reported high levels of students' engagement. This highlights a potential increase in teachers' culturally responsive teaching practice. Educators and school leaders who introduce inquiry groups emphasising a detailed analysis of students' writing as a form of professional development may see promising results in writing classrooms typified by diversity.

6.4 Concluding Remarks

When I started my Master's journey, I was curious why so many students reported that their writing had not been responded to positively and appeared to feel little enjoyment in writing. In considering the essential role of response in enhancing student learning and improving the quality of teaching (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Wisniewski et al., 2020), I wanted to know how I could respond to writing that reflects the lived experiences of students from different cultural, social, and economic backgrounds whilst juggling with the conformity in writing that predetermined writing standards require. Reframing my perception of students and their writing through an appreciative lens profoundly transformed my teaching experience. This research was initially undertaken with the hope that exploring appreciative pedagogies (R. Bomer, 2011) would similarly impact other educators and enhance both teachers' experiences of teaching writing and students' experiences of learning to write. I hope that this study will inspire others who engage with it to critically analyse their assessment approaches and reconsider how they respond to all students in the future.

This research contributes to a broader body of research into writing assessment and response approaches as well as a body of research on appreciative pedagogical practices.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Responding to the writing of children in a Health School: Developing an appreciative approach.

Focus Group Questions

Guiding questions for the focus group meeting.

Beliefs about writing

1. *What are some things you believe about teaching writing effectively?*
2. *What are the most important aspects or aspects to focus on in writing?*
3. *Where did you learn what writing should look like and sound like?*
4. *Can you identify any key influences on the way you teach writing?*
5. *What does writing look like here at the NHS?*

Beliefs about responding to writing

1. *Where did you learn how to respond to students' writing?*
2. *What do you believe is the main purpose of responding to students writing?*
3. *How often do you respond to writing?*
4. *How do you respond to writing? Are there any particular structures/guides you use to guide you?*
5. *How does responding to students at the NHS compare to your experience of doing this elsewhere?*

Appendix B

Responding to the writing of children in a Health School: Developing an appreciative approach. \

Guided Inquiry Groups and Protocol

Firstly, thank you! I am appreciative and excited about the wealth of knowledge and experience, both in your teaching experiences and your own experiences with learning and education, that this group is bringing into this inquiry and this research project. Here is an outline of the next phase, the guided learning inquiry groups.

Inquiry into appreciative framing/stances

An appreciative stance is "acknowledging [students'] already-existing interests, experiences, knowledge, and skill in order to build upon them" (R. Bomer, 2011, p.22),

Kaupapa / Purpose:

The purpose of these inquiry groups is to read about and talk about appreciative stances and appreciatively framed responses together to ensure that we read our ākongas' writing generously and use asset-based/ strength-based feedback to help our ākonga grow as writers.

Before the meetings:

I will share essential and optional readings and articles. The essential articles will help inform your inquiry (if you have time for further reading, the optional readings will also be helpful). Any other articles that you would like ot share please feel free to bring them to the group sessions.

During our meetings, we will:

- *Discuss your right to withdraw from this project at any time before or during the upcoming inquiry group meetings and interview, and up to two weeks after receiving a copy of the transcript of your final interview.*
- *Have a chance to chat about our past experiences with viewing and responding to students' writing, including your childhood experiences with responses to writing.*

- *Have a chance to discuss readings and articles.*
- *Have an opportunity to share students' writing together and discuss how we might respond.*

A rough guide of our guided inquiry meetings:

Meeting One (29th Feb)	Discuss protocols and the purpose of inquiry group meetings, and review an article on appreciative stances. *https://twowritingteachers.org/2022/10/24/lets-get-curious-using-appreciative-inquiry-in-the-writing-classroom/*
Meeting Two (14th March)	Review and discuss chapter one in Katherine Bomer's (2010) Hidden Gems. Discuss our personal experiences with response.
Meeting Three (28th March)	Review and discuss chapter two of 'Hidden Gems'.
Meeting Four (2nd May)	Review and discuss chapter nine of 'Hidden Gems' - moving forward from a guided inquiry approach to an independent, open approach to your inquiry.

My role in the inquiry meetings *- I am learning alongside you but also have some questions and prompts to help guide learning. These meetings will be audio recorded.*

If you have any concerns please feel free to discuss them with me either in person or through email. I am looking forward to learning together.

Appendix C

Responding to the writing of children in a Health School: Developing an appreciative approach.

Interview Questions

Past and present approaches to writing.

1. *How would you describe your approach to responding to students and their writing before our inquiry group meetings?*
2. *Can you tell me how your approach towards viewing and responding to students and their writing has changed since you inquired into appreciative stances?*
3. *Can you think of an example of a moment in your writing responses where you were thinking about conversations or other work we did together in the inquiry group meetings we have had this year?*
4. *When you responded to students' writing, what was your purpose for responding to your students' writing?*
5. *you responded to students' writing, were there any aspects of the texts you focused on more than others? What were they?*
6. *What strategies or techniques did you use when you responded?*

Experiences with noticing and naming.

1. How did you find the process of noticing and acknowledging strengths? Can you give examples of where you used this approach?

2. What did you notice about your students' writing that interested you?

3. What content knowledge did you realise that you needed to know to notice the strengths and possibilities in students' writing?

Students' experiences with feedback:

1. *What did you notice about your students' response to your feedback?*
2. *What do you think your students would say about the feedback they have received?*
3. *How helpful do you think your feedback was for helping your students with the writing process?*

4. *What changes did you see your students making in their writing after you responded to their writing?*

5. *What are you celebrating, and what are you hoping to keep working on for the rest of the year?*

6. *Do you have any other comments on viewing students' writing through an appreciative lens?*