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**Out of Sight, Out of Mind:  
Truancy, through the lens of five Māori 'Truants'.**

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Masters Degree  
in  
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## Abstract

### **Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Truancy, through the lens of five Māori 'Truants'.**

*"But I feel sorry for our kids, because I know once they get outside the gates, a lot of [teachers] are saying.... "Out of sight, out of mind- they're not my problem". And then, the next group- they're complaining or handing out statistics of how many Māori people are in institutions" (Simon, 1993, p. 21)*

Defining the cause and solutions as to why Māori students truant by non-Māori definitions can be problematic, especially if it creates a profile based on stereotypes and assumptions. It is likely that truants and their backgrounds are viewed as culturally deficient, socially inept and intellectually ignorant about the value of education. Furthermore, truancy linked to 'at risk' youth, creates discourse not only about the 'truant', but also about their families. Such discourse might construct them as also being "abnormally integrated, socially irresponsible and morally defective (Jacka, Sutherland, Peters & Smith, 1997:10). Current literature provides definitions of truancy and descriptions of a culture of schooling, where some students have found it very difficult to 'fit'. For those who do find space in the classroom, it can come at a cost.

'Out of Sight, Out of Mind' examines truancy, through the lens of five Māori students in order to provide some understanding of some of the causes behind this social phenomenon. It is anticipated that the results of this study will contribute to more positive outcomes on education for Māori students in the mainstream education system. Interviews with a small group of Māori students and their parents, reveal their experiences in mainstream schooling, and identify areas of concern that escalated into their student's decision to withdraw from school. Initially, withdrawals were from individual lessons or subjects, escalating into withdrawing for whole days at a time.

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I dedicate this document to your memories:

**William Edward White (April 25<sup>th</sup> 2000)**

**Donald McCallum Miller (December 21<sup>st</sup> 2005)**

## PREFACE

In the late 1970's, I was a second year fifth form student, which was the classification then given to students who did not pass the National School Certificate examination in their fifth form year. I found that I had created my own school timetable regime, where I spent more time out of the classroom, than inside it. I was absent so often that a teacher commented that he was surprised I was not hospitalised, given the number of days I was supposedly sick at home. However, I was not sick, nor was I at home, but because I was not in the classroom during the official school hours, I was classified as a truant. I did not need to be coerced by my peers to absent myself from class. Nor did I plan what I would do with the extra time. I neither knew what I was going to do nor where I was going to go; I only knew where I didn't want to be. Initially, I attended school every day and sat amongst others just like me, while being constantly reminded, either directly through classroom practices or indirectly, through hidden curriculum and institutional policies and practices, that the meritocratic equation (ability + effort = reward) (Marshall, 1988) was not a myth and I was evidence of that. Meritocracy as an aim of education was used internationally (Darder, 1991) and in most New Zealand schools (Coxon, Jenkins, Marshall & Massey, 1994). Education was to be made "*accessible to all, in such a way that differences in achievement and reward would be perceived as the outcomes of differences in the abilities and efforts of individuals*" (Ibid, p. 48). What was often not acknowledged within the dynamics of student success or failure were the uneven power relations determined by cultural and economic forces that advantage students from the dominant culture (Ibid). So meritocracy reinforced the assumption that those who were second year 'anything' repeated their second year due to lack of ability, lack of effort or a combination of the two. The stigma and negative treatment associated with being a 'second year fifth', along with many other Māori and students from Pacific Nations was so strong that it seemed to me that if there was a choice, truancy was the only sensible option. So as a past truant and more recently, the parent of a truant, trying to make sense of why and how truancy still exists is an interesting yet very complex issue. Through my experiences, and having my own story to tell, I hear my story resonating through the lived experiences of others, and working in the educational context, I continue to read about, hear from and speak to many others who tell those same

stories; stories that have been retold year after year- same tale, different teller, different time.

So what is that story and who is telling it?

## CHAPTER 1            PROBLEM, PERSPECTIVE AND APPROACH

Sam is 14 years old and is no longer in school. He is a 'typical' teenage boy, with a laid back, phlegmatic, yet friendly demeanour. He quite candidly speaks about his school experiences, especially his attitude towards teachers and classroom life- school is a "*party in the classroom*", and his attitude towards his teachers was one of hostility; "*I used to swear at them... kick them*". Although Sam could not specify reasons behind his hostility, he thought it could be related to the curriculum; "*It was probably the subjects they were teaching. I didn't like it*". Sam did not participate in any of the school clubs or sports, but he felt there was no need to, as he had "*lots of friends anyway*". Because of his popularity, bullying was also not a concern. In fact, being with friends was the only time Sam felt such a strong sense of belonging, and this became his motivation to not only attend school but to also 'skip' school- so that he could "*hang out with friends*".

When Sam 'skipped' school, he developed a number of successful strategies to avoid detection. Therefore, whenever he was confronted by his teachers or his mother, he always had a repertoire of excuses that he could draw from, and succeed with. Sam does acknowledge the importance of education, but he doesn't believe that education is for everyone. It is interesting that although Sam did not like school work and resisted working in the classroom, he often took work home and completed it. After a number of incidents at school, including truancy, Sam was 'stood down'.

I begin with Sam's story as it provides a profile of a truant that 'typifies' the truant profiles represented in the literature; however, Sam is Māori. Discourse has been created about the 'typical' truant and Sam's story highlights the complexities and dilemmas of categorising people using a blanket definition based on a dominant view. When one is classified under the 'typical' label, they have already been stereotyped as having certain attributes based on this form of pigeonholing, and although the literature claims that truants are not a homogenous group and they do have uniqueness in their individuality, writers still represent truants as if they all share the same experiences, think the same way, act the same way, in fact, as if they are all the same person. This study presents truancy from the 'other' person- the truant themselves.

## Overview of Thesis

'Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Truancy, through the lens of five Māori 'Truants' relates the stories of a group of Māori students, on reasons to why they 'truant'. Chapter one introduces the problems and issues that have surrounded truancy and truants, and examines ways in which truancy has affected the education of Māori and Māori society. Māori are disproportionately represented along the lower end of the education spectrum with low or no qualifications and the number leaving school with no or a low qualification is increasing. Māori have fared poorly in terms of social parity, since Māori children are more likely to leave secondary school with much lower levels of qualifications than non-Māori and the majority of the qualifications attained late will disadvantage Māori when attempting to gain access to post-school education and employment (Te Puni Kokiri, 2000). Furthermore, Māori are over-represented in 'second chance' schemes, for example Training Opportunity Programme (TOP), Māori unemployment rates are significantly higher, Māori income is significantly lower than non-Māori and Māori are more likely to require government assistance or be totally dependent on a 'benefit'. In turn, this impacts on Māori, as they continue to experience poorer health status, lower income levels, higher unemployment, higher rates of prosecution and conviction, lower educational status and lower rates of living in owned homes than non-Māori (Ibid, p.10). The long term implications of truancy are the same for both the students and their families: alienation, underachievement and failure that leads to larger social problems, for example limited employment options, poverty (Smales, 2002) and in some cases, prison (Lashlie, 2002).

Chapter two identifies truancy as a major concern and attempts to provide definitions of truancy and explanations as to causes of truancy. It looks critically at the character profile that the literature paints of truants, Māori included. It asks who defines truancy and questions the benefits of adopting a 'problem-solving perspective' focussed on the truant as the problem. Different writers discuss why truancy is an issue and express the importance of addressing the problem. Because a number of discourses have been validated through these writers, there is a need to hear the voices of those who are at the centre of numerous debates, the truants themselves. To try to define truancy or to understand its culture, there is a need to examine current and historical literature from a critical viewpoint, but also a

need to make sense of truancy from different cultural and ethnic perspectives. School types, decile rating and location do appear to influence absence rates, with higher levels of truancy found in state, co-educational and low decile rating schools located in city and secondary urban centres (Cosgrave, Bishop & Bennie, 2003).

Current literature generally positions Māori and truants from a deficit and pathological perspective, so giving Māori students the space to voice their 'truths' about their school experiences, provides some understanding as to why they withdraw from school. In addition, it creates space for them to deconstruct existing myths or even just to plant seeds that may change the way they are viewed. This study also highlights that in reality, the refusal of young Māori students to attend school is not through choice, as an exercise of 'free will'. Guare & Cooper (2003:2) reject the simple view that truancy is the result of a personal deficit or characteristic of students. Guare & Cooper (ibid) also have reservations about the view that students 'skip out' because their friends do. From their research, students are viewed as thinking, rational decision makers who assess their situation and decide to 'buy' their education or reject it, like other consumers and clients.

To engage in discussion about research and teaching and the different methods that are commonly used or are effective in practice, there must be some understanding that there are differences in the way things are seen, framed, perceived or interpreted. It is difficult to define others' thoughts, ideas and knowledge, or even align them to a parallel that is deemed 'normal, natural, and neutral', because there should be no emphasis on which is 'right', but rather, an acceptance that the status quo is not the only way to see and define the world. A common problem faced by Indigenous and other minority groups is that their cultures societies, knowledge, ways of seeing and ways of life have been explained, framed and analysed through a Eurocentric Western model, and this has created a discourse of epistemology that can be, and is, applied to all humans, simply because they belong to the 'same human race'. Therefore, chapter three outlines the method design and the approach that is adopted for this research. It examines the procedure carried out and rationalises why a particular approach is used. Indigenous epistemology and methodology research is introduced as a way of engaging in research, highlighting differences in perspective that help us to understand that the ways knowledge is constructed, interpreted and transmitted

are based on processes that, although different from the dominant Western view, are just as valid. Historically, research has not been a positive experience for some groups, Māori included, and those experiences will affect what stories are told and how much the participants are willing to contribute. One of the commitments to Māori participants and their whanau is a commitment to foster principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, through partnership (shared decision making) participation (the participants' contribution towards the research and being able to participate in the decision making process of this research paper) and protection (maintaining confidentiality; maintaining the mana of the participants and their whanau) (Durie in Kawharu, 1989).

A correlation between educational success and school attendance has been identified (Educational Review Office, 1997; Cosgrave, Bishop, & Bennie, 2002; Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai & Richardson, 2003), so addressing concerns surrounding truancy will affect other issues within the dynamics of school culture. For this to even begin to happen, there needs to be some understanding to what motivates Māori to place themselves in positions, either intentionally or under duress, that can ultimately limit their chances and choices. Listening to the stories of those who truant will help gain a better understanding of the motivation behind truancy. Chapters four and five introduce the findings, based on the student interviews, and provide an analysis of those findings. Students have identified a number of reasons why they *opt* out of the classroom, and there is a common link and dominant theme between the participants. Gaps have been identified in the literature, where cultural epistemology, experiences, interpretations and understandings do not seem to be a significant feature when defining terminology or interpreting and understanding situations that relate to such a culturally diverse concept and group.

Truancy in New Zealand is a growing issue (Cormack, 2005). It is a problem that implicates not only the students and their whanau, but teachers, schools and associated agencies involved with the school, the Ministry of Education, local businesses, social and community services and other Government agencies. Truancy is fast becoming a very expensive industry, but those who pay the higher price are Māori students in the mainstream education system. Legally, school attendance is compulsory and parents are liable for prosecution if they do not ensure that their child(ren) attend school.

This study is not about apportioning blame. It is hoped that the students' stories will become catalysts for change and that the myths created about truants and the causes of truancy are deconstructed to envelop other wider structural and institutional issues as major contributing, even dominating, factors in the educational and social crisis of truancy. Finding solutions to truancy will contribute to improving the highly disproportionate number of Māori children who are failing in school, being failed by school and ultimately ending up unemployed with no educational skills or in prison, still in the prime of their youth (Lashlie, 2002).

Schooling in Aotearoa/ New Zealand has been in existence since the arrival of the early settlers as early as 1840. Schools were run by churches and individuals on a private enterprise basis and were modelled on the English and Scottish systems of the period, with little adjustment (Coxon, Jenkins, Marshall & Massey, 1994, p.39). There were no laws in place that made school attendance compulsory so no more than half of New Zealand children aged between five and fifteen went to school. In 1849, there was a push for universal schooling, "*largely on the grounds that it would assist in developing the moral character of the child and in doing so, would help to prevent crime*" (Ibid). Because the underlying objective of compulsory schooling was more concerned with social control than a means of increasing life chances and upward mobility, it became evident that schooling was producing inequalities in terms of access and opportunities over the next thirty years. Illich (1973, in Giddens, 1997) argues that compulsory schooling needs to be questioned as it creates dependency on a system through passive consumption<sup>1</sup>, and because education is compulsory, school has become a "*custodial organisation*" (p. 416), to keep the children off the streets between childhood and their entry into the workforce.

The introduction of 1877 Education Act laid the foundation for the New Zealand education system, as it provided a national system that was state funded and controlled, making education universal, compulsory and secular (Coxon et. al., 1994). This was to bring about schooling for all children of non-Māori descent aged between seven and thirteen years.

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<sup>1</sup> An uncritical acceptance of the existing social order by nature of the discipline and regimentation they involve (Giddens, 1997, p. 416)

However, advocates for education began promoting the necessity to take control, so as to overcome inequalities so that all children had the same opportunity to attend school:

*In the interest of equality of enjoyment of individual right, parental discretion should be forgone and attendance at school be enforced upon all children of legislatively defined school age (Coxon et. al, p.43).*

Schooling for Māori became compulsory in 1894 (Simon, 1992). The state, however, was involved in education for Māori as far back as 1847, through the provision of government subsidies to schools being run by the missionaries and during this period, there were no attendance laws and school was not compulsory.

Underpinning the 1877 Education Act was the notion of 'equal access' to schooling for all children. As Adams, Clark, Codd, O'Neill, Openshaw and Waitere-Ang, (2000) argued, New Zealand prided itself on its egalitarian ideal and its position on fairness by treating people equally and giving equal access to schooling for all children. One of the values or ideologies that New Zealand had prided itself on, was its egalitarian ideal that all people should be equal, and that schooling had been held to be a public good provided by society for the benefit of all (Adams, Clark, Codd, O'Neill, Openshaw and Waitere-Ang, 2000). Education would therefore lead to social equality and justice for all, based on the principles of equal rights, equal opportunities and racial harmony (Coxon et al., 1994). However, schooling for Māori was vastly different to that being offered in non-Māori schools. Māori were being educated in Mission schools, until the introduction of Native schools in 1867, and although education for Māori was a means of "*maintaining sovereignty and enhancing their life-chances*" (Simon, 1992, p. 179) and to "*extend their existing body of knowledge*" (Simon, Ibid), the Government had ulterior motives. The major goal for educating Māori was to gain control over Māori and their resources through assimilation and to "*limit advancement by Māori by selecting and controlling the types of knowledge to which Māori children had access*" (Johnston, 1998, p. 163).

It became apparent over time, that intellectual development for Māori, that would give them an equal footing alongside Pākehā, was given low priority (Ibid, p. 59); Native schooling was not intended to extend their knowledge, but rather to "*train them to become*

*law abiding citizens and provide them with 'sufficient' schooling for mainly labouring class roles within society"* (Ibid, p. 63). This was overtly stated by the first inspector of Native schools, when he declared that the role of the Native schools was:

*... to bring an untutored but intelligent and high-spirited people into line with our civilisation and by placing in Māori settlements European school buildings and European families to serve as teachers, especially as exemplars of a new desirable mode of life* (Ibid, p. 61).

In 1879, the Department of Education established control of the Native schools, and although there were two separate schooling systems operating at the time (Native schools and Education Board schools) there were no restrictions as to which school one could attend. Māori were attending both, but in 1969, Native schools were disbanded.

The introduction of the 1989 Education Act saw some changes within the public schooling system, and one significant amendment was a change to the compulsory schooling age range to six to sixteen years (Ministry of Education, 1999). Although compulsory education was intended to bring about order and social control, what developed was truancy (Towgood, 1977; Kerlake, Lange & Bennie, 1997).

The Education act also clarified the parents and Board of Trustees' legal obligations to ensure that children attended a school they were enrolled at. The Act stated that:

*Every Board shall, by any means it thinks appropriate, take all reasonable steps to ensure the attendance of students enrolled at its school or schools (or institution or institutions) (1989,31(3)).*

Over ninety percent of Māori students in the twelve to fifteen year age group continue to attend mainstream English-medium schools, despite the introduction of a small number of alternative Māori medium education settings in Aotearoa New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2001b). Walker (1996) highlights areas of concern about mainstream English schools viewed as unwelcoming places for Māori children. They can be for a number of reasons. These include the minority status placed on Māori, low teacher expectations, cultural alienation, contributing to the social breakdown of extended family support and 'racial' conflict. The students have responded by truanting, and schools have reacted by

standing them down or, more recently, prosecuting parents who did not make a 'genuine reasonable effort' (Guardian, Thursday June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2005) to ensure their children went to school. Although truancy workers cannot identify a single factor that causes or creates attendance difficulties for students, ethnicity of the student and socio-economic status of the family and school community have been identified as factors that contribute to truancy (Manawatu Standard, Thursday October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2005, p. 5). In 1991, Graham Smith stated that "*Māori children suffer disproportionate and high levels of schooling failure across a range of indices, from poor achievement levels to high truancy rates*"<sup>2</sup>. Years later, although initiatives have been introduced to address educational achievement and attendance concerns, not much has changed.

Truancy is such a complex term that finding a definition that fits the many different ways it is viewed and practiced is difficult. It is known both nationally and internationally and although there have been many and varied strategies to address the issue, research shows that truancy is still on the rise and therefore causes increasing concern (Ministry of Education, 1999). In Aotearoa, Ministry of Education research highlights the increasing rate of truancy, noting that there is more than one pupil in every ten missing from school each day, which shows that the overall rate is up by 2.2 percentage points from 2002. The truants themselves are an even more complex part of the culture of truancy. 'Truants' can be used to define and encompass a whole range of people, groups, behaviours, experiences and cultures; however, as a group classification, truants are usually viewed from a deficit perspective. Truancy has been linked to 'at risk' youth. This categorisation creates discourse not only about the 'truant' but also about their family and their culture. Jacka, et al (1997) argue that once a 'truant' is labelled 'at-risk', they are constructed as "*abnormally integrated, socially irresponsible and morally defective*" (p.10), as well as having behavioural problems such as vandalism, gang associations, physical violence and theft (Ministry of Education, <http://www.minedu.govt.nz>). While the reasons behind truancy are complex, a contributing factor may be the mainstream education system in failing to adequately meet the educational needs and aspirations of Māori (Te Puni Kokiri, 2000). Jacka, et al (1997) state that there is a concern that although everyone has an opinion about

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<sup>2</sup> Monograph to the Keynote Address presented at the post Primary Teachers Association Curriculum Conference in Christchurch, May, 1991.

who truants are and why they truant, there seems to be a “*total absence of the voices of young people whose behaviours, back grounds and life chances are being debated so publicly*” (p. 1). They have also identified through their work that “*research literature on truancy for the most part ignores the impact of cultural differences amongst truants*” (p. 63).

Because the focus of this study is on Māori who truant, it is important to question from a critical perspective, why Māori students, either intentionally or unintentionally, *choose an option* that may ultimately take them from a path of success to one of dependency. Is it by choice? What prompts Māori out of the classroom in the first place? There have been officers and operations to round up the ‘offenders’, but ultimately, once there is a resistant attender in the classroom, then what can be done? How can one ensure they maintain regular attendance? Based on statistical evidence (Te Puni Kokiri, 2000), media headlines and research findings the figures are not dropping and the situation is no better than it was twenty years ago (Smales, 2002). Research shows that across the board, rates of truancy and absenteeism have remained constant since 1870 (Reid, 1999:4). Green MP, Metiria Turei, states that to address the root causes of truancy, the Government must question the culture of Secondary schools to find out why kids don’t want to go to them” (14<sup>th</sup> October, 2003; <http://www.scoop.co.nz/mason/stories/PA0310/S00303.HTM>). To understand the motivation behind truancy, Le Riche (1995) states that a multi-professional approach is required and there must be involvement with the pupils; there is a need to ‘see’ through their lens. For Māori who truant, the multi-professional approach also requires a multi-layered stance. Applying a ‘one size fits all’ model to truants and treating them as if they are all the same, denies each participant the significance of their own identity and their own experiences, so there is a need to unpack some of the discourse that has kept Māori entrenched in a cycle of disadvantage.

## CHAPTER 2            REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Introduction

In 1997, Jacka, Sutherland, Peters & Smith carried out research addressing truancy among Māori using Kaupapa Māori theory to explore ways to deconstruct the myths about Māori who truant and their Whānāu. Their work highlighted the issue that “*research literature on truancy for the most part ignores the impact of cultural differences amongst truants*” (p. 63).

This chapter will review literature on truancy and recognise that there are diverse definitions of truancy and truants. Although there is a vast amount of literature on this topic, attempting to gather culturally inclusive data that presents a critical perspective of truancy among Indigenous groups, specifically Māori truants, is more difficult. The literature review attempts to draw together different perspectives of truancy to give a clear picture of truants and truancy. Truancy is viewed from a universal position,

This chapter will also examine the notion of choice and how this concept is constructed on an institutional, social and personal level. Smales’ (2002) study on the Education Advisors who work for the Non-Enrolment Truancy Services, reported truants as being social misfits, who “*could not or would not take their place*” in school so therefore often “*made the choice and chose*” to be out of education because it is irrelevant (p. 121). Looking at where ‘*their place*’ is in the classroom will help understand some of the reasons why students ‘*choose*’ to truant.

Skutnabb-Kangas (1990) argues that the ways that Indigenous groups have been defined and viewed has been a contentious issue as the worldview has been based on research from an outsiders perspective which has provided a deficiency-based framework that defines groups negatively in terms of what they are not, do not have or do not represent.

*Defining the cause and solutions to Māori truancy by non-Māori definitions is likely to result in the invisibility of the structural determinants of Māori dysfunction and a*

*marginalizing of fundamental Māori concepts and worldviews* (Stewart- Harawira, 1995, p.152 in Jacka, Sutherland, Peters & Smith (1997, p.15).

This further conceptualises Māori truants and their whanau as culturally deficient. When conducting research on Māori, or any other minority group, a common concern is that the research serves to highlight the negative issues and circumstances faced by Māori. Equally, research only tells Māori what they already know (Stokes, 1985 in Te Ariki, Spoonley & Tomoana, 1992).

There are multiple interpretations and assumptions about truancy; therefore, it is important to examine causes and effects of truancy to gain a clearer picture of why Māori students 'truant', what can be done to eliminate this practice and where to target intervention strategies. Approaching the problem with a 'wide-angled lens' allows for a multi-pronged approach when attempting to find strategies to address the problem. Past studies (Carlen, Gleeson & Wardhaugh, 1992; Le Riche, 1995; Riki, 1997; Jacka, Sutherland, Peters, Smith, 1997; Reid, 1999; Schwanen, 2004; Taia, 2005; McCormack, 2005) have identified factors that past 'voices' have raised as reasons behind their own truancy. This may give insight into some the issues that are raised by students today.

### **Why Truancy Needs to be Addressed**

Riley & Rustique-Forrester (2002, p.6) highlights how the *process* of schooling disadvantages young people and places a lot of pressure on them through increasing demands on teachers, competitive pressures generated by national demands, as well as the varying needs of students themselves. A deficit approach has been the 'norm' when trying to find blame for social problems; however, without acknowledging the role in which educational processes play in the exclusion of individuals or groups, young people will in effect be disenfranchised from society, socially and economically.

The government has allocated funding to initiatives to address the problem of truancy, and to extend truancy prevention programmes nationwide that will try to "fix' truancy, truants and their families', (Kerslake, Lange & Bennie, 1997) and one example of an initiative is 'Operation Truant'. Truancy does not only concern the students, families, teachers and school communities, but also affects politicians, sociologists, psychologists, economists,

business community, police and the wider community that truants stem from, develop in and socialise with. Therefore, 'Operation Truancy' assembles Community groups in the Manawatu area, to work together, targeting truants and placing them back in school. This has become a necessity as the link between truancy and crime increases (Guardian, 23 / 06/ 2005). It has been suggested that, for some students, school is supposedly the safest place for them (Ibid).

However, these strategies do not address the root causes of truancy so because truancy initiatives have been developed from documented reports, surveys and research material, it alters how truancy is perceived and defined, which would therefore alter how it should be 'fixed'. These findings have been the basis for more government policies and initiatives to firstly address truancy at different levels, but mainly through programmes which target the parents to be made responsible or accountable for their child/ children's non-attendance, and secondly, through the development of District Truancy Services and truant officers to ensure children are 'rounded up' and placed back into the classroom. Due to the rise in truancy and the increase in the government allocation, it is evident that the initiatives are not working; however, the government continues to pour more money into them and into alternative education programmes. Since 1994, the government has allocated and increasingly increased funding for truancy programmes. It has climbed from \$0.5 million compared to \$8.6 million, which is the amount that has been allocated to spend over four years on existing and new initiatives to reduce the level of truancy (Ministry of Education, 2003, [www.minedu.govt.nz](http://www.minedu.govt.nz)); "*the aim is to reduce and prevent truancy, thus improving educational opportunities for students who would otherwise be at risk of social and economic disadvantage*" (Ibid, p. 3). What has also increased is the amount being spent on alternative educational programmes. In the 1999 Budget, the Government allocated \$21.7 million for 'Alternative Education' over three years from 1999/2000, and a further \$15.1 million over two years from 2000/2001.

*The purpose of this funding is to extend the provision of educational programmes for those aged 14 and 15 who are outside of and alienated from the education system. The ideal outcome for these students is to re-enter the education system in a mainstream school. Once eligible (ie. age 15 and exempted, or 16), other positive outcomes would include entering a TOP course or Polytech or finding a job and joining the workforce (Ibid, p. 7)*

McCormack (2005, p.3) provides a number of reasons why truancy must be addressed:

- Education matters to people
- Highly educated people are more productive
- Education gives choice
- Truancy is expensive
- There are significant links between education and better health, longer life expectancy, lower infant mortality and reduced crime; good health incidence are more likely amongst the better educated.

Generally, truancy is a costly concern and education is seen as the pathway to the future prosperity of the nation. Truants are not a viable commodity; *“every extra person without work skills probably represents an extra unemployment benefit- payable for life”* (McElrea, 1997). If truants cannot contribute to the economy in a positive way, truants need to be ‘fixed’. In theory, agencies all work together to provide care, support and supervision, but truants are not viewed as the responsibility of some agencies. According to the agencies, truancy would not be a problem if schools were *“more effective and responsive”* (Ibid, p. 12)

The Ministry of Education (2003) has identified a disproportionate representation of Māori young people among those ‘alienated’ from the education system. They are therefore keen to encourage Maori community groups already involved in working with such students to develop partnerships with schools., recommending that appropriate alternative educational programmes better meeting Maori students’ needs, can be provided through partnerships that link schools and Maori communities. They see this as a way that schools can develop their Treaty partnership (Ibid, p. 8). However, it still does not address the issue of truancy in New Zealand mainstream education system or support treaty partnership between the school and community.

For Māori, truancy needs to be addressed as the effects of little or no educational qualifications have far greater consequences. Māori are disproportionately represented in almost every crisis of education; underachievement, failure, retention rates (Smith, 1999).

- Crime rate statistics show that New Zealand has one of the highest imprisonment rates in the world, second only to the United States and that there has been a sharp increase in Māori offending, especially by young Māori (Te Puni Kokiri, 2000).
- Significant proportions of Māori students have also been absent through suspension from school for differing lengths of time and focussing on truancy issues will address retention and suspension concerns.

Although the statistical evidence shows that Māori feature often on the list of offending, suspensions and truancy, the evidence does not indicate other wider social issues that help to explain and interpret what the statistical data means, how it was gathered and what other circumstances were involved when analysing emerging themes, for example racist attitudes from people in power, such as teachers, enforcement agencies, justice system, Boards of Trustees and institutional racism in the way of school rules, regulations and policies. As Reid (1999) emphasises,

*Evidence shows that some groups within the community have well above average rates of excluded pupils; many of these pupils are also truants. One reason for this is the undoubted racism and racist attitudes which can be either endemic beneath the surface in schools (p. 124).*

A commonality in the young people resident at Christchurch prison is the early age that they have become disconnected from Primary School, and this raises an important question about the role that schools play in determining the paths taken by children (Lashlie, 2002, p.134). Police, counsellors and bureaucrats have drawn a correlational link between the statistics of offending and patterns of literacy and truancy at school, as ‘common factors’ to many offenders and these figures have increased over the years (Te Puni Kokiri, 2000).

Although there are economic benefits for the nation when students attend school, there are wider societal effects when they do not; teachers carry the burden of truants in their classrooms, families pay the cost of truancy through fines or imprisonment and students, the ones who are affected most by the compulsory schooling law, experience the long term effects through the loss of potential. It would be easier to think that the problem is too diverse and too complex for schools to deal with. However, McCormack (2005) emphasises that there is a moral mandate to search for solutions because, “*regardless of the diversity of*

*opinions, it is the child who is at the centre and it is the child who should be the focus”* (p. 42).

### **Definitions of Truancy**

Defining ‘truancy’ is problematic as it includes a wide range of behaviours that can fall under this category. McCormack (2003) suggests that it becomes evident that truancy is best defined as a range of behaviours, but these cannot be clearly defined as the lines of definition between the different behaviours are distorted. Truancy is an old term, deriving from the Gaelic term ‘truaghan’ meaning ‘Wretch’ (Green, 1980 in Carlen et al, 1992, p.49). It is used to explain behaviour, a relationship and a philosophy. Truancy describes, defines and justifies absenteeism from school, either with or without parent’s permission (Reid, 1985; Educational Review Office, 1997). It can be defined as student absences from school for officially unacceptable, unexcused (illegal) and unjustified reasons (Howard, Haynes & Atkinson, 1986; Hofkins, 1994; Zuckerman, 1984; in Guare & Cooper, 2003, p.7). However, excused and condoned absences also fall under that category (Carlen, Gleeson, & Wardhaugh, 1992). Some writers (Eaton & Houghton, 1974; Galloway, 1976; Carroll, 1974; Reid, 1985) prefer to avoid the term altogether because of the “*emotive connotations*” (Reid, 1985, p.6) and “*negative connotations and labelling*” (Jacka et al, 1997) commonly associated with it. Carlen et. al (1992) identify truancy as a term that is complicated to define due to the wide range of different models; however, as Cormack (2003) succinctly describes:

*Truancy is an explanatory fiction in that it seeks to define, in one word, a spectrum of different behaviours carried out by numerous individuals for a variety of reasons* (p.28).

It is important to differentiate between truancy and absenteeism, because, as Kerslake and Lange (1998) have identified, they imply different behaviours. From its original form, truancy or ‘wretchedness’ signals an association with anti-social behaviours such as lying, deception, destructiveness and fighting (Carlen et al, 1992). Although the concepts both imply the same behaviour, their differences become obvious when comparing absences between different types of learning institutions. The Ministry of Education (2005) carried

out a study looking at absence and truancy and compared the rates of absences and truancy among Māori between Kura Kaupapa, other Immersion schools, and Mainstream schools. The Ministry reiterates that the data must be *'treated with caution'* because of the low numbers of Immersion schools involved in the study. Their findings indicated that absence rates for Māori were higher at Kura Kaupapa Māori, yet lower in Mainstream schools; however truancy rates were lower at Kura Kaupapa Māori, and higher in Mainstream schools. Table 1 shows the results of the study:

**Table 1:** Absence and truancy of students in Kura Kaupapa Māori and Māori Immersion schools by school type.

	Total Māori roll <sup>c</sup>	Absence rate (%)	Justified absence rate (%)	Truancy rate (%)	Unjustified absence rate (%)	Intermittent unjustified absence rate (%)
Māori students in Primary Kura and other Immersion schools (N=38)	2,523	13.8	10.9	2.9	2.7	0.2
<b>Māori students in all other 1,810<sup>a</sup> primary schools</b>	<b>89,897</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>0.5</b>
Māori students in composite Kura and other Immersion schools (N=19)	1,987	13.4	10.5	2.9	2.7	0.2
<b>Māori students in all other 53<sup>b</sup> composite non-Immersion schools</b>	<b>4,513</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>0.9</b>

(Ministry of Education, 2005, p.19: Table 8).

<sup>a</sup> A total of 1,810 primary schools is obtained by subtracting 38 primary Kura and other Immersion schools from the total of 1,848 primary schools that responded to the 2004 survey.

<sup>b</sup> A total of 53 composite schools is obtained by subtracting 19 composite Kura and other Immersion schools from the total of 72 composite schools that responded to the 2004 survey.

<sup>c</sup> Source: Data Management Unit, Ministry of Education. This refers to the roll of Māori students as at July 2004

**Absenteeism** involves ‘excused and justified’<sup>3</sup> absences that have been condoned and authorised by parents and school, whereas truancy involves unjustified<sup>4</sup> and/ or intermittent<sup>5</sup> absences (Guare & Cooper 2003, p. 8; Kerslake & Lange, 1998, p. 6). Truancy was often perceived as a practice where parents were ignorant of their children’s whereabouts during school hours. However, parentally condoned absences have also been identified as truancy if the school is *not satisfied* with parents’ explanations and withholds authority for the child to be absent (Reid, 1999). The difference between what is legitimate as truant behaviour is reflected in the values and culture of the school. In terms of cultural difference, this can create problems for whanau who are put into a position where they have to justify removing students from school for a tangihanga<sup>6</sup>, for example, which could be for an hour, a day or a week.

**Teacher condoned truancy** is a classification that describes how teachers do not actively encourage pupils to be absent, but follow up procedures, attentiveness to reintegrating absent students into the class or consistency when reporting absences is not as thorough as it should be (Cormack, 2003). Willis (1977) also provides a further view of truancy, where teachers are seen to play an active role in condoning or even promoting truancy. He (Ibid) defines truancy as being a very “*imprecise- even meaningless- measure of rejection of school*” (p. 27) because it measures one aspect of what can be accurately described as “*informal student mobility*” (Ibid). Students develop the ability to move about school at will to a remarkable degree. At some schools, although it is not encouraged by staff, it is not discouraged either. Students virtually construct their own timetable throughout the day from what is offered by the school, which covers many diverse activities, for example, “*being free out of the class, being in the class and doing no work, being in the wrong class, roaming the corridors looking for excitement, being asleep in private*” (Willis, 1977, p.27). Too often, schools condone specific lesson absence<sup>7</sup> or post-registration truancy<sup>8</sup>; however, although it is a big temptation for teachers to ‘turn a blind eye’ to student absences, an

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<sup>3</sup> Absences are recorded in the register and marked as being satisfactorily explained by the school (Kerslake & Lange, 1998:6)

<sup>4</sup> Not explained or unsatisfactory explanation (Ibid)

<sup>5</sup> Absent for part of day without justification (Ibid)

<sup>6</sup> Protocols and practices in farewelling those who have passed away- a funeral.

<sup>7</sup> Where pupils miss particular lessons often taught by teachers they do not ‘respect’ (Reid, 1999:31)

<sup>8</sup> Pupils register as being present at school during form time, then skip school (Reid, 1999:31)

unexcused absence from school is a legal offence and these compulsory attendance laws, in Kaeser's words, "*make educators agents of the legal system. Laws give school personnel responsibility and authority to intervene when children are absent*" (Kaeser, 1991, in Guare & Cooper, 2003, p.8). 'In loco parentis' was a doctrine that required that those acting in the place of parents "*exercise a reasonable standard of care for the safety of children or young persons in their custody*" (Ministry of Education, 1997). This principle no longer applies to state and integrated schools; however, it may apply to school activities that are outside school time, for example, school camp. It may also still have limited application in private schools, but does apply in boarding hostels (Youthlaw Tinorangatiratanga Taitamariki, 2001).

Natriello (1994, in Guare & Cooper, 2003) argues that discouraging attendance among certain groups of students is intentional, because school is actually structured and organised to cause truancy among the poor and children of colour as a form of "*practice for life on the margins of unemployment, poverty, welfare and participation in society among the disenfranchised*" (Ibid, p.7). He views truancy as a 'symbolic proxy' for deeper social and economic problems and goes so far as to argue that "*schools are structured to discouraged attendance among certain groups of students and that absenteeism rates are a function of society's rate of employment*" (Ibid, p. 7).

Guare & Cooper (2003) offer a different way of framing truancy, where truancy is seen as a decision which is not made quickly or spontaneously or under peer pressure for acceptance; a decision to truant is not the result of a rebellious attitude and not a decision made recklessly by delinquents for 'fun'. Cooper (2002, in Thompson, 2005) argues that,

*When you view education as 'the law' and treat students as prisoners, you rob them of their natural desire to make their own decisions, which becomes a very important attribute later on in life.*

**Culturally motivated truancy** stems from a society that is increasingly multiethnic and multicultural. McCormack (2005) discusses the value that different cultures place on education, and rather than seeing it as a cultural difference, he asserts that cultural views have a 'status' value placed on them, in terms of high status/ low status; "*there is no doubt*

*that amongst some cultures the value placed upon education is less than in others"* (p. 30). However, this can be problematic, in terms of how 'education' is defined, and which aspects of education are given more value and importance. Historically, Māori displayed an interest in schooling, initially from their admiration of European technology and desire to gain access to those technological skills and knowledge (Simons, 1994). From a contemporary perspective, education was, and continues to be, very important. It was seen by Māori as a means of overcoming inequalities and addressing power imbalance in schools and ultimately, society. However, for Māori, there is also recognition that learning and education is located in many different contexts, for example Marae-based learning. The statement "*...the value placed upon education is less than in others"* could also be interpreted as meaning that the dominant group places a low status on education that is not framed from a western perspective and not delivered in a mainstream learning institution, for example, learning within a Marae context .

Truancy in Aotearoa/ New Zealand generally refers to students between the ages of six and sixteen years who are not in regular attendance or enrolled in school (Ministry of Education, 1999). Part 3, section 20 of the 1989 Education Act requires all children living in Aotearoa/ New Zealand to be enrolled at a registered school from their sixth to their sixteenth birthday (Education Review Office, 1997). Section 25 requires parents to enrol their children at school and make sure they attend regularly while Section 29 states that parents are liable to be fined if they refuse to enrol their children or if the children do not do the work in their correspondence courses (Ibid). **Parental condoned truancy** is supposedly the hardest to identify as students are absenting themselves from school with the parent's support (McCormack, 2005). Jacka, Sutherland, Peters & Smith (1997) argue that parental lack of support may be a result of the parent's own negative school experiences.

The Education Review Office (1997) acknowledges that not all students who are absent from school are truants, and overseas research shows evidence that although many pupils commit truancy, only certain pupils are labelled 'truants'(Jacka et al, 1997). Who has the power to define what counts as 'truant' is where the issue lies as it can create discrepancies based on difference. This will be discussed further.

Le Riche (1997) critiques the reasons behind a compulsory education system, arguing that this Western practice gives the impression that it is “*in the interests of the child's welfare*” (p. 3). Article 29 of the United Nations Convention reiterates the principle of education ‘for the good of the child’, by outlining the basis of compulsory education for every human being:

*Social justice also demands that compulsory education is necessary in order to compensate for apparent parental neglect. By means of education, the life chances of disadvantaged groups can be enhanced. Education also aims at developing the children's personality and talents, preparing them for active life as adults and fostering in them respect for basic human rights and respect for the child's own cultural and national values and those of others.*

This statement underpins the charters and policies that have guided New Zealand's education system, and still influences it today. This article inadvertently contributes to a schooling system that has not served Māori well.

### **Effects of Truancy**

Birman & Natriello (1978 in Guare & Cooper 2003) state that truancy can have serious effects on students and society, leading to the interruption and deterioration of learning, academic failure, school drop out and “*the loss of credentials which are necessary for future success*” (p. 31). Statistics also illustrate the link between attendance and academic success, criminal offending and socio-economic status. Although truancy may not be causative, truancy has been clearly established as being a stepping stone to crime (Jacka, Sutherland, Peters and Smith, 1997).

Historically, books, reports, research projects, and Government initiatives have been written and implemented to address truancy and to combat the ‘drop out’ rate of Māori. Library shelves are stacked with them, so it is evident that there is a concern and that truancy among Māori is not a ‘one off’ problem. The disparity between Māori and non-Māori in entry to school, retention rates and academic achievement in school is widening, rather than closing, and the pattern has become so commonplace that society has come to

accept that it is quite normal for Māori to fail (Te Puni Kokiri, 2000). Initiatives<sup>9</sup> have been introduced to address the 'Māori crisis'. However, the numbers of truants are still high for Māori, who 'resist' mainstream forms of education. Crime rate statistics also show a sharp increase in Māori offending, especially by young Māori. Police, counsellors and bureaucrats have drawn a correlational link between the statistics of offending and patterns of literacy and truancy at school, as 'common factors' for many offenders. The overall effect of truancy has meant that on average, Māori have lower levels of educational achievement than non-Māori and a higher drop out rate (Ibid, 2000). A correlation has also been identified between academic success and school attendance (Ministry of Education, 2001b). These figures have increased over the years, with significant proportions of Māori students not only truanting, but being suspended from school for differing lengths of time (Ibid). There is definitely a concern, and the implications are evident today when looking at numbers within the Youth Justice Centres and prisons nationwide.

In the Christchurch community alone, there is a clear link between truancy and youth crime and the police have netted almost 140 youths out of school in a week. A similar operation in Auckland last month showed more than 900 truants in one week (The Press, July, 2003). A Christchurch Police youth services manager said that statistics showed youth who were excluded from school for long periods of time were more likely to commit crime; *"It's the ones who are truant regularly because they don't succeed or fit in at school. They take an anti-social attitude towards society"*. However in Auckland, Police are saying that truancy and its associated problems are community issues; *"Not all truants are criminals, but most young criminals are truants"* (Superintendent Howard Broad, The Press, New Zealand 04 July, 2003).

Lashlie (2002) alludes to the fact that there is a tendency to focus blame on the families when a crime is committed, which is a view supported by many within the school community. An example is a comment made by a Principal during the school's prize-giving ceremony;

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<sup>9</sup>For example, Suspension Reduction Initiative; Alternative Educational programmes; Te Kauhua Māori Mainstream Pilot Project; Student Engagement Initiative (ERO, Māori Students in Mainstream Schools, June 2003)

*Schools are not, and never were, created to be social welfare institutions... every group with a cause wants schools to undertake the teaching or instruction of passing 'fads' ... the school curriculum is overcrowded now, without any more dumping of topics/ subjects by trendy, transitory politicians or do-gooders with a cause.... The future of our community and the responsibility for the upbringing of our young people rests firmly with families.... Schools are only accountable for the education of young people and not for solving New Zealand society's shortcomings (Keith Scott, Principal Rangitikei College. Manawatu Evening Standard, 19th February, 2002).*

Lashlie (2002) suggests that perhaps there needs to be more recognition of schools, as an influential component in the path taken by children. The majority of Māori children and their families continue to be educated within mainstream education, and Māori are failing and being failed in this context. The lack of educational attainment leads Maori into unemployment; becoming dependent on government benefits, or work in low-paid low-skilled jobs. This excludes or limits Maori opportunities to break the cycle of poverty, and keeps them entrenched in a pattern of dependency, crime and poor outcomes.

Education is cited as a key to transforming current social and economic status of Maori. However, it becomes problematic for Māori if the system where Māori are failing and being failed is the same system that defines, constructs and distributes an educational package that is defined by others.

### **Defining the Truant**

Le Riche (1995) states that truants are not a homogenous group because there is no typical truant; however, Reid (1999) asserts that there are certain personality types who are more likely to truant than others. They are frequently lonely and unhappy; they have few friends and are disruptive in class (although a minor tendency). Reid (1999) lists some personality characteristics that, in general, describe three different types of truants (see Table 2). He suggests that these categories can be "*especially helpful as we develop our knowledge of successful treatment strategies*" (Ibid, p.6).

Reid (1999) suggests that Table 2 should not be used as a checklist or even as a general guideline to identify or classify truants as there are other variables that have not been

considered; age, area, level of maturity, ethnic and cultural factors and gender. However, he emphasises that by refining and amending the categories, it will highlight different approaches towards ‘treatment’ for all the different groups and agencies that interact with truants (Ibid). These include teachers, education welfare officers, education psychologists, social workers, child care agencies and possibly the police.

**Table 2: Types of Truants**

Traditional	Psychological	Institutional
Isolates- invisible in class	Psychological related factors- illness, laziness, fear	Absence linked to school
Unsupportive home background	Unsupportive home background	Deprived or unsupportive background
Low self concept- shy but pleasant,	Emotional	High self esteem- popular
Introverted- feel inadequate in crowds	Physical complaints- handicap, tantrums	Extrovert- engages in confrontation, leader
Victim of social circumstances	May require specialist help- counselling to overcome fears	Disregard for authority Unconcerned about discipline measures
More likely to have been bullied	More likely to have been bullied	More likely to be a bully

(Reid, 1999:6)

Table 2 displays a dominant viewpoint of truants that locates the problem and defines the ‘victim’ of truancy from a pathological deficit. The classification of truants based on personality traits has changed over time, as maturation of adolescents plays a major role in determining truants. Traditional truants are clearly the most minimal type, whereas institutional truants make the largest group by far. This means the main reasons students are choosing not to go to school are increasingly school based (Reid, 1999, p.12).

International research shows that student characteristics are seen to be one factor that contributes to truancy. Truants are portrayed as not having personal and educational ambition, having poor academic performance, lacking self esteem (Megert, 1989 in Schwanen, 2004; Dalicandro, 1998 in Schwanen, 2004), having unmet mental health needs and being users and abusers of drugs and alcohol. Reid (1999, p.5) adds that truancy is symptomatic of pupils who are insecure, have low academic and general levels of self esteem and personality disorders; however, truancy “*breeds and develops in climates of*

*hostility, fear, negativity and low expectations*” (p. 29). This is supported by Guare & Cooper’s study (2003, p.11) where the emphasis is again focused on the student as the source of the problem when looking for causes of truancy. This situates the ‘blame’ within the truant and their home life, which absolves the education system from any responsibility when attempting to seek strategies for intervention. When truancy is framed within a deficit model, it implies a ‘remedial’ programme is put in place to ‘fix’ the deprived and disadvantaged student and their family.

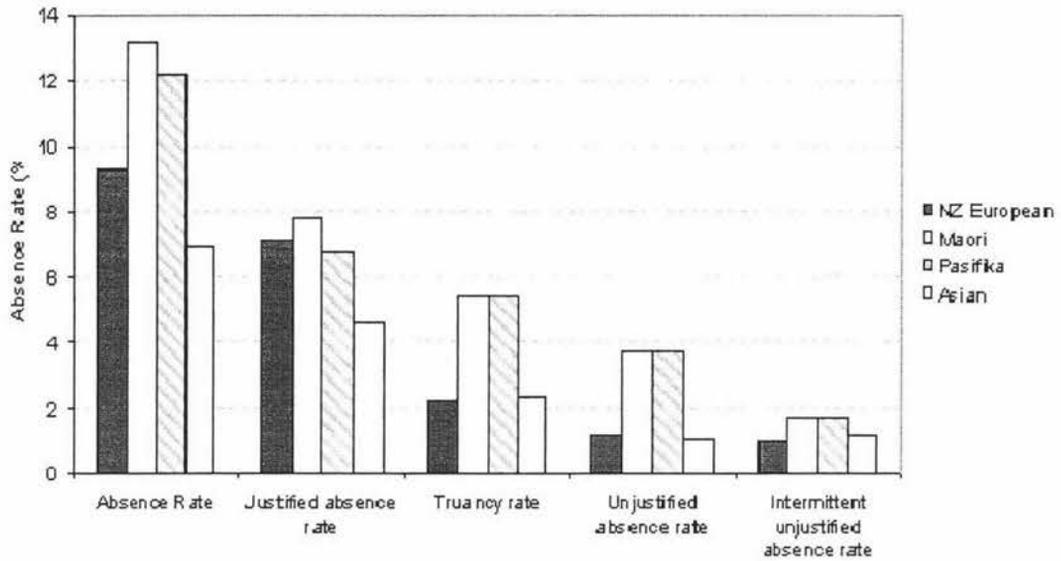
However, there are other opposing theories. Where one theory views truants as deviants with character flaws and personal deficits, who cannot fit into the regime of the school and fail, another theory refers to truants as thinking, rational decision makers and consumers of education, who make careful decisions about which classes to attend or skip, based on the importance of the lesson or course to their grades, their attitude towards the curriculum and pedagogy, the risk factors involved when skipping class and the consequences of being caught (Guare & Cooper, 2003, p.13). Cooper (Ibid) highlights the fact that students today are more sophisticated, more aware and more mature than past generations and have a clear sense of the choices and consequences of their decisions.

In September 2002, Cosgrave, Bishop & Bennie carried out a survey in New Zealand, for the Ministry of Education to identify student attendance and absence over a one week period. Their results indicate that a significant factor contributing to the profile of a truant is the ethnicity of the truant, with Māori students more likely, than New Zealand Pākehā or Asian students, to be ‘frequent truants’<sup>10</sup>. A further study, repeated by Ministry of Education in 2004 showed truancy among Pākehā, Māori and Pasifika students had increased.

Figure 2 shows a comparison between the ethnic groups, where Māori clearly dominate the figures of absenteeism and truancy (Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 17).

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<sup>10</sup> Those who were unjustifiably absent (but not on an intermittent basis) for three or more days during the week of the survey

**FIGURE 1: Absence and Ethnicity**

(Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 17)

**Table 3: Absence and ethnicity**

Ethnicity	Total roll <sup>c</sup>	Absence rate (%)	Justified absence rate (%) (N=227,416 <sup>b</sup> )	Truancy rate (%)	Unjustified absence rate (%) (N=63,745 <sup>b</sup> )	Intermittent unjustified absence rate (%) (N=40,362 <sup>b</sup> )
NZ European	350,957	9.3	7.1	2.2	1.2	1.0
Māori	132,977	13.2	7.8	5.4	3.7	1.7
Pasifika	55,188	12.2	6.8	5.4	3.7	1.7
Asian	46,633	6.9	4.6	2.3	1.1	1.2
Other	10,386	29.0	20.7	8.2	4.7	3.5
MFAT/FFP <sup>a</sup>	9,428	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>605,569</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>1.3</b>

(Ministry of Education, 2005, p.16: Table 6).

<sup>a</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade Scholarship (MFAT) and Foreign Fee-Paying (FFP) students

<sup>b</sup> Total number of absences over one week

<sup>c</sup> Source: Data Management Unit, Ministry of Education. This refers to the roll of students as at July 2004

Figure 1 and Table 3 shows the proportion of students surveyed on the school roll, who were either 'truants' or 'frequent truants', and shows that Māori students are more likely to be truants (Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 21). Research in New Zealand reports Māori children are the most represented ethnic group who experience behavioural and emotional difficulties (Burgess, 1992; Clarke, Smith & Pomare, 1996; Report of the Education and Science Committee, 1995; Galloway, 1985; Kelly, 1990; Macfarlane, 1995 in Macfarlane, 2004). Many of these students seem to become alienated within mainstream schooling and are often excluded from it (Macfarlane, 2004, p. 10).

Education Review Office (1997) argues that those who are most likely to be a truant are likely to have a lack of parental support and supervision, and may come from a disadvantaged background. However, Kronick & Hargis (1998) believe that most children who 'drop' out of school should be viewed as "*curriculum casualties rather than as casualties of personal, family, or financial problems*" (p. 5).

### Causes of truancy

Students raise a number of issues and concerns behind their reasons for truancy. A study carried out by Le Riche (1995, p. 26) highlighted some main points, which are listed in Table 4, in descending order of frequency.

**Table 4: Student's View of School/ Classroom** (Le Riche, 1995, p. 26. Table 3.5)

Reasons for Truancy	%
Dislike of teachers	66
Dislike of lessons	62
Home problems	46
Peer pressure	42
Bullying	38
Fear of name calling/ ridicule	36
Escapism- cannot cope/ psychological	35
Find work difficult	32
Homework not done	29
Bored	29
Like appearing 'tough', 'big'	22
Parental lack of interest	20
Dislike school	15
The thrill of it	14
Teacher does not like them	13
Pupils lack of interest, lazy	10
Lonely, no friends	8
Fear of exams	4

While this table indicates how students felt about general aspects that contribute to school culture, it is difficult to isolate or identify anything specific unless there is to be an analysis that focuses on one particular aspect. Table 4 does indicate that school related issues were a major contributing factor when choosing whether to go to school or not however, there are also factors that point towards the student's personality or characteristics that contribute to their own decision making skills.

Table 5 (Reid, 1999) presents students' perspectives of why they truant; however, these results were from a selected number of schools and the responses grouped together to form the categories shown.

**Table 5: Student's View of School/ Classroom (Reid, 1999, p. 88. Table 6.4)**

Reasons for truancy
The form group eg. no being with my friends
The curriculum e.g not being given homework, forced to do French and RE, 'disliking science'
School rules and regulations- being forced to wear uniform
Bullying- I need protection in school
Parent-school relationships- 'my father loathes Mr 'B', my parents hated school and never come here
Specific teachers- 'I use to like maths, but now I hate it because of Miss W'
Teachers and their teaching styles- not giving us homework, favouring brighter pupils
School punishments
Pastoral care- 'no one helps me or my mother with our problems'
Primary/ secondary transfer- I use to like the other school (primary) but hate this one- it is too big'
Literacy and numeracy- why do I have to do French and science when I can't read or write'
Early problems starting in Primary schools
School transfers- both internal and external

The causes of truancy are similar to Le Riche's findings (Table 4), that school related issues were a significant factor when students truanted, although Reid (Ibid) emphasises a correlation between low self concepts of truants and their behaviour in school that it is not just the social and educational backgrounds of truants which make them miss school, but also something from within- presumably temperamental and personality factors (p. 78). However, when reviewing student's perspectives on why they truant, personality and characteristic deficits did not seem to feature.

From the voices of rangatahi<sup>11</sup>, Jacka et. al (1997) situated schools as the largest contributing factor in their truanting. However other less dominant aspects were parental and peer influences. What they found particularly interesting was the self blame that rangatahi had for their failures or their inadequacies. Although they were able to identify external aspects to why they did not like school, they also blamed themselves for not going to school. For example:

*Schools are there for people who want to learn. If I really wanted to learn, if I really wanted an education I guess I could have sat there and gone along and done it [finished school] (p. 104).*

<sup>11</sup> Māori Young people, youth, teenagers

## The Role of the Parents

In 1998, a report by the Social Exclusion Unit noted that poor parental supervision and a lack of commitment to education are crucial factors behind truancy. Teachers and local education authorities also cited family values as regular causes of non-attendance (McCormack, 2005, p. 35). In the more public forum, truancy has been categorised as a societal problem rather than an educational one. As the media highlights, "*Truancy is a symptom of parenting, society and poverty. There's not a formula for it*" (Phil Hann, Co-ordinator for Truancy Prevention Service; Manawatu Standard, Thursday, October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2003). In 2003, Education Minister Trevor Mallard announced spending an extra \$8.5 million during the next four years on existing and new initiatives to "*keep children engaged in learning*" (The Dominion Post, 16/10/03). Some of the money will go towards reducing truancy, including making it "*easier and cheaper to prosecute the parents of truants*" (Ibid). The Marlborough Express (21/10/03) also reinforced the 'common' notion that truancy was an issue that could be 'fixed' by improving parenting skills or values. As Julie Saul, a College guidance counsellor argues, the best thing parents can do is "*make their children recognise the value of education and ensure they are attending school*" (The Marlborough Express, 21/10/03). It is assumed that parents don't care about their children's education and that truants do not value education. Based on Ministry of Education estimates, at least 60% of truants miss school because their parents let them, which reinforce the assumption that parents also condone school truancy (Ministry of Education, 1999). Smales (2002) found that parents were almost or equal to schools in creating barriers for students continuing their education: a major contribution to truancy.

Although there is evidence that some schools attempt to educate students and families on the advantages of education and regular attendance, as well as creating a family based, inclusive school culture, it does seem that the main focus and priority is getting students back to school ( Educational Review Office, 1997, p.11).

Truancy affects parents from a structural and personal level as the legal implication of their children not attending school is prosecution. Section 29 of the 1989 Education Act states that:

*Parents are liable to be fined if they refuse to enrol their children or if children enrolled in a registered school do not attend for four hours or more each day or if the children do not do the work of a correspondence course in which they are enrolled* (Educational Review Office, 1997).

This would imply that parents have a moral and legal duty to ensure that their children attend school, to improve the life chances of their children and “*prepare them for effective participation in society*” (Ministry of Education, 1993, p.5); if parents do not, they are seen to be negligent and irresponsible.

Le Riche (1995) suggests that some parents regard education as a low priority, based on their lack of it, and ability to survive regardless; however, the media is more open to positioning blame for truancy on “*weak parenting, lack of discipline and uncontrollable children*” (p.10). There are still major truancy operations around the Lower North Island to “*tackle truancy, with an initiative that will encourage schools to prosecute parents of students who skip class*” (Manawatu Evening Standard, July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2005). Truancy was considered by many as being symptomatic of underlying factors, such as:

*Parents/ caregivers lacking interest in the care of their children; lacking in management and parenting skills, failure to ‘discipline’ their children, parents on drugs, violence in the home, solo parents, poverty, unemployment, lower social (sic) economic status, negative peer influence, bullying, substance abuse, crime and health problems* (McAlpine, Burke, Walker & McIlroy (1998, p. 3).

Carlen et al (1992) assert that there is no strong evidence that discipline and punishment, by way of fines and prosecution, work effectively and if anything, they create a bigger problem for families, who are then identified as ‘criminals’ through the court system. The deficit approach raises concerns as it blames the student, their families, their community and their culture for their own social and educational dilemma and struggle. There is an assumption that parents are aware that their children are not in school and even so, they do not care about their children or value education enough to ensure they go to school. ‘Operation Truant’ is an example of an intervention strategy based on a deficit approach, that shows how a community can work together for a common cause, under the illusion that it is for ‘their own good’. Whanau members are provided with a ten week care

package which includes weekly contact with coach and may include counselling, mentoring, monitoring sessions and timeframes. Parents would also be asked to attend the Toolbox parenting programme (Guardian, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2005). The Toolbox parenting programme is an initiative that will teach parenting skills by giving them tools to deal with teenage issues and to act as a support group.

### **School Perspectives**

In 2003, the Scottish Council for Educational Research (SCER; published in *Absence from school: A study of its causes and effects in seven Local Education Authorities*) found that the reasons for truancy were challenged and that different causes for truancy were highlighted, depending on the group defining the concept. Students were more likely to blame school-based factors, for example bullying, problems with teachers, lessons, boredom and peer pressure (McCormack, 2005). Teachers, however, interpreted truancy from a different angle.

*Boredom is often shorthand for a lack of understanding and, in the context of truancy, may well say a lot about the truant's sense of self and their ability to cope (p. 42).*

Local education authorities and secondary teachers, on the other hand, were less likely to place so much blame on the parents (Ibid). Whilst they, too cited many excuses for truancy that blamed the student and their families for their own educational failures, they also felt that an inappropriate curriculum or low levels of ability left pupils feeling embarrassed by their inability to cope and this resulted in low self-esteem. In their analysis, it is this lack of self-esteem that ties together all the different causes and contributory factors. Pupils who fail to engage with the school process through home background and/or lack of ability are plunged into a spiral of failure from the very start; this almost inevitably results in one form of truancy or another. Pupil inability to relate to others or to cope with the work also leaves them feeling isolated and threatened. Their resulting absences leave them further behind, resented by other pupils who see them 'rewarded' with extra attention from the teachers, and resented by the teachers who experience an increase in workload and see the truant as an obstacle to achieving performance targets. Comments from teachers such as '[Absentee]

*drags down their marks... I try to help... that takes time and the other children are missing out', and from other children such as 'they just waste their... education and turn out to be thickos... I wouldn't want to be friends with them. There's no point if you don't see them'* bear this out and clearly indicate that any move to combat truancy must combat much wider social and emotional issues (McCormack 2005, p.42).

## **Bullying**

Peer bullying was found to be a recurring factor as to why young people refused to go school on a regular basis (Holme, 1989 in Carlen et al, 1992; Riki, 1997; Reid, 1999; McCormack, 2005; Taia, 2005). Bullying is said to include repeated attacks over time, *by one or more other students* who systematically abuse their power and for the most part, is motivated by the need for social status or the need to dominate. It is a social activity and is characterised by 'aggressive behaviour or intentional harm doing; repetitive, coercive acts over time without provocation; interpersonal relationships where the victim is powerless to resist and the bully derives status and gratification' (Canadian Public Health Association, 2003).

However, new research is suggesting that bullying from teachers is more common than parents are realising, but because teachers do not freely admit to bullying, there is very little written on this topic (Heins, 2003; Piekarska, retrieved 16/12/05). Three pilot surveys were conducted in New Zealand (2001-2003) with 412 university students and overall, 42.2% of students experienced abusive behaviours by teachers (Piekarska, retrieved 16/12/05).

*A bullying teacher is one who uses his or her power to punish, manipulate, or disparage a student beyond what would be a reasonable disciplinary procedure," says Stuart Twemlow, M.D., a bully researcher. The majority of bullies have had a lifetime of success in intimidating others* (Heins, 2003).

The dynamics that exist within the classroom walls are complex, and often students are ignored, made fun of and ridiculed by their teachers in front of the whole class. What then begins to unfold is a power struggle between the student and the teacher, where "*the feature show in the class becomes for the other students to see whether or not the teacher will successfully force a child into a submissive posture*" (Briggs & Hawkins, 1996 in <http://www.psparents.net/Teacher>). Briggs & Hawkins (1996) assert that regardless how

legitimate the teacher's motives may have been in initiating the reprimand, "*the price of the victory pales in comparison to the cost of a child's self-esteem*" (Ibid).

### Notions of Choice

In discussions about the behaviour, attitudes and practices that contribute to truancy, one recurring factor is the personal characteristics of the truants themselves; that they lack motivation, have difficulty forming relationships, are socially inept, are slow learners and are even lazy and rebellious. These factors, combined with poor parenting, low socio-economic backgrounds and a cultural mis-match between home and school set the learner up to be a truant (Jacka, Sutherland, Peters & Smith, 1997; Le Riche, 1995; Educational Review Office, 1997). It is also assumed that those who consciously choose not to go to school are not goal orientated, or delinquents, classified as 'at risk youth' with low self esteem and an inability to deal with peer pressure. Those who consciously *choose* not to go to school do so because of deficits within their own personal characteristics (Educational Review Office, 1997; Turner, 1974; Kerslake & Lange, 1998; Jacka, Sutherland, Peters & Smith, 1997). It is commonly assumed that they are also predominantly Māori (McAlpine, Burke, Walker & McIlroy, 1998). Chapple, Jefferies & Walker, (1997) also identify Māori and Pasifika students as the most likely group to use truancy as an alternative to compulsory schooling.

When a student truants, it is commonly assumed that the student chooses to do so. The notion of 'free will' is reiterated through the individual's power to determine their own lives through their own *choices*. What is not so blatant is that there are no 'real' choices because conditions in place steer a person to choose one alternative over another, and that some people have more agency than others in society to determine their lives, as they have more power. Cohen (1994 in Kidd 2002) offers an explanation to explain this concept further:

*Culture requires us to think, give us forms- metaphors, dogmas, names, 'facts'- to think with, but does not tell us what to think: that is the self's work. In other words, culture offers us a range of choices to choose from in a creative fashion. Culture*

*provides us with the possibilities for action, but we take responsibility- through our possession of agency- for what we actually do (p. 75).*

It is problematic that *possibilities for action* implies multiple options and agency for the participant, and does not address power issues that underpin those ‘possibilities’.

‘Possibilities’ are extremely limited and the “*freedom to choose is between a number of situations of inequality- not much freedom of choice at all*” (Cohen,1994, in Kidd, 2002, p. 75).

Another illusory nature that underpins the notion of choice is that ‘choice’ implies agency<sup>12</sup> in decision making, access to resources and information and power and control in outcome. Giddens (1993, in Kidd, 2002) looks further than ‘intentions’, when discussing ‘agency’. He defines ‘agency’ as having the capability to do things in the first place:

*The agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently (p. 75)*

From this definition, agency is about choice and the freedom to exercise that choice.

Bourdieu rejects the view that humans are free and that they are passive victims of culture (Kidd, 2002, p. 73). He links the idea of ‘freedom’ and ‘passive victims’ together through his idea of ‘habitus’<sup>13</sup>. This means that while we are never totally free, we do have choice even though we may not be aware of these choices or conscious that we will benefit from the choices we make. We have learned how to act- to behave- out of habit and experience and requiring no conscious thought to put into practice in everyday life. Culture provides us with that routine (Ibid, p. 73).

Sultana (1989) states that the dominant way of thinking among teachers is that “*individuals freely choose, unhampered, their present and future paths*” (p. 3), but teachers miss important everyday realities playing out in the classroom. An example is how students internalise messages about themselves, through classroom interaction and hidden curriculum, which therefore shapes and influences the students’ direction. Students see

<sup>12</sup> Notion of agency means ‘freedom to act’; having freewill (Kidd, 2002, p. 74).

<sup>13</sup> Embodiment of culture (Bourdieu)

themselves as making choices- sticking together for subject options for example- in order to resolve dilemmas that rise for them out of the organisation of schooling (Sultana, 1989).

As Gaskell (1984, in Sultana, 1989, p. 2) points out:

*Groups of students who consistently 'choose' second best, their assumption of responsibility for course choice is important because it leads them to accept responsibility for the restricted options they face later (p. 2).*

Adams, Clark, Codd, O'Neill, Openshaw & Waitere-Ang (2000) state that to be able to exercise choice, one needs to have knowledge of the be available options as well as the "capacity to regard those options as viable and realistic" (Ibid, p. 157). They (Ibid) highlight the justification of a compulsory form of schooling, based on this construct of choice:

*If the nature of that education itself is made to depend upon the exercise of choice, then the outcome, in an unequal society, is likely to favour those who already possess the knowledge, finances and capacity to make informed choices for themselves and their children.*

Schwanen (2004) adds that with choices such as alcohol, drugs and suicide, as immediate coping strategies, for some youth to maintain their positive self concepts, and to combat against a stressful and demanding school environment, truancy is perceived to be the only option.

## CHAPTER 3                    METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

### Introduction

The aim of this study is to identify reasons why Māori truant, through the lens of five Māori students. Therefore, this chapter examines the methodology and outlines the method design engaged in constructing narratives that articulate the voice of five students and their whanau. The design is presented in two sections:

Section one discusses the philosophical and theoretical principles that guide the methods undertaken.

Section two illustrates the research design, which addresses the procedures implemented. The methodological approach addresses truancy at three levels:

1. Interviewing to gather data on student perceptions
2. Interview transcribing and content analysis
3. Sorting and categorising interview content units.

The procedure for each of these levels will be described later in this chapter.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods are adopted as part of the research process. Although the focus of this research is to try and understand what is going on in particular spaces, it is also important to know whether the participants are experiencing the same things at the same frequency. As a qualitative research exercise, this study seeks to determine whether similar patterns occur within the individual stories. From a quantitative perspective, although a small number of participants were used, the research examines the frequency of variables and whether they are common occurrences.

Before commencing this research, there were a number of issues to consider as they might have affected the overall research procedure. The main issue was my eligibility to research a group that I did not '*belong*' to, and how that would affect the planning, initiating, analysis and outcome of this study.

Those concerns are addressed throughout this chapter.

## Ethical Considerations

This research raised some issues that I had not anticipated, however they contributed to the validity and reliability of this study more than they complicated it.

In seeking the approval from parents/ caregivers and the students themselves, I had not expected that parents may also have wanted to participate and contribute to this study. The objective of this study was to present narratives from the student's voice, but parents spoke candidly about the realities of truancy and effects it has had on them. While this study does not provide the space to delve into the parent's voice, I have included segments of their stories to support statements made by their children and to also give insight into parents' concerns.

An interview room was set aside for the 'formal' part of the interview process; however, I also drove each of the participants to their homes, and was invited to 'stay for a cuppa' by some of their whanau. They wanted to 'chat'. These 'chats' were impromptu, informal, unstructured conversations, between the participants, their whanau and me; they were very perceptive, emotive and a valuable source of experiences and data. Though the conversations were not taped, journal entries were made with whanau consent. An important aspect of Kaupapa Māori<sup>14</sup> is whanau which is significant when addressing issues and concerns that relate to all things Māori (Smith, 1997). Pere (1982) describes the notion of Whanau as "*practices that bond and strengthen the kinship ties of a Whanau*" (p. 26) which is fundamental to understanding how best to interact and communicate with Māori. Whanau embraces relationships, whether there are genealogical kin ties or not and as committed parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and other Whanau members,

*A co-operative and collective effort is able to be mounted and sustained with the Whanau management and support structures and to assist the 'group' in the collective education and nurturing of all the children (Smith, 1997, p. 441).*

The ethical issue of the participant revealing more than they had intended, to the point of risking harm from self exposure, is a recurring theme in qualitative research (Griffiths, 1998, p. 137). Griffiths argues that it is not just a matter of confidentiality and anonymity,

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<sup>14</sup> 'Inclusive' term to describe "a Māori way of thinking and doing things which feels culturally appropriate and which takes seriously our [Māori] aspirations- (Fieldnotes: Māori secondary school: 1990, in Smith, 1997)

but also of not putting people into positions where they reveal things they may not want to reveal about their identity (Ibid). Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct states that privacy and confidentiality of the participants must be respected and that participants must be informed about the consequences of divulging information or information that is obtained incidentally, that extends beyond the law or may cause grave harm. As stated in Section 12.C of the Code of Ethical Conduct,

*Where an assurance of confidentiality has been given as a condition for participating in the research, the researcher must be pro-active in protecting that confidentiality.*

My obligations towards assuring privacy and confidentiality were addressed through two methods: the information sheets given to the participants and through discussion. It was important that the participants understood the meaning and implication of 'information obtained incidentally' before they enter into this study, so the discussion session gave the participants the opportunity to ask questions and to clarify any of their concerns. At the end of this discussion, the participants were given the opportunity to withdraw from this study if they wanted to.

Another concern, which Yin (1994) identifies in case study research, is lack of discipline applied by the researcher, which leads to careless methods or a casual attitude to the methods approach. This has allowed inaccurate or vague evidence or biased views, to influence the direction of findings and conclusion. Lack of discipline can also create deliberate altering of case study material by demonstrating a particular point more effectively to serve the interests of the researcher (Ibid). Yin (1994) also outlines one problem that can arise from interviews in research, which is validity or authenticity of the research through an interviewing. Invalidity exposes itself through a number of forms:

- Research questions being asked may be culturally biased
- Research/ participant characteristics and attitudes
- Misinterpretation of the questions being asked
- Researcher bias, which can influence the response and direction of the findings and conclusion.

It is difficult to maintain cultural neutrality, even cultural objectivity, as people come laden with culture. Therefore all questions that are formulated are already culturally biased. The objective in research is to ensure that research questions do not bias the participants or influence how the participant will answer. From a broad sense, culture refers to a way of life and encompasses the ideas, attitudes, values, beliefs, behaviours, rituals and artefacts: in fact, everything that contributes to a person's identity (Kidd, 2002);

*Humans are both cultural beings and social beings: we are shaped by our culture, and we shape it and perpetuate it in our day to day lives when we interact with others (p. 11)*

To ensure validity, reliability and tighter methods control, Yin (1994) advises that research needs to be conducted as if there is always someone looking over your shoulder. A strategy applied in this study to address issues of cultural bias, researcher bias and research/research credibility, was the use of an 'expert panel' during the processing and analyses of the transcripts. The panel were a designated group of people who became my authenticated voice through their expertise as experienced teachers. Although they are not 'expert' in their knowledge and experience of truancy, they have experienced truancy issues through their own teaching practice. They are 'expert' at observing and describing children's behaviour through their vast experience of teaching and they are 'expert' in their own fields of educational study, both as academics and educators within a tertiary institution.

Researchers were sometimes expected to keep their opinions to themselves, as it tended to bias research however Griffiths (1998) highlights the point that research begins with an 'opinion', but that is not where it ends. Opinions form the basis of the questions that a researcher asks, and if they do not, then the research is already 'biased'. Griffith (ibid) also stresses that if your research does not surprise you it is also biased.

### **Whose Interests Does Research Serve?**

From a Western perspective, research has been defined as "the systematic investigation into, and study of, materials, sources etc., in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions. Bouma (1996) adds another definition, which views research as a disciplined

way of coming to know something about our world, and ourselves. He posits research as a test of knowledge, where knowledge is seen to be the ‘product and property of particular groups. Research can create change, confirm status quo beliefs and create discourse; however discourse becomes problematic as it can be accepted as truth, and this truth becomes reality. Smith (1999) gives an Indigenous perspective that aligns the term ‘research’ with the ‘F’ word. Due to the implications of research towards colonialism, imperialism and a continued denial of the validity of indigenous people’s claim to existence, land and territories, to the right of self-determination, to the survival of languages and forms of cultural knowledge and to natural resources and systems for living within our environments, she states that research is “*probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary*” (Smith, 1999, p.1). Research has different meanings and agendas, depending on who is writing, who they are writing for, who benefits from the research and whether the research maintains status quo or leads to change (Smith, 1999; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1990). The role of the researcher is therefore imperative in terms of perpetuating hegemonic beliefs or liberating from oppressive practices. The question of who benefits from research must underpin the process taken, as it becomes the fundamental principle that prevents harm to the participants and keeps the researcher grounded when faced with such questions as whose interests are being served, who benefits from the research, whether the research causes harm to the participants and the group they belong to. Durie (2000) maintains that Māori have not been served well by past research and that they have adopted a deficit view when attempting to find blame for Māori resistance to mainstream schooling. She (ibid) states that,

*The findings may well be logical products of the evidence presented but the narrow frameworks within which the research has been conducted may have actively prevented any conclusion that might be beneficial to Māori. It is not a question of avoiding the facts, or hiding from the issues, but conducting research that can address the centre as well as the incident i.e. accepting that the classroom does not exist in isolation and any interaction between the teacher and the student is itself a product of a range of variables many of which have been excluded from the equation (p. 21)*

Travers (2001) maintains that research has either to “*improve the economic position of the country, or contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of public and private sector institutions*” (p. 12).

This study attempts to understand motives behind truancy. The overall objective is to increase academic achievement among Māori; decrease the high rates of Māori youth imprisonment; and to contribute to an increase in the number of Māori in tertiary educational institutions and employment. This study therefore contributes to improving the economic position of a 'people', which will ultimately lead to "*efficiency and effectiveness of public and private sector institutions*" (Ibid) and therefore the state of the nation.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Skutnabb-Kangas (1990) critiques the role of the researcher and discusses whether the role of the researcher posits them as an implement for change, or just another cog in the wheel that maintains and perpetuates the status quo. She states that discourses, ideologies and concepts have been born out of research; although it may be questionable whether they are 'truth', that doesn't really seem to count. What counts is, "Who is asking the questions, who will benefit from the research and who is interpreting the data". Validation of research is based on how these questions are answered. There is no one 'method' of collecting data and evidence. Research methodologies describe diverse methods of investigation, which consider the procedures used to acquire knowledge and the context and philosophy of both the researcher and researched. The different methods serve the interests of particular groups and in doing so, invalidate knowledge and contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypical ideology from groups defined as 'other'; 'other' is anyone who is not 'self', where 'self' is the dominant group (Ibid). Smith (1999) argues that Indigenous peoples have been, in many ways, oppressed by theory and identifies research and theory as "*significant sites of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West, Indigenous peoples and other minority groups*" (p. 38). She (Ibid) reiterates that Indigenous languages, knowledge and cultures have been silenced, misrepresented, ridiculed or condemned in academic discourses in thousands of ways, which is why it is important to acknowledge and validate knowledge systems that have been deemed irrelevant and denigrated by the Western colonial system by decolonising the existing 'methods and systems' and reconstructing new ones. As researchers are perceived as the 'experts in the field', the role of the researcher is therefore imperative in producing new

discourse to eliminate a perceived 'truth' and this can only be done through research, through creating one's own truth and through a new discourse.

Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai and Richardson (2003) highlight the need to address issues of power and control that are fundamental to research by establishing relationships in a Māori context. This involves participatory research practices or "*participant driven research...which calls for researcher commitment and not simply for removing research bias*" (Ibid, p. 227). Participant driven research addresses issues of power that exist within a researcher/ participant relationship. The participant has agency in the research process, and becomes pro-active in becoming an 'agent of change'. The researcher is not viewed as the expert, as the relationship is reciprocal and collaborative, embracing the values of participation, partnership and protection: three principles of the Treaty of Waitangi (Durie in Kawharu, 1989). Bishop & Glynn (1999) refer to Whakawhanaungatanga (establishing relationships in a Māori context), as a major aspect of the participatory relationship as it is used symbolically to "*give voice to a culturally positioned means of collaboratively constructing research stories in a culturally conscious and connected manner*" (p. 121).

### **An Epistemological Approach**

To engage in discussion about research and teaching and the different methods that are commonly used or are effective in practice, there needs to be some understanding that there are differences in the way things are seen, how they are framed and why they are perceived or interpreted a certain way. It is difficult to define others' thoughts, ideas and knowledge, or even align them to a parallel that is deemed 'normal, natural, and neutral' because there should be no emphasis on 'which one is right', but rather an acceptance that the status quo is not the only way to see and define the world. A common problem faced by Indigenous and other minority groups is that their culture, society, knowledge, ways of seeing and way of life have been explained, framed and analysed through a Eurocentric Western model, and this has created a discourse of epistemology that is, and can be, applied to all humans, simply because they belong to the 'same' human 'race'.

However, highlighting differences in epistemology provides a perspective that helps us to understand that the ways knowledge is constructed, interpreted and transmitted is based on processes that, although different from the dominant Western view, are just as valid. Epistemology is a concept which, in philosophical terms, means the theory of knowledge, the study of knowledge or the theory of how it is that people come to know knowledge of the external world (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 1984). In its various forms, it is defined and characterised by ways of enquiring and transmitting knowledge so that there is no doubt about whose perception of reality and 'truth' it is. It encompasses questions and issues about knowledge: what it is, how we get it, how we recognise it, how it relates to truth and how it is entangled with power (Griffiths, 1998, p. 35). One definition refers to epistemology as the "methods of scientific procedure which lead to the acquisition of sociological knowledge" (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 1984, p.120). By this definition, epistemology infers that there are a number of 'methods', but there is an assumption that only one method counts, a 'one size fits all' model, which is legitimate only if it can be authenticated through a scientific procedure. Marglin & Marglin (1990, p.233) state that there is no single epistemology, but specific epistemologies which belong to distinct ways of knowing and ways of transmitting which highlight the different power relationships between those who share knowledge and between insiders and outsiders. Epistemology gives an account of what counts as knowledge and how people know what they know. It is a form of cultural representation that defines knowledge within a Western and Indigenous framework that encompasses and supports a variety of different approaches, including science, nature and culture. Code (1991) argues that reflection and reflective teaching are not sufficient methods for teachers to examine their ideas of teaching by themselves, because reflection privileges the epistemology of the 'individual'. The notion of the 'individual' is based around the 'individual' belonging to the dominant group, therefore adopting its model.

## Indigenous Research Methodology

### *Critical Theory/ Kaupapa Maori Theory*

Indigenous research provides a new perspective that unpacks, validates and legitimates new discourse. Indigenous research is not ‘an indigenous person who does research’. Neither is it ‘research on indigenous people’. Indigenous research is a process that leads to transformation and freedom, by adopting a critical theory and Indigenous-based approach that reveals factors that underpin a perspective of ‘truth’. Gibson (1986) discusses critical theory as a tool that examines common-sense assumptions, exposing how these assumptions serve to maintain those interests at the expense of others. A critical theorist attempts to ‘unpack the layers’ surrounding a problem, so as to expose what lies beneath the surface. For truancy among Māori, a critical theorist questions about classroom practices, student/ teacher relationships, pedagogy, curriculum and school structure in an attempt to find long term solutions that enable “*change towards better relationships, towards a more just and rational society... by identifying bias and distortions*” (Ibid, p.8) within the classroom, school system and also the education system. Critical theory, according to Gibson (1986), discloses the true interests of those in power, giving a deeper awareness of those interests (enlightenment), and allows you to gain the power to control your own life (emancipation) and tino rangatiratanga<sup>15</sup>

Kaupapa Māori theory also involves a complex arrangement of conscientisation, resistance and transformative praxis (Smith, 1997); however it does not sit under the umbrella of critical theory. McLeod (2002, p. 32) asserts “*that a blending of commonalities does not see either paradigm as ‘belonging’ to each other; each stands in its own right*”. Kaupapa Māori theory, which is an educational strategy evolved out of Māori communities, challenges the power and control that ‘others’ have held over research:

*It offers a critical perspective that addresses and challenges researchers, who seek to gain for their own benefits and their own agenda” (Bishop, 1995)<sup>16</sup>*

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<sup>15</sup> Principle of self-determination (Smith, 1997, p. 466)

<sup>16</sup> Addressing Issues of Self-Determination and Legitimation in Kaupapa Māori Research, in Webber, 1996.

Power relations are addressed through the use of Indigenous knowledge and concepts providing negotiation for relations; relationships with people and the environment are an integral part of the social and physical environment of Indigenous knowledge (Durie, 2003). As Sutherland (1994, in McLeod 2002) explains:

*By utilising, yet indigenising, theoretical approaches, Māori people are able to deconstruct notions which purport to enable and empower and thereby 'emancipate' Māori people by reconstructing theories which are more appropriate* (p. 32).

Critical theorists start at the same point, acknowledging that there is a “*linear progression of prerequisites*” (Smith, 1997, p. 164) from conscientisation to resistance then emancipation; unlike Kaupapa Māori theory and praxis, which “*holds the notion of conscientisation, resistance and praxis from a cyclic*” (p. 164) approach, which acknowledges that there is no specific start point; that Kaupapa Māori allows for human agency, which means that for a truant, for example, the student does not need to be conscientised to resist.

### ***Kanohi Ki te Kanohi***

Kanohi ki te kanohi<sup>17</sup> is a concept that is a cultural representation of Māori and Indigenous epistemology and an appropriate method, when researching and gathering data that involves Māori and other Indigenous communities. Historically for Māori, cultural traditions were passed orally and relationships were formed and consolidated on trust, so kanohi ki te kanohi was an important method for developing trust and sharing information between groups (McLeod, 2002). Kanohi ki te kanohi is still relevant today as it,

*conveys the sense that being seen by the people- showing your face, turning up at important cultural events- cements your membership within a community in an ongoing way and is part of how one's credibility is continually developed and maintained* (Bishop and Glynn, 1992 in Smith, 1999).

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<sup>17</sup> Face to face interaction

An implication of this method is that it maintains the ‘mana’<sup>18</sup> of the researcher, the participants, their whanau and the group to whom they whakapapa<sup>19</sup>. ‘Mana’ is a principle that is integral in Kaupapa Māori, because for Māori, it is the essence of all things-relationships included. It can be likened to respect, dignity or standing (Durie, 2000) which is why Kanohi ki te kanohi is used as opposed to questionnaires and other written forms of data gathering, for example, online surveys and telephone interviews. The acknowledgement and application of mana, as the underlying philosophy throughout and within the entire research process, “*seeks to modify the poor reputation that research has had in many Māori communities and actively search for positive advantages for Māori*” (Durie, 1998, p. 20).

### *Treaty of Waitangi*

Bishop (2003) reinforces Durie’s (in Kawharu, 1989) principles of the Treaty of Waitangi by reiterating the importance of the researcher’s commitment to the Treaty by endorsing the principles of protection, partnership and participation (Ibid);

- *Research would be conducted within partnership/ power-sharing modes of decision making (Article One),*
- *Māori cultural aspirations, preferences and practices will guide the research (Article Two) and,*
- *All participants should contribute to the betterment of Young Māori people in our schools. (Bishop, 2003, p.5)*

It is anticipated that the results of this study will contribute to the betterment of Māori students. Schools are more geared towards teaching the curriculum to the learner rather than teaching the learner the curriculum and this model facilitates a ‘one size fits all’ approach; those who do not ‘fit’ the model can be disadvantaged and excluded.

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<sup>18</sup> Pere (1982) states that ‘mana’ has multiple meanings; an attempt to translate from the Māori language will lose the essence of what ‘mana’ represents. It includes “psychic influence, control, prestige, power, vested and acquired authority and influence, being influential or binding over others” (p. 36).

<sup>19</sup> Genealogy (Ibid).

### *Insider/ Outsider Perspective*

A common theme in insider/ outsider arguments is “nothing about us, without us” as it is argued that only those who have experienced particular phenomenon can really understand what it is like, and therefore can represent those experiences from ‘those who know’ (Charlton, 1998). Razavi (1992) asserts that the insider researcher will “*be something of an outsider in his or her own community..... by virtue of being a researcher, one is rarely a complete insider anywhere...*” (p. 161).

Skutnabb-kangas (1990) argues that the way Indigenous groups have been defined and viewed has been a contentious issue, as worldviews have been based on research which, from an outsider’s perspective, has provided a deficiency- based framework that defines groups negatively- in terms of what they are not, do not have or do not represent. She (Ibid) adds that,

*Minorities are seen within a deficiency-based framework, where the problems they face are not analysed in terms of the racism, ethnocentrism and discriminatory practices of the majority society (i.e. in terms of the relation between the minority and the majority), but are seen as resulting from handicaps and deficiencies in the minority themselves (p. 84).*

Researchers can, knowingly or unintentionally, come to function as parts of the repressive state apparatus, and can ideologically contribute to the support of racist ideologies, structures and practices. Although there is a need for research, Skutnabb-Kangas (Ibid) argues that Indigenous people themselves need to do it, as research would then work in the interests of the community it serves. The process would be through a deficiency- oriented framework, which would define groups “*positively in terms of what they are, have or represent and their cultural and linguistic inheritance would be seen as assets in a mutual exchange relationship with the majority*” (p. 85). As Durie (2003) would argue, when one form of knowledge base is used to try and understand another, knowledge can be misinterpreted. Walker (1973, in Durie, 2000) also reiterates the importance of this issue: “*To put the matter succinctly it is difficult for those who are monocultural to analyse problems from a bicultural point of view*” (Ibid).

Smith (1999) argues that Indigenous peoples have been oppressed by theory in many ways and identifies research and theory as sites of struggle between the interests and epistemology of the West, Indigenous peoples and other minority groups. She (Ibid) asserts that Indigenous languages, knowledge and culture have been silenced, misrepresented, ridiculed or condemned in academic discourses in thousands of ways, which is why it is important to acknowledge and validate knowledge systems that have been deemed irrelevant and denigrated by the Western colonial system by decolonising the existing 'methods and systems' and reconstructing new ones. As Irwin (cited in Smith, 1999) urges,

*We don't need anyone else developing the tools which will help us to come to terms with who we are. We can and will do this work. Real power lies with those who design the tools- it always has. This power is ours (p. 38)*

The resulting appreciation of Indigenous epistemology can provide Western peoples with another view of knowledge production in diverse cultural sites while at the same time situating Western knowledge in its own cultural setting, instead of a universal setting. Making sense of other world views comes through making sense of your own first, and this process will lead to creating narratives that are more accurate in terms of presenting knowledge and epistemology that counter the existing negative stories that have been created, represented and transmitted as a tool for racism, subjugation, exploitation and oppression (Smith, 1999).

On the other hand, Minh-ha (1995, in Tawake, 2000) states that differences do not just exist between insiders and outsiders, as two separate entities, but also through the distinct concepts of 'insider'- 'outsider', when asked who the insiders or outsiders are? Using Pacific writers as an example, Tawake (1995 in Tawake, 2000) asserts that there is no clear-cut, simple answer because Pacific writers, like Witi Ihimaera and Albert Wendt, are not positioned inside a single fixed cultural community.

*In no real sense can any of these writers be considered simply an insider or native voice who speaks for Pacific Islanders, since the category Pacific Islander is not clear cut or capable of a definition that allows people to be assigned to one and only one category (Ibid, p. 161).*

Durie (1995, in Durie, Black, Christensen, Durie, Taiapa, Potaka & Fitzgerald) supports Minh-ha and Tawake's argument by addressing assumptions that position contemporary Māori within a cultural context, stating that Māori have a variety of cultural characteristics and live in a number of social and cultural realities. "*Māori society is not static- it is dynamic and interactive*" (p. 465).

Bridges (cited 2005: [www.dur.ac.uk/r.d.smith/Bridges.html](http://www.dur.ac.uk/r.d.smith/Bridges.html)) suggests that while individuals from within a community have access and understanding to their experiences, so too do 'outsiders' have an understanding: not the same understanding as an 'insider', but it is still an understanding. This highlights one of the arguments for an outsider perspective. This perspective creates a bank of information with a greater source of data, coming from different angles, based on different interpretations. Smith (1999) asserts that although insider and outsider need to both think critically about their processes, relationships and the quality of data analysis, one major difference between insider and outsider is the accountability process of the insider. An insider researcher "*has to live with the consequences of their processes on a day-to-day basis for ever more, and so do their families and community*" (p. 137). A critical perspective is a significant aspect of research, and it is in talking to each other, acknowledging 'voices' that 'sing to a different tune', participating in a language that is shared, constructing language and knowledge that does not harm participants, that helps to construct a framework that gives an understanding of our own situation in relation to others. This is a construction which involves understanding differences as well as similarities from both an insider and outsider perspective. Smith (1999) recommends that research by outsiders should not be done on their own and that there are ways of negotiating a relationship between the researcher/ researched groups. Māori/ Indigenous research requires certain protocols that underpin Māori/ Indigenous ways of knowing, seeing and thinking and Ngahuia Te Awakotuku, Graham Smith (in Smith, 1999) and Durie (1992) present frameworks that challenge a Western epistemological dominated research practice. They are based on a code of conduct and principles for conducting research in a Māori context. Although that does not give automatic entry or authority for outsiders to conduct research, it is a means that may give access or authority to 'proceed with caution'. This is also a mandate to insiders. Durie (1992) states that when an outsider engages in cross cultural research, there is a further

degree of accountability to ensure that *“their practices are not in conflict with the values of the societies they seek information from, and that they will be able to make a positive contribution to the participants in the area of study”* (p.7).

### ***A Guide to Research: Appropriate Cultural Frameworks***

I have drawn on a number of frameworks to guide the way I proceeded with this study. Each of them is relevant as they guide me, as a Samoan, in a culturally appropriate manner when researching students who are Māori.

Durie (1992) presents six principles for conducting research in a Māori context. These principles are theoretically based and underpins the practice of research. They identify concepts that should be taken into consideration for all research that include and involve Māori; for example, the research should contribute positively to Māori needs, aims and aspirations as defined by Māori.

Where possible, the terms of the research should be a jointly shared between the researcher and the group they are researching. These terms were discussed with the Youth Board Co-ordinator, the Youth Aid Officer and the students. Where possible, the parents also contributed to this study.

The third principle recognised Māori as partners of the research with the power of veto or withdrawal of information. During the interview, the participants knew that at any time, they could withdraw from the study or ask for the tape to be turned off. Meeting with the participants to validate the transcriptions was acknowledgement of the partner-sharing relationship. The findings of the research should be presented back to the participants.

Te Awkotuku (Ibid) presents seven ethical considerations as imperative to research, which are similar to Durie's (1992); however, these principles were more relevant to the application of practical strategies during the interview process:

- Aroha ki te tangata (respect for people)
- Kanohi kitea (the seen face; a requirement to present yourself 'face to face')
- Titiro, whakaronga.... Korero (Look, listen..... then speak)

- Manaaki kite tangata (Share and host people, be generous)
- Kia tupato (be cautious)
- Kaua e takahia te mana o te tangata (do not trample on the mana of the people)
- Do not flaunt your knowledge (p.120).

Graham Smith (Durie, 1992) has put four models in place that gives non-Indigenous researchers a culturally appropriate way of researching. These principles protect both the researcher and researched from harming themselves or others and although all relevant in this context, the most applicable was the ‘Tiaki’, Whangai and Empowering models. ‘Tiaki’ is a mentoring model where the researcher is guided and sponsored by authoritative Māori people. For this study, my mentoring has been under the guidance of my Supervisor and second Supervisor, who are both Māori as well as senior lecturers and mentors from Te Uru Maraurau, the Department of Māori and Multicultural Studies at the Massey University College of Education. They have advised and guided me throughout this study to ensure I stayed within the cultural boundaries and to offer advice to avoid cultural harm of Māori, and the researcher.

The Whangai model allows the researcher to be incorporated into the daily life of Māori, where they are able to maintain a life-long relationship which extends far beyond the realms of research.

The empowering outcomes model addresses the sorts of questions Māori want to answer and which have beneficial outcomes.

Smith (Ibid) states that these models go beyond the culturally sensitive and empathetic approach, but peel away the layers and delve deeper into asking the questions and addressing the issues which make a difference for Māori (p. 177).

### *Narrative as a Qualitative Approach*

Narrative is a tool for representation and Smith (1999, p. 35) states that representation is important as a concept, as it gives the impression of truth. The researcher is not a ‘cultural

blank slate', and this can be problematic because they do the writing, gather and interpret data, and select the frameworks for their research. From an insider/outsider perspective, where only one form of knowledge base is validated, the ways and means of interpreting and transmitting personal information have problems. The writer's cultural background, epistemological perspective, prior 'lived' experiences or lack of cultural experience in the arena they are working in may be affected by their own prejudices and bias that may act as obstacles that blind or limit the vision of the writer. Freire (1998, p.66) asserts that it is as *"immoral to have our voices silenced, our body interrupted, as to use the voice to falsify the truth, to lie, deceive, deform"*. Therefore, there is a need to present 'voices', or stories from diverse 'lived' experiences that acknowledge differences and validate 'other' forms of epistemological practices. Riessman (1993, p. 2) discusses how narratives are a format of personal experience, in that *"they are ubiquitous in everyday life... and that telling stories about past events seems to be a universal human activity"*. Alternatively, Donald Polkinghorne (1988, p.1) emphasises the strengths of 'narrative', as the *"primary form by which human experience is made meaningful"* and Bruner (1986, p.11) reiterates the importance of narrative as a *"distinctive way of ordering experience, of constructing reality"* which reinforces the need to alter perceptions, stereotypes and attitudes that have been shaped from narratives from those defined as 'other'. There is no one 'method' of eliciting 'stories'. Research methodologies describe diverse methods of investigations, which consider the procedures used to acquire knowledge the context and the philosophies of both the researcher and researched.

Narrative as a qualitative approach to validating knowledge bases runs the risk of being disqualified as an accepted methodology when it uses one body of knowledge to validate the criteria of another. Stories/ Narratives strip away the cosmetics and lay the lived experiences of people bare. These need to be validated so that power relationships can be unpacked to uncover inequalities and imbalances of power dynamics that have become a normalised process of classroom and societal culture. Research is about power and the struggle for power (Smith, L. NZARE, 30/11/03) and storytelling is used as a forum of power negotiation. A qualitative method allows researchers to:

*Get under the skin of a group or organisation to find out what really happens- the informal reality which can only be perceived from the inside and to view the case from inside out: to see it from the perspective of those involved (Gillham, 2000, p.11).*

### **Identity**

Durie et al (in Mackintosh, 2004, p. 83) states that a common issue among Māori was that not all individuals of Māori descent chose to identify themselves as Māori. In the information sheet that I sent out to the participants and their families, it clearly stated the intentions of my study and that to be able to participate in this study, you had to whakapapa<sup>20</sup> to Māori. The participants were Māori and although they referred to Māori through something that they could identify, like Clare's 'taonga'; "*They would tell me to remove my taonga. I wouldn't. My Nan gave it to me*"; or school Kapahaka; "*... I don't really understand it... we've stopped it 'cause the tutor's left*", their identity as Māori was acknowledged by just three of the participants; "*... but most of the girls were Māori chicks, and like, I'm Māori but they didn't see me as, you know*" (Kate) and Clare, "*I'm the only Māori left in my class again 'cause my mates left*". Mary acknowledged her Pakeha and 'Raro' links, and although she stated that Māori "*was not her thing... I'm Raro... I'll just learn Raro*" she did confirm that her maternal grandfather is Māori. Similar to Schwanen (2004), students were not asked specifically about their experiences as a Māori in a mainstream school; however, I did make links to things Māori in terms of their involvement in school Whanau and Kapahaka groups.

It is important to note that although this study focuses on Māori students who truant, the participants in this study were at different stages of Māori, in terms of speaking te reo Māori and understanding and practicing cultural protocols (tikanga) that pertain to Māori attitudes, values and beliefs. Grant and Sleeter (1986 in Jacka et al, 1997) highlights an issue that cautions against making assumptions based on the groups that people belong to or attach themselves to. They (ibid) state that, "*Subjects give meaning to their experiences in context which are shaped, in part, by the 'status group' to which they belong*" (p. 105). Jacka et al (1997) assert there is an assumption that being Māori makes a difference but that there is a need for rigorous research into this area as it is difficult to identify young Māori

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<sup>20</sup> Genealogical links and ties

as belonging to a 'status group', especially if their position within that group is read as "*having low or no status within the wider society*" (p. 105). This is an aspect of the politics of voice (Ibid).

## **Research Design:**

### ***Case Profile***

A series of case studies, which involved interviews based on a predetermined set of questions (see Appendix 5) was conducted, with the contributions of five participants: three females and two males. The participant profiles are presented as Appendix 6-10.

A case study asks 'what is going on'? Although case studies can test hypotheses, they can also adopt an 'exploratory' approach, which investigates and attempts to identify what creates a specific occurrence (Bouma, 2000, p.91). Adopting this type of approach (exploratory case study) gives a broader perspective, which will identify other relevant variables that could lead to further research. As Yin (1994) highlights,

*Exploratory case study should be preceded by statements about (a) what is to be explored, (b) the purpose of the exploration, and (c) the criteria by which the exploration will be judged successful* (p. 29).

When collecting data for research in a case study, it is important to start with an open mind, as assumptions can easily be formed through our own perceptions and an attitude of arrogance that we have insight into a particular arena, as an 'insider', and that we are privileged to understand 'inside information', but as Gillham (2000) reiterates, "*this very familiarity, can blind us and close our minds*" (p. 18).

Yin (1994) argues that if research questions focus mainly on 'what' questions, either of two possibilities arise. First, some 'what' questions are exploratory. For example, 'What motivates Māori students to truant?' This type of question is a justifiable rationale for conducting an exploratory study, by identifying from students other relevant variables,

which as Bouma (2000) suggests, can be used to formulate a hypothesis for further research. The second type of 'what' question is a form of 'how many' or 'how much'. Although 'how many' was a focus when analysing the frequency of content units, the main objective of this study was to explore the motivation of a phenomenon.

## **Focus of Research**

### ***Participant Selection***

This case study focuses on a small group of Māori students, drawn from a community-based initiative and identified by the Youth Board Coordinator of the programme as truanting and, through various reasons, truancy included, were no longer in the mainstream schooling system. In this study, truancy was investigated through the 'lens' of the students, not to find fault or to 'victim blame' but to identify factors that made the view beyond the school gates more appealing than the one behind them from their perspective. A letter of invitation was sent to the coordinator, with an attached information sheet, detailing the objectives, desires and format of this study in depth. It is important to acknowledge the Youth Board Coordinator and the significant role she played in this study. The students were under the supervision of the Youth Board Coordinator and were quite suspicious of outsiders, raising concerns that it might affect the quality of the responses. There was also a concern that the participants may not have wanted to participate unless a whanau<sup>21</sup> member was present, so the option of inviting a whanau member to the interview, was presented to them. Smith (1997) affirms the importance of whanau within a cultural and social structure that allows for, and supports Māori practices, values and thinking (p. 471). The Youth Board Coordinator was held in the highest regard by the community and very highly respected by the whanau members of those in her care. The rapport she had with the students was based on total trust, so it was suggested that I may want to spend some time with her and Youth Aid Officer in their community to meet potential participants and their whanau, but more importantly, so that whanau could meet me and participants could 'scope me out'. For whanau, this process proved very important, as it gave them the space to talk about their child's experiences of schooling and to voice their own concerns, but also to formulate their own 'feelings' about me and my intentions. This is revealed in the

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<sup>21</sup> The extended family structure (Smith, 1997:471); kinship

following statement by one of the parents, on reading the information sheet sent out to potential participants and their parent(s)/ caregivers:

*This piece of paper isn't worth wiping our arses on. It's all shit. Another Pākehā upstart coming to tell me how to raise my kids. Then we watched and waited to see who this Marilyn White was. A van pulls up, and we see Sue (not her real name- the Youth Board Co-ordinator), and another short Māori lady...She was dressed normal, like us. So we watched and waited.*

Again, this reiterates the importance of using methods that are culturally appropriate and culturally specific to the groups concerned, in this case, Kanohi kitea, (the seen face; a requirement to present yourself 'face to face').

### **Data Collection Approach**

The participants were selected by the Youth Board Coordinator, in conjunction with the Youth Aid Officer and letters of invitation, information sheets, stamped self addressed envelopes and consent forms were given to the participants and their Whanau (see Appendix 2 and 3). They were informed of the confidentiality surrounding their participation in this study to protect their anonymity. I was aware that fear of my disclosing their opinions or information may have affected their willingness to contribute. However, they were informed of the ethical considerations of confidentiality, and the consequences of contributing information that may cause grave harm or extended outside the boundaries of the law, on the information sheet and at the initial meeting with the potential participants. Participants signed confidentiality and consent forms as a requirement to be in the study (see Appendix 4).

The individual interviews took place at the office of the Youth Board Coordinator, as it was already a familiar context for the participants. Individual interviews were carried out to protect the confidentiality of the individual participants and to provide a safe space to talk about their experiences that were very personal, for some. The interview was semi-formal and unstructured however, I facilitated the process by asking questions that may have prompted the participants to share their 'stories' (see Appendix 5).

As I was unable to fully control the structure of the interview, I was prepared for unforeseen situations; however, as the conversation was informal and unstructured, I was also mindful that if the participants wanted to discuss other issues, that was well within the scope of this study. A significant aspect of research is forming positive relationships with the participants, and giving the participant the space to tell their story. Reinharz, (1988) argues that researchers, especially those who locate themselves as ‘outsiders’, can sometimes persuade themselves that their intentions and behaviour in research supports emancipatory values and practices, because their work ‘gives voice to’ neglected or disenfranchised sections of the community. She (Ibid) and Durie (1992) highlights points that are central to a genuine move towards empowering the ‘voice’:

- As the researcher, you have to be willing to hear what someone is saying, even when it violates your expectations or threatens your interests. In other words, “*if you want to tell it like it is, hear it like it is*” (Reinharz, 1988, p.15-16).
- It is important for the researcher to go to the participants; to hear their stories in their space or in a safe space that is neutral. This supports *kanohi kitea*. The power dynamics implicit in the context chosen by the researcher is actually disempowering so shared negotiation is very important (Durie, 1992).
- The researcher needs to be approachable and needs to create an environment that allows the participants to talk and the researcher listens. This supports ‘*titiro, whakarongo and korero*’ (Ibid).

Students raised issues that had a major affect on the decisions they made and their way of coping was to withdraw themselves from school. Sometimes when students cannot articulate their feelings, or they feel powerless to voice their concerns, they manifest their feelings through some physical demonstration, for example, truancy. A common assumption is that when a student truant, it is the student’s ‘choice’ to do so, but the illusion of choice is that it is underpinned by the notion of ‘free will’. However, hidden conditions are already in place, steering students towards making a particular selection. This study identifies some of those ‘conditions’ from the students’ perspective.

With the consent of the participants, the interviews were audio taped and an assistant transcribed the data. The transcriber also signed a confidentiality form.

Once the tapes were transcribed, I returned to the participants to validate the written material and confirm that it had been interpreted and portrayed in 'their own words'. Students were asked to share their experiences and revisiting those experiences through their stories had quite a poignant effect for some. Returning to the participants is an important aspect in research. It validates the reciprocal relationship between the researcher, the participant and their whanau and is one of the principles that must be adhered to when conducting research in a Māori context. Durie (1992) states that monitoring the research process ought to be shared equally by the researcher and the group providing the information. Mahitahi or cooperation is essential to ensure that balance is retained, where

*Māori should be regarded as partners in the research, with the power of veto or withdrawal of information, where actions or methodologies fall into conflict with those held by the Māori group (Ibid, p. 9).*

In case studies, triangular techniques are used more often and these techniques possibly have the most to offer (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p.239). Aldelman et al, in Cohen & Manion, (1994) stress the importance of triangulation when adopting a case study research. Case study needs to represent these differing and sometimes conflicting viewpoints fairly. The central tendency among all types of case study is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result (Schramm, 1971, in Yin, 1994, p. 12).

## **Reliability and Validity of the Data**

### ***Identification of Content Units (CU)***

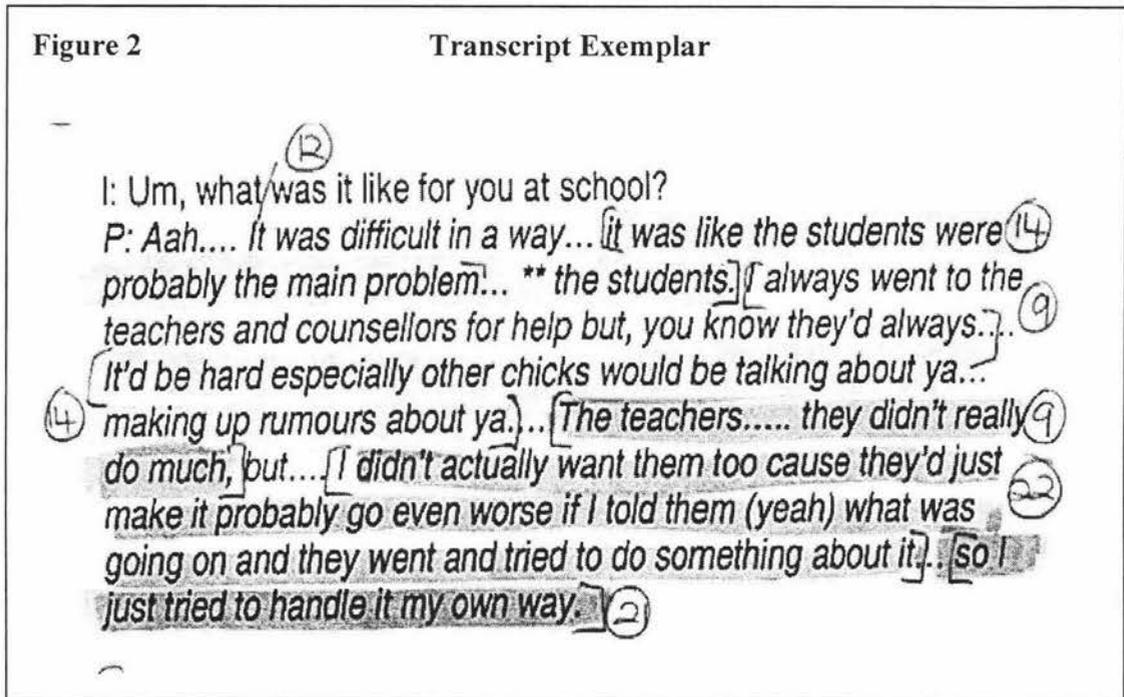
Content units<sup>22</sup> were created from the transcripts and each unit was based on statements that manifested the participants' reports and explanations of their conflict with teachers, school,

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<sup>22</sup> A statement entity characterised as having a whole intent and meaning in and of itself. This means that a content unit may be made up of a complete sentence or a part thereof. It may also be made up of more than one sentence ensuring that there is a whole intent and meaning contained within each content unit. The key part to a good content unit is a paraphrase (Niwa, 2005).

curriculum subjects, home and themselves. Each content unit/ statement was highlighted and cut into separate strips, to eliminate any possibility of linking the units to the participants; and to be sorted into groups. The groups were based on similarity so that each group's content units said the same things.

Examples of content units are shown out in Figure 4:



In the above transcript exemplar, there are seven (7) content units; they have each been allocated a code (number in brackets), which correlates to a variable. An example of a content unit is shown below:

*It was like the students were probably the main problem... the students (14).*

### *Similarity sorting of Content Units into Variable Cluster*

The content units were sorted so that all units similar in meaning were clustered together, and then allocated a code which correlated to a variable.<sup>23</sup> I did not want individual variable clusters that shared similar characteristics to another cluster. They needed to be clearly defined, so a final peer review from the Panel was sought to examine and confirm the overall groupings, to which they reviewed for redundancy and overlap.

### **Identification of Variables**

1. Eighteen (18) variables were drawn from the literature (Le Riche, 1995). See Table 4, Chapter 2, p. 26).
2. Eighty seven (87) variables from the interview transcripts.
3. The final list was from peer review by the Expert Panel.

This resulted in a total of:

1. Seven (7) categories
2. Thirty (30) variables or clusters of similar content units
3. Five hundred and ninety eight (598) content units.

The original list of variables (Table 4) was too generic for a detailed transcript analysis, so a revised list of variables was created by combining variables that were clearly identified as being similar in meaning. Each of the variables was supported by a content unit/ statement, with an even distribution of units across the each of the transcripts. Appendix 10 presents the list of variables and defining quotes from interview transcripts. Where an exemplar unit could not be found in the transcript, the variable was either changed or eliminated from the list. Again, panel advice was sought to examine and confirm the groupings. They reviewed for redundancy and overlap, and the result of their analysis was a 'codebook', a final list of

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<sup>23</sup> Sociological variables are normally social constructs that are constructed in such a way that they can be measured and used in numerical analysis (Abercrombie, 2000)

variables that I could use to analyse the transcripts. The final list of variables used to analyse the transcripts is presented as Appendix 11.

### **Similarity sorting of Variables into Categories**

Similar variables were also clustered. This process of categorising and sorting helped order and clarify the interview data in a way that made the findings very clear. Frequency of content units was also assessed to determine how often a content unit was stated and was it a common concern across all interviews (see Appendix 14 for frequency of content units for each variable for student interviews).

## CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

The findings from this study are presented in two parts:

1. Analyses of each of the Interview transcripts.
2. Portrait of one of the participants and narrative of their story.

The analyses will give overall impressions from the interviews, a summary of frequency and analysis of the content units and a summary of groupings and categorising.

### KEY

A more detailed definition of some of the key terms can be found in chapter three, under 'Reliability and Validity of the Data'.

#### Content Unit:

Statement(s) made by the participants, which have been drawn from the interview transcripts. Each unit has a theme, for example, "*I didn't like the way they treated me*". The theme in this content unit is teacher treatment.

#### Variable:

An overall grouping that each content unit/ statement can 'fit' into. The above content unit would fit under the variable, '**Did Not Like How Teacher Treated Student**'.

#### Category:

The main group that each variable 'fits' into. The above variable would fit under the category, '**Student Perception of Teacher Attitude**'.

#### Variable Cluster

Groups of similar variables under one main category.

The analyses were conducted in stages, according to methods and procedures described in Chapter three. This process of sorting into similar variables results in identifying seven (7) main categories of statements by the student truants. These seven categories are:

1. Student perception of self
2. Student perception of issues related to truancy.
3. Student perception of teacher attitude.
4. Student perception of school environment.
5. Student perception of relationships with peers.
6. Student perception of Whanau/ home relationships.
7. Student perception of lessons/ subjects.

Truancy Issues relates to specific truant behaviour and awareness of other issues that relate to truancy, for example the legal ramifications of truancy and consequences at school when caught truanting.

To identify the predominant variables and their content units, the cumulative percentage of content units across variables was calculated. This was done to ascertain and prioritise students' most pressing concerns to their least concerns. Appendix 12 shows the results of students' concerns, with Appendix 13 showing a cumulative percent of variable occurrences across all interviews.

### **Findings from Transcripts:**

As the number of students interviewed were low, so too were the percentages of the findings. The findings were not able to be generalised to the wider population because of the low numbers used, none the less, from the content analysis, there was enough of a clear trend to provide evidence to counter some of the current literature.

I interviewed a small group of students and from those interviews concluded that the most significant factor was the students' perception of themselves and their ability to discriminate situations and practices in their lives that were not of their making nor within their control. They spoke of their own educational abilities, the value of a 'good' education, issues related to truancy and whanau influence in the decisions they have made.

#### **1. Student Perception of Self:**

Forty two percent (42%) of the comments and concerns revealed students were very aware of issues relating to themselves; for example their learning needs, their aspirations, the value of a 'good' education and what they needed to do to acquire one.

There were 249 content units that related to this category. These content units are represented by the numbers in the brackets in each of the eight (8) variables:

<b>Variable</b>	<b>No. of Content Units</b>
Students took matters in their own hands	69
Student did not feel a sense of autonomy	23
Student self efficacy- how the students saw themselves, so could be high or low self efficacy	54
Student view of school and aspirations	43
Student bored with school/ lessons	4
Student concerned about retaliation/ effects	17
Student learning needs not met	17
Other factors affected attitude	22

'Took matters in their own hands' relates to decisions and actions that the students made in relation to the classroom environment, peer interaction, teacher/ student interaction and truancy, for example: "... *and she started to be real nice to me... 'cause I started arguing back to her*".

Self efficacy relates to how the students see themselves, especially in the classroom. They talk about their own worth and how they see themselves as a valued member of the classroom. An example is: "*In a way, I've gained more confidence to actually to go out there and not worry about... stuff*".

'Other factors' relates to factors that the students identified that were out of their control, yet not school or home based; for example, personal problems or the death of friends, other people; for example, "... *that's when my mate died, right... he was like a real good friend*".

Table 4.2 (see Appendix 14) indicates the frequency of content units across each of the interviews and the percentage for each individual content unit. An example of how a variable in Table 4.2 is analysed: 9% of the content units (quotes or statements) featured under the main category, 'Student Perception of Self', was found under the variable, 'Student self efficacy/ perception of how students saw themselves/ their worth'. That equated to sixty nine (69) specific content units, which were spread across the participants:

Participant	No. of Content Units
1	11
2	13
3	03
4	13
5	14

## **2. Student Perception of Issues Related to Truancy:**

Thirteen percent (13%) of the content units indicated that when it came to truancy issues, students were very perceptive when making the decision to either absent themselves from, or attend school.

There were seventy nine (79) content units under the main category, ‘Student perception of Truancy Issues’ and the four (4) variables;

Variable	No. of Content Units
Students view of truancy	17
Student views of school and aspirations	21
Students self awareness of truancy	17
Student antecedent	24

An example of a variable analysis is:

2.8 % of content units were found under the variable ‘Student views on truancy behaviour’ and below is a breakdown of how the content units were spread across each of the student participants:

Participant	No. of Content Units
1	02
2	07
3	03
4	03
5	02

‘Student antecedent’ referred to background information about truancy rather than the practice or theory of truancy. An example of a content unit in this category is: *“The first term, I think I was up to number six. The first three were for truancy”*.

The findings showed that when it came to planning whether to truant or not, decisions were impromptu, *“Sometimes I don’t even know what I’m thinking. I just don’t wanna be there and just go out”* but also pre-planned; *“It’s my own decision, but I find somebody that’s gonna do it, and then I go off with them”*; and when the students truanted, their days were both boring: *“... her mum would work all day til 6 o’clock and she use to sleep out in the bach and I use to sit there... yeah... sit there and wait and wait”* (Kate) and exciting *“... ”*

*we walked into town... just like hanged out in shops for awhile, just in case somebody went past that we knew... play station, music... heaps of stuff” (Sam).*

### **3. Student Perception of Teacher Attitude:**

A dominant theme that stood out was that students were very perceptive at discerning teacher attitudes. Teachers’ attitude and their behaviour towards the students was a key factor when deciding whether to go or not to go to school and when making a decision to absent themselves from particular subjects.

Thirteen percent (13%) of the content units indicated that students were very intuitive about the way teachers treated them and this was a dominant factor in the student’s decision to truant.

There were seventy eight (78) content units under the main category, ‘Student perception of Teacher Attitude’ and they were spread between four (4) variables;

<b>Variable</b>	<b>No. of Content Units</b>
Teacher not accepting of students	08
Teacher did not understand student	11
Students did not like teacher	12
Student did not like how teacher treated them	47

An example of a variable analysis is:

8.0 % of content units were found under the variable ‘Student did not like how teacher treated them’ and below is a breakdown of how the content units were spread across each of the student participants:

<b>Participant</b>	<b>No. of Content Units</b>
1	17
2	16
3	0
4	0
5	14

Although there were five different participants, the comments were similar in how they felt about the way teachers treated them. They each admitted their role in the teacher/ student dynamics however, they felt their actions were reactions: *“I know for a fact it is the teachers; and me you know... I’m an egg to them because I know how they feel about me, where they shouldn’t even be doing that; like judging me just from what they’ve heard”*

#### **4. School Perception of School Environment:**

The school environment featured in the top four of the list of student’s concerns. The student participants spoke about the school environment, and the relationship between home and school. The structure or rules was a concern for two of the five participants. They did not have a problem following some rules; their difficulty was in making sense of the relevance of the rules and trying to understand why they had to follow them.

Eleven percent (11%) of students’ concerns were about attitude towards the school environment and factors that affected their learning; for example, school structure, rules and regulations of school.

There were sixty seven (67) content units under the main category, ‘Student perception of School Environment’ and they were spread between four (4) variables;

<b>Variable</b>	<b>No. of Content Units</b>
Lack of support given from some staff members	11
Student negative towards school	11
Student positive towards school	20
Student found it hard to understand reason to conform to school structure	25

This final variable, ‘Hard to understand reason to conform to school structure’ related to rules and routines within the classroom and school environment that the students were expected to conform to but yet at times, did not conform. From the students’ perspective, it was not that they were disobedient or even openly defiant. For them, this variable was about trying to understand **why** they had to follow this particular rule. For example, Clare

accumulated points against her, which elevated her up the steps; *"It's like step one and then step two, step three until you get to step seven and then you get stood down, you get suspend- oh um, expelled"*. In a written report about her, she went up two step levels for 'incorrect gear'; she was put on step one for not having a ruler in social studies; step two was through the absence of a homework diary.

The 'positive and negative towards school' variables, related to school practices that affected the students feelings and attitudes about school: for example, *"I started to get awards and stuff"* and from the other end of the spectrum, *"I might have been in school all my life you know, but I haven't learnt nothing"*.

An example of a variable analysis is:

4.2 % of the content units were found under the variable 'Hard to understand reason to conform to school structure' and below is a breakdown of how the content units were spread across each of the student participants:

Participant	No. of Content Units
1	05
2	03
3	07
4	01
5	09

### **5. Relationship with Peers:**

The student participants identified that, although they would sometimes skip school with their peers, the student participants did not always seek peer input into the final decision to skip school. One out of the five participants identified her relationship with peers as the key factor for her reasons for not attending school.

Seven percent (7%) of the students concerns was about their relationships with their peers, and bullying was the main concern.

There were forty three (43) content units under the main category, 'Student Relationship with Peers' and they were spread between two (2) variables;

Variable	No. of Content Units
Student positively affected by other students	09
Student negatively affected by other students	34

An example of the variable analysis is:

1.5% of content units were found under the variable 'Students positively affected by other students'; 5.7% were under 'Students negatively affected by other students'. Below is a breakdown of how the content units were spread across each of the student participants for their contributions for both the variables:

**Positive Comments:**

Participant	No. of Content Units
1	01
2	0
3	05
4	01
5	02

**Negative Comments:**

Participant	No. of Content Units
1	02
2	02
3	03
4	19
5	18

## 6. Whanau/ Home Environment

Three out of the five student participants felt that the effects of truancy on their whanau had only a slight influence on their decision to attend or not to attend school. Positive Whanau influence was a dominant feature. This study identified that parents condoned their children's absences from school and fully supported the absences when they felt that the school environment was not 'safe' for their children. Parents felt the dilemma that they were legally bound to ensure their children attended school; however, the environment that they were mandated to place their children in was not culturally, spiritually or physically safe. Parents shared their concerns to teachers and Principal, about how they and their children were feeling about school. The responses from the Principal put into perspective the types of support the parents knew to expect (or not expect) from the schools. The action taken by parents to support their children's absences was based on those responses. From the student's perspective, six percent (6%) of the students' concerns were about how their Whanau were affected by truancy, especially in terms of how their Whanau were being treated because of truancy.

There were sixty seven (67) content units under the main category, 'Student relationship with parents/ home environment' and they were spread between four (4) variables:

Variable	No. of Content Units
Negative support from home/ Whanau	0
Positive support from home/ Whanau	25
Student perception of home/ school relationship	11
Parent supporting statements	17

The final variable included parent input.

An example of a variable analysis is:

4.2 % of content units were found under the variable 'Positive support from Whanau'.

Below is a breakdown of how the content units were spread across each of the student participants:

Participant	No. of Content Units
1	05
2	05
3	05
4	06
5	04

Parent supporting statements came from structured and unstructured interviews from three out of the five parents/ caregivers. The structured interviews were taped, transcribed and analysed; the other conversations were documented in a diary form. So it should be noted that the spread of content units evident in Table 4.2 is from the taped interview only.

### **7. Student Perception of Lessons/ Subjects**

Students confirmed that the subjects were one of the positive aspects of school, but that was dependent on which the teacher taught the subject. This was the least of the students concern, drawing five percent (5%) of content units overall. This equated to twenty nine (29) content units under the main category, 'Student perception of subjects/ lessons' and they were spread between four (4) variables;

Variable	No. of Content Units
Did not like classroom subject	09
Did not do school work	02
Did not understand school work	04
Liked some subjects	14

This category was interesting, as the students talked about their resistance to the subjects or lessons; however, they would still take work home, and either complete it or even do 'catch up' work: *"I use to follow up. I use to do my homework. I never use to do the work in class"*.

An example of the variable analysis is:

2.3 % of content units were found under the variable ‘Students liked classroom subjects’. Below is a breakdown of how the content units were spread across each of the student participants:

Participant	No. of Content Units
1	03
2	05
3	0
4	01
5	05

### Summary:

The findings of this study indicate that:

Over 42% of the comments and concerns revealed student’s awareness of self.

Students were very perceptive of their own identity and showed an awareness of who they are and where they see themselves in the future. When discussing the role of education in their future, they were confident stating that, although “*education will get you somewhere*”, it is not necessary to take you “*somewhere up there*”.

Over 50% of the comments and concerns revealed that students were very aware of issues related to truancy. These issues ranged from the consequences of being caught, impact on families, the classes/ teachers/ subjects that were ‘easy’ to miss, places to go or not go when truanting and how to avoid being caught. Although ‘Truancy Issues’ was second to ‘Student Perception of Self’, students’ awareness of self and teacher attitude were still important components of truancy issues.

A dominant theme that emerged was how very perceptive students were about teacher attitude towards them. Teachers’ behaviour towards the students was a contributing factor when deciding whether to attend or not attend school. Although the students were able to relate specific behaviours from the teachers towards them, they identified bullying as an issue between students only.

Peer influence was identified as a dominant factor when deciding whether to truant or not. However, bullying was a dominant theme for two out of the five participants. The plea from Kate and her mother about bullying to the staff and principal was ignored. The message implied that 'problems with girls are quite normal- all part of growing up'; this led to Kate's truancy. John also sought help from staff for bullying and again was left unheard. The lack of action led to John having to defend himself by fighting and eventually, truancy.

Whanau and home environment were not major considerations when deciding whether to miss school. Whanau were very supportive of their children's learning and they were wanted a working relationship with the schools and during conversations, the parents emphasised that they condoned truancy when school was not a safe place to send their children.

School subjects or lessons were not high in the list of 'causes for truancy'. Although participants found some lessons boring, they still enjoyed other subjects- especially the ones that were taught by a teacher they liked. When making a decision to absent themselves from particular subjects, it was based on who was teaching the subject.

## CHAPTER 5      DISCUSSION

*A humanising education is the path through which men and women can become conscious about their presence in the world. The way they act and think when they develop all of their capacities, taking into consideration their needs, but also the needs and aspirations of others (Freire, 1998, p.xiii)*

### **Introduction**

This chapter examines the findings of this study and discusses causes of truancy, reflecting back on the different perspectives portrayed in the literature and from the findings of this study. It revisits the variables gathered from the literature in chapter two, and then looks at similarities and differences between the data gathered from the interviews and data gathered for the literature review. The findings indicate seven variables that the students highlighted as issues for them when deciding whether or not to attend or absent themselves from school and they will be discussed in relation to other factors that arose from the findings. The seven main themes that were key factors to the participants concerns were student perception of:

1. Self.
2. Issues related to truancy.
3. Teacher attitude.
4. The school environment.
5. Relationships with peers.
6. Whanau/ home environment.
7. Lessons and subjects

Through discussion and analyses of the main themes, we critically examine educational practices and conditions in place that steer or influence people into making the types of 'choices' that they do. We look at the 'notion of choice', while examining causes of truancy and the other issues that arise from the data, to try and understand why one comes to the decision to withdraw from a process that would ultimately situate them in a position that would give them some autonomy over their own lives. One of the concerns for the

participants was that they did not feel a sense of autonomy in their own lives and that going to school was a place where “... *we gotta do this... we gotta do that*” and bullying was something only students did to each other or to their teachers. However, John had a different angle on bullying; “*I was wearing them right [trousers] but it was just that they were real baggy... next thing you know, Mr B comes up to me, pulls them up by my, pulls them up by my tits, and I’m like... nah... nah, don’t do that you old man*”.

The problem with truancy as a form of resistance that separates from schooling as a form of institutionalising is that the outcomes can be the same as attending school- a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure and underachievement.

In the past, the literature has tended to attribute causes of truancy to the “*individual failure and family malfunction*” (Herbert et al, 1998 in Bourke, Rigby & Burden, 2000, p. 19). In terms of personality, truants are seen as lazy pupils, with low self concept who lack self esteem and confidence. They are thought not to have any personal or educational ambition and not to have high aspirations for their future or future employment. This is also reiterated in Riki’s (1997) study, which identified student attitude towards school attendance and education as a key component to addressing truancy. He noted that “*truancy was a manifestation of many problems in their personal lives*” (p.99) and although school had an influence on truanting, Riki (Ibid) found that teachers and schools were not regarded as large contributors to causing truancy; teachers and schools were just referred to as “*part of the negative experiences of school*” (Ibid). Maiki Marks commented on the frustrations of being in mainstream education as a teacher, in the same system that Māori children are striving to succeed in. She likened it to the “*feeling that the education system has invited you to be a mourner at the tangihana of your culture, your language, yourself*” (Walker, 1990, p. 242).

Chapter two introduced past writers, both National and International, who have contributed their own studies in an attempt to find solutions to an ever increasing social behaviour. Locally, recent studies in Aotearoa have examined truancy from different perspective, mainly from the voice of truants, but framed within different contexts; for example, truancy from an ethnic perspective, especially Māori (Jacka, Sutherland, Peters & Smith, 1997); truancy through students, parents and staff involved in a community truancy initiative

programme operating in a lower socio-economic community (Riki, 1997); truancy from students enrolled in an alternative education provider (Schwanen, 2004); truancy within a large, urban, low decile school community (Taia, 2005) and truancy from the perspective of the Education Advisors who work for the Non-Enrolment Truancy Services Smales (2002). A universal perception was that education and truancy were about choices and a common assumption is that truants come from poor, single parent families, who do not care about, or see any value in, having an education. However, there may be other theories to why parents support their children's absences from school and this will be addressed to deconstruct stereotypical discourse that lays the blame of truancy at the feet of families.

The power to define what counts as *satisfactory*, in terms of valid reasons for absences, is ultimately left in the hands of school Principals. The validity of this term will be discussed, as compulsory education continues to place parents into a position where they are breaking the law. Schools define the validity of what is or is not justified, and this can create huge discrepancies, in terms of cultural difference. Who determines what counts as 'justifiable cause', and based on whose criteria? Jacka et al (1997) have identified that absences are more readily accepted by the school if the parents are from a higher socio-economic background.

The literature locates truancy within multiple contexts. Different writers contribute their own studies towards causes of truancy in order to develop intervention initiatives to address the growing concern. Foucault discusses forms of truth, where he acknowledges that there is no one "*single, identifiable, absolute truth*" (Kidd, 2002, p. 153) but different ways of thinking about, speaking about and knowing the 'truth'. It is interesting that Indigenous groups have maintained that very philosophy for many years (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1990) asking, however, who has the power to determine which 'truth' counts?

This chapter will elicit different 'truths' located in various contexts, but more specifically within mainstream educational providers, based on the literature and students' perceptions; and within the home environment, from the literature, students' and parents' perception. Although the literature provides many perspectives, the gap occurs when attempting to locate studies that are culturally defined and culturally specific. As Jacka et al (1997)

highlights in chapter two, research literature on truancy ignores the impact of cultural differences amongst truants (p. 63). Truancy is so complicated that there is no one sure method to 'fix' it. Truancy is relational and past work has applied a 'band-aid' approach, focusing on one area when looking for solutions: either the home environment, teacher pedagogy or the curriculum. As truancy has been identified as being multi-causal, manifesting multiple behaviours and involving multiple groups, it would therefore make sense to confront the problem with a multi-pronged approach, incorporating all voices in this relationship. This study resonates from voices who are Māori and who are truants.

As Smith (1997) reminds us, Māori are not a homogenous group; neither are truants (Le Riche, 1997). However, while very different, yet unique even in their similarities, the participants have a story to tell.

This chapter tells their story.

## Background

In Aotearoa, the effects of a Western education process on Māori has been the alienation of Māori from the dominant culture, but also from their own culture. Schooling was used as one of the most subtle yet potent techniques to establish a moral position, by 'saturating' the consciousness of colonised Māori, by the dominant group with the 'economic and social world of the new order' (Apple, 1982). Māori were, and continue to be, eager consumers of education, thereby sometimes unwittingly participating in the subversion of their own culture. Historically, children were being sent willingly to mission schools to access the knowledge that made the European culture so successful in the production of material wealth. However, what was 'hidden' in the schooling process was the power of schools to control access to different forms of knowledge. The Missionaries, who 'carried' the knowledge, kept their clients away from secular knowledge by confining the curriculum to the scriptures (Walker, 1996). Native schools became the arena of cultural conflict, with the method of teaching based on the 'monocultural banking concept of education'<sup>24</sup>, to 'best fit' people into *their place* in society. Schooling has not changed for Māori and this is indicated by statistics that show Māori disproportionately represented in terms of positive and negative educational outcomes. Schooling is a site for socialisation and conformity, and despite its attractive ideology of equal access to the world of 'market, capital and opportunity', schooling, for some groups, is still a site of resistance and struggle (ibid).

Monocultural pedagogies developed in Aotearoa have dominated classroom practice for much of the history of schooling and although these pedagogies have been successful for the dominant group, they are increasingly being tested and rejected by students, manifesting in a culture of silence, truancy and aggression (Shor & Freire, 1987). Freire (ibid) argues that schools do not educate, because their pedagogical practices domesticate people to accept their position in life and are not generally freed from the authority of others. This creates an environment where unequal power relations become part of the normal, everyday, common sense occurrences and beliefs; also supported by a collection of other agencies repeating the same myths and messages that teach social positioning in society.

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<sup>24</sup> This is a system that views the student as empty vessels and the educator as the vessel of all knowledge, whose major role is to 'fill the empty vessels with knowledge (Freire, 1996).

For Māori students, it can become difficult to see an alternative to the norm of this everyday hegemonic barrage, so they may resist through different means. Western discourse labels this form of resistance from a deficit approach. Where Māori students are labelled with behavioural problems including truancy, aggressiveness, laziness and rebellion, the deficit approach is being invoked (Shor & Freire, 1987). For a 'banking concept of education' to be successful, it needs 'passive vessels' (Ibid) to inspire passive consumption (Giddens, 1997). Passive consumption teaches, although not consciously, that there is a hierarchical status in society, and through the hidden curriculum, children learn that their role in life is "*to know their place and to sit still in it*" (Illich, 1973 in Giddens, 1997).

### **Our Stories: Student Perception of Self:**

Although participants found it complex to articulate their reasons for 'skipping' class and school, they had a story to tell that summarised their feelings about their school experiences. Each of the participants had personal predicaments in their lives, however, from the student's perspective, those issues did not seem to have a direct influence on their decision to 'skip' school, but they did have an influence on how they were being treated at school, which ultimately had an affect on their decisions to 'skip' school. The participants were very perceptive of their own self concepts, recognising they had something worth listening to:

*It's just up there [previous school] they pay attention to what you have to say, and you've got an opinion to what you want to say... down here, you're only allowed to say so much... the teachers ignore you (Clare).*

Although they learned socially appropriate behaviours, through school rules, regulations and routines, they were not 'passive vessels'. This is evident through their non-attendance of school and eventually, their withdrawal from the schooling system, either through voluntary means or through the action taken by school Boards of Trustees.

### *Self Esteem*

The participants spoke openly and confidently about their experiences, but they seemed reluctant, even embarrassed to talk about themselves, unless it was in comparison to someone else or something else. The ability to share what they liked or did not like, or to talk about events, activities and procedural routines was quite comfortable for them, but it was more difficult to share about themselves, especially acknowledging or celebrating their own personal achievements; they found it easier to talk about the things they were less successful at. For Māori, elevating themselves above others is not deemed culturally appropriate; it is said to be *whakahihi*<sup>25</sup>. Your good works and deeds are manifested through your actions, but it is through others that they are acknowledged; *Kaore te kumara e kōrero mo tōnā reka*<sup>26</sup>. *Whakama*<sup>27</sup>, *whakaiti*<sup>28</sup> and *whakanui*<sup>29</sup> are also very important concepts for Māori, as they all impact on how ‘self’ is portrayed or treated or how self impacts on others. In the classroom context, to single someone out, that is, *whakanui* or *whakaiti* them, can be a form of humiliation, which could cause *whakama* in the student. This can be interpreted as having low self esteem. Brash (1989, in Schwanen, 2004) defines self esteem as a “*self appraisal of one’s worth; the extent to which one feels significant, capable, successful and worthy*” and from my perspective, the participants did not have low self esteem. I ascertained them to have strong self esteem; very perceptive of how they should be treated, which is where their strength came from, to resist what did not ‘feel’ right. These participants did not need to be politically conscientised to understand unfairness and inequality. Smith’s (1997) kaupapa Māori theory acknowledges human agency in addressing problems, recognising that points of entry towards emancipation may firstly begin at the resistant stage. Conscientisation and understanding may not eventuate until years later, and that understanding may lead them back into the educational arena that will lead to emancipation.

<sup>25</sup> Arrogant, officious, opiniated, smug (Ryan, 1997)

<sup>26</sup> The kumera need not boast of its sweetness

<sup>27</sup> Shame, shyness, feeling ashamed (Williams, 2000, p. 161)

<sup>28</sup> Debase, diminish, despise (Ibid, p. 80), humiliate.

<sup>29</sup> Make or consider great or important (Ibid, p. 225)

### **Student Perception of Truancy Issues:**

Over fifty percent of the comments and concerns revealed that the participants were very aware of truancy issues, from how to prevent detection; the subjects that were easy to 'wag'; the classes they were 'invisible' in; how to prevent contact between home and school; to alibis such as forged notes and excuses lest they were caught. There were also some concerns about the effects of truancy on their families which suggest that participant's awareness of the legal ramification of truancy. Reasons for truanting varied and although they were able to isolate one specific motive, further discussion elicited other more significant reasons behind their decisions. They enjoyed the social aspects of school and some of the learning, but in general, school was not a positive experience.

Their first response when asked why they truanted was:

*Well usually when you finish school, you're tired when you get home to go out; so you just use to go out during the day (Sam).*

*I didn't like the way they [teachers] treated us... they treated me (Mary).*

*It was like the students were probably the main problem...yeah, the students (Kate).*

*Teachers don't really pay attention or listen... like some of them don't listen to you if you've got something to say, or when you need help with something (Clare).*

John spoke about the negative experiences of school life, and although he admits "*quite abit was my fault*", the teachers were the reasons why he did not want to go to school.

Their views affirm the importance of relationships for these young Māori students.

Whanau and whanaungatanga acknowledges relationships as an important value in group dynamics, and it is through shared experiences that the non-kin relationships become like kin (Mead, 2003). Pere (1982) views whanau as relationships that are bonded by kinship ties and Bishop (1996) describes whanau as a process of establishing relationships. Smith (1995 in Macfarlane, 2004) refers to whanau as the notion of a group sharing based on kinship, common locality and common interests. Whanau is about "*the heart of*

*relationships*” (Macfarlane, 2004, p. 65). A learning environment that creates a sense of belonging with trusting relationships acknowledges the importance of whanaungatanga and it is apparent that it did not exist for these students. Sam sought his own ‘whanau’ groups both within and out of the school boundaries, because underpinning his reason for attending and absenting himself was to “*hang out with his friends*”.

The students felt that even if they got bored when they truanted, it was still a better option than being in class. The participants did not plan what they were going to do whilst truant; they neither knew how they were going to spend their time, where they were going or what they would do. What they were certain of was that school did not want them there and school would not miss them. So although it seemed to me like they were ‘wandering aimlessly’, to the participants, there was purpose in their wandering.

Kate usually skipped school on her own, but she would still seek out the assistance of friends:

*Even though I had nothing better to do... one of my friends used to go to ‘Whero’<sup>30</sup> school. While she was at school we’d, cos her mum would work all day ‘til like six o’clock and she [friend] use to sleep out in the bach and I use to sit there... yeah... sit there and wait and wait.*

It was interesting how Mary defined truant behaviour. Usually, when she did not go to school, she would find things to do at home. She would refer to those times as, ‘*didn’t go to school*’. However, when Mary did not go to school and participated in ‘anti-social’ behaviour, she referred to those times as, ‘wagging’:

*I never wagged school; only twice. Yep; twice I can remember, and it was to go out with my mates and we went to a party in Palmie.*

### ***Concerns for Whanau***

Both the student and parent participants were concerned about the consequences of truancy on their whanau. The concern was that parents would be punished if students did not attend school. For Clare and Kate, the effects of truancy on their whanau were a major factor in

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<sup>30</sup> Not real name

their decision to attend school. Clare made the decision to return, but Kate was made to return by her mother. Clare's mother spoke about how the fine system would affect her:

*It would affect me badly. I think I would be more inclined to want to pick up, pull her out and we go home.*

For Clare, that was a major deterrent to truancy:

*That's one reason why I wanna keep going to school, so Mum doesn't have to keep paying the fine. I got told that if I keep doing that, they'll keep giving Mum a warning, and then after a warning, they'll start sending her a bill... so that's not an option. That's not a choice. It's either go to school or get a bill. So it's straight; school.*

There is no strong evidence that discipline and punishment (the fining of parents or cutting their benefit, for example) effectively works; if anything, it shifts the blame onto the families, who can sometimes be powerless to do anything about the problem, or in a position where they do not have the financial resources to help themselves. As Carlen, Gleeson & Wardhaugh (1992) argue, getting students back into school at all costs, via a system of fines, withdrawal of benefit and court orders, ignores broader questions about what they are getting sent back to, and why they truant in the first place.

### ***Education for Life***

John feels that truancy for the children in New Zealand is based on a choice that students have to contend with: "... *drugs or school*". He feels that the biggest influence on kids today is the music that young people are listening to:

*.. Modern music that sort of tells people like, I don't wanna go to school [sings], I don't wanna education, one day I will leave this world, waiting for the revelation.*

John states that kids are also listening to singers, who they look up to as role models, telling them; "*do this, do that, drugs are good*".

### **Student Perception of Teacher Attitude:**

A dominant theme that emerged from the student's responses was that they were very perceptive when discerning teacher attitudes. Teacher attitude and the way they behaved

towards the students was a major contributing factor when deciding whether to go or not to go to school and when making a decision to absent themselves from particular subjects. Although they referred to teachers as the prime reason for their absence in the classroom, teachers were the prime reason for their attendance as well:

*It wasn't because of students... or the schooling. It was because of the teacher itself. Every teacher I've had has known my history, of what I've done. And they've put me down.*

However, Mary had one teacher for two years, who she really liked. This teacher catered to Mary's learning needs, which gave Mary a sense of belonging in the class:

*She was primo aye. I was at school for two years straight, until we moved.*

Mary felt she was disadvantaged but still tried to persevere in school:

*Every teacher I've had has known my history, of what I've done and they've put me down.*

She felt that when she did ask for help, teachers would either ignore her, or just give her a quick and easy solution:

*Only give me the answer instead of taking me through the processing of doing everything.*

Clare felt that teachers would only listen to the "top brainy ones", and although she asserts quite clearly, "not that the teachers are racist or anything", when asked what would need to change for her to return back to school, she stated,

*Teachers to listen to what you have to say, and not because of your colour and who you are and stuff... and not because of that because... they should just listen to what you got to say, your opinions and everything.*

Because student bullying was Kate's main problem, Physical Education was the class that she would skip whenever she could:

*You're not sitting there in front of the teacher, you're in the changing rooms getting changed, and you know that's when heaps of shit use to happen.*

She began to "handle it" on her own because of two reasons; she was aware of the effects of 'telling' the teacher:

*They'd just make it probably go even worse if I told them what was going on and they went and tried to do something about it;*

When bullying first began and she went to the teachers for support:

*They didn't really do much. My group teacher, she kinda knew what was going on but all the other teachers use to just think I was some... little truant (Kate).*

Freire argued that there was no such thing as a 'neutral education' and that education was used as an instrument to domesticate, to facilitate the integration of the younger generation and the logic of the present system and about conformity to it (Giroux, 1983). He identified an important relationship between education and domination. Initially, John saw school as being about the control of wills, where he felt teachers were only there to tell you what to do:

*I don't really like Police, 'cause they're exactly like my old teachers and that... they got that authority to try and tell you what to do.*

He sometimes struggled with conforming to routines as he needed to know reasons why he had to do the things they asked of him. He tells the story of a teacher dropping something by him and then trying to get John to pick it up. He did not, hence he was sent out onto the step:

*You know, it's alright if I fix my own mistakes, but I'm not fixing no one else's mistakes.*

He has spent a lot of learning time, on the 'time out step'; he has been locked in a room:

*Put me in this room. It was completely black.*

The police have been called to remove him from the school premises:

*The cops came down, they threw me in the back of the paddy wagon; I was getting arrested. I was only eleven years old.*

John felt that school was about control, as He relates his story about a teacher who used to drop things near him, and then spend the next few minutes trying to get him to pick it up:

*You know, it's alright if I fix my own mistakes, but I'm not fixing no one else's mistakes*

He does however admit his role in the relationship:

*That's what I was saying- half of it was my, my personal problem and half of it was the school... when I was thirteen, I done... I went bad... I just couldn't cope, aye.*

### ***People Like Us***

Mary and Clare also acknowledge that although there were minor concerns, truancy began when they moved into the area. Mary states, *"I was at school for two years straight, until we moved, and ever since then..."*. Both participants have taken ownership of their own roles in the breakdown of teacher/ student relationships, but they both feel that their roles were in response to given situations as opposed to apparent behaviour problems:

*I'm an egg to them, because I know how they feel about me; where they shouldn't even be doing that... like judging me just from what they've heard (Mary);*

*I tend to argue... if they [teachers] don't help me, I'll just sit here and talk... and teachers, they say you need to listen so I do the opposite to what they say (Clare).*

Although Clare recognises her role, she also identifies that her actions are in response to how she is treated by teachers:

*When teachers listen, I do [like school], but when they don't, I don't [like school]... the teachers don't really pay attention or listen.*

Clare was the only Māori in her class *"cause my mates left"*. She found class difficult as she felt the teachers swung from ignoring her to picking on her:

*The teachers nut at you for having one thing wrong and then they keep picking on you... and 'cause I'm like the only Māori left in my class again... the teachers just ignore me... that's the only thing I don't like... it's not that the teachers are racist or anything but like they just don't wanna listen to you because you're not like one of the top brainy people that are going to listen.*

Alton-Lee, Nuthall & Patrick (1987) asserts that through the use of pronouns, people are able to express their cultural identity. It is a way of defining difference, but in doing so, it also forms allegiance to others in the group. Clare referred to the 'other' group of students in the classroom as "brainy". Mary and Kate adopted an 'us and them' approach, by justifying their own lack of achievements in school:

*People like me...I guess there's gonna be things out there for people like me and sometimes it's hard for people like us.*

The hypothesis that the 'not-like-us' mechanism is fundamental to domination and discrimination must be taken seriously in the context of pupil learning in curriculum. Part of this mechanism is the belief that we are normal and our lifestyle is so taken for granted that it is invisible (Ibid, p. 41).

### **Student Perception of School Environment:**

#### ***Education and Future Aspirations:***

While it is generally assumed that those who truant are not interested in the value of education and have no personal or educational ambition (Schwanen, 2004) it was not evident with the participants in this study. The participants defined what a 'good' education looked like to them, and their responses were mainly based on what they felt was relevant and necessary to survive 'out there'. They were asked to provide background on their schooling, and when asked if they enjoyed school, participants identified aspects of school culture that they did 'enjoy', but also what they did not enjoy. Although there were aspects of school they did enjoy, it was evident that school was not a positive experience. Participants were also asked to talk about their aspirations, where they see themselves in the future and whether they felt schools had a role in helping them to achieve their goals:

Clare saw school giving her a *'little bit of education and getting better at maths'* which is what she liked best about school; however she did recognise that school was only enjoyable when the teachers listen:

*Sort of like when the teachers listen I do but when they don't, I don't.*

She considered herself a 'good' student:

*Up North, they [school] were good...I was straight, real good and everything,* and she did not give her mother reason for concern:

*She was damn jolly good. She was a real miss goody two shoes.*

Her school 'up North' was very whanau based and whanau orientated so coming to a new school, in a semi-urban town, took some adjusting. Initially, Clare's whole motivation for going to school was *"to get an education"*, as her school experiences 'up North' had been positive. The motivation for Clare to stay in school was her vision of becoming a lawyer, so that every time her mother got in trouble, she would be in a position to help her. However, Clare did not have much confidence in her ability:

*I don't reckon I can make it... I don't think I'm good enough in the education and stuff 'cause I wasn't going to school for long.*

When asked if her belief was something she 'picked up' on, she stated,

*I just think that's something I think.*

Willis (1997) states that through the processes of schooling, students learn their place in society. 'Working class kids' learn that because they do not have the ability, motivation or effort; *"they are not clever enough to expect to get highly paid or high-status jobs in their future work lives* (Giddens, 1997, p. 418). This highlights the impact and success that meritocracy has had on the institutionalisation of students, when they buy into their own oppression, and come to believe in their own 'natural inferiority'. Freire would say that

this form of oppression denies humans the right to be ‘fully human’. He discusses a society where the culture of silence has created ‘passivity’ among students, ‘a passive tolerance of domination’ that can be interpreted as an angry silence (Shor & Freire, 1987).

Mary insists that school is not for everyone and is not the only option “*that will get you there*”:

*School is good... and like... look at all those lawyers and that. Those are from people who have been staying at school, and I guess that if that's where you wanna be, I guess that's what you gotta do... for people like me, I guess there is gonna be things out there for people like me.*

She felt that school needed to be supportive and you had to be ‘*awhied*<sup>31</sup>’ but because schools were not supportive for everyone, school wasn’t the only option that was going to get them there:

*Anyone could do what they wanted to do; they just had to do it... and I know that because I've done it.*

Mary’s learning and development has been through her job and that’s where she feels the starting place for many lies:

*Ever since I've found my job, I've just learned more and more... those are the starting places for people to change.*

Courses sometimes don’t work, but that starting place for some people may be in the workforce:

*Where I am? Those are the starting places for people to change... this is how I started; from my job.*

She admits that she may need an education “*in like, mathematics and those kind of ways*” but she is confident that she will succeed in life because she has the support of whanau:

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<sup>31</sup> Māori word meaning supported, nurtured with English suffix ‘ed’ added.

*My mum and all of them. They're all there to help me... It's hard for me, but I know I can do it... I've done it for myself, for so long. Look where I am now, if I keep doing it myself, I could end up... I can end up, up there.*

It is apparent that both Mary and Clare saw school as a stepping stone to academic achievement, but from their perspective, one had to want it first. They both identify school as a place for those who have higher aspirations; for example, wanting to be a lawyer; or for those wanting to achieve in what they perceive as the *education* type subjects, for example, mathematics. This highlights the perception that although school offers opportunities for all, success is based on individual motivation and aspiration. Education is there for the 'passive consumers', but only for those who want it. Jones (1991) argues that the idea that school offers a chance for all and that success is based on effort, motivation and ability underpins the thinking behind many:

*Schools failure is explained by teachers and students in terms of lack of individual ability or motivation, the myth of the schools offer of opportunity to all can remain unquestioned. By blaming themselves for their own inadequacies, participants can justifiably believe that the organisation and operation of the school and the job market are 'fair' (p.155).*

However, Mary does make the point that if it served the interest of the school, there would be more opportunities for the student because the school would help them. Mary loved sports and enjoyed the sports programme that her school offered. She was a member of the school rugby team, and felt that it was the only thing teachers valued about her:

*Ohhhh yeah. I miss school, but I also don't want to go back, for they never helped me. They helped me because they knew I was good at it [sports]... but everything else, they didn't care. All they wanted me to do is show their school out that I can do that... other than that, they didn't care.*

John and Sam saw school as a place where learning should be based around topics that are meaningful and relevant in life. John's enjoyment for learning lay in his love for cars:

*Well I've always had... like, something for cars, eh? Cars are my life. I'm doing a car at the moment.*

He felt that if students were learning topics that had meaning, it would motivate them to keep coming to school. John also saw the value of educating students on topics that would help them address social concerns. He saw this as education for saving lives:

*If they [teachers] could brainwash them [kids] not to touch drugs or alcohol or... and that teachers can be good, they're gonna notice that a lot of people aren't dropping out.*

He also felt it was the school's role to teach children about other social issues, for example, censorship:

*There are a lot of things that the schools aren't stopping kids from. They need to know these things, you know, like when they see R18... I don't recall a teacher showing me, 'You see this sign? It's R18.... I don't care whether it's a video or a CD, don't watch it, don't listen to it'; but the teachers don't do that.*

Sam also considered education to be very important, but only in some areas:

*Like teaching... people behind the desk in a restaurant; or something like that.*

He is currently on a course, where attendance is compulsory and he does not skip classes:

*It's cool there... you don't get pressured as much as at school.*

Sam does not regret leaving school as he was able to complete a YMCA course, doing "outdoor things", with people who treated him with respect and where "they help you get your drivers licenses and things like that", which he refers to as life skills. It was once perceived that a quiet classroom was a learning environment and a good teacher was one, who was able to maintain control over the students. Sam found the pressure "to do your work... to be quiet" quite restricting to his learning needs,

John's school experience is one he would rather forget: "I didn't like it... I hated it". As he talks about his negative experiences at school, they all involve his associations with teachers. When school did not work for him, he was put on correspondence and then a

Marae-based initiative: “It was kinda like to keep kids off the street course”. It was one he enjoyed because he was not amongst,

*a whole bunch of good people, a whole bunch of bad people, a whole bunch of real goody goods, whole bunch of like, dudes that hate people... and so like I felt I was sort of on the same level as them, and we got on pretty good; but that was better than anything I've done... it was better than school.*

John recognised relationships as an important part of school life, but found it difficult at times to form any kind of relationship because teachers were “arseholes”, and students were either “bullies or goody goodies”. It was having a sense of belonging and being “on the same level” as his peers that created an environment conducive to John’s learning. He found that environment among people on the Marae based programme. Bishop, Berryman & Richardson (2001) identifies relationships as a critical component in determining Māori achievement and states that educational well being for Māori is also affected by the teacher’s willingness to develop relationships with the students and their Whanau.

As an intrinsically motivated student, Kate enjoyed the subjects, the lessons and the teachers. She worked hard but found the pressure from her peers hard to cope with;

*I enjoyed my work; like I could sit down and do the work, without talking to anyone in your class most of the time... I sat back and just concentrated... they'd all be whispering behind me, or something.*

When asked if she thought education was important, Kate response was:

*Yeah, it really is, but... I don't know; just sometimes it's hard for people like us.*

Mary furthered her education, through correspondence, then a course:

*I want to learn. I still want to learn. Maybe one day I might want to go back to school; maybe to a different school.*

She found correspondence difficult:

*It's a lot of work... You have to try and figure out things without, you know, being able to ask the teacher.*

Mary wants to be a chef, and although she is too young for Universal College of Learning (UCOL), her tutor is preparing her for a course next year. The student participants spoke about the school environment, and the relationship between home and school. For two of the five participants, the structure or rules was a concern. They did not have a problem following some rules; their difficulty was in making sense of the relevance of the rules and trying to understand why they had to follow them.

Clare accumulated points against her, which elevated her up the steps:

*It's like step one and then step two, step three until you get to step seven and then you get stood down, you get suspend- oh um, expelled.*

In a written report about her, she went up two step levels for 'incorrect gear'; she was put on step one for not having a ruler in social studies; step two was through the absence of a homework diary.

Like Clare, problems began for Kate when she moved into the area, although "*it wasn't bad then*". Kate enjoyed learning, especially social studies, but she found it very difficult to be in the school environment. Kate felt supported by her group teacher because "*she kinda knew what was going on*", and from the counsellor and other students, but there was no other support at school:

*The teachers, they didn't really do much... the Principal was never there.*

The responsibility for Kate's truancy, even the complete withdrawal from school, lay with the counsellor, teachers and Principal. Kate's group teacher "*kinda knew what was going on*"; the Principal's blasé response to Kate's mother's concerns:

*Well you know, every girl here has problems with a few girls every once in a while.*

The counsellor, who also had insight into the seriousness of the bullying that Kate received. Kate's mother would call the school counsellor to enquire about Kate's low moods, and

*Sometimes she 'd [the counsellor] tell her.*

The Ministry of Education states that schools not only have a moral obligation to reduce bullying, their charter agreement between the school's trustees and the Ministry of education specifically directs the schools to "*provide a safe physical and emotional environment*" (NAG, no. 5). This was not so for Kate, so she made a decision to withdraw herself from school:

*I remember, it was the last week of term three... I just told Mum, that's it. I'm not going back. I'm not. I don't care. They can't force me to go back. You know I'm just gonna sit here... they can come and pick me up and drag me to go back there.*

Students and parents felt that there was no support in place for the student's transition back into the school environment. Different agencies went to great measures to get truants off the street and back into school. However, students and parents did not feel there was support for reintegration; if anything, they felt as if they were being punished for skipping class in the first place:

*They [teacher] treat me alright, but they find out that I've skipped, they start nutting at me like, "Well, you'll have to find out and catch up on your own work. Even when I'm sick or something, they say that.*

Clare's mother sought help for Clare:

*I asked for help to learn certain areas, and they said 'Oh yes. We can do that. We're good at this, blah, blah, blah... and three weeks later and I'm going 'ah'. Oh we'll try and get around to dah, dah, dah... see what happens... term 1, term 2 and here we're still struggling.*

The Principal summarised to these student's how their school career was going to take place:

*This is what we're going to do, and you just have to live by it.*

### Relationship with Peers:

The student participants identified that, although they would sometimes skip school with their peers, when making the decision to skip school, the student participants did not always seek peer input into the final decision.

Clare sometimes did not know what she was thinking; she just knew she didn't want to be at school. So when it came to taking time out from school, she just made a decision and did it;

*I find somebody that's gonna do it, and then I go off with them. Once one of my mates asked me to go for a walk with them and so I waggged the whole day off school and didn't go.*

Because Sam attended school to 'hang out with his mates', he skipped school for the same reasons; to hang out with mates. He never truanted on his own,

*It was abit boring then... I use to say to other people on the way to... but I use to ask... people use to ask me too as well... sometimes we would ring up on the phone the night before... and then go.*

Kate's decision to truant was based on negative affects from other students as it was the constant bullying that she was trying to separate herself from. She would skip school two to three times a week. She did not have any friends, "not friends I could call actual true trusted friends". So when she would skip school, it was usually on her own;

*I use to be at school half the day and not come then... or not come in the morning or not come after morning tea or something.*

Mary had no problems deciding where she did not want to be:

*I did wanna go to school but I didn't... I didn't feel right at school.*

So she would stay at home, and when her mates skipped school, they would visit Mary:

*Like my mates use to always come around, pick me up... let's go out.*

### Whanau/ Home Environment:

This study identified that parents not only condoned their children's absences from school, but they fully supported the absences when they felt that the school environment was not 'safe' for their children. Parents felt that they were legally bound to ensure their children attended school, however; the environment that they were mandated to place their children in was not culturally or physically safe. Parents shared their concerns with teachers and Principals, about how they and their children were feeling about school. The responses from the Principals put into perspective the types of support the parents knew to expect (or not expect) from the schools. The action taken by parents to support their children's absences was based on those responses.

Clare's mother spoke about the attitude of the Principal, not only towards Clare, but also to her:

*And then he finished talking to me, which was funny 'cause it was fast then he more or less 'balled' her up. So I 'balled' him up too... I don't talk to my kids like that, you know. He's not her father; why's he doing that? He's only a damn Principal. So I 'balled' him up.*

Clare's mother understood that at times, Clare had an 'attitude', but she felt it was justified:

*I didn't blame her... it's him [the Principal]; he's an instigator. I mean, what's she suppose to say back after all that, you know; he had no damn right. I didn't give a stuff who he was. He's got no respect for my baby, so why should I respect him.*

Kate's mother also had concerns for her daughter. She had rung the Principal and informed him of the bullying that Kate was receiving on a daily basis: "It was constant... constant". Initially, Kate's mum would make her go to school and was furious at her for "wagging"; "They [teachers] won't do much about it, so it's going back".

Kate's mother's attitude changed, however, when she saw how distressed Kate was and how determined she was about not going to school:

*Then I told her [mother] why and she kind've wanted me to stay home... she's kinda glad in a way that I left... in a way.*

When asked if she would approach the Principal herself, she said:

*He wasn't there. He never liked my older sister or my brother or my other sister. I never use to talk to him at all. I don't think I'd ever say hi to him, ever.*

Mary's mother described how Mary was 'had it' from the beginning. Mary had attended the same school as her sisters, so she was walking "in the shadows of her sister's reputation": Mary felt it too:

*I really felt unwanted like the teachers just already had a thing over me... and I couldn't get that away. I tried getting it out of their heads but it was like saying that's how they felt so that's what they wanted to do.*

Mary's parents were not angry with her absences from school, but they were disappointed:

*[The parents were] really disappointed in the way that me and the teachers didn't blend in together... my mum felt like she had to be my teacher. She had to show me everything.*

There were a number of incidents that John went through at school that confirmed to John's parents that school was not conducive to John's wellbeing; physically, emotionally, mentally and academically. John admits that there was always someone who wanted to beat him up, and initially he 'followed the rules':

*Yeah... they'd beat me up, I'd tell the teachers and nah"... "I wasn't a bully; I can tell you that much... I didn't walk around picking on people; it was always people that picked on me.*

The way teachers behaved towards John was also a concern but John took ownership of the role he played in the teacher/ student dynamics:

*It wasn't the school's fault. The school didn't make me go like that... I was in the frame of mind that I had nothing to lose".*

Some parents felt that teachers created truancy. Clare did not have the same educational problems 'up North' and her mother was considering moving again, to remove her child from this school. Clare's mum attributes the truancy problems to this particular school and feels that this school has 'turned' her into a truant:

*It's all here ... it's not up there. I said she was damn jolly good. She was a real miss goody two shoes all... right up to now.*

Clare also recognises that the problems she was experiencing only began for her when she moved from 'up North':

*Like up North, they were good. I was straight, real good and everything.*

Although overall there were attempts at trying to get the child back into school, there did not seem to be any commitment by the school to establish a relationship with these families. Parents were supportive of their children getting a 'good' education. However, they felt that the relationship between the home and school was non-existent unless the school contacted them for disciplinary reasons. Parents felt that this has had an effect on their children's learning environment.

Mary felt that the school didn't want her there: "*The teachers didn't even want me at school really*". When she was not at school, it was not followed up. There were no phone calls and no knocks at the door:

*No one ever came to come and get me. Nobody would contact Mum and Dad. I was in school suspension for a whole two weeks. My Mum and Dad didn't even know I was in there until I told them the second week ... and then my mum came down and said, 'Hey, we didn't know my daughter was in here; we didn't know why she was in here'.*

Mary's parents were not angry, just disappointed;

*Really disappointed in the way that me and the teachers didn't blend in together; mum felt like she had to be my teacher... she had to show me everything... Mum, she took it pretty easy, but Dad like... what he wanted... me, you know... to go right through school and that... I knew I had let him down.*

The school would notify Sam's parents once he reached number three on the 'Steps' programme, but other than that, there were no other forms of communication. However, Sam did reveal that "*Before you left, you unplug the phone; or do something*".

The teachers would ask him why he was absent, and he would just make up an excuse or bring a forged note:

*My mum kept following up... sometimes she would drive me to school, and she'd make sure that I was at school that day; like she would ask around.*

When Sam was stood down from school his parents were still supportive:

*They just kept thinking, there goes your education... not that I had one really. I used to listen to some of it.*

When asked if the teachers would ask to meet with his parents to discuss problems at school or concerns, Sam response was, "No".

Clare's mother felt quite inadequate after her meeting with the Principal. She felt there was no relationship between home and school:

*There's no damn connection between me and the school... they ring me up to say we have to have a meeting... I felt like it [the meeting] was all one sided... it was all for them and not for her [Clare]. It was like, 'Now you're the mother. Now you need to listen'.*

At their first meeting, there was no attempt to try and build a positive relationship: "He [School Principal] didn't even say, 'Hello. I'm so and so'... just got into her. Were you like this at your last school?" Clare's mother describes one form of support that they received from Clare's last school:

*We could all talk and that was really cool. Because I don't drive or anything, the school often rings. You know, we end up baking or things like that so it was really supportive. Here, they only ring you when you're in trouble.*

### **Student Perception of Lessons/ Subjects:**

Mary was very astute about her own learning needs, also recognising that there were others who shared the same learning style: "I just needed somebody that, for myself, one on one sort of thing. That's what some of us youth do need, is the one on one". Mary felt that the subjects did not help her because she wasn't interested in them;

*I was more interested in the sports and like, going away on trips and that. That's the sort of person I am, like I'm an outdoor education sort of person.*

She felt that in some areas, she was quite capable to complete work in class, but that also became a problem for her, as it left her with 'free time to fill':

*I'll be sitting in class and I'd finish all my work and then I'd start talking to my mates and that's where the teachers didn't like it. But there was nothing for me to do, sort of thing, because if I'd get up and walk around the class, it was "... sit down" ... or "... get out of my classroom.*

Mary had internalised messages from the teachers about her expectations of her;

*They would just like, "Mary do this", expecting me to do something, and when I'd ask for help, it was like they just ignored me; only give me the answers instead of taking me through the processing of doing everything.*

This reinforces the banking concept of education that views the teacher as the source of all knowledge and Mary as the empty passive vessel. For Mary, it denies her power over her own learning, as the fundamental aspects of learning and emphasis of classroom pedagogy becomes more about doing as you are told, following orders and following procedures.

Initially, John saw school as being about the control of wills, where he felt teachers were only there to tell you what to do: *"I don't really like Police, 'cause they're exactly like my old teachers and that... they got that authority to try and tell you what to do"*. He tells the story of a teacher dropping something by him and then trying to get John to pick it up. He did not, hence he was sent out onto the step; *"You know, it's alright if I fix my own mistakes, but I'm not fixing no one else's mistakes"*. He has spent a lot of learning time, on the 'time out step'; he has been locked in a room: *"... put me in this room. It was completely black"*; police have been called to remove him from the school premises: *"The cops came down, they threw me in the back of the paddy wagon; I was getting arrested. I was only eleven years old"*.

## SUMMARY

Teacher attitude towards the participants was a key finding when explaining causes of truancy from the student's perspective. Although students found it complex to articulate their reasons for 'skipping' class and school, they still had a story to tell. Students manifested their frustration of school practices and the structure of school by 'walking'. They felt they were not being heard, they were not being listened to, they were feeling alienated and excluded at school and there were times that they were invisible at school. This led to absenting themselves from school. Each of the participants had problems in their personal lives; however, they were not a major influence when deciding whether to attend or not attend school. From the students' perspective, their own personal and cultural 'knapsack' that they 'carry around' as part of their identity did not seem to have a direct influence on their decision to skip school; however, from the teachers' perspective, the students' and whanau's personal issues played a major role in determining and defining truancy (Riki, 1997; Smales, 2000).

The importance of school was reiterated in Mary's advice to others who truant or were thinking about it:

*Stay at school... like if you're gonna be an egg, don't go to school, but find something for you to do while you're not at school.*

As a fourteen year old, a maturity that her school experiences both in and out of school has helped her develop:

*It's hard to be a kid. It's really hard because sometimes people like, you go to one place and you've gotta be all mature and you go to another place and you know, it's all different... everywhere you go.*

When asked if they had advice for students contemplating truancy as an 'option':

*And for the kids, just try harder at school. Don't be a bum (Clare).*

*Just try not to let them get to ya; and until it does... (Kate).*

The participants were not sure at times, what they wanted, but they were adamant about what they did not want:

They did not want to be treated with disrespect:

*I reckon it would be primo if the teachers could just look at the student, know who they were and treated them the way they wanted to be treated, but in self respecting ways.*

They did not want to be ignored:

*I'm the only Māori left in my class again 'cause my mates left and then um... like the teachers just ignore me. That's the only thing I don't like.*

They did not want to be rejected:

*...like I was trying my hardest, but she [teacher] just wouldn't accept it. She just wouldn't accept it....*

They did not want to be judged:

*I know for a fact it is the teachers; and me you know... I'm an egg to them because I know how they feel about me, where they shouldn't even be doing that; like judging me just from what they've heard.*

They wanted to be heard:

*Teachers need to listen to what the children are saying, not what the teachers just have to say to the children; and for the teachers not just for the colour on the person. It's what they've got to actually get to know that person.*

## CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

The objective of this thesis was to examine a social behaviour to find out reasons as to why students choose to withdraw themselves from classes and school; specifically, students who are Māori. Kerslake and Lange (1998) identified ethnicity as a contributing factor to truancy, where schools with high numbers of Māori students are identified as having a high rate of unjustified absences, contributing to the high truancy rates.

Sometimes, ethnicity does not need to be overtly stated as there may be visible markers that indicate differences, and although identity, or acknowledgement of identity, was not openly stated in this study, being 'different' was assumed to be the norm. As the student participants and their parents shared their school experiences, they spoke of occurrences where they, parents as well, were made to feel different; from the time they enter into the school reception area by those at front office, right through to the Principal. Up until three of the families moved to the area, being Māori and being a regular school attendee, was the 'norm'. Truancy for four of these families began once starting at their new school.

Truancy is a problem and it is not solely specific to age, gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, ethnicity, culture, religion, spirituality, geographical location, socio-economic status, social class, social and learning needs and nationality. Truancy involves relationships and the dynamics within relationships that exist in a learning environment; for example, teacher/ student, student/ student, parents/ teacher, teacher/ Principal and student/ Whanau. There are many contributors to this social phenomenon, and the belief that truancy can be addressed through a 'one size fits all' approach can deny other major contributors their role in this relationship. Metiria Turei, the Green Party Education spokesperson in 2003, argued that "*Education in New Zealand must move on from the imperial 'one-size-fits-all' model to a modern 'different strokes for different folks' approach.*" (October, 14<sup>th</sup>, 2003 <http://www.greens.org.nz/searchdocs/PR6822.html>).

Truancy is still rising, and so too is the Government's allocation of funding to truancy initiatives. It has risen from \$0.5 million in 1994 to \$8.6 million in 2003/ 2004 which is evident that the initiatives, predominantly focused on 'fixing' the families, are not working. Many projects continue to find causes to truancy and although there are commonalities in

their findings, which ask schools to look also at their own role as educational providers, the initiatives that are still being introduced focus on deficit models that look to 'fixing' the students and their families as the solution. Some of those initiatives involve oppressive practices, for example penalising the families through fines, even the threat of prison sentences. Many alternative education institutions have been introduced to tackle those students who do not 'fit' into the mainstream system, but for a society and nation that so readily accuses the Government of racial segregation when schools of special character are introduced (for example, Kura Kaupapa Māori), there seems to be a silent tolerance of allowance and acceptance of this type of 'separation'.

Afrocentric theorist, Molefi Asante (in Carlson & Apple, 1998) asserts that the longer middle class, European-American students remain in mainstream schools, the more steeped they become in their own culture. Conversely, in Aotearoa, the longer Māori and students of other cultures stay in mainstream schools, the more separated they become from their own culture; *"for Māori students to feel good about themselves, they have to feel good about being Māori"* (Pacific Education Resources Trust, 1996, p. 13). Many teachers and prospective teachers have little or no experiences with Māori culture thus their perceptions may be misinformed. As one Indigenous student so astutely puts, *"White teachers should learn about us mob before they teach us"* (Bourke, Rigby & Burden, 2000, p.21).

*"Learn about us mob before they teach us"* (Ibid), is a genuine and valid statement. That is what the student voices were asking; learn about us so that we can learn about the worlds that we move and live in. Truancy is a complex issue and involves many 'voices'. However, not all voices are heard and that has been an issue in this study; whose voice counts?

### **Thesis Finding**

The literature provided a deficit picture of Māori, their background and their attitude towards education; that they did not value education and lacked a commitment to ensuring their children received regular, 'proper' education. Parents were criticised for their weak

parenting skills and for poor supervision of their children (McCormack, 2005). Truancy was considered by many as being symptomatic of underlying factors, such as:

*Parents/ caregivers lacking interest in the care of their children; lacking in management and parenting skills, failure to 'discipline' their children, parents on drugs, violence in the home, solo parents, poverty, unemployment, lower social (sic)economic status, negative peer influence, bullying, substance abuse, crime and health problems (McAlpine, Burke, Walker & McIlroy (1998, p. 3).*

Truants were also portrayed as having no personal and educational ambition, poor academic performance and lacking in self esteem (Megert, 1989 in Schwanen, 2004; Dalicandro, 1998 in Schwanen, 2004). They were described as having unmet mental health needs and being users and abusers of drugs and alcohol. Reid (1999, p.5) added that truancy was symptomatic of pupils who were insecure, had low academic and general levels of self esteem and personality disorders and who could not fit into the regime of school and fail.

However, the findings of this thesis showed that truancy is more complex than the literature suggests. This complexity becomes more evident when experiences across the cultural divide are taken into account. Thesis findings therefore contribute a valuable dimension to the current debate over truancy and in particular to factors attributable to Māori. The chapter summaries that follow show the extent to which Māori experiences differ from the current literature claim.

## **Summary**

Chapter one introduced the rationale for examining truancy through the lens of Māori and the discourses created about particular groups when only one view counts as valid. Carlen, Gleeson & Wardhaugh (1992) provided an analysis of the culture of truancy by situating it in the different contexts that needed to take responsibility for it. They discussed absences from school from an 'ownership' perspective, by asking questions like, "Who is responsible for them? How can their absences be interpreted?" They allude to the fact that getting children back into school 'at all costs' ignored broader questions of what they were being sent back to, and why they were opting out of school in the first place.

Chapter two theorised the way truancy had been constructed, exploring different definitions of truancy and truants and the implications of those meanings. It highlighted a gap in terms of a cultural and Indigenous perspective about a phenomenon that affects mainly those groups that are positioned outside the dominant group. Defining truancy was problematic as there were diverse descriptions and interpretations to explain this social practice. What was apparent was the power to define truancy, truants and satisfactory/ non-satisfactory excuses was sometimes left in the hands of a small group of people, or even with one person, to decide. A school has to make a judgement as to which explanations they will accept and these may vary from one school to another. It was evident from the literature that the number of students identified as truants was based on the schools' norm and definitions of what they classified as 'justified' or 'unjustified' and whether the school was *satisfied* with parents' explanations for absences and gave their authorisation for the child to be absent. What was not being questioned however was who has the power to define and determine what is or is not '*satisfactory or justified*', based on whose perspective and whose interests are being served by validating these definitions. In terms of cultural difference, this can create problems for whanau who are put into a position where they have to justify removing students from school for a tangihanga<sup>32</sup>, for example. For Māori, a tangihanga occurs over time, from the process of mourning and laying them to rest, which can take a number of days; to a Kawemate<sup>33</sup> ceremony, to the headstone unveiling ceremony, which can occur up to a year later. This may require a student to be absent from school for a number of days, but although the students are not in school, they are still immersed in a learning environment, gaining knowledge and skills that are also important for young Māori to exist in their world. For other groups, a funeral may require the student to be absent for a few hours or a day, for the same cultural practice. The culture, character and community of the school determine how schools view and perceive cultural differences.

The notion of 'choice' was discussed, to ascertain the options that the participants had to select from, to determine whether absenting themselves from school was really about making decisions that were free from other influences. Education is promoted as being fair

<sup>32</sup> Protocols and practices in farewelling those who have passed away.

<sup>33</sup> Obligation on Whanau to uplift and take the spirit/ memory of loved one to a significant 'somewhere else', for example to a tangi or back to a/ the marae (pers comm., Ogdén, 01/01/06).

and neutral, that it is cultureless and apolitical. However, vested interest groups have contributed to developing a curriculum package that is very political and very market-driven package and these participants were being excluded; they stated that the subjects were meaningless, boring, irrelevant and did not relate to their reality. The participants were also acknowledging their own agency in choosing whether they wanted to learn or not, but having a choice to learn did not mean having access to knowledge. Although there is the view that the education system is not achieving all that it was designed to do, which among other objectives is to develop the potential of every child and enhance life chances of the disadvantaged, others would say that the education system, as a tool for cultural reproduction (Bourdieu), social immobility and social inequalities (Althusser) is achieving the results it was designed for:

*The government's objective, broadly expressed, is that every person whatever his (sic) academic ability, whether he (sic) be rich or poor, whether he (sic) live in town and country, has a right, as a citizen, to a free education of the kind for which he (sic) is best fitted and to fullest extent of his (sic) powers (Coxon et al, 1994).*

Chapter three outlined the method design and approach taken. There were many things that needed to be considered before commencing this journey: some were expected; some occurred during the research process so turning to the literature and examining past studies, consulting colleagues and supervisors; being under the 'wing' of a writing consultant and the expert panel, helped to guide this study towards a direction where objectives were met, whilst ensuring the protection of the participants, their whanau and the group they belonged to. The use of qualitative and quantitative methods helped to ascertain the importance of the participants' concerns, to construct narratives that articulated their 'voice' and also to deconstruct assumptions that were formed through prejudicial stereotypes; more importantly, both methods gave the participants and their whanau the space to demonstrate the importance and value that they place on education, and to see that they were among others who had the same experiences. This study was guided by culturally appropriate frameworks that allowed me, as a Samoan, to research a different ethnic group in a culturally appropriate manner. The different principles theorised research practice by identifying concepts that should underpin all research including and involving Māori; most importantly that the research contributes positively to Māori needs, aims and aspirations as defined by Māori.

Chapter four presented the findings of the study. The findings were presented in two stages. Stage one detailed the findings, based on a quantitative method, which was used to sort, code and interpret the transcripts. This was to ensure validity and authenticity of the data and to determine commonalities across all participants. It was also a means of presenting how the students prioritised their concerns. Stage two presented a breakdown of the findings, which indicated that as complex as truancy is, and as diverse a group that truants are, there were common causes behind the participant's truanting. The overall dominant theme that emerged from the findings was the student's awareness and perception of their own self concept and their ability to analyse education as a tool for upward mobility, a tool that not all have access to; only for those who "want it", who are "brainy", who want to be "teachers or lawyers", who "are good at maths and that" and who are "not Māori". Foucault states that schooling is about creating docile minds, and Freire (in Shor & Freire, 1987) suggests that schooling is a major instrument for maintaining silence. Docility and silence lacks a thinking, critical quality (Ibid). The participants in this study were not silent observers in the classroom and although they could not name their feelings of oppression, they knew that it was not right and that nobody had the right to make them feel that way, whether it be other students or their teachers. Schools are presented, by the dominant group, as free of all ideological contestation, struggle and resistance, and any forms of 'struggle' in school are seen as behavioural struggle, on the part of the students. The reality of classrooms is rarely presented as socially constructed, historically determined and politically motivated; where asking 'what now' was more important than 'why', and competition overruled co-operation. The participants' spoke of their struggle at being immersed in a learning environment, where obedience and conformity were the order of the day. Although their options seemed limited, withdrawing from school gave them a sense of control over their own lives; because it was a decision made by them, for them. Truancy was a manifestation of their struggle.

Chapter five presented an interpretation and analysis of the findings, using the transcripts and the literature to help make sense of truancy and all those involved in it. The assumption is that New Zealand schools offer is an education that is 'best for all' and for their own good. There is also an assumption that many would argue that if education were optional, children would not learn what they need to know in order to be 'successful' or

personally fulfilled in the kind of society 'we' live in (McCormack, 2005). However, when 'we' becomes the benchmark for all groups to measure education from, who then, are 'we'? Each of the participants in this study talked about their own personal problems and whether they had impacted on their ability to make decisions; however, the participants did not feel that their personal problems influenced their decision to either attend or not attend school. They did, however, feel that their personal issues affected how the teacher behaved towards them, and that had a direct impact on their decision to absent themselves from school.

The participants seemed especially self-assured, with strong self esteem; extremely aware of unfairness and very perceptive of how the school environment and culture made them feel. They spoke confidently about their school experiences, yet with a tinge of disappointment and resentment that they had been denied an education. They felt that they could not find space in the classroom to 'fit', as none was made for them. Education was important to them, but not the 'sort' that was being offered in school, as it was irrelevant and meaningless in the world that they moved in. Participant's perceived education exclusive to select groups.

Whanau also felt a sense of frustration at trying to abide by the law, by sending their children to school. They felt their hands were tied because the consequences for not ensuring their children 'receive proper' education was being fined, having their benefit withdrawn (the assumption is that truant's whanau are unemployed) or imprisonment. However, there did not seem to be consequences for teachers for not ensuring that children 'receive a proper' education. Again, the assumption here is that because the student is at school or in class, they are learning.

Whanau saw the value of education and they wanted their children to have more options available to them that would change their life-chances. They did not put much trust in the schooling system or the teachers. The parents identified that communication was very important, but spoke about the lack of communication between home and school. This sometimes meant that whanau were unaware of their child's truancy or situations that led up to the truant behaviour. Whanau were supportive of their children's education but they

were not supportive of unsafe learning environments. Therefore Whanau not only condoned 'truancy', they fully supported their children's absences from school.

Whanau were of the opinion that schools contributed to their children's truant behaviour. They discussed the way that schools initiated truancy in their children by way of teacher attitude and behaviour towards their children and a school regime that was not effective in practice, or inclusive, of diversity. The school controlled and dictated how whanau would be involved or even participate in their children's learning and learning environment. Whanau spoke of their own treatment by staff members, including the principal, and if they were made to feel excluded, inferior, uncomfortable and unwelcoming in the short time that they spent in the school environment, how much more intense and damaging must it be for their children, who spend up to seven hours, five days a week there.

The participant's voices resonate clearly that school is not a happy place for those who are "like us". Clare summarises the participants voices:

*Teachers need to listen to what the children are saying, not what the teachers just have to say to the children; and for the teachers, not just for the colour on the person. It's that they've got to actually get to know that person.*

The aim of this study was to share the experiences of five Māori students, which led to their truanting, their truanting experiences and their views on that. There are a number of studies that identify the culture of schools, including teacher pedagogy, attitude and cultural capital, at the heart of truancy problems. In 1997 and the year 2000, two studies argued that if the education system wanted to overcome the present problems and meet the needs of Indigenous people, it was essential that the "*structural components are changed to promote a more responsive environment for them*" (Partington, 1997, p. 2 in Bourke, Rigby & Burden, 2000, p. 19). They added that without such changes, Indigenous people will continue, actively, to resist the schooling process, with absenteeism, a prominent manifestation of such resistance (Folds, 1987; Keefe, 1988 in Bourke, Rigby & Burden, 2000, p. 19).

In chapter one, I stated that this study was not about apportioning blame. There are many contributors to truancy, and each has their own agenda, interest, responsibilities and obligations within the dynamics of the classroom, school and society. The participants and their whanau were concerned about the dynamics within the classroom and school environment that had a direct impact on them and their future. This study was about giving 'voice' to those concerns. It is therefore with their voice that I conclude:

**What would need to be different for you to want to go to school each day?**

*Teachers to listen to what you have to say, and not just because of your colour and who you are and stuff; and not because of that because... they should listen to what you got to say, your opinions and everything.*

*I reckon it would- would be primo if the teachers could just look at the student, know who they were and treat them the way they wanted to be treated... but in self respecting ways.*

*If they got rid of drugs, if teachers had more one on one with the kids...and teachers can be good, they're gonna notice that a lot of people aren't dropping out.*

*Education is important in some areas... Not for me.*

*Um... the kids... or some of them... some of them are alright but there are a few of them who just want to try... that just thrive on making your days hell. But if it was something like at school, like bullying... if there was something there that showed...how badly it can affect some people [her voice fades sadly- tears in eyes again].... Yeah.*

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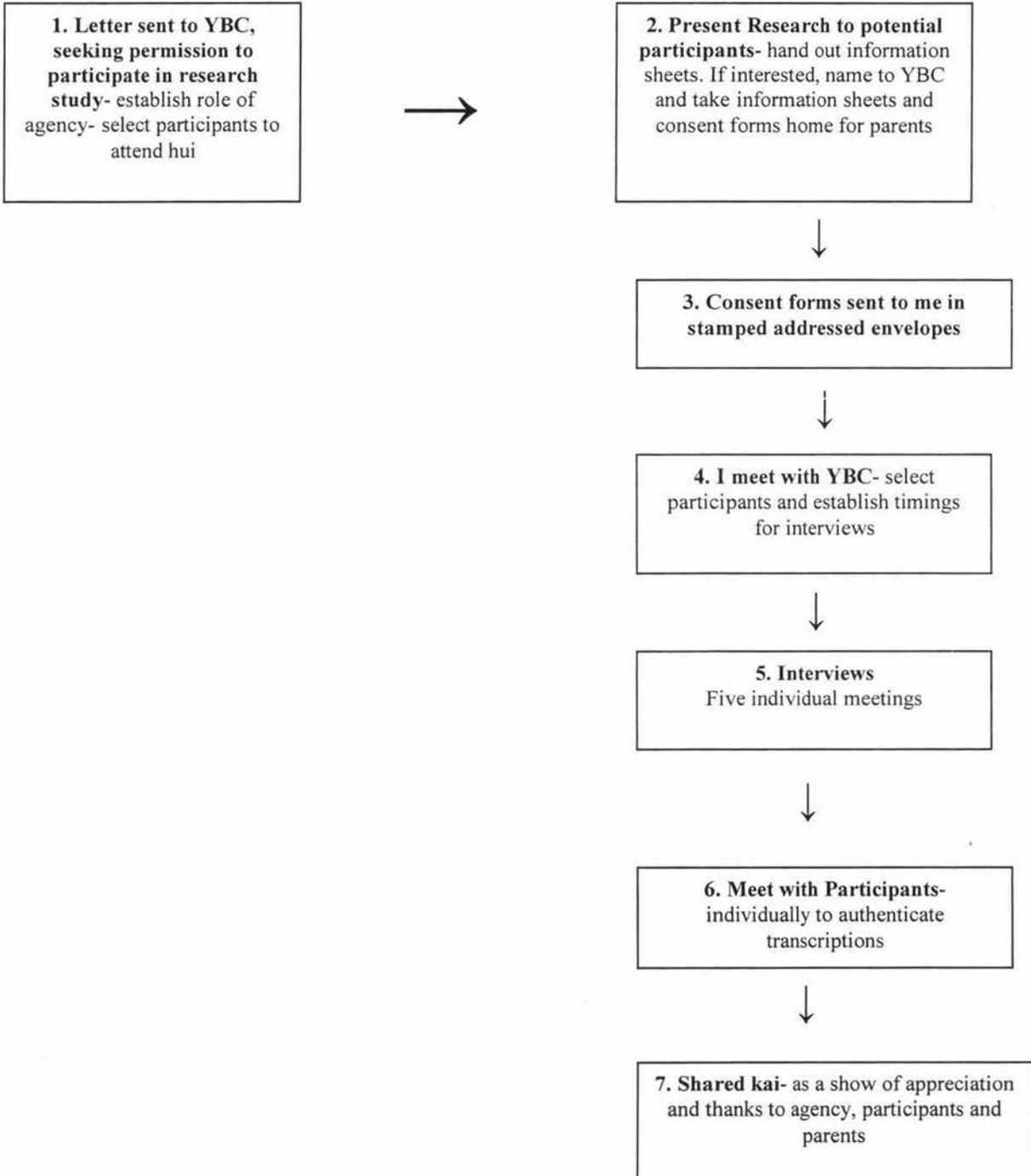
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## APPENDIX 1

## Recruitment for Selected Participants:

The first four consent forms returned- Three male/ Two Female

## DETAILED PROCESS OF SELECTION FOR RESEARCH



## APPENDIX 2

### Project Title: Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Truancy through the lens of five Māori Voices

#### Information Sheet for Master of Education Research Project For Student Participants.

<u>Student:</u>	<u>Supervisor:</u>
Marilyn White Te Uru Maraurau/ Dept. of Māori and Multicultural Education College of Education Massey University Work: (06) 350 5799 extn: 8604 Mobile: 021 269 2019 Email: M.White@massey.ac.nz	Jenny Marie McLeod Te Uru Maraurau/ Dept. of Māori and Multicultural Education College of Education Massey University Work: (06) 350 5799 extn: 8628 Email: J.M.McLeod@massey.ac.nz

Tena koutou katoa.

My name is Marilyn White and I am Samoan, born in Auckland, New Zealand. I have two children, who are of Samoan/ Māori/ Pākehā ancestry and who whakapapa to Ngati Ruanui and Ngati Tuwharetoa. I am a student, studying towards my Masters of Education and I also work as a tutor at Te Uru Maraurau, which is the Department of Māori and Multicultural Educational Studies at the Massey University College of Education.

As part of my study, I have to research a topic, and I have chosen a topic based on something that I am very interested about but also very concerned about. Books that I have been reading state that when it comes to truancy, the group that are most likely to be truants are young Māori students of Secondary school age. Different writers give different reasons why they think Māori don't go to school or don't want to be in school, but there doesn't seem to be much information to explain why, from Māori students themselves. So what I want to know is:

- Why do Māori students truant?
- Why don't Māori students want to go school?
- Are the different writers telling the truth?
- Are they only telling one side of the story?
- Whose story are they telling?

I want to know from you, your reasons, your stories, so that when it comes to looking for answers to a problem, your stories will be taken into account when creating and developing programmes to deal with truancy. Books also state that there is high number of young Māori in prisons, who don't have jobs and who are on the benefit and this has been closely linked to truancy. As a parent and teacher, those figures are upsetting, and raise some real concerns that need to be addressed. This has motivated me to do this study, to identify reasons from you, to why you don't want to, like to or need to be in school. What motivates you to do so? Hopefully this will help develop programmes that help deal with your concerns. It is hoped that initiatives that are developed out of this study, will benefit all truants, by motivating and encouraging them to attend school, and also prevent others who may be thinking of truancy.

I am therefore inviting you to participate in this study, as I have been given your name by the Youth Board Coordinator. I have provided this information sheet as background to the study, but I am available to answer any questions that you may have. I have set out below the methods, as per the requirements of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

1. If you accept this invitation to be a part of this study, you and your parent/ caregiver will need to sign the enclosed consent form, if you are aged between 13 and 15 year. If you are 16 years, you may give your own consent.
2. You will be interviewed and the interviews will be taped. However, at anytime that you do not wish to be a part of the study or feel uncomfortable about part of the questions or discussions, you can ask for the taping to stop, or withdraw from the study altogether. If you decide that you don't want to continue in the study, then there wont be any negative effects.
3. Everything that is taped and all the information that is collected from the interviews will not be owned by me, but I will keep them for safe keeping for five (5) years. Massey University Policy on Research Practice recommends that data be retained for at least five (5) years, and then disposed of. After five years, if you want the data, you just need to ask for them and they will be returned to you. A copy of the final report will be given to your school, and your parents will also have access to the final report.
4. Confidentiality or privacy is assured. You will not be named in the interview findings or the throughout the whole process, including the final report. I will be very pro-active in protecting your confidentiality.
5. So that I am able to carry out the interviews and focus on the interviews/ discussions, there will be an assistant in the room to help with the taping and writing. My assistant will also sign a confidentiality form, so that your identity and what you share in the discussion groups are not disclosed. This can be discussed further if I have not explained it properly, and you do not understand.
6. The interview will take approximately 1-2 hours, during school hours, in a room where privacy and confidentiality is ensured. The time and location will be negotiated with the Youth Board Coordinator, but it will be when you are available.
7. You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:
  - Decline to answer any particular question;
  - Withdraw from the study at any stage of the proceedings;
  - Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
  - Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
  - Be given access to a summary of the project findings.
  - Understand that they have the right to ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

I will make myself available, for queries, questions or concerns that you may have, either at a group or individual meeting.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, Palmerston North protocol 04 / 32. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact:

Professor Sylvia V Rumball  
Chair

Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee:

Palmerston North

Phone: (06) 350 5249

Email: [humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz)

Participants and parents are asked to contact myself and/ or the supervisor if you have any questions about the project.

The result of this study is important as the programmes and initiatives that are developed from your 'stories' can help provide answers to a problem that is widespread among schools in Aotearoa. It will help develop strategies and programmes that address the problems of truancy, from a wider perspective, based on in-depth

data from your voice. This will ultimately benefit Māori, in terms of improving school attendance, and addressing educational achievement.

If you decide to take part in this study, please return a completed 'Consent Form', in the stamped addressed envelope that has been provided. You may keep the information sheet for further reference. If I receive more than four consent forms, I will take the first four (two male/ two female) that I receive. If you have any questions, queries, concerns, please ring me on (06) 350 5799, Extn: 8604. I am available to meet with you also, to provide more information, if needed, and to answer any questions.

Kia Ora

Marilyn White  
Tutor  
Te Uru Maraurau  
Department of Māori and Multicultural Educational Studies  
Massey University College of Education  
Private Bag 11-222  
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### APPENDIX 3

**Project Title: Out of Sight, Out of Mind:  
Truancy from Māori Voices**

**Parents Information Sheet for  
Master of Education Research Project**

<u>Student:</u>	<u>Supervisor:</u>
Marilyn White Te Urū Maraurau/ Dept. of Māori and Multicultural Education College of Education Massey University Work: (06) 350 5799 extn: 8604 Mobile: 021 269 2019 Email: <a href="mailto:M.White@massey.ac.nz">M.White@massey.ac.nz</a>	Jenny Marie McLeod Te Urū Maraurau/ Dept. of Māori and Multicultural Education College of Education Massey University Work: (06) 350 5799 extn: 8628 Email: <a href="mailto:J.M.McLeod@massey.ac.nz">J.M.McLeod@massey.ac.nz</a>

Tena koutou katoa.

My name is Marilyn White and I am Samoan, born in Auckland, New Zealand. I have two children, who are of Samoan/ Māori/ Pākehā ancestry and who whakapapa to Ngati Ruanui and Ngati Tuwharetoa. I am a student, studying towards my Masters of Education and I also work as a tutor at Te Urū Maraurau, which is the Department of Māori and Multicultural Educational Studies at the Massey University College of Education.

This letter is to ask permission for your child to take part in my study, if your child is under 16 years. Children 16 years and over may give their own consent to participate. I have been given your child's name by the Youth Board Coordinator.

The focus of my research is 'Truancy', which a very personal issue to me. I was a truant and years later, I was the parent of a truant. I am very concerned that although money is being poured into intervention initiatives to address truancy, statistics show that it is on the rise. What is also on the rise is the suspension rate of Māori, and the high number of Māori leaving school with no school qualifications (33%). In 2001, the statistics for those who left school with university or high level of qualifications were as follows:

Māori	7%
Asian	54%
European	30%
Pacific Nations	10%

What is also alarming is the increasingly high number of young Māori offending and in prison and truancy has been identified as a common factor among many offenders. Although truancy cannot be blamed, or is of the cause of criminal offending, literature shows that truancy is closely linked to educational underachievement and failure, unemployment or limited employment opportunities, welfare dependency, poverty and a stepping stone to crime and prison.

Many books, reports and policies have been written about truancy. Literature presents profiles of what a truant may look like, what type of background a truant will come from and provides many and varied reasons why children truant. A recurring theme that comes out of the books is that truants are of secondary school age, with a peak age of truants at 13-14 years, and they are predominantly Māori. Although the writers of these books provide different ideas to why they think Māori choose not to go to school, they do not provide evidence from the student's perspective.

There are many and varied reasons why Māori students are not in school and different authors have written numerous books and reports on why they think students do not want to go to school or do not want to be in

school, but not from the perspective of the student. Are the books telling the truth? Are they only giving one side of the story? Whose story are they telling? Where are these 'stories' coming from?

As a parent and educator, the statistics are alarming, and raise some real concerns that need to be addressed. It is this concern that has motivated me to do my research on truancy; to try to identify factors from the student's perspective to why they truant. What motivates them to do so?

It is expected that by identifying factors from the student's perspective, it will help develop strategic plans to address their concerns and effect a plan of action that benefits Māori students, schools and communities.

I hope to be able to draw participants from this community based programme, due to the high percentage of Māori students and this programme's proactive position in implementing strategies to address Māori concerns, including truancy. Because of the nature of this study, participants must be Māori, aged between 13-16 years, inclusive. The Youth Board Coordinator will assist by identifying potential Participants

### **Participant Involvement:**

This study involves four (4) students. The low number of participants allows me to gain a more in-depth study on truancy from an individual's perspective, rather than gain a surface understanding from many perspectives. The interview will take approximately 1-2 hours, during the hours of learning, in an allocated room where privacy and confidentiality is ensured. The time will be designated by the Youth Board Coordinator, so that the interview does not disadvantage participants from learning. Participation in this study is voluntary and consent will be sought from the participant and parents. Approval to use the agency's premises during the hours of learning will be sought from the Youth Board Coordinator.

### **Project Procedures:**

All the data provided by participants is not owned by the researcher, but kept for safe keeping. Participants have the option of retaining the tape(s) or agreeing to their storage in a research archive. Massey University Policy on Research Practice recommends that data be retained for at least five (5) years, and then disposed of. A copy of the final report will be given to the Agency and participants and their parents will have access to the final report.

The students will remain anonymous throughout the proceedings, as well as in the final report. So that I am able to carry out the interviews and engage with my participants, an assistant will be in the room to assist with writing and taping. This person will have also signed a confidentiality form. Confidentiality is ensured.

### **Participants Rights:**

They are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If they decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Decline to answer any particular question;
- Withdraw from the study at any stage of the proceedings;
- Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings.
- Ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

### **Committee Approval statement**

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, Palmerston North protocol 04 / 32. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact:

Professor Sylvia V Rumball  
Chair  
Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee:  
Palmerston North

Phone: (06) 350 5249

Email: [humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz)

Participants and parents are asked to contact myself and/ or the supervisor if you have any questions about the project.

The findings of this study will have implications for Māori students and families, in terms of developing strategies and programmes that address the problems of truancy, from a wider perspective, based on the in-depth data from the 'stories' of the participants. This will ultimately benefit Māori, in terms of improving school attendance and educational achievement and ultimately addressing Māori offending and the high number of young Māori in prison.

If your child is aged 13 to 15 years and you decide to allow your child to take part in this study, please return a completed 'Consent Form', in the stamped addressed envelope that has been provided. You may keep the information sheet for further reference. If you have any questions, queries, concerns, please ring me on (06) 350 5799, Extn: 8604.

Kia Ora

Marilyn White  
Tutor  
Te Uru Maraurau  
Department of Māori and Multicultural Educational Studies  
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## APPENDIX 4

**Out of Sight, Out of Mind:  
Truancy: through the lens of five Māori 'Truants'.**

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years**

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/ do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

I wish/ do not wish to have my tapes returned to me.

I wish/ do not wish to have data placed in an official archive.

I agree to not disclose anything discussed in the Group.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Full Name- printed** \_\_\_\_\_

**Out of Sight, Out of Mind:  
Truancy: through the lens of five Māori 'Truants'.**

### PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

**This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years**

I have read the Information Sheet and understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand that my child's interview will be audio taped.

I give/ do not give consent to my child to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the information sheet.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Full Name- printed** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 5

### Interview Schedule for Participants

These questions are based on the questions that were asked during a small scale, qualitative study of truancy in West Auckland, carried out in 1997, which was used during the process of this study:

**Participants were asked to provide background on their schooling, with the following questions as a guide to draw them into dialogue.**

- *What did you enjoy/ not enjoy about school?*
- *What subjects did you enjoy/ did not enjoy?*
- *Tell me about the benefits or advantages of school?*
- *How do you see school helping you in the future?*
- *What was the best thing about school?*
- *What was your worse experience at school?*

**Participants were asked to share their experiences with truancy:**

- *Do you think that you're a truant? Talk about your experiences.*
- *Are your parents/ caregiver aware that you 'skip' school?*
- *When did you first start skipping days at school and why?*
- *Which classes did you 'skip' and why?*
- *How do you decide which classes you are going to attend/ not attend? What are some factors that you think about?*
- *Do you skip school/ classes by yourself?*
- *Is truancy pre-planned or is it a decision made on impulse? Do you make the decision to miss school, or is it made for you by friends?*
- *How easy/ difficult is it to miss school?*

**Participants will be asked to share their views about the consequences of truancy:**

- *What happens when you don't go to school?*
- *Do you think about what will happen if you get caught?*
- *Does it scare you to think that you could get into trouble by being truant?*
- *Have you ever been brought back to school by truant officers?*
- *What do you think will happen if you miss too much school?*
- *What happens when you return to the classroom?*
- *Are there any consequences at school, for truancy?*
- *Do you know that by law, your parents can be prosecuted/ fined if you don't go to school?*

- *How do you feel about that?*
- *What do you think will happen if you miss too much school this year? Next year?*

**Participants will be asked to share about their future**

- *What are some things that would make school a more appealing place?*
- *What are some things that you see, that would make you want to be in school?*

## APPENDIX 6

Mary<sup>34</sup>

While other 12 year old 'kids' were 'hanging with friends', going to school or playing Saturday sports, Mary was being locked up for fighting, experimenting with drugs, having sex, smoking and drinking. She has partied and lived a lifestyle that many girls her age would not know existed unless they saw it on the big screen. Clare was able to do this during the hours where, by law, she should have been in a learning environment which enabled her *"to attain high standards and develop appropriate personal qualities"* (Ministry of Education, 1993).

Mary is now 14, and has been out of the school system since she was 12 years old: March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2002, to be exact. She remembers this date as if it were yesterday. She is the youngest of three girls; her two sisters attended the same local high school, and earned themselves reputations at that school for 'bad' behaviour. By the time she arrived, *"I really felt unwanted, like the teachers just already had a..... thing over me, and I couldn't get that away"*.

She was once a regular attender, and although she too liked and enjoyed particular subjects, particularly art and PE, she found the culture of school very intimidating and unreceptive, if you were *"not like them"*. She confesses to missing school, but is adamant that she wouldn't go back because *"school is good for other people whereas some people like me, it's different. And for people like me, I guess there is gonna be things out there for people like me"*.

Mary felt very uncomfortable in school, and the message became clear to her that she was unwanted; although there were times when she was absent from school or there were concerns over behaviour or truancy, Mary's parents were never notified. There were no links between home and school, and although this served Mary's need to hide things from her parents, she eventually made a decision to quit school. She truanted twice with friends, to 'have a good time' and then just decided to stop going to school:

*"I just stopped... I just... go find somebody else that youse can treat like mud, sort of thing"*

She found school work quite easy and enjoyed certain subjects, especially the hands-on activities and sports. However Mary felt that the way the teachers

treated her, and the way they tried to control every aspect of her learning, became too big a barrier to her learning. She didn't think they taught her much, except that school was not a place for her or people like her. She feels that if she spoke to the same teachers today, they would probably say, *"Yep. You're right Mary, that's the way we... you know... yeah"*. .

### Reference

Ministry of Education (1993). *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework*. Wellington: Learning Media Limited.

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<sup>34</sup> Pseudonym

## APPENDIX 7

Kate<sup>35</sup>

Kate, a seemingly shy, quiet girl, talks about her school experiences with sadness and regret for what could have been her loss of potential. Although she is unsure about how she feels about school in general, she has an air of assuredness. She certainly enjoyed most of her work and learning. She displays an unashamed love of learning, and an enthusiasm to want to learn more. Whilst she was in school, Kate was a good student.

Truancy began for Kate at 13, when she and her family moved into town. She attended the local intermediate school, where bullying began, which continued into High School and was done by the same group of girls. Initially she went to teachers and counselors, but Kate felt that they didn't really do much. Kate was actually pleased that they didn't, as she is sure that there would have been reprisals. She sought help from her older sister's friends, but once again she was pleased that they, too, did not follow up Kate's cries for help. Kate's mother even rang the Principal to try and find a 'safety net' at school for Kate, but the Principal's reply was that *"every girl here has problems with a few girls every once in a while"*. Her worst times at school where she felt most threatened, were during PE, because that was a subject where: *"you're not sitting there in front of the teacher, you're in the changing rooms getting changed and.... You know, that's when heaps of shit used to happen"*, and *"at lunchtime, and in between classes, it was like...."* (she frowns and screws up her face as her eyes fill with tears).

Although Kate's mother did everything possible to ensure Kate went to school or was at school, the turning point came when she saw Kate in such emotional states over school, that she could no longer force Kate back into an environment which could not guarantee her safety, would not consider a mother's concerns over a daughter's safety and would not even be prepared to investigate solutions to ensure Kate's right to a safe learning environment was upheld. Kate is no longer in the school system. She struggles with Correspondence, and would prefer the face to face contact time with a teacher, but she 'knuckles down' and does the work.

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<sup>35</sup> Pseudonym

## APPENDIX 8

John<sup>36</sup>

John is the youngest child in a family of four. His sister owns her own business, his brother is doing very well financially and his other sister is a journalism student: "...they (his siblings) all went to university... they all went to the same school, and when I turned up, they expected me to be like the others."

His mother moved him to another school, which was out of their township. Although sibling-based pressure was eliminated at the new school, such pressure was still an emotional burden to him. John's home life and family are very supportive.

Truancy was only one of John's many problems. John has a history of extreme behaviour. One incident at school was so serious that it took multiple adults to restrain the eleven-year-old John during one of his tantrums. As a result, John was taken to the police cells for assaulting a teacher. Within a year, two of his best friends had passed away. That had a tremendous effect on him emotionally, which seemed to manifest in behaviour issues at school. A letter was sent to the school Dean to explain some of his recent emotional traumas and to seek support and tolerance for John's absences at school. However, both John and his mother felt that the letter was not adequately considered. The school felt that to treat John differently would create problems in the classroom, and send the wrong messages to John about school condoned absences. Treating John the same as the rest of his class was fair to the other students.

John speaks with confidence and seems quite relaxed about sharing his school experiences as he remembers them. School was not a happy experience, and he becomes agitated as he begins to share some incidents and talk about certain teachers.

John's absences from school were both parent-condoned, for various reasons, and self-condoned-- to "run away" from the teachers. He has a very creative mind, loves cars and loves to draw. However, he admits that he hates structure and has problems sitting still.

John was eventually enrolled in Correspondence school, and then a course. John believes the course was "better than school", and "better than anything" else he has done, because at school, he was amongst "a whole bunch of people: A whole bunch of good people; a whole bunch of bad people; a whole bunch of real goody goods; whole bunch of, like, dudes that hate people". However, on the course, John "... felt like [he] was on the same level as them and we got along pretty good... that was better than anything [he has] done... better than school."

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<sup>36</sup> Pseudonym

## APPENDIX 9

Clare<sup>37</sup>

Clare is 14 and up until 2004- the time she moved to town- Clare was a regular attender and active participant in school life. She enjoyed certain subjects, especially Drama, which gave her the space to express herself in more creative ways. At her old school, she managed to remain 'straight' and be 'real good' because she liked school; especially "*up North; they were good*".

Clare has a twin brother and is the namesake of her maternal grandmother, which is quite a special honour in some cultures. Her mother, along with one of her older sisters, moved to Feilding to give Clare a chance at school which was away from the closeness of the Māori community (her Iwi) and her twin. Clare does not have a history of behavioural problems or truancy. 'Up North', school was a fun place to be at. However, at her current school, the experience has not been positive: "*There were only four Māori in my class and they either left or were told to leave. When I would ask for help 'cause I didn't understand, I... I wouldn't get it. They would tell me to remove my taonga- I wouldn't. My Nan gave it to me (10/ 08/ 04).*"

Because of the move South, Clare was not fully prepared or equipped to start the new school year, so her family was given assistance to help with her uniform and stationery. However, she still managed to be placed in the school 'Step' programme, which is a disciplinary process for 'offenders' who had incorrect gear, for example no ruler, no homework or no diary. In fact, it seemed to Clare that certain teachers took pleasure in reminding her that she was given a 'handout' to buy a uniform and stationery, so there was no excuse to be ill prepared. Her Principal also informed her that he thought she shouldn't be at his school if she wasn't prepared to learn anything or do anything.

Her 'Rap' sheet dates from 16/03/04- 1/ 06/ 04. It chronicles continual defiance, truancy and behaviour issues such as non cooperation or not following instructions. She has been given a number of lunchtime and after-school detentions, which she only sometimes attends. On a number of occasions, she has been stood down.

When Clare truants, she usually makes the decision to do it on her own, then looks around for "*somebody whose gonna do it and go off with them.*" Although there are probably a number of reasons why she truants, Clare is not quite sure which reason describes her. She just knows that she doesn't want to be at school. Although she truants, she still enjoys some of the subjects, like Drama, English and Maths, but overall she finds school a 'boring' place to be and the teachers very hostile. The only thing that seems to be pushing her to attend now is the fact that her mother 'gets a bill' when she doesn't attend school.

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<sup>37</sup> Pseudonym

## APPENDIX 10

LIST OF VARIABLES AND DEFINING QUOTES  
FROM INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

<sup>38</sup> No.	VARIABLES	SELECTED DEFINING QUOTES
1.	Student did not like how teachers treated them	<p>"I didn't go to school because the way they treated me... and I think that if the teacher was in here today, they'd probably say, "Yep, you're right Christine, that's the way we.... You know.... Yeah" (S2)</p> <p>"Like some of them don't listen to you if you've got something to say, or when you need help with something" (S1)</p>
2.	Teacher did not understand student	<p>"I can admit like... like quite abit was my fault but... some teachers didn't really know much.... But nah, they just don't understand aye" (S5)</p> <p>"I reckon it... it would... it would be primo if the teachers could just look at the student... know who they were and treated them the way they wanted to be treated... but in self respecting ways (S2)</p>
3.	Student did not like teacher	<p>"The subjects, the subjects were alright but... some of the teachers were just arse holes" (S5)</p> <p>"I never use to get on with them" (S3)</p>
4.	Teacher was not accepting of students	<p>"My group teacher... she kinda knew what was going.... But.... all the other teachers use to think I was some... little truant" (S4)</p> <p>"But school was primo-as, except for the teachers didn't accept me, and things... and like sometimes I use to go home and cry cause the teachers never accepted me... for who I am" (S2)</p>
5.	Student did not understand classroom work	<p>"Some things, if I don't understand it, I'll ask the teacher and if they don't help I'll just sit there and talk. But if they help me, then I'll sit there and learn" (S1)</p> <p>"... oh you put a 2 in there and you put a 1 in there [<i>he mimics teacher</i>], yeah... I leave you to it... and I'm sitting there like um.... Um.... [<i>rolls eyes, taps fingers</i>] (S5)</p>
6.	Student did not like classroom subject	<p>"Well I didn't actually like the subjects. I just like sitting there and being noisy.... Not he subjects.... Not for that" (S3)</p>

<sup>38</sup> a. Each quote is relevant to an interview, that is S2 refers to interview with student number two  
b. This list presents sixty quotations, two for each variable. The quotes were selected for each of the interviews: 12 from S1, 10 from S2, 12 from S3, 13 from S4, 12 from S5.

		<p>“Certain ones like PE.... That was the certain one... ‘cause that’s when I was like all, you know... you’re not sitting there in front of the teacher, you’re in the changing rooms and getting changed and.... You know, that’s when heaps of shit use to happen” (S4)</p>
7.	<b>Student liked classroom subject</b>	<p>“... like I did all my work. I use to take my work home with me ‘cause I use to like it and I was, you know, I always had things to do to catch up... always done heaps of work for missing days out” (S4)</p> <p>“I miss like the sports and everything it done at.... I didn’t really get into like... drama. I didn’t like drama, but I got into art and... yeah” (S2)</p>
8.	<b>Student did not do school work</b>	<p>“I use to follow up. I use to do my homework. I never use to work in the classroom” (S3)</p> <p>“I just started to slacken off.... I didn’t feel like doing work” (S1)</p>
9.	<b>Student felt a lack of support from some school staff members</b>	<p>“There’s Counselors but.... Counselors... to me they’re just counselors. They don’t do nothing. They just talk” (S1)</p> <p>“The Principal just reckons, well you know, every girl here has a problem with a few girls every once in a while... my mum tells him that... it’s constant... it’s constant” (S4)</p>
10.	<b>Student found it hard to understand reason to conform to school structure</b>	<p>“Like... talk... when they sit there and talk too much... when they write too much and you have to sit and listen... too structured... I like to be loud... I just didn’t like the structure” (S3)</p> <p>“My Mum was paying quite a bit just for me to go there and just sit down and read verses out of the Bible and shit... yeah.... It wasn’t my thing” (S5)</p>
11.	<b>Student positive towards school</b>	<p>“I enjoyed my work.... Like I could sit down and do the work you know, without any talking to anyone else in your class” (S4)</p> <p>“It wasn’t the school’s fault. The school didn’t make me go like that. I was just in the frame of mind that I had nothing to lose” (S5)</p>
12.	<b>Student negative towards school</b>	<p>“It was mostly the teachers... I use to swear at them... kick them...” (S3)</p> <p>“... I don’t really like police, ‘cause they’re exactly like... they’re exactly like my old teachers and that... they got that, they got that authority to try to tell you what to do” (S5)</p>

13.	<b>Student positively affected by other students</b>	<p>“I use to have a few of my sisters friends [as support].” (S4)</p> <p>“I just use to go there [<i>to school</i>] to hang out with my friends (S3)</p> <p>“There was this chick ‘A’.... I kinda helped her out”</p>
14.	<b>Student negatively affected by other students</b>	<p>“Some of them [teachers] are alright, but.... There are a few of them who just want to try.... that just thrive on making your days hell” (S4).</p> <p>“”There were a lot of cheeky c---s at school... like at school I was just going there and, you know, someone starts getting smart to me and then next thing you know I’m getting in trouble” (S5)</p>
15.	<b>Positive support from Whānāu</b>	<p>“When Nan’s here she gives me the, like courage and stuff to lead me straight but when Nan’s gone, I like go straight then wonky... you know” (S1)</p> <p>“They weren’t angry... just disappointed... really disappointed in the way that me and the teachers didn’t blend in together it was like, my Mum and Dad.... My Mum felt like she had to be my teacher... she had to show me everything” (S2)</p>
16.	<b>Negative support from Whānāu</b> (Le Riche, 1995)	No example found
17.	<b>Student perception of home/ school relationship</b>	<p>“My mum never use to know I was wagging until the teacher would ring up... or until she’d get my report and it would say the amount of days I’d have off” (S4)</p> <p>“No one would ring home. Nobody would contact Mum and Dad. I was in school suspension for a whole two weeks; my Mum and dad didn’t even know I was there until I told them the second week” (S2)</p>
18.	<b>Supporting statements from Parent</b>	<p>“And then he finished talking with me, which was quite funny ‘cause it was fast then he more or less ‘balled’ her up... so I ‘balled’ him up too... cause to me, my ears are connected like, <i>aye... I don’t talk to my kids like that</i>’ you know. He’s not her father... why’s he doing that? He’s only a damn Principal. So I ‘balled’ him up” (S1)</p> <p>“Her last school, we could all talk and that was really cool. Because I don’t drive or anything the school often rings... you know, we end up baking or things like that so it was really supportive. Here, they only ring you when you’re in trouble... when we went to our first meeting, they said... the first thing they said.... They didn’t even say “Hello. I’m so and so”. They just got into her. “Were you like this in the last school?” I said “What’s the lasrt school got to do with it. It’s all here... it’s not up there... I said, she was</p>

		damn jolly good. She was a real miss goody two shoes all.... Right up to now" (S1)
19.	<b>Student did not feel a sense of autonomy</b>	<p>"Like at school, it was like.... I had to be young and I had to do what they wanted me to do, but all they wanted me to do was what I could do. They never teach me anything else" (S2)</p> <p>"The cops came down, they threw me in the back of the paddy wagon, I was getting arrested. I was only 11 years old, and they were using hard out force... " (S5)</p>
20.	<b>Student took matters in own hands-made own decisions in school context</b>	<p>"I'm not standing there and get my arse kicked every time, I'm gonna do something, so that's when I started fighting. I started just... fighting back... (S5)</p> <p>"Um... I... got really naughty and they kicked me out... um showing off... um, stealing... just to get what I wanted" (S3)</p>
21.	<b>Student concerned about retaliation/effects</b>	<p>"Yeah... if you tell the teacher, it does make it better for a little while, but then its either gonna be someone else that's gonna be like "Oh you told the teacher" (mimics in a tell tale drone) you know.... "You can't handle it" (in same drone)... just little things like that, you know... (S4)</p> <p>"I got told that if I keep doing that, they'll keep giving Mum a warning, and then after a warning, they'll start sending her a bill" (S1)</p>
22.	<b>Student learning needs not being met</b>	<p>"You have to try and figure things out without, you know, being able to ask the teacher" (S4)</p> <p>"I'd go to ask for help, it was like... they just ignored me... only give me the answer instead of taking me through the processing of doing everything" (S2)</p>
23.	<b>Student boredom an issue at school</b>	<p>"Sometimes just I go to school and I get real bored, so I just think I don't go to school, and I don't" (S1)</p> <p>"I went to this class and this class and it was real boring" (S3)</p>
24.	<b>Self concept- how student saw themselves</b>	<p>I don't think I'm good enough in the education and stuff 'cause I wasn't going to school for long" (S1)</p> <p>"... like I wasn't... I wasn't... I wasn't a bully. I can tell you that much... but like, I didn't walk around just picking on people, you can ask anyone at my old school... like I didn't walk around picking on people, it was always people that picked on me" (S5)</p>
25.	<b>Student perception of their own future</b>	<p>"My um tutor... she's getting me onto a course next year, 'cause I wont be able to go there next year either... you gotta be 16... and it's just something for me to do" (S4)</p>

		<p>“And for people like me, I guess there is gonna be things out there for people like me. Where um courses? They sometimes don’t work. I think where Rangitikei Foods where I am? Those are the starting places for people to change” (S2)</p>
26.	<b>Student felt other factors affected attitude to school</b>	<p>“... you know, it’s alright if I fix my own mistakes, but I’m not fixing no one else’s mistakes (S5)</p> <p>“I just get real frustrated... especially with other things... like love life and everything... and then... you don’t wanna be there... and just go out” (S1)</p>
27.	<b>Student self awareness of truancy</b>	<p>“Um.... Like when I went home, they’d ask me what I did at school today, and like if I wagged school that day, I used to like, look at my timetable.... Seeing what was first, I went to this class and this class and it was real boring... yeah...” (S3)</p> <p>“Like if you’re just gonna go to school and be an egg, don’t go to school, but find something for you to do while you’re not at school, because I’m... it’s so... it is so boring” (S2)</p>
28.	<b>Students views of general truancy behaviour</b>	<p>“We use to... oh sometimes we walked into town... just like hanged out in shops for awhile, just in case somebody went past that we knew....” (S3)</p> <p>“... cause her mum would work all day til like 6 0’clock and she [ S4’s friend] use to sleep out in the bach and I use to sit there.... Yeah.... Sit there and wait and wait” (S4)</p>
29.	<b>Student views of school and aspirations</b>	<p>[Talking about problems with kids attitudes today]... “... I don’t need to go to school, I don’t need to get a job, I’ll just live at Mum and dad’s house, I’ll start selling things to get money. Next thing you know, they don’t go to school”. (S5)</p> <p>“Well... I want to learn... I still want to learn, but um... yeah. Maybe one day I might want to go back to school. Maybe to a different school... but...” (S4)</p>
30.	<b>Student antecedent (background information)</b>	<p>“Um... it’s like Step 1 and then Step 2, Step 3 until you get Step 7 and then you get stood down, twice and then once you get stood down, you get um suspend... oh um expelled” (S1)</p> <p>“Like they would do like a topic on what we like and what we didn’t like and that. I use to write I didn’t like them” (S3)</p>

**APPENDIX 11****FINAL LIST OF VARIABLES  
USED FOR CODING INTERVIEWS**

1. Student did not like how teacher treated them
2. Teacher did not understand the student
3. Student did not like teacher(s)
4. Teacher was not accepting of student
5. Student did not understand work
6. Student did not like classroom subject(s)
7. Student liked classroom subject(s)
8. Student did not do school work
9. Student felt a lack of support by some staff members
10. Student found it hard to understand reason to conform to school structure
11. Student positive towards school
12. Student negative towards school
13. Student positively affected by other students
14. Student negatively affected by other students
15. Positive support from Whānāu
16. Negative support from Whānāu
17. Student perception of home/ school relationship
18. Parent supporting statements
19. Student did not feel a sense of autonomy
20. Students took matters in own hand- made own decisions in school context
21. Student concerned about retaliation/ effects
22. Student learning needs not being met
23. Student boredom an issue at school
24. Self concept- how student saw themselves
25. Student perception of their own future
26. Student felt other factors affected attitude to school
27. Student self awareness of truancy
28. Students views of general truancy behaviour
29. Student views of school and aspirations
30. Student antecedent (background information)

## APPENDIX 12

## LIST OF CATEGORIES

Category Title	Example	Order of Student Concern
Student Perception of Self	"I know for a fact that it is the teacher..... and me you know. I'm an egg to them because I know how they feel about me... where they shouldn't even be doing that... like judging me.... Just from what they've heard" (S2)	42%
Related to issues of truancy	"My mum never use to know I was wagging until the teacher would ring up... or until she'd get my report and it would say the amount of days I'd have off, and she was.... She was furious.... But... then I told her why and then kind've wanted me to stay home" (S4)	13%
Teacher Attitude	"I think it's because... not that the teachers are racist or anything but like they just don't wanna listen to you because you're not like one of the top brainy people that are gonna listen"(S1)	13%
School environment	"No one would ring home. Nobody would contact Mum and Dad. I was in school suspension for a whole two weeks; my Mum and Dad didn't even know I was in there until I told them the second week"(S2)	11%
Relationship with peers	"... you think you can handle it until a certain point, you know.... and you could... you can handle it then you're like, 'nah, it's alright', until it carries on and it's a lot of them wanting to make up things about you so it ruins your education.... ruins your reputation and.... Mine's already ruined, so I don't care" (S4)	7%
Whanau/ home environment	"... Like when I went home, they'd ask me what I did at school... my mum kept following up... sometimes she would drive me to school, but she'd make sure I was at school that day. Like she would ask around" (S3)	6%
Student perception of lessons/ subjects	"... I might have been doing reading or something and I wasn't doing it.... I was doing it properly... like I was trying my hardest but... she just wouldn't accept it. She just wouldn't accept it 'cause you know, my sister used to read... things perfectly, my brother knew how to read things perfectly... when it was me, I was like 'I ... I... a... am', you know?... and she was like 'Hurry up, hurry up' (S5)	5%

## APPENDIX 13

**Cumulative Percent of Variable Occurrence  
Across All Interviews**

No.	VARIABLE	PERCENT (Descending Order)	CUMULATIVE PERCENTAGE
1	Took matters in own hands- made own decisions in school context	11.5%	11.5%
2	Self efficacy/ perception- how student sees themselves/ their worth	9.0%	20.5%
3	Student did not like how teacher treated them	8.0%	28.5%
4	Student perception of their own future	7.2%	35.7%
5	Student negatively affected by other students	5.7%	41.4%
6	Student found it hard to understand reason to conform to school structure	4.2%	45.6%
7	Positive support from Whānāu	4.2%	49.8%
8	Statements that provided background information	4.0%	53.8%
9	Student did not feel a sense of autonomy	3.8%	57.8%
10	Student felt other factors affected attitude to school	3.7%	61.5%
11	Students views of school and aspirations	3.5%	65.0%
12	Student positive towards school	3.3%	68.3
13	Student concerned about retaliation/ effects	2.8%	71.1%
14	Student learning needs not being met	2.8%	73.4%
15	Student self awareness of truancy	2.8%	76.2%
16	Statements relevant to truancy	2.8%	79.0%
17	Parent supporting statements	2.8%	81.8%
18	Student liked classroom subject	2.3%	84.1%
19	Student did not like teacher	2.0%	86.1%
20	Teacher did not understand student	1.8%	87.9%
21	Student felt a lack of support from some school staff members	1.8%	89.7%

No.	VARIABLE	PERCENT (Descending Order)	CUMULATIVE PERCENTAGE
22	Student negative towards school	1.8%	91.5%
23	Student perception of home/ school relationship	1.8%	93.3%
24	Student did not like classroom subject(s)	1.5%	94.8%
25	Student positively affected by other students	1.5%	96.3%
26	Teacher was not accepting of student	1.3%	97.6%
27	Student did not understand classroom work	0.7%	98.3%
28	Student boredom an issue at school	0.7%	99%
29	Student did not do school work	0.3%	99.3%
30	Negative support from Whānāu	0%	99.3%

## APPENDIX 14

### Frequency of Content Units For Each Variable for Student Interviews

Title of Variables (Similar Cluster of Content Units)	Frequency of Content Units for Each Student Interview					Total Frequency of Content Units Across All Interviews	Percentage of Content Units for Each Interview
	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5		
1. Student did not like how teacher treated them	17	16	0	0	14	47	8.0%
2. Teacher did not understand student	01	04	0	0	06	11	1.8%
3. Student did not like teacher(s)	01	01	03	0	07	12	2.0%
4. Teacher was not accepting of student(s)	01	06	0	0	01	08	1.3%
5. Student did not understand classroom work	02	01	0	0	01	04	0.7%
6. Student did not like classroom subject(s)	01	01	03	03	01	09	1.5%
7. Student liked classroom subject(s)	03	05	0	01	05	14	2.3%
8. Student did not do school work	01	0	01	0	0	02	0.3%
9. Student felt a lack of support from some school staff members	04	0	0	06	01	11	1.8%
10. Student found it hard to understand reason to conform to school structure	05	03	07	01	09	25	4.2%
11. Student positive towards school	06	04	01	06	03	20	3.3%
12. Student negative towards school	01	02	05	01	02	11	1.8%
13. Student positively affected by other students	01	0	05	02	01	09	1.5%
14. Student negatively affected by other students	02	02	03	19	18	34	5.7%
15. Positive support from Whanau	05	05	05	06	04	25	4.2%
16. Negative support from Whanau	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
17. Student perception of home/ school relationship	0	02	03	05	0	11	1.8%
18. Parent supporting statements	17	0	0	0	0	17	2.8%
19. Student did not feel a sense of autonomy	04	08	0	01	10	23	3.8%

**Frequency of Content Units for Each Variable for Student Interviews**

Title of Variables (Similar Cluster of Content Units)	Frequency of Content Units For Each Student Interview					Total Frequency of Content Units of Across All Interviews	Percentage of Content Units for Each Interview
	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5		
20. Took matters in own hand- made own decisions in school context	13	11	14	14	17	69	11.5%
21. Student concerned about retaliation/ effects	07	01	0	08	01	17	2.8%
22. Student learning needs were not being met	05	07	01	02	02	17	2.8%
23. Student boredom an issue at school	02	01	0	0	01	04	0.7%
24. Self efficacy/ perception- how student saw themselves/ their worth	11	13	03	13	14	54	9.0%
25. Student perception of their own future	08	12	06	11	06	43	7.2%
26. Student felt other factors affected attitude to school	03	02	01	09	07	22	3.7%
27. Student self awareness of truancy	05	04	07	01	0	17	2.8%
28. Student views of general truancy behaviour	02	07	03	03	02	17	2.8%
29. Students views of school and aspirations	02	0	01	02	16	21	3.5%
30. Student antecedent (background information)	04	02	05	05	08	24	4.0%
<b>Total Number of Content Units for Student Interviews</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>598</b>	<b>100%</b>