

**Student Reflections on School Transitions and Their Experience of E Tū Tāngata in
Promoting School Belonging.**

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	5
Acknowledgements.....	6
Chapter One: Introduction and Literature Review	7
1.1 School Transitions	8
1.1.1 Academic and Social Challenges for Students Changing Schools	9
Academic Achievement.	9
Peer Victimization.	10
Psychological and Emotional Wellbeing.	11
1.1.2. How to Promote Smooth School Transitions.....	11
1.2 School Climate.....	13
1.2.1. Theories of School Climate	15
Risk and Resilience Perspective.	17
The Bioecological Model.....	17
Systems View of School Climate.	20
Figure 1	21
1.2.2. Student Outcomes of School Climate	22
Psychological and Emotional Wellbeing.	22
Behavioural Outcomes.....	23
Academic Outcomes.	25
1.2.3. Improving School Climate.....	27
1.2.4. School Climate Initiatives.....	28
PALS in Norway.....	28
Restorative Practices Intervention.	29
1.3 School Belonging.....	30
1.3.1. Teacher and Student Perspectives of Student's Sense of Belonging	32
1.3.2. Theories of School Belonging	34
1.3.3. Student Outcomes of School Belonging	35
1.3.4. Improving School Belonging.....	38
1.3.5 School Belonging Initiatives.....	39
Wiz Kidz.	39
REAL Girls Program.	40
1.4 E Tū Tāngata.....	41
1.4.1. First Strand: You Have Value.....	43
1.4.2 Second Strand: We Succeed Together	43
1.4.3 Third Strand: Others Matter.....	44

1.4.4 E Tū Tāngata Theory of Change Model	45
Figure 2	48
1.5 The Present Study	49
Chapter Two: Methodology	51
2.1. Design	51
2.2. Recruitment	54
2.3 Participants	56
2.4 Procedure	56
Table 1	59
2.5 Data Analysis	61
2.6 Ethical Approval	62
Chapter Three: Results and Discussion	64
3.1 Participant Context and Transition Experience	64
3.2 RQ1: How Do Older Primary Students Who Are New to the School Reflect on the Differences in School Climate and Their Sense of Belonging to School Compared to Their Previous School?	66
3.2.1 New Opportunities in School Transitions	67
3.2.2 School Belonging	69
3.3 RQ2: How Do Older Primary School Students Experience the E Tū Tāngata Principles in Their Classrooms and Other School Environments and Activities?	72
3.3.1 Connections Between School Values and E Tū Tāngata	72
3.3.2 E Tū Tāngata Encourages a Welcoming Environment and Individual Self-improvement	74
3.4 RQ3: How Do Older Primary School Students Reflect on the Implementation and Application of E Tū Tāngata?	77
3.4.1 The E Tū Tāngata Strands	77
3.4.2 The Application of ETT	90
Chapter Four: General Discussion	94
4.1 School Transitions	94
4.2 New Students' Experiencing E Tū Tāngata	95
4.3 E Tū Tāngata Theory of Change	97
4.4 Implications and Recommendations	98
4.4.1 Recommendations for E Tū Tāngata	99
4.5 Limitations and Future Research	100
4.6 Conclusion	102
References	104
Appendix A: Ethical Approval	113
Appendix B: Parent/Caregiver Information and Consent Forms	114

Appendix C: Children Information and Assent Form.....	118
Appendix D: Study Flyer for Students.....	122
Appendix E: Interview Schedule	123

Abstract

Young people spend nearly half of their waking hours at school, and this complex context has the potential to support or undermine children's development. A new initiative in Aotearoa New Zealand called E Tū Tāngata (ETT; Stand Together) is being implemented in a variety of schools to help address the concerning rates of young people experiencing mental health difficulties and the cultural practice of tall poppy syndrome, in addition to promoting students' sense of belonging to their school, self-worth, and positive relationships with peers and school staff. ETT promotes three key mindsets – *You Have Value*, *We Succeed Together*, and *Others Matter*. In this retrospective, qualitative evaluation of ETT at a single target school, six students new to the school participated in semi-structured interviews exploring their recent school transition, their experience of this new school climate, sense of school belonging, and relationships with peers and teachers. Across all participants, their school transition experience was consistently described in the context of peer relationships, rather than other elements of school climate. Five participants reflected positively about their school transition, the positive and socially inclusive climate at the target school, and sense of school belonging; whereas the sixth participant's experience of peer exclusion and difficulty adjusting to the target school provided a sharp contrast. These new students had difficulty in distinguishing between the ETT mindsets and the school values, which may be due to insufficient exposure or could also reflect issues with implementation. The findings were broadly consistent with the literature on school transitions, school climate and belonging, and are generally supportive of the ETT theory of change model. In light of the strengths and limitations of this study, additional opportunities to further examine the hypotheses of the ETT theory of change in future research are discussed.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Literature Review

In Aotearoa New Zealand it is compulsory for children who are between the ages of six and sixteen years to attend school or be in home education (New Zealand Immigration, 2022). Therefore, as young people are spending nearly half of their waking hours within the school environment it is certainly possible that factors such as the quality of interactions with teachers and peers may influence their development, mental health, and wellbeing (Patton et al., 2000). Although most young New Zealanders do not experience mental health challenges, the Youth12 survey of secondary school students revealed that almost one in four (24%) of all respondents had intentionally self-harmed in the 12 months prior (Menzies et al., 2020). Furthermore, Aotearoa New Zealand is reported to have one of the highest youth suicide rates internationally, and the second highest bullying rates out of 51 countries (Glenn et al., 2020; OECD, 2017). Growing awareness for these mental health concerns have lead an increasing number of schools to embrace holistic educational approaches and incorporate socio-emotional and wellbeing initiatives to try and help address these issues (New Zealand Council For Educational Research, 2018). However, the ecological context of any school is complex, with multiple levels of a school system that come together to shape the daily experiences of children. Furthermore, schools vary considerably in their interpersonal, moral, and academic culture, and their expectations and goals for students (Eccles & Roeser, 2011a, 2011b).

According to Developmental Systems Theory (Osher et al., 2020), development should always be considered in context, as context shapes the transactional experiences encountered by young people. These ongoing, reciprocal interactions between a young person's biological characteristics, developing brain, and physical and social settings are increasingly seen as the 'engines' of development and learning. With this perspective, the school context is of particular importance and potentially grows in its influence, as many

childhood experiences take place in this dynamic, multi-level, and developmentally rich context with the potential to support or undermine healthy development. In this regard, a key challenge for schools is to promote relationships within the school community (between school staff, across students' peers, and between school staff and students) that drive learning and development. These relationships are key to supporting a young person's social and emotional learning, including their ability to regulate emotions, behaviour, and cognition, develop a sense of agency and self-understanding, and feel connected to other people.

1.1 School Transitions

Most young people will shift between schools at some point throughout their education (Wang et al., 2015), and for many students this will be in addition to the typical transitional years between primary, intermediate, and secondary school. The Ministry of Education (2021) emphasises a student's need for stability in schooling to experience belonging, support and remain engaged in their learning. This becomes difficult when students shift school part-way through the year and in 2020, there were 2,400 students in Aotearoa New Zealand who were categorised as 'transient'. These are students who moved schools twice or more between March and November, and of these, Māori students and those attending decile 1 and 2 schools were found more likely to be transient than other students (Ministry of Education, 2021). This figure is lower than the 3264 transient students of 2019, which may be influenced by the unique challenges for education in 2020, including the Coronavirus pandemic and extended lock-down periods (Ministry of Education, 2020).

There is considerable literature acknowledging that school transitions are often stressful, bringing academic and social challenges (Bullock et al., 2021; Crouch et al., 2014; Erath et al., 2019; Goldstein et al., 2015; Shell et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2015). Transient students may experience less progress in their learning, and achievement can be impacted compared to other students (Ministry of Education, 2018). As well, they may have an

increased risk of experiencing discrimination (Crouch et al., 2014), peer victimization (Erath et al., 2019; Shell et al., 2014), and poor mental health outcomes (Coelho et al., 2020; Symonds, 2015) including higher school anxiety (Goldstein et al., 2015).

School transitions create many contextual changes that can be difficult for children such as gaining a new teacher and the loss of familiar routines within the classroom and wider school context, and peer group disruption (Bullock et al., 2021; Goldstein et al., 2015). Entering a new school environment requires students to establish new friendships in an unfamiliar social hierarchy, whilst learning a new school system and navigating new rules and social norms (Bullock et al., 2021). Further, these challenges are often magnified for individuals with disabilities, special learning needs, or for those who are a social minority and are already more likely to feel isolated from most of their peers (Crouch et al., 2014). In contrast, there is potential to foster positive change for students during school transitions. Although entering a new complex environment may naturally create some anxiety and stress for children, it may also be accompanied by new possibilities, and provide a turning point for students with previously difficult or negative schooling experiences. Schools can play an integral role in supporting a student's transition and adjustment to their new environment, mitigating potential negative outcomes.

1.1.1 Academic and Social Challenges for Students Changing Schools

Academic Achievement. Goldstein et al. (2015) investigated how a young person's subjective stress about transitioning to middle school is associated with academic performance, motivation, and school bonding. The authors found that adolescents who experience greater stress during this transitional period, were more likely to have lower academic performance, motivation, and school bonding. Evans et al. (2018) suggested that such outcomes may be attributed to the new academic environment and demands, teachers' expectations, and a decrease in academic self-concept. Further evidence comes from an

evaluation of student progress in Aotearoa New Zealand by the Ministry of Education (2018). The transition from Year 8 of primary school or intermediate school, to Year 9 of high school was associated with the lowest mean annual progress for all three learning areas of reading, writing and mathematics. Outside of the transition period between primary and secondary school, the average achievement for students who had changed schools since the previous year was found to be relatively lower in all learning areas, compared with students who had not shifted. This was suggested to be from the variety of challenges associated with moving to a new school environment (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Peer Victimization. Erath et al. (2019) identify that students transitioning to new schools may be at an increased risk for peer victimisation. This is evidenced by Shell et al. (2014) who tested a diathesis stress model of peer exclusion and victimisation during middle school transitions. This longitudinal study followed 688 middle-school students from south-eastern United States when they were in third grade until seventh grade (with a school transition in sixth grade). It was found that for students who had a school history of anxious solitude (individual vulnerability) and then transitioned to a new school (environmental stress), this was predictive of a trajectory toward peer exclusion and victimization in their new environment. These students who display anxious solitude behaviours may find it increasingly difficult to integrate into new peer friendships and require a supportive classroom environment to do so. Peer exclusion and an inability to defend oneself at middle school was found to contribute to a continuation of these behaviours for students with a previous school history of anxious solitude. Despite this, Shell et al. (2014) found that on average exclusion and victimization declined following the student's transition, suggesting that collective renegotiation of peer relationships after the school transition may relate to a decline in peer mistreatment.

Psychological and Emotional Wellbeing. Early adolescence is a time where psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression may become more salient (Evans et al., 2018; Kuperminc et al., 2001). Coelho et al. (2020) found that transient students reported lower levels of self-esteem and academic, emotional and physical self-concept following their shift to middle school. Moreover, Goldstein et al. (2015) found that students who reported their school transition as more stressful predicted higher school anxiety. Galton et al. (2003) identified that students who expected their new school to have similar teaching styles and organisational elements became anxious when they transitioned to new schools and experienced strict teachers and increased academic difficulty. During school transitions, students will encounter many changes that may influence their psychological wellbeing, and according to Symonds (2015), qualities of both the individual student and school environment make the difference between a positive or negative experience. For example, student characteristics that shape their experience of school transitions include their confidence, whether they are outgoing, their self-esteem and ability to socialise, as these influence their response to transition challenges, and their ability to make friends (Symonds, 2015). Characteristics of the school environment that influence school transitions include whether new students are treated fairly and receive adequate emotional support from peers and teachers (Galton et al., 2003). Symonds (2015) further explains that negative experiences can manifest into other psychological difficulties including depression and anxiety. Once again, this reiterates the need for schools to establish a supportive school climate, with particular care for new students as they adjust to their new school environment.

1.1.2. How to Promote Smooth School Transitions

Despite the evidence that students who transition schools have increased risks for a variety of academic, social, and psychological challenges, there is also potential to foster positive outcomes. For example, Gazelle and Faldowski (2019) found the transition into middle

school to be an ecological shift, creating a window of opportunity for children with a school history of anxious solitude, as they could respond to challenging peer situations more effectively. This reflects the dynamic nature of stressors and supports which young people face throughout middle childhood and early adolescence. An improved ability to defend oneself in middle school appeared to be related to a decrease in anxious solitude, and Gazelle and Faldowski (2019) suggest improvements may occur merely because these students are actively trying to adapt to a new social environment. This provides opportunities to establish new peer relationships with less resistance from their previous reputations. If students consider a different approach to interpersonal challenges, this can be an opportunity for more positive interactions with peers who are unaware of prior reputations, and may cascade positively onto peer relationships, social behaviour, and mental health outcomes (Gazelle & Faldowski, 2019; Shell et al., 2014).

Crouch et al. (2014) suggests that for marginalized students and those who experience complex and layered forms of discrimination, school belonging is critical to their success. Therefore, it is important to understand the factors which support or diminish one's sense of school belonging, and these authors found that students with disabilities reported greater belonging when their teachers were encouraging, supportive and understanding. Fostering the relationship between student and teacher, and an environment where students feel included may be critical for successful school transitions for all students, including those with disabilities (Crouch et al., 2014). Goldstein et al. (2015) explained that the psychological experience of transient students in terms of subjective stress may impact their academic and motivational success. They suggest that fostering a positive school transition may be achieved by focusing on stress reduction strategies and efforts to make young people feel confident and comfortable during this time.

There is limited literature on school transition interventions, though one example comes from Coelho et al. (2016) who evaluated whether the Positive Transition Program promoted a positive middle school adjustment. This initiative included 20 sessions led by an educational psychologist which were 50 minutes in length. Fifteen of the sessions took place before the middle school transition, while the remaining five occurred once students had started high school. Pre-transition sessions explored students' expectations for the next year level, analysis of their new schedules, evaluation sheets, and a visit to the middle school. Post-transition sessions discussed the differences between schools, analysis of any difficulties encountered, and promotion of appropriate coping strategies. In this study 1147 participants were assessed for self-esteem and five dimensions of self-concept including academic, social, emotional, physical, and family at four time points across their school transition. Results found that students who participated in the intervention had increased scores of self-esteem and social self-concept, while those did not participate reported lower levels of self-concept (academic, emotional and physical) and self-esteem following their school transition.

1.2 School Climate

Every school setting has a set of psychological and institutional attributes that give it a distinct interpersonal climate (Rhodes et al., 2009). There are many theoretical constructs and operational definitions of school climate, when combined with a lack of theoretical and conceptual consensus, means there is considerable ambiguity about this topic (Lee et al., 2017; Rudasill et al., 2018; Wang & Degol, 2016). Additionally, similar constructs are often confused with school climate including school belonging, school culture, classroom climate, and teacher support (Rudasill et al., 2018). Ultimately, the term school climate can encompass many different components of the school environment (Wang & Degol, 2016).

Research into school climate is not a new phenomenon, and the first documentation of this concept was over 100 years ago by Perry in 1908, an early educational leader who

considered its effects upon students and their learning (Cohen et al., 2009; Grazia & Molinari, 2020; Marraccini et al., 2019). Interest has garnered over the years as recent shifts in education recognize the importance of the cultural context of schooling (Eccles & Roeser, 2011a), with an increasing body of research examining the interrelated concepts of school climate and school culture. There is considerable overlap between these constructs, though Roach and Kratochwill (2004) distinguish that school culture is typically more abstract than school climate. They explain how it focuses less on individual behaviours within the school context, and more on the assumptions, interpretations and expectations driving these individual behaviours. Early definitions establish school culture as the underlying assumptions and beliefs which are developed through solutions to problems and help define the reality of an organisation (Angelides & Ainscow, 2000). More recent definitions outline school culture as the customs, beliefs, and relationships which are evident and valued throughout a school (Educational Leaders, 2022; The Glossary of Education Reform, 2013).

Alongside school culture, school climate refers to a school's physical and social environment and has become an increasingly popular concept within education policy, research, and practice. School climate is based upon patterns of people's experiences of school life, but is also understood to be larger than individual experience, as the influence of internal and external factors inform the collective experience of school life. It is a group phenomenon consisting of a complex set of elements from various aspects of school life, as well as larger organizational patterns (Cohen et al., 2009). School climate has often been operationalised as the degree to which students, teachers and parents feel welcome, respected, and emotionally, socially, or physically safe within their school environment (Aldridge et al., 2016; Grazia & Molinari, 2020).

Due to subjective variation in perceptions of school climate, most commonly measured through self-report, two students at the same school may have different perceptions

of their school climate. For example, Molinari and Grazia (2021) assessed 1065 middle school students to discover whether students who positively engaged in school activities and practices had a different perception of their school climate to those who reported feeling distant and disengaged. They found the largest profile of students to be those who were engaged and reflected positively about school, with no reports of burn-out symptoms. Conversely, there was a smaller cluster of students who despite being engaged in school tasks, did not have the same positive outlook and experienced high levels of burn-out (Molinari & Grazia, 2021). Perceptions of school climate are associated with academic, behavioural, and psychological outcomes and therefore is an important consideration in understanding how school's function as developmental contexts (Aldridge et al., 2016; Demirtas-Zorbaz et al., 2021; Kuperminc et al., 2001; Marsh et al., 2014; McGiboney, 2016; Thapa et al., 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016; Wang & Dishion, 2012; Wang et al., 2010; Z. Wang et al., 2017; Zysberg & Schwabsky, 2021).

1.2.1. Theories of School Climate

It is now well recognised by educators and researchers that school climate is a multidimensional construct (Grazia & Molinari, 2020; Marraccini et al., 2019) made up of a complex set of elements. Cohen et al. (2009) reviewed past research along with practitioner and other scholarly writing to identify four major elements of school life which comprise school climate, including safety, teaching and learning, relationships, and environmental-structural domains. Safety encompasses both physical safety (e.g., clear rules, and attitudes towards bullying and other violence), as well as social-emotional safety (e.g., attitudes toward individual differences, and conflict resolution). Teaching and learning considers the school's pedagogical quality, including the curriculum, as well as social, emotional, and ethical learning, professional development, and leadership. Relationships involves the degree to

which members of the school community respect diversity, provide opportunities for the inclusion of the wider school community (e.g., family), and encourage collaboration, a positive morale, and connectedness. Finally, the environmental-structural domain refers to cleanliness, space and materials, and curricular and extracurricular opportunities (Cohen et al., 2009).

Since the Cohen et al. (2009) publication, other authors have identified similar school climate domains, though with varying subdomains (Rudasill et al., 2018; Voight & Nation, 2016; Wang & Degol, 2016). For example, for their systematic review Voight and Nation (2016) identified a framework that included three domains (engagement, safety, and environment), each with several subdomains (10 in total). That same year, Wang and Degol (2016) published an extensive review of the school climate literature and advocated for a multi-dimensional model that included four broad domains (academic, community, safety, and institutional environment), each with three or four subdomains (13 in all). This variation between models of school climate seems largely due to the shifting parameters of what constitutes school climate, and researcher's discretion within this (Cohen et al., 2009; Rudasill et al., 2018; Wang & Degol, 2016).

More recently, Grazia and Molinari (2020) examined the extent to which researchers actually adhered to Wang and Degol's (2016) multidimensional model. They found continuing inconsistency in how researchers conceptualise and operationalise school climate, but with some commonalities in two areas, including the importance of school connectedness and relationship quality, and reference to safety and order in school. As the work of Wang and Degol (2016) is one of the more integrated and theoretically informed school climate models, I will use that framework as a basis for describing key theories that will inform the present study.

Risk and Resilience Perspective. Despite there being less academic recognition for this theory, Wang and Degol (2016) explain how the risk and resilience perspective remains notable. This model identifies the protective factors within a young person's environment that will cultivate adaptive adjustment and reduce negative outcomes despite the presence of risk factors (Wang & Degol, 2016). Here, risk is considered to be any influence increasing a young person's likelihood for negative outcomes. Examples of this include socio-economic status and the experience of discrimination (Wang & Degol, 2016). While resilience refers to the aggregation of developmental assets which a young person can utilise to combat the negative effects of risks within their contexts. Benson et al. (2011) and Soares et al. (2019) explain that developmental assets are a set of related experiences, relationships, skills, and values which become building blocks for healthy development. These help young people to grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. From the understanding that school is a key developmental setting in which to consider risk and protective factors, combined with the knowledge that risk and protective factors interact and operate within various ecological settings, thus youth development will vary according to their unique combination of personal attributes and the school environment.

The Bioecological Model. Ecological Systems Theory (EST) was first introduced by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the 1970's as an ecological framework for human development, and was revised into the Bioecological Model of Human Development two decades following (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Guy-Evans, 2020). This model remains by and large the most widely applied theory for school climate. This is a dynamic theory which posits development as the phenomenon of continuity and change within biopsychological features of individuals and groups (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Development takes place across the life course, following generations and over historical time, with increasingly complex reciprocal interactions between an agentic human and the proximal and distal physical and

social contexts that encompass them (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The four core features of bioecological theory (process, person, contexts, and time) and Bronfenbrenner's identification of the nested ecological contexts (micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chronosystems) will not be reviewed here, although connections to the relevant aspects of this theory are discussed in the following paragraphs.

One of the defining characteristics of school climate research is the way individual behaviours are shaped by the multiple domains and features of the school environment (Wang & Degol, 2016). Similarly, foundational to the bioecological model is the multidimensional nature of a child's environmental contexts and the need to consider the influence of both distal and proximal processes. The application of bioecological theory for school climate research has focused on the complexity of the school environment and how the different elements collectively shape student outcomes. For example, within the macrosystem, the national and local governments contribute to curriculum decision making and learning outcomes which students are expected to complete. These government bodies make decisions about where to build schools, how each school's physical environment will be constructed, and the number of children for each classroom. These decisions will affect the students' microsystems, as they experience the conditions of the school's physical environment on a daily basis (Wang & Degol, 2016), and learn from a teacher trying to effectively teach a curriculum that was determined by people who have no idea who the children are in that classroom.

Within the exosystem, parental occupation, the family and community economic conditions and living location will all influence which school their child attends and as a result, the scope and quality of school resources and facilities available. School boards develop their own policies and ethos which students are expected to uphold, and each of these opportunities and constraints of a school can influence student outcomes (Rudasill et al.,

2018; Wang & Degol, 2016). An example of this is revealed through the mesosystem, in a parent's relationship with their child's teachers and school. During a parent-teacher conference a teacher and family may collaborate, problem solve and establish management plans to influence their child's motivation and engagement (Rudasill et al., 2018).

Alternatively, if there were a disruption to this relationship due to conflicts or disengagement, the child may be left to negotiate between these microsystems (Rudasill et al., 2018), which could impact the student-teacher relationship and their levels of conflict or cooperation, school enjoyment, and active participation. In addition to this are the social expectations and influence of peer relationships within the microsystem, and a child's self-confidence, self-belief, perseverance and natural ability at the person or ontogenic level. These factors will all impact students' engagement at school and will contribute to individual differences in academic, behavioural, and social outcomes. Ultimately these are only a few examples of the many complex factors which interact to influence a child's daily experience of school life, development, and outcomes.

Wang and Degol (2016) argue that bioecological theory has been a theoretical pillar of school climate research and this is confirmed by Anderson (1982), Acosta et al. (2019), Eugene et al. (2021), Kuperminc et al. (1997), and Rudasill et al. (2018) who all situate school climate within a broader systems perspective. Anderson (1982) describes ecological theory as one of the more inclusive theories, viewing all variables as potentially modifiable for the benefit of student outcomes. Wang and Degol (2016) suggest that the risk and resilience perspective holds similarities to bioecological theory as they are both non-specific in regards to school climate dimensions, nor to particular developmental periods, and both emphasise the importance of developing strong social bonds between teachers and students (Wang & Degol, 2016). Further, Hopson and Lee (2011) consider the risk and resilience model from an ecological perspective which illustrates how these theories may be

complementary. From an ecological lens, risk and protective factors operate and exist across ecological levels. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) proposed that proximal processes within the microsystem have the most direct influence upon student development, and within a school setting this includes students' daily interactions with peers and staff (most notably, their teachers).

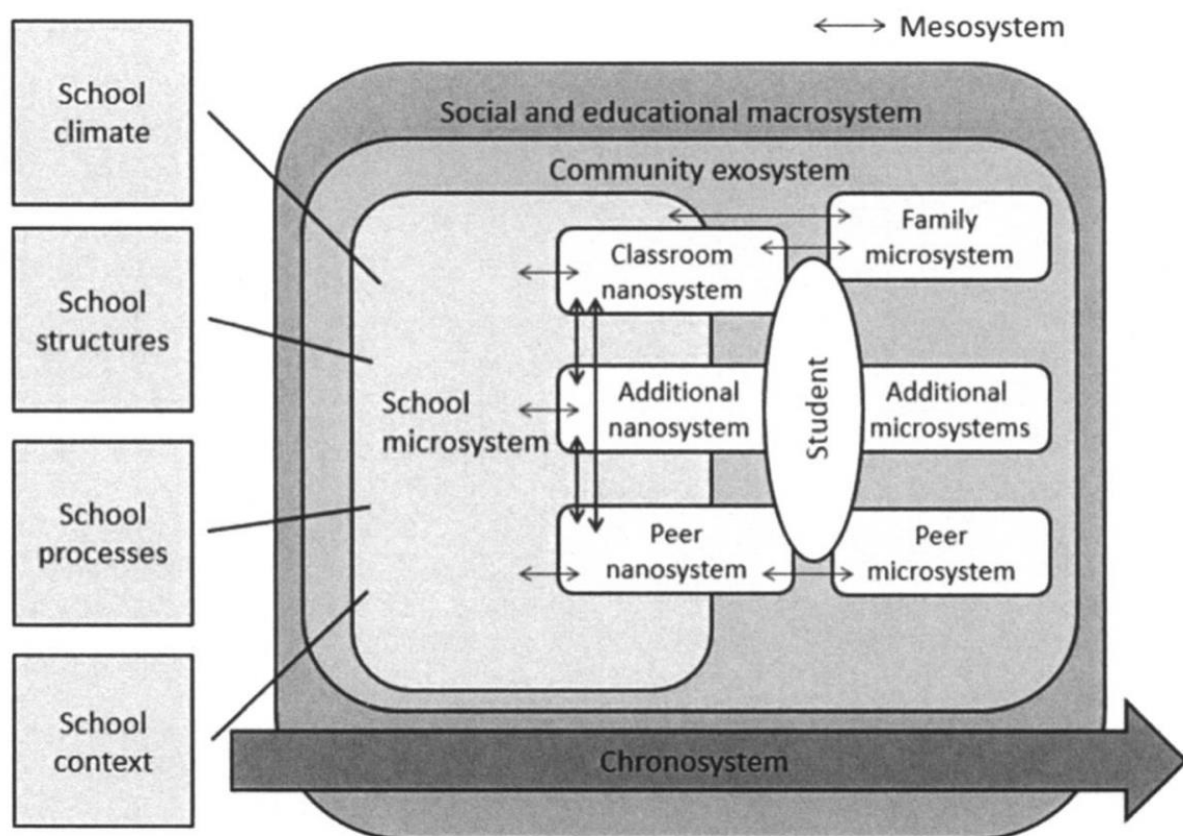
Systems View of School Climate. As an extension of these foundational theories, the Systems View of School Climate (SVSC; see Figure 1) will be adopted for the present study (Rudasill et al., 2018). Rudasill and colleagues propose that the SVSC is a more refined framework that carefully distinguishes school climate from other elements of the school environment (such as school structures or processes); and because of this, will be more effective at guiding research and measurement strategies. Although not explicitly depicted within Figure 1, there are three core elements that comprise the school climate construct within the SVSC framework; *relationships*, *safety*, and *shared beliefs and values* (Marraccini et al., 2019). Rudasill et al. (2018) claim that the SVSC builds upon the work of Cohen et al. (2009) and others, but excludes the environmental-structural domain. This reflects the observation from Grazia and Molinari (2020) mentioned above that the school climate factors common across much of the research was an emphasis on school connectedness and relationship quality, alongside safety and order in school.

The SVSC school climate element of *relationships* is most relevant for the present study, as this broadly considers the interactions and underlying social processes between individuals and groups shaping school climate. For example, Rudasill et al. (2018) describe how a sense of trust, openness, and cooperation provides the foundation of interactions within a positive school climate. Next, the *safety* element of school climate consists of a student's sense of physical, social, and emotional safety, the latter two of which will also be considered for the present study as they may speak to a new student's emotional and social experiences,

as well as their adjustment to school. The third dimension of *shared beliefs and values* held by students and school staff, includes beliefs which are rooted in perceptions of experience, and values which often include expectations on students' academic engagement and success. Academic expectations and achievement are positively associated with a positive school climate, though the present study is more focused on students' perceived belonging and wellbeing outcomes.

Figure 1

Systems View of School Climate



Note. This model summarizes and depicts the SVSC framework. From *Systems View of School Climate: a Theoretical Framework for Research* (p. 38), by Rudasill, K. M., Snyder, K. E., Levinson, H., & L. Adelson, J., 2018, *Educational Psychology Review*, 30(1), p. 38. Copyright 2018 by Springer.

The SVSC draws on Bronfenbrenner's earlier conceptualisations of ecological systems theory (1979) and it is not clear why they seemingly ignored the considerable advances that were made in subsequent decades as it became bioecological theory (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In addition, Rudasill et al. (2018) created a further subsystem within the school microsystem known as the nanosystem (see Figure 1). The nanosystem comprises the school specific structures which operate as the bridge between students and the school microsystem, such as classrooms, sports groups, and peer groups (Marraccini et al., 2019).

The SVSC recognises the influence of the family and peer microsystems, while the mesosystem includes the interactions between and across the micro and nano systems (Marraccini et al., 2019; Rudasill et al., 2018). Rudasill et al. (2018) proposed that when the Ecological Systems Theory (EST) is applied to school climate, the school is the microsystem and school climate is created through the combined perceptions from members of the school community. This reflects the previous suggestion by Cohen et al. (2009) that school climate is a group phenomenon.

1.2.2. Student Outcomes of School Climate

Psychological and Emotional Wellbeing. The impact of school climate upon student wellbeing and psychological outcomes including mental health, life satisfaction, identity, self-concept and esteem has been explored across a variety of studies (e.g., Aldridge et al., 2016; Kuperminc et al., 2001; McGiboney, 2016). For example, in the cross-sectional study by Aldridge et al. (2016), the relationship between school climate and 4067 Australian secondary school student's perception of wellbeing, life satisfaction, moral identity, and resilience was examined. Based on previous school climate literature, the authors developed a questionnaire to assess students' school climate perceptions using social connectedness, school connectedness, safety, and inclusivity as indicators of a positive school climate. A

statistically significant, positive relationship between the extent to which students felt a sense of school connectedness, and their moral and ethnic identity was found. In addition, there was a strong, positive relationship between ethnic and moral identity and school climates in which students reported more positive relationships with their peers (social connectedness). In an earlier study, Kuperminc et al. (2001) examined the interaction between psychological vulnerabilities (interpersonal concerns, self-criticism, and efficacy) and perceptions of school climate as predictors of emerging behavioural and emotional problems in a sample of 460 middle school students. The authors found that students who had more negative perceptions of their school climate were also more likely to be self-critical and reported higher internalizing problems.

In research on middle school environments, Roeser et al. (1996) found that as students perceived their schools to be more supportive, caring, and emphasised individual effort and improvement (rather than competition and relative ability), they were more likely to report adaptive patterns of cognition, affect and behaviour. Taken together, the research suggests a positive school climate can mitigate the social-emotional challenges that are common in the middle school and high school years, and can contribute towards a student's sense of wellbeing and self-esteem.

Behavioural Outcomes. A negative school climate may worsen emotional health and wellbeing issues, exacerbating conditions that lead to behavioural issues, school attendance problems, and impair social-emotional development (McGiboney, 2016). Evidence for this also comes from the study by Kuperminc et al. (2001) which found three interaction effects. Positive perceptions of school climate moderated the negative effects of a lack of efficacy on internalizing problems, and positive perceptions of school climate also moderated the negative effects of self-criticism on both internalizing and externalizing problems. They also

identified a stronger association between self-criticism and externalizing problems for students who also held a negative perception of their school climate.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Marsh et al. (2014) examined student perceptions of school climate, school engagement, and their relationships with their teachers, peers, and parental involvement at their secondary schools. These authors were interested in how school climate and school engagement may relate to aggressive behaviours and attitudes. The quality of teacher-student relationships was found to be the strongest predictor of student perceptions of school climate. For example, fair, helpful, encouraging and interested teachers were strongly associated with school perceptions of being a collaborative, fair, not overly strict, safe, and nice environment. The quality of student-peer relationships had a relatively weaker association with school climate, while parental school involvement had the weakest relationship. Positive perceptions of school climate were found to predict less aggressive behaviour and attitudes at school. Marsh et al. suggest that school climate may operate as a mediator between the quality of relationships in the school environment (in particular teacher-student), and aggressive behaviours and attitudes and proposed that “by enhancing the quality of teacher-student relationships and interactions, schools encourage the development of a supportive school climate and promote the engagement of individual students with school life.” (2014, p.35)

The relationship between negative perceptions of school climate, increased aggressive behaviour, and underlying mechanisms was also investigated by Wang and colleagues (2012; 2010). Wang and Dishion (2012) investigated the change in adolescent school climate perceptions, and the effect of this trajectory upon problem behaviours in a sample of 1030 participants who were followed from sixth grade until eighth grade. Across this period, all dimensions of school climate perception deteriorated with increases in behavioural problems and deviant peer affiliation. A weak positive association between deviant peer affiliation and

problem behaviour was found for students who reported high levels of school behavior management (clarity and consistency of school rules and regulations), and for individual students who received high levels of teachers' care, support, and respect (Wang & Dishion, 2012).

Z. Wang et al. (2017) examined whether deviant peer affiliation and sensation seeking mediated or moderated the association between school climate and aggression, using questionnaires completed by 1401 adolescents. These authors found that deviant peer affiliation mediated the association between school climate and adolescent aggression. Sensation seeking operated as a moderator for the association between school climate and adolescent aggression. Here, lower school climate quality was associated with more adolescent aggression under the condition of higher sensation seeking.

Academic Outcomes. Thapa et al. (2013) describes a positive school climate as an environment which promotes cooperative learning, group cohesion, respect, and trust, which support a student's ability to learn. Academic achievement is a complex construct which is generally measured by classroom assessments, tests, and course grades. Although there is variation between studies in the criteria determined for academic achievement, based on grades, Grade Point Average (GPA) and average yearly results (Demirtas-Zorbaz et al., 2021). The magnitude of the relationship between school climate and academic achievement and whether it is direct or indirect has been debated, as the level of association differs and research findings are inconsistent (Demirtas-Zorbaz et al., 2021; Zysberg & Schwabsky, 2021).

Evidence which emphasises the importance of a positive school climate for academic success comes from Wang et al. (2014), who investigated the association between school climate, self-reported peer victimization and teacher-reported academic achievement. All associations between these variables were analysed using multilevel modelling, with school

climate as a contextual variable in a sample of 1023 fifth grade students from 50 schools. Results showed that students' perceptions of school climate were significantly associated with teacher-rated GPA, and an increase of one point in school-climate scores was related to almost a one-point increase in GPA.

In a meta-analysis of this literature, Demirtas-Zorbaz et al. (2021) found 38 studies published between 2000 and 2020 which investigated the association between school climate and academic achievement. Achievement was based on GPA, exam scores, and similar measures, while subjective perceptions of achievement including academic self-efficacy or competence were excluded. School climate was found to be significantly correlated with academic achievement, though with a small effect size (.178). Interestingly, these authors identified that whether the different dimensions of school climate (academic, safety, community, or institutional environments) were measured in the study, could influence the relationship between school climate and academic achievement. Specifically, the academic dimension had larger effect sizes than safety, community, and institutional environment, respectively.

Another recent contribution is from Zysberg and Schwabsky (2021) who also recognised the presence of an association between school climate and academic achievement. These authors were more interested in the additional processes that might be involved in this association as this remains less explored. These authors investigated whether academic self-efficacy is a mediator for the relationship between school climate and academic achievement. The grades of 1641 middle school and high school students were collected, and these participants completed questionnaires assessing academic self-efficacy and school climate. None of the covariates (sex, class, and family income level) showed a significant association with students grades after the primary variables were included. Two of three climate subscales (interpersonal relationships and a sense of belonging) were found to be positively

associated with measures of academic self-efficacy, which in turn were positively associated with all three measures of achievement. These results point towards an indirect path between school climate and academic achievement.

A student's potential for achievement increases with appropriate encouragement of students' active participation within academic learning (Thapa et al., 2013), and in Cemalcilar (2010) the influence of school climate factors upon student's school-related attitudes were examined in a sample of 799 Turkish students in seventh and eighth grade across 13 schools who completed questionnaires. Results showed that regardless of academic or individual background, when students were in caring and supportive school contexts, students were likely to be more engaged in academic work and like their schools.

1.2.3. Improving School Climate

In response to school climate research, educators have been tasked with improving the climates of their schools by implementing strategies and establishing reforms which create more personalized and caring environments for children, to improve health outcomes and address problems such as substance use and school violence (Roeser et al., 1996; Voight & Nation, 2016). School climate interventions may tackle social adjustment concerns, support students' ability to manage and succeed in school, and promote emotional and behavioural wellbeing and healthy development in children and adolescents, by improving the fit between a school's social setting, a young person's developmental needs, and supporting peer and student-teacher relationships (Chapman et al., 2013; Kuperminc et al., 2001; Marsh et al., 2014; McGiboney, 2016).

Strategies to improve school culture and climate have been widely implemented in primary, middle, and secondary schools. However, Voight and Nation (2016) argue that many are without empirical evidence supporting their effectiveness. There are various common strategies for improving school climate, the first of which are school-wide

prevention (SWP) approaches. These involve all school staff and multi-tiered behaviour management systems. Support for this approach comes from Aldridge et al. (2016) who found that school-wide, early interventions with adolescents can lead to improvements in numerous mental health, behavioural, emotional, and pro-social outcomes. Other common strategies are student social and emotional learning (SEL) approaches. These involve curriculum, classroom-based instructions to help students develop social skills (Voight & Nation, 2016). An extension of SWP are school-wide positive behaviour support (SWPBS) programmes. These are SWP approaches grounded in providing evidence based practice, but with varying levels of intensity (Bruhn et al., 2015). In SWPBS initiatives, the primary prevention level includes academic, behavioural, and social skills support provided to all students regardless of their level of need. One focus at the primary prevention level is to establish a school-wide positive social culture by defining and teaching a small set of behavioural expectations (Horner & Sugai, 2015). This is similar to the aims of the initiative which will be evaluated for the present study. Schools can then determine which students require support beyond the primary level of prevention (at the secondary or tertiary level). More intensive supports can be more costly, and it would be inefficient to provide these to all students, thus it is important to carefully consider which students require the additional resources (Bruhn et al., 2015). The SWPBS approach establishes a helpful frame for the present study's evaluation, as the school-wide initiative is set at a primary level, for all students regardless of specific or additional needs.

1.2.4. School Climate Initiatives

PALS in Norway. Sørli and Ogden (2015) investigated the effects of the three-level SWPBS model on problem behaviour and classroom climate. This was adapted for Norwegian primary schools under the name PALS in Norway (N-PALS), and the primary level involved SWPBS strategies administered to all students. These included teaching school

rules, positive expectations and social skills, strategic praise and encouragement for positive behaviour, monitoring student behaviour across school, collectively applying school-wide discipline (using mild and immediate consequences); classroom management skills for teachers, and parent information and collaboration approaches. Students who required support beyond this level were then identified and support plans were established. These involved time-limited problem reduction and skill promoting programmes for individuals or small groups. The final level consisted of intensive, multimodal, individual interventions for high-risk students created from functional behavioural assessments.

As most schools invited to participate did not accept randomization, this study implemented a quasi-experimental design. Data was collected from 1200 teachers and 7640 students from 28 intervention schools and 20 control schools at four points across four years. Questionnaires measuring problem behaviour at school and intervention implementation quality were completed by staff, and the classroom learning climate was completed by staff and students. Findings from the longitudinal multilevel analyses indicated a significant positive main effect of the N-PALS model over time. Lower levels of all problem behaviours were observed in the N-PALS schools compared to the control schools, and this was particularly evident for schools with high scores of implementation quality. A positive main effect was indicated by the teacher-rated quality of the learning class climate, though this was moderated by implementation quality. Overall, schools with high implementation quality benefited the most from the intervention. Effect estimates remained when controlling for influencing school factors, and staff and student characteristics. Finally, many of the control schools had been implementing other intervention programmes across this study duration, which suggests these group differences may be conservative.

Restorative Practices Intervention. Acosta et al. (2019) also evaluated a SWP approach, known as the Restorative Practices Intervention, using a randomized control trial.

This two-year, whole school intervention was designed to promote positive youth development, reduce bullying, and build a supportive environment among middle school students. All school staff were trained to employ a continuum of 11 ‘Restorative Practices’ which ranged from informal (the use of ‘affective’ statements to express emotion), to formal (coordinating restorative ‘conferences’ to encourage the communication of feelings following disruptive behaviour). This study by Acosta et al. (2019) was conducted in 14 middle schools following a two-year implementation of this intervention. The evaluation assessed the extent of implementation and changes in school belonging, positive developmental outcomes, and bullying victimization. The Restorative Practices Intervention was not found to be an effective method for whole-school change nor an effective comprehensive positive youth development programme. Although interestingly, students who reported having greater restorative practice experiences due to the actions of their teachers (regardless of whether the teacher had accessed this intervention) also reported more positive outcomes. This included increased school belonging, improved school climate, peer relationships, developmental outcomes, and reduced victimization from bullying. This highlights the general influence teachers have on their student’s experience of school life.

1.3 School Belonging

A sense of school belonging or “belongingness”, is a psychosocial construct present within the psychological and educational literature, also identified by several other terms such as school connectedness and school attachment. These terms are regularly used interchangeably with small differences in their operationalisation (Korpershoek et al., 2020). School belonging is often defined as an individual’s relationship, sense of fit, or feelings of acceptance to their school (Bouchard & Berg, 2017; Nichols, 2006). Belonging is recognized as fundamental for mental health and psychosocial adjustment, and Baumeister (2012), discusses that the universal human “need-to-belong” is a motivator for maintaining positive

relationships with others. A study by Saeri et al. (2018) confirms this within Aotearoa New Zealand communities as social connectedness was identified as a stronger and more consistent predictor of public mental health each year, than mental health was of social connectedness.

School belonging describes a young person's relationship to school, primarily at an emotional level. School belonging and school climate are related, parallel constructs with significant overlap in their measures, and Wang and Degol (2016) explain this to have contributed to confusion within the literature. Previous studies have positioned school belonging as a dimension within school climate while others have separated these constructs. In the latter, school belonging has been distinguished as a distinct construct of the school environment and an outcome which school climate can both facilitate or interfere with (Wang & Degol, 2016). For example, McGiboney (2016) describes school connectedness and interactions between and among students as significant components *of* school climate. This review found that a positive school climate can benefit student's social and emotional health and development. Conversely, when there were limited interactions, relationships, and opportunities for connection within the school environment, this climate increased the social-emotional volatility within the school. This was found to be consistent across ethnicity and nationality and the author states that cultivating a positive school climate and conditions which increase opportunities for students to feel connected are important regardless of a school's size or demographics (McGiboney, 2016).

Others have considered outcomes of school belonging *separate* to school climate. A review of the literature by Chapman et al. (2013) found that school connectedness is related to a reduction of adolescent engagement in risk-taking behaviour, while also being an important protective factor for school retention, education, adolescent behaviour, health, emotional and social well-being. Further, a study by Rowe and Stewart (2009) examined

school belonging as a distinct outcome of the Health Promoting School (HPS) programme. This research involved a case study methodology with in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observations across a primary, secondary, and special education school in Australia. Focus groups comprised of teachers, parents, students, health service representatives, community agency workers and parent liaison officers. Findings revealed that the use of whole-school community activities promoted interactions between students, staff, and parents, and the mutual reciprocity from this was identified to influence participants' perceived school belonging. These whole-school community activities were characterised as being economically inclusive, fun, social, informal, well-organized, and involved a shared activity of eating together. Similarly, whole-class activities such as collaborative curriculum planning were employed within HPS, to encourage students and school staff to work together. Participants reported this to have encouraged student participation through student 'ownership' and students 'having a say'. Rowe and Stewart (2009) explained that these activities provided opportunities for supportive interactions throughout the school environment and across all levels of the community, including between and within classes, which ultimately promoted connectedness. These authors have not drawn connections to school climate literature, yet their findings are relevant within the *relationships* domain, a major component of school climate in the SVSC (Rudasill et al., 2018) as described above. The interactions and other social processes between school members which are promoted in this programme, are aspects which both shape a positive school climate and promote a sense of belonging.

1.3.1. Teacher and Student Perspectives of Student's Sense of Belonging

Another way researchers have operationalised school belonging is based on students' perceptions of being a member of their classroom. Williams and Downing (1998) explored characteristics of classroom membership in a sample of 51 middle school students from the

United States. Participants were asked to discuss among focus group interviews what classroom membership meant to them, and from these groups, four students were selected for more in depth, individual interviews. Over all, many participants felt that membership meant they had a place in the classroom, felt welcomed, wanted, and respected by their classmates and teachers. Students felt they belonged to a group or wider class if they were familiar with their classmates, had friends who understood them, and classmates were nice to them. For some, high academic achievement made them feel a part of their class while others felt that the effort to achieve was more important than actually consistently obtaining good grades.

Another approach by Nichols (2006) examined student belongingness in a North American middle school that had been attempting to foster a sense of community among students and teachers. Researchers identified three themes from the interviews that summarised interpersonal relationships, learning-academic community, and school facilities or activities. Similarly, Midgen et al. (2019) identified four key themes related to school belonging, including relationships, school environment, teaching and learning, and extracurricular activities. Gowing and Jackson (2016) also found that students understood and experienced their connection to school through relational, activity-based, and academic opportunities. Students in Bouchard and Berg (2017) emphasised the value of having a voice in the creation and implementation of activities. Furthermore, Williams and Downing (1998) found students consistently believed membership came from active participation within classroom activities. Those who did not try or participate were perceived to be non-members of their classroom.

While students varied in the importance they gave to different dimensions of school belonging, Nichols (2006) found 55% of students identified belonging in terms of support and guidance from peers and teachers. The significance of relationships was confirmed by Williams and Downing (1998), Gowing and Jackson (2016), Bouchard and Berg (2017),

Midgen et al. (2019) and Gowing (2019), where students reported reciprocal, caring, student-teacher relationships and trusting peer friendships to be key predictors for students' school belonging. In Nichols (2006) study of Australian students there was a particular emphasis upon the value of peer friendships for a young person's experience of school. A large majority of students (93%; 192 out of 206) said they would miss their friends and peers most if they were to leave their school. Nevertheless, the value of student-teacher relationships should not be discounted. Bouchard and Berg (2017) found that teachers may overestimate the impact of peer acceptance in school belonging and underestimate their own influence.

1.3.2. Theories of School Belonging

The theoretical basis for school belonging has drawn on a diverse range of theoretical perspectives (for reviews see Allen et al., 2018; Chapman et al., 2013). For example, Wagle et al. (2021) and Korpershoek et al. (2020) refer to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and Bowlby's theory of attachment (Bowlby, 1958) as setting the foundation for belonging and relatedness as a fundamental human need that can be partially met at school. Researchers have also drawn on Social Control Theory (SCT), which was developed by Hirschi (1969) to explain delinquent behavior and proposes that when adolescents are bonded to others and institutions, this inhibits their risk-taking and deviant behaviour and influences their conformity. An individual's bond to social institutions is conceptualised as having four primary domains; attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief (Chapman et al., 2013; Peguero et al., 2011). An extension of SCT, and another contributing theory is the Social Development Model which recognises that factors such as opportunities and interpersonal skills, reinforcement, and involvement are required for the establishment of social bonds. Risky behaviour is described as an *outcome* of low self-control, rather than from low bonding. Unlike SCT, involvement in groups is seen as a part of the socialisation process that leads to bonding, and belief in values and norms of a group are

considered the consequence of these bonds and a mediator between bonding and behavioural outcomes (Chapman et al., 2013).

Ultimately, the theoretical basis for school belonging is limited in that there has been no recent theoretical development, and most researchers have drawn on theories which only implicitly relate to school belonging. Theoretical work in this area needs to more specifically address questions such as how a sense of school belonging develops and changes across primary and secondary schooling, and how and why it contributes to students' educational and social outcomes.

Similar to school climate, researchers have drawn on ecological theories to understand the diverse array of predictors that are associated with school belonging. A meta-analysis by Allen et al. (2018) including 51 studies found that considerable research has focussed on predictors of school belonging at the individual level. Student characteristics include emotional stability, conscientiousness, optimism, self-esteem, aspirations, academic self-regulation, self-academic rating, education goals, motivation and valuing academics. Within the microsystem parent, peer and teacher support were all strongly associated with school belonging, though peer relationships were found to have a smaller contribution than parent or teacher support. Allen et al. found six studies that focussed on a safe school environment and found that student's perceived safety is important. According to the SVSC ecological theory discussed above (see Figure 1) elements of *safety* are one of three domains of school climate, the other two being *relationships* and *shared values and beliefs*. It is interesting to note that according to the Allen et al. meta-analysis a number of studies have investigated and found support for *relationship* factors as a significant predictor of school belonging, but the aspect of *shared values and beliefs* has not been readily explored.

1.3.3. Student Outcomes of School Belonging

The few studies which have assessed students' perspectives towards both school climate and sense of belonging have identified a range of outcomes including the quality of a student's overall school experience, subjective well-being, adaptive functioning, improved academic achievement and engagement (Aldridge et al., 2016; Arslan, 2018, 2019; Cemalcilar, 2010; Gowing & Jackson, 2016; Korpershoek et al., 2020; McGiboney, 2016; Rowe & Stewart, 2009). A qualitative study from Bouchard and Berg (2017) compared middle school teacher and students' perspectives of student belonging and revealed that a sense of school belonging was foundational for a student's overall schooling experience. With one student sharing, "without belonging, you wouldn't be having fun" (pp.117).

A review of literature by McGiboney (2016) found that students who felt connected to school with staff and peers experienced more confidence in their social interactions and academic challenges than students who feel disconnected. An Australian longitudinal study by Bond et al. (2007), examined associations between school engagement, mental health, and educational achievement, with data from a cohort of 2678 students from 26 secondary schools. The authors collected data at the beginning of high school when participants were in Year 8, again at the end of Year 10, and finally, 71% of this sample completed a final survey after they finished school. Analyses from this study indicated that students were more likely to have mental health and substance use difficulties later in school if they had reported lower school connectedness, and relational conflicts earlier in high school. Additionally, these authors suggest that school connectedness may be equally important for positive mental health outcomes as social connectedness, as they found students with low school connectedness but good social relationships were at a higher risk of engaging in risky behaviours. Having both good school and social connectedness was associated with the lowest risk of depressive symptoms.

Arslan (2018) investigated the relationships between school belonging, wellbeing, distress and emotional health in a sample of 413 adolescents aged between 11 and 18 years. The students completed a survey that assessed school belonging, positive and negative experiences, and psychological wellbeing and distress. Their preliminary analyses found a large positive association between school belonging and emotional wellbeing variables (psychological wellbeing and positive affect). Social inclusion was operationalised as a subscale of belonging, and showed a large association with these mental health variables. A moderate negative association was found between school exclusion, another subscale of belonging, and emotional distress variables (psychological distress and negative affect).

Later, Arslan (2019) explored the association between school belonging and school achievement, internalising and externalising problems through a cross-sectional study of 223 primary school students from a Turkish school. Participants completed four scales that assessed each of these variables, respectively. Findings revealed school belonging to be predictive of school achievement and academic functioning, with the author suggesting that a sense of school belonging may encourage positive experiences which then promote academic achievement. School belonging was also found to have a strong predictive effect upon students' internalising and externalising behaviours. Being excluded was closely related to negative outcomes and a relationship was found between school belonging and emotional and behavioural problems, in particular with depression and conduct problems than other symptoms.

These previous findings are complimented by the meta-analysis from Korpershoek et al. (2020). The authors identified 82 correlational studies which investigated the association between school belonging and various student outcomes. Students who felt accepted, included and supported by others in their school environment were more likely to have greater academic achievement with higher school grades, a greater mastery goal orientation,

better behavioural, social-emotional, self-concept, and self-efficacy scores. Students who reported that their classroom encouraged a mastery goal orientation and felt the classroom climate was positive, also felt a stronger connection to their school. School connectedness was negatively related to school dropout rates, as those who perceived a lack of school belonging were more likely to be truant or leave school. This supports research by Gowing and Jackson (2016), who explain that young people experiencing low school connectedness are more likely to withdraw from school.

1.3.4. Improving School Belonging

Alongside school-climate change initiatives, various programmes aiming to increase school belonging have been developed and evaluated. School belonging has been shown to be potentially modifiable through changing various elements of the school environment (Chapman et al., 2013).

Chapman et al. (2013) reviewed 14 school-based initiatives that aimed to increase school belonging and decrease risk-taking behaviour. Most of these programmes focused on widespread, “whole-of-school” system change, which can be likened to the previously described SWP approach. These programmes were mostly developed and implemented within the USA, except for two programmes from Germany and Australia. Each study reinforced the importance of positive relationships within the school environment and emotional bonding to school as predictors of behavioural outcomes. Chapman et al. (2013) identified the Child Development Program (CDP), Seattle Social Development Project (SSDP), Raising Healthy Children (RHC), and Information + Psychosocial Competence = Protection (IPSY), as demonstrating significant increase in student connectedness, although this was often both a complex and time-consuming process. Of these, the CDP, SSDP and RHC utilised a SWP approach involving widespread school system and social change, which may be indicative of the type of intervention most effective for increasing student belonging.

These authors suggest that across the programmes, many of the positive changes to students' risk-taking behaviours may be attributable to an increase of school connectedness or bonding. However, the majority of the reviewed studies did not actually include analyses of mediators, to test whether school connectedness increases led to reductions of risky behaviour.

Chapman et al. (2013) explained that for effective behaviour change and successful school-based interventions, these must be guided by an appropriate and comprehensive theoretical base. This provides structure that can guide implementation, as well as a clear understanding of targets for change, and the environmental context where this can occur. Across the interventions reviewed by Chapman and colleagues, many shared theoretical principles and emphasized positive youth development, the development of social skills, sense of belonging and establishing emotional connections to decreasing undesirable behaviours. In addition to this, Allen et al. (2021) explained that successful interventions target student's strengths and promote positive interactions between student and between staff and students. This has implications for the initiative under evaluation in the current study, and the areas for the current study to assess as these may enact successful change.

1.3.5 School Belonging Initiatives

Wiz Kidz. An evaluation comes from Coyne-Foresi (2016), who investigated the impact of participation in the Wiz Kidz intervention, upon a student's connectedness to school, peers, and teachers. Wiz Kidz is an in-school student mentoring programme which was established by a Canadian school counsellor to address the social and emotional needs of younger students through utilising older student leadership abilities within a supportive environment. This programme was 34 weeks in duration (a full academic year) and began with two hours of mentor training before matching mentors with mentees. Programme engagement consisted of mentors and mentees eating lunch together before a guided activity

and ended with a group activity that required strategy and co-operation, such as an obstacle course. A school support counsellor was also present and engaged the mentors with supervision throughout each session (Coyne-Foresi, 2016).

Coyne-Foresi (2016) gathered pre and post test data of 24 participants using an adapted version of the Hemingway Measure of Connectedness, and a questionnaire about their experiences. Participant's teachers and parents also completed pre and post intervention questionnaires assessing their observations. Overall findings suggested that students enjoyed participating in the Wiz Kidz programme and mentors reported greater responsibility and leadership, whereas mentees exhibited greater social skills and confidence. Participants reported increases in connectedness at the end of the year, but this was only statistically significant for mentors. In general, the mentors appeared to benefit equally, or more than the mentees. Mentors also reported significantly higher connectedness to school post-test, than those who did not participate. Although the difference in connectedness to peers or teachers between the Wiz Kidz participants and the comparison group was not statistically significant. Ultimately the findings provided only limited evidence that student mentoring could be effective in improving student connectedness to school, but since this effect was more pronounced for mentors who are likely to already have a higher sense of school belonging, the findings need to be treated with caution.

REAL Girls Program. Mann et al. (2015) conducted a preliminary evaluation of the school-based initiative, the REAL Girls program. This programme was designed to support middle school girls to develop resilience, improve school belonging, and academic self-efficacy and identity. This study was a quasi-experimental design and the intervention took place across two full school days, with a follow up two-hour 'booster' session 10 days following. Treatment effects were compared on two matched groups, which were assigned to the experimental and control conditions at different time points across the study. This

crossover design was an ethical decision ensuring all groups experienced the treatment as prior evidence had suggested treatment efficacy. Quantitative analyses between groups revealed significant group differences for academic efficacy, identity, and school belonging. Alongside this, a programme satisfaction survey indicated that almost all participants found the programme helpful and engaging. Qualitative results were able to confirm the quantitative findings, in that those who participated in the programme reported feeling more connected to their school and academically confident. Some participants noted they were able to form positive relationships with their peers and teachers who understood them. This programme provided a community within the school that facilitated a greater connectedness with the wider school community.

1.4 E Tū Tāngata

Aotearoa New Zealand has concerning rates of young people experiencing mental health difficulties (Menzies et al., 2020; OECD, 2017). Students have reported high rates of bullying in their schools (Glenn et al., 2020), and since the Coronavirus pandemic, there have been widespread concerns about children's disengagement from school both in terms of attendance and poor learning outcomes (Reimers, 2022). As well as this, Aotearoa New Zealand (in addition to Australia) has a well-known cultural practice of tall poppy syndrome (TPS). TPS is where people are resented, 'cut down', or criticized because of their high status or success which has distinguished them from their peers and colleagues (Feather & Sherman, 2002). An Australian study by O'Neill et al. (2014) interviewed 19 high performance school aged athletes to investigate their experience of TPS bullying behaviours. Interestingly no male participants discussed these issues, but all female participants (12) reported that they had been marginalized or bullied at school. These behaviours ranged from teasing, name-calling, mean comments and behaviour, body language, gossiping, to ostracising. Half of these females attributed this bullying to be because of their success, and two participants reflected

feeling like outsiders and a lack of school belonging which led them to withdraw from school activities to avoid this bullying.

A new initiative is being implemented in a variety of schools across Aotearoa New Zealand to help address concerns about TPS, and to promote students' sense of belonging to their school, their sense of self-worth, and social connections with peers, teachers, and other school staff. This grassroots initiative, called E Tū Tāngata (ETT; "Stand Together" in English), was formed as a 'movement from the ground up' to address the aforementioned issues at a cultural level, through fostering community, family, and individual wellbeing (E Tū Tāngata, 2022a). Despite a limited foundation of research, ETT was born from years of practice-based evidence and experience within the youth sector. 24-7 YouthWork (24-7YW) is an established non-profit organisation operating within Aotearoa New Zealand schools with a positive youth development approach (24-7 Youth Work, 2016a). Originating over 20 years ago, today 24-7YW is present in nearly every region in Aotearoa New Zealand and is best described as a trust relationship between a local school and church, working together to support young people in their local community (24-7 Youth Work, 2016b). A church, school, and the broader community (local government, philanthropic groups, private donors, and businesses) financially support youth workers to work within a school (24-7 Youth Work, 2016c). It was out of this practice that youth workers began to identify that many young people they were working with had very poor self-concepts, low self-esteem, and difficulties in relating to their peers. A desire to change this and encourage young people to understand their intrinsic worth, regardless of behaviour and circumstance ultimately led to the establishment of ETT (E Tū Tāngata, 2022b). The objective of ETT is to both combat the influence of TPS and to help address Aotearoa New Zealand's alarming mental health concerns by promoting three principles (also called 'mindsets' or 'strands') – *You Have Value*, *We Succeed Together*, and *Others Matter* (E Tū Tāngata, 2022c). ETT has been

implemented across a variety of contexts such as businesses, sports teams, clubs, and schools, and the organisation strives to facilitate personal reflection, group work, and community contribution in making Aotearoa New Zealand a more inclusive culture (Bisseker, 2022; E Tū Tāngata, 2022a).

1.4.1. First Strand: You Have Value

The first strand, *You Have Value*, refers to the intrinsic worth held by all people (E Tū Tāngata, 2022d), and is also closely tied with the Māori understanding of mana – an inherent value, authority, and esteem that is present from birth through their whakapapa (ancestry), but can also develop over the life-course as both character and skills are developed (Ara Taiohi, 2023; Herzog, 1998). ETT employs this first principle as a way to encourage young people to recognize their inherent value, and to challenge the more dominant narratives that young people are exposed to and are associated with our youth mental health and bullying issues discussed above. Hascoët et al. (2017) found that children who perceived only conditional support from their teachers had a lower self-perceived school competency, reflecting that they only felt valued for their ability to meet others' standards. While Grier and Boutakidis (2018) found that when children perceived continuous and positive social support, this was associated with enhanced self-perception and improved behaviour. Bernard et al. (2013) explains that self-acceptance can provide children with a lens to view the world and consider their own value and self-worth. Additionally it can foster emotional regulation, resilience, and a willingness to experience life and grow. Bernard and colleagues affirm that schools are a central setting for the development of self-acceptance, which provides further support for this first ETT principle.

1.4.2 Second Strand: We Succeed Together

ETT's second strand is *We Succeed Together*, which refers to the idea that people are stronger in community, and when communities embrace an inclusive attitude it fosters an appreciation

for communal success (E Tū Tāngata, 2022e). The tendency for people to develop an “us” vs “them” attitude often promotes status loss and discrimination (Eisenberg et al., 2010). Young people do not need to compete with others to prove their intrinsic worth, yet much of educational life is competition-based and one’s sense of value can become based on social comparisons, which potentially reduces collaboration and inclusiveness (Di Stasio et al., 2016). Students are often competing to gain team positions and represent their school through sports, arts and clubs, or to win wider recognition across the school with end of year academic and general prizes. *We Succeed Together* reminds children that their individual worth (linking back to *You Have Value*), does not need to be based off comparisons and competition with others. ETT encourages individuals to employ a team mindset and look for opportunities where working together can lead to success, together. In this way each child’s strengths and successes can be supported, and contribute toward the wellbeing and achievement of all. In a study by van Eijl et al. (2005), university students were given the opportunity to work either individually or collaboratively (in groups of two to four) on their course assignments. These authors found that students both valued the choice to work together, and collaboration resulted in significantly higher grades.

Social confidence, including self-efficacy, and the degree to which one believes they are valued by others, is significantly related to academic achievement in children (Trusty et al., 1995). A young person’s psychosocial adjustment to the school environment is linked to their peer relationships. This includes the perceived quality of friendships, number of mutual friends, and peer acceptance, and can influence the extent that children develop school liking, have high self-esteem and do not feel lonely at school (Antonopoulou et al., 2019). As children come to understand and practice the *We Succeed Together* mindset, it may create new opportunities for communal success and remind people of the value of working together.

1.4.3 Third Strand: Others Matter

The third strand of ETT is *Others Matter* and naturally extends the ideas from the previous two strands. As students come to internalize that they have intrinsic value, and they need others to succeed and can help others succeed, then this must also be true of other people. This final mindset also extends the principle of the second strand, by encouraging students to look beyond one's own community (the 'we') to see the value of caring for others who are outside of one's own social circles (E Tū Tāngata, 2022f). Most people are willing to help others when they know they will get the same in return. ETT proposes that lasting impact occurs when young people contribute to something bigger than themselves, supporting individuals they may have not otherwise seen, considered, or interacted with (E Tū Tāngata, 2022f).

The *You Have Value* mindset is closely related to the development of empathy, and Eisenberg et al. (2010) explains that empathy related responding is a key protective factor for children and is associated with the development of other pro-social behaviour. Empathy can influence the extent to which children negatively react to those outside of their group and discriminate against those different to themselves. This is in line with ETT as Eisenberg et al. (2010) proposes that empathy and sympathy are mediators which can be employed within intervention and prevention programmes, and explained that if empathy is fostered toward all people; less prejudice, discrimination, and an increase in prosocial behaviour can be expected.

1.4.4 E Tū Tāngata Theory of Change Model

Theory of change (ToC) models are increasingly employed by organisations to explain the process of how change will occur, exploring the conditions necessary for the successful application of a framework or programme and the outcomes it has hypothesised to produce (Yin, 2013; Zand & Sorensen, 1975). Once a ToC has been developed it can also inform the research questions that are necessary for an effective evaluation plan (Yin, 2013).

Importantly, a ToC is a working document, iteratively developed, that evolves as an organisation does and as its strategies are tested, reviewed, and refined.

A draft ETT ToC was developed in 2020 and I was a part of a team at the University of Canterbury which worked with ETT to substantially revise this in 2022 (see Figure 2). This pilot research is part of a wider set of studies that will seek to build a theoretically informed rationale that links together the initiative's strategies, intended targets (short-term outcomes), and longer-term outcomes. The research questions for the present study were informed both by the ETT ToC, as well as the academic literature on school climate and school belonging. The *Antecedent Condition* is the reason why there is a need for this initiative, while the *Partner Profile* discusses the involved community members. *Strategies* refer to the programme's actions, *Targets* outline the direct targets of the strategies and *Outcomes* are the ultimate goals of ETT. Finally, *Moderators* are factors which are thought to affect who will benefit, or not, from ETT. The elements of the ETT ToC for the education context which are most relevant to the proposed study are outlined below.

The important ETT ToC strategies include the direct teaching of the three ETT strands, communication and training (presentations, professional development and collaboration workshops), customised and collaborative implementation strategies with school leadership, staff and ETT, a wellbeing strategy development, ETT Resources (videos, music, worksheets, activities and stories), and branding (apparel, posters and social media). These strategies are theoretically related to Rowe and Stewart (2009) and Brown et al. (2005) who found that school wide approaches and interventions which are customized to the unique needs of schools can improve school climate, student wellbeing, belonging and the quality of interactions throughout settings, including the school environment.

These strategies contribute to the following targets, an increased sense of acceptance (within self and from others), increased awareness and inclusion of others, increased positive

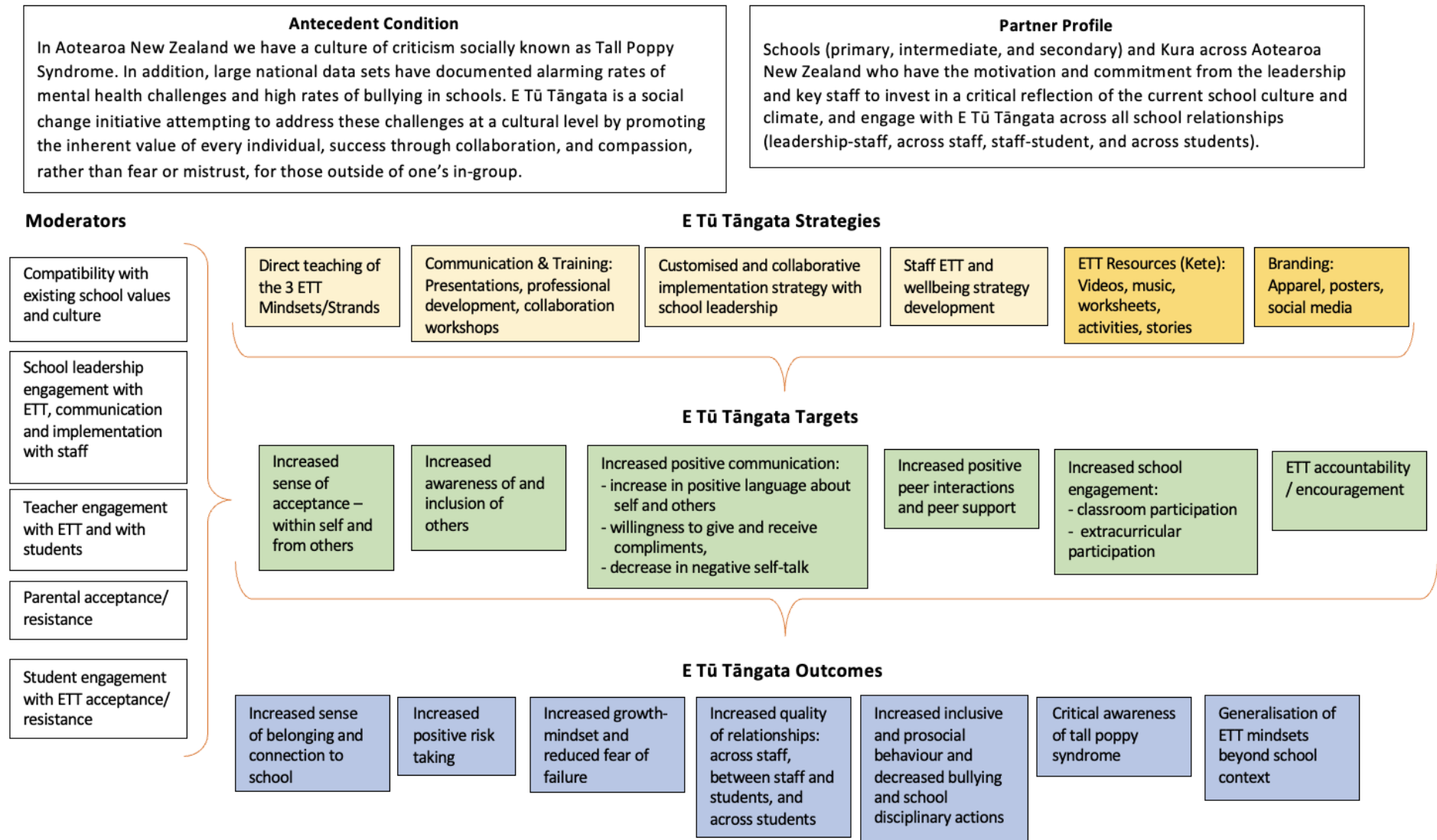
communication (increased positive language about self and others, willingness to give and receive compliments, and decrease in negative self-talk), increased positive peer interactions and peer support, ETT accountability and encouragement, and increased school engagement (class room participation and extracurricular participation).

Finally, as a school environment experiences more of these short-term targets, the cumulative effects of these should contribute to broader and longer-term outcomes among the students. As there are several identified in the ETT ToC, it is beyond the scope of the present study to examine all of these. Relevant goals for the proposed study include increased sense of belonging and connection to school, increased quality of relationships (across staff, staff and students, and across students), and increased inclusive and prosocial behaviour and decreased bullying and school disciplinary actions.

These outcomes are theoretically related to literature from Cemalcilar (2010), Marsh et al. (2014), Aldridge et al. (2016), Bouchard and Berg (2017) and Saeri et al. (2018), who recognise that active participation in school is an important contributor to a sense of school belonging, and identify the importance of peer relationships and teacher-student relationships for improving student wellbeing, school belonging and positive school climate. Further, a sense of school belonging has been identified in the ToC as one outcome of ETT, and all three of the ETT strands must be evident at school for this to develop. ETT is promoting these strands within the students, but more importantly the students need to see these within the school staff and in how school policies are applied. In the past, successful interventions have emphasised the teacher-student relationship (Allen et al., 2021), and for primary school children, evidence of the ETT strands are likely to be ‘felt’ in their relationship with their teacher, and as they watch their teacher interact and show empathy for other students and staff.

Figure 2

ETT Theory of Change: Education Sector



1.5 The Present Study

Schools within Aotearoa New Zealand are faced with many challenges concerning their students including youth mental health difficulties (Menzies et al., 2020), high rates of bullying and peer victimization (Glenn et al., 2020), and school disengagement following the Coronavirus pandemic (Reimers, 2022). New transitional students are particularly vulnerable to experiencing academic, peer, and psychological challenges as they enter new school environments (Bullock et al., 2021; Erath et al., 2019; Goldstein et al., 2015), and school climate is an important and modifiable factor which can support student mental health, school engagement, and as most relevant to the current study, school belonging (Aldridge et al., 2016; McGiboney, 2016). While previous research has typically investigated the importance of school belonging for new students with a disability, additional educational needs, or social, emotional, and mental health difficulties (Bagnall et al., 2021; Crouch et al., 2014), a sense of connection to school is suggested to be important for all new students (Whiting & Nash, 2023).

ETT is a new initiative which is trying to promote an inclusive school social climate through their three strands (*You Have Value, We Succeed Together, and Other Matter*). For the present study, school climate is considered through the framework SVSC (Rudasill et al., 2018) and when ETT is applied to a school setting this primarily focuses on the social climate of the school, rather than other dimensions. In this way, and according to the ETT ToC model, this initiative will most likely address the school climate elements of *relationships* and the social and emotional elements of the *safety* domain (Rudasill et al., 2018).

New students to a school are well-positioned to identify differences in aspects of school climate between their former and new school, and to reflect upon their school transition experience. As ETT has not been widely implemented, this presents an opportunity to explicitly examine how students from schools without ETT may experience a new school

which has ETT. In light of this, the present study addressed the following three research questions:

1. How do older primary students who are new to the school reflect on the differences in school climate and their sense of belonging to school compared to their previous school?
2. How do older primary school students experience the ETT principles in their classrooms and other school environments and activities?
3. How do older primary school students reflect on the implementation and application of E Tū Tāngata?

Chapter Two: Methodology

2.1. Design

This study employed a qualitative, retrospective research design, utilising semi-structured interviews with older primary school children from the target primary school. The current study is one part of a wider collaborative evaluation of the ETT initiative. The present study supplemented the larger research by providing a retrospective evaluation of how ETT has influenced students' transition to a new school, whilst other components of the larger research have considered students', teachers', and parents' perspectives of ETT, its implementation, and effect on key outcomes from the ETT theory of change.

Qualitative research allows for the exploration of children's lived experiences, perceptions, and beliefs. It involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of reflective data (generally) which is not easily reduced to numbers (Anderson, 2010). Within education research, it can reveal how children are understanding their experiences in the school environment, and in this way, it is a useful complement to quantitative studies investigating school environment effects upon learning and health outcomes (Jamal et al., 2013). It can also be beneficial in demonstrating how children are experiencing and responding to interventions (O'Reilly & Parker, 2014). For these reasons, qualitative research was appropriate for the present study as it had the best potential to provide rich insight into each child's perspectives of their experiences related to their school transition and exposure to ETT. Questions posed in the semi-structured interviews carefully targeted both the experience of starting a new school and phenomena specific to ETT.

The value of demonstrating rigor and validity in qualitative research is contested as not all qualitative methodologies agree this is required. Within IPA, which is the perspective employed within the current study, Peat et al. (2019) explains that four broad principles are applied to judge rigour and credibility including: sensitivity to context, commitment and

rigour in undertaking the analysis; transparency and coherence of the narrative produced and impact and importance. More specifically, one strategy to establish credibility within IPA includes triangulation and the use of different data collection methods, as phenomena is approached from a range of perspectives. Although the current study was unable to achieve triangulation on its own, the current study is one part in the triangulation of data across the entire ETT case study at the target school.

2.1.1. Retrospective Student Perspective

The outcomes for retrospective studies are investigated by looking back to data collected previously, or by using information from events which have already occurred. They allow for a temporal sequence of risk factors and outcomes to be assessed (Sedgwick, 2014). While also being relatively inexpensive and faster to conduct than other research designs.

Phenomenology involves the search for meaning and understanding of phenomenon, centring on human beings and their lived experiences (McWilliam, 2018). Seeking to clarify rather than explain, insights from phenomenology can improve practitioners understanding of, sensitivity to, and strategies for working with individuals (McWilliam, 2018). Thus, for the current study which relies on students' perspectives and their experience, a qualitative phenomenological perspective will provide the best opportunity to achieve this.

Although children can be susceptible to suggestive or leading questions, they are capable of accurate reporting when interviewed appropriately, and can contribute to retrospective data collection (Hanna et al., 2019; Murnikov & Kask, 2021). To achieve this, it was important that each student was given the freedom to talk about topics which were important to them and their experiences, rather than directly asking questions where children may have felt led to provide a socially desirable response. Engaging students and listening to their voices is found to be an essential element of collaborative evaluation research (Harris et al., 2018). Both Thapa et al. (2013) and Forsberg et al. (2021) acknowledge the gaps within

current school climate research, specifically, the limited qualitative analysis of student perspectives. It is necessary to understand how students perceive their own school environment and their needs within this as school climate has considerable influence on student wellbeing, achievement, and overall schooling experience (Forsberg et al., 2021; Mælan et al., 2020). Moreover, new students will provide a unique and crucial outlook of their experience with ETT and how this may have influenced their school transition, as well as differences in their previous and current school environment.

2.1.2. Story Completion Tasks

The semi-structured interviews involved a story completion task which was an additional activity within the interview to foster a collaborative style of communicating with the students (Bland, 2018). During the interview, three hypothetical scenarios were posed to each student regarding their schooling experience, and students were asked to finish each story based on their own experiences (Lam & Comay, 2020). Vignettes have previously been successfully used in conjunction with other data collection methods as they provide flexibility within these approaches (Barter & Renold, 2000). Story completion tasks give participants autonomy over the direction of discussion, which extends their voice and engagement with participation in the research (Bland, 2018; Lam & Comay, 2020). For this study the story completion task was designed to help shift participants' focus from responding to interview questions to more fun and child-centred way of sharing their experiences (Lam & Comay, 2020; O'Reilly & Parker, 2014).

Barter and Renold (2000) recognise two commonly identified theoretical limitations of this approach which include first, the distance between the vignette and social reality. In other words, people may believe they would respond to a situation different to how they would respond in actuality. Similarly, participants may provide socially desirable responses (Barter & Renold, 2000). This reinforces the importance of adopting a multi-method

approach in research, as Barter and Renold (2000) explain that no research tool can entirely encompass social existence and so it is beneficial to utilise the strengths of different techniques within research. The story completion task was a tool to extend the conversation in a fun environment and break down barriers for students to freely express their ideas. This was incorporated into the current research through the middle phase of the interview process.

2.2. Recruitment

The current study recruited older primary students who were new to the target school in the current academic year. These students were able to reflect upon their experiences across their two school environments, and their previous schooling experiences provided a point of comparison which would not have been possible if students continuously attended the target school. The use of these students also helps to mitigate other potential effects, as it is important to recognize that as children develop and experience a learning environment over time there could be natural changes to their sense of belonging and perception of that learning environment. Examples of these changes are naturally occurring growth of relationships, connection to school, and other factors occurring throughout their schooling experience. This includes the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic and online teaching from the previous two years. As well as the quality of student-teacher relationships which may skew perceptions of school climate positively or negatively.,

This evaluation recruited students from a local Canterbury primary school that has been implementing ETT over the past two years (2020 and 2021). Participants were recruited throughout the third school term and in first three weeks of term four. This process began with communication between the target school and the research team to establish a primary school contact for the research team, outline the proposed study details, and obtain their approval to proceed with the study. This primary school contact was the principal of the target school and all initial communication with eligible student participants and their

caregivers was conducted via the primary school contact. Through the school role, the school had access to the appropriate contact details of students who were new to the school. The school contact sent an email written by the research team to the parents/caregivers of these prospective participants with a full information sheet and a consent form attached (see Appendix B). Note that a child-friendly version of this information sheet, and an assent form were provided for student participants at the time of their interviews (see Appendix C). Following this email, the researcher visited the school and gave short presentations to the Year six, seven, and eight classes about this project and the wider survey study and distributed flyers (see Appendix D) for students to take home. Parents were asked to email their consent form directly back to the research team with their contact details, and a convenient time for the student to participate was arranged between the researcher and caregiver. Due to limited initial intake, the research team returned to the school on a second and third occasion to recruit further students for both the present study and the co-occurring survey-based study. Students who expressed interest through completion of the concurrent ETT research were also contacted directly, via their provided parents email, regarding their potential involvement in the present study.

2.2.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The participants for the current study were students who started attending the target school in the current year, and had moved from a previous primary school within Aotearoa, New Zealand.

- Students who had attended the target school for a longer duration were excluded. This was so that the participants were new to the school and ETT, and could make comparisons between the previous and target school.
- Participants were enrolled in Year 6, 7, or 8 at the target school, as these students were of sufficient age to have attended a previous school while also having more

developed memory and reflective cognitive skills than younger children to discuss the relevant topics.

- In order to adequately participate in the interview, participants required fluent conversational English language development.
- Finally, this study did not exclude anyone based upon socioeconomic, gender, or ethnicity characteristics.

2.3 Participants

Six students from the target school agreed to participate in this research, and of these students three were enrolled in Year six and three were enrolled in Year seven. Four students were aged 11, while the remaining two were 12 years at the time of their respective interviews. Of these six participants, five identified as female and one as male. Each participant had moved to the target school from another school within Aotearoa New Zealand during the current academic year. Four participants began attending this school at the beginning of the year, in term one (approximately nine months of attendance), the remaining two participants transitioned during term two (approximately five months of attendance).

2.4 Procedure

Following recruitment, the caregiver of each potential participant was individually contacted by the research team to establish a time for their interview. The interviews were conducted at the end of the school's third term, during the third term holiday and in the beginning weeks of term four. Since each student had attended the target school for between five and nine months, this was long enough to establish some connection to the environment, while not so long that they had forgotten what their previous schooling experiences were like. The semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face in a private room of the public, local library. This ensured both confidentiality and privacy for the interviews while maintaining the safety of all involved. Students were given the option to bring a whānau member or other

support person to the interview, and it was at the student's discretion whether their support person came into the interview room or waited outside for the interview duration. Three participants chose to have a caregiver present for their interview. All students received a \$20 gift voucher as koha for their participation. Caregivers (with their child participant's permission) and participants were given the opportunity to examine and review the interview transcripts before data analysis. Three parents asked to see the transcripts but did not request any changes.

2.4.1 Interviews

An interview protocol was curated by the research team and reviewed with the developers of ETT and the target school's leadership, to ensure the interview assessed was well-balanced both in terms of being evidence-informed, while adequately addressing phenomena related to ETT. This protocol was pilot tested with a Year six student who was new to an alternative school also involved with ETT. The final interview protocol is included in Table 1 (below) and consisted of 24 interview questions and 18 follow up questions, which were all discussed within the semi structured interviews.

Before each interview caregiver consent (see Appendix B) and student assent (see Appendix C) was obtained. One caregiver had submitted this prior to the interview but confirmed their permission once again. Participants were given their voucher and thanked in advance for their time and involvement with the study. The interview procedure was guided by the Hui process which is a culturally informed and responsive approach to clinical practice and interactions within Aotearoa New Zealand, as set out by Pitama et al. (2017). The semi-structured interviews were initiated with a Mihimihi (greeting) and Whakawhanaungatanga (the process of establishing relationships) in which sufficient time was allocated for introductions and building rapport, with the intention of providing a safe and welcoming environment. The length of this section was flexible in each interview, as O'Reilly and Parker

(2014) and Hanna et al. (2019) reinforce that while the rapport building phase can be time-consuming, it is vital for engaging children with interviews and eliciting detailed perspectives.

Next, in the Kaupapa phase, the details and purpose of the study were outlined, an overview of the interview schedule with each section's topic was provided, and opportunity for students to ask questions was given. Participants were informed of privacy and the limits to confidentiality, their rights, and their ability to withdraw at any time. The semi-structured interview prompts were flexible to each participant's responses and were adapted accordingly, to the naturally occurring conversation between the participant and researcher. Initially, questions broadly assessed school belonging, school climate, and remained general so that participants could discuss issues important to themselves. This was so that students did not feel led to a particular opinion nor to immediately mention ETT. Latter questions posed were more directly related to ETT.

The story completion task was embedded in the middle of the interviews, where three hypothetical scenarios were posed regarding the participant's schooling experience, and students were asked to finish the story orally (Lam & Comay, 2020). The first scenario was loosely related to the first ETT strand, *You Have Value*, and asked participants to consider how they would be treated by other students and staff if they missed a period of school. The second scenario loosely focussed on the second ETT strand, *We Succeed Together*, and asked participants to consider how they would be perceived by other students and peers if they were selected for a highly competitive school team, and how they would work together with other team members. The final scenario loosely targeted the third ETT strand, *Others Matter*, and asked participants how students would interact with a new student who did not speak English.

The final stage, *Poroporoaki* (farewell and conclusion), closed the interview session. A summary of the key elements discussed were recapitulated to the participant alongside the

opportunity for any final questions or comments. They were encouraged to email the researcher about anything that arose following commencement of the interview. Lastly, general conversation and an orientation back to their day was facilitated by the researcher. Interviews lasted between 33 and 65 minutes and all interviews were recorded on a digital audio recorder and then transcribed verbatim.

Table 1

Student Interview Protocol

Item #	Question
Introduction and Whakawhanaungatanga	
A	Mihi mihi according to child's cultural preferences.
B	Kaupapa: explanation of privacy, rights, and ability to withdraw. Assent and Consent obtained and koha gifted.
1	Tell me a little bit about yourself. Who are you? What do you like to do?
2	I know that you started at this school this year. What school were you going to before this?
3	What do you remember most about (previous school).
School Transition	
4	This year has had some big changes for you, starting at this school!
5	Tell me what it was like in the beginning?
6	Tell me what it's like to be a student at this primary school now.
7	When you wake up in the morning on a school day, how do you feel about going to school?
	a) Is there anything about this school that makes going to school (better/worse/easier/more difficult) when compared to your experience at the other school?
	b) What is it about this school that makes you want to go to school every day? OR What makes you not want to go to school?
School Belonging	
8	Do you feel as though you belong at (name of school)?
	a) What would need to change at this school for you to have a greater sense of belonging at the school?

- b) Does this feel different from your feeling of belonging at your other school?
- c) You were a new student this year, if you could give any advice to another new student trying to feel connected to the school, what would you suggest that they do?

- 9 Do you feel comfortable in your class?
- 10 How do your classmates speak to other?
- 11 During class, are students able to talk and participate without being teased or insulted by other classmates?

Story Completion Tasks

C Brief introduction to story completion activities

- 12 One: Let's pretend that you had to miss school for 1 week. When it is finally time to return to school, how do you feel about going back? What happens that first day you return to school? How do you think people will treat you (teacher, classmates)?
 - a) At school, do you feel accepted and valued for who you are?
 - b) From your experience, are people interested in what's going on in your life?
- 13 Two: Let's pretend that you are selected for a very important school team (sport, drama, dance, art, speech, math, science, etc).
 - a) How will people work together on this team?
 - b) You have the lead role; how do others respond to all the attention you get?
 - c) What if you had a supporting role (in the background) how would people see your contribution?
 - d) Do you think that everyone who wanted to would have an opportunity to contribute to the team?
- 14 Three: Let's pretend there is a new student in your class who doesn't speak English.
 - a) When it's time to go outside for morning tea or lunch, what happens to her/him?
 - b) How are students who are "different" (they may act different or look different from others) treated by the other students?

E Tū Tāngata Focus Questions

- 15 Have you ever heard of ETT? / I heard you mention ETT earlier, I would like to talk about that some more.
 - a) How would you describe ETT to someone who has never heard of it before?
- 16 How do you see ETT being used at your school?

- a) Who do you hear referring to ETT most frequently?
- b) How do they talk about it? How do your classmates talk about ETT?
- 17 What do you remember ETT being about?
 - a) Do you remember the 3 ETT mindsets? Can you describe them?
- 18 How have you seen “You have value” practiced at this school?
- 19 How have you seen “We succeed together” practiced at this school?
- 20 How have you seen “Others matter” practiced at this school?
- 21 What do you like about ETT?
- 22 What do you not like/enjoy about ETT?
- 23 What do you think are some of the most important things you’ve learnt from ETT?
- 24 Do you think that ETT has made a difference for you, in starting school at this primary school?
 - a) Tell me how.

Closing the Interview

- D Poroporoaki: debrief, opportunity for participant questions or final comments, orientation back to the outside.
-

2.5 Data Analysis

Audio recordings and transcribing devices were utilised to support the verbatim transcriptions of each interview. These were completed by the researcher to ensure familiarity with each interview, and this also provided an opportunity for initial notetaking of key ideas within and across participants. Each transcript was read multiple times to develop awareness of their breadth and depth, and exploratory notes for analysis were written at this point, before the more formal coding process (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). There are many potential approaches to data analysis, but interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was considered most congruent with the proposed study and their coding strategy was employed to each interview.

The analytic process proposed by Smith and Fieldsend (2021) guided the IPA data analysis of the current study, which is a well-established qualitative approach that focuses upon exploring and understanding people’s lived experiences through interpretative work. As

I created the interview transcripts from the audio recordings, I made initial comments about each interview before developing these into exploratory notes after reading through each transcript numerous times. These notes evolved into experiential statements of each interview relating to the current studies research questions and captured both the participant's account and my interpretation. I then examined each statement for patterns, and clustered these into personal experiential themes and subthemes. Throughout this, I checked each transcript for their fit within the clustering which ensured key aspects of data were appropriately understood and captured in analysis. After this was completed, I considered patterns of convergence and divergence across the participants which led to higher order clusters, group experiential themes and subthemes that I used to write the final report. To maintain rigour and credibility throughout this analytical process I was meticulous, careful and sensitive to each participants individual context and experiences. I took effort to maintain a coherent and transparent narrative of their experiences, and I focussed on being fair and reasonable when discussing the impact and importance of their experiences as new students at the target school.

2.6 Ethical Approval

This study was reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Research Committee [HREC 2022/77]. Three ethical considerations were identified to be most apparent for the present study including, psychological risks, management of personal or sensitive issues, and research with children. First, interviews discussed children's personal experiences and evaluation of their school environment. In that regard, there was an element of risk for emotional stress for children who chose to disclose experiences that were negative, and some topics may have covered information that they had not consciously reflected on before (e.g., their sense of belonging at school). This was mitigated in several ways. First, the questions posed were open-ended and neutral (i.e., they did not explicitly ask children about

negative or stressful experiences). Second, children were informed of their right to skip questions or withdraw from the interview at any time if they became uncomfortable. Third, children were invited to have a support person (parent/caregiver or friend at the interview with them). Fourth, as the researcher/interviewer, I remained attuned to the emotional state of the participants, gauging how they were emotionally responding to the questions posed. No participants appeared to become distressed nor requested to skip questions throughout these interviews. Finally, parents of all children (regardless of any emotional arousal displayed in the interview) were provided with information about available counselling support services, if the interview triggered something that they reacted to after it concluded. The next consideration was that participants within the research were unable to provide informed consent due to their young age. However, I obtained written parental consent in addition to children's written and verbal assent at the beginning of each interview.

Chapter Three: Results and Discussion

3.1 Participant Context and Transition Experience

This chapter has been organised into sections for each of the research questions outlined in Chapter One. The findings which emerged from the interviews have been developed into relevant group experiential themes and integrated with some discussion of the previous literature. This is a common practice within qualitative research to reduce repetition that can occur when these are separated (Levitt, 2020). A more general discussion including limitations and recommendations regarding the implementation of ETT at the target school, are included in the next chapter.

To provide the necessary context for these sections, the chapter begins with a general summary of, and introduction to, each of the six participants who took part in the semi-structured interviews. This will help contextualise each student's experience of the target school in relation to their previous schooling experiences. If students mentioned their reason for moving to the target school, this was also included. Three participants had their parent present in the interview, and two of these parents (Ryan's mother and Sammy's father) interjected at various times when their child seemed to struggle in responding to some of the questions. Informed consent was obtained from these two parents to include and discuss their comments.

3.1.1 Introducing Linda

Linda (Year 6) moved to the target school at the beginning of the current school year. Linda felt very familiar and comfortable at her previous school, enjoying many aspects of it including the curriculum, teachers, peers, and facilities. Having attended this school for all her previous years of education, this made the transition to the target school, which was much larger in size and where she did not know anyone, a worrisome experience. Linda reflected that students were friendly and invited her to play with them, which supported her transition

and allowed Linda to feel comfortable within the target school easily. Linda explained that she enjoys attending the target school and appreciates the values it promotes, however Linda prefers her previous school because of the smaller size, and because she was more familiar with this school.

3.1.2 Introducing Isla

Isla (Year 6) moved to the target school at the beginning of the current school year. Isla believes that some of her experiences whilst attending her previous school led her to be treated carefully by those around her and she felt held back because she received less opportunities than other students at times. Isla reflected that students at the target school were immediately welcoming and included her into their friendship groups, which supported a smooth transition into the target school.

3.1.3 Introducing Ryan

Ryan (Year 7) moved to the target school at the beginning of the current school year. Despite having some close friends at his previous school and liking some of his teachers, Ryan moved to the target school because he was not enjoying his previous school. This was mostly because some students were mean, both towards himself and others. When Ryan first moved to the target school, he was nervous because it was significantly larger in size, and he often became lost navigating the school campus. Ryan reflected that students at the target school are friendly and generally nice to each other which is an improvement from his previous school, and this established a welcoming environment that supported his school transition.

3.1.4 Introducing Zoe

Zoe (Year 6) moved to the target school at the beginning of the current school year. Zoe enjoyed her previous school, had many friends and was very familiar with the students. Zoe moved to a different city with her family and subsequently began attending the target school. Zoe did not know anyone and was worried that students may not like her, however they were

immediately welcoming and friendly. Over time, Zoe has made some good friends and reflects on this transition positively.

3.1.5 Introducing Lily

Due to changing circumstances in her parents' vocations, Lily (Year 7) first attended the target school for only a single term, before leaving for six months and returning once again later in the year. Before this period of change, she had been at her previous school for six years. Lily described feeling slightly nervous in her more recent transition to the target school as she did not know many people, but through the help of one close friend, Lily was introduced to more friends. This supported a quick adjustment to the target school, and Lily reflected that other students often forget she was ever new.

3.1.6 Introducing Sammy

Sammy (Year 7) moved to the target school during the current year, after a one-month period attending another school. Before this, Sammy attended a school in another city for the first six years of her education. Sammy's father described this previous school to have significant amounts of difficult student behaviour and disrupted class time. Her previous school was also smaller in size, and the schoolwork was easier. Sammy found moving to the target school to be a big adjustment and was not used to class peers being as focused on their schoolwork and having less behavioural disruptions throughout class time. This was confronting and ultimately Sammy's school transition was made increasingly difficult as she felt students at the target school were not as friendly and Sammy described feeling ignored and excluded.

3.2 RQ1: How Do Older Primary Students Who Are New to the School Reflect on the Differences in School Climate and Their Sense of Belonging to School Compared to Their Previous School?

For this research question, I identified two themes which explained the differences between the participants former school and at the target school. These included New Opportunities in School Transitions, and School Belonging.

3.2.1 New Opportunities in School Transitions

Isla, Ryan, and Zoe each described their transition to the target school as providing new opportunities. For Zoe, this was related to the school's practical resources, while for Ryan and Isla this transition allowed them to start afresh in a different environment. Zoe and Isla both reported that there was an increased number of resources and facilities at the target school, including bigger playgrounds and fun events. For instance, Isla remarked "I am really enjoying the adventure playground, the big hall for a bunch of activities...The field is way bigger, so we've got lots of room." Ryan identified students at the target school to be nicer than those from his previous school, and that he felt better about going to school in the mornings. Ryan agreed to feeling comfortable in class, that he is able to participate freely, and also be himself at school. Following his mother's prompting, Ryan agreed that this may not have been as easy nor as encouraged at his previous school, with his mother noticing that Ryan is happier in this new environment. This suggests that despite the stressors which often occur alongside a school transition, this time also provides opportunities for positive change, particularly for those who are leaving behind a negative experience. Further, Gazelle and Faldowski (2019) suggest that as students actively try to adapt to their new environment, they may be able to establish new peer relationships with less resistance as they are free from their previous reputations. New students may find it easier to create a new narrative for themselves and Isla described feeling more comfortable and freer at the target school to be herself and participate in activities without being constrained by her past identity.

Do you feel comfortable in class? Isla: Yes, very much...They don't know me as [that] person, like [previous school]. They always felt bad and made it too easy. But I'm not known as that person anymore. It's like a new fresh start. (Isla)

Of the six participants, only Ryan and Isla's previous schooling experience was somewhat negative, and so it is consistent with the literature that these two recognised and maximised the window of opportunity their school transition provided.

Linda, Isla, Ryan, Zoe, and Lily each described a smooth school transition primarily justifying this with the presence of inclusive peers. In contradiction with these participants, Sammy experienced a difficult school transition and was unable to describe positive opportunities at the target school, attributing a lot of her negative early experiences to be from a lack of friendliness and feeling ignored by other students. Sammy explained that while generally students at the target school were not overtly mean, they were exclusive within their already established peer groups. This is a different experience to those of the other five participants who described feeling welcomed to the school and included in peer groups. Sammy also noted the differences between the target school and her past school.

I mostly remember how friendly the kids were and they were quite nice. There were a few fights there and then. But yeah, most of the kids were quite friendly. I had a lot of friends, quite a big group of friends. (Sammy)

Sammy described students at the target school as behaving like "robots", lacking individuality and personality. It was Sammy's father's suggestion that this may refer to the differences between Sammy's previous and current school. At the target school, Sammy's class peers were described as significantly more focused on their work, and they did not talk or disrupt class as often as at her previous school. This may have led Sammy to perceive

these students as having less “personality”, as she has not seen as many interactions, nor do they seem to have fun and behave in the ways she had previously experienced. This was not observed by the other participants as Zoe reflected on her level of comfort in class, “I’m relaxed because everyone’s just kinda, they’re not uptight, they’re not scrambling to do their work...Everyone just jokes around with each other. Like while we’re doing our work.”

School transitions involve many contextual changes including the loss of familiar routines within the classroom and wider school context, peer group disruption and new teachers. It also requires students to establish new friendships in an unfamiliar social hierarchy, learn a new school system and navigate new rules and social norms (Bullock et al., 2021). Sammy and her father agreed that these factors were significantly different between her previous and current school, and Sammy seemed to be struggling with unfulfilled expectations and the loss of a social environment that was familiar. Symonds (2015) found that students experienced more anxiety in their transition when their expectations of environmental differences were inaccurate. Based on the description of her experiences, it seems that Sammy’s tumultuous transition was exacerbated by peer exclusion, the differences in school climate, and her difficulty adjusting to the more rigorous academic expectations of the target school. Whereas the other participants did not express these same unmet expectations, and seemed to interpret their classroom climate and other environmental aspects of the target school differently to Sammy.

3.2.2 School Belonging

A distinct overarching theme shared by Linda, Isla, Ryan, Zoe, and Lily was a sense of belonging towards the target school which is in line with one of the E Tū Tāngata (ETT) theory of change (ToC) outcomes. These participants predominantly experienced their sense of belonging and connection to the school through the presence of peer relationships. This is

in support of previous findings from the literature as one significant factor contributing towards school belonging (Bouchard & Berg, 2017; Gowing, 2019; Gowing & Jackson, 2016; Midgen et al., 2019). While Zoe, Lily and Linda perceived their sense of belonging at their previous school to be stronger, they reasoned this to be because they had attended their previous school for longer, and as a result had a higher level of familiarity. All participants identified positive peer relationships at their former schools, including Sammy who described a lack of peer relationships as a significant reason for why she did not feel connected to the target school. Ryan and Isla noted that students at the target school were generally friendlier than those from their previous schools and they preferred their experience of belonging at the target school. This further supports evidence (Gowing, 2019; Gowing & Jackson, 2016) that positive peer relationships may be an important resource which builds a sense of school belonging and is one of the most valued aspects of school life for young people.

Isla and Zoe also discussed increased resources and facilities at the target school in relation to their perceived belonging, and enjoyment of their new school. When asked what it is about school that makes her want to go to school every day Zoe said “My friends and some of the stuff that we do, like rhythmic gymnastics, we didn’t have that at my old school...and fun days, like all my school had was tournaments”.

Isla and Lily both revealed the importance of teacher relationships, though for Lily this was from a negative experience of disliking her previous teacher and wanting a change. Finally, Lily and Zoe both said that active participation in school activities would help new students to connect with their school.

Just try and get involved in as much stuff... Cause like, you know, that's how you meet new people. Someone told me ‘just go try out for like traveling sports and stuff. Just try out for a bunch of stuff. (Lily)

While greater facilities and resources, active participation in events, and teacher relationships were discussed in less detail by these participants compared to peer relationships, each of these elements are consistent with themes from the school belonging literature (Gowing & Jackson, 2016; Midgen et al., 2019; Nichols, 2006). Zoe appreciated the opportunity to participate freely in school events without requiring specific skills. This indicates that the target school may have cultivated a climate where there are opportunities for participation at school which are more inclusive, and there may be a perceived freedom to be oneself. Later, when Zoe was asked whether she was comfortable being herself at school, she agreed saying that she is “able to talk about what I love, and I can just act like the way I do at home.” Linda, Ryan, Isla and Lily also seemed to agree with this, as they each reported that they felt accepted and could be themselves in class and at school.

In conflict with each of these experiences, Sammy reflected a lack of connection and belonging to the target school due to limited peer relationships and a perceived lack of friendliness and exclusion from other students. Sammy also described feeling different to other students in a negative way, rather than feeling accepted, let alone celebrated for these differences. This seemed to be exacerbated by Sammy’s difficulty adjusting to the target school’s academic demands, which Sammy saw other classmates adhering to easily.

It's kind of hard to explain. Interviewer: Yeah, do you feel quite different to everyone else then? Sammy: Yeah...Everyone just knows everything and like, as soon as [Sammy’s teacher] asks everyone a question, something really difficult, everyone just puts their hand up and just...yeah. Interviewer: has an answer for it? Sammy: Yeah.
(Sammy)

This theme was not anticipated in my review of previous research, however within the literature (J.-L. Wang et al., 2017; Weiguo et al., 2022) Sammy’s attributions would be

described as an upward social comparison. These involve the comparison of oneself against others who they perceive to be superior or better off and can induce negative emotions (J.-L. Wang et al., 2017; Weiguo et al., 2022). Sammy's reflections indicate that she felt equal to the peers at her former school, whereas in this new school the academic work was more difficult, and academic engagement by her peers was higher. In this way, Sammy has found it difficult to keep up with the other students which likely contributed to her perception of being an outsider.

Each participating student reflected upon their school transition experience and made comparisons between their former and current school. Five of the new students experienced a smooth transition and described positive early experiences. Three students identified schooling differences through the new opportunities available at the target school. All participants emphasized the importance of a sense of school belonging, although one participant revealed this through a lack of belonging. It was evident how perceived school belonging influenced each participants perception of their new school climate, and subsequent enjoyment (or lack thereof) of school life.

3.3 RQ2: How Do Older Primary School Students Experience the E Tū Tāngata Principles in Their Classrooms and Other School Environments and Activities?

For the second research question, I identified two themes which explained how participant's experienced ETT at school. These included Connections Between School Values and E Tū Tāngata, and E Tū Tāngata Encourages a Welcoming Environment and Individual Self-improvement.

3.3.1 Connections Between School Values and E Tū Tāngata

Participants frequently made connections between the ETT strands and the target school's values, but some had a difficult time separating the two. For Ryan, Lily, and Sammy, ETT was likened to school values though distinguished as a separate narrative, while Linda and Isla had difficulty differentiating these. Ryan, Lily, and Sammy explained that each school has their own set of values, which are what the school is encouraging students to develop. In their explanation of ETT, they each described ETT as one part of these values for the target school. Ryan understood that ETT is also used in contexts outside of school, though he had difficulty articulating what was specifically promoted by ETT.

How would you describe E Tū Tāngata to someone who has never heard of it before?

Ryan: I'd say, like the school's values almost... The school values are like what the school tries to encourage the students to do really. But [ETT] is not really just [at] the school. Interviewer: Yeah. Ryan: Because the values are used in lots of different places. Interviewer: Ah, where else is it used? Ryan: Um, here, I guess? (Ryan)

Linda could not recall the ETT strands, and when prompted she provided generic descriptions of these, which could be interpreted as overlapping with school values. For example, Linda described that her main lesson from ETT was to be kind, respectful, and treat other people how you want to be treated. Similarly, at an explicit level Isla did not articulate the distinction between ETT's three strands, and the target school values. Although, at an experiential level and implicitly, she identified the overlap between these. For example, Isla provided the scenario of being quiet when the teacher was talking or when other students were working as a way of showing respect, which is a school value. Though Isla described this in relation to the ETT strand of *You Have Value*, as it helps 'others' feel valued if people are quiet when they are speaking or trying to work. This also highlights the overlap between each ETT strand as Isla's explanation also reflects *Others Matter*.

One strategy of the ETT ToC model for implementation in the educational sector is to have a customised and collaborative implementation strategy with school leadership. Further, the target school has established the ETT strands and core principles as being recognised through the lens of their own school values (personal communication with school principal¹). This overlap may explain why Ryan, Lily, and Sammy have made these comparisons, and why Isla and Linda interchangeably discussed components of their school values in reference to ETT related questions. There needs to be careful consideration around how ETT is applied into a school's existing strategies, as Linda's and Isla's difficulty distinguishing between these values indicates some confusion in their understanding of ETT. Perhaps through this integration of the ETT strands and school values, the distinct message of ETT has been diluted through these other values and contributed to the confusion in these new students. This could also be due to the short length of time these students have spent at the target school reducing opportunities for consolidation. Finally, this also suggests that ETT will look different and face different implementation challenges in every school, because in Aotearoa New Zealand, each school co-develops their key values with their local community and stakeholders, including local hapū or iwi.

3.3.2 E Tū Tāngata Encourages a Welcoming Environment and Individual Self-improvement

Isla and Zoe both reported that ETT encourages individual development, through motivating students to be kind, inclusive and supportive, and an example of this comes from Isla, "[ETT] reminds you of being a really good person...it's kind of like 'stand together', and we're all not the same but we are all special". The participants from the current study offer a unique perspective as to whether this has been successfully achieved or not, as they can reflect on

¹ Please note, this source is not referenced due to privacy concerns.

what they have noticed the most about the target school. Thus, it is significant that without prompting, Linda, Isla, Ryan, Zoe, and Lily all articulated how the target school and its students were welcoming. Zoe described that “everyone was willing to show me around and stuff. They were willing to let me be part of their group, friendship groups and stuff”. Further, each of these participants suggested that ETT may be one reason for this with Ryan saying “[ETT] makes the school feel more welcoming”.

The variation between each participant’s personal context also strengthens this argument, as five out of six participants recalled a positive experience of social inclusion despite their individual differences. Isla and Ryan both described negative previous schooling experiences, which may have magnified the differences between these schools and made this welcoming environment more obvious. Yet for Linda, her preference for her previous school did not prevent her from acknowledging her enjoyment and appreciation of these aspects in her new school. Zoe and Lily (as well as Linda) felt a greater sense of belonging at their past schools, but again identified this genuine welcoming into the target school. Lily, who had moved between three schools recently could see that this culture is not necessarily representative of all schools, which is why she linked this experience to ETT. While a causal connection here cannot be made, it seems that ETT may have helped in the cultivation of a socially inclusive and welcoming environment for new students at the target school. It is clear that for these five students at least, this has made a significant difference in supporting a smoother school transition.

However once again, Sammy’s experience of ETT and the target school is in direct contrast to the other participants. Sammy was asked whether ETT had made any impact upon her school transition, to which she disagreed and explained “mostly because, the kids just ignore other students...that are not [their] friends.” Sammy described feeling different to her class peers which had impacted her sense of school belonging. She also explained that it

“depends on who you are”, and how well you perform, as to whether students would be teased for class participation. ETT aims to support all people to feel accepted and valued for themselves, regardless of their abilities or success. Yet Sammy has found performance to be highly regarded by her peer groups and important for peer acceptance. When her experiences are considered alongside the contrasting accounts of the other participants, this also seems to indicate that this welcoming and friendly culture at the target school was not generalizing to all students. Sammy’s experience of being excluded by her classmates disrupted her experience of each of the ETT strands. This may illustrate how social exclusion is an antithesis to what ETT is promoting and a key reason for the significant differences between Sammy and the other five participants’ view towards, and experience of ETT and the target school.

Classroom social integration with peers has been described as essential for students’ success at school (Farmer et al., 2019), and children are thought to learn best when they feel accepted, have positive relationships with peers and teachers, when they are visible, and can participate at school (Ministry of Education, 2023). Additionally, social confidence including self-efficacy and the degree to which one believes they are valued by others, is significantly related to academic achievement in children (Trusty et al., 1995). While the other five participants have reflected positively about these areas of school life, Sammy felt different to her peers and had difficulty integrating into the social environment of her classroom and school. Once again, it may be that Sammy is making upward social comparisons against her peers, which past research has linked to negative emotions, lower self-evaluation, and increased risk of depression (J.-L. Wang et al., 2017; Weiguo et al., 2022). If Sammy felt that she could not measure up to her peers, it is likely to have made it difficult for her to believe or accept the first ETT strand, *You Have Value*. This in turn would impact the development of the other strands, as these are interlinked and reliant upon each another to operate

successfully. This is an example of how the experience of each ETT strand may be compromised when students feel vulnerable, and how social exclusion may exacerbate this experience. There are also implications here for ETT (which will be discussed in the following chapter) as it may be that ETT needs to work alongside schools to identify students who are having these experiences, and explore how they can flexibly adapt their framework to support these students.

Ultimately, when participants discussed their experiences of ETT they frequently drew connections between the existing school values and the core ideas of ETT. Further, when participants reflected upon how ETT may have influenced school life, two students identified that ETT encouraged betterment on an individual level. Finally, five students felt that ETT helped create a welcoming environment, as other students were friendly and included them when they were new.

3.4 RQ3: How Do Older Primary School Students Reflect on the Implementation and Application of E Tū Tāngata?

For this research question, I identified two themes which explained participant's reflections about the implementation of the ETT initiative. These included The E Tū Tāngata Strands, and The Application of ETT.

3.4.1 The E Tū Tāngata Strands.

All participants referred to the three strands (*You Have Value, We Succeed Together, Others Matter*) when describing ETT, although there was some variation in the participants' ability to recall the strands without prompting, and in their general understanding of this initiative. This impacted their ability to reflect upon the implementation and application of ETT. Linda had difficulty describing each of the ETT strands. Ryan remembered two of three strands (*We*

Succeed Together and *Others Matter*), and Isla and Lily were able to recall *We Succeed Together* and *You Have Value*. Sammy identified *You Have Value*, but based on her experience of feeling isolated, believed it was not well practiced at the target school. Finally, Zoe was the only participant to remember all three strands quite easily, and at times appeared to have a clearer grasp of multiple aspects of the ETT initiative compared to other participants. This becomes particularly noticeable as Zoe's voice is emphasised in a later section which discusses the application of ETT.

You Have Value. Zoe described this as “you still matter”, explaining how students may forget their value, but because this concept is repeated throughout school on posters and by teachers, students begin to believe this idea for themselves, developing increased self-concept and confidence.

People just kinda remind themselves, like, they kinda just think...You Have Value because some people will forget that...and then they'll remember it because we talk about it quite a bit...in class they'll be like 'remember you have value'...and they'll probably think that, and they can have more confidence and stuff like that. (Zoe)

Indirectly, Zoe's responses to the first story completion scenario and follow up questions revealed an understanding of *You Have Value*. Zoe was able to identify that if she were to return to school after being away sick for one week, she was confident her friends would check in, show concern for her absence, and treat her carefully while she re-adjusted. This highlighted Zoe's security in her friendships and that she felt cared for by her peers. Further still, Zoe explained that she knew she was accepted, valued, and could be herself at the target school because her friends were interested in her life and hobbies, even though they did not share the same interests. I am cautious about over analysing conversations with one participant; however, these can relate to the connections between *You Have Value* (which

refers to intrinsic worth) and the Māori understandings of mana. According to Mana Taiohi, the youth development framework for Aotearoa (Ara Taiohi, 2023) everyone is born with mana which can be enhanced through four principles: whanaungatanga (relationship and perceived family connection), manaakitanga (kindness, respect and support), whai wāhitanga (recognition that young people can contribute to society in meaningful ways), and mātauranga (knowledge, wisdom and skill) (Ara Taiohi, 2023). To some extent, this framework may be applied to Zoe's experiences. First, Zoe suggests that as teachers have reinforced *You Have Value* in classrooms, this has supported students' increased self-concept and an understanding of this strand on a cognitive level, which may be similar to encouraging mātauranga in young people. Whanaungatanga and manaakitanga may be likened to the respect and value Zoe felt through her secure peer friendships, and teacher support. Finally, Zoe felt accepted for her different interests which may allow space for whai wāhitanga, whereby Zoe can contribute her unique skills and interests freely.

Lily described *You Have Value* as everyone having value and meaning something and suggested that this mindset can be embodied throughout all elements of the target school in the way people treat, speak to, and lift each other up. When discussing the first story completion scenario, Lily did not think anything would be different if she were to return to school after being sick. However, she pragmatically discussed her numerous school transitions in the past year, and a change to routine did not appear to concern her as it may have for other students. When considering Lily's statements in the context of her experience (numerous school transitions and attending a new school), this suggests that Lily is confident, and has a sense of security in her new friendships and belonging at the target school. This may all flow from a foundational understanding of *You Have Value* as Lily conveys these ideas through her belief that she can be herself at the target school, and that she feels accepted and valued for who she is, which is a core facet of this first strand (E Tū Tāngata, 2022d).

When asked to elaborate, Lily explained that students are nice and inclusive towards those who may be ‘different’ in some way.

I don’t know, because obviously there are other people in our school whose... there’s someone that has a disability, and everyone’s like so nice and stuff to them and they’ll say, ‘Hi!’ when they walk past and stuff. So yeah, I just know that, like... yeah.

Interviewer: That you can be yourself. Lily: Yeah. (Lily)

Isla’s description of this strand was “yourself is amazing, and also you are an excellent learner”, which indicates Isla may associate ETT with education and learning, due to it being emphasized in a school context. Similarly, Isla’s example of how *You Have Value* is practiced at school was about valuing the teacher and behaving respectfully during class. Within the first story completion scenario, Isla conveyed a connection to *You Have Value* through her confidence that being away from school would not disrupt her learning, nor her friendships.

Zoe, Lily and Isla’s experiences are in line with previous research, as Grier and Boutakidis (2018) describes social support as involving positive regard from others, practical support, and stability of care. These authors found that students who perceived continuous and positive social support within the school context had enhanced self-perception and improved behaviours. In this way, Zoe, Lily, and Isla experienced positive social support which was seen through their confidence in the stability of their friendships, and their perceptions around how their peers care for, support and value them. These participants also reflected positive self-perceptions and recognition of their value and acceptance as Grier and Boutakidis (2018) suggests.

As described above, some participants failed to distinguish ETT from the school values. For Linda, this impeded her ability to describe and apply the strands to real examples at the target school. In this instance *You Have Value* was described as people being kind, although Linda was able to reflect on some experiences that were suggestive of how ETT may be active within the school environment. This is evidenced in the first story completion scenario when Linda reported feeling accepted and valued at school because people did not treat her differently due to her disability. This implicitly reflects her connection to *You Have Value*, as well as *Other's Matter*.

Interviewer: At school do you feel accepted and valued for who you are? Linda:

Mmhmm. Interviewer: Yeah? Can you tell me more about that? How do you know that? Linda: Cause people aren't like, 'Seriously? Sit down, you have [a disability]!

(Linda)

Based on the discourse in parts of the interviews for Linda, Isla, Ryan, and Sammy, the limited explicit recall and description of the ETT strands may reflect a lack of exposure to each of the ETT strands that would support a more explicit understanding and internalization of these values. This limited exposure could be due to their recent arrival at the school, and/or teachers' assumptions of children's understanding given that ETT had been a part of the school culture for the two previous years. For example, Ryan did not appear to have a clear understanding of *You Have Value*, describing it as "I guess it's kind of, always give it a hundred percent". This misunderstanding may have impacted Ryan's ability to find examples of how *You Have Value* may or may not be applied at school. Yet he agreed with his mother's comments:

Ryan's Mother: I'm intrigued by the freedom to allow you to be you, which I think comes back to *You Have Value*. The lack of fear of what's cool and what's not

cool... You're a lot happier being yourself at [target school] aren't you? Ryan:
 Mmhmm. Ryan's Mother: Or, not happier, you find it easier. Interviewer: To just be
 yourself? Ryan's Mother: To be you, yeah. Interviewer: Mm. And you agree with
 that? [To Ryan]. Ryan: I guess so [laughter]. Ryan's Mother: Yeah... You've always
 been yourself, but I guess there is more acceptance [at the target school]. There's
 less...I don't know, conflict. More friends, more like minded people, I don't know
 what it is? Interviewer: Yeah, okay. And you did say that before when I asked if you
 feel comfortable being yourself in class, and you agreed [To Ryan]. (Ryan)

Ryan did not expand his mother's observation, though his verbal and physical agreement to her thoughts appeared genuine. Ryan's physical demeanour and his nods to my two comments throughout this conversation also seemed genuine. Although he appeared relaxed and engaged with the interview, Ryan was soft spoken, often providing only one-word answers or nodding rather than verbally responding, despite my attempts to draw out more descriptive comments. Thus, Ryan's response above was not out of character, and he seemed to appreciate his mother's input, which she provided at three points during the interview when he had difficulty answering questions. Although these needed to be treated with some caution as they were not Ryan's own reflections, I think this conversation usefully demonstrates Ryan's difficulty identifying *You Have Value*.

We Succeed Together. Isla identified this strand as everyone getting a chance to learn from and help each other, and not leaving those who are struggling behind. Isla experienced this as a new student when she did not know her way around, or what to do at school. Her friends were inclusive and supported Isla which made her feel as though she belonged. In the second story completion scenario where participants imagined what would happen after being selected for a prestigious team position, Isla felt that other people would

feel sad she was receiving so much attention. Though on an individual level Isla emphasized an equity perspective, wishing to share the role. Similarly, when asked how their team might work together Isla suggested drills and activities involving all participants and discussed how they would share the responsibility of leading the team. Conversely, when Isla imagined receiving a supporting, background position she nicely articulated how everyone in a team has a role to contribute regardless. Here, Isla had difficulty removing herself from the hypothetical scenario and speaking to how this may transpire on a general level:

Do you think that everybody who wanted to would have an opportunity to contribute to the team, even if they were on the side-line or in the main position? Isla: Yes. They should be able to. Interviewer: Okay, so you think that they should. But do you think that people are able to, you know? Isla: They should be able to because then that would be unfair for everyone. Interviewer: Yeah. That seems like the fair thing to do, that everyone gets an equal opportunity, right...Does that happen? Isla: Um sometimes. Sometimes I don't get into teams, sometimes I do. But my friends do but I'd be happy for them. (Isla)

Ryan, Linda, and Zoe all described *We Succeed Together* as “working together”, and Zoe provided an example of how this strand may be practiced at school through teachers reminding students about the value of working together to solve disputes as they arise, “sometimes kids will fight, and then the teacher will be like ‘Hey! Hey! Remember the values? Remember that if you do something together, you might succeed?’”

The second story completion scenario led to interesting discourse with Zoe around how others would see her contribution to the sports team. She felt that regardless of whether she had an important role, herself and others would consider her a valuable and necessary team member. Zoe felt that if she got a less desirable role others would comfort her rather

than ‘brag’, and she believed that everyone would have an equal opportunity to contribute. When discussing how her teammates would work together Zoe emphasised that everyone would be more than willing to help each other but it was important to share this support equally.

Ryan suggested that this strand is applied at school within sports teams and in other team contexts. He was not sure what working together looked like and did not provide much elaboration beyond this. In the second story completion scenario, Ryan said that people would be happy for him regardless of whether he received a priority team position, or one in the background. Here, Ryan referred to his personal experiences on a team and considered their lack of success. He suggested that his team worked well together when they were all able to contribute and take different roles within the team. He said that when some team members were away, their ability to operate together was impeded. Interestingly, neither Zoe nor Isla discussed this idea of success and neither seemed to connect participation as a team to winning games and competitions.

Similar to the previous strand, Linda’s insight around *We Succeed Together* and her discussion of the second hypothetical scenario appeared limited. Linda identified that some students may be jealous of her receiving an esteemed position, and that her contribution to the team would be valuable regardless of the calibre of her role. Linda said that all students had an equal opportunity to be involved in a team, and that working together looked like encouraging and supporting each other.

Lily described *We Succeed Together* as helping each other and explained that success can come from this. An insightful conversation came from Lily’s response to the second story completion scenario whereby Lily was selected to be a part of a sprint racing team that would represent her school. Lily identified that some people would be jealous of her selection and

think that she was undeserving. Although, she reported that her friends would be happy for her because they would be aware of the significance of this achievement for her. Lily also said that if she received a role of lesser significance, she would still see her contribution as important, and described how their team would work together.

We would all probably help each other and stuff, I guess. Interviewer: Yeah. Lily: Even though, you are versing the people. Say someone else won, you'd still be happy for them because you all trained at the same thing. Interviewer: Yeah, and so you still feel like you are a team together? Lily: Yeah...I'd be a little bit disappointed... But like, yeah. (Lily)

On an individual level, Lily recognised that if another teammate won the competition, she would be disappointed that it was not herself, but was able to celebrate their success and be happy for them.

A young person's psychosocial adjustment to the school environment is linked to their peer relationships and can influence their enjoyment of school, self-esteem and prevent loneliness at school (Antonopoulou et al., 2019). Five of the participants, Zoe, Ryan, Isla, Linda, and Lily, each identified how their contribution to a team would be important regardless of their position within that team. This ultimately relates to school belonging literature, as students who feel accepted, included, and supported at school are more likely to have increased perceptions of self-concept and self-efficacy (Korpershoek et al., 2020). These participants had previously described a sense of belonging to their school, and again to these hypothetical teams. The potential merit of their individual roles did not seem to negatively impact their anticipated self-evaluations, self-concept, or contributions to the team.

Moreover, *We Succeed Together* attempts to foster an appreciation for communal success (E Tū Tāngata, 2022e), and encourage young people that their individual worth (linking back to

You Have Value) is not conditional nor based on comparison and competition with others. While social comparison theory suggests that individuals have an innate need to self-evaluate, and emotions such as envy have been described as a product of an upward social comparison (Ganegoda & Bordia, 2019), it seems as though these five participants were able to separate their personal self-evaluations from the success of others at least in these hypothetical scenarios.

The final participant was once more a sharp contrast to these participants, and when discussing the target school's application of the ETT principles, Sammy firmly said that she does not see nor experience *We Succeed Together*. Sammy explained that students only work in their friend groups and proposed that if this was not the case, it would feel as though this strand had potential. In the second story completion scenario, Sammy identified that some people would be jealous if she received the primary position, while others would not care and remain focussed on their role. Sammy was also asked how her help and contribution to the team would be perceived if her role was less significant to which she remarked, "they will probably just see me as nothing, they probably just think I'm like, I don't know, a nothing character...a person who just stands at the back, just a backup for something."

Sammy did not think their team would interact and work together well, as friendship groups within teams would stay together and exclude other members. This once again displays the sharp contrast of Sammy's perspective to the other students and her consistent stance that her peers do not work together or value other's contribution unless they are already in established friend groups. Additionally, Sammy felt that some students were favoured by teachers at school, increasing their chances of being selected for teams and making opportunities to contribute unequal. Crouch et al. (2014) explains the important position teachers are in to include students and support school belonging, especially for those

who have recently moved to a new school. This translates to the team context for if teachers are perceived as being reliable, understanding, and respectful of student's opinions, as Crouch et al. (2014) suggests, they may be able to facilitate team inclusion and support students to feel like they are respected, valuable members of their team.

Others Matter. This third strand extends the ideas from the previous two strands and acknowledges how recognition of personal value (*You Have Value*) is the foundation for being able to recognise the value held by all, even though no two people think, act, and look the same. Further, people need others to succeed and can help others succeed (*We Succeed Together*), and this strand motivates students to look beyond one's own in-group to see the value of caring for those outside their social circles, or who are marginalised in some way. Young people are encouraged to seek out friendships with, and support individuals they may have not otherwise seen, considered, or interacted with by including them and showing that they matter.

Ryan, Isla, and Zoe each described *Others Matter* as including everyone in games and activities at school, though Zoe extended this to also looking beyond oneself and considering what others value. She acknowledged this is likely different to one's own interests but that should not matter. Zoe said that she has seen *Others Matter* practiced at the target school because everyone tries to include each other. The final story completion exercise attempted to tap into this final strand, and asked participants how a new student who was unable to speak English would be treated in their class and through lunch. Zoe thought that students would try to find ways to communicate and include this student. Although Zoe acknowledged how life may be more difficult for students who are 'different' at times, "we're all treated about the same. But sometimes...I guess if they look different, or they sound different or they speak different it could be a bit harder for them than for kids who look the same." Zoe explained

that overall, students at the target school make more of an effort to treat these “different” students the same as everyone else and include them, compared with her previous school. Although there was a limit to that, for if such students are not receptive to these efforts, Zoe said they will eventually move on with their own groups.

Isla described *Others Matter* as, “Everyone should be treated equally, but if they’re not that’s just a bit mean and we could help them out”. As briefly noted above, Isla explained that this strand is engaged with at school when others are included. Isla reflected on her personal experience as a new student and how significant it was that many students invited her and let her join their activities. This helped her to feel like she was a part of the school and mattered.

Ryan described this final strand as being caring towards other people and including them. He explained that he has seen students care for others when they are hurt, which to Ryan reflects *Others Matter*. In the third story completion scenario, Ryan was asked what would happen at lunch time to a new student who did not speak English. Zoe, and Isla answered this question from the perspective of what they or other students would personally do. Ryan was the only participant who first considered how this student might be feeling, before discussing what students could do to help.

I reckon they’d be like feeling left out, almost? Interviewer: Why do you think that?

Ryan: Because they wouldn’t really understand what everyone else is saying, or like, doing really? Interviewer: It would be a bit strange, wouldn’t it? How do you think

other students would respond? Ryan: I think some will try help them...Like, let them in. Others might not care. (Ryan)

Ryan was asked how students who are different are treated at school and he explained that they are treated “mostly normally”. Although Ryan acknowledged that other people might get confused sometimes because there may be unusual things this person does. Ryan said that he would ask the student and try to understand rather than judge them. This conversation revealed how Ryan perceived *Others Matter* and nicely outlines an important aspect of this strand which involves looking beyond oneself to the people one may not automatically connect with. Taking the time to recognise and learn about these differences in behaviour, rather than forcing change and assimilation is an important part of *Others Matter* (E Tū Tāngata, 2022f).

As mentioned above, Linda found it difficult to explicitly discuss ETT concepts, sometimes providing generic descriptions of school values. Some implicit understanding of *Others Matter* was found through the final hypothetical scenario. First, Linda provided very practical solutions, such as Google Translate to communicate with and include this non-English speaking student. Linda was aware that some students may not help this person and explained that while students who may be ‘different’ are mostly treated “normally”, sometimes they may be treated poorly by “meaner” students.

Lily described *Others Matter* as, “Even if people are like different and stuff, everyone matters in their own way”. Interestingly, in the final story completion scenario Lily placed the responsibility of supporting this new student onto the teacher, explaining that they would pick someone to pair up and spend time with the new student. In line with her previous comments, Sammy’s experiences were largely connected to her feeling excluded at school and similarly when asked about *Others Matter*, Sammy replied “It's not working...Other people don't care about other people. They just care about their friends and themselves.”

Each participants' discussion of *Others Matter* related to small components of this strand which have been outlined by E Tū Tāngata (2022f). First, conversing with, including, and affirming others, was discussed by Ryan, Isla, and Zoe. Next, providing practical support was suggested by Linda and Lily, and befriending 'other' individuals, as Isla experienced and appreciated. Finally, Ryan indirectly discussed how 'entering their world' to understand individuals and their perspectives displays *Others Matter*. This strand can be applied and experienced in numerous ways, but from the limited description of their experiences it appears that these participants have not fully understood *Others Matter*.

3.4.2 The Application of ETT

Zoe described ETT as “an organization that encourages people to be nice to one another, to support each other, and the fact that you have value.” She explained that ETT is about including others, and not only caring for yourself. Sammy also identified that ETT is supposed to promote kindness and social inclusion, though in contrast to the other participants she does not believe this has been achieved at the target school. Lily thought that students engaged with ETT more than teachers or the principal, “I never really hear the teachers doing it. It's usually just the principal in assemblies, whenever he's at assembly [but] we don't really have that many assemblies. Interviewer: So out of everyone: students, teachers, and principal, who do you think would [talk about ETT] the most? Lily: Probably students.”

Interestingly, Lily, Linda, and Isla each identified that although students' may not discuss ETT in detail, they display ETT through their behaviour, how they treat each other, and embodying the ETT strands. Ryan, Zoe, and Lily all reported noticing that students will talk about ETT by saying to their peers who may be misbehaving or acting mean toward other students “That's not E Tū Tāngata” or reminding them of the ETT values. Conversely,

Zoe acknowledged that at times students have misused E Tū Tāngata to behave selfishly and provided an example of a student stealing a book off another student and saying “E Tū Tāngata”, or “Other’s Matter, don’t fight with me”.

For Linda and Zoe, teachers were seen to engage with ETT the most, and Linda, Isla, Ryan, and Zoe all suggested that teachers predominantly use ETT for classroom behavioural management. As previously mentioned, it may be because of this that Isla reflected ETT as being mostly related to learning together and how to treat teachers. Isla evidenced this with an example of being rewarded for good classroom behaviour. Zoe believes it is also used by teachers to encourage student empowerment, in how they see themselves, and collaboration when working together.

They remind us about the values and how we can use them in a nice way. And they kinda just use it to remind people that even though you are important, you can still succeed with other people, because other people matter and... I don't know really how to explain. I guess they kinda just use it to make sure that everyone is included, and everyone is having a good time at school. (Zoe)

Isla and Sammy thought that the principal equally engaged with ETT as much as teachers, and Ryan believed the principal engaged the most by discussing this in assemblies. Overall, Lily did not appear to see ETT engaged with a significant amount at the target school, yet this is likely influenced by her personal context as she moved to the target school later in the year. Over the two terms Lily had attended the target school she may have had fewer opportunities to witness engagement. Moreover, Lily mentioned that her teacher did not really talk about ETT beyond pointing to ETT posters around their class. This suggests that the degree of teacher engagement may have a significant impact upon implementation success and is also reflected in the ETT theory of change as one of the principal moderators

of this initiative. Teachers are the most consistent and proximal adults from the school context for students, and research suggests that each teacher shapes their own classroom climate, also influencing students' overall enjoyment of school (Acosta et al., 2019; Cemalcilar, 2010; Marsh et al., 2014; Rhodes et al., 2009; Rudasill et al., 2018). The following comment from Ryan's mother furthers this point, "[previous school] was really hard. Yeah, the teacher didn't realize how much effect they could have. But he could spend one whole year in a principal's office labelled as a naughty child. And then the next year absolutely fine."

When discussing what each participant liked the most about ETT, Zoe identified that she appreciated how "ETT encourages people to learn the three values and try hard to succeed and believe in themselves and believe in others". While Isla liked how it helped people become a good person and celebrate their individuality. For Lily, she appreciated how ETT is encouraging students to think about themselves, and others positively. Ryan and Linda were not sure about specific parts of ETT which they liked, though alongside Isla, Zoe and Lily acknowledged the difference they believed ETT made in cultivating a welcoming environment for new students.

Finally, Sammy could not suggest anything positive about ETT and was the only participant to identify negative aspects of this initiative. Sammy related most of the interview questions to her experience of being excluded from peers at school, and her difficulty keeping up with the school's academic demands. This relates to McGiboney (2016) who explained that students who feel disconnected to school have less confidence in their social interactions and academic challenges than students who feel connected. Sammy explained that ETT is not working, as kids are not nice and exclude newer students who are not in their friend groups. Although Sammy said that students are not necessarily rude or nice to each other, they just

speak neutrally. When Sammy was asked what she does not like about ETT specifically, she mostly discussed the application of ETT through her experiences of how the student body treat each other, rather than phenomena explicitly related to the ETT initiative itself. Her father agreed that he does not like that ETT is ignored at school. Sammy was also asked if she had learnt anything from ETT and explained "...I don't think this really applies to E Tū Tāngata, but I've just learnt that most other people just don't really care about other people." This reflects Sammy's perception that the ETT principles are not being applied at the target school as they should be.

Nearly every participant had a different opinion about who engaged with ETT the most, how this was achieved, and what they liked about it. To me, this reveals the subjectivity of how ETT is both understood and experienced. In some regards, individual differences are to be expected and will depend on numerous factors including an individual's personal context, their developmental needs, the availability of classroom and school wide ETT resources, and staff engagement, particularly their main classroom teacher.

A unifying theme across these participants is social inclusion, with five participants recalling a positive experience and one reporting a contrasting negative experience. This theme is shared because Sammy was looking for peer relationships to support her adjustment to the new school but did not experience this. Positive peer relationships are one of a student's most valued aspects of school life (Gowing, 2019), and both the quality of friendships and feeling accepted by peers can influence the extent student's enjoy school (Antonopoulou et al., 2019). Even though it is important for leadership and staff to engage with ETT, what these interviews suggest is that if this does not translate to peer experiences, students will still feel that this initiative has not been effective.

Chapter Four: General Discussion

The following chapter provides a general discussion and summary of the key findings of this study, which are related to these new student's school transition experiences, as well as their experiences of ETT. This is followed by an overview of the relevant elements of the ETT theory of change, the implications of findings from this study, and any subsequent recommendations for ETT. Finally, limitations and areas for future research are discussed below.

4.1 School Transitions

Multiple participants experienced anticipatory worry about moving to the target school although following this, five of the six participants reflected positively about their school transition and early schooling experiences. This was primarily attributed to the presence of inclusive peers and a welcoming environment. Whilst in contrast, the final participant experienced a difficult school transition, describing a lack of friendliness and feeling ignored by other students. School transitions involve many contextual changes and the negative early experiences of this participant appear to have been exacerbated by various differences in their former and present school climate, their difficulty adjusting to the more rigorous academic expectations of the target school, and a loss of a familiar social environment. The other five participants did not express these same unmet expectations, and they seemed to interpret their classroom climate and other environmental aspects of the target school differently. These contrasting experiences suggest that a positive school transition may be dependent upon certain experiences that are closely related to previous experiences and expectations of the new environment. For most of these new students this was facilitated through a socially inclusive environment, that in turn supported the development of a sense of school belonging and their school enjoyment.

The experiences of these students are largely consistent with previous literature, as Crouch et al. (2014) and Whiting and Nash (2023) suggest that school belonging is critical for students' success. While other authors (Crouch et al., 2014; Bullock et al., 2021 & Goldstein et al., 2015) have acknowledged the numerous challenges encountered during school transitions that can make this a stressful experience. Specifically, Galton et al. (2003) found that students who expected their new school to have similar teaching styles and organisational elements, became anxious when they transitioned to new schools and experienced strict teachers and increased academic difficulty. To some degree, this seems to account for Sammy's challenges in her transition to the target school. Finally, Goldstein et al. (2015) found that students who experienced greater stress during their transition were more likely to have lower academic performance, motivation, and school bonding.

Ultimately Sammy's experience has brought a very important contrast and provided significant nuance to the otherwise generally positive experiences. It was apparent in the interviews that Sammy had expectations which were not met, and she likely made upward social comparisons that contributed to her being an outsider. However, it is very important that the weight of these explanations is not placed on to Sammy herself, which would be the equivalent to victim blaming. Even though most participants had positive experiences, is important for schools as they work in this environment to not lose sight of those aren't, and to explore why this may be occurring. Sammy's negative experiences undermined everything else and points to *You Have Value* as the foundational element for ETT to be effective, which has implications for how students will also experience the other two strands.

4.2 New Students' Experiencing E Tū Tāngata

Overall, the six participants displayed limited explicit understanding of ETT and the three core strands (*You Have Value, We Succeed Together, Others Matter*) as they discussed their experiences as new students. Despite this, five out of six participants described positive

schooling experiences which could be mapped back to one or two of the ETT strands, and these same participants described a strong sense of belonging to the target school. These participants each identified that the target school was very welcoming towards new students, and both perceptions (sense of school belonging, and a socially inclusive school environment) were particularly connected to their peer relationships. All participants came from different schools and personal backgrounds, but despite their individual differences five of them (and one parent) identified how this welcoming environment was different at the target school. These participants attributed this inclusivity to ETT, although the experiences of one participant contradicted those of the other five, describing instead a difficult school transition, lack of school belonging, and a lack of peer relationships. This participant had a very different perception of the target school, and generally felt ETT was well intentioned but ineffective.

The findings of this study raise questions as to why these new students had difficulty describing ETT after spending at least two terms at the new school, and in spite of the prevalence of the ETT strands displayed in posters around the school, communicated by the principal at assemblies, and incorporated by teachers into classroom activities. First, it is possible that even though these new students had spent a little over half a year at this new school, the numerous contextual, environmental, and social changes, involved with a school transition are likely to be somewhat overwhelming (Coelho et al., 2020). It may have been confusing for these students to be introduced to ETT alongside the school's existing values, and having only attended the school for a short time, this may not have been sufficient for them to consolidate their knowledge of ETT. Since ETT had been a part of the school culture for the two previous years, it is also possible that teachers may now assume a certain level of understanding of ETT and may not recognize the need to spend more time clarifying it for new students. This raises a rather practical question of how schools can best introduce ETT to

new students and their families and help them understand how these mindsets are intentioned to work alongside school values. In addition, while it is important that ETT considers the teachers' role as a moderator for this initiative, they also need to consider what their own role is in supporting school staff to engage all students in ETT.

4.3 E Tū Tāngata Theory of Change

Embedded in the interviews with students were questions which related to hypothesised outcomes from the ETT theory of change (ToC) for the education sector. The three outcomes that were partially explored in this study included increased sense of belonging and connection to school, increased relationship quality, and increased socially inclusive and prosocial behaviour (see Figure 1). Overall, findings from the interviews support these outcomes from the ETT ToC model and showed that according to most of these participants (five out of six), even in their short time attending the target school they had developed a strong sense of school belonging and connection. Peer relationships were the primary reason given for this, and the sixth participant attributed a lack of school connectedness to be from their lack of peer relationships.

Five participants identified that peers typically spoke and behaved nicely toward each other, which generally supports the ETT ToC target for an increase in positive communication, as well as the ToC target for an increase in positive peer interactions. The significance of positive peer relationships was an important theme in this study and supports the second ToC outcome that when schools effectively embed the ETT mindsets, there should be a general trend in positive peer relationships. It is worth noting that two participants identified peers to be friendlier at the target school compared to their previous school, with another suggesting that students made more effort to be friendly to those who were 'different', compared with their previous school. Students did not describe their relationships

with staff in detail, though five out of six participants spoke positively about their teachers and principal.

Finally, five out of six participants identified that the target school was welcoming, with friendly staff and students supporting their smooth school transition. Outside of their own experiences, participants also discussed the importance of including others which generally supports the ToC target for an increased awareness of, and inclusion of others. These five participants also suggested this inclusivity may have been from the influence of ETT. This socially inclusive environment with welcoming peers is a significant finding from their experiences, particularly given the participants' unique ability to reflect as new students and compare against their former school. These findings generally support the final ToC outcome that the target school students displayed a degree of socially inclusive behaviour that facilitated school belonging, at least as experienced by five of the six participants.

4.4 Implications and Recommendations

The findings from this study are largely positive regarding these new students' experience of their school transition, along with their sense of belonging and enjoyment at the target school. This suggests that for the most part the target school has been generally effective in supporting new students' school transition, and in encouraging inclusive practices among students. However, these findings also caution that new students may require additional support in their introduction to ETT to develop their understanding. Some of the students in this study had a difficult time distinguishing between the school values and the ETT strands. Thus, for new students, there may be a need to creatively teach these strands to help them see how they work with the schools values, even as the wider school becomes more accustomed to these ideas and the emphasis shifts slightly over time. Furthermore, the sixth participant experienced both ETT and the target school very differently to the other participants. As discussed, their perspective towards ETT was mostly explained through their experience of

being excluded from peers and how students would interact, rather than phenomena explicitly related to the ETT initiative; whereas the other participants were clear in their appreciation of feeling welcomed at school and each attributed this to ETT. Thus, there may be a need to intentionally focus on addressing exclusionary behaviour patterns as these arise, to help students see the practical ways that both *We Succeed Together* and *Others Matter* can be implemented.

4.4.1 Recommendations for E Tū Tāngata

One observation from this study with potential implications for how ETT is implemented within a school concerns the level of teacher engagement. Previous research has shown the importance of both teacher-student relationships (Wilson, 2004), along with teachers engagement with school climate and belonging initiatives (Allen et al., 2021). Yet when this was explored in each student's interview, they did not describe the importance of teacher relationships. For one participant, who did not see ETT much at the target school, this seemed mostly attributable to their teacher's lack of engagement with ETT. In the same way that teachers can influence a student's experience of school life, the degree of teacher engagement may have a significant impact upon implementation success (this also reflects one of the key moderators from the ETT theory of change). This reinforces the importance that staff are supported to engage with the ETT resources, core concepts and develop a consistent practice of embedding ETT language within their classrooms and across campus, as this will also increase students' exposure to this programme. Although ETT is reliant on teachers to keep ETT and its principles alive within the classroom, this also presents a challenge for school leaders as they implement this initiative. On the one hand, staff engagement is essential, but on the other hand school leaders need to allow for individual differences and a certain degree of autonomy for staff in how they engage and the degree to which they engage. In terms of the experiences of the students in this study, they seemed to have an awareness of teachers

not engaging, and this likely shapes their experience of the initiative. For ETT, this suggests a need to focus on teacher buy-in and promote their engagement with the principles and wider material, for students to be able to witness ETT throughout the school and internalise these ideas beyond the cognitive level that is taught.

With any initiative, there will be considerable individual differences in how students accept and engage with it, in addition to different levels of need. For some students, understanding and applying the ETT strands may come relatively easy as the overall narrative may align well with the social norms established in their whanau (family) and culture. For other students, the ETT strands may be more difficult and could even seem contradictory to the values and social norms they have been socialised with. This relates to the 3-tier model of health intervention, like the SWPBS approach, which Sørli (2021) explains was developed to reduce student problem behaviours, and promote a socially inclusive learning environment and positive school climate. This 3-tier model is based on a system of matching interventions to students' needs as well as a school's need for change. In this regard ETT can be considered a Tier One, universal level initiative. As the initiative becomes more embedded within a school, school leaders and the ETT team may need to think carefully about how to adjust and support those students who seem to need it most. Students who are experiencing other challenges in their school environment may require additional layers of support to align with their individual differences.

4.5 Limitations and Future Research

The present study has various methodological limitations due to the scope, time, and resource constraints of a Master's thesis. For example, the current study was limited by examining the experiences of new students in only one school which has been implementing ETT. Although this allowed for a deep understanding of the functioning and experiences of this sample, the

findings may not be generalisable to the wider school population, nor to new students attending different schools in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Two limitations also concern the sample of participants. This includes having a reasonably homogenous sample in that majority of the participants were female (five of six participants), which further limits the generalisability of this data. There were also no year-eight participants which would have been beneficial due to potential further cognitive development, and possibly different attitudes about the school given they were in their final year. Older participants may potentially be more reflective about their experiences than younger students, and may have a greater recall of, and ability to draw comparisons against their former school.

The interview process may have influenced the level of transparency for some participants. This is despite efforts to counteract this through being semi-structured in design, emphasising participants' privacy and confidentiality, and assurances that the research team was separate from the ETT organisation and interested in all perspectives. Socially desirable responding is always a concern, and some participants may have felt obligated to provide answers they thought I wanted to hear. This has also been highlighted as a limitation within story completion scenarios (Barter & Renold, 2000), and is one reason why this was only supplementary to the present study findings. Additionally, three participants had their parent present in the interview, which may have further influenced their level of disclosure. Two parents interjected their own voice when their child had difficulty responding to some questions. These opinions were not as heavily weighted in the findings of this study, but at the same time offered helpful insight which the remaining three participants were without. At times students provided minimal responses that required follow up questioning to try and extract further information. As I reflected on the skills and strategies employed in each

interview, there was a tension between prompting the participants for more information and feeling as though I was leading them to responses.

Finally, there was an implicit assumption made within the current study that because students found the target school to be more socially inclusive than their former schools, this was due to the implementation of ETT over the last two years. However, there is no way to identify how positive, socially inclusive, or supportive the target school was before ETT was introduced, and it may be easier for a school with a good climate to implement ETT, compared to a school with a negative climate. Thus, future research could investigate changes to school climate through collecting baseline data before ETT is implemented into schools, and compare these against later outcomes.

The present study has been exploratory as one of the first research projects and evaluations of the ETT initiative. As this programme develops alongside the ToC model, more research will be instrumental in expanding the evidence base for this initiative. For example, one ETT ToC strategy was to establish ETT resources, and in the time following these interviews, ETT has released an easily accessible, free, and in-depth resource library. Future evaluation studies may consider how resource development has supported the application and implementation of ETT in schools.

4.6 Conclusion

This retrospective, qualitative evaluation was intended to investigate older primary school students' transition to a new school, and their sense of school belonging and relationships with peers and teachers. Participants also reflected upon the implementation and application of the E Tū Tāngata initiative through the three mindsets (*you have value, others matter, and we succeed together*) in their classrooms, the wider school context, extramural school activities, and any changes in school climate compared to their previous school. Although there were individual differences, overall, the results from this study show that the students

have experienced the target school to be socially inclusive, supportive, and an environment where they could quickly make friends among their classmates. This seems to have fostered a strong sense of school belonging for most students, which is consistent with the aims of the E Tū Tāngata theory of change.

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Appendix A: Ethical Approval



Ref: HREC 2022/77

5 August 2022

Constance Parkes
Faculty of Health
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Constance

The Human Research Ethics Committee advises that your research proposal “Student Reflections on Changes in School Climate: A Qualitative Evaluation Examining E Tū Tāngata and Students’ Sense of School Belonging, Academic Self-Concept, and School Engagement” has been considered and approved.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your email of 2nd August 2022.

Best wishes for your project.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'DS' followed by a stylized flourish.

Dr Dean Sutherland
Chair
University of Canterbury Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendix B: Parent/Caregiver Information and Consent Forms

University of Canterbury,
School of Educational Studies and Leadership
Email: constance.parkes@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
10.04.2022
HREC Ref: 2022/77



Student Transitions and E Tū Tāngata: A Research Project Information Sheet for Parents/Caregivers

Kia ora,

Your child is invited to participate in a research study about their transition to the new school and their perspective of the E Tū Tāngata initiative. This study is being conducted by Connie Parkes from the University of Canterbury / Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha (UC). Other research team members include Dr. Myron Friesen and Dr. Hilary Dutton, as Connie's supervisors. The study is being carried out as a requirement for a Master of Science, in Child and Family Psychology.

What is the purpose of this research?

This research is exploring children's transitions to a new school and how E Tū Tāngata might facilitate children's sense of belonging. The information from this study will help to discover how E Tū Tāngata is understood by students and its effect in helping create an inclusive school environment. In order to accomplish this, I am hoping to interview children who are in Years 6, 7, or 8, and who are new to their school.

Why have I received this invitation?

Your child is invited to participate in this research because they have been identified as a new student at [Target School] in 2022. Your child's participation is voluntary (their choice, with your permission). If you decide that your child will not participate, there are no consequences. If you give your permission for your child to participate, but they do not want to, that is fine. Their decision will not affect any relationships with their school, E Tū Tāngata, or the University of Canterbury.

What is involved in participating?

I will also be going into classrooms at [Target School] and providing a short presentation about this research project so that students, including your child, can hear about it and ask me any questions directly.

If you give permission for your child to participate, and your child chooses to take part in this research, I will ask them to have a conversation with me (an interview). This interview will hopefully take place face-to-face in a private room, in a public space such as the [local library] This interview will be conducted outside of normal school hours, at a time that suits you. If necessary, the interview could also be conducted via a video call through Zoom. I will contact you and your child to arrange a suitable time and confirm the location. The interview will involve a brief time for introductions, getting acquainted, and I can answer any questions that you or your child may have. Then I will have a conversation with your child about how they have adjusted to their new school, what they understand about E Tū Tāngata, and how

they feel it has helped the school (if at all). I estimate the interview will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes.

Will the interview be recorded?

With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded using a portable recorder. The recording will be used to create a written transcript of the interview, which I will analyse as part of the research. If you choose to review a copy of the interview transcript, I will provide this to you within 1 week of the interview. Following this, if you have any comments or concerns about this transcript, I will ask you to inform me via email within 2 weeks.

Are there any benefits from taking part in this research?

We do not expect any direct benefits to you or your child personally from participating in this interview, although there could be some indirect benefits for your child from reflecting on how they have adapted to their new school. However, the information gathered will potentially benefit the refinement and development of E Tū Tāngata as an initiative at this school to support an inclusive learning environment.

As a “thank you gift” for your child’s participation, I will provide them with a \$20 Warehouse gift voucher. They will receive this gratuity even if they were to withdraw from the study for some reason.

Are there any risks involved in this research?

None of the interview questions explicitly ask children to share negative experiences; however, if your child has had a bad experience at this new school and they tell me about that, then that could bring up some negative memories or emotions. If this happens, and they feel uncomfortable or show any distress, we can skip the question, take a break, or even stop the interview. You could also call one of the groups below who provide support for your children over the phone.

WhatsUp
Kidsline

Free Call 0800 942 8787 | Chat Online <https://whatsup.co.nz/>
Free Call 0800 543 754 | <https://www.lifeline.org.nz/services/kidslife>

What if I or my child change our mind about participating?

Your child is able to withdraw from the study at any time. If it is after the interview, please let me know by emailing me and I will remove any information your child has provided from the data set if it is still possible. Once data analysis has commenced, approximately around the fourth term, removal of data may not be possible.

What will happen to the information my child provides?

I will transfer the audio recording of the interview to a password-protected file on the University of Canterbury computer network and then delete this from the recording device as soon as practical. All data will be kept confidential. To ensure your child’s identity is not known to anyone outside the research team, we will keep the signed consent form and your child’s assent form in a file separate from the interview transcript. On the transcript itself your child will be given a fake name (a pseudonym) and only this will be used in the data analysis process.

All study data will be stored in password-protected files on the University of Canterbury’s computer network or stored in lockable cabinets in research offices. All data will be

destroyed five years after completion of the study/publication of study findings. Connie Parkes will be responsible for making sure that only members of the research team use your child's data for the purposes mentioned in this information sheet.

Will the results of the study be published?

The results of this research will be published in a Master's thesis. This thesis will be available to the general public through the University of Canterbury library. Results may also be published in peer-reviewed, academic journals, presented at conferences, or used for teaching. Quotes from your child may be included in published documents, but these are only identified by their pseudonym. Any other identifying information of your child or other persons will be removed. A summary of results will be sent to all participants or guardians who request a copy. A child-friendly summary may also be provided if this is requested.

If E Tū Tāngata or the school wish to publicize the findings from this study, they are entitled to do so. We (the UC research team) will provide a description of the results that are required and will take considerable care to ensure that no private information about study participants is revealed.

Who can I contact if I have any questions or concerns?

If you have any questions about the research, please contact myself, Connie Parkes by email at constance.parkes@pg.canterbury.ac.nz. You can also contact my supervisor Dr. Myron Friesen by email at myron.friesen@canterbury.ac.nz or by phone at 03 369 5598. This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). If you have a complaint about this research, please contact the Chair of the HREC at human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz.

What happens next?

If you give permission, and your child would like to participate, please contact me via email at constance.parkes@pg.canterbury.ac.nz to arrange a time for the interview. At the interview, I will need to receive a completed consent form (see below), so please fill that out beforehand if convenient.

Thank you for your time and consideration.
Connie Parkes

University of Canterbury,
 School of Educational Studies and Leadership
 Email: constance.parkes@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
 10.04.2022
 HREC Ref: 2022/77



Student Transitions and E Tū Tāngata: A Research Project
Consent Form for Parents/Caregiver of Participants

- ☐ I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- ☐ I understand what is required of my child if I agree to let them take part in the research.
- ☐ I understand that participation is voluntary, and my child may withdraw at any time without consequences. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information my child or I have provided should this remain possible.
- ☐ I understand that comments and quotes from my child may be included in the final published document. I understand that any information or opinions my child provides will be kept confidential to the research team. I understand that any published or reported results will not identify my child.
- ☐ I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.
- ☐ I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form. I understand the data will be destroyed after five years.
- ☐ I understand the risks associated with my child taking part and how they will be managed.
- ☐ I agree to the interview with my child being audio recorded. I understand how this recording will be stored and used.
- ☐ I understand that I can contact the researcher Connie Parkes: constance.parkes@pg.canterbury.ac.nz or supervisor Dr. Myron Friesen: Myron.friesen@canterbury.ac.nz for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Human Research Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz.
- ☐ I would like a summary of the results of the project.
- ☐ I or my child would like to review the transcript of the interview. I understand that my child has the right to refuse this, and they will be asked of this in the interview.
- ☐ By signing below, I agree that my child may participate in this research project.

Name: _____ Signed: _____ Date: _____

Email address (for report of findings or sending a copy of the transcript)

Appendix C: Children Information and Assent Form

University of Canterbury,
School of Educational Studies and Leadership
Email: constance.parkes@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
10.04.2022
HREC Ref: 2022/77



My New School and E Tū Tāngata: A Research Project Information Sheet for Children

Kia ora,

My name is Connie Parkes, and I am a student at the University of Canterbury. I would like to invite you to take part in a research project on your feelings about school and E Tū Tāngata.

What is this research project about?

I would like to talk with you about what it was like coming to a new school this year, and how this school might be different to your old school. I would also like to ask you some questions about E Tū Tāngata and what you think about it.

Do you remember hearing about E Tū Tāngata at school? Well, my goal is to find out what you know about E Tū Tāngata, and whether you feel like E Tū Tāngata is helping your school. By sharing your story, you will help me to better understand how E Tū Tāngata may or may not help students like you.

If you choose to take part in this research, I will ask you to have a conversation with me (an interview). This interview will hopefully take place face-to-face in a private room at [local library] This interview will happen afterschool, at a time that suits you. If you would prefer to have our conversation on a video call, through Zoom we can do this instead.

It is your choice:

It is your choice if you want to be a part of this study or not. If you choose to take part but change your mind later on, I can remove all your information from the research. You can tell your parents and they can contact me, and I will make sure that everything you have told me is removed.

During our talk, if there is a question that makes you feel uncomfortable or that you do not know the answer to, you can choose to skip it and come back to it later, or we can just skip it completely.

If you would like to, you can bring a friend or family member with you to our interview. It is your choice whether they come in the room with you or wait outside.

Your information will be kept private:

With your permission, I will make a voice recording of our talk. Only our voices are recorded. From this recording I will write out everything that you and I say. This is called a transcript, and on this transcript, I will create a fake name for you so that your information is kept private. This transcript becomes the information that I look at in my study. The only people who will be able to hear the recording or see your transcript are me and my supervisors.

You and your parent/guardian can ask to see this transcript before my report is finished. If you want to see this transcript, tell your parent/guardian and I can email them a copy of this. It is your choice if you do not want your parents/guardian to see the transcript and I will ask you when we meet.

The only time that I may need to talk with someone else about something you say is if you tell me something that shows that you or someone else is in danger. If that happens, then I will work with my supervisors to inform the right people who can best support you.

Your information will be combined with all the other students who also take part in this study and I will write a report about my findings. In my report, I might use a quote of something you have said. If I do, I will use your fake name (not your real name), and I will edit the quote so that any personal information about you or anyone else is removed.

Is there a benefit for being involved?

I do not think you or your family will get any direct benefits from being in this study. But as a big thank you I will give you a \$20 Warehouse gift voucher as a gift for helping me with my project.

Are there any risks from being involved?

If you have had a bad experience at this new school and you tell me about that, then that could bring up some negative memories or emotions. If this happens, and you feel uncomfortable we can skip the question, or take a break, or even stop the interview. If you feel upset after the interview, I encourage you to talk to your parents, or a school counsellor or youth-worker. With your parent/guardian you could also call one of the groups below who provide support over the phone.

WhatsUp	Free Call 0800 942 8787 Chat Online https://whatsup.co.nz/
Kidline	Free Call 0800 543 754 https://www.lifeline.org.nz/services/kidline

What if I have questions?

If you have questions about this research, you can ask your parents, or you (or your parents) can email me at any time. My email address is constance.parkes@pg.canterbury.ac.nz. You can also contact my supervisor (teacher) at the University of Canterbury (Myron Friesen at myron.friesen@canterbury.ac.nz).

What happens now?

Tell your parents whether you would like to take part in my study or not. If you would like to take part in my study, your parents will email me and let me know. Once I have heard from your parents, I will talk to them about when we can meet for our interview.

When we meet for the interview we will review this information again, and I will ask you to sign the form on the next page so I know you want to be a part of my study and you understand what you need to do.

Thank you for thinking about being a part of my research.

Ngā mihi nui,
Connie Parkes

My New School and E Tū Tāngata: A Research Project
Child Assent Form

- ☐ I have been told the details about this project and have been able to ask questions.
- ☐ I know that I will be asked to talk with Connie about coming to this school and E Tū Tāngata.
- ☐ I understand that I do not have to take part in this research if I do not want to.
- ☐ I understand that if I change my mind and do not want to take part anymore, I can tell my parents before the interview, or I can tell Connie during the interview. If I change my mind and withdraw from the study, all my information will be deleted.
- ☐ I understand that the person I talk to in the interview (Connie Parkes) will keep what I share private, unless I talk about something which shows that myself, or someone else is in danger.
- ☐ I know that my interview will be recorded, and I understand this recording will be kept in a safe place and no one else will hear it except Connie and her supervisors.
- ☐ I know that my parents/caregiver might ask to see a copy of the transcript from my conversation with Connie, but that it is my choice, and I can say no to this if I want to.
- ☐ I know that I can ask my parents or Connie (constance.parkes@pg.canterbury.ac.nz)
- ☐ By writing my name and the date below, I agree to take part in this research and talk with Connie about my time at school.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Please read the above assent form carefully. If you want to take part in this research and have written your name above, please give this form back to your parents or to Connie.

Before the interview you will be asked these questions again to check you still want to be involved in the study and fully understand what will happen during the interview.

Appendix D: Study Flyer for Students



How do you like E Tū Tāngata? We invite you to tell us.

Researchers from the University of Canterbury are working with our school to try and understand how students, parents/guardians, and teachers feel about E Tū Tāngata and how it is affecting our school. You are invited to take part in this research and share your thoughts on E Tū Tāngata.

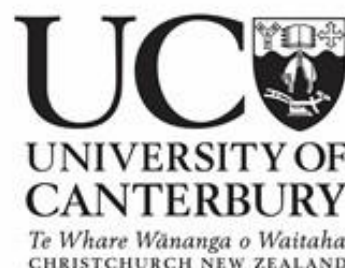
There will be 2 research projects:

1. If you are in Year 6, 7, or 8, you and your parents/guardians are invited to take an online survey and answer some questions about E Tū Tāngata. Your teachers have been invited to do a similar survey. All the students who complete the survey will receive a \$10 Warehouse gift voucher.
2. For Year 6, 7, or 8 students who are new to the school this year, they will also be invited to participate in an interview with a researcher about what it was like to come to this new school with E Tū Tāngata, and how it compares to their old school. All the students who participate in these interviews will be given a \$20 Warehouse gift voucher.

An email has been sent to your parents/guardians about this research. If you want to participate, please talk with them about it. They will be able to give you access to the survey and can contact the researchers for more information.

Your opinions and your perspective are important in this research, and we invite you to share your story about E Tū Tāngata with us .

For more information, please see the emails sent to your parents/guardians from [the principal or] your parents/guardians can send an email to the lead researcher at the University of Canterbury – myron.friesen@canterbury.ac.nz



Appendix E: Interview Schedule

E TŪ TĀNGATA STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Role definition, consent, right to withdraw, interview/study outline.

Introduction | Whakawhanaungatanga (Estimated time: 10 MIN)

- Mihi mihi (according to child's cultural preferences)
- Tell me a little bit about yourself. Who are you? What do you like to do?
- I know that you started at this school this year. What school were you going to before this?
- What do you remember most about (previous school).

School Transition (Estimated time: 5 MIN)

- This year has had some big changes for you, starting at this school!
- Tell me what it was like in the beginning?
- Tell me what it's like to be a student at this primary school now.
- When you wake up in the morning on a school day, how do you feel about going to school?
 - Is there anything about this school that makes going to school (better/worse/easier/more difficult) when compared to your experience at the other school?
 - What is it about this school that makes you want to go to school every day? OR What makes you not want to go to school?

School Belonging (Estimated time: 10 MIN)

- Do you feel as though you belong at [name of school]?
 - What would need to change at this school for you to have a greater sense of belonging at the school?
 - Does this feel different from your feeling of belonging at your other school?
 - You were a new student this year, if you could give any advice to another new student trying to feel connected to the school, what would you suggest that they do?
- Do you feel comfortable in your class?
- How do your classmates speak to other?
- During class, are students able to talk and participate without being teased or insulted by other classmates?

Story Completion: Brief introduction to story completion activities (Estimated time: 15 MIN)

- #1 - Let's pretend that you had to miss school for 1 week. When it is finally time to return to school, how do you feel about going back? What happens that first day you return to school? How do you think people will treat you (teacher, classmates)?
 - At school, do you feel accepted and valued for who you are?
 - From your experience, are people interested in what's going on in your life?
- #2 - Let's pretend that you are selected for a very important school team (sport, drama, dance, art, speech, math, science, etc).
 - How will people work together on this team?
 - You have the lead role, how do others respond to all the attention you get?
 - What if you had a supporting role (in the background) how would people see your contribution?

- Do you think that everyone who wanted to would have an opportunity to contribute to the team?
- #3 - Let's pretend there is a new student in your class who doesn't speak English, when it's time to go outside for morning tea or lunch, what happens to her/him?
 - How are students who are "different" (they may act different or look different from others) treated by the other students?

E Tū Tāngata focus questions (Estimated time: 15 MIN)

Have you ever heard of ETT? | I heard you mention ETT earlier, I would like to talk about that some more.

- How would you describe ETT to someone who has never heard of it before?
 - What do you remember ETT being about?
 - Do you remember the 3 ETT mindsets? Can you describe them?
- How do you see ETT at being used at your school?
- Who do you hear referring to ETT most frequently?
 - How do they talk about it? How do your classmates talk about ETT?
- How have you seen "You have value" practiced at this school?
- How have you seen "We succeed together" practiced at this school?
- How have you seen "Others matter" practiced at this school?
- What do you like about ETT?
- What do you not like/enjoy about ETT?
- What do you think are some of the most important things you've learnt from ETT?
- Do you think that ETT has made a difference for you, in starting school at this primary school? Tell me how.

Closing the interview (Estimated time: 5 MIN)

- Wrap-up, debrief, opportunity for participant questions or final comments, orientation back to the outside.