An Investigation into Māori students' academic disengagement
from the Mainstream Education system and re-engagement in
the Alternative Education system

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand the academic disengagement and re-engagement process from the perspective of Māori students enrolled in New Zealand Alternative Education (AE). Specifically, this study focused on students' perceptions of the factors that influenced their lack of success in the mainstream school setting, the motivational and engaging factors that lead to them enrolling in an alternative education school, and the factors that are maintaining their success either in the Alternative Education setting or back in mainstream education. Six Māori students participated in semi-structured interviews. The criteria for selection were that the students had shown positive re-engagement to their academic learning. The main barriers to student success in mainstream education were their poor attendance along with disruptive behaviour. Students did not feel that teachers and peers in mainstream believed they could do the work and they lacked self-efficacy while attending mainstream in that they could not perceive themselves achieving academically. The findings from this study confirm what the literature suggests, in that becoming academically disengaged is a process taking place over a period of several years and not a one off event. Interpreting the 'voices' of the students strongly suggested that early intervention in addressing issues of academic engagement could reduce the number of students disengaging from mainstream education. Students interviewed in this study retrospectively became aware of the negative effect of their behaviour on their learning in mainstream after experiencing the Alternative Education. Students developed a new sense of self belief and determination and the new engagement with their academic work seemed to directly fuel even further motivation to succeed at their schoolwork. The Alternative Education system was highly beneficial and directly responsible for the students re-engaging in their academic learning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Coding: The process of examining data, identifying and noting aspects that relate to the research question.

Contextualism: A theoretical approach informing some qualitative research, which assumes that meaning is related to the context in which it is produced.

Critical Realism: A research paradigm that recognizes an obdurate reality of fixed structures Juxtaposed with the individuals' ability to construct their own reality and influence change.

Data (raw): Material generated and collected through student interviews.

Data Analysis: The application of techniques in the treatment of generated and collected data for achieving research outcomes.

Epistemology: A branch of philosophy concerned with the study of knowledge.

Hermeneutics: The theory and practice of interpretation.

Idiographic: An approach to knowledge production which is based on the specific and the individual, rather than the shared and generalizable.

Interpretation: A process of making sense of, and theorizing the meanings in, data; goes beyond summarizing the obvious semantic content of data and puts an interpretive framework around it.

Ontology: The study of the being, concerned with concepts of existence and reality.

Paradigm: Frameworks that represent a shared way of thinking in respect of how the world is viewed and how knowledge is generated from that perspective.

Phenomenology: The careful and systematic reflective study of lived experience.

Positivism: The underpinning paradigm for scientific research that asserts the existence of a single reality that is there to be discovered.

Postmodernism: A paradigm for the conduct of research that posits that the reality of a phenomenon is subjectively relevant to those who experience it.

Post positivism: A paradigm that rejects the concept of a measurable reality that exists in isolation of the observer.

Pseudonym: A fake name used in the place of a real name, to protect a participants' Anonymity.

Qualitative Research: A research tradition that relies primarily on inductive approaches to the treatment of data, usually in the form of words, to explicate an understanding of phenomena of interest from the perspective of those who experience it.

Realism: An ontological and epistemological position which assumes that the world has a true nature which is knowable and real, discovered through the experience and research; that we 'know' an object because there are inherent facts about it that we can perceive and understand.

Reflexivity: An active systematic process used by the researcher in order to gain insight into their work that will guide future actions and interpretations.

Relativism: A theoretical position that holds that there are multiple, constructed realities, rather than a single, knowable reality; holds that all we have is representations of accounts of what reality is and that at least epistemologically all accounts are of equal theoretical values, there is no foundation on which to claim some version of reality as more true and right than another version.

Rich Data: Data which provides detailed complex and contradictory accounts about the research subject.

Rigour: Control of the process employed in a study in order to accommodate or explain all factors that can impact on, and thereby potentially erode, the value of research outcomes.

Semantic Code: This refers to the data-driven code. For example, the succinct account of participant interviews.

Subjectivity: Peoples' sense of themselves; their way of being in, and relating to, the world.

Thematic Analysis: A form of analysis which has the theme as its unit of analysis, and which looks across the data from many different sources to identify them

Transcription: The process of turning audio data into written text, so that data can be systematically coded and analysed.

Chapter 1. Introduction

Learning disengagement, youth at risk, school dropouts, Māori underachievement, and Alternative Education (AE) all attract negative undertones and a sense of hopelessness, but does it need to be this way? The reasons for undertaking this research into the lives of students who had dropped out of school are many fold but paramount was that I wanted to research positive aspects of student dropouts. To achieve this I interviewed students who had successfully re-engaged in a learning environment. This thesis is an exploration of learning engagement from the perspective of students who had disengaged from their learning/school environment but then re-engaged in a different school setting (AE setting). It explores the experience through the eyes of students who have experienced the cycle of dropping out of school and re-engaging into mainstream education.

In its purest form, engagement begins with children beginning life eager to explore the world around them. Watching a young child making a sand castle shows engagement at its best. The child demonstrates engagement through their curiosity, effort, and persistence. The child is busy and on task. However, engagement is more than being on task. It also involves the child using their mind, emotions, and physical capabilities. Schlecty (2001, p.11) captures the difference between being engaged and being on task when he says *"engagement is active and it requires that the student be attentive as well as in attendance; it requires the student to be committed to the task and to find some inherent value in what he or she is being asked to do. The engaged student not only does the task assigned, but also does it with enthusiasm and diligence"*.

A young student who has been marginalized from the mainstream school system, has unfortunately departed a long way from demonstrating the engagement associated with a child building a sandcastle. When a young student has not been engaged, in the way described above, for any length of time the way back may seem impossible and people working with the young student often struggle to define strategies, which will help and make a difference. This dilemma is cleverly portrayed by the following story:

A young woman approached an old man on the beach and asked,

"Why in the world are you throwing starfish into the water?"

"If the starfish stay on the beach, when the tide goes out and the sun rises higher, they will die," replied the old man.

As he continued tossing them out to sea the woman replied,

"That's ridiculous! There are thousands of miles of beach and millions of starfish. You can't believe that what you are doing can possibly make a difference!"

The old man picked up another starfish and said, tossing it back into the waves, "It makes a difference to this one."

<p align="right">– Author unknown. (Rohnke-Butler, 1995)</p>

This story illustrates the importance and significance of trying to help each student who has been marginalised from the mainstream system. When a student has been marginalised and ultimately removed from mainstream education, it represents a major negative experience for the student and their family. Therefore, their individual situation deserves our attention and to generalize and see those efforts as insignificant and not capable of making a difference (like in the starfish story) is contradictory to the 1989 Ministry of Education policy that states that all children up to the age of 16 must have access to the education system (Ministry of Education, 2010).

This study, although it explores why and how students have become disengaged, most importantly concentrates on how we can re-engage young Māori students into a positive learning environment that will foster the same level of engagement demonstrated by the child building their sandcastle. It is envisaged that such findings will help in re- engaging a greater number of students who have been marginalized from the mainstream education system. One also hopes that the findings will be equally important in suggesting strategies and changes in the classroom environment that may lessen the chance of students becoming marginalized in the first place. Therefore, in brief, this study is about the re-engagement of young Māori students into a healthy, positive, social learning environment.

Chapter 2. Background

2.1. Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore students' perspectives on the cycle of dropping out of mainstream education, re-engaging into the AE system and, in some cases, into mainstream education. The study examined students' experiences of learning re-engagement and highlights the importance of hearing student voices. It is my hope that the study will give an insight into why some students disengage and dropout of mainstream. I hope that such insight will assist teachers in re-engaging students but equally as important, assist teachers in preventing students disengaging and dropping out in the first place.

2.2. Rationale

Youth are regularly portrayed in the media in a very negative light. Issues are wide ranging, from binge drinking, burglaries, youth gangs, truants, to school dropouts. The last issues, truancy and school dropouts, are where this study began its exploration of students disengaging from the mainstream learning environment.

During the 1990s suspension rates in New Zealand schools rose dramatically, despite various initiatives to reduce suspensions and students dropping out of school. Exclusionary methods of suspensions, such as stand downs, and expulsions are increasingly used in the New Zealand education sector (Ministry of Education, 2011). According to Hancock and Trainor (2004), suspension rates increased significantly from approximately 10,000 in 1996 to 22,000 in 2002. It is significant that this was the time when AE emerged. The emergence of AE will be documented later in the review of literature.

The consequences of dropping out, both to the young people involved and the community as a whole, should not be ignored. Dropping out of the school system potentially sets in place a series of negative outcomes. These negative outcomes are demonstrated by

the comments of Judge Beecroft (Youth Court Judge). He proclaims that the great majority of offenders, whose crimes were so serious that they did get to youth court, were severely disadvantaged. Their biggest common characteristic is that they are boys and their next biggest common characteristic is that they are not at school (Beecroft, 2012). He further added that "the sea of change" (p.10) in education, which aimed at getting young offenders back to school, could dramatically cut youth crime and that if there was any "magic bullet"(p.10) which would slash youth offending it would be keeping as many young people as possible in school. At an Auckland youth justice conference (28th June 2012), several speakers saying it should be harder for schools to exclude difficult students drew the loudest applause from 250 people from across youth justice agencies. Judge Beecroft (2012) said between 2000 and 3000 young people had been lost to the education system largely because they were simply not enrolled anywhere. He then went on to explain, *"Actually they are not lost, because we find them"* (Beecroft, 2012).

The youth crime statistics reiterate Judge Beecroft's belief that students who have dropped out of school are highly represented in the youth crime statistics (Beecroft 2012). Māori children (10-13 years old) were apprehended five times more than their Pacific and European counterparts and Māori youth (14-16 years old) three times more (Ministry of Justice, 2010). Further Judge Beeccroft referred to historic all-time lows, in terms of overall apprehension of young people by the police and that there had never been less offence apprehensions than there had been in 2012 and 2013. However, he reported that there were some worryingly disproportional ties in these all-time low statistics. Although apprehension rates for Māori are coming down, they're not coming down as fast as for non-Māori, so the disproportionality between Māori and non-Māori is in fact increasing, which he finds concerning. Judge Beecroft went on to say he had observed an increase in the commitment, in recent times from schools trying to keep troubled students within the school community. He said schools had led the way in realizing that a problem student excluded is simply a problem student transferred. He believed most schools were now working hard to try to keep all kids at school (Beecroft, 2014). It is encouraging that the percentage of school leavers leaving with higher-level qualifications has consistently increased from under 20% in 1986 to 74% (Ministry of Education, 2011), but the disproportionate gap between ethnic groups is of

concern. A breakdown of ethnic groups reaching this level of achievement outlines that Asians were the most successful with 85.8%, followed by Europeans with 75.2%, others at 70.3%, Pacific Islanders with 62.9%, and Māori with 50.4% (Ministry of Social Development, 2011). This is despite the many initiatives implemented by the Ministry of Education to address Māori Student underachievement. One model of culturally responsive pedagogy is the research and professional development programme, Te Kotahitanga. In essence, the model identifies the relationships between teachers and students as the most powerful means of achieving educational success for Māori Students (Bishop, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2009). According to Bishop et al. (2009, p. 739) "Deficit theorizing has no place in Māori theories of successful classroom practice. This limits student progress (whereas) agentic thinking (by which teachers accept the importance of their pedagogical practice) promotes student learning". MacFarlane, Glyn, Cavanagh, and Bateman (2007) have also used theoretical frameworks in their analysis of what makes schools culturally safe for their students. MacFarlane et al.'s (2007) model, will be discussed in the review of literature.

This study investigated the relationship of culture and engagement. It is very relevant that 63% of students enrolled in the AE system identify themselves as Māori (Ministry of Education 2012). Although there is ongoing research and evaluation of some of the AE initiatives to improve Māori achievement, there is much scope to hear more from the Māori students who have experienced the cycle of disengagement and re-engagement. This study addressed this gap.

2.3. Aim of Study

I hoped this study would add to knowledge about perceived realities of Māori students who have fought their way back and re-engaged into mainstream education. The specific aim of the study was to find out both what led to the students disengaging and the key factors that resulted in the young students re-engaging in mainstream education.

2.4. Significance of Study

We cannot underestimate the seriousness, on both a personal and community level, of allowing students to disengage from their learning environment and drop out of school, because recovery and re-engagement is not an easy pathway back. Listening to the voices of the students who have been down this pathway of disengagement but have made it back seems to be vital information that is most often missing when discussing how to stop students disengaging in the first place. It was envisaged that the findings of this study would give a deeper understanding of the role the AE system has to play and would highlight that much is still to be done in the overall development of the AE structure. When the Ministry of Education first implemented AE in 1997 it had a clear aim of returning students to mainstream (Milbank, 2000). This has not eventuated, with less than 3% of AE students returning to mainstream (Ministry of Education, 2010). Listening to the students who have re-engaged will give us a view very sadly missing in the literature (discussed later in the review of literature). In addition, the fact that this study is based on the AE setting is significant in itself because of the scarcity of such research. Further, what little research has been carried out with AE students is most often about the negative demographics and causes of students finally dropping out.

2.5. Voice and Profile of Students

The general view of those associated with AE students is that they do not show a lower average academic ability as a group, but many of the students have not acquired the social and personal behaviours usually taught in family settings (Ministry of Education, 2000).They often have no career goals, demonstrate indifference to normally accepted constraints and authority, and have little fear of punishment. In addition, many have emotional, alcohol or drug problems, which have brought them into contact with social service agencies. (Ministry of Education, 2000)

According to the Ministry of Education (2000), in order to qualify, an AE student must be aged between 13 and 15 years at entry and must not be currently enrolled in any other school. The criteria for enrolling as an AE student are having one or more of the following characteristics:

- Out of school for two terms or more

- A history of "dropping out" of school

- A history of multiple suspensions

- Been refused enrolment by more than one school

- "Dropped out" of Correspondence School.

2.6. Voice and Profile of the Researcher

My justification for the role I take as a researcher for this study is twofold. Firstly, very few practitioners, who have worked with marginalized students, undertake research projects. As a result, I believe that valid and informative information can be gathered about disengagement and engagement in mainstream education. Secondly, I have 40 years' experience of working with students who have been marginalized from the mainstream school system, and, as a result, was able to relate to such students to enable the collection of rich and relevant data.

I was raised in a middle class family of eight by parents who placed a high value on education as a means of helping other people. My father, who, in a voluntary capacity, was Chairman of the Wellington Education Board, was instrumental in establishing one of the first special education schools in New Zealand. It was inevitable that somebody in the family would go into education and it turned out to be me. I began teaching when I was at high school and, as Head Boy at a co-educational school, spent most of my time in year 13 teaching/coaching and organising sport at the school. I somehow passed sufficient subjects to be accepted into Otago University where I completed my diploma in Physical Education, a

qualification that, to this day, I am immensely proud of. After completing some papers towards a Bachelor of Science and attending one-year of teachers college, I took up a teaching position at Awatapu College in 1976. I was a foundation staff member. Starting a teaching career in a new school no doubt defined my pathway as a teacher in the years to come. It was a unique and very insightful experience of what makes a school "tick." After six years, I took up a position at Queen Elizabeth College as HOD of Physical Education, Health, and Outdoor Education. After fifteen years at Queen Elizabeth College, I left to work for a Māori private training trust as their training manager. During this period, I developed and implemented a residential programme for at risk youth. Each programme was 24 hours a day/7 days a week, for 20 weeks. After working for the Trust for three years, I returned to University and completed a Bachelor of Science majoring in Psychology. I then took up a position at Freyberg High School where I implemented various recovery learning programmes. I left Freyberg to take up a position of Director at the local AE School.

Finally, it needs to be appreciated that my understandings of young people have come about through work with countless other people who have devoted their lives to helping young people marginalized from mainstream schooling and society in general. My thoughts and understanding have also been shaped and blessed by the special young students who have let me into their lives, often at times when they felt vulnerable and helpless. I cannot quantify, or even put a qualitative value on, one young student's effect on me. This is one of many hundreds of stories I could tell but I have chosen one with relevance, joy, and sadness, as it relates to my current thesis. I first met this 13-year-old Māori girl when I was teaching in the learning support class at a high school. The young student came under my guidance along with a group of five other girls who had been identified as extreme at risk and were all on the brink of being expelled from school. I undertook an adventure therapy activity based counselling programme with the group. After leaving the position at the high school, I became the director of the local Alternative Education School and the young student followed me to the AE setting. For more than a year, I picked the student up at 8.15am each morning from a gang house where she lived with her step Father. Every morning I was greeted with a smile and a "good morning" and "I have done my homework." While she was getting into the van, she would open her book to show me the homework she had done. Against all odds, and I know what she was subjected to in the family situation, this 13 year old

became re-engaged in wanting to learn and desperately wanted someone to believe in her. I remember taking this young student on an eight-day sea kayaking journey in the Marlborough Sounds and the amount of academic preparation she did, with regards the trip. The journey involved an integrated curriculum approach where students did curriculum projects prior to and after the journey. I also remember "accidentally "discarding her Ritalin pills into the sea on day two and observing what a delightful and pleasant young woman she was in the last few days of the journey. I resigned from the position at the Alternative Education School and lost contact with the now fifteen-year-old student. At the age of seventeen, she was an unlicensed driver of a car in which a passenger was killed. She was sent to prison for manslaughter and consequently, at the age of twenty, she committed suicide while still in prison. After the local gang, members did their thing at the graveside I was the one who lowered her into her grave.

2.7. Research Questions

Question 1:

What are the significant factors that resulted in young Māori students disengaging from their academic learning and consequently dropping out of mainstream?

Question 2:

What are the significant factors that resulted in young Māori Students, who had dropped out of mainstream, re-engaging in academic learning?

Question 3:

What is it about the AE environment that encourages the academic re-engagement of Māori students?

2.8. Summary

This chapter has given a background to the profile of the young students that end up in the AE system along with the personal profile of me, the researcher. It also highlights the importance and significance of reengaging students who have dropped out of the mainstream education system. The chapter concluded with the research questions. The review of literature, which now follows, discusses literature relevant to the academic re-engagement of previously disengaged students.

Chapter 3. Review of Literature

To review the literature relevant to this study I will divide this chapter into five parts. Firstly, I explore the construct of engagement with particular reference to the part it plays in the processes of dropping out of school. Secondly, I review Alternative Education both overseas and, in particular, in the New Zealand context. Thirdly, I examine the effect of ethnicity and the role of culture in student engagement. Fourthly, I specifically look at cognitive learning in relation to engagement. Finally, I examine interpretive studies that have listened to the voices of students who have experienced the cycle of dropping out of school and then re-engaging into the education system via the Alternative Education system.

3.1. Engagement

This study is about the re-engagement of marginalised students into the education system. However, engagement is a construct that has many and varied definitions. Chapman (2003, p.11) defines it as *"Students' cognitive investment in active participation in and emotional commitment to their learning."* This definition was chosen for its simplicity and relevance to the fact that this study is about investigating the factors that have resulted in the students re-engaging in their learning. For students to re-engage into the education system, the issues of motivation participation, and personal investment they put into their learning are of paramount importance and it is these elements that are the core of Chapman's definition.

There are three main schools of thought on student engagement: one from the perspective of general school reform (e.g. National Research Council, 2004), another which originates from the motivational literature (e.g., Skinner, Kinderman, & Furrer, 2009), and the third arising from the dropout prevention theory and intervention area (Christensen, 2009; Finn & Rock, 1997). It is this latter perspective that will be mostly featured in this literature review on engagement. However, because of a number of still unresolved issues in the relationship between the constructs of engagement and motivation, which will be covered

later, we also look at aspects of engagement in relation to the historic motivational literature.

There is still a lack of consensus on definitions of student engagement, although there is a general agreement that it is a multi-faceted construct with behavioural and psychological components (Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Fredricks, Blumenfield, & Paris, 2004). In contrast to Chapman's definition, and from a New Zealand context, an excellent and more comprehensive, multi-faceted definition was presented by Gibbs and Poskitt (2010) who reviewed the literature on student engagement in the middle years of schooling:

"engagement is a multi-faceted construct that encompasses students' sense of belonging and connectedness to their school, teachers, and peers; their sense of agency, self-efficacy and orientation to achieve within their classroom and in their broader extra-curricular endeavours; their involvement, effort, levels of concentration, and interest in subjects and learning in general; and the extent to which learning is enjoyed for its own sake, or seen as something that must be endured to receive a reward or avoid sanction. Further, engagement is a variable state of being that is influenced by a range of internal and external factors including the perceived value or relevance of the learning and the presence of opportunities for students to experience appropriately pitched challenge and success in their learning. As such, engagement is malleable by the actions of teachers." (p.10)

Gibbs and Poskitt (2010), although presenting a very comprehensive holistic definition of engagement, also stress the importance of specifically defining the individual constructs of behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement. They argue that it is *"*through an awareness of the elements of engagement we have a framework to interpret the engagement behaviours exhibited by students in our classrooms" *(*Gibbs & Poskitt 2010, p.11). With the research on student engagement conceptually shifting from looking at behavioural, emotional and cognitive constructs in isolation to a more holistic approach has resulted in more insight into the complex interaction of the three sub-constructs (Fredricks, Blumenfield, & Paris, 2004; Joselowsky, 2007). The conceptual haziness that has emerged as the definition of student engagement has broadened (Reschly & Christenson, 2012) has further emphasized the need for greater clarity of the individual constructs. Researchers

need to operationalize their definitions of constructs they are investigating, something that I have endeavoured to do.

As a multi-faceted construct that often lacks unified definitions, engagement, in its broadest terms, involves student thoughts, beliefs, emotions, and behaviours within the context of the school environment. One of the early models of engagement was the participation-identification model (Finn, 1989). Finn's theory addressed the critical variables of students' engagement and the process of both dropout and completion as an on-going process of participation → school success → identification (completion) or of non-participation → poor school performance → emotional withdrawal (dropout) (Finn, 1989). We will return to this model later when addressing engagement and dropout prevention. Following on from Finn's work, research has conceptualised engagement as consisting of subtypes: behavioural, cognitive, and emotional (Fredricks et al., 2004; Jimerson, Compos, & Greif, 2003). Behavioural engagement is described as on task behaviour, effort, attendance or other desirable behaviours typical of good students. Emotional engagement referred to students' affect and emotions in school, including interest, boredom, happiness, sadness, and anxiety. Cognitive engagement has been referred to as students' mastery in learning and depth of processing (Newman & Wehlage, 1993). Ryan and Deci (2000) defined cognitive engagement as intrinsic motivation to learn within a given learning environment and or the use of self-regulated metacognitive strategies such as planning and goal setting. Similarly Fredericks et al. (2004) suggested cognitive engagement is students' investment in learning, self-regulation, and the use of strategies to gain knowledge and skills.

In addition, several models have four sub-constructs of engagement. Appleton, Christenson, and Furlong (2008) added the component of academic engagement to behaviour, emotional, and cognitive. They described the sub-construct academic as measuring points earned, homework completed, and time on task. Finn and Zimmer (2012) also put forward a four dimensional model based on what they considered were sub-constructs that repeatedly appeared in the literature. Academic engagement referred to behaviours that directly relate to the learning process, for example attentiveness and completing assignments. Social engagement referred to the extent to which a student follows the rules of the classroom behaviour such as being on time, interacting appropriately with

teachers and peers, and not disrupting the work of other students. Cognitive engagement is when students go beyond the minimal requirements, for example, in asking questions for clarification of concepts and persisting in difficult tasks. In addition, they also describe the role of self-regulation in guiding the learning process as representing cognitive engagement. Affective or emotional engagement is the level of emotional response characterized by feelings of involvement in school as a place and a set of activities worth pursuing. They also considered emotional engagement provides the incentive for students to participate behaviourally and to persist in school endeavours. Finn and Zimmer (2012) describe emotional engagement in terms of belonging and valuing. Researchers sometimes fail to include both of these aspects when describing emotional engagement. Finn and Zimmer (2012) confess to there being a fine line between academic and cognitive engagement. However, for them academic engagement refers to the observable behaviours that are displayed by a student when they participate in class. In fact, this is what Finn (1989) is referring to in his participation-identification model. In contrast, Finn and Zimmer (2012) describe cognitive engagement as an internal process that results in students being able to understand course content. Finn and Zimmer (2012) concluded that the four components are highly inter-correlated so that some students are highly engaged while others disengage on most of the dimensions.

Reeve (2012) suggested another four-type model. Reeve added agentic as a fourth sub-construct of engagement. See Figure 1 for Reeve's engagement model.
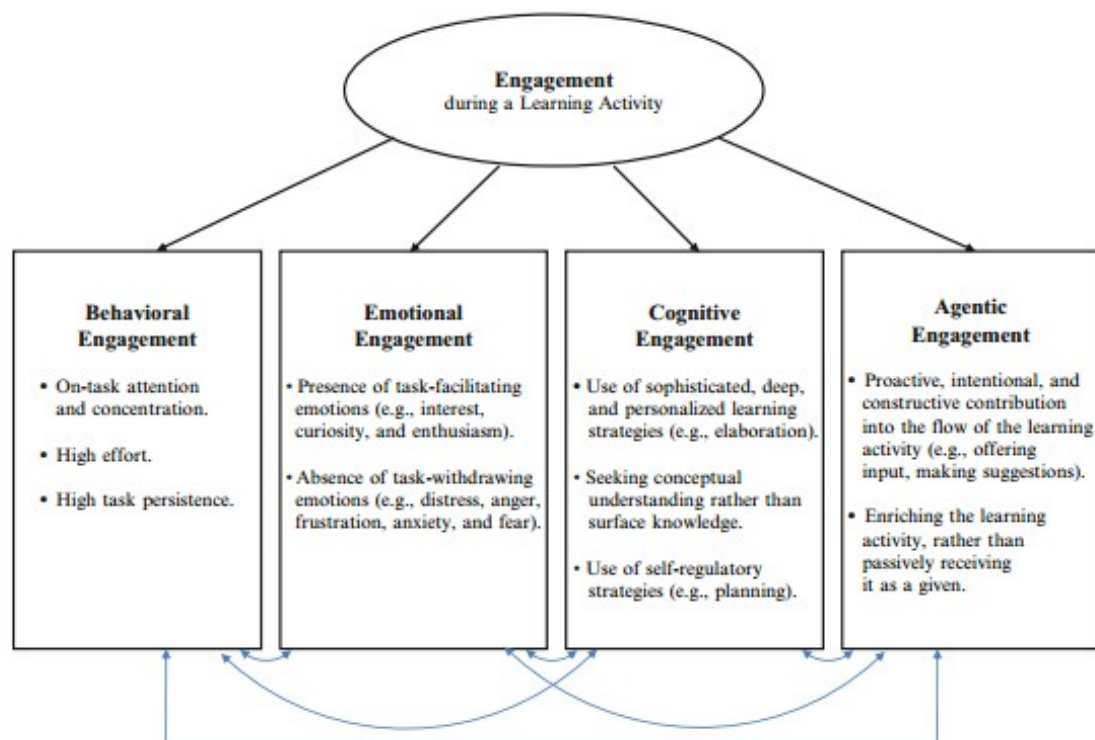
Figure 1: Multiconstruct diagram of engagement (Reeve, 2012, p. 151).

Agentic engagement as presented by Reeve is not at this stage widely accepted or proven but it does raise a very important issue that past researchers do not appear to appreciate. Agentic engagement involves the reciprocal nature of student – teacher interaction. Agentic engagement attempts to measure the positive, proactive response a student displays in the learning situation. I will return to Reeve's four type model later in discussing self-determination theory.

A recent study that was very specific in the measurements of the sub-constructs of engagement was carried out by Eccles & Wang, (2012). They looked at engagement trajectories in relation to education success and described how they measure behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement. School participation was their indicator of behavioural engagement. The construct was measured with six questions being asked of the students such has "have you been sent to the office?", "have you had trouble paying attention in classes?" Responses to each question were rated along a five-point scale, 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). School belonging was used as their indicator of emotional engagement. This construct measured the students' perceived sense of connectedness to school. Sample

questions were "I like school a lot", "I feel like a real part in this school" The responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Self-regulated learning was their indicator of cognitive engagement. The questions asked were derived from four items measuring students' use of metacognitive strategies and self- regulated approach to learning. Sample questions were "how often do you try to plan what you have to do for homework before you get started?", "how often do you try to relate what you are studying to other things you know about?" The responses were measured 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). After controlling for individual and school characteristics, Eccles & Wang (2012) found that changes in school participation (behaviour) and self- regulated learning (cognitive) were positively linked to academic success both in the short and long term. However they found that students' sense of school belonging (emotional) did not significantly contribute to short or long term positive academic outcomes. This finding was contradictory to a number of previous studies such as (Voelkl, 1997). This discrepancy may well reflect the different aspects of emotional engagement that were measured and conceptualized (Eccles & Wang, 2012). Eccles and Wang defined emotional engagement as school belonging and assessed whether students were happy, felt safe, and felt part of the school. However Voelkl (1997) operationalized emotional engagement as whether students both felt they belonged and whether they valued the education provided by the school. Eccles and Wang (2012) acknowledged that their contradictory findings may be explained that, if students do not feel that school or education has a purpose or meaningful value, then a sense of belonging may not be enough to motivate them to study and work hard and improve their academic performance. This is a good example where future research needs to distinguish between school belonging and valuing of school so that their individual effects on academic performance can be assessed. Most importantly, it further emphasizes the importance of researchers clearly defining the aspect of engagement they are trying to measure.

In summary the research on student engagement is still hindered by a lack of consensus on definitions of the sub-constructs or elements of student engagement. There is increasing agreement that student engagement is multi-dimensional consisting of behavioural, emotional, cognitive, academic, and, more recently, agentic dimensions.(Appleton et al., 2006; Christenson et al., 2008; Finn, 2006; Fredricks et al., 2004;

Reeve, 2012). But there is still a lack of clarity between the researchers on the definitions of the sub-constructs. For example, Finn (2006) classified perceived relevance or utility of school as emotional engagement whereas Appleton et al. (2006) and Christenson et al. (2008) considered it as representing cognitive engagement. And to further confuse the issue, Wylie and Hodgen (2012) classified this as motivation.

In describing engagement in my study, I have clearly operationalized the individual sub-constructs (elements) that I investigated. In developing a code book, described later in the methodology section, to help organize the student interview data, I have defined each of the engagement constructs. I have chosen six constructs; behaviour, emotional and cognitive because they are universally represented in the literature. The other three constructs, agentic, relationships and culture, are used more sparingly in the literature and often indirectly. However, I feel such constructs are very relevant for my target group of students. Many of the conceptualizations and measurement of cognitive engagement have much in common with those used previously in the motivational literature, something that will be discussed next as we look at the relationship of the two constructs motivation and engagement.

3.1.1. Motivation

There are two lines of research on academic success in schools that has been going on over the last 30 years. Firstly the research grounded in psychological motivation theory. Such theory includes scholars associated with self-determination theory, achievement goal theory, achievement motivation theory, self-efficacy theory, and expectancy-value theory of achievement (e.g., scholars such as Anderman, Bandura, Blumenfield, Connell, Deci, Dweck, Eccles, Elliott, Meece, Midgeley, Pintrich, Rocser, Schunk, Skinner, & Wigfield). Secondly, there is a line of work that is grounded in engagement theory and often linked closely to dropout prevention. This tradition is represented by scholars such as Finn, Newmann, Whehlage, Reschly, Christensen, and Rumburger. Finn and Zimmer (2013) and Rechly and Christenson (2012) give extensive reviews on student academic engagement. What is interesting is that, despite a quite common goal of associating various constructs with

indicators of school success, the two different lines of research have progressed independently although recently there appear to be efforts from both sides to share and evaluate concepts to enhance the "global understanding of motivation and engagement in relation to examining intervention strategies to prevent students disengaging and dropping out of school" (Eccles & Wang, 2012, p. 134).

It is essential to make the distinction between the two constructs of engagement and motivation prior to analysing the research on student engagement. According to Reeve (2012) motivation is a private, unobservable, psychological, neural, and biological process that serves as an antecedent to the publicly observable behaviour that is engagement. However, engagement and motivation to learn are highly related and overlapping concepts having many commonalities as measurable constructs (Stipek, 1993). Most of the research stresses the importance of establishing that motivation is an internal personal experience and that it is not something that can be inferred by others (Griffiths, Lilles, Furlong, & Sidhwa, 2012). Bempechat and Shernoff (2012) conceptualised motivation as a personal trait and engagement as a context varying psychological state. In simple terms they are implying that motivation is a global set of personal orientations that affect the students' attitude to school and learning. In contrast they refer to engagement as the quality of interactions of the learning activity within the context of the classroom environment.

However confusion can arise. Griffiths et al. (2012) explain motivation as the "psychological driving force that increases the probability that a student engages in behaviours that lead towards desired scholastic goals" (p. 565). They are implying that engagement is the visible manifestation of motivational tendencies. The confusion I am referring to arises when we include both behavioural components and internal psychological ones (emotional and cognitive) as constructs of engagement (Griffiths et al., 2012). The term engagement, unlike motivation, always implies some level of action and activity. A further distinguishing factor that separates engagement from motivation is the interpretation of the emotional component of each construct. Accordingly, in engagement the emotional component is seen as combining the concept of a student as an individually motivated learner and the student as a member of a wide social network that includes teacher and peer

student relationships and the wider classroom and school climate. So engagement links the individual's motivational state to the resultant actions undertaken by the student in their wider social context. The distinction between the two constructs is that motivation is the unobservable, psychological, internal, and biological process that potentially manifests as the observable behaviour that is engagement. However, there is still a prominent lingering issue in that some researchers use the terms engagement and motivation interchangeably (e.g., Martin, 2007) while others, such as Fredricks et al. (2004), suggest that the metaconstruct of student engagement subsumes motivation.

However, most researchers subscribe to the position that engagement and motivation, although interrelated, are also clearly distinguishable in that motivation represents intention, and engagement, action (Rechly & Christenson, 2012). Martin, (2006; 2008) in carrying out intervention work, maintained it was not important to distinguish between the two constructs. Martin referred to the fact that "both motivation and engagement are influenced by context, that there are individual differences in how students respond to the environment and that these constructs are linked to important student outcomes" (p. 8). In contrast, most researchers believe a clarification of the two constructs is important for future research on student engagement (Reschly & Christenson, 2012).

As already referred to, there are a number of three and or four type (constructs) models of engagement. The confusion with motivation arises when we explore the more internal constructs such as emotional and cognitive engagement. It has been suggested that cognitive engagement and motivation are possibly very similar or even the same construct.

In fact, in defining cognitive engagement, the motivational concepts like self-regulation are often used to support such assumptions (Wolters & Taylor, 2012). However Reschly and Christenson (2012) maintain that engagement and motivation are separate but related constructs, wherein motivation is necessary but not sufficient for engagement. Obviously these two constructs are inherently linked to each other and Reeve (2012) makes reference to such by stating "those who study motivation are interested in engagement mostly as an outcome of motivational processes, whereas those who study engagement are

interested mostly in motivation as a source of engagement" (p. 151). In summary, my position for this study is that I consider motivation is an internal and more privately experienced cause while engagement is the external and more public objectively observed action. The theory of self-determination helps to further explain the inter-relationship of the constructs of motivation and engagement.

Self-determination is the feeling of control over one's own actions, and self-determination theory (SDT) focuses on the intrinsic inclinations that are the basis of motivation. SDT describes three basic and universal psychological needs that facilitate intrinsic motivation; it includes autonomy which can be described as consciously chosen participation, competence which is the sense of success on effort when participating, and relatedness which is about the sense of connection and inclusion a student feels. SDT is based on the premise that meeting the above three psychological needs is essential for the development and wellbeing of all individuals.

As already alluded to, motivation and engagement are two distinct but inter-related constructs. Self-determination theory provides the overarching theoretical framework to assist in the understanding of how the constructs of motivation and engagement play themselves out in the context of the classroom. The uniqueness of SDT is that it emphasizes the important instructional task of vitalising students' intrinsic motivational resources as the key process in facilitating high quality engagement (Reeve & Halusic, 2009). SDT research identifies the classroom conditions that support and vitalise students' intrinsic motivational resources versus those that undermine and neglect them (Reeve et al., 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Accordingly, we can see how students' inner resources interact with classroom conditions to result in varying levels of student engagement.

As SDT research has advanced, five mini theories emerged to explain motivational phenomena that a student potentially possesses. These are summarized in Figure 2. Students possess inner motivational resources that allow them to become constructively engaged in their learning environment. From the perspective of SDT, changes in engagement result in changes in motivation, as students behavioural, emotional, cognitive and agentic

engagements are actions taken to both learn and to meet psychological needs (Reeve, 2012, p. 149). The conditions that feature in the learning environment will tend to support or thwart the intrinsic motivational resources with which students arrive at the classroom.
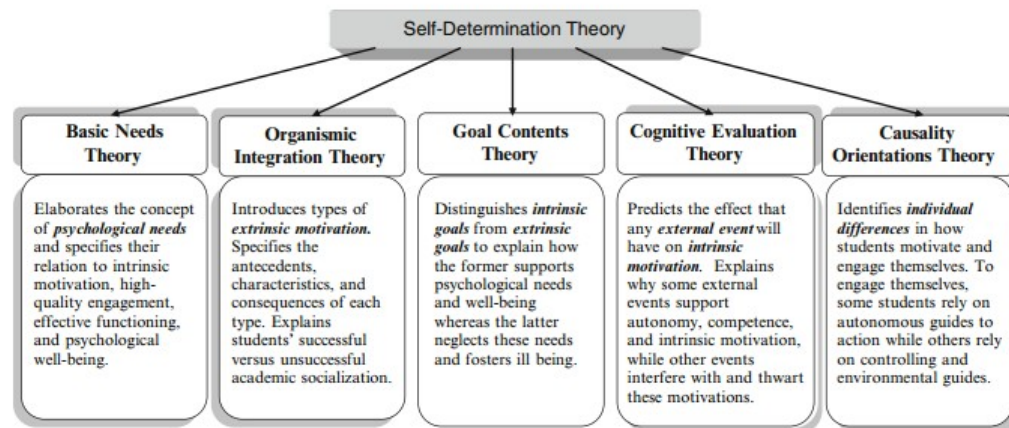
Figure 2: Five mini-theories of self-determination theory and the motivational phenomena each were developed to explain (Reeve, 2012, p. 153).

The resultant reciprocal student teacher relationship can be explained by the Student-Teacher Dialectical Framework within SDT. Characterizing engagement as a three component construct featuring behavioural, emotional, and cognitive sub constructs, is insufficient to fully explain the Student-Teacher Dialectical Framework. The Student-Teacher Dialectical Framework involves a unidirectional flow of instruction when focusing on behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement. However, when we include the agentic construct of engagement which, in its briefest definition, is the proactive participation that the student brings to the learning activity, then the unidirectional or linear model of teacher-student (engaging in activity) does not explain what is potentially happening in the learning environment. In reality, students may, in addition to reacting to the learning activities, proact and actually further enrich the learning activity. The inclusion of the engagement construct of agentic enables us to explain how students initiating and generating different learning strategies will increase the chance of experiencing both strong motivation and meaningful learning. When we accept agentic as a fourth construct of engagement, three important functions of student engagement emerge within the student-teacher dialectal framework.

Figure 3 highlights these three new functions.
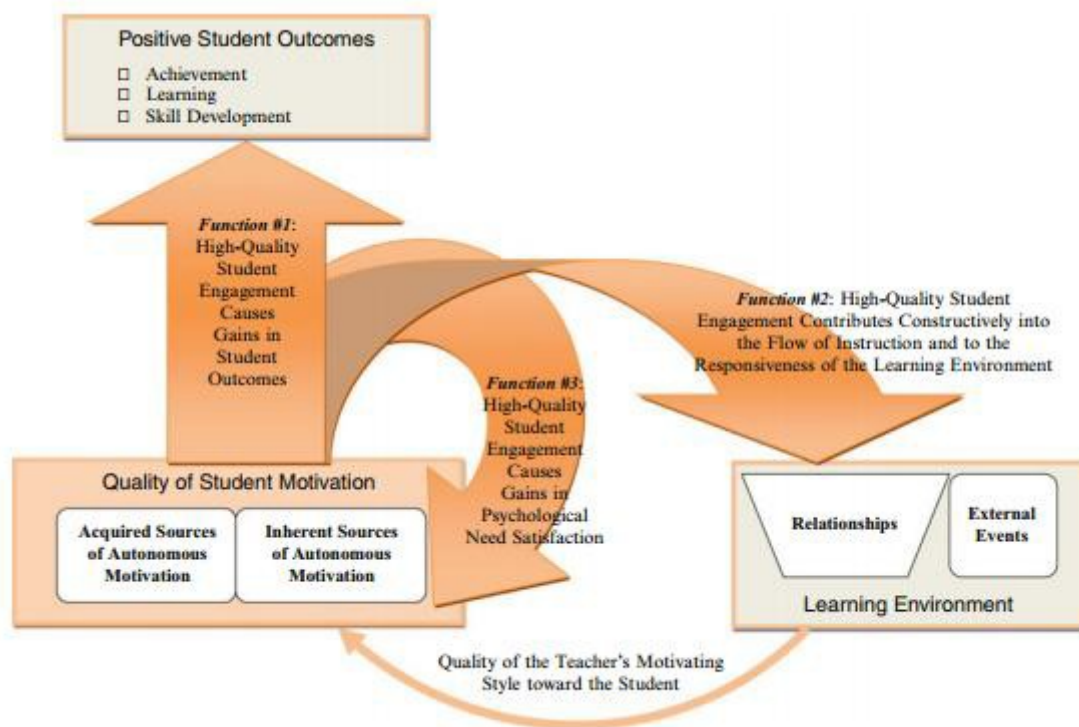
Figure 3: The functions of student engagement (Reeve, 2012, p. 163).

Firstly, the vertical arrow in Figure 3 shows how student engagement results in positive student outcomes. Secondly, represented by function two in Figure 3 is that student engagement has a direct effect on the quality of the learning environment. The third new function is represented in Figure 3 by the arrow (function 3) that circles back to into student motivation. This is suggesting that increases in student engagement further enrich future student motivation. I will now elaborate on each of the three new functions of engagement.

3.1.2. Function One: Engagement Fully Mediates the Motivation-To-Achievement Relation

It is not a controversial assertion that engagement mediates the motivation to achievement relation (Black & Deci, 2000; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). However, to suggest, as Reeve and Tseng (2011) do, that engagement actually fully mediates and explains the motivation to achievement relation, is somewhat controversial. Reeve and Tseng (2011) are suggesting that when student engagement is used as a predictor of students' positive school outcomes, as demonstrated in Figure 3, the direct effect that student motivation has on

student achievement drops to zero. Reeve and Tseng (2011) highlight two significant factors in their research, which gives explanation of why they conclude that engagement fully mediates the motivation-to-achievement relation. Firstly, they operationally defined engagement as a four component construct (behavioural, emotional, cognitive and agentic). They maintain it is the addition of the agentic component of engagement that results in engagement fully mediating motivation (Reeve & Tseng, 2011). What this suggests is that agentic engagement in some way contributes to positive student outcomes that behavioural, emotional, and cognitive aspects of engagement are unable to achieve. This new hypothesis that engagement fully mediates the motivation -to- achievement relation needs to be further researched. However, two articles have supported this finding (Reeve & Cheon, 2011; Reeve, Lee, Kim & Ahn, 2011). Both of these studies operationally defined student motivation in terms of psychological need satisfaction, (that is, autonomy, competence and relatedness) and operationally defined student engagement as a four component construct as conceptualized in Figure 3. This research is suggesting that programmes for re-engaging students need to concentrate on actual learning engagement rather than trying to motivate students to learn.

3.1.3. Function Two: Engagement Changes the Learning Environment

This suggests that high quality student engagement contributes constructively to the responsiveness and flow of instruction within the learning environment (see Figure 3). Once again, the component of agentic engagement is paramount to explaining how students may sometimes, proactively and constructively, contribute to the learning activities and environment. Accordingly, what agentically engaged students are doing is offering input and potentially enriching the learning environment and often modifying and adapting learning activities to enhance an improved opportunity for learning.

3.1.4. Function Three: Engagement Changes Motivation

The effect that changes in engagement have on subsequent changes in motivation is depicted in Figure 3. The circular arrow representing Quality Engagement loops back to

predict future changes in the quality of student motivation. The quality of student motivation represented by the box in Figure 3 is both a cause and a consequence of student engagement. The role of this third new function of engagement is to highlight how changes in engagement result in changes in motivation. Reeve and colleagues have further verified these findings (Jang, Reeve & Deci, 2010; Reeve et al., 2011). In both of these longitudinal studies, student motivation was operationally defined as the extent of psychological need satisfaction and the four components of engagement, as outlined in Figure 1, were used to operationally define engagement. However, these findings have not been verified by other researchers at this stage.

In summary, looking at the theoretical perspectives of SDT and the student-teacher dialectical framework within SDT has resulted in a number of new ideas in the function and nature of student engagement (Reeve, 2012). A definition of engagement that captures the latest research is. "*Student engagement refers to the students' active participation in academic and co-curricular or school related activities, and commitment to educational goals and learning. Engaged students find learning meaningful, and are invested in their learning and future. It is a multidimensional construct that consists of behavioral (including academic), cognitive and affective subtypes. Student engagement drives learning; requires energy and effort; is affected by multiple contextual influences; and can be achieved for all learners".* (Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012, p816-817). This definition suggests that the interaction of both student and environment are critical targets for change to achieve increased student engagement, so it is a very appropriate definition for me to use in examining my results and answering my research questions.

3.2. Prevention and Dropout

The evolution of the construct of engagement emerged out of the dropout prevention literature (Reshly & Christenson, 2012). The participation-identification model developed by Finn (1989) was one of the early theories that addressed student engagement and the process of school dropout and completion. According to Finn's theory, dropout and completion are ongoing processes of participation → school success → identification

(completion) or of non-participation → poor school performance → emotional withdrawal (dropout). A significant aspect of Finn's theory, which is still considered relevant today, is that dropout and completion are not single events but are long term processes of disengagement or engagement.

Interest in both student engagement and dropout prevention has grown since the publication of Finn's seminal theory. With the assumption that engagement is a crucial basis of dropout prevention and the importance of contexts as targets of intervention have led to expansion of Finn's two factor participation-identification model. Student engagement is the cornerstone of some of the most promising dropout prevention and intervention efforts (Christenson et al., 2008).

The applied nature of engagement as a basis of dropout prevention and the importance of contexts as targets of intervention have led to expansion from the two factor Participation Identification Model. This expansion has been led by researchers such as Reschly and Christenson (2012) who developed a structured mentoring intervention for students who were at risk of dropping out of school (Christenson & Reschly, 2010). This intervention called Check & Connect is an intervention designed to promote student engagement through relationship building, problem solving and persistence for marginalized students. The seminal assumption of Check & Connect, since its inception in 1995, is that students are placed at risk when the learning environment fails to meet their needs. Check & Connect is under-pinned by four theoretical perspectives, systems-ecological, resilience, cognitive-behavioral and autonomous motivation (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2002). The intervention has four components: (1) A mentor who works with students and family for a minimum of two years; (2) Regular checks, monitoring the educational progress of the student; (3) Timely interventions, driven by data, to maintain students' connection to learning and the school; and (4) A partnership with families. Analysis of the Check & Connect intervention impact data has consistently resulted in positive outcomes with reduced rates of truancy, suspensions and dropout rates (Sinclair, Christenson & Thurlow, 2005). It is of interest that the MOE in NZ has now adopted the Check & Connect intervention as part of its positive behaviour for learning programme (Ministry of Education, 2013).

3.3. Alternative Education

In the international literature, alternative education for students who have been alienated from mainstream education occurs as a response to a global problem of public education not meeting the needs of all of its students. Whilst there is a considerable amount of overseas literature on alternative education programmes, few studies relate specifically to initiatives in New Zealand. Gerritsen (1999) traces the early development of New Zealand alternative education programmes to the mid-1980s. Originally, these programmes concentrated on pastoral care, presenting a curriculum based on social skills as a response to students' failure to engage in the mainstream education system.

The School-Based Alternative Education (SBAE) Policy of the Ministry of Education was initiated in the mid-1990s. This policy was initially developed because of an increasing truancy problem. There were growing numbers of students between the ages of 13 to 15 who were not in the mainstream education system. The SBAE policy was developed as it became apparent that students identified within the Non-Enrolment Truancy Service (NETS) could not be immediately reintegrated into the mainstream education system (Millbank, 2000). The SBAE policy framework was developed in the recognition that many of these long-term truants would need placement in non-mainstream classrooms for a period before they could be integrated into mainstream. Key goals of the programmes established under the SBAE were:

- The stabilization of social behaviour of these young people (this was especially so for those behaviours which made their participation in mainstream difficult).
- Addressing their educational needs where they were below that which would be expected given their chronological age
- Establishing patterns of attendance and also working widely with whanau/family and other significant individuals in the lives of those young people with a view to improving their life chances (Sanders & Mumford, 2001, p. 11.)

The SBAE policy integrated the connection between both the local mainstream schools along with the local community because it had become obvious that most of these students, who had been out of the mainstream education system for some time, needed a different system prior to integration back into mainstream. This is what led to the establishment of community providers, who had previous experience in working with high risk young people. The first SBAE programmes were funded from the 1997 budget and this was further increased in 1999. By 2001, 1820 pupils aged between 13.5 and 15 years of age were in SBAE programmes (Ministry of Education, 2001). The programmes, which are operated because of community collaboration, are best described within a Ministry of Education document as follows:

Under the New Zealand alternative education (AE) policy, the Ministry of Education establishes contracts with schools to provide a given number of places for young people, aged 13 and a half to 15 years who have been alienated from the education system. Generally, schools work with community partners who provide the alternative education programmes. Alienation has to do with neither the young person nor the school(s) being willing to have them attending a regular school setting. The target group is young people aged 13 and a half to 15 years who are not enrolled in and cannot be re-integrated into a regular school and schools locally are refusing enrolment and one or more of the following apply.

The young person has:

- Been out of school for two terms or more,

- Multiple exclusions (urban – more than one school, rural one plus other factors),

- A history of dropping out of mainstream schooling after being re-integrated,

- Dropped out of Correspondence School after enrolment as an "At Risk Student".

- The ideal outcome for these students is to re-enter the education system in a mainstream school. For those who are 15, other positive outcomes would

include entering a training programme or finding a job and joining the workforce (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 4).

External providers, often-private training organizations, deliver AE. In some cases, schools have their own on-site provision of AE. Schools often cooperate by pooling their funding to create consortia or clusters. One of the schools is nominated as a consortium lead school or managing school. This school has an overall responsibility for managing the relationship with the cluster's external providers of AE. The remaining schools, which place students in AE, are referred to as enrolling schools. The obligations of managing schools and enrolling schools are set out in the Ministry of Education guidelines for AE. It is important to understand that the obligations are linked to the 1989 Education Act. "The Act requires that young people aged 6-16 inclusive are enrolled at and attend a registered school." It also stipulates that a school can arrange for a student to attend a course of programme off-campus and with another provider. Nevertheless, the School of Enrolment remains responsible for the student's safety, education, and pastoral care (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 2)

Alternative Education, as we know it today in New Zealand, was established in the late 1990s. In the New Zealand context a report on key informants experiences in alternative education (O'Brien, Thesing, & Herbert, 2001) was a comprehensive study undertaken early on after the establishment of alternative education in New Zealand. The study, however, did not include the voices of the students. According to the Education Review Office (ERO) report on Alternative Education, approximately 3500 students now participate in AE each year (Ministry of Education, 2011). A majority of the students in AE are Māori. In 2010, 63% of AE students were Māori, 9% Pacific and 25% Pakeha/European. Two thirds of AE students in 2010 were male. Unfortunately the dilemma of whether the emphasis of AE should be a temporary programme prior to reintegration to mainstream or an education programme/system in its own right has plagued AE since its foundation. A report to the Ministry of Education in 2001 on key informants' experiences identified the over-riding need for staff professional development and training qualifications (O'Brien, Thesing & Herbert, 2001). It is disappointing that this recommendation has not been acted on. The up-skilling of

staff, many of whom have little in the way of formal qualifications, has not eventuated over the years, although the Ministry announced in September 2010 that it would ensure each AE provider employs a Registered teacher to provide advice, professional guidance, and support to tutors (Ministry of Education, 2011).

3.4. Ethnicity/culture in Relation to Engagement

The ethnicity and the culture of students can have a significant effect on their academic engagement. However, the relationship between engagement and ethnicity is not a simple one. There is no doubt that ethnic or cultural membership appears to be a critical factor in the degree student's value, believe and engage in the school learning environment (Smalls, White, Charvous & Sellers, 2007). However, in contrast to the cultural ecological perspective of Ogbu (1986), it appears that developing a strong academic identity can co-exist with a strong ethnic cultural identity (Chavous, Bernat, Schmeelk-Core, Kohn-Wood & Zimmerman, 2003). Furthermore, Okagaki, Helling and Bingham (2009) suggest a strong ethnic identity, as well as bicultural identity, that encourages academic achievement in the mainstream environment is a key element for minority students engaging. This is in line with social identity theorists and researchers who maintain people belong to multiple groups at any one time. It is also suggested that for minority students, their ethnic, bicultural and academic identities either support or deny the students' motivation for engagement in the school learning environment (Bingham & Okagaki, 2012).

There is no doubt teachers are a crucial component in the engagement process for students from ethnic minorities. Students' engagement or disengagement are the result of the quality of the teacher- student relationships, teacher expectations for learning and most importantly, teachers' pedagogical practices (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Skinner, Marchand, Furrer & Kindermann, 2008). It is of relevance that much of the American research acknowledges there is more to learn on the factors that support and hinder academic engagement of students of ethnic minorities (Bingham & Okagaki, 2012). Of particular

interest is identifying those behaviours that lead to positive teacher- student relationships and to then train teachers to engage in such behaviours, when teaching students from ethnic minorities (Bingham & Okagaki, 2012). It is significant the Ministry of Education in New Zealand has been implementing strategies in relation to Māori students in mainstream schools that attempt to address this issue. (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2007)

Research findings in New Zealand on closing the gap of academic achievement for Māori students has led to the implementation of a number of different strategies, of which a significant one aims to increase student engagement (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy, 2007). Bishop and colleagues' research on Te Kotahitanga suggest that teachers benefit from learning a range of strategies that will promote effective interactions with Māori students, resulting in an increase in student academic engagement. There is a strong and ongoing argument that many Māori students find the school environment not conducive to academic learning and accordingly many Māori students do not function to their full potential (Glynn & Bevan-Brown, 2007; MacFarlane, Glynn, Cavanagh & Bateman, 2007). Te Kotahitanga is a kaupapa Māori programme that has been implemented in some mainstream schools.

The aim of the intervention was to create culturally appropriate and responsive contexts and systems within schools to enable full participation and enhanced outcomes for Māori students (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy, 2007). Essentially Te Kotahitanga is a research and professional development programme to support teachers in secondary school with English as the first language and where those schools have high numbers of Māori students. In 2009, thirty-three schools were participating in this programme and since then it has grown to fifty-five schools (MOE, 2013). The concept of ako is a teaching and learning relationship in which learning is reciprocal between teachers and students. It acknowledges that high quality teaching is the most important influence on education for Māori students and incorporating culture and productive partnerships in learning leads to Māori students' academic engagement and resultant achievement. The quality of the teacher student relationship will be significant in the degree of engagement displayed by the students. (Bishop et al., 2007).

A media release on 24th April 2013, announced Te Kotahitanga would continue as part of a new expanded programme. The new programme renamed "Building on Success" will incorporate the strengths of Te Kotahitanga but will be broader, so that secondary schools have a comprehensive range of support structures to help teachers lift achievement for all students. The renaming of the programme, has led some to believe the programme had ended. The MOE has reassured people that the expanded programme will include the strengths of Te Kotahitanga and will feature additional elements designed to support effective leadership and accelerate achievement in literacy and numeracy. From the Ministry of Educations point of view, it remains committed to raising achievement among Māori. Te Kotahitanga has played a vital part in increasing the academic engagement of Māori students and that is why it is being expanded under the arm of "Building on Success" (Ministry of Education, 2013).

3.5. Cognitive Learning In Relation To Engagement

Under the section on student engagement, I have already presented various definitions of cognition as a sub-construct of engagement, but the role of cognition in relation to student engagement, in particular for students at risk of academic failure, is of great significance (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2012; Schunk & Mullen, 2012). Over the last 50 years early behaviourist models of psychological functioning gave first explanations to theories that likened the mind to a computer and, more recently, to perspectives that emphasize the social environment's role in the development of mental processes. As a result the sociocultural theory (SCT) of mind, as developed by Russian psychologist L.S. Vygotsky and his colleagues more than 80 years ago, has re-emerged as a theory that illuminates the relationship of cognitive development and student engagement (Kozulin, 2003).

Vygotsky's research into the development of cognitive functions revealed that this process is not a matter of innate abilities growing into a mature state but that it is the emergence of new ways of thinking, acting and being, that result from an individual's engagement in activities where he or she is supported by interactions with more

knowledgeable others. What this is suggesting is that the social environment is not merely the stage on which development plays out, rather it is the actual development and associated engagement in learning. In SCT the development of higher forms of consciousness, such as voluntary control of memory, perception, and attention, occurs through a process of internalization whereby these functions initially occur as interaction between human beings but once formed they are then transformed into cognitive abilities, with the result that "the social nature of people comes to be their psychological nature as well" (Luria, 1979, p. 45). Vygotsky believed that the scope of individuals' abilities could only be revealed when various forms of support are offered as students struggle with difficult tasks. Vygotsky introduced the zone of proximal development (ZPD) which involves the scaffolding of students' learning. His argument was that cognitive abilities emerge from interactions in the world and that these are always mediated so the students' abilities do not simply mature on their own, but instead result from individuals' histories of engaging in activities with teachers and peers (Vygotsky, 1986).

Similar to Vygotsky, Bandura's (1977b, 1986, 1997, 2001) social cognitive theory of psychological functioning states that much human learning and behaviours occurs in social environments. Bandura's theoretical approach, more so than Vygotsky's SCT of mind, can be used to explain student motivation and engagement. One key social cognitive variable described by Bandura is self-efficacy; one's perceived capabilities for learning or performing actions at designated levels (Bandura, 1977a, 1997). For the cognitive sub-construct of engagement, students engaged in learning have a sense of self-efficacy for learning. Similar to self-determination theory already discussed, Bandura's social cognitive theory presents a view of human agency, which results in students proactively engaging in their learning (Schunk & Pajares, 2005). The suggestion about human agency is very similar to Reeve's (2012) fourth sub-construct of engagement (agentic) which I have previously discussed. Accordingly, Reeve's suggestion that agentic was a new sub-construct of engagement should be challenged when one explores the research in areas such as social cognitive theory.

Self-efficacy affects motivation through self-evaluation of progress including goals that have been set. Motivation then potentially energizes the subsequent engagement in learning

as displayed through the sub-constructs of engagement (academic, behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and agentic). Very little research has been carried out on the role of self-efficacy as it pertains to students re-engaging in a positive learning situation (Mullen & Schunk, 2011). Vick and Packard (2008) expressed the importance of investigating self- efficacy in disadvantaged ethnic students in America. They undertook preliminary work to discover why some youth displayed resilience and persistence, despite obstacles, to achieve positive engagement in academic learning. Similar to Schunk and Mullen (2012) they emphasized the roles of personal and contextual factors on students' academic motivation. Therefore, self-efficacy as a personal factor can both affect and be influenced by contextual factors. We need to understand how contextual variables operate in order to enhance student's self-efficacy, motivation, and engagement (Schunk & Mullen, 2012).

A social-cognitive theoretical framework of self-regulatory engagement (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2012) gives a potentially more detailed explanation to the cognitive processes behind self-efficacy. Such a theory integrates related but distinctive constructs of motivation, engagement and metacognition. A cyclical feedback loop is central to Cleary and Zimmerman's theory of self-regulation. The cyclical loop is a process that involves students thinking about a learning activity before, during and after and is largely cognitive in nature.

Intervention programmes to address the issue of students dropping out of mainstream education have been in effect in most countries for years, however many such programmes and strategies are problem based, not developmental (Bloom, 2010). Student self-efficacy is often not assessed let alone fully understood (Bloom, 2010). Cleary (2011) has developed a cyclical event method called self-regulated learning analysis. This assessment is designed to examine student's regulatory beliefs and reactions as they actually take part in context specific activities. The analysis targets the self-motivation beliefs such as self-efficacy and regulatory processes such as goal setting. Engagement strategies for assisting high-risk dropout students need to take into account the level of self-efficacy and regulatory processes being displayed by individual students (Wolters & Taylor, 2012). Accordingly, understanding self-efficacy and regulatory processes as variables of cognitive engagement is vital to the overall understanding of the cycle of student disengagement and re- engagement.

3.6. Using Voices of Students

Listening to what students have to say about how they make meanings of their experiences in the school environment gives understanding of the social world from the student perspective (Bruner, 1986). Morgan and Morris (1999) stated the importance of the student perspective in research because "their views have been and still are, relatively neglected" (p. 3). Student perceptions are an important tool to utilize in order to understand why some students disengage from and re-engage in mainstream education.

Listening to their "voices" will hopefully give us a better understanding of student engagement. Evaluating and investigating why students drop out of school often leads to the formation of a list of demographic factors, which describe the dropouts. It is only when we start to listen to the voices of dropouts themselves that we start to get an insight into the causes and potential solutions to academic disengagement, which precedes the act of dropping out of school. There is a limited amount of research on students who have dropped out of school (De La Ossa, 2005; Meeker, 2008; Reyna, 2011; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Rumberger, 2011; Stayton, 2011) There is even more of a scarcity of studies that focus on dropout recovery school settings in an attempt to discover and explore the students' perceptions and experiences related to the cycle of disengagement, and then to a new recovery (alternative) school setting. One study that did explore this cycle is the work of Lagna- Riordan, Aguilar, Franklin, Streeter, Kim, Tripodi, and Hopson (2011).

Lagna-Riordon and colleagues focused on exploring student perceptions of their experiences in a traditional public school setting and a solution focused alternative public school setting. Lagana- Riordan et al. (2011), using semi-structured interviews with students, found that students reported differential experiences across their two school setting, with stronger teacher and student connections reported in the alternative school setting. Iachini, Buettner, Anderson- Butcher & Reno, (2013) further attempted to fill the void in the literature by specifically exploring students' perceptions regarding the factors that led them to be unsuccessful in traditional school settings, and the factors that motivated them to enrol

in a dropout recovery charter school setting. Iachini and colleagues found that the students in their study highlighted how the relationship with teachers can be an important factor in a students' educational trajectory. The most frequent barriers to success in the traditional school setting, as reported by the students, were behavioural and discipline challenges along with a lack of support from teachers. These findings are similar to those found in two New Zealand studies on alternative education (Sanders & Munford, 2001; Brooking et al., 2008). In both NZ studies students explained that referrals by family and school staff were often the reason they enrolled. Iachini and colleagues found that most students also talked about their own intrinsic motivation. Several students indicated that they were motivated to come back and complete their high school qualifications. They argued that this indicated a sense of readiness on the part of the students to engage in learning for more self-determined reasons. They concluded this because of the students discussing the value of graduating high school and how this could support their future needs (Iachini et al., 2013).

When individuals are more self-determined to achieve a goal, enhanced psychological and well-being outcomes result (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In the educational context, more self-determined motivation in students has been linked to enhanced academic and psychological outcomes (Reeve, 2002). As already alluded to, there is an increasing body of research, which highlights the close relationship of the self- determination theory and the theory of student engagement (Eccles & Wang, 2012; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). Reluctant students interviewed by Strahan (2008) identified aspects of care that resulted in trusting relationships and focused learning were very important. Strahan concluded that "caring relationships were the key to reengaging disengaged learners … when a student learns to trust a caring teacher he or she can begin to take changes, find the will to invest effort in a task and receive the guidance needed to improve skills" (p. 7).

One study that did include the voices of the students was a report on the first 18 months of the Highbury Whanau Resource Centre AE programme (Saunders & Munford, 2001). This study incorporated in-depth interviews with the students but, along with Brooking, Gardner, & Calvert (2008), which also documented the voices of AE students, failed to make clear their research methodology for analysing the data collected from the student

interviews. As a result, both studies are inclined to list the demographic characteristics of students in the AE system and fail to give an in-depth understanding of why and how the students ended up in the AE system. Most importantly, both studies fail to suggest strategies that will address the issue of why the students disengaged from mainstream education in the first place. Further, they both throw very little light on the reason why some students have re-engaged in the education system.

3.7. Chapter summary

The current study involved the interviewing of young Māori students who have dropped out of mainstream education system but then re-engaged through the alternative education system in New Zealand. The above review discusses the complexities surrounding the definitions of student engagement and disengagement, the role of AE, and the importance of hearing the "voices" of the students. There is a scarcity of research in New Zealand into students who have experienced the cycle of disengagement from mainstream education and re-engaged in education. The review of literature highlights the importance of investigating my research questions related to disengagement, engagement and the role of AE in helping Māori students to re-enrol in mainstream education. An additional significance of this study is that unlike the limited previous research, I will endeavour to explain the methodological framework undertaken and present a more in-depth explanation in the interpretation of the "voices" of the students. I will now explain the methodological approach undertaken in this study.

Chapter 4. Methodology

It is vital that the methodology used is appropriate in relation to the overall aims of the research questions. I begin this section by outlining the key philosophies, paradigms and components of my research design. After deciding on my topic, I, as a researcher, had to consider how to collect the evidence that is required to answer the research questions. In this chapter, I explain the how and why of the data collection process, with particular emphasis on the phenomenological approach, qualitative data collection, and semi- structured interview methods, which all consequently determined my methods of data analysis. The research process section precisely outlines what I actually did in collecting my data. Finally, I discuss the ethical considerations and issues of validity, reliability, quality, rigour and limitations in qualitative research relevant to my study.

4.1. Research Design

Ontology and epistemology are very much interlinked and the stances taken by a researcher need to be compatible. For this study, I have taken a critical realism/contextualism position. A critical realist position implies that there is a real and knowable world, which sits behind the subjective and socially located knowledge a researcher, can access (Madill, Jordon, & Shirley, 2000). The critical realist position holds that we need to claim that some authentic reality exists to produce knowledge that might make a difference (Stainton-Rogers & Stainton-Rogers, 1997). However, socially influenced knowledge is thought to reflect a separate reality that we can only partially access. This means that, based on individual experiences and points of view within the world, there can be more than one way of seeing and understanding reality. Contextualism, like critical realism, is an epistemology, which sits between the two poles of Postivism and Constructionism (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994). Tebes cites Pepper (1942) to describe the central metaphor of contextualism as "the human act in context" (2005, p. 216). Importantly, contextualism does not assume a single reality but instead sees knowledge as emerging from contexts and reflecting the researcher's position, so it is therefore always provisional (Madill

et al., 2000; Tebes, 2005). However, contextualism does endeavor to understand the truth, hence has a realist dimension, and maintains the knowledge will be true (valid) in certain contexts (Tebes, 2005). For this study, a critical realist/contextualist position underpins the qualitative data gathering methods and thematic analysis and this is justified by the importance that the context of the learning environment has on student's academic engagement.

This study used qualitative research methods and a phenomenological approach in order to collect data through semi-structured interviews. Within qualitative research, focusing on an in-depth examination of a small number of cases, the purpose of phenomenology is to appreciate participant's experiences of a particular phenomenon (Johnson & Christensen, 2007). The phenomenon of interest for this study is academic re-engagement of students who had dropped out of mainstream education. Johnson and Christensen (2007) explain that phenomenological research endeavours to explain and report meanings of the experienced phenomenon as shared by the individual students. The underlying philosophy of phenomenological research was born out of protest with the positivism paradigm. The positivism paradigm suggested that reality was ordered, rational, and logical, meaning that researchers could study reality. Positivists assumed objectively measured knowledge was independent of human interaction. The counter movement to the positivism paradigm was the naturalistic paradigm that is based on the assumption that reality is not fixed but based on individual and subjective realities. Accordingly, the philosophy of phenomenology is very compatible with the naturalistic paradigm.

Phenomenologists assume that knowledge is achieved through interactions between researchers and participants. Husserl (1859-1938) developed descriptive phenomenology where every day conscious experiences were described while preconceived opinions were set aside or bracketed (Dahlberg, Drew, & Nystrom, 2008). Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Husserl's student, rejected the theory of knowledge known as epistemology and adopted ontology, the science of being. Heidegger developed interpretative phenomenology by extending hermeneutics, the philosophy of interpretation (Creswell, 1994). Heidegger, who was interested in interpreting and describing human experience, believed that bracketing

was not warranted because hermeneutics presumed prior understanding (Dahlberg, Drew & Nystrom, 2008). Heidegger further believed it was impossible to negate our experiences related to the phenomenon under study, for he believed personal awareness was intrinsic to phenomenological research. I wanted to explore the meaning of contexts in which students re-engage academically so accordingly I adopted interpretive phenomenology for this study. In using an interpretive phenomenology framework, the researcher is extremely important to the research process.

It is the researcher's ability to communicate and put the participants at ease that will help to ensure the collection of deep and meaningful data (Speziale & Carpenter, 2003). It is essential for the researcher to be extremely self-aware and perceptive and be able to recognize when a participant is not at ease in order to change the data collection process accordingly. It was my intention, as the researcher, to use my extensive experience in working with students who have dropped out of mainstream education to collect meaningful and relevant data from the students. I undertook semi-structured narrative interviews with the goal of collecting rich descriptive data relating to the re-engagement of Māori students into a positive learning environment. The face-to-face one-on-one interviews (Kanoi Ki Te Kanoi) lasted between 30 and 40 minutes duration and took place either at the AE Centre or at the student's home. The use of narrative interviews provided a sense of warmth and encouragement for the participants to feel comfortable sharing their experiences. In addition, semi-structured interviews enabled me, the researcher, to pursue lines of enquiry during the interview that I felt would give me data relevant to the phenomenon of student engagement.

To provide reassurance of a shared understanding of the AE environment I was open with the students about my own experience working with youth and in the AE environment. As part of the process, I emphasized the importance of their stories. The interviews were conducted with some flexibility to allow the phenomenological approach to be carried out to ensure the collection of rich and relevant data. By using the interviews, rather than written or other methods, this allowed me to clarify things said by the students and to observe body language and facial expressions that gave added understanding to the student's perspective.

The questions used in the semi-structured narrative interviews were designed to be broader than the phenomenon of engagement so no explicit questions on engagement were included in the interview; this ensured that no leading questions were asked. The questions followed some general sections including preschool, school, health, family (Whanau), mainstream education versus AE experiences, individual strengths and weaknesses, and future goals and aspirations. Some examples of the questions include:

- Do you remember your first day at primary school? (School)
- What did your family think about you being enrolled in AE? (Family)
- Are you aware of being sick when you were a child? (Health)
- What way do you think you learn best? (Mainstream experiences versus AE experiences)
- What do you think you will be doing in five years' time? (Future goals and aspirations)

The full interview schedule is included in Appendix C. The interview schedule had a degree of flexibility which encouraged students to talk freely about anything they thought was significant in their experiences of mainstream and AE education. This flexibility was also helpful to me so that I was able to take certain lines of enquiry outside of the schedule when I felt it would enlist further rich data related to the phenomenon of engagement. The justification for using this semi-structured narrative interview process was to elicit as much socially constructed knowledge as possible and allow the students to raise key experiences.

4.1.1. Analysis of Data

For my analysis of the data, I chose to use a hybrid approach of qualitative methods of thematic analysis, and consequently, it incorporated both the data-driven inductive approach of Boyatzis (1998) and the deductive, template of codes approach, outlined by Crabtree and Miller (1999). This approach was designed to integrate data driven codes (student interviews) with theory driven codes based on the tenets of academic engagement. This approach complemented the research questions by allowing the tenets of engagement to be integral to

the process of deductive thematic analysis while allowing themes to emerge directly from the data using inductive coding. The approach was similar to that outlined by Crabtree and Miller (1999). I formed a codebook (deductive) as a means of organising the data for subsequent interpretation. Although sometimes the codebook is developed based on preliminary scanning of the data, in this case, I developed the codebook based on the research questions, the theoretical framework of academic engagement and my experience as a practitioner in working with students who have dropped out of the mainstream education system. The codebook was produced before commencing an in- depth analysis of the data (student interviews). It was envisaged that the codebook would serve as a data management tool and would assist in the interpretation of the data (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). The codebook is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Theory driven codes

Sub Constructs of Engagement:	Definitions:	Examples:
Behaviour	Attendance/non-attendance, attitude to following school rules, and participation/non- participation in class discussions.	Students demonstrate ability to stay on task in classroom and show a respectful attitude to peers and teachers.
Emotional:	The feelings of belonging and attachment students feel to the school and their learning environment. In addition, the belief students have in the value of their academic learning.	Students express that they feel part of the school community and that they see the value of learning.
Cognitive:	Students seek conceptual understanding rather than surface knowledge and evaluating different learning strategies.	Students demonstrate self-regulation along with planning and goal setting. Students show signs of action prior to activity, during and being reflective after learning activity.
Agentic:	Students make proactive, intentional and constructive contribution into the flow of the learning activity. Attempts to enrich the learning activity by making the learning experience more interesting and relevant to the student.	Attempts by students to enrich their learning activity by making their learning experience more interesting and relevant.
Relationships:	Demonstration of trusting relationships between peers, teachers and family.	Students express they feel supported by peers, teachers and family.
Cultural:	Whether students feel comfortable about being Māori in the school learning environment.	Students express that, as a Māori student, they felt encouraged by teachers that they could achieve at their academic work.

Interpretive rigour requires the researcher to demonstrate clearly how interpretations of the data have been achieved and to illustrate findings with quotations from the raw data (Rice & Ezzy, 1999). The process of data analysis used by the researcher demonstrates how the coded data from the student interviews are supported by excerpts from the interviews. This ensures that any data interpretation will remain directly linked to the words of the participants. Overarching themes that describe the phenomenon of engagement will emerge from the patterns of coded student responses.

The thematic analysis sits well with the epistemology and the phenomenological research framework adapted for this study. Contextualism is positioned between the two poles of essentialism and constructionism and characterised by theories such as critical realism (e.g. Willig, 1999). Critical realism acknowledges the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of 'reality'. In the context of this study, therefore, the thematic analysis is a method that works both to reflect reality and to unravel the surface of reality. The analysis explored whether the codes in my codebook were portrayed in the codes derived from the student interviews (inductive analysis) and whether some of the definitions of the elements in the codebook needed redefining after analysis of the interview data. The analysis will also explore whether any additional codes emerge from the interview data that were not originally coded for in the codebook.

To capture the experience of the students who have reengaged in a positive learning environment, the analysis will obviously stick closely to what the students report in their interviews with an analysis that is typically inductive and semantic, but one needs to make sense of the patterns and, most importantly, one needs to address the 'so what?' questions. Using the code book, deductive approach will assist in making sense of a students' account of their experiences. Combined, the inductive and the deductive coding of the data will result in an interpretive analysis that will address one of the main research questions: What are the significant *factors that resulted in young Māori students, who had dropped out of mainstream, re-engaging in academic learning.* UK-based health psychologists, Willig and Stainton-Rogers (2008), however, sound an important word of caution in relation to

interpretation in qualitative analysis. The challenge to qualitative researchers is … *"to go beyond what presents itself, to reveal dimensions of a phenomenon which are concealed or hidden, whilst at the same time taking care not to impose meaning upon the phenomenon, not to squeeze it into pre-conceived categories or theoretical formulations, not to reduce it to an underlying cause"* (p. 9). One is reminded that qualitative methods are a way of capturing messy complexities of everyday realities, of presenting students' experiences and meanings. Further, these methods ensure that the researcher's role as an interpreter does not impose on the true meaning of the collected data. This does not mean interpretation should be avoided; rather, it suggests we should not engage in it with a disregard for our data. Likewise, it is not a call to provide only analysis which honours the data.

In summary, the analysis process involved the production of a codebook (deductive) that helped organize and interpret the codes identified in the student interviews (inductive). Coded patterns from the student interviews were represented as overarching themes that captured the essence of why these students had re-engaged in a positive learning environment. The hybrid approach enabled the collection of the relevant data from the interviews to answer the research questions on student engagement.

4.2. Research Process

Six Alternative Education (AE) providers in the Central North Island of New Zealand were invited, in writing, to put forward students who may be suitable to participate in the current study. These centres were recommended by the local Ministry of Education office. All of the potential participants had been marginalized and disengaged from mainstream education because that is the criteria for them enrolling in AE. I invited the providers to suggest Māori students that they considered to have positively engaged in the AE learning environment. This criterion of positive re-engagement is the phenomenon identified within the research framework. As it turned out three of the students had recently (within the previous six weeks) been reinstated to mainstream education and they reflect part of the 3% of AE students that return to mainstream. The other three students were currently in AE classrooms but were considered potential candidates for return to mainstream within the

next three months. These particular students were considered as the appropriate participants to reflect on their experiences of the phenomenon of re-engagement into a positive learning environment. I offered to be part of the selection process in terms of assisting the centres to identify suitable participants. Three centres took this up and, as I had previously worked in the AE system, it was appropriate for me to be part of the process.

Five different centres provided six students to participate, three females and three males, aged between 14 and 15 years. One Centre provided two students, a male and a female. Initially I envisaged interviewing just males, because males are disproportionately represented compared to females in the AE system (Ministry of Education 2011). Also initially, I did not envisage interviewing students who had returned to mainstream, but when the opportunity came to interview such students I was very keen to include them and, as it turned out, the only reinstated students available were three girls. It needs to be noted that one potential candidate was ruled out by me, through collaboration with the AE provider and the student, because the student did not want to be identified as Māori. Making participants feel at ease and enabling them the opportunity to tell their story was a priority for me. This was achieved by making personal contact with the students and providers prior to the interviews. The participants were encouraged to tell their stories in an open and honest way that focused on their strengths. I also made a significant effort to show my genuine interest in the students' stories and in particular their future goals and aspirations.

In preparation for the interviews, a pilot interview was carried out with the research supervisors in order to refine the questions being asked. In addition, prior to commencing the interviews I had a detailed discussion with my cultural advisor about non-Māori doing research about Māori student experiences. The discussion included the importance of student, family (Whanau), and local iwi being informed and having an opportunity to contribute to the research discussion. The cultural advisor felt that in relation to non-Māori researchers connecting with the students, pre-contact initiatives being undertaken by me would be helpful.

The students chose the location to be interviewed; four students choose a private

room at the AE centres and two students chose to be interviewed at their homes. Within two hours of all of the interviews I wrote notes from memory (without listening to the audio recording) to make sure that any additional details, such as body language and general atmosphere, were acknowledged. It is of interest that the first two interviews only lasted approximately 20 minutes each and it appeared that the students struggled with recalling information in chronological order from early childhood to the present day. To remedy this I changed the interview schedule, reversed the chronological order so that the students started describing their experience at their present school setting, and then reflected back on their experiences. In addition, it became apparent after the two initial interviews that "going in cold" without any pre-contact with the student did not enhance access to the rich data I was seeking. My initial thinking, from a quantitative stance, was that pre-contact could contaminate the data and act as a confounding variable. Following this experience, I became more confident in the use of qualitative methods that allowed more personal contact and interaction to enhance the rich data acquisition. For example, I attended the prize-giving ceremonies at the AE schools and had contact with the students, their families, and their teachers prior to the interviews. This pre-contact resulted in a more open exchange between the students and me for the last four interviews.

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by me. The transcription process was an important part of the analysing stage because it allowed me to become very familiar with the data. The coding process initially involved the reading of the interview transcripts and coding for elements of engagement that were identified in the codebook (table 1).These were initially color-coded in the individual interview transcripts. I then grouped together each of the individual, six codes of student excerpts from the student interview transcripts. At this stage, I then looked for any codes that had emerged out of the student interviews (inductive) that I had not coded for in the codebook. The analysis then involved looking for patterns of codes that represented themes of the phenomenon of academic engagement. A number of sub-themes were identified and the analytical process was concluded with the presentation of overarching themes that I felt the data had demonstrated were very significant in why these particular students had re-engaged in an academic learning environment.

4.3. Ethical Considerations

This study acquired full ethical approval by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (Southern B, Application No. 13/32). Information sheets along with consent forms were sent to the Alternative Education providers, parents/caregivers, and the participants (see Appendices 1, 2, & 3). The information sheets to all three groups stressed that the names of the students taking part in the research would remain confidential to my supervisors and me. Pseudonyms were given to all participants. In addition, the identity of the participating Alternative Education providers will remain confidential. All participants were, both in writing (information sheets – Appendix 3) and verbally (immediately prior to interview), given the right to:

- Choose not to answer a particular question;
- Withdraw from the study (until 24 hours prior to the time we arrange for the interview;
- Ask any questions about the study at any time during the project;
- Be given a summary of the project findings when it is finished;
- Contact me within 24 hours after the interview to change anything in the interview;
- Have the opportunity to review the recorded interview.

4.4. The Ethical Principal of Doing No Harm

It was important to me that the research experience would be positive for all of my research participants. This was not merely based on the ethical requirement of research to do no harm, but because of my personal and philosophical commitment to the young students who had made a series of steps to improve their lives, situations, and future prospects. In addition, I was very grateful that these students had given themselves and their time for the purpose of my research. All students appeared to appreciate the opportunity to tell their story and have their voices heard. In all cases, the students appeared to be reflective during the interview and highlighted both, to themselves and me, how far they had come in their lives. This was no better demonstrated than when Kate was asked what it was like going back

to mainstream where she had previously felt she was not supported. Kate replied *"I think teachers realize how hard I've worked to get back to mainstream and I just got the award in Māori Performing Arts at the senior Prize-giving. The first person from AE to ever get a mainstream award"* (sounded proud). Approaching the students with a positive strengths-based attitude allowed them to have the self-realization that they can change their own future stories.

4.5. The Ethical Principle of Cultural Safety

Another ethical issue, confronting me as a New Zealand Pakeha researcher (of European descent), was that of the cultural safety of all my Māori participants. A number of Māori researchers have challenged Pakeha involvement in research with Māori participants because the Pakeha "point of view of Māori is filtered through their own values, circumstances, research training, privilege" (Cram, 1997, p. 50). Having worked for a private Māori training trust and at times taught exclusively Māori students I was comfortable and determined to carry out the present research. I further managed this issue by consulting with Professor Piri Scia Scia the Pro-Vice Chancellor Māori at Victoria University, throughout the conduct of my research and by endeavouring to ensure the cultural safety of all my participants by sensitive and respectful interviewing.

4.6. The Ethical Principle of Interpreting Student Experiences

Finally, the ethical issue of how we interpret the experiences as told by the students was always going to be a dilemma for me as the researcher. As a researcher, undertaking an interpretive thematic analysis one can tell a different story from that told by the participants. Analysis for this study involves interpretation, which is informed by particular subjective and theoretical lenses, and this potentially can mean that my analysis may be somewhat removed from the raw data of the student interviews. Some researchers have written about the anxiety this can cause (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Price, 1996). What is important is that I, as the researcher, fully appreciate that an interpretive thematic analysis involves balancing the verbatim accounts of the students against the more overtly interpretative analyses carried

out by me the researcher (Larkin et al., 2006). It was imperative that I used reflexivity at all times. Reflexivity is concerned with critical reflection on the process and practice of my research, on my role as a researcher, and my stance on what constitutes knowledge. Reflexive research acknowledges the role I play as a researcher in the production of knowledge. I, as the researcher, must reflect on my positioning and the ways this might have shaped the collection and analysis of the data. A significant attempt to be reflexive was achieved by keeping a research journal. For example, after each interview, as already mentioned in the method section, within two hours I sat down and wrote everything that came into my head about the interview. An example of one journal entry was.

I have just interviewed Nancy at her home where she lives with her Nan and I have come away from the interview feeling really positive about Nancy's future, however it is important for me to appreciate and understand that because of my extensive involvement in implementing and running strength based recovery-learning programmes that I am always looking at the positive changes that students have made. I wonder if this bias sometimes results in me seeing what I want to see and ignoring and failing to acknowledge some of the negative behaviours that have led to the students being marginalized from the mainstream education system. I reminded myself the extent of negative behaviours that Nancy had displayed prior to being enrolled in the AE system.

4.7. Quality and Rigour

When evaluating the quality of quantitative research we refer to terms of reliability, validity, and transferability and in the past qualitative research was often evaluated using such constructs (Gilbert & Mulkey, 1984). These constructs also apply to qualitative research but the means by which they are achieved are very different. For the study I have adhered to British health Psychologist, Lucy Yardley's (2000, 2008) set of four theoretically 'neutral' validity principles as set out in figure 4.

LUCY YARDLEY'S (2000, 2008) 'OPEN-ENDED,
FLEXIBLE' QUALITY PRINCIPLES

1.   *Sensitivity to Context* - a qualitative researcher can be sensitive to the context by:
- Contextualising the research in relation to relevant theoretical and empirical literature;
- Being sensitive to participants' perspectives and socio-cultural context (during both data collection – by, for example, asking open-ended questions that encourage participants to talk about what is important to them – and during data analysis by exploring how the participants' socio-cultural context shapes their accounts);
- Being sensitive to ethical issues, such as the extra responsibility of care when representing the stories of marginalised or vulnerable participants;
- Being sensitive to the data by not simply imposing the researcher's meanings on the data and being open
to alternative interpretations of, and the complexities and inconsistencies in, the data.

2.   *Commitment and Rigour* -can be demonstrated by:
- Thorough data collection;
- Breadth and/or depth of analysis;
- Methodological competence and skill;
- In depth engagement with topic (both professionally and personally)

3.   *Transparency and Coherence* – can be demonstrated through presentation of the analysis that exhibits:
- Clarity and power of description or argument through persuasive and convincing interpretation of data;
- Fit between the research question, the theoretical framework, and the methods used to collect and analyse data;
- A transparent account of how data were collected and analysed; presentation of data extracts to allow the reader to judge for themselves the adequacy of interpretations;
- Reflexivity through considering how the researcher, or the use of particular methods, shaped the research.

4.   *Impact and Importance* –'can only be assessed in relation to the objectives of the analysis, the application is intended for, and the community for whom the results were deemed relevant' (Yardley, 2000, p.223). So a piece of research might have:
- Practical or applied impact for a particular user – group or community, or for practitioners or policy makers;
- Theoretical impact through increasing our understanding of a particular issue or creating new understandings;
- Socio-cultural impact through contributing to positive social change for a particular group

Figure 4: Lucy Yardley's (2000, 2008, cited in Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.290) theoretically

neutral validity principles.

An example of how I applied the principle of Sensitivity to Context was that I formed a codebook to help organize and manage the student interview data. The codebook consisted of the elements of engagement that were derived from relevant theoretical and empirical literature. The principle of Commitment and Rigour was demonstrated by my thoroughness in collecting data-rich student interviews along with an in-depth interpretative thematic analysis that involved a lot more than just recording and reporting the students experiences. Transparency and coherence was the third principle and this was adhered to by presenting a clear transparent account of how the data was collected from the student interviews and consequently analysed to produce overarching themes that are representative of academic engagement. In addition, sufficient student excerpts were presented to allow people reading the study to judge for themselves the degree the student excerpts personify the overarching themes of student academic engagement. The final principle of Impact and Importance was achieved by undertaking research that potentially is highly beneficial and helpful to teachers and administrators involved in the AE system. The findings will give a greater understanding of the role the AE system plays in assisting students to re-engage in mainstream.

One quality criteria often used in qualitative research is member checking. Member checking (or 'member validation'; Seale, 1999, p. 61) refers to the practice of checking your analysis with your participants. The theoretical and methodological assumptions that underpin the concept of member checking need to be considered and for this study a decision was made not to member check the student interviews. In the first instant, member checking seems to be significant in order to accurately represent the experiences of the students. However, it is important to consider the theoretical and methodological assumptions that underpin the concept of member checking. This study was always going to involve me the researcher viewing the students' experiences from a different perspective to them and the interpretative nature of my thematic analysis is not compatible with member checking. Because I took a critical realism/contextualism, position for this study the interpretation of the student interviews are underpinned by theory and subjectivity and accordingly the results are not necessary a reflection of the students experience, as they

understand it. Therefore I used a broader strategy of 'member reflections' instead of member checking. This involved having a meeting with each of the students individually and presenting to them the overarching themes that emerged as being important for student academic engagement. I was able to re-interview four out of the six students. There was a consensus that the themes represented the reasons why they had re-engaged in an academic learning environment. I also intend to make my summary findings available to the AE centres, which provided students, at the completion of my study, but prior to any publication. This further strategy of validation will give the AE staff an opportunity for reflective elaboration of the study. Reflections can entail sharing and dialoguing with the staff about the findings and providing opportunities for questions, critique, feedback, affirmation, and even collaboration (Tracy, 2010).

4.8. Limitations

The main limitation of this study is that it was limited to a small number (six) of students from only five AE centres. However, it was never intended for this study to be a widespread report on what was happening at AE centres and likewise it was never the intention for the participants of this study to be a representation of the general population of AE students and, as a result, the findings cannot be generalized. Due to the nature of this thesis, the study resulted in only one person, me the researcher, in transcribing, checking and analysing the interview data. Due to the transcription process being a first for the researcher it would have been valuable to have had an experienced person to check on some of the transcription process. Finally, the member reflections of the overarching themes involved only four of the six students because two of the students had moved a considerable distance away by the time this study was completed.

In this chapter I have explained the methodological choices as a result of my research question and its focus on the life experience of students who have dropped out of mainstream education but then re-engaged in a positive learning environment (in some cases back into mainstream). I have explored phenomenological research from a critical/realism contextualist perspective. I have explained my choice of critical realism/contextual

perspective as the framework within which my research was conducted and my choice of interpretive phenomenology. I have also explained the choice of participants, and both the interview and analytical methods associated with the data collection and analysis. I also detailed a number of ethical considerations and these, along with issues of validity, reliability and rigour associated with qualitative research, influenced my research decisions and practices. The detailed exposition of methodological choices and decisions along with the methods used to collect, analyse, and present the findings hopefully will support my claims for the trustworthiness, rigour, and validity of this study.

However the real significance of my methodological choices was that they enabled me to get an in-depth interpretation of the students' experience of the cycle of engagement-disengagement and re-engagement in order to answer my research questions related to disengagement, engagement and the role of AE in re-engaging students.

I will now proceed to the presentation of my results.

Chapter 5. Results

In using a hybrid approach of thematic analysis, as explained in the methodology chapter, I formed a codebook (deductive analysis) as a means of organizing the student interview data. These initial codes were derived from the literature on engagement. Six sub-constructs of engagement formed the codebook. These were behaviour, emotional, cognitive, agentic, relationships and culture. I then coded the interview transcripts looking for any of the six-codebook elements of engagement. In addition, I examined the interview transcripts to see if there were any aspects of engagement that were not coded for in the codebook (inductive analysis).

5.1. The Nine Codes

The following nine codes are the deductive and inductive codes used in my research.

5.1.1. Behaviour

Firstly, behaviour was so coded because the research literature and the experience of the researcher as a practitioner suggested that on-task attention and concentration by students would result in more persistence and greater academic achievement. This is clearly demonstrated by Kate when she replied to a question about why things were good for her compared to in the mainstream, *"here (AE) I get one on one attention, easier, not so many, less people disrupting the class."* Behaviour was also coded because in mainstream students were often exposed to traditional, punitive, negative, and exclusionary practices. Such practices result in some students not being successful in modifying their behaviour and they become academically disengaged from mainstream because of their behaviour. For example, Sam: *"I got (pause) asked to leave for getting into trouble lots of times",* also Nancy: *"bad decisions, going to school drunk, stoned, getting into trouble with people".* Exposure to positive behaviour supports in the AE system allowed students to modify their undesirable behaviours, which lead to academic re-engagement both at the AE centre and, in some

instances, back in mainstream. This was verified by Nancy: *"after AE I changed my attitude and wanted to come back to mainstream".* Nancy went on to explain that while in AE *"I was starting to do work, I wasn't going to school stoned and stuff and I would chose when I wanted to work and stuff."* There is no doubt that the time in the AE system allows and encourages students to modify their behaviour. This is clearly demonstrated in Ken's reply when asked by the researcher *"If you had stayed in mainstream, do you think you would have worked things out?"* Ken replied; *"I needed to get away so I could work things out in my head."* The AE system often gave students the opportunity to modify their behaviour, and to demonstrate in the AE setting, that such change was conducive to engagement in academic learning. Kate explained: *"I think it's because my brain was switched off to what was important, my friends were more important than everything else, but then my priorities changed when I came to AE."* The long-term maintenance of such behaviour change can be best demonstrated by several students returning to mainstream. For example, Kate talked about how she felt after returning: *"I feel like I'm doing really well and I haven't had any absences from what I used to and I attend everyday unless sick."* Nancy also talked about her behaviour since returning to mainstream: *"I had one detention in maths for walking out of class and that was all (pause) but it got sorted."* The student data clearly identifies behaviour is a very significant factor in academic engagement.

5.1.2. Emotional

Emotional was coded for because it was believed that it was important for students to feel they belonged in, and valued, their learning environment. All students talked about how they felt at home in the AE setting and did not feel threatened or insecure as they often felt when they were in mainstream. Students talked about being comfortable in the AE system. For example, when Sam was asked, "why do you seem to get on better with your teachers and tutors in AE than you did with your teachers in mainstream?" Sam replied, *"Yea, I think being here you aren't forced to do something like at school you have to do it, but here we do it at our own pace we are just comfortable with it."* Most students talked about the value and importance of academic learning and their pride in succeeding in the classroom. This was no better displayed than when Kate was asked why she felt she was now better supported since

she returned to mainstream (compared to her previous experience). Kate replied, *"I think teachers realize how hard I've worked to get back to mainstream and I just got the award in Māori performing arts at the senior prize giving. The first person from AE to ever get a mainstream award"* (sounded proud). The AE system gave all of the students a place where they felt comfortable about re-engaging with academic learning. Lastly, it seemed for most students that the AE restored dignity in them as people. This was evident in Nancy's comment *"I needed to be proud of myself and for others to be proud of me."*

5.1.3. Cognitive

The coding of cognitive was based on the belief that students would demonstrate an improved self-regulation of their learning and display personalized learning strategies along with the ability to set both short term and long-term goals. The expected outcome would be that their actual learning of the classroom subject matter would improve. All students displayed some degree of improvement in their ability to set both short and long-term goals. This was portrayed when Kate talked about *"well here (AE) I get my science from correspondence and do all that stuff and I'm quite comfortable with it and I have got a lot of credits for science from here and my assessments".* Also George, *"I'm doing really well I do assessments and get credits to pass my NZCA".* A good example of students displaying personalised learning strategies was Kate when she was asked if she learnt better in the AE centre. Kate replied, *"I can adapt to either yea I get the support when I need it".* Overall students appeared to show much improved displays of cognitive thinking and strategies towards completion of their classroom academic work.

5.1.4. Agentic

Agentic engagement is about students taking more control over their learning after attending AE. All of the students took a more active participation rather than a passive acceptance of their learning. George demonstrated this when he was asked if he had thought about going back to mainstream. *"yea I'm thinking about it and I've been asking my teachers what extra work would I need to do if I tried to go back, yea suppose would need to catch up"*

. All of the students demonstrated a renewed sense of self- determination to improve their academic learning. Sam talked about how he had *"changed since I have been here (AE). I know I have told many people that and I have let some people down. But I really feel I have changed and being here really makes me want to go back to school"* (mainstream). The renewed motivation to plan for their future and accordingly engage in the academic learning they needed to achieve their future aspirations was evident in all students. A good example was Sue *"I have thought about university but I know I would have to get all of my NZQA units and might have to do an extra year."* It was almost as if the AE classroom environment was fulfilling an intrinsic need of the students. For example, Nancy said she was *"doing good I'm getting my NZCA credits and the things I need."* An important aspect of agentic engagement is that students display a sense of pro action about their learning. Kate evidences this when she was asked if she felt she learnt better by talking about things. *"No not really. I can learn independently and read and that it's just being able to ask questions".* All students displayed some degree of increased agentic engagement after attending AE.

5.1.5. Relationships

Relationships were coded for because it was believed that the students in AE would have felt supported by both teachers and peers and that they had a sense of trust towards their tutors and teachers. All students interviewed talked about how supportive and helpful their teachers and tutors were in AE. For example, Nancy *"I love my teachers, I realize they are always there to help me and support me."* When Ken was asked about what was so good about AE compared with mainstream, he replied. *"The teachers are always there for you and help you with all sorts of things both at school and outside school".* Asked about the differences she found between mainstream and AE staff, Nancy replied, "*Um the AE, I think the AE teachers cared more and always at least one around. There was 5 tutors and they are always around, it's not like in mainstream where you go to class and see one teacher and then on to the next teacher".* Further, when Nancy was asked if she felt she could have returned to mainstream without attending AE, she responded, *"No, no way, they helped me so much".*

Several of the students talked about how they got on with their peers better than in mainstream and that everybody got on and supported each other. Kate remarked, "*The boys here I get along with really well --- and we are just like a family*". Sam remarked. "*I get on with everybody here*". When asked about AE compared with mainstream Sue replied. "*It was small so it kinda comes like a family sort of thing because you got to know everybody and everybody mostly, yea mostly gets along well*". Most students talked about how their parents/caregivers supported them and were proud of their achievements since joining AE. Sue commented "*No I live with my step Mum and Dad. But my Mum is also proud of me and I talk to her*". When George was asked about how his parents felt about him going to AE he responded, "*Well at first they were not that happy and they thought I would get into even more trouble being with all the other bad kids, but then I don't know they sort of saw me doing better and that I was a lot happier and not really getting in trouble any more, yea they then sort of thought it was good.*" The element of relationships, as it relates to engagement, was evident in all student interviews and students portrayed this by expressing the support they felt from teachers, peers and parents.

5.1.6. Culture

The effect of culture on engagement was coded for because it was felt that students needed to feel that the learning environment took into account a perspective of the Māori worldview. The responses to questions about their Māori identity resulted in some contrasting responses from the students. In response to being asked if he thought the Māori focus of AE was helpful George responded, *"Yea yea I'm finding out heaps of things I didn't know about and I like it when Uncle Ronald comes in and we talk about everybody's whakapapa and family tree and stuff".* When asked if Māori was spoken at home Kate replied, "*Dad speaks Māori and he was really pleased when the tutors at AE encouraged me to start learning the language and I'm now taking Māori language back in mainstream".*

However, Sam conveyed a very contrasting response when asked if he was any way involved with Māori language. *"No I stay well away from that Māori stuff".* A somewhat

middle of the road response was solicited from Sue who, when asked about her first few years at primary school, said, "*I didn't like it at my first school, it was a total immersion Māori school and I couldn't keep up with the Māori. I didn't really like it there, I couldn't keep up.*" However, Sue later made the comment. "*Recently I have enjoyed talking to my Nan about things Māori and I'm thinking about learning the language proper.*" To even further confuse the issue Kate, who is now back in mainstream taking Māori language, talked about her time at Intermediate in response to a question about whether she was involved in Kapa Haka. "*Yea I was right into it at Intermediate. I was in mainstream then got put into the bilingual unit and then I felt like the odd one out because class together a couple of years. I was the new kid and I felt I didn't really belong*". Kate went on to explain, "*I felt because I was Māori that they thought I would get along with everybody else but it didn't end up like that so I hanged out with people from other classes, mostly bad eggs*". Understanding that students can have multiple identities (bi cultural) functioning at the same time, gives some explanation to the varied responses to the cultural element of engagement.

Three additional elements of engagement emerged out of the inductive analysis of student interviews that I had not reported in my codebook.

5.1.7. Location of AE

Several students referred to the importance of their AE programme being on site and how this helped them to re-engage into mainstream. Ken explained, "*I was able to try one class for a while, now I'm doing two but I still spend most of my time back here at AE and yea it's going really well.*" One other student (Sue), whose AE programme was not on site of the mainstream school, was transported (across town) by a mentor so she could attend one class in mainstream each day. Sue explained "*my aunty (mentor) picked me up each day and took me to the other school so that I could do English".*

5.1.8. The Time Lapse from Mainstream and Getting Into AE

All students referred to the time they were marginalized from mainstream and how

quickly, usually through families or social workers, they were re-engaged in their learning through the AE programme. For example, Nancy explained how *"my Nan made sure I got into some school after I got expelled, she took me across town to this AE School each day."* It is significant that all of the students interviewed were enrolled in an AE programme within a month of leaving the mainstream system.

5.1.9. Non-Involvement with Drugs

It is interesting that five out of the six students made strong comments in the interviews that they were no longer involved with drugs. When Nancy was asked what happened when she moved to AE she replied, *"I was starting to do work; I wasn't going to school stoned and stuff."*

5.2. The six sub-themes describing the process of disengagement and re-engagement

Coding of the student interview data resulted in the establishment of six sub- themes that described the process of disengagement and re-engagement. The sub-themes of engagement arose mainly out of the responses to why the students have been able to academically re-engage since joining AE. The sub-themes of disengagement were mainly derived from the student responses to their experiences in mainstream. In establishing these sub-themes, it was important to remember that dropping out of school is not a one off event, but a process that happens over time and that behaviour is often the resultant symptom rather than the cause of academic disengagement. The six sub themes derived from the coded data are: Inclusion as a learner, Purpose and value of learning, Teacher, peer and family support, Student behaviour, School climate and the relevance and level of learning. (See figure 5 for the sub themes.)

5.2.1. Inclusion as a Learner

One repeated theme from all the students was that, as a learner, they felt more like everybody else when in AE, whereas in mainstream they felt they were the only one

struggling. For example when talking to Sam about going back to mainstream he explained *"I'm worried about the work when I go back but I know I won't be the only one people like me, that's why I like it here, because if I struggle I know I'm not the only one struggling. The class I was in last time when I was at the high school, I was the only one struggling".* Sue also made the remark about how learning was more about teamwork in AE. Sue had been back in mainstream for four weeks and was asked how it was going. Sue replied, *"Yea I suppose at AE it was more about teamwork learning together but at school you maybe sit in twos and try to be quiet. Don't always understand".* Several students talked about how they feel they were excluded from being able to play for school sports teams. Ken referred to being kicked out of the school rugby team. *"When I was at school I was away from school one week and didn't turn up to rugby on Saturday so they kicked me out of the team. I was really upset and mad because it was not my fault. Then a few weeks later they asked me to play again but that was the week I got kicked out of school and they said I couldn't play now that I had got kicked out of school".* Ken enjoyed the sport at AE but he would *"still like to be in a proper team".* Nancy talked about not being able to play netball for her school after she left and enrolled in AE. *"I wanted to still play netball but they wouldn't let me because they said I had been expelled".* Nancy went on to talk about how she had taken up kick boxing and that she was enjoying that and it was something she could do in her own time. This sub-theme demonstrated how all students wanted to feel they belonged to the mainstream school.

5.2.2. Purpose and Value of Learning

All students talked about how they needed to do better at their schoolwork when asked about his plans Sam replied, *"I want a job so I feel like I do here when I wake up wanting to come to the course now that I know the course is taking me where I want to go".* Most importantly, it gave students a reason to attend that made sense to them. Similarly when Sue was asked about what motivated her to go back to mainstream she responded *"Well I did enjoy myself at the AE programme but it just couldn't give me the credits I need, couldn't teach me the things I need for my future. Yea so school looked like what I had to do for my future".* Kate expressed the positive aspect of knowing what the purpose was to her academic learning *"I'm going for year 12 subjects. I 'm taking Chemistry, Biology, Maths,*

English, Māori, and Physical Education. Also going on an experience to sort of see what it is like to do my dream job, going to a primary school and working with a physical education teacher". All students demonstrated they understood the importance of academic learning, with three students returning to mainstream (one part time). When Sue was asked if she had thought about going to University, she said "*I have thought about University but I know I would have to get all my NZQA units and might have to do an extra year. I have sort of missed a year*". When asked about her goals, Kate replied, "*Next year I'm leaving this place and going back fully into mainstream*". Sam also talked about going back to mainstream next year and he made the comment. "*I believe when I go back to school I'm still going to find the work difficult but I need to get past that*". When George was asked about the difference between AE and mainstream, his comments emphasised how the students had re-engaged in academic learning: "*I just want to do the work. When I came to AE don't really know why but I work really hard at my maths and my project work*".

All students showed a greater understanding of the purpose and value of their schoolwork after attending AE.

5.2.3. Teacher, Peer and Family Support

All students felt they were supported by their tutors and teachers in AE. This was demonstrated by Nancy's comment. "*A lot more support. They were always there to help and there were lots of one on one*". Kate also talked about the support she felt from the AE Teachers; however it was also significant that she now felt supported in mainstream. "*Hum, well here they have helped me a lot with my work, they prepare me here for going back and the teachers over there (mainstream) are really supportive*". Similarly when Nancy was asked about her teachers after returning to mainstream she said, "*I love my teachers (in mainstream). I realize they are always there to help me and supporting. Yea, I now see them as support.*"

Most students also referred to how they felt they had the support of their peers in the AE setting. For many of the students this was in sharp contrast to when they were in

mainstream. Ken referred to all his friends in AE. "*I get on with everybody here and there are no clicky groups like in mainstream, yea I feel we are all mates and we help each other*". In addition, when Sam was asked about how he felt after deciding to come to AE, he replied. "*I was actually sort of kind of glad because I knew a lot of the students before I came here*".

All students revealed that their parents/ families were initially not over keen on the idea of them moving to AE due to the perception that they would be in with badly behaved students and that they would get no formal qualifications. However, students indicated that their parents and families became supportive after they had stated attending AE. Kate was asked how her Mum was asked how her mum now felt about AE. "*She's really astonished how well I have done*". Nancy referred to how her Nan was disappointed after she was expelled. "*But now she is proud of how well I'm doing and is very supportive of me trying to do well and go back to mainstream full time*".

5.2.4. Student Behaviour

Although, as already mentioned, negative behaviour is often the symptom of disengagement rather than the cause, it still needs to be acknowledged as a major factor that is highly related to the degree of engagement displayed by a student. There are two aspects to this subtheme, the gradual disengagement over a period (often years) and the sudden disengagement of being suspended or expelled. Firstly, about disengagement over time, all of the students felt that school was not for them and suggested that is why they misbehaved. Sam talked about is time in High School. "*All we did was ditching (skipping class)*". In addition, when Kate was asked how often she went to school in Nelson, she answered, "*Probably about half the time*". When Sue was asked about Intermediate she talked about how "*It was cool but I think that was where my learning went down a bit. At Primary school I was confident in doing work then I don't know after Intermediate I couldn't really remember things like maths*". Secondly, students talked about the suddenness of being suspended and expelled. Sam talked about, "*I got warned many times and then I got asked to leave for getting into trouble lots of times*". Similarly, Nancy referred to her leaving mainstream. "*I was in mainstream initially and then I got asked to leave*". Most of the students felt school just

was not for them and went along with whatever was going on and in several cases often not attending on a regular basis. Finally being asked to leave or being expelled is potentially a permanent form of disengagement from mainstream. Students displayed a sense of bewilderment when they were finally expelled or asked to leave. For example, Nancy seemed somewhat confused by the process. "*I was stood down. Supposed to have a meeting. I couldn't make the meeting, so they made the decision themselves and expelled me.*"

5.2.5. School Climate

Most of the students talked about the school climate and how the AE environment was much more conducive to learning because there were fewer dramas going on and everybody got on with everybody. Sue talked about *"I got along with everybody and yea I think I might find it easier to learn in AE than in mainstream".* Ken talked about how there were no separate groups at AE and everybody was one big group. In mainstream, there were all these different groups. He also showed some insight in suggesting this may be partly to do with the smaller number of students in AE compared with mainstream. *"There were all these different groups at college and you had to decide which one you were going to belong to and it sometimes caused all sorts of arguing and fights. Here at AE everybody belongs to the same one group (Pause) maybe because there are less people here, yes maybe that's what helps".* Nancy talked about *"always getting into trouble with people".* Overall most students considered the AE represented more of a positive learning environment than their original mainstream experiences.

5.2.6. The Relevance and Level of Learning

Most students expressed how they could not see the point or any value in their learning when they were in mainstream. George, when asked why he found the work more interesting in AE portrayed this. *"Well they do work that you know you will use later yea real things not work that doesn't make any sense".* This sub-theme also incorporates the degree of difficulty students experienced in learning when in mainstream. Several students referred to the difficulty they had with understanding their work. Sam's response to being asked if he

found the work at High School hard was very enlightening *"I had difficulty with learning at High School"* but when the interviewer then inferred that he had found the work at High School hard, Sam interrupted *"No I found it easy. When I got into trouble they moved me to a higher class and kept on telling me it was the class I was suitable for but I didn't believe that. Yea I was put into a class where the work was too advanced".* When Sue was asked how Intermediate was she replied *"It was cool but I think that was where my learning went down a bit. At Primary school I was confident in doing work then I don't know after Intermediate I couldn't really remember things like maths."* Ken said, in response to being asked how he found work in mainstream, *"I found it really hard, I kept on telling the teachers but they just said I was lazy, so I just gave up".* Several students found the work in mainstream meaningless and felt the work they were expected to do was too hard.

5.3. Overarching Themes

From the six sub themes, three overarching themes emerged that captured the phenomenon of student engagement. (See figure 5)

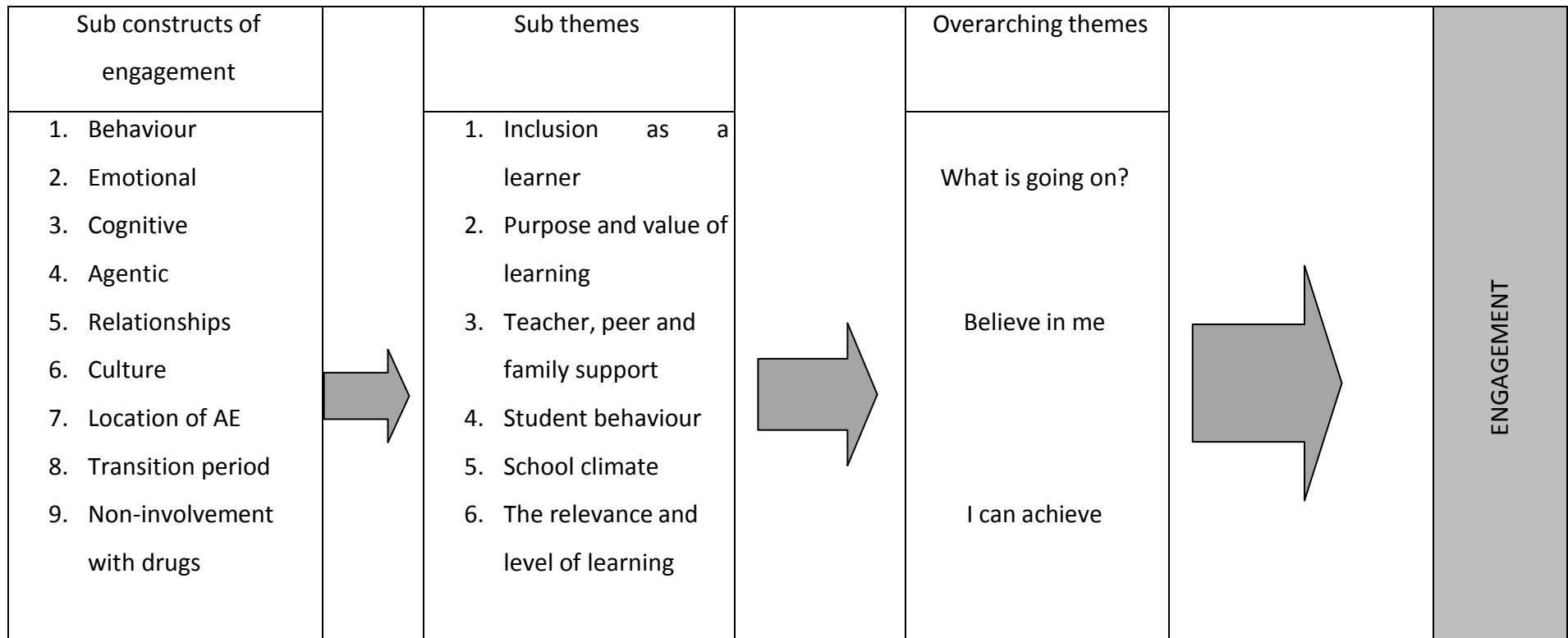| Sub constructs of engagement		Sub themes		Overarching themes		ENGAGEMENT
1. Behaviour 2. Emotional 3. Cognitive 4. Agentic 5. Relationships 6. Culture 7. Location of AE 8. Transition period 9. Non-involvement with drugs	→	1. Inclusion as a learner 2. Purpose and value of learning 3. Teacher, peer and family support 4. Student behaviour 5. School climate 6. The relevance and level of learning	→	What is going on? Believe in me I can achieve	→	

Figure 5: Students' re-engagement into academic learning

A detailed explanation of the overarching themes along relevant examples are presented in tables 2, 3 and 4

Table 2

Overarching theme: 'what is going on?'

Overarching Theme	Elements Related To Engagement	Explanation	Relevant Response
What is going on?	Behaviour	Participation: Poor attendance disables any possibility of engagement	Researcher: "How have you felt since you have returned to mainstream?" Kate: *"I feel like I'm doing really well and I haven't had any absences from what I used to and I attend everyday unless sick".*
		Awareness: Several students demonstrated they could look back and see how their behaviour was affecting their learning.	Researcher: "Do you think you would have worked things out in mainstream?" Sam: *"Nah, I convinced myself I would have (long pause) I need to learn (pause) how to take myself out of situations I find myself in".*
		Attitude: All students felt their different attitude to both peers and tutors in AE resulted in them finding it easier to learn.	Researcher: "How did you find AE compared with mainstream schooling?" Sue: *"It was small so it kinda came a like a family sort of thing because you got to know everybody and everybody mostly, yea mostly gets along well. I got along with everybody and yea I think I might find it easier to learn there than in mainstream".*

Table 3

Overarching theme: 'believe in me'

Overarching Theme	Elements Related to Engagement	Explanation	Relevant Response
Believe in me	Emotional	Sense of Belonging: Students in AE experienced a sense of belonging and felt secure and comfortable.	Sam: *"Here you don't feel the need to leave because it's the sort of school we wanted"*.
	Relationships	Positive Support: Students in AE reported on positive support from both peers and teachers and in most cases parents/caregivers.	Kate *"Yea I keep in contact with mum and yea when I was with mum in Nelson I was doing really bad and she has seen I have turned my life around and she is very happy and proud of me"*. Ken: *"Well the teachers in my old school use to act as if I was dumb but here it is different and the tutors convince me that I can do the work if I try really hard "*.

Table 4

Overarching theme: 'I can achieve'

Overarching Theme	Elements Related to Engagement	Explanation	Relevant Response
I can Achieve	Cognitive	Personal Investment: Students in AE attempt to self-regulate their learning and demonstrate the ability to plan out and set goals	Researcher: "What are your plans?" Kate: *"Yea I want to be able to do two more years, years 12 and 13 and work hard so I can get into uni, that is one of my main goals for when I finish school"*
	Cultural	Māori Focus: Some students within AE embraced the strong Māori focus and support from the local Māori community and they felt endorsed that the Māori community wanted them to do well at school. In contrast some students were unsure whether the Māori focus had helped them.	Researcher: "Is there a Māori focus of the AE programme?" Ken: *"Yea everybody here, especially the elders want me to do well and I feel I would let them down if I don't do good at my work"* I asked Sue if she thought having the Māori focus of AE might be the reason that she has thought about learning the language. Sue responded." *Don't really know, maybe I'm not sure".*
	Agentic	Proactive in Learning: Students in AE demonstrated they were proactive in the learning relationship rather than passive.	Sam: *"I spoke to the tutors about receiving more work like I will be doing when I go back to mainstream. So when I go back there won't be a big difference in the work"*

The next chapter will discuss the significance of these three overarching themes and how they help to answer my research questions and support and or challenge previous research on engagement as it relates to understanding the academic disengagement and re-engagement process from the student's perspective.

Chapter 6. Discussion

This section reports on the major themes that emerged during analysis of the data. Explanation will be given about the three overarching themes of what is going on, believe in me, and I can achieve, as a process to answer the research questions.

Research question 1: What are the significant factors that resulted in young Māori students disengaging from their academic learning and consequently dropping out of mainstream?

Similar to Finn's (1989) original portrayal that dropping out of school is a process over time rather than as a result of one or two behavioural events this study confirmed that students dropped out as a result of disengagement over a period of several years. In fact, a considerable body of research since Finn's original work further suggests that the decision to drop out has not been caused by recent behavioural issues but is part of a much longer process of disengagement from the school environment (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morrison, 2004; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). The findings of this study suggested that disengagement is a long-term process rather than a one off event, although the final result of expulsion is very much a one off event. I also investigated the deeper causal factors of disengagement. This was done in order to identify why the students start down the spiral process in the first place.

This is in contrast to traditional research relating to disengagement which looked at the behaviours and the demographic characteristics of students who have, or are at risk of, dropping out of school (Brooking, Gardiner & Calvert, 2008; MOE, 2009; Sanders & Munford, 2001). As already explained in the results section, I deliberately underplayed the themes of behaviour and discipline challenges, referring to them as symptoms rather than the root causes of student disengagement. However, it needs to be acknowledged that behavioural and discipline challenges are one of the main reasons students in this study attributed to their lack of success in their previous schools. Much of the research involved in interviewing dropout students involved the students reporting the reasons for dropping out which are often the symptoms of the final act of dropping out related to behavioural issues (Lagna-

Riordan et al., 2011; Iachini et al., 2013). For this study, I was most interested in establishing the underlying causal factors that resulted in students disengaging. Accordingly, although we know quite a lot about the characteristics of student dropouts (Brooking, Gardiner & Calvert, 2008; MOE, 2009; Sanders & Munford, 2001) much less is known about the causal factors underlying the process of students disengaging.

As already explained in the results section, I deliberately underplayed the themes of behaviour and discipline challenges referring to them as symptoms rather than the root causes of student disengagement. Ten out of the thirteen students interviewed by Iachini and her colleagues, considered bad behaviour was why they did not do well at school, which ultimately resulted in them dropping out. In the defence of my approach for this study one has to ask does the observation of student characteristics and behaviours along with student self-reported reasons for leaving school really give us information of the underlying causal factors of why students start down the spiral process of disengagement in the first place. It is my belief that it is essential to know and have a deep understanding of what leads to students disengaging in order to reduce the number of students disengaging and dropping out.

The overarching theme of 'what is going on' suggests the causal factors why the students disengaged from mainstream education. Firstly, students repeatedly referred to how they felt excluded as a learner when in mainstream and that they were the only one in class that was struggling and that they failed to get the support they needed. These findings verified those of Iachini et al. (2013) who found more than half of the students interviewed indicated that they considered their lack of success at school was at least in part due to the lack of support they received from teachers.

The students interviewed in this study repeatedly referred to how they felt excluded as learners when in mainstream; this is similar to previous research on students that have been marginalized from mainstream education (Brooking, Gardiner & Calvert, 2008; MOE, 2009; Sanders & Munford, 2001). This feeling of not belonging and fitting into the school environment was demonstrated by students referring to how they felt they were the only

one struggling. Further, students talked about how they were excluded from other aspects of school life such as not being able to play for school sports teams due to behavioural issues in the classroom. Lagana-Riordan et al. (2011) also found students' behavioural issues often resulted in them being excluded from other aspects of school life.

Even though on one side we can talk about behaviour being a symptom rather than a cause of disengagement, the reality is that many teachers often feel that a student's behaviour is the underlying cause of disengagement. However, the students in this study felt that school just was not for them and that is why they misbehaved or just did not bother to turn up at all. Although one student talked about how authoritarian type of discipline of mainstream did not suit him, the other students did not feel the disciplinary measures were unfair or unreasonable. The students were adamant that it would have been beneficial to them if teachers had explained the purpose and value of the classroom work and how it may be important for certain future job and training opportunities. Sanders and Munford, (2001) also reported similar findings.

Most students also complained about how they did not understand the work and thought some of the work was too hard. This theme that mainstream school lacked meaning and that the work was too hard was also expressed by students in several other studies, which surveyed AE students in NZ (Brooking, Gardiner & Calvert, 2008; Sanders & Munford, 2001). Finally, the students talked a lot about the negative school climate and how there were always dramas going on and that they felt they had to belong to one group or another. They did not feel that they belonged to a united school community. This finding is common with other research (Lagna-Riordan et al., 2011; Voelkl, 2012). Overall, mainstream education represented a negative learning environment and many of the findings in this study in relation to the theme of 'what is going on' were similar to the limited previous research on AE students in New Zealand (Brooking, Gardiner & Calvert, 2008; Sanders & Munford, 2001).

Research question 2: What are the significant factors that resulted in young Māori Students, who had dropped out of mainstream, re-engaging in academic learning?

All the students interviewed re-engaged with their schoolwork after attending AE. This of course was expected because it was the criteria for them being selected in the first place. The three overarching themes of 'what is going on', 'believe in me' and 'I can achieve' all give testimony to significant factors that have resulted in this group of students re- engaging in their academic learning. Students, after attending AE, seem to develop awareness about how their previous disruptive behaviour had affected their learning. The less rigid, more friendly and family aspect of the AE environment resulted in students modifying their behaviour with the consequence that they developed more positive and supportive relationships with teachers and peers and family members who acknowledged their improved attitude towards their academic learning. Students also felt the individualization of learning that they received in AE was of benefit and most students interviewed talked about the one on one attention that they had received in AE. This is similar to the findings overseas (Iachini et al., 2013) and in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2008; Sanders; & Munford, 2001). The family room atmosphere was a factor that directly encouraged students to re-engage with their academic learning. Previous research also found a family like atmosphere in the class room was conducive to re-engagement (Iachini et al., 2013; Ministry of Education, 2008; Sanders; & Munford, 2001).

Students expressed that they felt more support by their peers in AE and that everybody got on with everybody. Iachini et al. (2013) and Lagna-Riordan et al. (2011) both emphasised how students reported much stronger peer relationships in AE compared with mainstream or traditional school settings. Bandura's (1977b, 1986, 1997, 2001) social cognitive theory of psychological functioning states that much human learning occurs in social environments and it was evident that the students in this study benefited from the strong peer supportive AE social environment.

Analysis of student interviews resulted in students acknowledging an increase in family support towards their learning. However, most students referred to their parents or family not being overly happy about them being removed from mainstream and into the AE system initially. Parents and families became very supportive after a while as a result of the students

improving their attitude towards school, learning. Most importantly, according to the students, their parents were relieved there were fewer behavioural issues after the students joined AE. A testimony to this renewed parental support is portrayed in one of my research book journal entries.

"Journal entry – Nancy – just finished (50 minutes ago) interview with Nancy. I'm still astounded by the degree of maturity displayed by this young woman, she was very focused and had clearly established goals of what she hoped to achieve by going back to 'mainstream'. Also as the interview took place at her home where she lives with her Nan I was privileged to witness the strong loving and supportive bond between Nancy and her Nan…"

As already discussed, a significant factor in students re-engaging is the new ability and or willingness to modify their behaviour; however, the question is why this eventuated. Interpreting the student responses, the overriding factor in student engagement is the development of positive and supportive relationships with their tutors and teachers. All students expressed their appreciation of how their teachers and tutors cared for them and helped them with outside school issues in order that they could then concentrate on their learning when in class. Munford (2002) and Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) found students also were very appreciative of tutors helping them with social issues outside the school environment. This concept of stronger teacher and student connections in the alternative school setting is supported by other research (Lagna-Riordan et al., 2011; Sanders & Munford, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2008; Youth Alternative Education Report 2009). The establishment of a caring and supportive relationship with tutors and teachers in the AE setting was paramount in the students being motivated to work hard at their academic work; previous research has found similar findings, emphasizing the importance of supportive caring relationships (De La Ossa, 2005).

Students displayed renewed cognitive engagement after attending AE. As described in the review of literature, Vygotsky (1986) maintained that cognitive functions are developed through students' social interactions with both peers and teachers. Vygotsky introduced the

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which involves the scaffolding of students' learning. Vygotsky defines the ZPD as "the distance between the actual development levels as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). For instruction to be most useful it should be "oriented toward the future, not the past, directed not at what children are already capable of doing independently but their upper threshold of functioning as it is in this way that instructions helps them realise their future abilities" (Vygotsky, 1986, p.189). One could postulate that, from a Vygotskian point of view that the students in this study re-engaged because the AE learning environment matched the students' ZPD. Student engagement occurs only when it coincides with the learners' ZPD.

The overarching theme of 'I can achieve' portrays how the students in this study acquired a sense of self-belief. A key aspect of Bandura's (1977a, 1997) social cognitive theory of psychological functioning is self-efficacy. Bandura described this as one's perceived capabilities for learning or performing actions. This sense of self-efficacy for learning has much in common with the self-determination theory. Both the self-efficacy and self-determination theories help explain the human agency, which was displayed by all students in this study when they proactively engaged in their learning. There is very limited research on the role of self-efficacy for students who have experienced the cycle of disengagement and re-engagement. Vick and Packard (2008) investigated self-efficacy in disadvantaged ethnic students in America in an attempt to discover the resilient factors displayed by some students, which resulted in some students re-engaging in their work despite obstacles, which for other students were preventing re-engagement.

A key issue mentioned by both Vick and Packard (2008) and by all students in this study was that teachers encouraged them to think about their work and to be reflective and set goals about what they were trying to achieve. A social cognitive theoretical framework of self-regulatory engagement (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2012) integrates the related but distinctive constructs of motivation, engagement and metacognition. This cyclic loop described by Cleary and Zimmerman (2012) involves students thinking about a learning

activity before, during and after. The students in this study emphasised how the tutors and teachers in AE encouraged such strategies.

One finding which has not been widely acknowledged in previous research is the degree of agentic engagement displayed by the students towards their learning, although Reeve (2012) refers to how the agentic construct of engagement helps to give explanation to the way the constructs of engagement and motivation interplay with each other. The students in this study displayed a very proactive attitude (i.e. were agentic) towards their learning.

For example, several students asked for additional work to help them prepare for going back to mainstream. Such findings strongly support Reeves' (2012) model describing three new functions of student engagement within the students' teacher dialectical framework. (See figure 6)
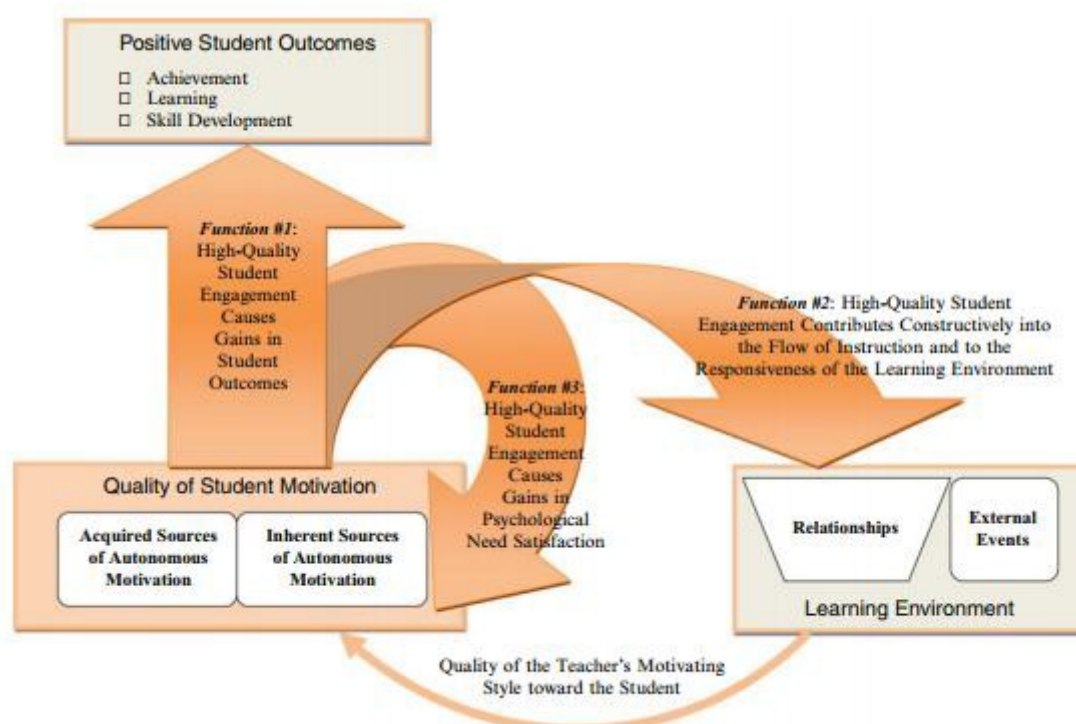

Figure 6: The functions of student engagement (Reeve, 2012, p. 163)

The reciprocal relationship between student and teacher is represented by the student-teacher dialectical framework, which sits within the Self Determination theory. The self-determination theory provides an overarching framework that guides the understanding of the interrelationship between motivation and engagement (Reeve 2012). Engagement and motivation are independent but highly related constructs. The literature sets out how motivation has been analysed for longer than engagement and that engagement is the new kid on the block (Reeve, 2012). What is intriguing is that engaging, for the students in this study, seems to have kick-started dormant intrinsic motivation in each of the students interviewed. It appears that these students have been turned off by inappropriate extrinsic motivation strategies and that they have convinced themselves that they are unmotivated to succeed with their academic learning. Of course motivation is important for engagement and Reeve's diagram, (see figure 6), on the three new functions of student engagement within the student – teacher dialectical framework acknowledges this. However, Reeve along with the interpreted data in this study, strongly suggest that for students who are re-engaging after a period of disengagement then engagement in a reciprocal manner reinforces and provides potential intrinsic motivation (see figure 6).

This renewed motivation then also results in further increased engagement. The resultant increased intrinsic motivation instigated by the academic engagement is what led to the students being motivated to do well. These findings emphasize the importance of trying to engage AE students with high quality academic work from the beginning of their time in AE.

Research question 3: What is it about the AE environment that encourages the academic re-engagement of Māori students?

AE for the students in this study provided a safe and supportive environment along with one, which instilled in them a sense of belonging. The students felt the teachers genuinely cared about them and were very appreciative of how the tutors and teachers were interested in their lives and issues that they faced outside the school setting. This greatly assisted in the establishment of strong positive student teacher relationships. Both Brooking,

Gardiner and Calvert (2008) and Sanders and Munford (2001) found that students expressed similar sentiments.

The AE environment provided a cross-curricular delivery approach to much of its curriculum along with a flexible structure and timetable, which appeared to encourage students to take a more responsible agentic approach to their academic learning. This renewed level of engagement with their academic learning displayed by the students in this study is not something that has been widely reported in previous research.

The students identified two issues as significant in their journey of re-engagement that I, the researcher, did not initially put in my codebook. Firstly, several students mentioned the transition time between dropping out of mainstream and joining AE. The students said they felt very isolated after leaving mainstream and made comments that it was just as well they got into AE reasonably quickly otherwise they may have decided not to re-engage in academic learning. It is ironical that in the past one of the criteria, by the Ministry of Education, for being eligible to attend AE was that students had to have been out of mainstream for at least six months. Polices and strategies need to be put in place to make any transition from mainstream to AE as seamless as possible and similarly any potential transition back to mainstream needs to be a viable constructive outcome. It is essential that the mainstream schools maintain a transparent and open line of communication with the AE schools. In relation to this, mainstream schools need reminding that they still have the overall responsibility for the pastoral and academic care of the students. (Ministry of Education, 2000; Ministry of Education, 2011). Secondly, several students mentioned how having AE on site or close to a mainstream school was very significant in providing a process of transition back into mainstream. This would often involve attending one subject back in mainstream for a period so they could make the appropriate adjustments while they still had the supportive environment of their AE setting. There was a period when the idea of schools within schools was being seriously looked at and encouraged by the Ministry of Education. Unfortunately, this gave way to most AE centres being off site and isolated from the mainstream schools. It became very convenient for schools to take the approach of 'out of sight, out of mind'. However with the implementation of "Building on success "(Ministry of Education, 2013)

which is a combination of support structures to help teacher lift achievement for all students, there needs to be a fresh look at strategies associated with the idea of schools within schools in the light of the evidence from this study.

There have been a number of different strategies implemented with the goal of closing the gap of academic achievement for Māori students. One such strategy is to increase student engagement. Research programmes such as Te Kotahitanga (Bishop et al., 2007) have played a vital part in increasing the academic engagement of Māori students and that is why it is being expanded by the Ministry under the arm of "Building on success" (Ministry of Education, 2013). Like programmes such as Te Kotahitanga, AE prides itself in improving the relationship between Māori students and teachers and this reciprocal relationship and the embedded culture within most AE programmes encourages academic re-engagement. From my research point of view, programmes such as Te Kotahitanga are very relevant because a significant part of the programme is about improving the relationship between teachers and Māori students and this is the overriding factor that all students in this study said was instrumental in them re-engaging in their academic learning. AE deserves to be recognized in its own right as a programme that creates an environment that encourages the academic re-engagement of Māori students and the consequential raising of Māori academic achievement and outcomes.

Students interviewed for this study all expressed the importance of how the teachers and tutors focussed on them achieving academically. This was in contrast to their most recent experiences in mainstream where the focus was on behavioural issues. The AE environment offered the students a way to map out their future rather than just a place to try and sort out their problems.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

Although I initially defined engagement from a contextual point of view, for this study students were considered either disengaged or re-engaged. This study was an investigation to see if there are critical contexts in a student's life that put an engaged student on a pathway of disengagement and equally whether there are critical factors that put disengaged students back on a pathway to re-engagement?

This study reminds us that dropping out of the mainstream education system is not a one off event but in effect a process, that in most cases starts during the age of 8-11 years. The findings of this study suggest that early intervention may greatly reduce the number of students disengaging and dropping out of mainstream. The challenge is to replicate the significant aspects of what AE offered, as an intervention back into mainstream so that students do not disengage in the first place. The recent introduction of the intervention programme 'Check and Connect' by the Ministry of Education is a significant and exciting development. The Check and Connect programme implemented by the Ministry of Education as part of the Positive Behaviour for learning programme will benefit by longitudinal research being implemented now (Ministry of Education, 2014).The programme will identify students early on in the 'cycle of disengagement' and with its mentoring aspect and longitudinal support structure, will assist students to re-engage in their learning.

Further research is required in identifying students at risk of disengaging and consequently dropping out. Historically, the limited research undertaken has involved evaluating the characteristics of students and their school experiences. However, approaching the issue from the individual student perspective often fails to give appropriate attention to the school context. The students from this study identified conditions within their AE setting, which promoted their re-engagement in academic learning. These conditions of teacher warmth, understanding and supportiveness, a sense of belonging and a safe and secure environment lead to the students displaying a renewed self-determination to re-engage with their academic learning. Most AE programmes have a Māori focus embedded

into their school environment. The students interviewed for this study had contrasting views on whether this had helped them in re-engaging. However, the Māori focus was so embedded in the teachers and tutors everyday interactions that students were not always conscious of the overall impact that such practices were having on them. This is a another aspect that needs further research and the contrasting findings of this study suggest that a set of a lot more focused questions need to asked to establish a clearer understanding of the role of the cultural sub-construct of engagement.

AE programmes are an invaluable part of the education system and are no doubt fulfilling an important role in re-engaging marginalized students back into academic learning. However, it needs to be acknowledged that this study investigated the re- engagement of a small, targeted number of students. The students interviewed had all displayed a high degree of re-engagement with their learning in the AE environment and in some cases back in mainstream. The successful re-engagement of the students for this study was the result of the students developing a sense of self-determination and a belief that they could achieve at their academic learning. The findings of this study also strongly suggest that students will modify their behaviour once a supportive and caring relationship has been established with teachers. Equally, re-engagement in 'real academic work' rather than 'busy remedial work resulted in students being motivated to work hard at their academic learning. The experiential nature, cross-curricular and embedded cultural aspects of AE programmes in addition to the all-important reciprocal teacher student relationship are the strengths of the AE programme that encourage students to re-engage according to the reports of the students. The resultant engagement then results in the students becoming more intrinsically motivated which then drives further engagement and a further strengthening of the teacher student relationship.

Listening to the student voices in this study would suggest that AE programmes should be on site or close to mainstream schools to help and encourage a seamless transition back into mainstream. This would endorse the concept of 'schools within schools'. Finally, the findings of this study should encourage us to assess and investigate classroom and school environments such as witnessed in AE in order to achieve a more in-depth understanding of

the cycle of academic disengagement and re-engagement for Māori students.

Appendices

Appendix A: Information Sheets

Information sheet 1

Invitation to take part in research: to Alternative Education Provider

June 2013

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MĀTAURANGA

Invitation to take part in research: to Alternative Education Provider

Kia Ora,

My name is Bob Huxford and I am undertaking a research project as part of my requirements to complete a Master of Educational Psychology at Massey University. My research project aims to find out what factors influence the re-engagement with learning for male Maori students in the Secondary School Alternative Education system.

I hope to find some of the reasons why some students drop out from Secondary School and, more importantly, why some students improve their learning after enrolling in an Alternative Education programme, such as the one you are running.

I am inviting your organization to be part of this research project. The reason you have been invited to take part is that you were identified as having students who are making positive gains with their learning.

Your participation will involve suggesting students who will be suitable for the research project. The students' participation will involve a one hour interview which will take place during normal class time in a private setting at your school. The interview will be recorded so that I can analyze their story, as this is an essential part of the research. The recording will be confidential to me and my supervisors. When I have finished, it will be stored with my research supervisor at Massey University and will be destroyed after five years.

If your organization agrees to participate after reading this information sheet and you think you may have suitable male Maori students you would mail the attached consent from to the researcher to confirm your organization's willingness to take part in the research. The researcher will then send a package which will include information sheets for the student and their parent/caregiver along with consent forms. The researcher will then arrange an onsite meeting to answer any questions from both staff and students.

The names of the six students taking part in this research will remain confidential to me and my supervisors. This means actual names will not be used. Also the identity of participating Alternative Education Providers will be confidential. The first six students, who agree to take part and return their signed consent forms, will be included in the research project.

If you need more information about the project please contact me or my supervisors.

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Supervisor 1

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This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application No._13/32. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Nathan Mathews, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 3505799x80877, email humanethicsouth B@massey.ac.nz

I thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. If your organization chooses to participate, I will have a personal meeting on site if you so wish. The research has the potential to be a positive and empowering experience for the students as they come to the realization that they can have some control over their "future stories". I also believe that research such as this is essential to help us establish what is important from the students' point of view in re-engaging in a learning environment. A summary of findings will be made available to your organization and I am also willing to personally present the findings of the research to the Alternative Education Providers who supported the research.

Kia ora rawa atu

Bob Huxford

Information sheet 2

June 2013

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MĀTAURANGA

Information Sheet Parents/caregivers

Kia Ora,

My name is Bob Huxford and I am undertaking a research project as part of my requirements to complete a Master of Educational Psychology at Massey University. My research project aims to find out what factors influence the disengagement from learning and the re-engagement with learning for male Maori students in the Secondary School Alternative Education system.

I hope to find some of the reasons why some students drop out from Secondary School and, more importantly, why some students improve their learning after enrolling in an Alternative Education programme, such as the one you're young person is currently attending.

The young person under your care has been invited to be part of this research project. The reason this young person has been selected to take part is that they were identified by their teachers/tutors as making positive gains with their learning.

Their participation will involve a one hour discussion which will take place during normal class time in a private setting at the school. The discussion will be recorded so that I can analyze their story, as this is an essential part of the research. The recording will be confidential to me and my supervisors and when I have finished, it will be stored with my research supervisor at Massey University and will be destroyed after five years.

If you agree for the young person in your care to participate in this project, you will be required to sign the attached consent form. This will need to be returned along with the young person's consent form in the enclosed stamped, addressed envelope. This envelope can be given to office staff at the Alternative Education centre or posted directly to me.

The names of the six students taking part in this research will be kept confidential. This means the young person's actual name will not be used in the project reports. The first six students, who agree to take part and return their signed consent forms, will be included in the research project.

If you need more information about the project please contact me or my supervisors.

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I thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. If the young person in your care chose's to participate, I encourage you to support them, as I believe it has the potential to be a positive and empowering experience.

Kia ora rawa atu

Bob Huxford

Information sheet 3

Information Sheet Participant

Kia Ora,

My name is Bob Huxford. I am doing a research project as part of my study at Massey University. I want to find out why young male Maori are sometimes switched off by school and what helps some of them to switch on to learning again when they attend Alternative Education.
I hope to find some of the reasons why some students drop out from Secondary School and, more importantly, why some students improve their learning in an Alternative Education programme, such as the one you are coming to now.

I am inviting you to be part of this research project if you want to. The reason you have been asked to take part is that you were identified by your teachers/tutors as making positive gains at your new school.

If you agree to take part it will involve a one hour discussion which will take place during normal class time in a private setting at your school. Our discussion will be recorded so that I can remember what you said and think about it later. The only people who will have access to the story you tell are me and my supervisors. When I have finished the project your story will be stored with my research supervisor at Massey University and will be destroyed after five years.

If you agree to take part, please sign the enclosed consent form and give the enclosed information sheet and consent form for parent(s) or caregivers to your parents or caregivers to read and sign. Both consent forms will need to be placed in the enclosed envelope and returned to the school .The school will then send your reply to me. You may also send the consent forms directly to me using the enclosed stamped, addressed envelope. No-one other than you, your teacher, parents/caregivers and I will know that you have agreed to take part in the research.

The names of the six students taking part in this research will be confidential. This means your actual name will not be used in any project reports. The first six students, who agree to take part and return their signed consent forms, will be included in the research project.

You do not have to accept this invitation.   If you do accept it, you have the right to:
- Choose not to answer a particular question;
- Withdraw from the study (until 24 hours prior to the time we arrange for your interview);
- Ask any questions you have about the study at any time during the project;
- Give me information about your story on the understanding that your name will not be used ;
- Be given a summary of the project findings when it is finished .
- Contact me within 24 hours after the interview if you want to change anything you have said in the interview.
- Have the opportunity to view your recorded interview if you so wish.

If you would like more information about the project, please contact me or my Supervisors.

<u>Researcher</u>
Bob Huxford

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I thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. If you choose to take part in my project, I look forward to meeting you and hearing 'your story'.

Kia ora rawa atu

Bob Huxford

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORMS

Consent form 1

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MĀTAURANGA

Consent to participate

Form for Alternative Education Provider

I have been given information about the research proposed by Bob Huxford . and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my Satisfaction and I agree that Bob Huxford is able to conduct educational research at _____(name of Alternative Education Provider) under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature	
Print Name	
Telephone	
Email	
Date	

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ki Pūrehuroa

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Consent form 2

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MĀTAURANGA

Consent to participate for parents/caregivers

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,

I agree that, (name), the young person in my/our care can participate in this research project being conducted by Bob Huxford under the conditions set out in the information sheet.

Signature	
Print Name	
Telephone	
Email	
Date	

Consent form 3

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MĀTAURANGA

Participant consent form - individual

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. I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to the interview being sound recorded.

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

Signature_____Date _____

Full Name (printed)_____

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Indicative narrative interview schedule

The most important consideration in in-depth (semi structured) interviews is that the participants must be allowed to answer open ended questions in their own words and at length in order for researchers to understand the interviewee's meanings ,perceptions ,beliefs ,attitudes and descriptions of their own behaviour. However, the researcher may probe, or extend questions to assist with the gathering of further information (data).

The open-ended questions and probing questions have been designed in relation to the research question and the interview is to be undertaken from an ecological conceptual stance.

The interviews will be audio recorded because it offers an accurate summary of what was said and also provides additional detail by capturing elements of tone and emphasis.

Audio recording has the potential to be an un-intrusive way of collecting data, however even though there are formal statements of informed consent for audio recording the researcher feels an obligation to cease recording any material that clearly makes the participant uncomfortable .In such a situation the researcher will negotiate with the participant. Whether the recording can be resumed. This may result in loss in data but such a concern is secondary to the protection and dignity of the participants.

Schedule

1) Tell me about some of the things you most enjoy doing.
    a) Do you like any sports?
        b) Do you like hanging out with your mates?
        c) What did you get up to last time you went on holiday?

    2) Who are your best mates?
    a) Have you made any new friends lately?

3) Can you remember when you first started school?

   a) What was the name of the school?

   b) Can you remember any of the teachers?

4) How did it happen that you stopped going to school?

   a) Did you just stop going?

   b) Were you asked to leave, suspended or stood down?

5) What did you when you stopped going to school?

   a) Did you enjoy not going to school?

   b) Did you miss your mates?

   c) What did you do during the day?

   d) Did you get bored?

6) How did it happen that you ended up in the school you are at now?

   a) Who thought it might be a good idea to come to the school you are now at?

   b) How long were you at no school?

7) Do you like it at your present school?

   a) What is the best thing about your school?

   b) What are the teachers/tutors like?

   c) What do your parents/caregivers think about your school?

8) What's some of the things that are different about your school from other schools you have gone to?

   a) Why do you think you are starting to do better at your schoolwork?

   b) What works do you like doing best?

   c) Do you think education and learning is important?

   d) What do your parents/caregivers say about getting an education?

9) What are your plans and goals for the future?

   a) What would you like to be doing this time next year?
   b) What would you like to be doing in five years' time?

10) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences at the different schools you have attended?

   I have allocated approximately five minutes for each question.

References

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