

***What are young people saying about
disengaging from mainstream secondary
schooling in Aotearoa-New Zealand?***

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts in Sociology

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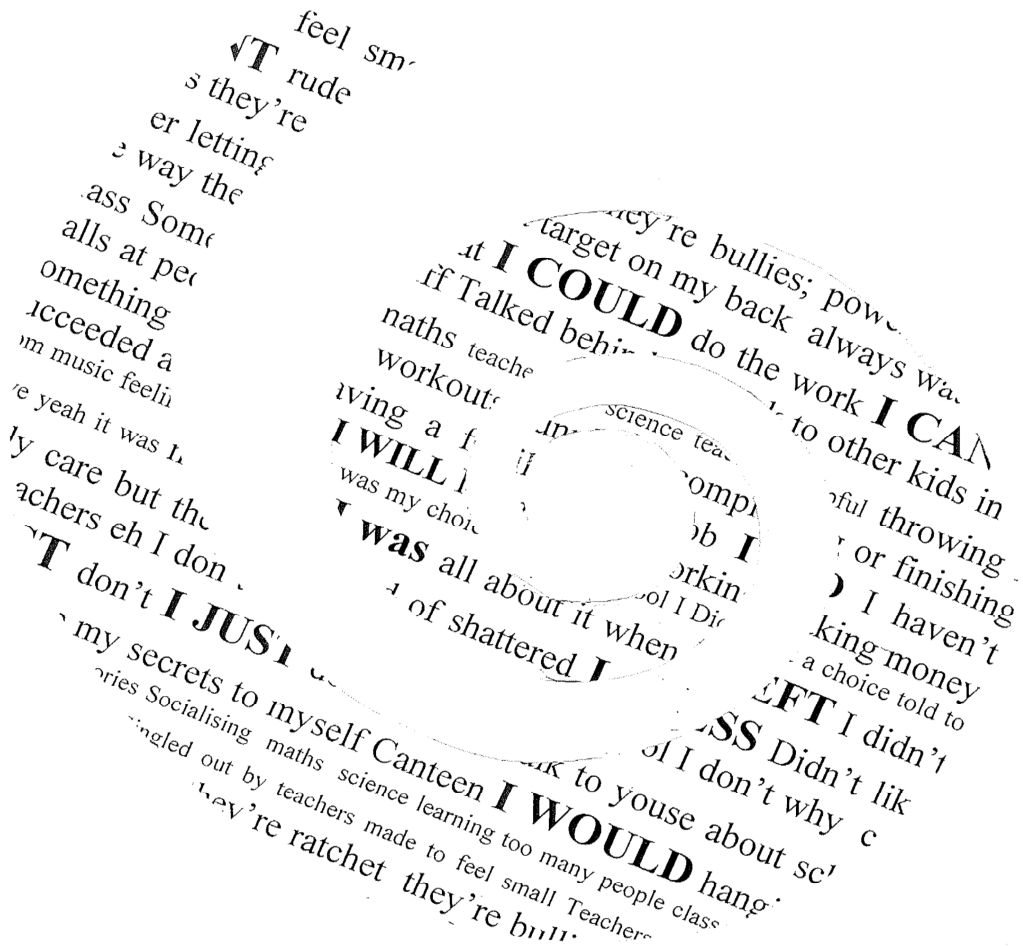
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Rangatahi Voices

Karere te reo o nga rangatahi tatou



“Young people’s voices fly free”

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Abstract

Young people disengage from mainstream secondary schooling for a variety of complex reasons. In the thesis, I explore young people's talk to investigate what these reasons are and I use voice as a research approach to hear first-hand how young people *feel* about leaving school early. In collaboration with the youth coaches from Te Runanga o Nga Maata Waka, (Nga Maata Waka) an indigenous Youth Service NEET (not in education, employment or training) provider, we gathered young people's voices as shared knowledge. For Nga Maata Waka these voices offer an opportunity to explore policy and practice implications in the Youth Service NEET environment and for me, so I could understand the constraining and enabling or push/pull factors of disengagement from mainstream secondary schooling. To guide and support me throughout this collaborative journey I draw on multiple sociological theories and methodologies such as Kaupapa Māori, critical ethnography and symbolic interactionism. To analyse their voices I use multiple methods such as the *Listening Guide* of Carol Gilligan, thematic analysis and elements of discourse analysis. The voices in this thesis add to the ongoing debate of disengagement, by suggesting young people are sensitive towards their unsuccessful schooling identities. I also gathered talk from the staff at Nga Maata Waka who offer their operational perspectives of working in a Youth Service NEET environment. From their talk the following themes emerged—the importance of relationships, the ethos and role of the youth coach and the *voice of knowing*, which connects with the important concepts 'silence' and 'silencing'. I address these two concepts in the ways we, as others, with our *voice of knowing*, intentionally or unintentionally speak on the behalf of young people and influence their choice to disengage from mainstream secondary schooling.

Glossary

In the thesis I refer to the young people of Te Runanga o Nga Maata Waka as either ‘young person’, ‘young people’, ‘participant’, ‘participants’ ‘student’ or ‘students’ and I introduce the staff members by either their full name and title, their first name, or collectively, I refer to them as ‘management’ or ‘staff’.

Aotearoa	New Zealand
CYFS	Child Youth and Family Services
CYWC	Canterbury Youth Workers Collective ¹
Hapū	Sub-tribe, clan— section of a large tribe
HEC	Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury
Huarahi ako	Teaching and learning methods ²
Iwi	Extended kinship group, tribe, nation, people, nationality, race—often refers to a large group people descended from a common ancestor
Kai	The gift of food to share, a meal ³
Kaumātua	Respected elder
Kaupapa Māori	Māori values and principles: agenda, theory, praxis
Koha	Gift
Kura Kaupapa	Kura Kaupapa Māori schools are state schools that operate within a whānau-based Māori philosophy and deliver the curriculum in te reo Māori. The first Kura Kaupapa Māori, Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hoani Waititi, was established in West Auckland in 1985. As with kōhanga, in the early stages parents were forced to fundraise to run Kura until they received Government recognition and funding. Kura Kaupapa Māori gained recognition in the Education Act 1989 and from 1990; the Ministry of Education supported the establishment of new Kura ⁴
Mana	Integrity, respect, prestige, authority

¹ <http://www.cywc.org.nz>

² <http://www.maatawaka.org.nz>

³ Moorfield (2011:50)

⁴ <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/māori-education-matauranga/page-5>

Marae	A marae is a place of learning, celebration, ceremony, and meeting. It is traditionally the focal and social point of a Māori community
Māori	People—used to distinguish the native, indigenous people of New Zealand
MOE	Ministry of Education
MSD	Ministry of Social Development
MYD	Ministry of Youth Development
NEET	Not in education, employment, or training
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
Pākehā	Originally, the term Pākehā described British Settlers ⁵ now indicates a New Zealander of European descent or New Zealand European. For those participants who identify as Pākehā, I refer to as either Pākehā or NZ European
Rangatahi	younger generation, youth ⁶
Rangatiratanga	Extending the student's range of knowledge, skills and resources ⁷
Taiao	Environment
Tangata Whenua	In relation to a particular area, means the iwi, or hapū that holds mana whenua over that area
Tangata Tiriti	Person, man, human being—treaty
Te reo me ngā tikanga Māori	Māori language and culture
Tino Rangatiratanga	Self-determination
Whanaungatanga	Relationship, kinship
Whānau	Family (extended)

(Unless otherwise stated, I have taken all Māori translations from the Environment Canterbury Regional Policy Statement 2013).

⁵ Rata (2011:2)

⁶ Moorfield (2011:168)

⁷ <http://www.maatawaka.org.nz>

Chapter 1: A conceptualisation of the voices of young people who are disengaged from mainstream secondary schooling

The aim of this thesis is to gather, listen to and honour the talk of young people who left school with either ‘early leaver’ status or left school with few or no NCEA⁸ credits and have chosen Te Runanga o Nga Maata Waka (Nga Maata Waka) as their dedicated Youth Service NEET provider. The young people who participated in this ethnographic case study have been categorised by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) as disengaged from mainstream secondary schooling and categorised as NEET.⁹ Currently, Nga Maata Waka is the primary contract holder for the Youth Service NEET in Canterbury with approximately 700 young people registered and operates from the Nga Hau e Wha Marae on Pages Road, located in the eastern suburbs of Christchurch.

My research journey with Nga Maata Waka began with a telephone call in November 2013 to see if they were interested in working with me to investigate why young people are ‘falling through the cracks’ of our education system in Aotearoa-New Zealand. I followed my telephone call with an email outlining my research objectives, which led us to working together on a research design. My initial reason for wanting to research in collaboration with Nga Maata Waka centred on my interest in Kaupapa Māori as a research approach (an interest I discovered from undertaking a Research Methods paper at the University of Canterbury in 2011) together with the opportunity to conduct cross-cultural research with an indigenous social services provider. I also found Nga Maata Waka to be geographically accessible (close to home) and I required a large group of young people who would feel

⁸ NCEA: National Certificate of Educational Achievement.

⁹ NEET: not in education, employment or training.

comfortable talking about their experiences of disengagement with me. Given their Kaupapa Māori focus, I sought to ensure I would conduct the research in respectful and culturally responsive ways. As a non-indigenous researcher, I also wanted to experience being part of a ‘whānau of interest’ (Bishop & Glynn, 1999:172).

As an indigenous Youth Service NEET provider, Nga Maata Waka weave Kaupapa Māori philosophies throughout their entire organisation. These philosophies operate from Board level to all other levels of management, to employees, and out to all the social services they provide in the greater Christchurch community. The five strands of Kaupapa Māori that they weave are Te Reo me nga Tikanga Māori (Māori language and culture); Taiao (environment); Huarahi Ako, (teaching and learning methods); Whānau (family); and Rangatiratanga (extending the student’s range of knowledge, skills and resources). Furthermore, they draw on the guiding theory of rangatahi (young people), which focuses on a strengths-based philosophy¹⁰ to transition young people from a problems-based approach (things which seem to be wrong) to a strengths-based approach (things they are doing well). This strengths-based approach has particular relevance to this case study, as the youth coaches empower young people through establishing rapport and the concept of Hakamanatia¹¹ to fulfil their educational or vocational aspirations.

To gather, explore, and analyse young people’s talk, I chose multiple sociological theories and methodologies to provide a comprehensive framework to guide me in examining young people’s voices. I drew on Russell Bishop and Ted Glynn’s ‘weaving metaphor’ to bring

¹⁰ Positive Youth Development through Education: Addressing Issues of (Dis)Engagement in Aotearoa/New Zealand Schools (2014:2).

¹¹ Hakamanatia the concept of empowerment—Youth workers as part of the young person’s wider community, seek to empower young people, ensuring they have a greater say in decisions that affect them and the world around them (Ara Taiohi, 2011, Code of Ethics for Youth Work in Aotearoa, *At A Glance*).

together the multiple qualitative theories and methodologies of voice, silence, Kaupapa Māori, elements of critical ethnography and symbolic interactionism to create a framework (Bishop & Glynn, 1999:175). This framework played an important role in guiding the research process and in providing the analytical lenses to examine the gathered talk. This framework also enabled me to focus on gathering the young people's voices sensitively, in ways that placed their emotional wellbeing and safety at the forefront of the research process.

I chose to use an ethnographic case study approach because I considered ethnography to be the best qualitative method of social enquiry to gather young people's voices. Furthermore, the ethnographic methods of a focus group, unstructured and semi-structured interviews also best supported voice as a research approach to explore the research question, 'What are young people saying about disengaging from mainstream secondary schooling in Aotearoa-New Zealand?' I also guided my ethnographic approach by using the Kaupapa Māori research strategy of Russell Bishop and Ted Glynn (1999), who suggest using Kaupapa Māori as a guiding theory for undertaking research within an indigenous environment. Focusing on the issues of initiation, benefits, representation, legitimacy, and accountability helped me to be reflexively aware of my role in the research process. This research process required that I consider the participants' indigenous world view, vulnerability, their level of vocal articulateness, and my own lived experience, to understand how young people experience disengagement.

In this first chapter, I discuss the importance of 'voice' as a research approach and I outline the ways voice is not only conceptualised as a way of knowing, but can also be described as a sensitive method of gathering talk from young people (Shacklock, Smyth & Wilson, 1998). I examine silence, the counterpart of voice, and I explore the idea that young people may use

silence as a method of communication and as an emotional barrier. I discuss the concept of disengagement and the reasons Governments worldwide consider disengagement a problem, along with the effect of the development of the neoliberal economy on educational policies within a New Zealand and global context. I suggest that neoliberalism provides the context for the ways young people negotiate and participate in their educational and employment opportunities and then become perceived as being either successful or unsuccessful in education (Nairn, Higgins & Sligo, 2012). I end the chapter with an overview of the thesis, which provides a broad outline of the ways the research process unfolded.

Voice as a research methodology

The challenge for this thesis focuses on using voice as a research approach to hear first-hand how young people *feel* about leaving school early. The aim is to gather their voices as shared knowledge so Nga Maata Waka can explore policy and practice implications in the Youth Service NEET environment and for me so I can examine their talk. I want to understand the constraining and enabling or push/pull factors of disengagement from mainstream secondary schooling.

The initial literature review and examination of voice as a methodology and as a theoretical concept revealed that recent international literature has focused mostly on hearing the voices of others (Bynner & Parsons, 2002; Pemberton, 2008; Russell, Simmons & Thompson, 2011; Seddon, Hazenberg & Denny, 2012). I use the term ‘others’ from within the context of those who have and exert power over young people such as educators, policymakers, whānau, researchers, and academics and in regards to this research, myself. Therefore, using voice as a research approach helped me shape a co-constructed research design to ‘hear’ and honour young people’s talk culturally, ethically and reflexively.

The research approach undertaken by Shacklock et al (1998) focused on young people disengaged from secondary schooling in South Australia. Using voice required Shacklock et al (1998) to ask questions about what voice brings to the production of research knowledge and what this means in the design and conduct of the research process. They wanted to 'create an epistemological imperative' to inform the methodological approach to investigate the way voice takes shape when out-in-the-field (Shacklock et al, 1998:1). They suggest that the way voice takes shape, or the 'unknowing' or possibly 'unexpected' way voice takes shape, makes voice a 'slippery term', especially when voice is used as 'a way of knowing and as a way of collecting information' (Shacklock et al, 1998:2).

Shacklock et al (1998) describe their research process as 'capturing' voices, however, for this thesis I have chosen not to use the word 'capture' as to 'capture' implies 'to take by force, or to seize'. This change in wording suggests to me that I am seeking to undertake research 'with' young people as opposed to doing research 'on' young people. In keeping with this view I discuss the idea that voice is complicated and that tensions can result, not only in the data gathering process, but also in the ways we interpret voices, particularly those of young people.

To capture voices, Shacklock et al (1998:9) developed layers of conversational questions, which they defined as a 'communicative repertoire'. They used these repertoires to engage the students in telling them about their experiences at school, while at the same time being careful not to pre-judge them as failures. These communicative repertoires enabled them to examine 'who is prepared to talk and their level of articulation' (Shacklock et al, 1998:4). Their methodological challenge focused on understanding students, which, they argue, had a significant bearing on how others make sense of what young people say. They claim that

access *to* and the *interpretation* of voice is significant because voice provides ‘evocative and highly resonant information about people’s lives’ (Shacklock et al, 1998:2). They propose voices:

Can be described as unique, or as having a specific existential quality; voices can also be labelled as heard, spoken, lost, found, oppressed, empowered, reclaimed, released, sponsored, accommodated, revisited, unlocked and ventriloquized (Shacklock et al, 1998:2).

The voices described above illustrate the multiple voices people use when they are expressing information about their daily lives. Their description of voice highlights that the use of voice or authentic voice and our ability to interpret voice can be problematic particularly within the context of an interview setting.

Smyth, Hattam, Canon, Edwards, Wilson, and Wurst (2004) argue that what young people ‘do’ through talk, is enact the concepts of identity and emotional work. They argue this ‘doing’ gives insights into how young people ‘create, present, and sustain their personal identities’ along with how they do ‘emotional labour’ within the school environment to ‘do’ this identity work (Smyth, Hattam et al 2004:128). Therefore, young people who feel judged or perceived as lacking within the school environment do ‘extra emotional labour’ when they feel misunderstood, unheard, labelled as troubled, and feel excluded from the classroom or their peers. This form of emotional labour creates what Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch (1993:xvi) argue is a young person with a voice that is ‘lifeless or life taking’ without the ‘resonances or connections’ that come from their relationships or interactions with others. Shacklock et al (1998:4) suggest ‘when individuals do not find resonance with other people and sense their voices are not honoured, they are, in fact, silenced, marginalised, and rendered powerless’.

Oldfather (1995:131) argues that a lack of talk or input from young people is problematic, particularly in education, given young people are the ‘primary stakeholders of their educational experiences’. What is highly significant about this statement is that young people are the ‘authentic chroniclers of their experience’, that is, they are the ones who know best about how they are feeling and what they are thinking (Delpit, 1988:297). As Shacklock et al (1998) suggest:

Having [a] voice is about making epistemic interventions into the dominant expressions of knowledge about some kind of life experience and thus making more permeable the inhibitive discursive boundaries that exclude marginalised selves (Shacklock et al, 1998:4).

However, what Delpit (1988), Oldfather (1995), and Shacklock et al (1998) allude to is that having a voice is only significant if young people feel they have safe spaces from which they can talk. More importantly young people need to feel that their contributions or life experiences are important to others and that they are heard otherwise they remain marginalised. Oldfather (1995, cited in Shacklock et al, 1998:4) argues that ‘finding voice is about seizing the agency integral to putting out self-knowledge of the world in ways not otherwise possible’. As Garcia, Kilgore, Rodriguez, and Thomas (1995) argue, young people only feel valued when they feel heard, listened to, and responded to in ways that are honouring.

Methodological implications of voice

Tuhiwai Smith, Boler, Kempton, Ormond, Ho-Chia and Waetford (2002:171) in their research with young rural Māori wanted to ‘hear it like it is’. To achieve this, they aimed to privilege youth voice through a methodology consisting of focus groups for the first phase and a youth tribunal for the second. To prepare for these two phases, they organised a programme that included research training and mentoring for beginning researchers, along

with two advisory groups. One consisted of youth workers, including youth representatives, and the other consisted of international advisors in qualitative youth research. However, even with such a strong methodological approach and their level of expertise, they found that hearing authentic voices can be problematic.

Tuhiwai Smith et al (2002:171) argue that 'voice is a form and an expression of knowledge and power'. They also argue that 'silence may mean resistance and a refusal to participate and that voice and silence are produced and mediated by the structures of race, class and gender' (Tuhiwai Smith et al, 2002:171). Therefore, some 'voices are rendered meaningless while others carry a weight of significance' (Tuhiwai Smith et al, 2002:171). They highlight how the 'different cultural and linguistic resources voice their relationships to place and identity' and suggest there may be no such thing as a neutral or possibly authentic voice (Tuhiwai Smith et al, 2002:169).

Drawing on the work of Fine (1991), Tuhiwai Smith et al, (2002) argue that voice is a social product, which is not pure, uncontaminated, or unadulterated. They discuss the idea that 'voice is a dichotomy, consisting of the concepts of voice and silence; while 'voice is good and powerful, silence is bad and represents powerlessness'. Therefore, the idea that we can 'hear it like it is' raises the question of how do 'we', as others, demonstrate to young people that we are listening or that we value and understand what they are telling us? As O'Boyle (2013) queries, do we, when young people talk, value their opinions in the context of education, and are they valued in public discourse?

O'Boyle (2013:128) draws on the work of Bourdieu to suggest that young people are not heard because 'young people's talk is not perceived to be as legitimate as, for example, adults talk'. The lack of legitimacy or being heard may then devalue young people's 'linguistic

capital' (O'Boyle, 2013:128). Legitimacy, or the valuing of young people's voices, is the reason Tuhiwai Smith et al (2002:171) specifically designed a methodology to 'hear it like it is' or 'hear it first-hand', so that these ethical challenges or questioning of values were minimised. What they strived to maintain is what Czerniawski and Garlick (2011:279) call a 'contextual sensitivity', meaning we must be 'sensitive to the actions, symbols, and relationships that may carry different meanings in different societies and cultures' when working with young people.

Gilligan et al (2003) highlights the concept of sensitivity to the way that we, as researchers, need to be receptive to young people's perceptions of us in that voice is responsive to the outer world. In an interview situation, they argue that it is how young people perceive the researcher, which may influence the amount of talk gathered. Meaning that their perceptions of us, as the researchers, may determine whether that young person chooses to speak; therefore, if we have a tense research situation then the voice will be constrained or flat, or possibly non-existent (Gilligan et al, 2003).

If voice is as Gilligan et al (2003) suggests, responsive to the outside world and influences how young people respond to us whether they talk or not, then how we hear young people in an interview situation is also responsive to the outside world. Therefore, the complexity of using voice as a research approach can be problematic when considering the issues of 'engaged listening' (Forsey, 2010:558). What engaged listening *is* and the ways we *do* engaged listening is determined by our own subjectivities of how we *hear* voice and *interpret* voice, which can lead to unintentional ethical challenges in the gathering of young people's vulnerable voices. That is, challenging by the way 'we', as 'others', join our voices with the voices of young people and unintentionally stop them from talking.

When the silence in an interview session becomes uncomfortable, or when tensions arise as participants struggle to answer questions, do we unwittingly replace *their* voices with *our* voices and call that information gathered data? Young people who choose not to talk about their inner thoughts and feelings may use silence in ways as another method of communication to hide their thoughts and feelings creating a feeling of safety. However, others may interpret this silence as a form of resistance and act accordingly. Young people who choose to resist or use silence may find themselves labelled as troublemakers and made to feel excluded. However, it is how we interpret silence, which as I discuss in the next section, can be just as complex and as ethically challenging as listening to, and interpreting voice.

Silence, the counterpart of voice

Silence can be described as something that happens inside your head, or as ‘nonlinear brain processes’ (Bruneau, 2009:881). Bruneau (2009:881) notes that silence relates to verbal and non-verbal interactions and that ‘silencing’ focuses on ‘restricting the speech and expressions of ourselves and others’. In Western societies, not talking can be seen as a virtue, compared with people who are deemed by others to be too talkative. Silence can be mystical, a quiet time for reflection, or a remembering of instances past and secret hopes for the future. Silences can include pausing during speech, an inability to speak, interruptions, feeling socially awkward, not being sure of what or how to say what you mean, or feeling too emotional to speak. Silences can expose clues about a person’s emotional wellbeing and for the engaged listener, may provide opportunities to ‘develop empathy and understanding’ (Bruneau, 2009:884). However, it is the concept of ‘silencing’ that has the most impact on young people and their opportunities to speak, in particular the way they voice (or do not voice) their concerns about school. Smyth, Hattam et al (2004:78) suggest that ‘young people

find it impossible to find a [safe] space in which to voice their concerns' about school life. They argue that when young people fail to find expression, or are blocked from expressing, the experience of not being heard, or responded to, may lead a young person to 'outright sabotage or silence' (Smyth, Hattam et al, 2004:78).

As previously discussed, Tuhiwai Smith et al (2002:171) propose that voice co-exists with the notion of silence and suggests 'voice is good and represents power, [whereas] silence is bad and represents powerlessness'. Therefore, the choice to talk, or not to talk, can be ambiguous and perceived as resistance. Like voice, silence is multi-dimensional and the way silence is interpreted has to do with power and privilege (Roberts 2000). Roberts (cited in Montoya 2000:343) argues that 'dominant groups are often ignorant about silence's multiple meanings they tend to misinterpret the silences of subordinated people'. Roberts (cited in Montoya, 2000:325) suggests silence can be deployed as a form of 'anti-subordination', in which silence and silencing may be a 'product of oppression or a means of resisting oppression'.

Fine (1987) discusses the concept of institutional silencing when she argues that silencing restricts young people's opportunities to engage in communicative expression. Fine (1987:157) argues that 'silencing constitutes a process of institutionalised policies and practices which obscure the very social, economic, and therefore experiential conditions of students' daily lives and impacts on the way young people experience mainstream schooling. She argues that schools are paradoxical; they empower individuals by increasing a young person's social mobility via getting an education, yet those who speak ill or undesirably of the education system or an individual school can feel 'buried, camouflaged, and discredited' (Fine, 1987:157). Furthermore, young people may find themselves excluded if they resist

school rules, interrupt classroom dynamics, or develop a negative relationship with their teacher. Therefore, silence as a concept identifies and explores insights into how silencing is enacted within the lived experiences of young people who are disengaged.

Bruce, Clelland, Macfarlane, Mikaere-Wallis, Ruddenklau, Taula, and Taula (2014:2) propose that ‘young people disengage from schooling for a range of complex reasons’ and that the steps to re-engage young people back into education can be just as complex. In the following section, I define and explore the ways disengagement impacts on young people who are categorised as disengaged from mainstream secondary schooling.

A discussion on disengagement

Smyth, Hattam et al (2004) argue that disengagement from education is the most pervasive and pressing education issue confronting affluent Western countries today. Their concern focuses on the impact of leaving school early, which produces the disconnection and tragic displacement from schooling of increasing numbers of young people, mostly those from backgrounds of disadvantage (Smyth, Hattam et al, 2004). They suggest that despite enormous policy efforts, disengagement seems to be a problem that is impossible to dislodge within the existing education policy paradigms, paradigms they suggest that appear to be exacerbating the problem. Smyth, Hattam et al (2004) suggest that open for debate is the question, have young people given up on school, or have schools given up on young people? They argue that whatever the causes of disengagement, countries such as Australia, US, UK, Canada and New Zealand have a growing proportion of young people who are falling into the category of being disengaged from mainstream secondary schooling.

In the UK, the disadvantages for young people disengaging or leaving education early came into political focus in 1990 with the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. His concern about young people prompted a global interest in NEET terminology and the impact being NEET

had on young people. Concerned about the numbers of unemployed young people in the UK, Blair noted in the foreword of the 1999 report, *Bridging the Gap*, that every year 161,000 young people aged between 16 and 18 are not involved in any education, employment, or training. He argued that for the majority, these are wasted and frustrating years that lead, inexorably, to lower paid work and worse job prospects in later life (SEU, 1999). Blair's biggest concern was that young people who were 'not participating' or who were not 'actively engaged' in employment, education, or training resulted in social exclusion. The extract from the report below describes the impact social exclusion has on young people who through being disengaged are more likely to be:

...by the age of 21, not only more likely to be unqualified, untrained and unemployed, but are also likely to earn less if employed, be a parent and experience depression and poor physical health. Men are also more likely to acknowledge a criminal record as a barrier to employment. Women are also more likely to live in rented accommodation and considerably more likely to be coping with the additional burdens of home-care responsibilities, and concede that these present a barrier to employment. These later life experiences are common to many people who have, for example, grown up in poverty or left school without qualifications, whatever they did between 16 and 18 (SEU, 1999:33).

However, at the time of publication, the report observed that youth unemployment rates in the UK were rising.

Stuart Middleton (2008:5) offers a definition of disengagement from a New Zealand perspective, and proposes there are three types of disengagement that young people experience: 'physical, virtual, and unintended'. 'Physical disengagement' refers to when a young person is no longer physically at school; not being at school tends to follow an increasing pattern of truancy to the point where they either leave of their own accord or the schools asks them to leave. 'Virtual disengagement' is where a young person is at school and enjoying extra-curricular activities such as sport, but may have low engagement within the classroom and is passing few or no NCEA credits, therefore limiting their options for further

education and training. ‘Unintended disengagement’ means that events outside the young person’s control have contributed to their leaving school with few or no NCEA credits.

Duffy and Elwood (2013) propose that disengagement is multi-dimensional, highlighting young people’s emotional states, their behavioural engagement, and the way that young people learn academically. They argue there are many factors that may either inhibit or encourage young people’s engagement in learning. These factors are young people’s relationships with teachers and peers, the quality of teaching they receive and their choice of school subjects. Another factor is their relatedness to school; that is, how the young person feels connected to school, their sense of belonging and their level of acceptance at school. More importantly, and from a policy perspective, young people need to be able to choose and pursue qualifications that are most appropriate for their needs and aspirations for their futures. However, the opportunities in New Zealand for young people to choose a vocation or training programme that appeals to them is mostly dictated by the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s.

Nairn and Higgins (2011:180) describe these neoliberal reforms as based on the ‘assumptions of individualism’, which include ‘independence, meritocracy (operating through markets), competition, constraints on public spending, and last, the promotion of particular versions of success’. The following section explores these reforms in more detail and I outline how schools have adapted to these reforms and the impact they have on young people.

Neoliberal educational policy reforms and being NEET

Openshaw, Adams, and Hamer (2005) argue that the fourth Labour Government (1984–1990) under the leadership of David Lange created an intense period of change for all New Zealanders. From the 1980s to the 1990s, free market ideologies extended from New Zealand

into a global market and at the time, the social consequences of such neoliberal reforms were ignored (Kelsey, 1999).

In 1989, the Labour Government introduced 'Tomorrow's Schools' and therefore overhauled the administration of state schools in New Zealand. Schools came under the management of Board of Trustees (BOT), a partnership that involved parents and schools working together, therefore becoming categorised as individual units. Under the management structure of a BOT, schools became more performance based than they had been under the previous administration and created a competitive environment in which schools competed for resources and the best students.

In 1993, the Government overhauled the New Zealand Curriculum Framework and determined that the curriculum should include technology and emphasise the sciences, along with mathematics and languages, providing young people with an education that would assist them in the global job market. The key to New Zealand making progress in the global economy depended on these essential skills. The Government believed that linked together, the ideas of participation, curriculum, and achievement would help New Zealand become a 'post-industrialised knowledge society' (Openshaw et al, 2005:44).

In pushing New Zealand to be competitive in the global economy, the Lange Government introduced competition into the primary and secondary markets and sold off state assets such as the railways. By the end of the 1980s, the number of jobs available in factories, freezing works and carpet mills had radically decreased. Loss of work, coupled with the welfare benefit reforms of the 1990s, saw families who were already living hand-to-mouth were suffering the most through the lack of financial resources. Harvey (2005) defines neoliberalism as:

A theory of political, economic practices, which proposes that human wellbeing, can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices (Harvey, 2005, cited in Kelsey, 2008:2).

The focus of the 1990s centred on the neoliberal concept of individual choice, with a shift away from primary production and manufacturing to a service economy or tertiary sector in which we provided services and not goods. As manufacturing and other service industries contracted, restructuring of the professions of accounting, law and information technology occurred in response to globalisation, promoting New Zealand as a vibrant knowledge economy. As a result, apprenticeships dwindled and the removal of tariff protection decimated the manufacturing sector, exposing New Zealand to greater global competition, with Government assistance only for the production of motor vehicles, apparel, and footwear (Kelsey, 1999). Young people's opportunities for employment dwindled, particularly for those who did not want to go to university or for those that wanted to learn a trade.

Tuhiwai Smith (2012:219) argues from an indigenous perspective or Māori world view that neoliberalism pushed indigenous communities to the margins, where their 'languages and culture have been obliterated, assimilated or at best hybridized into some other culture'. Tuhiwai Smith (2012) further argues that Māori people had little reason to support Government policies that predated the 1980s due to the marginalising of their communities after decades of reform. She suggests that while the neoliberal reforms were dangerous for some Māori, other Māori saw the reforms as a way of engaging in the economy. Tuhiwai Smith (2012:219) claims that while 'competition and individualism' are not part of the Māori view of collaboration and collective identity, these neoliberal economic reforms became the status quo for younger generations of both indigenous and non-indigenous people, as 'the taken-for-granted knowledge that underpins society'. Therefore, the taken-for-granted

knowledge is the ‘social, political, historical, intellectual, and cultural legitimacy of Māori people’, in that it is a position ‘where Māori language, culture, knowledge, and values are accepted in their own right’ (Smith, 1992, cited in Bishop, 1996:12). An example of this taken-for-granted knowledge is education and how education for Māori and non-Māori is perceived as a vehicle for upward social mobility or a way out of inequality and poverty.

According to Rata (2011), the reality is that educational achievement for Māori and non-Māori reflects a disparity in achievement rates, with young Māori males being the lowest group of achievers. Rata (2011) suggests there are two ongoing arguments that may explain why Māori struggle more than non-Māori do at school. First, is the argument based on available resources (an orthodox Marxist social class-based approach), that focuses on whether families have the financial resources to engage in all areas of the school curriculum. The second argument is the cultural debate that suggests Māori underperform at school due to a lack of cultural recognition in the classroom.

Tuhiwai Smith (2013:229) draws on a class-based approach to argue that the ‘hegemony of neoliberalism has closed minds and conversations’ to dealing with poverty because we ‘believe’ as a nation that people choose to be poor. This is because ‘we’ do not want to talk about what real poverty is and how this directly influences society and that inequality does exist in New Zealand. She suggests that poverty in popular discourse is defined as ‘dumb decisions made by stupid and irresponsible people’ (Tuhiwai Smith, 2013:229). Conversely, those that make good decisions based on the market economy are clever people, unless of course, their business closes and they are unable to get another job. Under these circumstances, their ability to pick themselves up relies on individual effort and if unable to find employment, ‘it is their fault because they were not sufficiently efficient, cheap, or

flexible enough to learn new skills’ (Tuhiwai Smith, 2013:229). The inference is that they have chosen their impoverished circumstances.

The second argument for low Māori achievement focuses on a 1970s Marxist culturalist explanation that suggests ‘the cause of low Māori educational attainment is the result of unequal power relations established in the colonial period and remaining into the present day’ (Rata, 2011:10). Therefore, cultural theorists argue the achievement gap is because of the lack of emphasis or value on placed on ‘Māori culture expressed through culturally oppressive pedagogical relations between teachers and Māori students’ (Rata, 2011:13).

Rata (2011:11) proposes that a ‘number of sociologists of education in New Zealand do support the socio-economic class explanation for the educational underachievement of a group of Māori’ such as Chapple (2000), Marie, Ferguson and Boden (2008), and Nash, (2001). However, since the 1970s the debate over this explanation has evolved as deeply divisive with a class based approach accused of creating a deficit perspective that places the blame onto young people and their families socio-economic status who under achieve, more so, if they are working class and Māori.

Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh and Teddy (2007) argue that young Māori underachieve at school because the quality of the relationships and interactions between the teachers and Māori students are lacking. However, for young people underachieving at school whether for socio-economic or for cultural reasons, 40 years of intense debate has not stopped young people having to experience the consequences of failing at school (Rata, 2011). However, as I

discuss below, the Government's initiative *Ka Hikitia*¹² originating in 2008 is intent on narrowing this achievement gap by focusing on providing an education for Māori and Pasifika students that reflects their values, that is, their identity, language, and culture.

In a bid to improve young Māori and Pasifika people's level of educational achievement the Hon. Hekia Parata at the 2013 New Zealand Education Summit, promoted the idea that knowledge, qualifications, and skills are the keys that open doors to better jobs, leading to improved economic and social outcomes for young New Zealanders. In her strategy for lifting educational achievement across the education system, Parata argued that lifting achievement requires every part of our education system to be doing the best that the system can; we cannot, she maintained, 'relocate the difficulties to the next part of the system'. She argued that this is how a whole generation of young people can fall through the cracks, becoming disengaged, dislocated, and disappointed. While Parata did not describe in detail the system to which young people often 'relocate', relocating assumes that young people are then transitioning into alternative education,¹³ training, the youth benefit,¹⁴ or being categorised as NEET. One of Parata's initiatives focused on making NCEA Level 2 a minimum educational requirement for young people. She argued that attaining this level would give young people choices that would give them real and meaningful options for further education, vocational training, or employment.

¹² *Ka Hikitia: Accelerating Success 2013–2017*, Ministry of Education, 2013.

¹³ Alternative education aims to provide a constructive alternative delivery of education for students who may have had negative experiences in a mainstream school setting. These students may have been habitual truants, while other students are deemed behaviourally challenging and are consequently excluded from school ([www.http://alternativeeducation.tki.org.nz](http://alternativeeducation.tki.org.nz)).

¹⁴ Youth Payment is a weekly payment that helps young people, aged 16 or 17 who can't live with their parents or guardian and aren't supported by them or anyone else, have no dependent children, are a New Zealand citizen or permanent resident.

For young people who disengage from education, the Government responded to youth unemployment with the reforms of the 1980s by providing various labour market policies to help young people find work or return to education. Examples of the more current providers are Te Kete I Purangi (alternative education providers) Youth Guarantee¹⁵ (Youth Service providers), Teen Parent Units¹⁶ in mainstream schools and Te Kura Correspondence School.¹⁷ Tuhiwai Smith (2013) suggests that historically some of these Government initiatives are viewed as solutions to poverty and are often ‘cynically designed’ and ‘funded on recycled resources from previous programmes closed down for a lack of outcomes’ (Tuhiwai Smith, 2013:230). Her argument is that these programmes ‘prepare the unemployed with more work skills, computer literacy, work readiness and interview skills, as if somehow their skill development will create jobs where none exist’ (Tuhiwai Smith, 2013:230). Therefore, young people who move into these new learning environments having left school, place their failure (of not getting back into education), or on a programme (and not finding a job at the end of the course) as being their own fault for not working hard enough. Nairn and Higgins (2011) refer to this ‘feeling of failure’ as a ‘meritocratic discourse’. For young people who are ‘unsuccessful in education’, feeling unsuccessful may carry ‘emotional implications’ that are only too real (Nairn & Higgins, 2011:180).

¹⁵ Youth Guarantee provides fees-free tertiary places for eligible domestic students aged 16 to 19 years who are studying towards a qualification at levels 1, 2 or 3 on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) (including NCEA); Tertiary Education, <http://www.tec.govt.nz>

¹⁶ ATPENZ is a professional association of New Zealand Teen Parent Schools and attached Early Childhood Centres, established to promote the provision of ongoing education for young parents and to support the efforts of the schools and teachers who provide these opportunities and to provide professional support, advocacy and co-ordination to Teen Parent Units in New Zealand, <http://teenparentschools.org.nz/about-atpenz/>

¹⁷ Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu- the Correspondence School—we provide distance education from early childhood level to Year 13. Our learning advisors, teachers and in-region staff work with students, their whanau and communities to help our students achieve their potential, <http://www.tekura.school.nz/>

Nairn and Higgins (2011:182) argue that the term ‘early school leaver’ suggests the young person has made the active decision to leave but obscures the fact that schools may push young people to leave, making this choice a ‘forced choice’ or as Middleton (2008) previously suggested their leaving is an unintended disengagement. Therefore, schools who consider young people as troublesome and are a risk to a school’s reputation may then ask a young person to leave, even when they may not want to leave.

Ministry of Education (MOE) policy surrounding young people who decide to leave school early or disengage from mainstream secondary schooling before turning 16 years of age requires that they get an early-leaving exemption from their school. Statistics New Zealand reports that since MOE restricted the criteria for early-leaving exemptions in May 2007, the rate of exemptions has dropped by over 90%.¹⁸ A request for an early-leaving exemption does not guarantee that the young person can leave mainstream secondary schooling altogether. For early-leaving approval to occur there must be proof of misconduct, educational problems or doubt that the student will benefit from attending other available schools. Parents, caregivers or whānau must provide information regarding possible training programmes or alternative education providers that the young person may move on to if an early exemption is approved, first by the school attended and then by MOE. Once this early-leaving exemption occurs, young people come to the attention of MSD. The MSD then categorises those who do not attend an alternative education provider after leaving secondary school as NEET.

¹⁸ Statistics New Zealand May 2013.

Historically, Statistics New Zealand labelled young people who were categorised as disengaged as YNEET (youth, not in education, employment or training), with ages ranging from 15 to 19 years. The concept of YNEET originated from a lack of statistics on youth labour market engagement and according to Statistics New Zealand, the area of youth inactivity remained poorly measured. In 2004, Statistics New Zealand instigated a Household Labour Force Survey questionnaire in an attempt to rectify the lack of measurable data, as previously, only the New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings data on youth was available. By 2005, the specifications used by analysts at Statistics New Zealand had organised the youth labour market data by year and region, initially calling these measures YNEET. These measures soon changed to NEET to follow common international terminology. The data available today from Statistics New Zealand's website suggests there is a correlation between a lack of youth labour market engagement and the impact of New Zealand's neoliberal reforms. The following diagram (Figure 1.) summarises the way educational policies in New Zealand unfolded in response to these reforms and outlines Government initiatives to help young people who have disengaged from mainstream secondary schooling in a bid to improve their social and economic wellbeing.

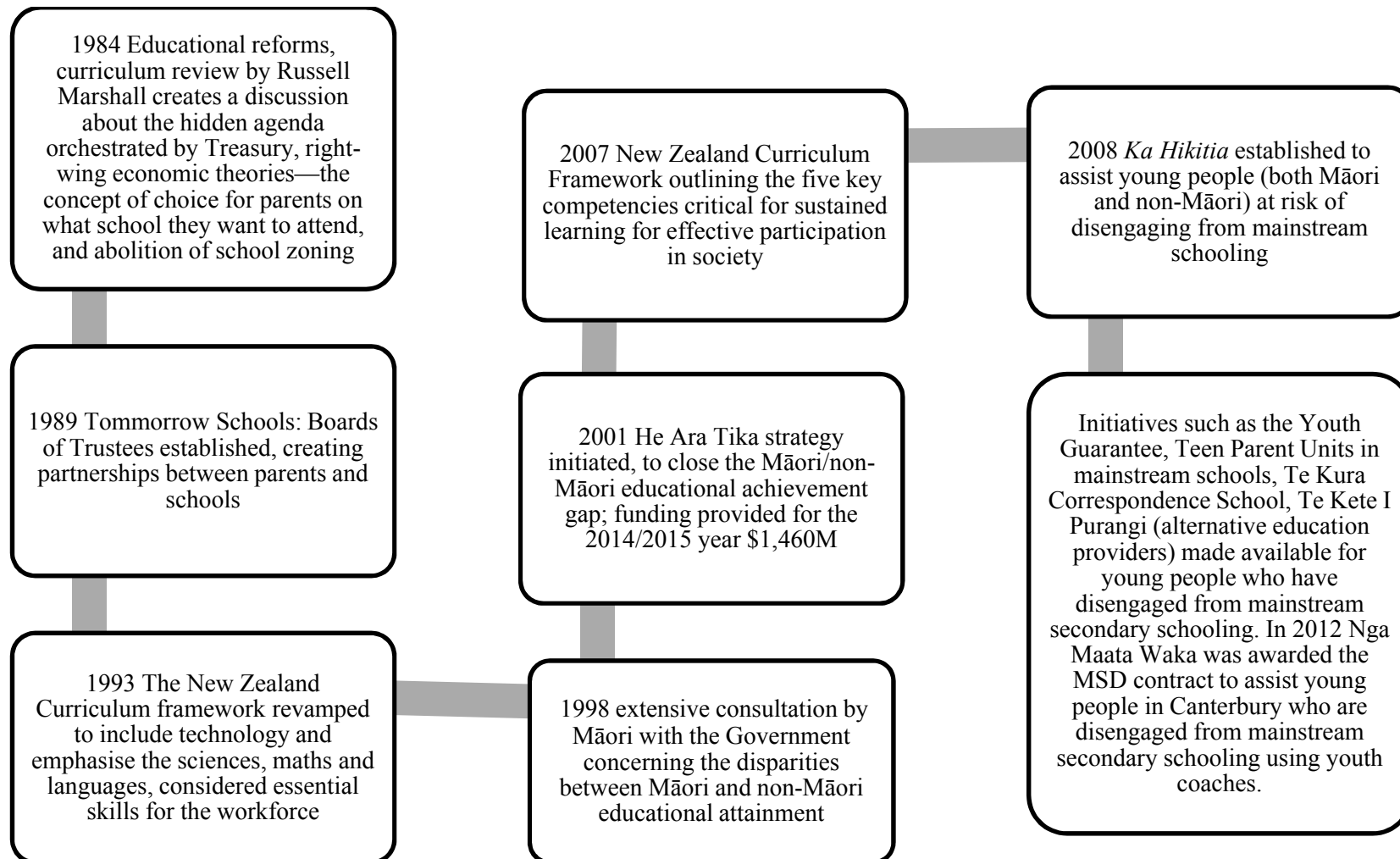


Figure 1: Timeline for the evolution of educational policies in Aotearoa, in response to New Zealand’s neoliberal economy.

Overview of the thesis

In this chapter, I introduced my ethnographic case study that seeks to explore young people's experiences of disengagement from mainstream secondary schooling through talk. I outlined my reasons for choosing voice as a research approach and I highlighted how complex and multi-dimensional employing such an approach can be. I discussed the concept of disengagement and outlined the educational reforms of the 1980s. I then linked these reforms with the way they influence young people and their vocational choices. I also introduced Rata's (2011) debate, which suggests there are two ongoing arguments that may explain why Māori struggle more than non-Māori do at school. First, is the orthodox Marxist social class-based approach, which focuses on whether families have the financial resources to engage in all areas of the school curriculum. The second argument is the cultural debate that suggests Māori underperform at school due to a lack of cultural recognition in the classroom. I drew attention to MOE policy and outlined the process young people move through; first, as an early leaver and then the process of being categorised as NEET. I also discussed *Ka Hikitia*, which seeks to close the education disparity gap between Māori and non-Māori with the aim of supporting young people to achieve a minimum of NCEA Level 2. Achieving NCEA Level 2 will give young Māori and Pasifika students choices that will give them real and meaningful options for further education, employment, or vocational training.

In **Chapter 2**, I outline the ways my chosen sociological, theoretical, and methodological framework of voice—silence, Kaupapa Māori, critical ethnography, and symbolic interactionism—guided my research process and the way this framework shaped the research question 'What are young people saying about disengaging from mainstream secondary schooling in Aotearoa-New Zealand?' I also outline and describe how the co-research design worked in practice and introduce the key people involved in the research process. I also

discuss my engagement in a Māori centred paradigm and explore the concept of *Pākehā Paralysis* and the tensions and challenges that rose from the ethics process with the Human Ethics Committee (University of Canterbury).

In **Chapter 3**, I describe my out-in-the-field research experiences as I gathered the voices of the young people with the youth coaches (my co-researchers) and the Nga Maata Waka staff in the three phases of data gathering. I discuss the focus group, the unstructured interviews with young people, and semi-structured interviews with the staff. I outline the multiple methods of data analysis drawing primarily on Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg & Bertsch, (2003) the *Listening Guide* along with thematic analysis and elements of discourse analysis to gather insights and meaning from the talk the transcripts provided.

Chapter 4 offers powerful insights into the ways young people experience disengagement. I introduce the participants and their unapologetically subjective voices that represent how they really felt about their experiences of mainstream secondary schooling. I construct their talk (from exactly the way they told the youth coach and me) through thematic and the 'I' poem format. I add to their talk by providing a discussion of the insights I gained into how the young people felt about their schooling experiences along with other young voices provided by Nairn and Higgins (2011) and Smyth, Hattam et al (2004). I also include in the analysis the field notes I took during the research process, adding another perspective to the voices discussed in this chapter.

In **Chapter 5**, I discuss what the voices of Linda Ngata, Andrew McHutchison, Matua William Motu, and Chantel Harris told me. Their voices provide a behind-the-scenes view of working in a Youth Service NEET environment. I provide an overview of their experiences

and I explore the ways the *voice of knowing* is evident in their work with young people who either are at risk or have disengaged from mainstream secondary schooling.

In this closing chapter, **Chapter 6**, I ‘look back’ on the research process to summarise what the voices of the 11 young people told me about their experiences of disengagement. In other words, what are factors that constrain or enable their concept of choice or forced choice to make the life-changing decision to leave school? I discuss the methodological limitations of using voice and Kaupapa Māori and reflect on what I would like to do differently, if I could do the research process over. To conclude the chapter I end my reflective discussion with some ideas for future research projects that have emerged from gathering voices as shared knowledge with Nga Maata Waka.

Chapter 2: A collaborative research journey

In the previous chapter, I outlined why using voice as a research approach is important to this case study as well as discussing why disengagement from education is the most pervasive and pressing education issue confronting affluent Western countries today. In this chapter, I outline the ways my chosen sociological, theoretical, and methodological framework of voice—silence, Kaupapa Māori, critical ethnography, and symbolic interactionism—guided my research process and the way this framework shaped the research question ‘What are young people saying about disengaging from mainstream secondary schooling in Aotearoa-New Zealand?’ I briefly outline the roots of Kaupapa Māori and the way this guiding philosophy informed me during the research process. My reasons for combining the multiple sociological methodologies of critical ethnography and symbolic interactionism with Kaupapa Māori is because I determined they fitted well with Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999:3) description of how Kaupapa Māori research is ‘localised critical theory’, in particular her notions of critique, resistance, struggle, and emancipation. I outline the co-research design, which we implemented to gather talk from the young people for the mutual reciprocity of gathering knowledge and introduce the key people involved in the research process. I also provide a timeline diagram detailing my preparations for entering a youth services environment and I explore my non-indigenous engagement and my discomfiting moments of *Pākehā Paralysis*. I also discuss the tensions and challenges of negotiating ethics between the Human Ethics Committee (University of Canterbury) and Nga Maata Waka, particularly with the issues of parental consent and wider Māori consultation, along with my visit to the Ngāi Tahu Research Centre. I also discuss the importance of trust in my collaborative relationship with Nga Maata Waka.

The diagram below (Figure 2) illustrates how weaving these theories and methodologies together created a theoretical and methodological framework that I considered best suited to exploring the talk from the young people at Nga Maata Waka.

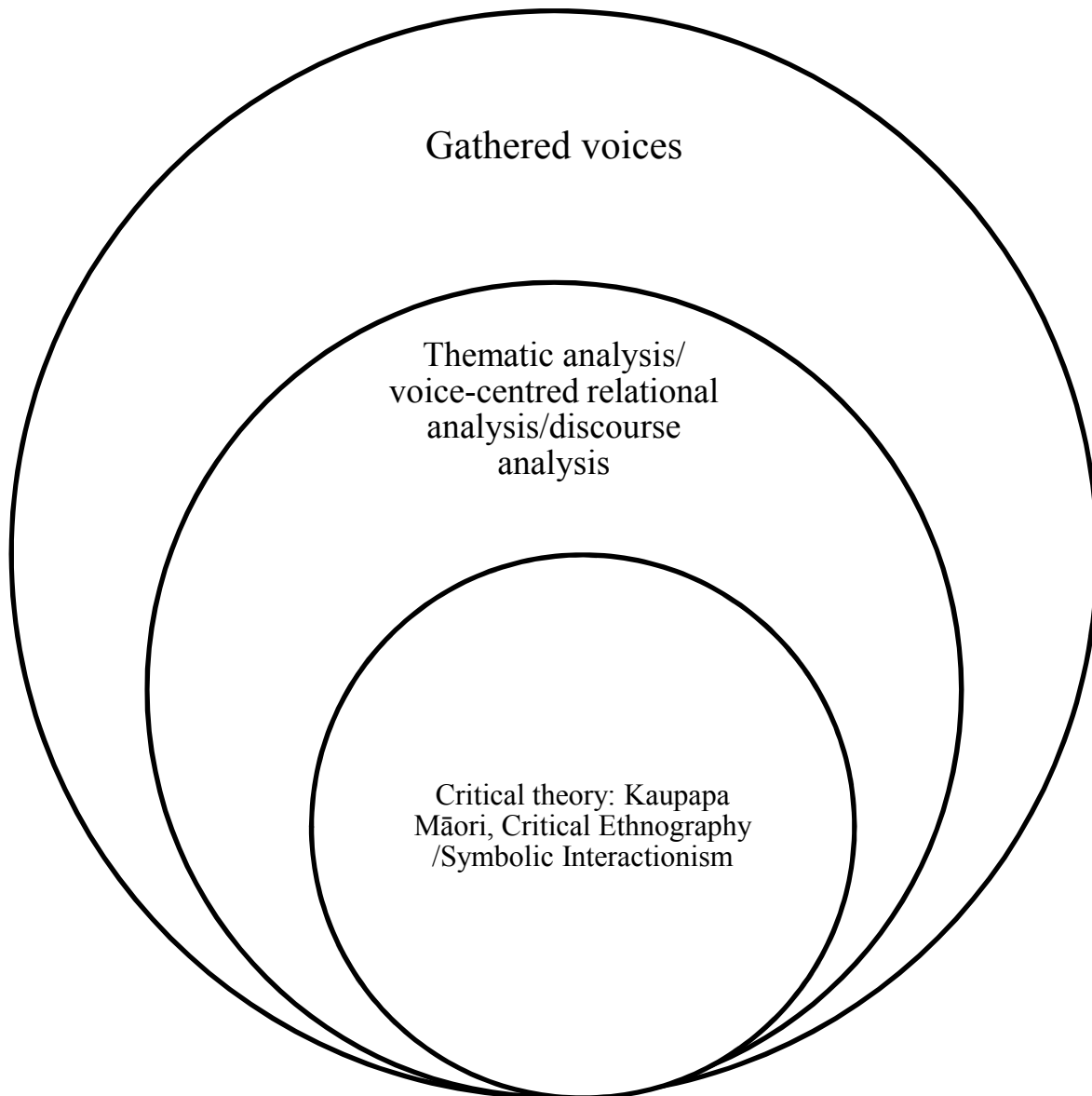


Figure 2: Relationship showing the multiple theoretical and methodological approaches that shaped the framework for this ethnographic case study.

Kaupapa Māori in the theoretical framework

Tuhiwai Smith (2012:193) defines Kaupapa Māori as a research approach that is ‘based on the assumption that Kaupapa Māori not only involves Māori people and communities’, but also ‘should set out to make a positive difference’ for the Māori community, that is, there must be a benefit to the research. In her critique of dominant Westernised research methodologies, Tuhiwai Smith (1999:1) argues that historically, Māori have been ‘researched to death’ and are the ‘most researched people in the world’, referring to research conducted on Māori prior to the 1990s, as ‘legitimising colonial practices’ in New Zealand. Therefore, she suggests that any research being undertaken in a Māori context must ‘address seriously the cultural ground rules of respect, working with communities, of sharing processes and knowledge’ (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:193). Tuhiwai Smith defines Kaupapa Māori as follows:

Kaupapa Māori research is a social project; it weaves in and out of Māori cultural beliefs and values, Western ways of knowing, Māori histories, and experiences under colonialism, Western forms of education, Māori aspirations and socio-economic needs, and Western economics and global politics (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:193).

Anaru Eketone (2008:1) proposes that Kaupapa Māori has ‘two major and in some ways, opposing viewpoints’. The first viewpoint focuses on how Māori communities ‘usually refers to Kaupapa Māori as a group or organisation that operates using Māori cultural values’, for example, ‘Māori language schools or Kura Kaupapa Māori’. Secondly, in academic circles Kaupapa Māori usually refers to a ‘Māori philosophical approach to a field of practice or theory that focuses on challenging well established Western ideas about knowledge’ (Eketone 2008:1). Walker, Eketone and Gibbs (2006) argue that Māori academics have challenged the legitimacy of Māori knowledge, creating tensions with the view that knowledge gathered from Māori by non-Māori lacks legitimacy. To overcome the issue of legitimacy and the associated negative interpretations, Walker et al (2006:332) argue that a commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi could give rise to ‘greater collaboration between non-Māori and Māori’,

to protect participants who provide knowledge for research purposes. Ultimately, Kaupapa Māori research is not about 'researcher control; it is about the collective care of knowledge, culture and values' (Walker et al, 2006:337).

Tuhiwai Smith (1999) also suggests that Kaupapa Māori is a discussion about critical theory in particular her 'notions of critique, resistance, struggle, and emancipation' and describes Kaupapa Māori as a tool for analysing existing power structures and social inequalities (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999:3). Therefore, Kaupapa Māori aligns with critical theory to expose the underlying assumptions that serve to conceal the power relations that exist within society. However, she draws on Bishop (1994) who suggests that critical theory has failed to 'address the issues' that stop Māori from seeking and achieving their emancipatory goals.

Eketone (2008) argues that critical theory has developed from a Marxist/socialist theoretical positioning, which seeks to challenge and transform oppressive structures. Graham Smith (1997) argues there are three significant components of Kaupapa Māori that align themselves with critical theory. The first is 'conscientisation or revealing the reality', a process that critiques and deconstructs the hegemonic forces that marginalise Māori knowledge. The second is 'resistance or oppositional reactions', which is, responding to oppression, exploitation, manipulation, and containment. The third component is 'reflective change' (Smith, 1997, as cited in Eketone, 2008:2). This involves not only critiquing what is wrong, but also means applying the information learned. Combined, these three components complement my choice to use critical ethnography, where my methodological approach to gathering the voices of young people is what I consider to be doing 'critical theory in action' (Madison, 2005:13).

Critical ethnography in the theoretical framework

Madison (2005) suggests that critical ethnography has an 'ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain' and that our ethical responsibility (a duty and a commitment) is to explore social injustices 'based on the moral principles of human freedom and wellbeing' (Madison, 2005:5). Evolved from the ideologies of neo-Marxism and feminist theory, critical ethnography is political and as a theory and a methodology, it aims to generate 'insights, explain events and to seek understanding' of individuals' social realities and the ways they connect with the outer world (Anderson, 1989:249).

Karen O'Reilly (2009) also argues that critical ethnography is explicitly political and critical. She draws on the work of Madison (2005) to argue that 'every attempt at representation has consequences and there is no neutrality' (Madison, 2005:6). Therefore, aware of my own experiences of disengagement I selected elements of critical ethnography (knowledge, ethics, representation, and reflexivity) and linked them with Kaupapa Māori. Linking these together helped to get beneath the surface of the sociocultural experiences of the young people and to reflect on my own performance as a novice researcher. Critical ethnography kept the issue of ethically representing young people's voices to the forefront of the analysis and highlighted, where applicable, the ways the voices of others overpowered those of the participants. My exploration into the social, cultural, political, and economic issues that are 'interpreted and represented to illustrate the processes of oppression' is of relevance (Cook, 2008:149). Therefore, I look for the ways these invisible processes of oppression may influence these young people and their choices so I can get behind the taken-for-granted knowledge that young people accept as real.

Critical ethnography also assisted me in the construction of the topic guides. Because I wanted to explore their ‘taken-for-granted’ or their ‘status quo’ knowledge, I constructed open-ended questions with this in mind (Madison, 2005:5). I wanted to explore Madison’s concept of ‘bringing to light’ (2005:5) concerning whether young people were able to *change* their circumstances from within a mainstream secondary school setting. In other words, I wanted to know if these young people had felt they could *challenge* the status quo or the existing rules of the secondary school they attended.

I also looked to critical ethnography because of its emphasis on the emancipation of voices, particularly those voices marginalised by a dominant culture. Therefore, critical ethnography linked with Kaupapa Māori, enables me to analyse existing power structures to see behind the statistics to examine the ways young people and others perceive notions of power within a schooling environment. Linked with this critique are issues of ‘whiteness and privilege’ and the ways this privilege is invisible and therefore taken-for-granted by those who have access to it (Madison, 2005:73). However, it is how young people find or make meaning from the taken-for-granted knowledge they experience that the last theory in the framework, symbolic interactionism seeks to explore.

Symbolic interactionism in the theoretical framework

I chose symbolic interactionism and the elements of ‘intersubjectivity’, ‘emotionality’, and ‘embodiment’ to illuminate and define young people’s interactions and emotions about their day-to-day experiences of disengagement. As a method of analysis, symbolic interactionism enabled me to examine how young people make meaning from their experiences about being NEET and how being NEET affects their relationships with their whānau, peers, and community. However, analysing these feelings and emotions through talk can be an ethical

minefield because young people convey their emotions either verbally and non-verbally, making their methods of communication complex and multi-dimensional. Madison (2005) defines symbolic interactionism as:

...a method of analysis that describes human beings as both products and producers of symbols. These symbols are constructed and reconstructed, whereby meanings (and meanings of those meanings) form social processes that guide human behaviour and experiences (Madison, 2005:64).

Denzin (1992) draws on the work of phenomenologist William James to argue that the stream of experience is unique to each person, with a continuously shifting awareness of his or her social reality. The self as the knower or subject, the 'I', is at the centre of an individual's state of consciousness. In the participants' lived experiences of disengagement, the 'I' interacts with the 'me' or self as object (Denzin, 1992:4). In their social relationships, young people experience their state of consciousness through the process of introspection, or reflection of their thoughts and emotions they exhibit when interacting with others at school, at home, or in the community.

Smyth, Hattam et al (2004:87) propose that young people 'doing', or who 'do', 'emotional labour' highlight the ways young people acquire perspectives, do activities and develop relationships. Young people, they suggest, need to manage their own and others emotions—for example, desire, fear, despair, caring, disillusionment, pain, anger, stress, anxiety, loneliness—through developing defence mechanisms. These defence mechanisms can be communicated through silence and used as an emotional barrier. Young people can also use their body language to embody their resistance or their refusal to talk.

Ellingson (2008) defines embodied knowledge as knowledge that is sensory and encompasses smell, touch, taste, sight, and sound. For young people, their embodied knowledge encompasses 'uncertainty, ambiguity, and the messiness of everyday life' (Ellingson,

2008:245). Voice, when used as a research methodology, highlights this messiness in the ways that the voices of the participants are understood and positioned as being an epistemological imperative; that is, the knowledge or narratives from the young people are ‘unapologetically subjective’ therefore they are celebrating their own individual complexities of voice when they speak (Ellingson, 2008:245). Therefore, how young people portray this ‘embodied knowledge’ verbally and non-verbally is what I will be observing in my shadowing role (Ellingson, 2008:245).

Symbolic interaction in this sense moves the young person beyond using language as a form of communication to the body as a ‘central resource’ (Waskul & Vannini, 2006:285). They argue, the way the young people communicate their emotions through their body language while they discuss their experiences, communicates their ‘social interaction’ with others (Waskul & Vannini, 2006:285). This facilitates understanding of the way young people make sense of, or find meaning from their experiences of disengaging from mainstream secondary schooling. Therefore, combining the theories of Kaupapa Māori, elements of critical ethnography, and symbolic interactionism will assist in providing multiple lenses to highlight through talk the ways young people negotiate or experience their social reality around them.

Disengaged young people register with Nga Maata Waka’s Youth Service for a variety of complex reasons. In their sessions with a youth coach, they talk about their personal issues or experiences about what made staying at school difficult. They then discuss with their youth coach their options and they either make plans to register with the Youth Guarantee initiative or find a vocational training programme they would like to attend or re-engage in some form of education. In the following section, I introduce the participants and the key people

involved in the research process. I also discuss the services Nga Maata Waka provides and in what ways they assist young people who come to the Youth Service.

Nga Maata Waka: an indigenous Youth Service NEET provider

In 2012, MSD awarded Nga Maata Waka the contract to provide youth services from the Nga Hau e Wha Marae¹⁹ in the eastern suburbs of Christchurch to the young people of Canterbury. Nga Maata Waka is an approved community services provider for Child Youth and Family, and the staff ‘provide social work support and being registered and accredited by the NZQA²⁰ under the Education Act as a Private Training Establishment’.²¹ Nga Maata Waka is the primary contract holder for Youth Service NEET in Canterbury. It subcontracts to five other providers who, with Nga Maata Waka, cover Christchurch City, Selwyn District, and Ashburton District, delivering the Youth Service NEET programme. These organisations are the Academy Group Ltd, Avonmore Tertiary Institute, Motivationz Ltd, Selwyn District Council, and Grow Mid-Canterbury.

The key people in this case study are:

- Linda Ngata—Executive Management, reports to the Board and gave her approval for the research project.
- Andrew McHutchison—Operations Manager, has a key reporting role to the MSD regarding the regulatory requirements for Nga Maata Waka as a Youth Service NEET provider.
- Matua William Motu (Matua Willy)—Break-Away Holiday Programme Coordinator and Community Services Representative who is responsible for the school holiday

¹⁹ Nga Hau E Wha National Marae is situated on approximately 14 acres of land located in the eastern suburbs of Christchurch. It is the largest national marae in New Zealand, <http://www.maata.waka.org.nz>.

²⁰ NZQA means New Zealand Qualifications Authority.

²¹ PTE’s contribute to the Government’s Tertiary Education Strategy priorities by: increasing the number of young people (aged under 25) achieving qualifications at Level 4 and above in the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF), particularly degrees, increasing the number of Māori students enjoying success at higher levels, increasing the number of Pasifika students achieving at higher levels, increasing the number of young people moving successfully from school into tertiary education, and improving literacy, language and numeracy and skills outcomes from NZQF Levels 1–3 study.

programme for young people at risk of disengaging from schooling and who teaches people to drive.

- Chantel Harris, Youth Services Team Leader—scheduled and facilitated many of the interviews and kept her team, Andrew and Linda informed during the research process.

Nga Maata Waka has a rich history of community involvement as outlined on their website.²²

Historically, Te Runanga o Nga Maata Waka came into being in the late 1970s:

Te Runanga o Nga Maata Waka was originally established as an Urban Māori Authority at the direction of the organisation's elders (Pakeke) who saw a need for a united voice, one that could symbolise the descendants of all ancestral waka. Because the people associated with the organisation did not belong to iwi in the rohe or area, they had to find a vehicle, which could address their needs.²³

An example of the way Te Runanga o Nga Maata Waka assists the indigenous peoples of Canterbury is the social services they provide. For example, Nga Maata offers to help young people with the following:

- Talk about where you are now and where you want to be.
- Figure out what might be stopping you succeeding at school, in training or in work-based learning.
- Sort out the steps you need to take to get into education, training, or work.
- Put together an action plan that will help you with your goals.
- Help you get back to school and training.
- Support you in school and training.
- Check your achievements.
- Help if you get off track.
- Update your plan when things change.
- Be your coach or go to person.²⁴

²² maatawaka.org.nz

²³ maatawaka.org.nz/about-nga-maata-waka

²⁴ <http://www.youthservice.govt.nz/about-youth-service/your-future-your-choice.html>

Having spent time talking to Linda and Andrew during the initial stages of the research process, I became interested in the role of the youth coach and how the youth coaches implement and practice youth work with particular relevance to youth policy and practice obligations to the MSD. As the co-research design unfolded, I examined these areas of interest in more detail, which assisted with shaping the questions for the topic guides.

The co-research design

This thesis came into being due to my interest in why young people were leaving school before turning 16, or leaving school at 16 with no qualifications. Having had my own experiences of disengagement I wanted to explore the concept of ‘choice’; that is, had the choice to leave school early been the young person’s choice, or had it been a forced choice? If so, who or what was forcing this choice: whānau, peers, or the school.

At our initial meeting in February 2014, Linda, Andrew, my university supervisor Dr Alison Loveridge and I discussed the ‘why, how, and when’ of the co-research design. We agreed that all aspects of the research must receive approval from the Board of Te Runanga o Nga Maata Waka before any research could proceed. Andrew then invited Chantel to be the facilitator for Nga Maata Waka and we determined the parameters of the research design. At this meeting, we discussed my spending time on the marae²⁵ hanging out or ‘embedded’ and adopting the role of a critical ethnographer (Wong, 2009:99). At the meeting, we discussed the problems of my interacting with the young people directly and establishing the trust required for a voice-oriented approach. As a critical ethnographer, I planned to sit and

²⁵ A marae is a place of learning, celebration, ceremony and meeting. It is traditionally the focal and social point of Māori community, <http://my.christchurchcitylibraries.com/nga-hau-e-wha-national-marae>

observe the staff during their working day and the young people interacting with them, hoping to gather insights into the ways young people talk about disengagement, with each other and the staff.

During our discussions at the initial meeting in February 2014, we noted that when young people first come to the Youth Service at Nga Maata Waka many of them struggle to talk about their feelings of being disengaged. Originally, Nga Maata Waka perceived my desire to hear from young people first-hand as problematic as they saw me (as I did) as an outsider rather than an insider. Due to this potential lack of talk, we agreed that we would only recruit young people who had been in mentoring sessions for six months or more. We felt they might have developed a better grasp of ‘why’ they had left school, and therefore, better able to articulate their story in an interview setting.

Through being embedded I hoped to make connections or ‘find a join’ with the young people (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:173). To overcome my outsider status and the possibility that the young people may not speak to me, Nga Maata Waka organised my ‘shadowing’ the youth coach in a session with the participant(s). We did this with the aim of minimising any possibility of my stopping the flow of talk. In this instance, we set out to achieve our own ‘contextual sensitivity’ (Czerniawski & Garlick, 2011:279). My shadowing role meant we were being ‘sensitive to the actions, symbols, and relationships that may carry different meanings in different societies and cultures’. Therefore, shadowing opened up multiple opportunities for me to observe the interactions between the youth coaches and the young people.

As the research design progressed, Nga Maata Waka provided a *Proposal for Consideration*²⁶ that set out their expectations for the operational aspects of the research. In addition to the *Proposal for Consideration*, our ability to articulate or openly communicate at all times with the team, via email or telephone, from the conception of the research process to the end, was critical to keeping all parties informed. A top-down approach to obtaining approval from Linda, via Andrew or Chantel, was necessary, particularly given that Linda was the head of my 'whānau of interest' (Bishop & Glynn, 1999:172) and our communicative style was the Kaupapa Māori guiding principle 'whakawhanaungatanga'. Bishop (1998) defines this principle as:

The process of establishing family (*whānau*) relationships, literally by means of identifying, through culturally appropriate means, your bodily linkage, your engagement, your connectedness, and therefore, an unspoken but implicit commitment to other people (Bishop, 1998:203).

From my perspective, our whānau of interest was one of the most rewarding aspects of this study. As part of Andrew's *Proposal for Consideration*, the issues of legitimacy and accountability of our shared knowledge were discussed (Bishop, 1998). Nga Maata Waka approved the publication of this thesis during the consent phase and each staff member had the right to refuse my use of any sensitive material provided. Nga Maata Waka guided the participants through a robust consent process in ways that were respectful, reflexive and honoured the legitimacy of their personal experiences of disengagement. My university supervisors and I are responsible for the research process and results of the research. The *koha* provided (the agreed 'thank you' or gift to Nga Maata Waka for supporting the research) is in the form of the executive report at the completion of this thesis. This 'thank

²⁶ See Appendix C

you token' is what Bishop and Glynn (1999) call 'a notion of agency within a whānau of interest' (Bishop & Glynn, 1999:174).

In our co-research design we decided to gather the talk in three separate phases: a focus group, unstructured interviews (with the young people), and semi-structured interviews with Linda, Andrew, Matua Willy and Chantel. The youth coaches and I facilitated the focus group, and the youth coaches the unstructured interviews. I facilitated the semi-structured interviews with the staff. The young people invited by Chantel were aged between 16 and 19 years and of the 11 who chose to participate, eight identified as Māori, one as Pacific Islander and two as NZ European. Seven were female and four were male. Three of the staff members identified as Māori (Linda, Matua Willy, and Chantel), and one as NZ European (Andrew).

We unanimously agreed that the safety of the young people was paramount and a major advantage of our collaborative approach was that Chantel and her team were aware of the ways young people may react in a stressful situation. Given their training, they would be able to assess whether to end the interview if the young person was struggling or was visibly uncomfortable during the interview. The youth coaches also knew when to dig deeper into the young people's experiences, given their history with the participant. I also realised during my conversations and email contact with Linda, Andrew, Matua Willy, and Chantel, that I lacked familiarity with the youth coaches' role and the youth services environment and set about rectifying this situation.

Researcher preparation

In preparation for my visits to Nga Maata Waka, I read most of the academic literature available that focused on young people's voices and disengagement. I also studied relevant Government reports on young people and youth work in Aotearoa-New Zealand and reports

from Statistics New Zealand to get a broad overview of young people’s participation, or lack of, in education. Listed below are examples of the New Zealand and international reports that I found to be the most beneficial:

- *Positive Youth Development in Aotearoa: ‘Weaving connections Tuhonohono rangatahi’*²⁷
- *Breaking the Cycle: Taking stock of progress and priorities for the future—a report by the Social Exclusion Unit*²⁸
- *A Matter of Perspective: Mapping Education Employment Linkages in Aotearoa-New Zealand*²⁹
- *Introducing the youth not in employment, education, or training indicator*³⁰
- *Not in employment, education or training: the long-term NEET spells of young people in New Zealand*³¹
- *Positive Youth Development through Education: Addressing Issues of (Dis) Engagement in Aotearoa/New Zealand Schools*³²

Although reading the above literature and youth strategy documents added sufficient information to my growing knowledge base, I found I wanted to have ‘real’ conversations and ‘access’ to people who were working out-in-the-field with young people who were disengaging or already disengaged. On one of my visits to Nga Maata Waka, Matua Willy in his role of He Ara Tika³³ (Youth-Mentoring) Programme Coordinator invited me to visit a Kura Kaupapa³⁴ (a Māori-language immersion school) to observe him talking to young

²⁷ Wayne Francis Charitable Trust—Youth Advisory Group, (2010).

²⁸ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London (September 2004).

²⁹ Vaughan, K., Phillips, H., Dalziel, P. & Higgins, J. (2009) EEL Research Report No. 3.

³⁰ Statistics New Zealand, (2011).

³¹ Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) (November 2013).

³² A resource for practitioners working with disengaged young people in Aotearoa/New Zealand Schools, Dr Judy Bruce et al, 2014.

³³ He Ara Tika is a mentoring programme that works specifically with young Māori students attending secondary school. The mentors are volunteers who are delivering an approved programme in the school setting. With the support of the Ministry of Education, He Ara Tika is dedicated to encouraging Māori secondary school students to remain in education and progress to tertiary study. This means providing support, mentoring and guidance throughout the school year and involving whānau, communities and stakeholders, www.maata.waka.org.nz.

³⁴ The most significant development in Māori education since the later 20th century has been the explosive growth in Māori-driven initiatives. Kōhanga reo (preschool language ‘nests’) led the way in the 1980s, followed by Kura Kaupapa Māori (Māori-language immersion schools), <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/māori-education-matauranga/page-5>.

people who were identified by the school as at risk of disengaging. What this visit provided was an opportunity for me to see the principle of whakawhanaungatanga (establishing relationships, relating well to others) in action. Additionally, the visit also provided a wonderful insight into the ways a Māori immersion school differed from a mainstream school, placing Te Reo (Māori language) and Māori culture at the forefront of the pedagogical practices experienced by the students.

After the Kura Kaupapa school visit, I volunteered to help Matua Willy with the He Ara Tika Mentoring Programme. In helping with the programme, I was able to form some ideas of the ways youth coaches or youth workers interacted with young people. I also attended, along with the young people chosen as ‘Leaders’ for the Break-Away Holiday Programme a *Code of Ethics*³⁵ training session run by a Nga Maata Waka tutors from their social services training programme. Attending this session made me aware of how young people negotiate authority, set boundaries, and are encouraged to demonstrate respectful behaviour. However, as we were too busy supervising young people during the programme, I was unable to have conversations about disengagement or young people at school that I needed with the youth workers. I realised I needed to pursue other avenues to have conversations with youth workers out-in-the-field. To do this I spent three days at a *Youth Hui wellbeing/research* workshop run by *The Youth Collaborative*.³⁶

The Youth Hui provided an excellent opportunity to talk with youth workers of all ages, learning about the way they negotiate the difficult pathways of transitioning young people out

³⁵ *Ara Taiohi: Code of Ethics* for youth work in Aotearoa New Zealand, <http://www.arataiohi.org.nz>

³⁶ The Collaborative for Research and Training in Youth Health and Development (The Collaborative) has been operating as a charitable trust since 2004.

of difficult situations to a state of wellbeing. While the focus of the workshop was on health, education played a role in the breakout sessions where we were given scenarios to find workable solutions for young people in trouble. These scenarios opened my eyes to the difficult situations experienced by many young people in Aotearoa-New Zealand, such as whānau breakdown, drug abuse, teen pregnancy, mental illness and so on, irrespective of ethnicity. Discussing solutions to these scenarios with youth workers, school nurses, psychologists, and experienced researchers gave me invaluable insights into the ways various service providers help young people. Most importantly, I discovered what a youth worker accomplished, particularly with how they facilitate young people's *talk* to connect with other service providers. To expand my knowledge further and to gain ethics accreditation, I attended another *Code of Ethics* training session for people who are working, or want to work, in the youth sector with the Canterbury Youth Workers Collective (CYWC).³⁷ Attending the CYWC gave me additional insights into the ways youth work is conducted and the way the *Code of Ethics* provides policy and practice guidelines for youth workers in Aotearoa-New Zealand.

As the research process for this study evolved, opportunities to consult with the youth coaches to discuss the required objectives were limited due to their heavy workload. Therefore, I was unable to address our expectations regarding the way the interviews would run and the depth of information or talk we required. Unfortunately, their heavy workload

³⁷ Canterbury Youth Workers Collective consists of Youth Workers and youth services in the province of Canterbury, New Zealand, and has been an Incorporated Society since 1986 with a Charitable Trust status. They are funded by the Christchurch City Council, the Canterbury Community Trust and the Department of Internal Affairs. The overall aim of the organisation is to support youth workers to provide a professional service to young people while promoting the concept that self-care is paramount.

also meant I was unable to fulfil the original research design of being ‘embedded’ or hanging out on the marae (Wong, 2009:99). However, the small amount of time I did spend with the youth coaches provided interesting, reflexive, and comprehensive field notes that I wrote drawing on critical ethnography and the element of reflexivity. During the research process, these field notes focused not just on my time spent with the youth coaches, but on any issue that required clarification to help me make sense of my research experiences. As the following section highlights, some of these experiences were due to drawing on a Kaupapa Māori approach and the ways I engaged with such an approach, particularly with the ethics approval process. The timeline below (Figure. 3) illustrates how the collaborative process unfolded and how I prepared for my out-in-the-field experiences ensuring I was familiar with the Youth Service NEET environment.

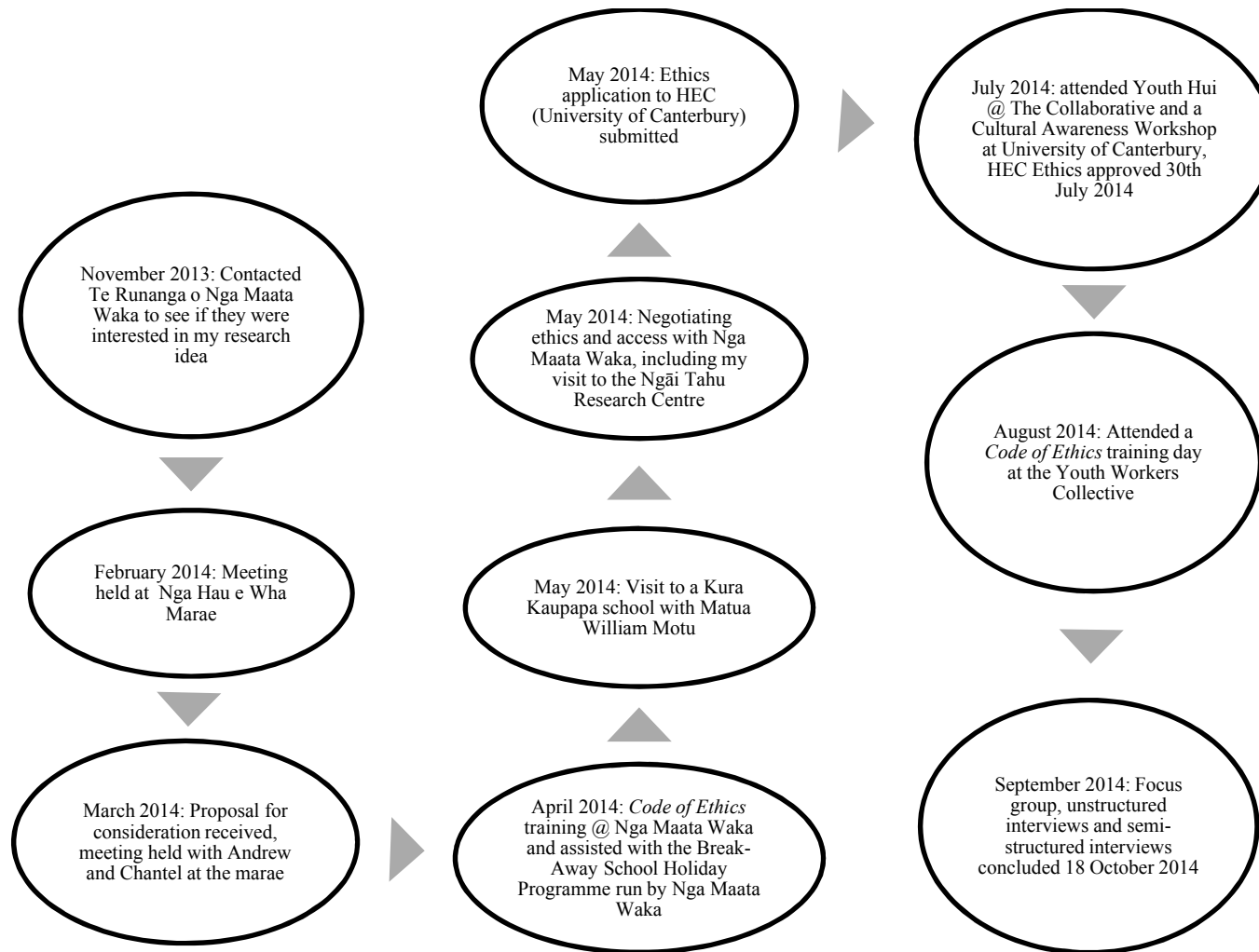


Figure 3: Timeline showing the preparation undertaken to gain familiarity with a Youth Service NEET environment.

The tensions and challenges of being Pākehā and engaging in a Māori-centred research paradigm

Bishop and Glynn (1999:172) define research groups developed specifically for research undertaken by non-indigenous researchers *with* Māori and *for* Māori, as a ‘research whānau of interest’. A ‘whānau of interest’ is an embodied group of people who share a research initiative but who have ‘differing positions according to Māori cultural preferences and practices’ (Bishop & Glynn, 1999:172). They argue that the research undertaken in this manner has a better chance of being respectful towards Māori. My ‘whānau of interest’ with Nga Maata Waka (Linda, Andrew, Matua Willy, Chantel, and the team of youth coaches) had the advantage of making sure the research process ensured the safety of the young people and the talk we gathered was not collected at their expense. Awareness of my non-indigenous positioning and the subsequent engagement with a Kaupapa Māori approach emphasised the need for a theoretical and methodological framework that sought to ensure I would carry out ‘inquiry in a respectful manner’ (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006, unpaginated).

Bishop and Glynn’s (1999) Kaupapa Māori guidelines for non-indigenous researchers helped to guide my understanding of Māori culture and ways of being (Walker et al, 2006). As mentioned earlier, following the guidelines positioned me to be involved ‘somatically’—physically, ethically, morally and spiritually—in the research process (Bishop & Glynn, 1999:170). Being somatically involved meant that from the moment I decided to research the concept of disengagement, to the concluding discussion on how young people experience disengagement, the theoretical framework guided the research process.

The research principles provided a guide to ensure that the research was culturally safe and responsive, which Martin Tolich (2002) suggests is the way to enable Pākehā to ‘study Māori and endorse the Treaty of Waitangi’ (Tolich, 2002:176). The questions that focused on the

concepts of initiation, benefits, representation, legitimacy, and accountability offered an opportunity to be reflexively aware of the boundaries of a Māori-centred paradigm with an indigenous community such as Nga Maata Waka. Bishop and Glynn (1999) link Kaupapa Māori philosophy to a ‘participatory consciousness’ (Bishop & Glynn, 1999:167), which includes being respectful when fostering relationships with indigenous organisations. However, these questions identified the glaring gaps or ethical dilemmas that were present in the research process because I was not an indigenous researcher. While issues such as representation, agency, and legitimacy were part of the theoretical and methodological framework, they uncovered the methodological limitations for a Pākehā engaging in a Kaupapa Māori research process with and for Māori. However, I was fortunate in my relationship with Nga Maata Waka that they did not consider my being a NZ European a limiting factor. Furthermore, while my being a Pākehā was not an issue, I still grappled with what Tolich (2002:164) refers to as ‘*Pākehā Paralysis*’.

Tolich (2002) argues that the ‘paralysis’ I was feeling focuses on ‘what’ my role is in a Māori-centred paradigm. To overcome my discomfort I drew on critical ethnography and the element of reflexivity to write daily on my confusion or my ‘unknowing’ in the format of a learning journal. At times this ‘unknowing’ felt very uncomfortable and at times competed with my desire ‘to get stuck in’ and just ‘do’ the research. However, as I discuss in the next section, being a novice researcher working in collaboration with an indigenous Youth Service NEET provider requires respectful negotiation and I discuss how this negotiation worked in practice.

A discussion of ethical considerations in the co-research design

As well as being accountable to the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee (HEC) and the rules and regulations that apply to a postgraduate student, I felt I was also

ethically and morally accountable to the 11 young people who participated. Issues of accountability also included my relationship with the youth coaches and Nga Maata Waka as a Youth Service NEET provider. However, I soon became aware that balancing the ethical considerations between the HEC and Nga Maata Waka created some tension not only for Nga Maata Waka as an organisation but also for me as a postgraduate student.

During the ethics application process to the HEC I was in negotiations with Nga Maata Waka to meet the recommendations from my first application was withdrawn because of the perceived lack of Māori consultation. This included the following issues; no parental consent, no community consultation, no meeting with their Kaumātua, and no hui to fulfil the cultural expectations of working with Māori. When I asked Linda and Andrew about fulfilling these recommendations (so that I could receive ethics approval), they both said, “No” as Nga Maata Waka were under no obligation to comply with the HEC. Also under MSD policy and the Social Security Act, Nga Maata Waka does not require parental consent for young people over the age of 16. The HEC request for community consultation, a meeting with their Kaumātua and a hui created tensions for me as I considered these demands ran contrary to a sensitive and culturally responsive Kaupapa Māori approach in this case.

To improve what the HEC saw as a lack of Māori consultation the HEC recommended I contact the Ngāi Tahu Research Centre. After attending a meeting with Associate Professor Te Maire Tau, his support resulted in the HEC approving my ethics application. At the time, I felt the tension the HEC created, placed an unnecessary strain on my relationship with Nga Maata Waka, as well creating a long gap between ethics approval and commencement of the research itself.

Once the HEC had approved the ethics application, I followed the guidelines of confidentiality and anonymity to ensure adherence within the context of working with young people from a Youth Service NEET provider. To achieve this, we (Andrew, Chantel, and me) constructed a consent form that required Linda's approval. The consent process involved Chantel and her team reading and discussing all aspects of the information sheet and the consent form with the participants prior to their signing. During this process, they reiterated to the young people the anonymity and confidentiality clauses. The youth coaches were then required to sign the consent form to show that they too had adhered to the consent requirements.

To alleviate any issues of internal ethics, I constructed a third-party confidentiality agreement with Nga Maata Waka's approval. We agreed on a third-party agreement so that we could ensure confidentiality. I removed any information that could identify the participants or the youth coaches. However, Linda, Andrew, Matua Willy, and Chantel all gave permission to have their names used in this thesis, providing the removal of any sensitive information would occur if requested. What we achieved was to balance the power between the two organisations and bring the issue of trust back into our collaborative relationship. I determined that trust was necessary not only with the young people, but was also important to the research relationship we established during our original negotiations.

The importance of trust in the interview relationship with young people

As a novice researcher and due to my lack of familiarity with the concept of shadowing, I was unsure about how the young people would feel about me sitting in their sessions with the youth coaches. Kearns (2000) suggests that the success of such research endeavours rests on

the way young people perceive the presence of the researcher, which then determines the success of shadowing:

The way in which a researcher is perceived by those encountered in a research situation will determine, to a large extent, the ease with which they will interact with and incorporate the researcher into their place. Embedded within the word incorporate is *corpus*, the Latin word for ‘body’. The idea of ‘incorporation’ helps us to focus on the researcher’s embodiment, and to recognise that as researchers, we take more than our intentions and notebooks into any situation; we take our bodies also (Kearns, 2000, cited in Wepa, 2005:84).

Drawing on Kearns’ (2000) ideas of how the young people would perceive my presence, I relied on the existing rapport between the youth coaches and the young people along with their social services training and their mentoring experience. I also relied on the youth coaches’ goodwill to include me in the sessions as I sat to the side observing. It was not my intention to make anyone feel uncomfortable, but I was a stranger to both the youth coaches and the young people. I relied on the youth coaches’ connections with the participants and assumed that these existing connections would encourage a great deal of talk between both parties.

What young people say, according to Hertz (1997), is always ‘filtered’ through the interviewer’s or the writer’s perceptions or interpretations. However, as I mentioned previously the listening to and the honouring of their voices relies on my interpretation of how I ‘hear’ their voices. In this case study, the young people’s voices have ‘multiple dimensions’ (Hertz, 1997:xi). For example, there are multiple voices creating multiple perspectives: the young people’s voices, the youth coaches’ voices, management’s voices and my voice, all representing our experiences of working with or our experiences of disengagement. Hertz (1997) suggests that my voice and the way I locate myself within the inquiry of the research question relates to my ‘cultural understandings of their social realities’ of what young people experience from being disengaged from education (Hertz, 1997: xii).

Therefore, the theoretical framework in particular the elements of critical ethnography (ethics, representation, and knowledge) emphasised not only how I heard and interpreted young people's voices, but also opened up the complexities of how I would represent their voices within this thesis.

Summary of Chapter 2

As I wrote this chapter, I reflected that my research journey with Nga Maata Waka provided me with a new perspective of building and maintaining relationships based on a mutual reciprocity of trust, which extended well beyond our collaborative research approach. Much of this extension was due to the complexity of drawing on multiple theories and methodologies such as voice, silence, Kaupapa Māori, and the elements of critical ethnography (ethics, representation, and knowledge) as well as symbolic interactionism. I found I relied heavily on my 'whānau of interest' that is, Linda, Andrew, Matua Willy, and Chantel who offered organisational support and professional knowledge during the initial stages of our co-research design. Much of this chapter has focused on our co-research design that sought to enable us to gather young people's voices sensitively and in culturally responsive ways. Shacklock et al (1998) are correct in stating that voice can be an ethical minefield. However, attending *Code of Ethics* training twice lessened my apprehension of shadowing the youth coaches and improved my lack of familiarity with the youth services environment.

I discussed how using a Kaupapa Māori research approach contributed to my confusion of being a Pākehā engaging in a Māori centred paradigm. I was unsure of where I 'fit' in at the beginning of the research process, which created a situation called *Pākehā Paralysis*. At times, the added stress that arose from trying to meet the recommendations of the HEC and

negotiating these proposed recommendations with Nga Maata Waka created challenges and unexpected tensions.

During our negotiations we determined we would gather voices in three separate gathering phases through my choice of ethnographic methods—a focus group, unstructured interviews (with the young people), and semi-structured interviews (with Linda, Andrew, Matua Willy, and Chantel). In the following chapter, I discuss how these three phases of data gathering evolved during my ‘out-in-the-field’ experiences gathering voices with the youth coaches in my shadowing role.

Chapter 3: Methods: out-in-the-field—‘doing’ ethnography

In this chapter, I describe my experiences of conducting an ethnographic approach as I gathered the voices of the young people with the youth coaches (my co-researchers) and the Nga Maata Waka staff in the three phases of data gathering. I discuss the focus group, the unstructured interviews with young people, and the semi-structured interviews I facilitated with the staff. I outline the multiple methods of data analysis drawing primarily on Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch, (2003) the *Listening Guide* along with thematic analysis and elements of discourse analysis to gather insights and meaning from the talk the transcripts provided.

An overview of ethnography and ethnographic methods

Karen O'Reilly (2005:27) proposes that ethnography is a 'fluid and flexible' approach to conducting research, which encourages us to 'write and think about what we see and hear'. Given this approach, I determined that ethnography would work well with exploring young people's talk, as I was uncertain of what I would experience once I was out-in-the-field. In this instance, ethnography worked well given we visited participants who were off the marae (which I was not expecting) as well as having additional people in the interviews, which I was also not expecting. This meant that during the research process, we were able to change direction when we needed to, making the co-research design an 'iterative' one (O'Reilly, 2005:23).

My out-in-the-field research experiences involved facilitating a focus group, shadowing in unstructured interviews and facilitating the semi-structured interviews. These methods worked well because ethnography 'provided the freedom to shift [the] focus' should I have found this to be necessary, especially given the complex nature of using voice as a research approach (O'Reilly, 2005:27). I found the exploratory nature of the research question enabled

me to move in and around the topic of disengagement to such a degree that the research was able to evolve not only as a case study, but also as a learning journey for both parties. O'Reilly (2005:130) suggests that in ethnographic research 'all material is potentially interesting, it depends on what you make of it, and unexpected events can turn out to be surprisingly revealing'. Because we were unprepared for when others entered the interview unexpectedly, the youth coaches and I were able to adapt quickly to include their information into the talk we gathered.

I drew on the idea that my research was iterative as our co-research design had a way of changing due to the youth coaches' workloads or if young people were unable to make their interviews. An example of how the research design changed occurred when originally the youth coaches were to facilitate the focus group and how at the last minute I found myself being asked by Chantel to take the session. Because I had planned to sit and observe the young people and the youth coaches during the focus group, I was unable to observe their non-verbal cues or their group dynamics. Observing these interactions was originally part of the research design and the reason I chose to use symbolic interactionism.

The combination of the multiple theories and methodologies I applied influenced the focus group and individual interview sessions by opening up an avenue or a space for the young people to voice their concerns regarding their schooling experiences. Drawing on the theoretical framework meant that I was sensitive to how I used my voice, and the research approach of Kaupapa Māori sought to ensure I was culturally responsive. The advantage of using critical ethnography enabled me to keep how I was going to represent their voices and at the same time seeking to ensure that I did not influence their voices with my own.

Another advantage to using critical ethnography was the emphasis on being reflective and assisting me to write detailed field notes. The advantage of these field notes, which I wrote after the sessions were completed, was they made me think carefully about what I had seen and heard. Writing at the completion of the sessions enabled me to have the time to process this information. I originally took the field notes to add another level to the analysis, which is in keeping with Bishop and Glynn's (1999:170) ideas of being involved 'somatically' in the research process. However, these field notes, which I include in Chapter 4 and 5, provide an unexpected opportunity to demonstrate the ways voice, silence, Kaupapa Māori, critical ethnography, and symbolic interactionism guided me to write reflectively. Writing while I was 'still in the moment' made me think about the ways my somatic positioning permitted me to gather insights on how disengagement is experienced by young people and how I experienced their participation and the youth coaches (verbal and non-verbal forms of communication) in the research process. Having to facilitate the focus group for example made me aware of how long the gaps of silence were, and the ways young people used silence, along with how uncomfortable silence made me feel.

First phase of data gathering—the focus group

The first phase of gathering talk was with the focus group. This particular group of young people were from a music class run by Nga Maata Waka. Of the seven that chose to participate, there were three males and four females; five were Māori, one was Pacific Islander and one was NZ European. The session opened with a brief introduction, led by Chantel, while I provided kai³⁸ in the form of pizzas for lunch. Originally, Chantel was going

³⁸ 'Kai' The te reo term for the gift of food shows a sign of respect and hospitality

to facilitate the session but after lunch I found myself facilitating the focus group, assisted by the youth coaches, who helped keep the talk flowing. Chantel and her team's assistance was one of the major advantages of having co-researchers. The support they provided not only to the young people participating but to me as well was important to the way the focus group unfolded. The youth coaches' presence provided a safety net not only should the young people experience difficulties or the talk break down, but also in helping me facilitate the group. However, I feel that the focus group would have produced more of a discussion had one of the youth coaches taken the session, particularly given their familiarity with the young people. The focus group session ran for approximately 32 minutes and the topic guide questions were as follows:

Can you please tell me about?

- When I hear the words 'disengaged' or 'NEET' I think of _____.
- The good things you remember about school.
- The bad things you remember about school.
- What would you like to change about school if you could?
- What would you not change about school?
- What are your thoughts about life now that you have left school?
- What do you think about when people ask you what sort of job or career you would like? Or do you want to go back to school?

These questions provided a loose guide and while we did not specifically adhere to the order of the questions, we covered the majority of the questions quickly. While the topic guide provided the conversational structure necessary to keep our talk focused on disengagement we were also flexible in our approach had the young people wanted to digress or contribute different perspectives to the gathered voices.

Choak (2012) suggests that focus groups are useful for identifying broad ideas and emerging themes. This proved to be an important function of the focus group, as certain themes arose from the talk and led to significant changes to the questions for the unstructured interviews. While these questions were not asked in the focus group, as they arose voluntarily from the young people during the group session, I quickly realised these details were important to the analysis so I re-framed the unstructured interview questions based on these insights. Choak (2012) also suggests that being nervous or anxious is normal for the researcher, especially if he or she has not met the participants before. My main concern about facilitating the focus group was my lack of connection with the participants. However, to balance this issue of connection Chantel and her team asked some of the topic guide questions. Given my discomfort while facilitating the focus group, I made sure I stayed in my shadowing role for the unstructured interviews.

Second phase: unstructured interviews

My second phase of gathering young people's talk involved me shadowing the youth coaches in four unstructured interviews. Of the four who chose to participate, there was one male (Māori) and three females (two Māori and one NZ European). The unstructured interviews provided an opportunity for the young people to talk without being in the presence of their peers. I considered these interviews to be a back-up plan in case the focus group did not work out well; that is, if we did not gather enough talk.

The youth coaches and my approach to the unstructured interviews felt relaxed and unhurried. I constructed the topic guide with open-ended questions to encourage the young people to expand on their narratives if they wished to. The youth coaches facilitated all of the interviews, asking me to join in if I wanted to follow a particular thread of talk. The trusting relationship between the youth coaches and the young people from over the six-month period

was noticeable in the participants' responses. Sometimes these responses were emotionally raw as evidenced by their use of strong language and the angry tone they used, when speaking of their personal circumstances. In one example, a young person had left school because of their issues with drugs and ill health. In the situations where the young people were emotional what became evident was the calm non-judgmental tone of voice the youth coaches used suggesting their social services training. The youth coaches' gentle style of questioning kept the sessions safe.

The advantage of using unstructured interviews was the ability of the youth coaches to facilitate conversation that did not necessarily follow the structure of the topic guide. The young people could choose to answer if they wanted and they talked naturally, not in a forced manner. While gathering talk was important, I felt uncomfortable about wanting more talk from the participant. I was careful not to ask the youth coaches to disclose sensitive information about the young person, unless the youth coach chose to divulge details, which they did not. Therefore, there were no ethical tensions or disrespecting the participants' privacy created from the context of the research. The youth coaches' connection or history with the young people allowed them to be aware of their feelings and to know whether to press further.

The unstructured interviews ran for approximately from five to 10 minutes. The topic guide questions were as follows:

Can you please tell me about?

- How's your day been so far?
- How are things at the moment?
- What did you like about being at school—can you give me some examples of what was okay or what was not okay when you were at school?

- How did you choose your NCEA subjects, or were they chosen for you?
- What about sports and other stuff?
- How did you like your teachers— if you liked any, what did you like about them?
- How were you supported at school? If you didn't feel supported at school, what made you feel like this?
- What did you and your mates like doing at school? Do you talk about school when you are together?
- What does your whānau/family say about school, when you talk about school?
- If you don't talk about school, why do you think that is?
- How did you feel about leaving school when you did?
- What would you like to change about leaving school if you could?
- Can you describe to me what success would feel like?
- How have things been since you left school?
- What experience about school haven't we talked about that you would like to discuss?

As the youth coaches asked participants the topic guide questions, I was able in my shadowing role to examine the mentor/mentee relationship. As a result, I observed what I have called the 'power dialogue' from drawing on ideas of dialogue and critical theory to explore the aspects of power in connection with young people in an interactive process (Madison, 2012:16). I suggest the power dialogue exists when conversations between parties are unequal with respect to race, class, privilege, or position. The power dialogue has more to do with how we verbally, non-verbally or bodily communicate our ability to listen to and talk with each other, rather than what we actually say. Therefore, how we embody ourselves within the power dialogue tells us about our relationships with others. In the context of this research, the power dialogue is relevant to the dynamics of the relationship each young person has with Chantel or the other youth coaches. By observing the youth coaches and their interactions with the young people, I discovered these interactions had multiple meanings. For example, from their previous discussions with the young people, the youth coaches had

developed a sense of ‘knowing’ of the young person and their personal history that I found evident in their practice. This ‘knowing’ also evolved from the semi-structured interviews, which I describe in the following section.

Third phase: semi-structured interviews

I held three of the four semi-structured interviews at the marae with Andrew, Matua Willy, and Chantel; and I facilitated Linda’s interview at her place of work. These interviews provided a behind-the-scenes view of the ways Nga Maata Waka supports young people. This perspective revealed how the young people came to be with Nga Maata Waka and how the youth coaches do their work to ensure their practice is client driven. In other words, young people determine the direction of the mentoring session and what they want to discuss during their time with the youth coach. The semi-structured interviews ran for between approximately 10 to 45 minutes in duration. For the four staff members, the semi-structured topic guide questions were as follows:

- Can you tell me about your role with Nga Maata Waka and what it involves?
- You mentioned in our first meeting that you are one of 157 Youth Service providers. Where does your organisation fit in?
- What Government policies are currently in place around NEET young people and how are these working, or not working?
- What do you think would make a difference for young people who are disengaged from school that is not already evident in your work with young people?
- With regard to young people who have transitioned out of school successfully or re-engaged back into education, employment, or training, can you tell me what makes this transition successful.
- Is there anything you would like to discuss that we haven’t covered in this session?

I formulated the topic guide questions to gather detail from an operational perspective. Linda, Andrew, Matua Willy, and Chantel’s contributions met my need to have a big-picture view of

the concept of disengagement and the context of young people being categorised as NEET in the Canterbury region.

Drawing on Kaupapa Māori methodology, Cram (2006) notes that in a semi-structured interview, placing the participant in the position of deciding what direction the interview takes reduces the distance or the lack of connection between the researcher and the participant. Therefore, when the participant takes charge of the interview the researcher is 'de-powered' reducing their control over the direction or scope of the research talk. This notion of 'de-powering' was an important aspect of this study's staff interviews, where the staff member directed the interview. As I was aware of their heavy workloads and the associated time constraints, I organised to give the topic guide questions to Linda, Andrew, Matua Willy, and Chantel prior to their interview, so they were able to prepare their answers in advance. This preparation gave us extra time enabling me to gather more talk by asking extra questions; as a result, we were able to move through the topic guide quickly. Their voices along with the young people's voices provided multiple layers of talk resulting in my requiring different methods of analysis to explore their experiences. In the next section, I discuss the multiple methods of data analysis I chose that best suited exploring their talk for meaning.

Data analysis methods

As previously discussed, the aim for this thesis is to hear young people's talk first-hand regarding their perceptions of school and about how *they* feel about where *they* are at this moment, and *their* aspirations for the future. The choice to represent the participants' voices using poetry as a creative format happened by accident when I was in the process of transcribing the focus group and the unstructured interviews. Taking their transcripts, I engaged in a process of linking repeated responses from participants and unintentionally

found myself with lines of a poem, or a group of stanzas (Gilligan et al, 2003). Extending the play on words to create poems led me to examine the work of others, for example Katie Fitzpatrick (2010) who has also used poetry as an ethnographic representation in her work with secondary school students. I also had to find a way to illustrate the brevity of the young people's responses or their one-worded replies in a way that not only honoured but also represented their voices in ways that showed sensitivity. Even though their replies were succinct, I found their responses layered with multiple inflections of emotions, such as, anger, disdain, contempt, hurt and shame. The *Listening Guide: a voice-centred relational method* (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg & Bertsch, 2003) fulfilled these aims.

To complement the four steps of the *Listening Guide* I have selected thematic analysis mostly due to the limited number of first-person pronouns—that is, the lack of 'I' responses from the young people in the focus group. I also chose thematic analysis because of its 'flexibility' as the method best suited to identifying and analysing the repeated themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2008:78). Thematic analysis complemented the *Listening Guide* because of its 'theoretical freedom' (Braun & Clarke, 2008:78) that did not constrain the voices. The *Listening Guide* helped to provide a better understanding of the talk gathered from the young people in the focus group precisely because I did not code their talk to a particular theory. Given the complex nature of young people's talk, this approach enabled the young people's non-verbal communication to be themed, particularly the way silence evolved in the transcripts.

I have also drawn on the elements of discourse analysis from Jonathan Potter (2011) who argues that discourse analysis can be used to study naturally occurring talk to find out what some of their phrases mean and how they are used as conversation fillers. These phrases

appear on the surface to be talk but are in fact a method of communication that give the appearance of being cooperative but are in reality defence mechanisms. All the methods of data analysis I chose best suit analysing voice, given voice is a very complex research approach, but even more so is its counterpart, the concept of silence.

Gilligan et al (2003) briefly touch on the concept of silence and the tension between knowing and silence. In her work with educational coaches Woodcock (2010:144) defines the *Listening Guide* as a qualitative, relational voice-centred methodology, 'which may be used to seriously reflect on the ways in which we listen to our clients' or in this case study the young people. Woodcock raises the idea that we need to examine our quality of listening in the way we interpret stories, voice, and silence. While her work relates to coaches within an educational setting, her work is relevant to this study because she identifies coaching as a transformational yet vulnerable process. Her appraisal of this process could also be applicable to the youth coaches at Nga Maata Waka in their role as co-researchers with this study.

Even though Gilligan et al (2003) briefly touch on the concept of silence and the tension between knowing and silence, it is Woodcock (2010) who addresses in detail the issues surrounding silence and how best to analyse silence from the transcripts. Drawing on the work of Raider-Roth (2000), Woodcock (2010:146) advises the coach or in this instance, the researcher to 'look for evidence of silence' in the transcripts or sessions. These silences might manifest themselves as pauses noted in the transcripts or interpreted from the participants lowering their voices, or their voices trailing off. Silence can also manifest in questions asked too soon. Woodcock (2010:146) suggests the key to locating silence is to collect related evidence that 'might explain these moments of quiet'.

Therefore, the *Listening Guide* is a four-step process (Gilligan et al, 2003; Woodcock, 2010) that requires the researcher to listen to the transcripts, then focusing on the first-person references, addresses the relationship between the voice and the research question and then focuses on composing the analysis through interpretation of the *talk* from the transcripts. Gilligan et al (2003) define the *Listening Guide* as a method adopted from other fields such as psychoanalysis to take seriously the complexity of the psyche, the fact of dissociation, the intellectual shifts and issues of culture—race, class, and sexual difference—therefore taking individual difference seriously and not as a mark of deficiency (Gilligan et al, 2003). The strength of the *Listening Guide* method lies in the multiple listenings undertaken by the individual(s) analysing the transcripts to ‘explore the different connections, resonances, and interpretations that each listener brings to the analytical process’ (Gilligan et al, 2003:161). By listening to the transcripts multiple times, the research question starts to shape the listenings and the theoretical framework helps the analysis to ‘frame’ the context from which the person lives (Gilligan et al, 2003:159). What follows is an outline of how the four steps of the *Listening Guide* process works in practice.

Four steps of The Listening Guide method

Step 1

The first step in the *Listening Guide* is to listen to the transcripts while taking note of the plot and the listeners, or in this case, my responses to the audio-recorded interviews. I found frequently listening to the audio recording of each participant useful. These listenings helped me to develop an awareness of the rhythm with the participants’ way of speaking and the various tones and pitches of voice they used. Gilligan et al (2003:160) suggests that we need to get a sense of ‘where we are, or what the territory is, by identifying the stories that are being told—what is happening, when, where, with whom and why’—allowing us to become

aware of the social and cultural contexts, or social realities, inside which the participants have located themselves.

As I listened to their voices during the sessions and from the transcripts, I needed to be aware of my own subjectivities or my own voice. My voice or my subjectivities play a role in identifying; exploring and making explicit the ways, my own thoughts and feelings affect the way I respond to the voices I am analysing. I consider my knowing voice with my lived experience of disengagement to be anything but neutral and it is important not to confuse my experience with theirs. Gilligan et al (2003) recommends that the listener or researcher should take notice and reflect on where we find ourselves feeling a connection with the person whose transcript we are listening to and where we do not (and *why* we do not). They suggest we should observe the way this particular person and this interview touches us (or does not touch us) and the thoughts and feelings that emerge. They suggest that as we begin to listen, we need to question our responses to understand how they might affect our understanding. This understanding is important if we are to find meaning from the participants talk.

Woodcock (2010) recommends for ease of locating notations within the data, using a colour-coded approach to highlight any themes or data units that contain main story lines or repeated responses. A master list of the themes can be made so that any ‘overlapping patterns’ across participants or sessions can be noted (Woodcock, 2010:146). Highlighting areas of the transcript that require further listening or attention with coloured stickers ‘allows one to create a trail of evidence’ so that the eye can perceive patterns at a glance (Woodcock, 2010:146).

Step 2

This step involves focusing on the first-person references in the data; that is, noting the ‘I’ in the transcripts. The main idea is to listen for the way the young person speaks about him or herself. Gilligan et al (2003:162) suggests that seeking the ‘I’ in the transcript is essential to ‘tuning in’ to the voice of the participant and listening ‘to what this person knows of her or himself before talking about him or her’.

There are two steps to the ‘I’ poem: first, I underlined and selected all the ‘I’ statements made by the participants. Second, I located the verb that comes after the ‘I’ keeping to the sequences of when these ‘me’ statements and verbs occur. This sequencing creates an ‘ontological narrative’ or highlights the aspects of the participants’ identity (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008:406). This allows the young people to portray who they think they are within their narrative or their responses to the questions from the youth coaches. The poems needed to occur in a ‘free-fall of association’, with no reframing of the data (Gilligan et al, 2003:162). In my view, this was the great advantage of the ‘I’ poems, as the data could not be manipulated. Therefore, the poems conform to the philosophies of Kaupapa Māori and critical ethnography with the legitimacy of the young people’s knowledge heard ‘first-hand’.

Step 3

This third step addresses the relationship between the voice and the research question by focusing on listening to the ‘contrapuntal and counterpoint voices’ from the transcripts. The musical term ‘contrapuntal’ means ‘the combination of two or more melodic lines’ (Gilligan et al, 2003:164). Gilligan et al (2003:164) defines contrapuntal voices as a way of ‘hearing and developing an understanding of several different layers of a person’s expressed experience, as it bears on the question posed but not on the research question itself’. Locating

the contrapuntal voices within transcripts involves specifying the ways in which the melodies interact or are in tension with one another (Woodcock, 2010). Drawing on the concept of counterpoint offers an opportunity to hear the ‘multiple facets of the story being told’ by the participant (Gilligan et al, 2003:165). In this third step, we begin to ‘identify, specify, and sort out the different strands [melodies—contrapuntal and counterpoint] in the interview that may speak to our research question’ (Gilligan et al, 2003:165).

While this step may seem a complicated way of listening to the narratives and interpreting their transcripts, it is the best way to analyse the many voices contained in the transcripts. Whereas the contrapuntal style listened to the many differing voices of the young people within their individual transcripts, the concept of counterpoint opened up the analysis for the interpretation of the ‘other’ voices that emerge from the transcripts; that is, the additional voices that I heard through the voices of the young people. In other words, counterpoint works from sifting through the multiple voices to expose one voice (monophonic) from the transcripts, which operates as a collective. When the young people can answer a question in a range of ways, these voices gathered together can create one or more melodies (that is, the collective can be polyphonic), contrasting with the voice gathered from only one person, which has one melody (that is, it is monophonic). The advantage of this step was it sought out who or what voices are influential in the day-to-day lives of the young people.

Step 4

The final step of the *Listening Guide* method focuses on composing the analysis, pulling together what I have learned about the participants in connection to the research question, ‘What are young people saying about disengaging from mainstream secondary schools in

Aotearoa-New Zealand?’ Gilligan et al (2003:168) offer the following questions assist in answering the research question:

What have you learned about this question through this process and how have you come to know this?

What is the evidence on which you are basing your interpretations?

This final step brings the young people’s voices to the forefront of the research project, creating a platform for the thoughts and feelings they have expressed in the interviews and the focus group. In this phase of the analysis, I sift the voices through the theoretical framework to explore their social realities and the ways they connect with the outer world. From a critical theory perspective, that is Kaupapa Māori and critical ethnography, I am looking for insights and understanding as I seek to expose the underlying assumptions that serve to conceal the power relations that exist within their experiences of being NEET. Drawing on symbolic interactionism I am looking at how they express through the elements of ‘intersubjectivity’, ‘emotionality’, and ‘embodiment’ their thoughts and feelings through the observations I have noted in my field notes. It is these observations that are not so obvious in their transcripts that will seek to illuminate and define young people’s interactions with others.

Summary of Chapter 3

This chapter described my reasons for choosing a fluid and flexible approach such as ethnography to support any uncertainty I may have experienced when I was out-in-the-field. My experiences with the focus group and their lack of talk meant I gathered a small amount of data. I also had to reflect on how I felt about their use of silence and how uncomfortable it felt and what this meant to me as I prepared to analyse their transcripts. Leading up to the three phases of data gathering it never occurred to me that the young people might not talk

especially since our co-research design focused on only recruiting young people who would be comfortable talking in an interview setting.

During the process of reflecting on their 'talk', I had to 'take a step back' so that I could process my responses to their voices. It was at this intersection of hearing their voices and reading my responses that I realised the theoretical framework enabled me to think outside my subjectivities to hear young people speak of their experiences without confusing them with my own. Furthermore, my awareness of my non-indigenous positioning with the theoretical framework sought to ensure I would carry out inquiry in a respectful manner. Looking back at my out-in-the-field experiences, they were at times both transformative, if uncomfortable. I determined that my discomfort was an important element of the research process and I found that my mind-set over my unexpected facilitation over the focus group turned out to be surprisingly revealing giving me insights into verbal and non-verbal communication or the ways young people embody their narratives.

In the following chapter, I represent the voices gathered from the young people in a sensitive yet creative format of poetry. The poems emphasise their thoughts and feelings through their unique use of language, illustrating how they really feel about being disengaged and categorised as NEET.

Chapter 4: Young people's voices — findings and discussion

In this chapter, I explore what the 11 young people from the focus group and the unstructured interviews told me. I highlight throughout the chapter their unique ways of speaking and what their narratives told me of how they really feel about their schooling experiences. I facilitated the focus group at the marae and the unstructured interviews at various locations on the 13th, 17th and 18th of September 2014. First, I present the voices from the focus group collectively in thematic poems that I constructed in response to the topic guide questions. The main findings that emerged from the focus group are the *perceptions of disengagement*, *student/teacher relationships*, *their views about success*, and *their thoughts and feelings about being categorised as NEET*.

The talk gathered from the unstructured interviews, has been constructed into 'I' poems to represent the contrapuntal (polyphonic) voices that emerged, which are unique to each of the participants voices. The key contrapuntal voices that emerged from the analysis are the *voice of engagement*, the *voice of uncertainty*, the *voice of regret*, and the *voice of silence*. Another voice that emerged from their voices in their interactions with others is the counterpoint voice, the *voice of knowing*. The *voice of knowing* emphasises the ways we, as others (including the youth coaches and myself) position ourselves as 'knowers' to express how we 'know' what we think a young person thinks or feels. As I conceptualised in Chapter 1, others (whānau, teachers, educators and so on) involves the way we unintentionally or intentionally use our knowledge and power through our voices to influence young people's choices. What is potentially problematic for young people is the way 'we' as others influence the use of their *voice of uncertainty*, their *voice of regret* that leads them to use their *voice of silence*.

Because the voices from the 11 young people expressed similar views, I have blended their voices throughout the chapter, irrespective of whether they were in a vocational training class

or individual mentoring sessions. In addition, I have also included the voices of other young people from the research of Nairn and Higgins (2011) and Smyth, Hattam et al (2004). These voices illustrate that irrespective of geographical location or ethnicity, they have had similar experiences of disengagement from mainstream secondary schooling as the young people's talk under discussion here.

Voices — from the focus group

Young people's conversations prior to the session commencing focused on finishing assessments for their music course and they were happily anticipating an afternoon of work and music practice. Their voices sounded engaged and motivated with their learning. The ages of the participants in the focus group were between 16 and 19 years old. Of the seven, five young people identified as Māori, one as Pacific Islander (Pasifika) and one as NZ European. Four of the group were female and three were males. In the analysis, they are identified as YM1 (Pacific Islander) YM2, (Māori), YM3 (NZ European) and the girls YF4, YF5, YF6, and YF7 as (Māori). After enjoying the kai I provided, their voices were chatty and loud as we settled ourselves in the large comfortable chairs in the Conference Room. The youth coaches in attendance were Chantel (Māori) and two coaches from her team, YC1 (male, Māori) and YC2 (female, Māori).

The session commenced with me introducing myself and asking the first question from the topic guide and a long lengthy silence ensued as not one of the seven spoke, even when prompted by YC1. This silence was in stark contrast to the chattiness of their voices prior to the session commencing. At more prompting from YC1, YM1 and YM2 spoke in voices that sounded stilted and resistant, emphasised by their brief answers. Although the setting for the session was not ideal, (we sat at a long wide conference table, which placed some distance between us all) their lack of talk was notable. The young women sat close together, opposite

to where I was sitting, and two young men, YM1 and YM2 spread out and lounged beside me. YM3 sat at the far end of the table beside Chantel and YC1, and YC2 sat beside the girls. The session ran for 32 minutes and upon reflection ran longer than I anticipated given the briefness of their responses and their lack of talk.

Both YM1 and YM2 exhibited dominant body language suggesting a staunch challenging demeanour as they lounged spread out in their chairs. Their body language implied they were the leaders of the group and were exerting a masculine authority over not only girls and YM3, but also me as well (Smyth, Hattam et al, 2004). Perhaps I mirrored an institutional dominance, that is, they saw me as one of their teachers or as Nairn and Higgins (2011:184) suggest I mirrored a 'performative aspect of emotions' in that my presence was constituted as an object of conflict through looking like a teacher, that is, white and with authority. Nairn and Higgins (2011:183) allude to a similar awareness of this perception as being 'conscious of our middle-class embodiment'. They highlight the ways this embodiment may contribute to young people's 'reticence' or lack of talk or engagement.

In contrast, YM3 sat upright and eager in his chair, and the girls sat with closed body language for instance the way they shoved their hands deep into their jacket pockets. Only two of the four girls spoke. I found the lack of talk from the girls perplexing given their previous chattiness. Had I in some way 'killed the talk'? On the other hand, perhaps they felt shy in such a formal setting. To explore this lack of talk I look to feminist and activist bell hooks (1989) for her work on voice to explore what the girls' possible shyness might suggest. She argues, that for girls who lack the courage to speak, only then:

Can their fear be understood solely as shyness, or is it an expression of deeply embedded, socially constructed restrictions against speech in a culture of domination, [a] fear of owning one's words, of taking a stand? (hooks, 1989:17).

However, as I re-listen to the transcript I am not so sure they were shy. In contrast to the staunch demeanour of YM1 and YM2, the girls giggled every time YM1 or YM2 spoke. Yet, whenever YM3 spoke, not one of the girls acknowledged verbally or non-verbally he had spoken. The girls' facial expressions, body movements or gestures communicated no acknowledgement to YM3. I ascertained their lack of response as a power response, highlighting the girls' dominant relationship with YM3. However, he did not appear concerned or affected by the girls' lack of response when he spoke. YM3's lack of concern could have been that they were of different cultures, and the girls appeared older. When YM3 was not speaking in an angry or defensive voice, he spoke in an engaged voice.

YM1, YM2, and YM3 answered most if not all the questions with YF6 and YF7 intermittently speaking. In the field note that follows, I describe and reflect on the research setting and the group dynamics:

Field note: There is a real physical display of dominance exhibited by the two young men (on my right) or perhaps a dominant masculinity portrayed and evidenced by the way they took up most of the space on their side of the table. It feels like gender politics on display. The girls sit tightly spaced together on the opposite side with one girl almost sitting away from the other girls as if to distance her physically and emotionally from the group; although there may not have been enough room for her to sit at the table. They looked protectively squished up. She kept her sunglasses on, and I think she kept them on all the time. The disadvantages of the space we used were noted when the door the main entrance to Nga Maata Waka was opened at regular intervals, with people talking loudly as they moved through to the main area. Sometimes this [noise] was a distraction, and it overemphasised the silence given the contrast in sound. At times, it was hard to hear the young people when they spoke. To ensure that all the data was recorded, meant that more often than not, I had to repeat what the participant said as the audio recorder struggled to collect their voices. This lack of audio clarity resulted in some of the data being too hard to hear.

The field note describes my reflections on the dynamics of the focus group, in particular, the girls. The participant YF4 chose to keep her sunglasses on and sat away from the table. She appeared as though she was distancing herself from the group, using her sunglasses as a defensive method of communication that told me she was enforcing her choice to remain

silent. Her use of her personal power highlighted that silence, when used as a barrier, is as powerful a method of communication as is using voice.

During the focus group, I noted that the young people conveyed consciously and perhaps unconsciously (the sunglasses, the masculine demeanour, and the long silences) non-verbal displays of personal power. Drawing on symbolic interactionism I observed or tried to ‘read’ these non-verbal power plays, however, my interpretations might not be what they were thinking or feeling at all. Nairn, Munro and Smith (2005:224) in their work with young people describe this ability to ‘read’ the specifics of embodiment as interpreting ‘comportment, facial expressions, laughter and silence as indications of the affective relations of power’.

In the following analysis, I draw on embodiment to explore what and how they tell me about their experiences of disengagement. The analysis focuses on the tone of their voices, their choice of words so that I can interpret the emotionality expressed through their talk, that is, the emotions such as happiness, hope, anger, contempt, disdain, hurt, shame, and rejection. However, as I did not factor into the co-research design the opportunity to take transcripts back for the young people to go over, I missed the opportunity to discuss my findings or receive feedback from the focus group. I would have liked to go back and ask especially with the girls what *they* were really thinking and feeling during the sessions. Even though we got off to a rocky start, the young people respond with voices that are angry and hurt in response to my questioning of their perceptions of disengagement.

Perceptions of disengagement

When the young people spoke of school, they talked of school as a place where more often than not, they felt emotionally distressed and harassed. YM1 spoke of his perception of

disengagement by saying he “*can’t remember*” as he consciously decided not to engage in talking about his experiences of school. YM1 spoke in a clipped voice, pitched lower at the end of his talk, suggesting he had said all he was going to say. At no time was there any clashing of voices, or talking over one another and no participant was interrupted mid-sentence. The silences in the transcript suggest there were abundant opportunities for participants to speak. YM3’s voice was angry when he spoke of his schooling experiences, suggesting his experiences of mainstream secondary schooling were still emotionally raw.

The poem below articulates their *perceptions of disengagement*, highlighting their resistance to the label of NEET. None of the girls responded to the question of how they felt about being categorised as NEET. While YM3 talked with an enquiring voice, YM1 and YM2’s voices were diffident, sounding disengaged or emotionally disconnected. YM3 accepts he was “*not listening and getting into trouble*” at school, and he perceives that his behaviour may have contributed to his disengagement. YM1’s voice was defiant when he spoke of being “*kicked out*” while YM2 talked of “*leaving school*” and appeared resistant when I prompted him for more information.

Perceptions of disengagement
Not listening, getting into trouble
Kicked out
Can’t remember
Leaving school

YM1 spoke of his disengagement in a challenging voice, and he appeared defensive to being categorised as NEET when he said, “*that’s what disengagement means that it’s not a label*”. Unfortunately, there was no opportunity to explore what he meant by his “label” comment as YM2 started talking about leaving school at 16 years old shifting my focus from YM1. What

I interpreted from their talk was that their ideas on disengagement focused on *their* behaviour suggesting they feel responsible for their disengagement.

Young people who take personal responsibility for their disengagement are what Nairn and Higgins (2011:185) refer to as adopting a 'meritocratic discourse'. A meritocratic discourse implies young people who have failed at school, have failed due to their lack of effort. They argue that if a school does not 'do' for the student or if the student is identified as a 'difficult student' because they require too many resources these students are perceived to be wasting valuable time and resources (Nairn & Higgins, 2011). These students are either alienated in the school environment or asked to leave, socially excluding them from school.

Smyth, Hattam et al (2004) argue that some schools have a culture that expects young people to take responsibility for their performance at school. They claim that some school cultures have an aggressive attitude, or culture, that places the responsibility for 'behaviour, attendance, and [academic] progress' onto young people. Schools view this culture as a 'common sense approach' (Smyth, Hattam et al, 2004:168) suggesting that young people have provoked the school to label them as troublemakers and asked to leave. As one of their participants responded:

Nothings followed up...it's your problem...you are in a big place, basically nobody gives a stuff (Extract from #001, p. 168).

The extract above points to participant #001 not feeling supported at school, which in the following section is similar to the responses from the participants under discussion here. The talk from the focus group provides evidence of their positive and negative experiences of the relationships they had with their teachers. They use strong adjectives to describe these experiences, providing emotionally raw insights of their time spent at school.

Student/teacher relationships

YM2 spoke in an engaged voice as he told us of his science and math teachers, as did YM4 from the unstructured interviews. Both YM2 and YM4 held these teachers in high regard. YM4 spoke of how his math teacher was supportive of his learning, although he did not expand on what his math teacher did that made him feel that way. Both YM2 and YM4's teachers were male and my suggestion is that gender may have made a difference in the way they related to the teacher and contributed to their feeling engaged in the classroom. In contrast, YM1, YM3, YF6 and YF7 talk of how they experienced perceived attitudinal biases from their teachers that they felt created a problematic student identity for them. Feeling targeted by the teacher, these attitudinal biases may have emphasised that they were 'the problem'. The poem below highlights the strong vocal response from this group. At times, their voices sounded defeated, at others hard, angry, hurt, emphasising their feelings of rejection.

Student/Teacher relationships

Too many people, class sizes too big,
Dicks, gits, bullies, anal reasons for randomly picking on me
Singled out by teachers, made to feel small
Teachers didn't help or believe me
They're rude, they're ratchet [teen slang for nasty], they're bullies; power goes to their heads,
They're fucked up
Never letting me prove that I could do the work
Talked behind my back to other kids in the class
Some were fun, my math teacher was good, my science teacher, helpful
I don't want this kid in my class

YM3 contributed the most to the conversation on teachers along with YF6 and YF7. They felt there were "*too many people at school*" and "*schools were too big*". YF6 spoke of "*being constantly singled out and excluded from the classroom*". YF6 and YF7 expressed a desire to have an opportunity to prove they were "*capable of getting their work done, without*

interference from teachers”. They felt their teachers targeted them unnecessarily and created feelings of being harassed, excluded (alienated) and stigmatised.

Feelings of alienation were also evident from the young people in the research conducted by Smyth, Hattam et al (2004). One of their participants spoke of feeling alienated in the classroom and spoke of how important it is to be with your peers:

It’s very important because you need someone there to help you out every now and again and if you’ve got no one to talk to in class you just feel all alone and feel like there is no one else there for you. You just sit there and do nothing (Extract from #106, p.83).

As discussed in Chapter 1, Duffy and Elwood (2013) argue that disengagement is multi-dimensional and suggest that young people need to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance at school. YM3 had strong and what appeared to me to be unresolved feelings about his time spent in secondary schooling, as his voice sounded defensive and hurt. YM3 spoke of feeling physically and verbally bullied at school by his peers and the teachers, *“was like I couldn’t get me work done, just people getting at me all the time”* and they were *“randomly picking”* on him for *“anal reasons”*. He spoke of receiving no support from his last school, as they *“didn’t believe him”*. Multiple schools were a factor for YM3, as he had to manage his entry and exit strategies to the point where he had been *“happy to leave”* mainstream secondary schooling.

YM3 also spoke of a lack of support from his family; his voice sounded dejected and inferred a sense of powerlessness in the face of the circumstances he experienced outside of his control at school. YM3 talked of his negative experiences of schooling in a voice that expressed his hurt at being unsupported from his last school. He describes this school as being the *“worst one”* and *“they didn’t support him at all, not believing him”*. He tells us the

lack of support was because his father had approached the principal to say [name omitted] “*has ADHD*”.³⁹ He spoke of how his father had asked the school not to believe him when he came seeking help.

YM3 was very angry when he spoke of teachers who were “*supposed to stop bullies*”. Instead, one of his teachers had repeatedly shown his “*failed work to the class and laughing about it and um calling me dumb*”. In this instance, YM3 had neither support at school nor at home creating his feelings of exclusion and possibly felt stigmatised both at home and at school. YM3 sounds mystified and uncertain of finding himself treated so badly by his teachers in ways that made him feel worthless. Shacklock et al (1998:4) suggest that ‘when individuals do not find resonance with other people and sense that their voices are not honoured, they are, in fact, silenced, marginalised, and rendered powerless’. Therefore, feelings of powerlessness may contribute to young people feeling not only alienated from school, but also young people choosing to disengage and leaving school early.

Nairn and Higgins (2011) and Smyth, Hattam et al (2004) have similar themes emerging from their work with young people in regards to relationships particularly with teachers and schools contributing to the emotional angst experienced by some in the focus group. Nairn and Higgins (2011) in their study with young people in alternative education (AE) discuss the negative relationships participants had with teachers. Three of the four young men reflected they were “*victims of their teachers negative responses*” leading to truancy. However, the ‘alienation they experienced from these relationships occurred while they were still in school’ (Nairn & Higgins, 2011:183). In similarity to the participants in this study, young people also

³⁹ ADHD Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is a common behavioural disorder. Children with ADHD are easily distracted, act without thinking and very active. <http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/>

used strong language to reflect their feelings of rejection and disconnection from their friends contributing to their sense of social exclusion. Smyth, Hattam et al (2004) discuss these negative experiences and how young people need to feel listened to in the mainstream secondary school environment. They describe this lack of hearing as young people's knowledge being 'subjugated' and 'considered unworthy' by those who make educational policy leading to issues of power struggles between students and teachers (Smyth, Hattam et al, 2004:25).

The participants' spoke of their expectations of their teacher supporting their learning in the classroom environment and for some, this did not happen. YM1, YM3, YF7 felt they had no support whereas YF6 and YM2 felt supported by their art and math teachers respectively. YM2 spoke about enjoying his science class because the teacher "*would always find a fun way to explain the most boring thing and like more entertaining*" and "*teachers who had kids make it fun*". YM3 spoke of how having "*happy teachers*" made a classroom better. YF6 spoke of her enjoyment of art and when prompted by me spoke of enjoying her art teacher as well "*yep both*".

Out of the seven in the group, only three spoke of enjoying their time at school. They felt that sitting with their friends in class was important, and were confused at their constant separation, which was why their voices expressed their distress when they talked about feeling excluded. In response to some prompting from YC2 about what she enjoyed about school, YF7 talked about the importance of "*hanging with their friends*". YF5, who chose not speak, however, showed some emotion when we talked about leaving friends behind at school as described in the field note below:

Field note: I thought that at one stage of the session, one of the girls who did not speak was crying as she hid behind her hair but I was unable to tell. She looked upset when

one of the girls was discussing her friends still being at school while she had left. This made me feel sad as I asked about making friends at Nga Maata Waka, but no one said anything in reply. YM1 said, all his friends, were in juvie or prison and talked about how they sent him a letter occasionally, creating a great deal of laughter from the group, in particular, the girls.

Another young voice gathered by Smyth, Hattam et al (2004) talks of a desire to hang with their friends at school:

I only look forward to seeing my mates really. ‘Cos I, reckon, Like, I reckon that’s the whole point why everyone comes to school, ‘cos that’s where, like, they’re whole beings; ‘cos they meet all their friends, and that’s how everything happens (Extract from #022, p.83).

In response to my question about sport at school YM1 and YM2 spoke of enjoying physical education. However, no one put his or her hand up for Saturday morning sport or participating in sport outside of school. YM1 spoke enthusiastically about chucking balls at people, which he called ‘sport’ with the aim of hoping to unsettle or shock me. He then spoke of going to school camp. When he spoke of camp, he said, “*Yeah camp, that wasn’t too bad eh, but I’m not explaining it eh*”. YM1 chose to block any attempt at my asking him to tell us more about his camping experiences. YM1 then proceeded to engage in a discussion of “*after school fights*” when asked about his teachers, and the group responded with much laughter. YM1 used strong language to talk about his teachers, “*my teachers were fucked up, they used to let us fight, they used to put us in the garden shed and fight*” and that the loser was labelled a “*pussy*”. His talk provoked even more laughter from the group. His response to the laughter was “*just being honest*”. His frequent use of this throwaway phrase suggested to me that his “*just being honest*” could be slang for “just saying”. Most of the participants’ use the word “just” quite frequently in their talk.

To examine YM1’s throwaway comment of “*just being honest*” I draw on the work of Jonathan Potter (2011:212) who describes this type of throwaway comment as a ‘stake

inoculator’ meaning that YM1 is using the words to block my questions or avoid the need to elaborate. At first, it feels as though YM1 has answered my question but in reality, he has spoken in a way that produces a verbal wall, giving me the impression that he is cooperating with me—hence the ambiguity or messiness of voice. However, to get him to respond I would have had to challenge him and given his challenging ‘staunch’ non-verbal body language, (he had turned physically in his chair to look at me) I reconsidered whether to push him further. On reflection, he appeared unwilling to share his experiences of mainstream secondary schooling in front of the group and with me. Using a stake inoculator suggests he was either at risk of losing his staunch demeanour or he felt his experiences were too personal to share (Potter, 2011). The field note below reflects on a conversation I had with YC1, where he mentioned that YM1 might have been ‘trying it on’ with me.

Field note: I spoke to one of the youth coaches (YC1) after the session and he noted that one of the young males was, and I think he said ‘trying it on’ as this young man used the f word to describe teachers, talked about being violent and chucking balls at people. It felt like he was in a way trying to shock me by using bad language and being the group clown. I got the impression that the girls idolised him and looked to him for support since every time he spoke, the girls giggled.

The voices expressed from the focus group so far have been angry, defensive, resistant, hurt and occasionally happy as they talk about their experiences of mainstream schooling. They talked of feeling left out, disconnected and the need to have a sense of belonging and hang out with their friends. The need to hang out with their friends suggests that these relationships provide additional support and may operate as an emotional buffer when they are feeling unhappy or alienated at school. Their voices in the next section are in contrast to those described above, as they talk about jobs and success with voices that sound hopeful and happy.

Views about success

YF6 and YF7 talked about success as “*achieving, accomplishing something*” and “*having a job*”. YM3 wanted to be “*happy and have a good family*” thereby voicing different social values in contrast to his peers about his personal concept of happiness. YF6 and YF7 spoke of cooking and farming respectively as vocational choices. YM1, YM2 and YM3 expressed that success was about making money, getting rich and feeling validated as young men who could ‘make it’ (achieving their life’s desires) from playing music.

Views about success

Achieving, happy, having a good family and a job
Knowing you’ve made it, doing the music thing, entertaining people, working,
Making money from music, feeling good
Work, music, farming, cooking
Rich

Suggested in the poem above is that the participants view success as an external identity. This identity highlights their desire to show the world they are successful in “*making money from music*” and being perceived as “*rich*”. Their desire to work and make money in a creative industry (to be entrepreneurial or risk takers who are happy without a regular pay check) is what Nairn et al (2012) describe as an ‘attempt to make-over the world of work into something closer to a life of enthusiasm and enjoyment’ (McRobbie 2002, cited in Nairn et al 2012:113). In contrast, YM3, YF6 and YF7 have chosen to work in traditional areas of employment and/or to work for regular pay. They have unconsciously tied their views about success to what an entrepreneur would argue is constraining their ability to be successful and have the freedom that comes with having money whereas working for regular pay constrains their choice of lifestyle.

In Chapter 1, I discussed the idea drawing on Smyth, Hattam et al (2004) that young people ‘do’ identity through their talk and with their identity work, they do emotional work as well.

Smyth, Hattam et al (2004) argue that if young people perceive their relationships as lacking, they do a greater amount of emotional work to create, present and sustain their personal identities. In this context, having a successful identity is critical to a young person's sense of self-perception. The response of "*knowing you've made it*" suggested YM3 had a list of requirements that once fulfilled he would be happy, subjectively identifying that he would *know*. Similarly, YF9 from the unstructured interviews also expressed her views about success that would be "*feeling good*". From her talk, YF9 reveals a need to have an identity of someone who wants to be an achiever or accomplishing something, which is similar to the talk of YF6 and YF7, who both spoke of wanting to be seen as "*achieving something*".

Smyth, Hattam et al (2004) propose that the connection between young people's inner desires and their outside world is a complex process. That is they suggest 'young people are working on generating and maintaining a sense of meaning and self-worth at an interface meaning between their inner life and the social context in which they live' (Smyth, Hattam et al, 2004:69).

During the discussion on success, their voices sounded hopeful and determined as well as aware of what they need to do to feel successful. In the following section, their voices respond to the question of how they feel about being categorised as NEET by the MSD. Some voices sound nonchalant, and some are defensive, suggesting a resistance to feeling negatively labelled by those (others) who do not know them.

Thoughts and feelings about being categorised as NEET

In the final moments of the session, I asked the young people if they could tell me about how they feel about being categorised as NEET. Their vocal responses expressed in the poem below reflect voices that range from being defensive to dismissal in response to the question.

YM1 “*couldn’t care less*” to YM3 and his vocal and defensive “*they don’t know us how can they label us*”. The responses below are from YM1, YM2 and YM3.

Thoughts and feelings about being NEET

Dressed neatly
So hopeless
Like a dropout
Like being stamped
I couldn’t care less
They don’t know us, so how can they label us?

YM1 and YM2 express their underlying vulnerability through being nonchalant concerning that others have labelled them “*like a dropout*”. It is the way others perceive their identity which is important to the young people in this study. The words expressed by YM3 who speaks with a defensive voice that the Government could not give them what YM1 considers a “*label*”. The voices or talk from the young men feels both resistant and defiant to their labelling suggesting they are neither “*drop outs*” nor “*hopeless*”. Only YM3 asked me to explain what ‘NEET’ was. His lack of knowing about the term NEET suggested to me his unawareness of being ‘labelled’ or categorised as NEET at Nga Maata Waka provides an insight to how he perceives his identity of being actively engaged at Nga Maata Waka. The inference they may have heard or interpreted from my voice was that they are NEET. This implied that I perceived their identities from a deficit perspective, which may have contributed to why they were defensive, especially YM3.

Missing from the talk on NEET is the girls’ voices and their thoughts of being categorised as NEET. That the girls chose not to talk could indicate they too resist the NEET label. I perceived their silence and their closed body language as agreeing with the young men’s talk that NEET is a deficit label, purely by their silence. As I discuss in the following section, silence is as complex and as multi-dimensional as voice. Given this complexity, I draw mostly on symbolic interactionism to examine their *voice of silence* and the ways they use

this voice as a method of communication. However, it is the way we bring our subjectivities into our interactions with young people, which is what makes *how* we interpret silence to be so problematic.

Voices – from the unstructured interviews

The contrapuntal voices gathered from each of the participants from the unstructured interviews explore the talk of YF8 (NZ European), YF9 (Māori), YM4 (Māori), and YF10 (Māori) who are aged between 16 and 20 years old. The voices of YF8, YF9, YM4 and YF10 are unique in the way they speak in response to the youth coaches who facilitated all the interviews, as I observed from my shadowing role. The interviews highlight the changing interactive perspective between whichever youth coach was taking the interview, as these differing personalities influenced the type and the amount of talk we gathered. The unstructured interviews ranged from five to 10 minutes. The analysis of the shorter interviews conducted by YC2 with YF9 and Chantel with YF10 emphasised their reluctance to talk. Chantel facilitated YM4's interview, and she invited me to bring myself into the conversation if I required additional information as did the other youth coaches. In practice, this was easier to do with YM4 as his Nan (grandmother) sat in on his interview and was talkative on his behalf. YF8's interview went for 10 minutes, and she was open to the prompting from YC3 (female, Māori) with lots of happy talk.

One of the advantages of the 'I' poems is that they reflect the tone of the voice young people use in their interviews. For some participants, their voice or lack of voice, highlights a 'disengaged passivity' when they talk about their experiences they had at school (Smyth, Hattam et al, 2004:78). The emotions expressed by the young people in the unstructured interviews are similar to those in the focus group. The contrapuntal voices under discussion

in the following section emphasises voices which are angry, hurt, rejected, disinterested, disengaged, tired, happy, motivated and are often resistant to talking, as evidenced by their use of one-worded replies to the topic guide questions. I commence the analysis with the participant YF8 who expresses her feelings openly in her interview with YC3 and me.

Young female: YF8

We met up with YF8 outside a community centre in a suburb of Christchurch. She and her mother were making lunch for people who drop-in to enjoy the company of others. YF8 was in a rush as they were running late as she had baked a cake as her contribution to lunch. YF8 is a young NZ European female from Canterbury who at 16 years old had been out of school for approximately eight months and is mentored by YC3. In the interview, I sat to one side shadowing with the invitation from YC3 to join in if I wanted. YC3 relaxed YF8 with a casual conversation at the beginning of the interview suggesting they had a comfortable relationship. The tone of YF8's voice during much of the interview expressed her enjoyment and satisfaction of being in control of her learning experiences from her decision to enrol in Correspondence School. She exudes a feeling of satisfaction at having the opportunity to choose her education provider and she moves forward with her plans with the active support of her mother. The poem below expresses her *voice of engagement* with her choice of words that indicate she felt thwarted at school and constrained by the school environment. The poem also reflects her distress at perceiving herself to be the object of hatred from her teacher. Her talk suggesting she felt harassed stigmatised and socially excluded at school.

I talk
A lot
About school with my friends
Not
Goods things though
Always glad

I'm not at
 Fagley!
 I felt like I had a target on my back
 I just felt like you know
 I was always kept after class to have a talk
 I thought [name omitted] specifically hated me
 I told her we didn't have the money, but I would have it next week
 But she kept going on at me about it

The poem expresses YF8's engagement with her friends highlighted by her talk that she and her friends discuss their schooling experiences. She speaks of needing to keep her schooling in perspective, suggesting she has reconciled with what happened at school, it was outside her control, and all she can do is put it behind her.

Nairn and Higgins (2011) in their research on young people identify young male voices expressing their feelings similar to YF8 that teachers targeted them unfairly. One of the four young men in their study called Mike, a young Māori, expressed strong emotions such as the word 'hate' when talking about his teachers at school. Mike reported a sense of "*teachers picking on me*" of expectations that he would cause trouble, "*I couldn't do much things without getting watched*" he called teachers "*arseholes*" (Nairn & Higgins, 2011:183). His talk highlights a similar voice to those expressed by YM1 and YM3 from the focus group and YF8.

Even though YF8 spoke of feeling harassed by her teachers, she uses her *voice of engagement* "*I applied, I managed, I can do it, I am doing*" to prove to herself that she is increasing her sense of achievement and confidence on her own. Her voice emphasises a desire to do well in her life irrespective of the perception or negative opinion her teachers had of her. However, even with this newfound freedom she talks openly of her insecurities, her voice suggesting a lack of confidence. She voices her insecurities or lack of confidence from her lack of skills in math. She talks of being frustrated at math, highlighting her expectations that she wants to do

well. She tells us that she has a tutor and with their help, she expressed, with her *voice of engagement* that she is motivated and disciplined to achieve her NCEA credits. However, in her introspective voice she expressed the weight of her expectations by saying “*I should know how to do math*”. She talks about her parent’s lack of math skills externalising the expectations she has of her parents but then she places the onus back on her “*where, she should know more than she does*”.

In our *voice of knowing* YC3 and I suggest that she probably knows more than she thinks, as we perceive her to be a competent and engaged learner. What our ‘knowing’ alludes to is the perception that we think we may know more about her than she does about herself. We express this knowledge even though we do not know what her capabilities at math are. We use our *voice of knowing* to make her feel better because we can ‘hear’ that she is working hard as she had told us that her time at school was problematic. At the time of her interview, YF8 had already amassed 40 credits in one year, mentioning that while at her last school, she had only passed three. YF8 talks about her weak points candidly, and that she is learning gradually:

I’m happy
I can do it
I am doing

YF8 reflects a voice of resilience and resistance in the above poem as she acknowledges her refusal to allow her lack of NCEA credits stop her from achieving her learning goals. There is a suggestion from YF8’s transcript of multiple schools and some personal experiences that involved her mother. YC3 did not probe YF8 for more details; suggesting that YC3 is aware of the background, evidenced through her moving quickly to the next question emphasising YC3’s *voice of knowing*. YF8 also talked about her experiences with a school counsellor who

helped her feel supported but YF8 felt that the support given by the teachers was not genuine and came across as false. YF8 talks of this support in a disbelieving voice *“like, you know why are you treating me special and blah, blah, blah and I didn’t want to be supported by the teachers who didn’t truly mean it”*. YF8 is aware of her needing external support to get through school but her talk is suggestive of being able to tell the difference between unconditional support and conditional support. YF8 talks about the expectations she experienced from teachers concerning achieving her NCEA credits. She argues this pressure came to her due to her *“being in with the wrong crowd, but that was my choice, and I bunked a lot”*. Her talk highlights her *voice of engagement* in resisting the expectations of the school that put her in an adversarial relationship with her teachers and the school. YF8 infers that these adversarial relationships contributed to her deciding to leave school.

When asked what she enjoyed at school YF8 replies with *“lunchtime and home time”* emphasising the importance she places on her relationships and the emotional security she has at home and with her friends. She did not participate in any sporting activities but talks about the community centre she attends with her mum and her voice rings with a happy tone. YF8 at the time of her interview was accessing a training provider with the help of YC3. YF8’s voice sounded engaged and excited when she spoke of *“it’s something I want to do, something I am interested in, so I want to go for it”*. Her voice rings with the conviction that she can and will determine her vocational opportunities, with YC3 standing by in case she needs further guidance. YC3 speaks of YF8 as *“motivated”* and *“awesome”*. YC3 is positively reinforcing YF8’s strengths as in her practice YC3 draws on Nga Maata Waka’s strengths-based approach. When we finished our interview, we followed YF8 back to the community centre’s kitchen where her mother was dishing up lunch and we left YF8 in

charge of the soup as we drove back to the marae. Not long after we were back, Chantel and I headed out to meet YM4 at his house.

Young male: YM4

YM4 is a young Māori male, 16 years old and is from the Manawatu. As we settle at the kitchen table Chantel discusses the information sheet and the consent form, which YM4 signs as we sit and chat with his Nan. Chantel told me on the way over to his house that he has a strong, supportive relationship with his grandparents and they have been his sole caregivers for most of his young life. Nan and Granddad were registered foster parents with CYFS.⁴⁰ As we start the interview I observe how respectful YM4 was to his Nan, his voice sounds strong and clear although he has a self-deprecating laugh he uses when Chantel asks a question he is unsure of or he chooses not to answer. When Chantel asked him about success his response was *“I haven’t succeeded at school so I wouldn’t know”*, suggesting for him a successful identity would be an academic one. He speaks in a strong resistant voice when Chantel asks him if he talks to his family about school. The poem below highlights his strength of feeling about not talking about school:

I don’t talk about school
I don’t want to talk to youse about school
I’ve never talked to youse about it
I’m not sure, to be honest, why
I never talk about school

His choice to be secretive or resistant is evident when Chantel gently seeks more details about why he chooses not to talk to his family about school when his Nan⁴¹ elects to answer on his behalf. He laughs and responds with *“I don’t know”* as his Nan demands to know

⁴⁰ Child Youth and Family Services

⁴¹ Consent form supplied by Chantel for ‘Nan’ to be a participant and her talk used in the research.

“*why*” he refuses to talk to her about school. Her talk suggests she finds his inability to tell her why frustrates her and his response is “*why not?*” I wonder if this is his way of saying his not talking is no big deal when he refuses to speak to her. Perhaps they have had this conversation many times in the past. His Nan demands he “*tell the truth*” she says to Chantel that talking about school always “*ends up in an argument*”.

During the interview, his Nan often spoke on his behalf raising questions as to the aim of the research to gather authentic voices, to hear *his* experiences first-hand not his Nan’s unintentional but informative version of his schooling experiences.

I guess
I guess
I guess

Reflected in the “*I guess*” statements above is YM4’s *voice of uncertainty*. I interpret this voice as a resistant voice that provides him with some emotional safety, emphasising a non-committal positioning with a stranger, even with Chantel being present. He expresses this voice so that he is not expressing his introspective talk, with his “I guess” statements to stop any unwanted perceived criticism. In this context, his caution is understandable, which may be why he responded with such brief replies. The poem below highlights the multiple or polyphonic group of voices within his talk signifying his *voice of uncertainty*, his *voice of engagement* and his *voice of silence*.

I
I don’t know
I
I don’t know

As the interview progresses YM4 is sitting tapping on his computer and his tapping becomes stronger when Nan is speaking. The tapping I observe seems to be his way of responding to

what Nan is saying about him to us. Prior to his session Chantel mentioned he likes to move around when he speaks.

In the later stages of the interview, his Nan keeps at him “*to be honest*” which prompts his later talk to start with “*to be honest*”. Listening and reading his transcript, I noted there was a similarity between his responses and the answers from YM1 in the focus group. The phrase “to be honest” is suggestive of a throwaway comment or a ‘stake inoculator’ (Potter, 2011:212) similar to “*why not*” used by YM1 in the focus group session. On the surface, this phrasing appears to be a defence mechanism, a stalling mechanism or an emotional barrier erected to fill the discussion with noise as a form of conversation filler. Alternatively, this may be a sign of vulnerability where he does not want to talk to us about school but may talk to Chantel when his Nan and I are not there.

YM4 also talks about his experiences of school and expressed the emotions of uncertainty in the poem and there is a suggestion of a *voice of regret*.

I was all about leaving school
When I left
I was how old when I got kicked out
I wasn't at high school at 14
I can't be at high school at 14
I don't know now
I got kicked out for non-attendance
I don't know

What this poem emphasises is YM4's regrets or the negative feelings of leaving school, such as the lack of social contact with his friends (although his Nan makes a derogatory noise when he mentions his friends) as he speaks in his *voice of regret*. YM4, in response to Chantel's questioning, discusses his attendance at an AE provider where his Nan mentions the two providers he attended, and he confirms he attended multiple AE providers. His Nan tells us of his attendance issues at these providers, which have occurred through his use of

drugs and his trouble with rules. She spoke of how the AE providers he attended loved having him but “*they tried, and they tried so hard you know, and he just bucked the rules*”. Nan uses her *voice of knowing* to talk about YM4’s attendance issues; why she thought he struggled to participate. His choosing not to tell us about his experiences is possibly because her *voice of knowing* has unintentionally silenced his.

By the end of the session, Nan was doing most of the talking. She spoke about how the size of schools was problematic for young people and that many of her foster kids struggled to find their way around a big school after having been at a small intermediate school. She compares YM4 to another boy who “*for a while couldn’t pick it up either*”. YM4’s Nan tells us:

“see with him a lot of it is he can’t write things down, he can do it, but he’s gotta be hands on, sometimes I think he was a bit dyslexic but if you like you can set him a task as long as he doesn’t have to write anything down, he can think about it, he’ll do it”.

The talk above highlights his Nan’s *voice of knowing* as she leaves us in no doubt that she perceives YM4 to be the problem and responsible for his learning outcomes. In the field note below, I discuss my observations with Chantel.

Field note: While in the car, we discuss her role of how she [Chantel] is looking to get YM4 into a work-training programme. We talk about how going to work is so much harder than going to school. We talk about the reward of earning money as a motivator that young people focus on and we discuss how young people can be so disengaged which makes Nga Maata Waka and the work they do so valuable. I felt glad that YM4 had someone like Chantel as his support and that she worked on his strengths and not all the deficit talk his Nan spoke of to us.

After YM4’s interview, we went to the home of YF10, who at the time of her interview was in mentoring sessions with Chantel. As with YC3 and YF8, I evidenced Chantel’s connection with YF10 by the casual manner they greeted each other emphasising a comfortable trusting relationship.

Young female: YF10

YF10 is 16 years old and identified as Māori (Ngāi Tahu). YF10 left school when she was 15 and at the time of her interview had been out of mainstream secondary schooling for almost a year. Her whānau had come to Christchurch from Otago and as with YM4, we started slowly and her voice reflects a *voice of certainty* as she jumps straight in responding to Chantel. While Chantel asks the questions, I sit quietly to the side observing in my role of shadowing. YF10 does not appear perturbed to be talking in front of a stranger at her kitchen table. Her body language is relaxed as she sits in her PJs (pyjamas) with her head resting in her hand, even though there was some noise from the remainder of the household. This noise did not seem to restrain her from responding and she did not appear to be self-conscious of her answers, or worried that someone might hear. Many of her responses are brief, for example, *no, nope, good, not much, yeah, and na* and she uses the word ‘like’ a great deal.

Siegel (2002:35) argues that in the field of semantics the word is a ‘discourse particle’ highlighting a mismatch between words and meaning. The word ‘like’ is punctuated by the brevity of her answers suggesting that she has some knowledge of how she feels about her experiences of mainstream secondary schooling but is reluctant to say so. Instead of using silence, as did the focus group as a form of resistance, YF10 has chosen to fill the silence with empty words. These words show her engagement with us but in reality, these empty words suggest that she is resistant to giving out personal information. For example, when she responds to Chantel’s question of ‘what would she like to change about her teachers?’ YF10 replied “*just like, I don’t know they were like ...at ya, like...like to get round about everything like doing your school work and stuff*”. YF10 uses a vague voice that does not tell us why she felt pressured, only expressing that teachers were “*at ya*”. Her lethargic responses show her disinterest in meeting a teacher’s expectations, but also in explaining to us why she felt this

was. The problem with trying to understand what she means by her stilted responses is that with our *voice of knowing* we may attempt to fill in the gaps in her talk with what we think we know. The risk for YF10 is that others might decide what is best for her thinking we know what she means or wants but in reality we have no idea.

YF10 drew sparingly on the personal pronoun use of 'I' for the duration of the interview. However, irrespective of her lack of personal pronouns, her voice was clear in what she expressed and how she felt about the questions asked, even though she said little. YF10 reflected a relaxed demeanour in the way her voice was accepting of her circumstances, and she exuded an air of handling her learning as had YF8. Her *voice of engagement* stressed her ability to goal set with Chantel, her desire to take responsibility for her education, and her motivation to study. YF10 is actively studying at Correspondence School similar to YF8 and working towards her NCEA Level 1. She spoke of passing well. Evidenced from within her talk was the *voice of engagement* where she talks "*it was my choice to leave school*", and sounds determined when she speaks of "*completing my NCEA Level 1*". YF10 talked of how she liked "*hanging with her friends, I didn't really like my teachers*" and that "*yeah*" she felt supported at school but "*more friends' kind of side of it*". Chantel asked her if she felt like she struggled at school and YF10 responded "*no not really*" suggesting that cognitively she was a competent learner.

We end the session as YF10's mother comes into the kitchen and she asks Chantel about YF10's performance at Correspondence School. Chantel reacts in a mediating capacity as YF10's mum was suggesting YF10 was not telling the truth about her performance at school, and her mother was demanding to see a school report. The suggestion was that YF10 was

lying about the credits she was gaining and keeping possible failing results from her. The field note below summarises the way I reflected on this situation:

Field note: There was a strong maternal influence in this household, and I felt that on face value YF10 had a great deal of support. The participant was vocal in letting her mother know in front of us after we had finished the session that she was passing and that her mother did not need to see a report card. YF10 told her mother that she had most of her credits for level one sorted. Not sure, of the relationship between the mother and the daughter, yet once again here is a young person who does not want to talk about school with her mother and yet her mother is berating her for not proving that she is passing. Are these trust issues a common occurrence in of young people who have left school early? If every time I went to speak about how I was feeling or doing, would I keep talking if I were accused of lying or the inference of being dishonest every time I went to speak.

In the field note above, I have noted the strong maternal influence of YF10's mother and I make note of YF10's use of her *voice of engagement*, when she resists what she perceives as her mother interfering. For example YF10 was 'was vocal in letting her mother know' she was doing her schoolwork. This suggests that even though YF10's mother supports her learning she is not fully convinced that YF10 is engaging with school. In contrast to YF8's mother, as evidenced through YF8's talk she fully supports her daughters learning. Added to the strong maternal presence of both YF8 and YF10's mothers, is the way in which YC3 and Chantel also support the decision-making both YF8 and YF10 to attend Correspondence School. There is no mention in the transcripts by YF8 or YF10 of a father figure suggesting that their primary caregiver is their mother. Evidenced from the interactions between YF8, YF9, YF10 and the youth coaches Chantel, YC2 and YC3 is the suggestion that the girls are familiar with having a strong female or maternal presence in their lives. I perceive that perhaps YF8 and YF10 view Chantel and YC3 to be their role models.

Young female: YF9

YC2 and I held the interview for YF9 at the marae where she filled in as a replacement for the participant who was unable to make it. YF9 is 20 years old, identified as Māori and even though YF9 is outside the age of our research sample, we continued with the interview with me in my shadowing role. At the time of her interview, YF9 was categorised as NEET. Like YM4, YF9 was originally from the Waikato, but had attended high school in Christchurch. However, unlike YF10, she did not identify her hapū or iwi. YF9's voice sounded self-conscious when she identified as Māori, as she expressed a nervous giggle when she said "*Māori*". As with YF8, her favourite time at school was the "*canteen*" and she found her teachers to be "*oh they were alright sometimes, but most of the time they were rude*". Occasionally she felt "*singled out*" although she did at times feel more supported by her friends. However, she said, "*some teachers were supportive as well*". Her voice in the poem below explores her feelings of leaving school showing her *voice of regret* emphasised in the words she uses:

I left
I didn't really care
I actually left
I got kicked out
I found the downside to leaving
I got kicked out

In a similar way to YM4, YF9 has a self-deprecating laugh when she talks about the downsides of not being at school and "*being shattered*" at leaving school.

YF9 responds in a similar manner to YF10 that she does not talk to her whānau about school. YF9's expressed in her *voice of engagement* as does YF10, and YM4 to highlight their resistance to talking to whānau in the poem below.

I don't know
98

I don't really talk about school to them

My interpretation of the above poem is that YF9 does not talk about school to her whānau nor does she talk to the school about her whānau. Hence, her “*away from school, away from them*” talk suggests she likes to keep her experiences to herself. As with YF10, YF9 expressed her *voice of uncertainty*, to avoid telling us why she does not want to talk about school. As I discuss further below YF9 reveals her reasons for leaving in her *voice of regret* as she responds to the prompting of YC2. Evident in her voice is the note of disbelief emphasising she was not aware of the consequences of leaving school or how she would feel once she had left. YF9 pauses when she speaks taking her time responding to YC2, but these pauses are not suggestive of having to remember deeply or that she has forgotten her schooling experiences. Although YF9 has not attended school for almost four years, she has vivid memories of school. Her *voice of regret* portrays a young woman who speaks in an introspective voice as having reconciled but has regrets about what happened at school.

What is suggestive from YF9's *voice of regret* is that YF9 played a major role in her leaving school with no qualifications. There is a suggestion that life became a great deal harder than she had expected when she talked about feeling “*shattered*”. YC2 questioned her on why she left school and YF9 replied that she was “*kicked out*” and when further questioned YF9 answered, “*Oh, fighting, drugs, getting caught smoking*”. When YC2 questioned her on what she would like to change about leaving school YF9 expressed a desire for a second chance to go back to school “*just go back there and redo it*”.

For YF9, YM4, and the others from the focus group, YF6, YF7 and YM3, their regret and uncertainty over why they have left school emphasises what Nairn and Higgins (2011:185) refer to as a ‘meritocratic discourse’, this concept implies that they have failed at school due

to their own lack of effort. That these young people *are* aware of the consequences and their behaviour of leaving school, take their failure personally. As a result, they do not want to talk to their families about school, which suggests they are unhappy they were unsuccessful at school. For YF9 and the other participants currently mentored, for every year they are not involved in any education, training or employment, as described by the *Bridging the Gap* report these years can be wasted and frustrating and may lead to lower paid work and possibly worse job prospects in later life. For those who are ‘not participating’, that is, not actively engaged in employment, education or training has the impact of being socially, economically, and politically excluded from society.

YF10 is another participant who talks in a *voice of uncertainty*. As with YF4 and YF9, she also does not talk to her family about school. The poem below gives some insight into her *voice of uncertainty* that in effect is emotionally blocking us as she talks to fill up the empty spaces of quiet. In reality, her use of silence as an emotional barrier is hiding the real reason she does not talk to her whānau about school and she shuts down when prompted by Chantel. YF10 in the poem below chooses to be vague with us (or possibly me) about why she does not talk about school.

Na
Cos
I don't know
I just don't
Don't know the reason

All through the interview, YF10's answers continued to be brief but full of meaning if I take into consideration the tone of her voice and her body language when she quickly responded to Chantel when she asked, “do you talk to your family about school?” YF10's voice becomes stronger when she talks of why she resists talking about school to her family and she sits straighter in her chair. However, unlike YM4, there is no one else adding to her talk about

why this is so, or contesting her as to why she does not speak of school. YF10 tells us “*things had been good*” since she left school and any opportunities to ask her to expand on that response was lost when her family came into the kitchen.

The contrapuntal or polyphonic voices expressed by YF8, YM4, YF10 and YF9 have all expressed through the *voice of engagement*, the *voice of uncertainty*, the *voice of regret* and the *voice of silence* to discuss and reflect their schooling experiences. Many times during the unstructured interviews there appeared to be hidden meanings expressed by the contrapuntal voices that they used to show they were uncomfortable answering that often left me confused and unable to interpret meaning from their talk. The danger of interpretation is that I draw on my *voice of knowing* to try to decipher what they meant. The voice that was the most complex was the *voice of silence* that highlights the concept of using silence as the young people did in the focus group or the concept of *silencing* where young people are ‘being silenced’.

Voice of Silence – and the concept of silencing

From the theoretical framework I drew on symbolic interactionism and the concept of ‘intersubjectivity or shared understanding’ as a tool for analysing the communication or verbal and non-verbal social interactions young people have with others in their social world (Anderson, 2008:469). I also drew on the theory of ‘emotional labour’ from Smyth, Hattam et al (2004:87) who suggest that ‘managing their own and other people’s emotions’, for example, ‘desire, fear, despair, caring, disillusionment, pain, anger, stress, anxiety, and loneliness through developing defence mechanisms’ young people use silence as an emotional barrier and as a method of resistance.

The four contrapuntal voices, the *voice of engagement*, the *voice of uncertainty*, the *voice of regret* and the *voice of silence* draw on the ways young people perceive themselves as the

‘knower’ or the ‘I’ as their state of consciousness. Therefore, the ‘I’ interacts with the ‘me’ or self as object (Denzin, 1992:402). Evident from the transcripts has been the ways the young people express their emotional experiences of how they felt about school. Also evident from the transcripts is the resistance highlighted by the choice not to talk for example, YM4, YF9 and YF10 about school with their family. Therefore, the evidence suggests that young people react uniquely to using their *voice of silence* or being silenced in ways that they feel protects their emotional wellbeing. Therefore, silence in the focus group felt more like the group were using silence not only as a form of resistance, but also as an assertion of power or defiance suggesting that they did not want to be there. At the conclusion of the session, I asked Chantel about the long silences and she expressed some surprise at the lack of talk from the girls. However, we were unable to come to any concrete conclusions as to why this was so, even though Chantel had recruited the group for their high-level vocal articulateness.

Smyth, Hattam et al (2004:78) argue that silence or feeling silenced has the most impact on young people who lack the opportunity to express themselves within the school environment, and may, ‘lead a young person to outright sabotage or silence’. In this instance, silence experienced this way suggests that silence is ‘imposed’ (Fivush, 2010:91). Fivush (2010) argues that:

Being silenced is almost always conceptualised as [a] negative. Examples of this type of silencing include the silencing of trauma in general and violent trauma in particular. For instance, survivors of sexual violence are implicitly or explicitly told not to talk about their experiences, and when they do, they are either not believed or belittled, or blamed for what happened (Fivush, 2010:91).

However, what the analysis has highlighted is the complexity that the concepts of silence and silencing suggest. For example, the two most expressive voices were YM3 and YF8 (NZ European voices) in the telling of their schooling experiences but who have also had silence imposed upon them, YM3 by the school and his family and YF8 at school. While there was

no *voice of uncertainty* for YM3 or although YF8 spoke occasionally in her *voice of uncertainty*, the contrast between their lack of “*I don’t know*”, or “*I guess*” was notable in comparison to YM4, YF9 and YF10. Nairn et al (2005:225) suggest that group dynamics (between Māori and non-Māori) can reveal a hierarchy between the ‘broader cultural, historical and geographical discourses [that have] implications for the social relations amongst the group’ that may have stopped some from talking. Drawing on the work of Tuhiwai Smith et al (2002) would suggest that in this instance some ‘voices are rendered meaningless while others carry a weight of significance’ (Tuhiwai Smith et al, 2002:171). Voices that carry this weight of significance would suggest that for YM3 and YF8 their ethnicity played a role in that even though they felt bullied and harassed in the school system, they still felt they were able to discuss their situation with others without fear of reprisal.

Nairn et al (2012) offer an explanation to the vocal disparity by drawing on the work of Bourdieu and his notions of social and cultural capital. In the analysis, I consider YM3 and YF8’s voices as those that carried the weight of significance or privilege (Tuhiwai Smith et al, 2002). Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of social and cultural capital argues that voices which have access to ‘discursive and material resources’ have social capital. The definition of social capital is ‘conferred by virtue of relationship networks, family background and knowledge acquisition’ (Nairn et al, 2012:24). Meaning that for some families, access to technology, extra-curricular activities that leads to development of extra skills and knowledge their children will have better access to employment opportunities. For those families in positions of privilege, this privilege may provide pathways to better jobs than those that do not.

As discussed previously, a strong female presence has also emerged from the analysis that I suggest plays an important role particularly with YF8 and YF10. In some instances, it has contributed to the participant’s ability to express their feelings and rationalise the choices

they have made at leaving school (YF8) and at other times, it has led the participant YF10 to stop talking. For example, YF8 spoke of her mother's support and how important this support was when she left school; whereas, YF10 resists what she sees as her mother's interference in her schooling activities and refuses to tell her anything. Her mother is adamant she is keeping secrets and inadvertently silences her daughter's voice.

Some young people have healthy self-esteem and self-confidence having the 'tacit knowledge' or a strong sense of knowing that an education is achievable or that the future looks promising. For others it is more of a wish list as they lack social and cultural capital (Nairn et al, 2012:24). Having this tacit knowledge or the embodiment of social and cultural capital is what Bourdieu calls 'habitus' (cited Edgerton & Roberts, 2014:197).

Edgerton and Roberts (2014) define habitus as:

A set of acquired dispositions, the internalised interpretive framework, rooted in family upbringing and conditioned by one's position in the social structure, through which one perceives the social world and one's prospects in it (p.198).

The concept of habitus therefore connects to the individual and links to the institutional power that ebbs and flows around the *voice of knowing*. In other words, the *voice of knowing* influences the *voice of silence* and the concept of *silencing*. For example, if a young person's whānau lack the confidence to challenge the system on their younger whānau member's behalf, this lack of confidence may filter down through to other family members contributing to their sense of powerlessness or their lack of voice in response to the *voice of knowing*. I also suggest this lack of social and cultural capital contributes to young people using their introspective voices, emphasising their *voice of uncertainty* and their *voice of regret*. As discussed previously, these voices lead to the *voice of silence* and because some of the young people in this group may feel they do not belong at school, and may internalise their feelings

of failure and choose not to talk about their schooling experiences with their whānau as evidenced by the talk of YM4, YF9, and YF10.

Summary of Chapter 4

In this chapter, I discussed the findings that emerged from the 11 young people who participated in the focus group and the unstructured interviews with the youth coaches and me. Drawing on a creative format of poetry of the 'I' poem, thematic analysis and elements of discourse analysis, I interpreted their unique perspectives of disengagement from mainstream secondary schooling. The findings that emerged from the young people's voices identified their sensitivity towards their unsuccessful schooling identities, particularly with the way others perceive them as either dropouts or losers. The four contrapuntal voices that emerged from their talk were the *voice of engagement*, the *voice of uncertainty*, the *voice of regret*, and the *voice of silence*. These voices signified their inability to discern why they felt the way they did and how they came to be disengaged from school. In this chapter, I linked these four voices to the counterpoint voice, the *voice of knowing*, which I suggested had affected young people's choices and ultimately influenced their using their *voice of silence* where they have chosen not to talk at all. What also emerged from the *voice of knowing* is how the concepts of 'silence' and 'silencing' may affect young people's voices and for the ways we as others with our counterpoint voice, the *voice of knowing*, intentionally or unintentionally speak on the behalf of young people.

Drawing on the work of Nairn and Higgins (2011) and Smyth, Hattam et al (2004), I included the voices of young people from their research to emphasise that irrespective of geographical boundaries, these young people had experienced the same negative student/teacher relationships. Drawing on symbolic interactionism their extracts suggests the intersubjectivity or verbal interactions that young people have with others, focuses on the notion that the

perceptions young people have of themselves and others are intersubjectively communicated. What became evident from their 'I' poems is the way the participants find meaning from their schooling experiences. Therefore, their social interactions are in response to their schooling experiences based on what they believe to be real rather than on what are objectively real. In the following chapter and in connection to their schooling experiences, I link their voices with the operational perspectives provided by Linda, Andrew, Matua Willy, and Chantel. Their voices discuss their perceptions of working with young people in the Youth Service NEET arena.

Chapter 5: An operational perspective of disengagement

The previous two chapters drew attention to the three phases of gathering voices as well as the multiple methods of analysis I used to explore young people's talk for the ways they shape their social realities as they connect with the outer world. The findings that emerged from the four contrapuntal voices illustrated that young people are sensitive towards their unsuccessful schooling identities, particularly with the way others perceive them as either dropouts or losers. This chapter provides a behind-the-scenes discussion of the Youth Service NEET (YS NEET) environment supported by the voices of Linda, Andrew, Matua Willy, and Chantel. Their voices build on the themes and the contrapuntal voices from what the 11 young people told us in the previous chapter. The main themes that emerged from Linda, Andrew, Matua Willy and Chantel's talk were the *role and ethos of the youth coach*, the *voice of knowing* and *whakawhanaungatanga: the importance of relationships for young people*. I give a brief overview of the role of the youth worker and the history that culminated in a key document called the *Ara Taiohi Code of Ethics* and the ways this document guides youth work in New Zealand. I discuss the counterpoint voice, the *voice of knowing* to suggest youth coaches, staff and others (including me as the researcher) have our own ideas about young people and their schooling experiences. Last, I explore how important relationships or *whakawhanaungatanga* are for young people in and outside the whānau to feel connected with their teachers and feel a sense of belonging at school.

The role and ethos of the youth coach

“Our vision is to support the dreams and aspirations of our people and to strive towards independence with integrity.” Nga Maata Waka⁴²

⁴² <http://maatawaka.org.nz/>

In his role as the Operations Manager, Andrew talked about the multiple reasons that bring young people to the organisation and suggested that 99.9% (of the time) young people come voluntarily. Andrew proposed with his *voice of knowing*, that “*young people don’t want to be bumming around, they want to be doing something*”, suggesting that young people actively seek opportunities for work or vocational training. Furthermore, a young person can be referred to the Youth Service as a form of diversion from the juvenile courts, requiring a young person voluntarily⁴³ attend sessions with a youth coach until the courts release them.

The participants who choose voluntary registration with Nga Maata Waka are categorised on a ‘disengagement risk matrix’ when Nga Maata Waka receives notification of their contact details from either the MSD or MOE. The MSD specifies three risk categories, low, medium and high. The low category is for young people who are still at school and do not require any assistance. The middle-risk category is for those who have disengaged and already left (the participants in this study) and the third category is high risk, which includes issues such as drug abuse or mental health needs. According to Andrew, the third category places young people outside the level of Nga Maata Waka’s expertise and require the intervention of health professionals and an allocated registered social worker. Chantel and her team mentor only those in the medium-risk category who can also come to the attention of Nga Maata Waka

⁴³ Voluntary attendance in this context means that once a family group conference agrees on a plan, such as attending a Youth Service NEET provider the young person goes back to the Youth Court to talk to the judge about it so he or she can decide whether to approve it. Nga Maata Waka receives from the courts the young person’s details and then the youth coaches make contact with the young person. The courts then determine (if the young person sticks to attending Nga Maata Waka) any charges held against the young person will probably be withdrawn or they may be discharged without anything else happening to them, <http://www.justice.govt.nz/courts/youth/information-for-young-people/main#8>.

outside of the MSD and MOE through various parties, such as grandparents, parents, or other extended family members.

The Youth Services team at Nga Maata Waka consists of three experienced youth coaches and Chantel, who have all received social services training from various providers. To my knowledge, only Chantel received her National Diploma in Social Services and Community Work⁴⁴ at Nga Maata Waka. Nga Maata Waka's social services programme incorporates a social worker ethos, which encompasses professionalism along with the need and ability to maintain ethical boundaries. The emphasis on maintaining professional boundaries is as Andrew said "*massive*" ensuring the youth coaches keep their youth-mentoring work separate from their personal lives. Maintaining this professional separation is necessary to ensure a practice of safe mentoring. Andrew noted an important distinction between a youth coach and a social worker. As the mentoring role undertaken by Nga Maata Waka involves young people classified at the medium-risk level by MSD, this level of risk does not require youth coaches to have a social worker's skill set. The previously mentioned mission statement emphasises Nga Maata Waka's passion and commitment to assisting young people within the context of being a YS NEET provider out in the community.

According to the MYD and noted in their 2006 publication *Youth work today: a review of the issues and challenges*, New Zealand has had a functioning youth work practice for the last 30 years. During this period, many Government initiatives have received funding to help and

⁴⁴ The National Diploma in Social Services and Community Work is a two-year programme. It is a clinical programme, which means that academic studies are complemented by fieldwork placement in year two. People awarded the National Diploma in Social Services and Community Work are able to work in the social services industry under professional supervision, but with a considerable degree of autonomy and accountability for achieving outcomes as a social services worker, but graduates are not eligible to register as a social worker, <http://maatawaka.org.nz>

support young people. Many in this sector work either part-time or are volunteers, working with little or no qualifications and with minimal youth work training. However, according to Barwick (2006) the last 30 years has seen the youth sector lacking a national policy and a qualifications framework to guide the development of youth work. Such a framework encourages the idea that a qualifications framework has the potential to provide a skilled and trained workforce. People working in the industry who were concerned at the lack of such a framework compiled the *Ara Taiohi Code of Ethics for Youth Work in Aotearoa New Zealand* (the *Code of Ethics*) to create a standardised document to promote best practice. The *Code of Ethics* defines the fundamental values and standards for those paid and unpaid working in the youth sector. In the foreword to the *Code of Ethics*, the Hon. Paula Bennett notes that it promotes the following significant outcomes:

It identifies the core youth work values; relationships, community, culture and youth-centred practice and it is a way of working that provides effective care, support and inspiration for our young people (AraTaiohi Code of Ethics 2011, unpaginated).

Nga Maata Waka bases their Youth Service practice on a strengths-based concept that complements the *Code of Ethics*. Andrew explained that the role or the ethos of the youth coach is being able to “*identify the barriers*” that young people experience, such as the entry requirements for engaging in education or training. As part of the mentoring process, a young person works with a youth coach to “*produce a plan*” to be independent.

To encourage young people to come to Nga Maata Waka for mentoring assistance, Chantel (in her role as Team Leader), said she “*does promotional work for our service*” including “*networking with organisations and schools [who] we may already have a presence in*” and works towards “*getting our service out there*” in the schools. She says they also aim to “*capture*” young people who are at risk of disengaging prior to them making the decision to leave school. At the time of her interview, Chantel had a caseload of 20 young people.

To ensure they deliver best practice Nga Maata Waka work from two key sources, the previously mentioned *Ara Taiohi Code of Ethics for Youth Work in Aotearoa-New Zealand*, and an online evaluation sheet⁴⁵ for young people to give feedback on their experience of attending a YS NEET provider. The evaluation form asks questions concerning whether they went through Nga Maata Waka or a subcontractor, why they went to the service, that is what type of support were they requiring, and did they manage to develop a plan with a youth coach? Part of the evaluation form also asks questions (ranked from strongly disagree to strongly agree) for information about the youth coach who mentored them and whether the youth coach was easy to understand, supported their cultural beliefs, identified their needs and did the youth coach support them in achieving their goals. Many of the outcomes on the form focus on transitioning out of their NEET status but asked as well, are their issues of wellbeing, self-confidence, and feelings of connectedness.

Gordon, Sedgwick, Grey, and Marsden (2014) provide a comprehensive look at the Youth Service as part of a recent study they conducted in conjunction with an evaluation of the Youth Guarantee (YG), an initiative created by the MSD in 2012. The primary purpose of the Youth Service (YS) Gordon et al (2014) advise, is to assist 16 and 17 year olds so that they do not graduate to the unemployment benefit at age 18. However, young people do not necessarily find a place on the YG scheme, although Gordon et al (2014) suggest this is the most likely outcome.

As the Operations Manager, Andrew has a key reporting role to the MSD regarding the regulatory requirements for Nga Maata Waka as a YS NEET provider. As part of their

⁴⁵ <http://maatawaka.org.nz/service-evaluation-form-1/>

operation, Andrew provides MSD regular updates on how they are meeting their targets as part of their contractual obligations. In Andrew's interview he spoke of a target of 85% of 18 year olds across the country attaining their NCEA Level 2. In this context, MSD and MOE view NCEA Level 2 as being the minimum educational attainment for giving young people options in the workforce or vocational training sectors. Andrew spoke of this target as being non-negotiable and that New Zealand was tracking slightly ahead of that target. Andrew's role also requires that he build and maintain healthy relationships within the Christchurch community and with other YS NEET providers in New Zealand.

Gordon et al (2014) highlight that the main advantage of the YS is that providers like Nga Maata Waka have access to the most at risk young people and can encourage them into courses, for example, the focus group's music course. Gordon et al (2014) also advise that the YS programme has received \$30 million in funding since its inception in 2014, which illustrates there is a significant amount of money being directed to assist young people who are disengaged from mainstream schooling. In their evaluation of YS NEET providers Gordon et al (2014) determined that one of the recommendations focuses on the need for more flexibility in funding to ensure that the YS is focused on student need and not on the administrative aspects of being a YS NEET provider. I interpret that to mean that running a YS NEET provider has a large administration component. Andrew discussed the compliance (reporting) requirements of Nga Maata Waka and his talk is suggestive of a heavy workload. To do his role effectively Andrew has delegated some of the administrative responsibilities to Chantel. Andrew mentions that there are,

“Monthly and quarterly [reports] to the funder [MSD] from the activity reporting tool that we use and [we] invoice accordingly and subsequent to that, [we] invoice our sub-contractors to what they do. [My role is] purely administrative and managerial so [I] also manage the team here and in terms of auditing their work [that, is in] terms of performance [and I] review their general work [as well as] just being their

departmental manager [and] auditing the sub-contractors as well” (Extract from the transcript for Andrew McHutchison).

Andrew also talked about the core emphasis of the YG initiative, which as previously mentioned, is to encourage young people to achieve their NCEA Level 2 credits so that they can move into vocational training courses. They also found that life skills, such as social connectedness and the building of self-esteem in young people who access the YS is crucial if they are to transition back into education, find employment or into a vocational training programme so they can lead independent lives. However, as Gordon et al (2014) discovered from their research, to get any real benefit, young people need to be able to progress up to Level 4 of the qualifications framework. However, some young people may not want to take on a student loan and if they do, they then have to struggle with everyone else in the labour market to find a job. One of the service providers in Gordon et al’s (2014:13) study suggested, “there are still no jobs out there for them” even if they attain a Level 4 qualification.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, Tuhiwai Smith (2013) suggests that these programmes ‘prepare the unemployed with more work skills, computer literacy, work readiness and interview skills, as if somehow their skill development will create jobs where none exist’ (Tuhiwai Smith, 2013:130). Therefore, young people who move into these new learning environments having left school, place their failure (of not getting back into education) or on a programme, (that is not finding a job) as being their own fault for not working hard enough.

Andrew and I talked about the availability of jobs for young people in the Canterbury post-quake employment environment and Andrew discussed one of his main concerns, which is,

“We are experiencing a higher than usual period of employment, education and other things because of the earthquake [and] the boom post-earthquake. When that boom stops, are we suddenly going to get a big upsurge in people requiring our services or

youth who aren't in any form of education or employment? [Since] the Government has reduced its capacity to a certain level...but they are aware of that so they have to be quite mindful of that, so when they are planning they [MSD] have to think... Canterbury's going to be a little bit different than the rest the country" (Extract from the transcript for Andrew McHutchison).

Andrew's talk reflects the uncertainty of Canterbury's employment and education market as vocational training providers have also focused on training young people specifically for the rebuild. Andrew's talk also suggested that Nga Maata Waka is prepared for when this downturn (a decrease in youth employment opportunities) occurs. Andrew is also confident they will be able to manage this influx, due to a) they are aware of what is happening in the job market and can advise MSD accordingly, and b) providing support to young people is their core focus. I discuss the implications of the youth labour market and the ways this impacts on Nga Maata Waka later in the chapter.

As part of their contractual obligations, the youth coaches at Nga Maata Waka receive independent supervision as part of their ongoing training. Andrew spoke of the need for all youth workers across the Canterbury region to be facilitating best practice the same way the youth coaches are at Nga Maata Waka. Andrew emphasised the supervision they receive,

"Our guys participate in what they call supervision once a month [from] someone who is independent of them [so] there is no conflict of interest anywhere. [They have someone] who can talk to them and have a look at their practice and help them to reflect on their practice...it can make a whole big different outcome...it can be educational...can be administrative but the important thing is that it can help them find resources" (Extract from the transcript for Andrew McHutchison).

Andrew also talked of Chantel's professionalism in her practice *"I have never seen the slightest hint that she brings anything personal into anything in her dealing with youth"*. I also evidenced this professionalism in practice in the way YC2's calm manner supported YF9 as she expressed using her *voice of regret* at how she felt about leaving school. I noted that all the youth coaches in Chantel's team had the same calm manner in their interactions with

young people. In our interview, Linda said, “*all the youth workers meet from all the providers [sub-contractors] to articulate a standard of practice across the whole service*”. Linda also mentioned that, “*management meet bi-monthly to iron out anything that creeps through with this youth worker from this provider [and] reports an issue to management that couldn’t be resolved at this level, [and] he’ll bring to the table and we have to sort it out*”.

Chantel and her team regularly visit schools to address the issues and concerns of young people at risk of disengaging. The emphasis for the work they do in schools is to provide a non-judgmental supportive relationship. Chantel talks about how “*we’re like the input feeders*”, providing “*information*” [and we are] “*neutral...we see that as a huge thing, so most of our stuff that we’re doing in schools [that is] the one-on-one stuff, addressing all that wellbeing stuff, [even though] they’ve got counsellors and that sort of stuff*”. Chantel spoke of the existing support structures currently in schools “*but I think even more [youth coaches need] to be put into school [which] would be of benefit*”. However, as evidenced from YF8 who spoke of her guidance counsellor as wanting to help but YF8 felt her support was ‘fake’ emphasising how important the youth coaches’ neutrality is and how it is valued by the young people they help within or outside of the mainstream schooling environment. This suggested that young people, in particular, YF8, interpret more than just words from voices and are sensitive to tone and demeanour—emphasising how young people respond to the ways others use their *voice of knowing*. To support this suggestion the following diagram illustrates the contrapuntal voices, along with the main themes from all the participants voices gathered, highlighting the ways the counterpoint voice, the *voice of knowing* influences the concept of young people using silence or silencing by others. In the following section, I discuss the ways the *voice of knowing* emotionally affects young people and shapes their schooling experiences.

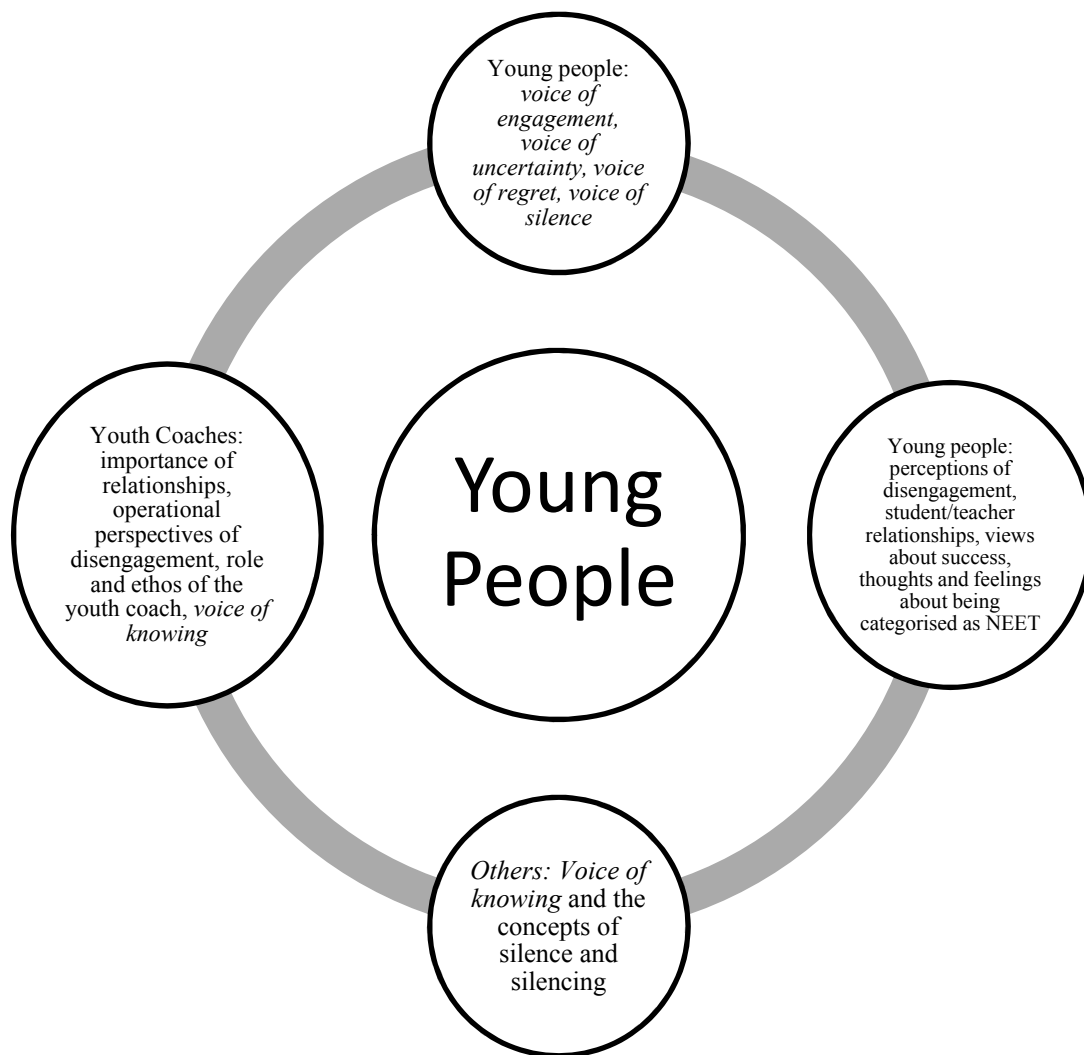


Figure 4: Relationship showing the critical voices and themes from the transcripts to the ways the voice of knowing influences the concept of young people using silence or being silenced by others.

The voice of knowing: youth coaches and others

In this section, I explore the counterpoint voice, the *voice of knowing*, which emerged from the contrapuntal voices expressed by the young people and their interactions with others particularly from their interactions with the youth coaches. The way the analysis evolved identified the ways the *voice of knowing* emerged from whānau/family members, and teachers. The *voice of knowing* suggests that young people might be *silenced* by those who care about them but who are complicit in undermining their *voice of engagement* leading young people to use their *voice of regret*, their *voice of uncertainty* and their *voice of silence*. In the previous chapter, I linked the voice of knowing with the concept of ‘being silenced’, where feeling silenced may ‘lead a young person to outright sabotage or silence’ (Smyth, Hattam et al, 2004:78). I also look to Fivush (2010) to argue that silence experienced this way suggests that silence is ‘imposed’ (Fivush, 2010:91). Therefore, in this section I link the idea of ‘being silenced’ with Bourdieu’s (1977) notions of symbolic violence, which I suggest is perpetuated at an individual and institutional level against young people who are disengaged from mainstream secondary schooling.

Previously, I explained my shadowing role and the ways this position enabled me to observe the underlying power relations between the youth coaches and the young people. Critical theory opened up what I interpreted was a power dialogue operating that occurs when conversations between parties are unequal with respect to race, class, privilege, or position especially for those in a position of authority (Madison, 2012). Therefore, the power dialogue illustrates the ways we take-for-granted the invisible power structures that are masked as neutral social arrangements, which are anything but neutral (Madison, 2005). My suggestion is that young people focus not so much on what is said but tend to focus on the way a person talks by interpreting the speakers tone, pitch, body language and so on. I suggest this power

dialogue is relevant, because it is these relationship dynamics and the ways young people interpret them, highlights how they make meaning, and take their social cues from their day-to-day relationships with others. This has particular relevance for youth coaches working with young people as they rely on the youth coaches' neutrality to help them with negotiating their experiences of disengagement.

In the field note below, I provide some insights into what I perceive to be these interactive cues between Chantel and YM4 with relevance to the way she shaped her questions to him using her *voice of knowing*. During the interview, Chantel would preface her questions with “*cos you don’t talk about school...*” or “*is it cos of the experience you had*” leaving me with the idea that there was more to his story of disengagement than was being disclosed. Discussed is some of his hidden history after the interview, which puts his interview into perspective. This history, which Chantel offers is more of a discussion than YM4’s actual personal history is described below:

Field note: Chantel and I have a conversation on the ‘nature versus nurture’ debate and how some parents erode a young person’s self-esteem and are responsible for their disengagement. Chantel tells me about some of the young people that Nga Maata Waka deal with who are so disabled by the fear of failure that putting them on the path to success can seem terrifying for the young person. I can’t help but compare this young man to YF8, who had a solid relationship with her mother that provided such a secure, supportive foundation to assist her to success. However, I am encouraged by the supportive role that the youth coaches provide.

Evident in the field note above are phrases such as ‘disabled by the fear of failure’ and ‘success can be terrifying’ signifying parallels with words that are usually described for victims of violence. My suggestion is that disengagement has the potential to leave invisible scars created from the interactions with others. Therefore, while the *voice of knowing* might not leave physical bruises or cause bleeding, I suggest that this voice is possibly a form of

symbolic violence as opposed to physical violence that imposes silence and blocks young people from talking. Parkin and Coomber (2009) argue that symbolic violence relates to the:

...imposition of power and control upon less powerful members within a given structure that results in unequal relationships, in which the dominated may be treated [as] inferior, denied access to resources and become limited in their social mobility and personal aspirations (Parkin & Coomber, 2009:391).

Hendricks (2014) a family therapist, argues that symbolic violence is perpetuated by people who are in a position to use their social and cultural capital with the aim of retaining power over those who have less capital. People, she argues, do this in a bid to retain the social order, or continue to reproduce the social inequalities embedded in, for example (within the context of this case study) the education system, the whānau/family, or an AE provider. However, symbolic violence is not always deliberate and could be a subconscious reflex or response that aims to maintain the status quo in favour of those who hold the most capital. Therefore, when symbolic violence is employed within the context of the mentor/mentee or whānau/family relationships, the violence ‘pertains to hidden patterns of interactions’ (Hendricks, 2014: unpaginated). When sifted through the lens of critical ethnography, the patterns or power dynamics within these relationships are exposed (Hendricks, 2014). Some of these patterns are what we consider to be as knowledge and are taken-for-granted. As discussed previously, others may perceive these notions of power to be within a schooling environment, issues such as ‘whiteness and privilege’ and the ways this privilege is taken-for-granted by those who have access to it (Madison, 2005:73).

Hendricks (2014) labels symbolic violence as a stealthy aggressor in her work with families, particularly with a family member ‘taking the voice of another’ (unpaginated). She argues that taking someone’s voice is an attempt to silence that person and is therefore an ‘act of symbolic violence’ (unpaginated). In addition, symbolic violence is also when the person

feels excluded, ignored, dismissed, or that their voice is devalued. Hendricks suggests that when a person feels invisible, symbolic violence affects their sense of self and their identity. Therefore, symbolic violence may only occur in instances where there is a power differential for example, between schools and young people or schools and whānau. For symbolic violence to feel real and for maximum impact on young people it must remain covert; this is why the *voice of knowing* can have such a powerful effect on young people. What critical theory exposes is that the hidden nature of the *voice of knowing*, which when found in language, (verbal and non-verbal) might be exercised through attitudes to race, gender and class.

As evidenced from the young people's talk, examples of symbolic violence can be from feeling bullied by teachers (YM3), of not being able to do their work (YF7), being singled out and being asked to leave the classroom before they had a chance to sit down (YF6) and feeling as if she had a target on her back (YF8). In these instances, symbolic violence is a method of power that teachers use through pedagogical practices to control their classrooms, impose the curriculum, or exclude students from their peers, and then when they are struggling and act out accordingly, they are asked to leave or placed with an AE provider. In these situations, young people may feel powerless and unable to explain why they are struggling at school or given an opportunity to explain their behaviour. They may not have someone who they can trust to talk for them, or who acts in their best interests. Fivush (2010) suggests that silencing:

...occurs at the cultural level for experiences that do not fit the culturally dominant narrative, and it also occurs at the conversational level with specific others who cannot hear what the speaker is trying to say. This can take the form of actually silencing, as in not allowing the speaker to talk, or it can be silencing through refusing to believe, deliberately misunderstanding, or re-interpreting the event in ways that do not validate the speakers' experiences or simply by being distracted and inattentive (Fivush, 2010:91).

Another example of the *voice of knowing* in practice was during the focus group when Chantel asked the participants “*at what age did you start to think that school’s not for me. Was it your first year of high school or intermediate?*” On hearing Chantel ask these questions, I interpreted Chantel’s talk as emphasising her *voice of knowing*, highlighting that either disengagement starts well before the moment young people decide to leave school, or she was influencing their perceptions of their schooling experiences.

Chantel suggests that for some young people “*a lot of the times, it’s because school hasn’t worked for them and that their only option is school*”. Chantel’s talk highlights the role the youth coaches fulfil in career planning so that there are other options available other than school. What is problematic about the suggestion that ‘school hasn’t worked for them’ is that many employers require a minimum level of NCEA 1 or 2 for basic numeracy or literacy skills. For young people who start disengaging from schooling early their disengagement is evident in their low attendance rate. Not attending school regularly may leave young people struggling to keep up with their peers in the classroom, and their constant struggling and not making any progress may suggest to them that school is not for them. What I heard in the transcripts suggested that the young people may have been influenced by Chantel’s *voice of knowing* to say that “no, school wasn’t for me”. However, YM3 resisted her *voice of knowing* through using his *voice of engagement* and responded with “*I never actually chose to leave school*”.

YC1 also used his *voice of knowing* when he spoke about young people who could achieve in a course run by Nga Maata Waka, but not in a mainstream secondary school. He said that “*I mean, obviously school isn’t for this lot*” suggesting with his *voice of knowing* that the young

people in the group who spoke with anger at not being included and valued at school, were not suitable for mainstream schooling and yet were suitable for an AE provider.

Nairn and Higgins (2011:184) found from their research with young people from an AE provider was that the AE environment ‘represented a refuge, a place to retreat from antagonistic relationships at school’ and that ‘in AE they experienced a less pressured environment, more positive social relations with staff, and a greater sense of control over their environment and their actions’. Nairn and Higgins (2011) in their talk with the young people found that while they may have enjoyed better relationships, had somewhere to go (that is, kept off the street) it appeared from their talk that the young people were not learning anything,⁴⁶ nor were they advancing towards achieving any NCEA credits. In our interview with YM4, his Nan spoke of his attending multiple AE providers and said that she found that with YM4 *“they do lots of things, they tried and tried and they tried so hard you know...and he just...bucked the rules”*. When we asked YM4 about his experiences at an AE provider he said, *I don’t really know...I just ...didn’t like it... ”*.

For young people attending an AE provider, many do so due to truancy or other behavioural issues that finds them no longer suited (or wanted) in a mainstream schooling environment. Those that do attend AE receive similar assistance to the young people at Nga Maata Waka such as goal setting, literacy, special interest areas, awards and of course gaining NCEA credits. The policies implemented by an AE provider and the YG are both facilitated by MOE and MSD and are based on returning young people back into a mainstream schooling environment.

⁴⁶ A discussion in their article between Sam and Mike (participants) about how AE kept them out of trouble but they also observed they were not learning much (Nairn & Higgins, 2011:184).

According to the Education Review Office and noted in their 2011 publication *Alternative Education: Schools and Providers*⁴⁷ found that the ‘majority of the enrolling schools studied did not provide enough support for the students they had placed in AE’. The report states that almost two thirds of the schools did not meet their legal obligations of returning young people back into mainstream schooling as legislated in the 1989 Education Act and the Ministry of Education’s AE guidelines. These figures suggest that only a few schools (14 out of 44) are applying a broad range of strategies to engage their students across the pastoral, social, sporting, cultural and academic domains. In addition, the report also evaluated how well schools keep young people in Years 9–11 engaged such as the academic and pastoral initiatives to prevent young people from disengaging. Schools that had low levels of truancy had initiated high quality processes such as effective teaching, supportive guidance structures and inclusive school cultures (ERO, 2011). These schools also had effective systems for monitoring truancy.

Recent truancy figures from the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) suggest that the rate of truancy is decreasing but schools are standing down more Māori students than any other ethnic group in the 13-15 year age group.⁴⁸ The TEC suggests that Māori male students are twice as likely to receive a stand-down and four times more likely to be expelled than females. Furthermore, in the 13-15 year age group, they have the most unjustified absences, that is, no valid reason not to be at school. These figures suggest a correlation between a school’s socio-economic decile rating, that is decile 1 or 2 and young people at these schools are five times more likely to be stood down than those in a higher decile rated school such as

⁴⁷ *Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa, The Child – the Heart of the Matter*, (Education Review Office, 2011)

⁴⁸ <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz>

a decile 9 or 10. Schools use a stand-down to de-escalate absences, to avoid exclusion or expulsion. Exclusion and expulsions are sub-sets of suspension where a student's enrolment is terminated.

As Bruce et al (2014) suggested in Chapter 1, young people disengage for various reasons, and some young people leave school because of their behaviour. For example, statistics from 2014⁴⁹ saw that physical assault was the most common reason for stand-downs and continual disobedience was second along with verbal assault towards other pupils and staff. Other behaviours included sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, weapons and other harmful and dangerous behaviours, illustrating that in these instances stand-downs were occurring for some very serious behavioural issues.

MSD and MOE are the two policy providers that identify how young people are categorised as early leavers, referred to AE providers or contacted by YS NEET providers such as Nga Maata Waka. One important aspect of MSD is their reporting requirements for YS providers including AE providers, and the ways MSD interpret the data they provide. As discussed previously, one example concerning for Nga Maata Waka is the current state of the employment market for young people with the increase in work opportunities in Canterbury given the rebuild from the 2011 earthquakes. Current regional data provided to MSD shows a decrease in unemployed young people. Andrew spoke of this as concerning to Nga Maata Waka because the rebuild has created a blip in the figures they provide to MSD. These figures show an increase in the uptake of youth labour market engagement highlighting that early school leavers are finding employment. The reason this is concerning is because linked

⁴⁹<http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/indicators/mainstudent-engagement-participation/stand-downs-suspensions-exclusions-expulsions>

to the reporting mechanisms for Nga Maata Waka are targets and ultimately their funding requirements. For their organisation to be viable, they need to be able to connect their services with schools and the community. If young people are finding work, funding will decrease and then when the rebuild blip is over young people may struggle to find re-employment and Nga Maata Waka may not be in a position to help. Therefore, they need to have a predictive quality to their thinking with their results in pre-empting any issues that may interfere in the continuity of their organisation. These layers of reporting give Nga Maata Waka a sense of knowing, that while focused on young people, the work they do is constrained by how the MSD allocates their funding. Gordon et al (2014:3) highlights that current funding 'is not providing for the in-depth and long-term support of all students'.

Another example of youth policy that contributes to a sense of 'knowing' for Nga Maata Waka is the *Ara Taiohi Code of Ethics*, which I introduced in Chapter 2. The *Code of Ethics* is not a compulsory working guide for all youth workers but it is the recommended guide, given the emphasis on transparency when working with young people. The *Code of Ethics* provides a guide that promotes a respectful relationship that operates with young people's best interests to the forefront of any youth work undertaken. At the 'heart' of the *Code of Ethics* is the emphasis on relationships and the *Code of Ethics*'s intention is to meet the responsibilities of Tangata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti. In doing so, youth workers are able to apply, where appropriate, their knowledge of Te Reo and Māori culture to best support the young people in their care. Also relevant to the *Code of Ethics* and the youth coaches is the

concept of Papakāinga⁵⁰ (ensuring key connections). In the next section, I discuss the importance of connections, of whakawhanaungatanga, and the trusting relationships that youth workers have with young people, which are the building blocks of youth work in New Zealand.

Whakawhanaungatanga: the importance of relationships for young people

The importance of a young person having a supportive network or a healthy relationship with others was one of the main themes that emerged from the interviews conducted with Linda, Andrew, Matua Willy, and Chantel. I link the importance of these relationships with the work of Cram (2006) whose work with talk explores the ways talk makes sense within the Kaupapa Māori context of whakawhanaungatanga (strong extended relationships). Cram (2006:30) argues that the role of talk within Māori society ‘is linked with the transmission of knowledge and the establishment of identity and a place to stand’. In this context, Linda, Andrew, Matua Willy, and Chantel, all discussed the importance of having strong relationships with whānau/family, or a youth coach. Chantel suggested that youth coaches are “*someone else to have an input*” who are not family and can connect with and help the young person from a different perspective. In the extract below, Andrew notes the importance of whānau in the young person’s life:

“Where whānau were a massive part of what was going [on, and had] a big part in turning it around, it had to be part of the solution. There was the odd occasion where they weren’t but then they would pull in an uncle or a grandparent so I saw them in action with their team...now on the spectrum of what we do, the focus is a little bit different because they are dealing with the higher end of the youth [on the risk

⁵⁰ Youth workers will endeavour to relate to, create, strengthen and maintain young people’s connections to their key social environments, these being their whānau, peers, school/workplace and community: *Code of Ethics, At a Glance*.

matrix]. *But the outcomes they are trying to get [are] the same sort of outcomes... so what I noticed there was that the whānau was a massive part of what was going on... I think they had a 70% success rate, quite big..., but all the ones [young people] that they had...they were engendering more a bit of pride in them, and it could be something as simple as taking them out fishing, so they could bring some food home to the family and that sort of thing...giving them a sense of achievement. So I think a lot of time, that's the extreme end. When they start to drop off and start to disengage [getting] caught up with [a]whole group of people that aren't doing much good for them...it becomes a bit of a cycle for them, so if you can sort of remove them from that in fact doing something a bit more positive, tends to be quite good"* (Extract from the transcript for Andrew McHutchison).

As part of his role as Operations Manager of Nga Maata Waka, Andrew along with Chantel both work to foster positive relationships with schools in the Canterbury area. The primary emphasis for them both is to build and maintain healthy relationships within the Christchurch community and with other YS NEET providers in New Zealand. Andrew's talk in his transcript highlighted the importance he places on building and maintaining key relationships, positioning him as a strong advocate for young people. Andrew leads by example with his team of youth coaches at the marae and the other YS NEET providers subcontracted to Nga Maata Waka.

Linda also identified the theme of whakawhanaungatanga or the need for strong whānau relationships to support young people. Linda's talk reflects her matriarchal positioning as a supportive grandparent in her whānau. In her whānau, Linda addressed an issue with an education provider as she felt she needed to step in '*I had to go into the school and challenge...and I let my grandson know that he had Nana's support*'. Linda's talk illustrates that she leads by example and that her need to challenge existing systems within schools and her desire to put young people first applies not only as a grandparent, but also as a mentor to the young people who keep in contact with her and the YS team at Nga Maata Waka. Linda has experienced how vital relationships are to young people. Parents, Linda suggested, "*are too busy, both parents are working and are too tired to sit and listen*". Linda talked about the

pressure parents place on older siblings when younger siblings need to be taken care of when Mum and Dad are both working. She said this pressure leaves little energy at the end of the day for the child to do their homework. She suggested that when “*wee Johnnie raises the issue that school is boring*” he starts to disengage; suggesting this is the perfect opportunity for grandparents to step in and make a connection with the young people to keep them motivated at school. Linda suggested that more research is necessary in this area of relationships with whānau, and asked me how many of the young people involved in this research project other than YM4 had a connection to their grandparents. In the extract from her transcript below, Linda explains:

“Their [grandparents are] the ones that pick up on all this [trouble at school]. You’ll find that the child who has a really close relationship with their grandparent or grandparents [are] often the motivated ones and continue because they have that other support system that sits behind the parents or sits alongside the parents. They [grandparents] can actually become the voice, to go to school and challenge [the system]” (Extract from the transcript for Linda Ngata).

My response to the extract above and Linda’s suggestion that grandparents can be the voice behind the child to challenge situations or problems that arise at school, is an excellent idea, assuming the whānau (grandparents) feel that they have the confidence to do so. Linda told a narrative of challenging her grandson’s school and spoke of being able to have her voice heard and listened to within the context of her grandson’s situation. In contrast, particularly with YM4’s interview, I became aware of the differences between the confidences conveyed by Linda when ‘talking back’ compared to the powerlessness I perceived from YM4’s Nan. Drawing on the theoretical framework I link this analysis of confidence with that of habitus which I defined in Chapter 4. As I discussed in that chapter, the marginalised voices within the mainstream secondary schooling environment are those voices that do not have high levels of self-confidence or self-esteem. Some grandparents may not feel they have a voice or

a *voice of knowing*, simply because voices, which are stronger, may have overpowered their ability to speak. Therefore, if the grandparents and their young people feel silenced as a collective, how can the whānau challenge the education system and let their young people know, as does Linda's grandson, that they have their whānau's support. Matua Willy, like Linda, is another who has strong views on relationships concerning young people, when we talked about what young people need to be successful at school.

Matua Willy used his *voice of knowing* when he emphasised the need to find rapport or make a connection with young people in his role as coordinator for He Ara Tika. He suggested that rapport, or connections are the difference between the young people talking about issues at school or choosing not to talk. He identified the need to capture at risk young people at Year 8 and Year 9 rather than at Year 11, when they are teenagers. By this time, he suggested, they have already decided that they do not like school, or their teachers, as was evidenced by the participants talk in Chapter 4.

Matua Willy's *voice of knowing* has developed from his 'inside view' as an individual who has experienced disengagement as a foster parent as well as his role as the He Ara Tika Coordinator and his new role of teaching young people to drive. He talks of his ability to '*sit on both sides*' illustrating the phases of learning and knowing he has moved through to be able to 'know' young people and his perspectives of disengagement from all the education opportunities available to them. Matua Willy talked of the necessary connections, the one-on-one relationships that the youth coaches have with the young people who come to Nga Maata Waka. He described this connection, when made through the YS NEET as being a "*perfect fit*"... "*because their [youth coaches] role is to ensure that they...know all about the alt [AE] education facilities that exist within our region*" and with their life experience and skills,

there is the potential for youth coaches to “*make a connection*”. The youth coaches provide information, which fits with Chantel’s description of youth coaches being “*input feeders*”. More importantly, he talked about how young people require “*having someone that the kids can rely on to just actually just be there, not necessarily a teacher*”.

The concept of having someone to rely on led to a discussion of the difficulties in securing funding and what happens to young people when funding is removed such as when the He Ara Tika contract was not renewed. Matua Willy identified the Government initiative of *Ka Hikitia* as being the replacement programme within the schools he worked in. As I had watched him in action at a local Kura Kaupapa school and saw the rapport that he had with the young people identified as at risk of disengagement, I felt he underestimated his connection and popularity with this group. One moment that will stay with me was the way Matua Willy drew on a Kaupapa Māori approach to engage these young people in discussing their iwi or hapū connections. They located their iwi or hapu on a map drawn by one of the students, while Matua Willy talked about the importance of knowing their ancestors. He played a vital role in connecting these students with ‘who’ they are and ‘where’ they are from. This experience highlighted for me the importance for young Māori, to recognise and celebrate their Māori identity.

Matua Willy said the *Ka Hikitia* initiative “*relies on the teacher working in the school and the school system and we all know that each school is unique and delivers [the curriculum], and how schools are pushing the Ka Hikitia programme*”. As the people who are delivering the programme are “*from a tertiary background*”, he asks “*what about those kids that don’t speak fluent Māori, and how do they [schools] make an approach to keep monitoring that?*”. He believes that progress relies on the strength of the relationships forged by non-Māori

teachers with Māori students. He suggests that young people “*are not gonna talk, therefore, if they’re not gonna talk you don’t get that relationship*” and that “*to me it’s not about being Māori, it’s about education*”. He said that in a one-on-one situation making that connection and getting a young person talking can take up to ten weeks. He suggested that if a young person is expelled from school or an AE provider and is out of the school environment, they may become socially excluded from their peers, they “*struggle in the collective environment*” until they come to a YS NEET provider.

Chantel, Linda, Andrew, and Matua Willy all alluded to the need for young people to experience positive relationships. Chantel suggested that the absence of these relationships within the schooling environment is because teachers “*don’t have 27 arms and that they can’t be expected to get around everyone in the classroom*” because of their time and resource constraints. These limitations mean that young people can get too far behind in the curriculum especially if the young person has a learning disability, which may create an overwhelming feeling of being left behind, leading to them giving up and leaving school. With a *voice of knowing* Chantel suggested that “*schools are too big and classrooms too big*” and that feeling overwhelmed might cause young people to have constraints in their relationships with their teachers. YF6 and YF7 from the focus group also spoke of there being ‘*too many people at school*’ and that ‘*schools were too big*’. Chantel suggested that while “*a one-on-one student-teacher ratio*” would be preferable, she said, “*some of the young people do get overlooked, and that is just, I guess the way it is structured, because it’s such a big environment*”.

In her grandson’s (YM4) interview, Nan also alluded to her experiences of watching young people struggle to find their way around at school. She said it’s “*my belief with these kids going straight from intermediate to high school, I mean is really hard because they*

don't...like everything is so different so many classes that they have to find, they're given a map you know, and that's the hardest thing going from classroom to classroom to find...". Nan compares YM4 to another boy they fostered who *"for a while couldn't pick it up either"*.

Nan's talk brings into question how schools support new students at the beginning of the school year, when young people transition from primary to intermediate to high school. Although Chantel suggested that there could be issues in a young person's environment that a teacher does not *"pick up on"* not only because teachers are busy, but also because *"sometimes it's the students themselves that feel like they can't, they don't want to intrude sometimes"*. The advantage of having youth coaches visit schools is that they can discuss young people's problems or concerns. Both Andrew and Chantel spoke of instances where schools had not been the problem or the cause of truancy or disengagement, rather the problems had stemmed from the young person's home life. For example, one young person was in a mentoring relationship with Chantel for almost two years before they told her what was happening at home. Andrew's talk highlights the complexity of disengagement, which may not always be indicative of a problem at school.

In the context of young Māori and their relationships at school, Bishop et al (2007) highlight in their research *Te Kotahitanga* that the relationships between teachers and students are important for young Māori to achieve within the schooling environment. They identified that achievement differences between young Māori and Pākehā remained constant regardless of whether the students attended a high or low decile school. Drawing on the work of Hattie (2003), Bishop et al (2007:740) argue that 'the evidence is pointing more to the relationships between teachers and Māori as the major issue'. Bishop et al's (2007) findings determine that the strength or quality of these relationships lie with the teachers and the school.

Highlighted throughout this chapter and Chapter 4, have been the young people's voices who spoke of strained and at times adversarial relationships they experienced with their teachers. These relationships led to their inability to feel a connection or a sense of belonging at school. In this section, the talk of Linda, Andrew, Matua Willy, and Chantel all spoke of the importance of having 'rapport' and connections to get young people talking. Matua Willy expressed with his *voice of knowing* that it is not about being Māori but more about education and teachers. Therefore, he suggests that having strong connections between whānau and school has the capacity to identify those at risk of disengaging early and may help young people to feel more engaged at school and in the classroom. The youth coaches and Nga Maata Waka as an organisation fulfil this role in young people's lives, when strong relationships are lacking at home and at school.

Summary of Chapter 5

In this chapter, I discussed the key themes that emerged from the talk of Linda, Andrew, Matua Willy, and Chantel whose voices gave a behind-the-scenes view of how they perceived young people and disengagement. To ensure best practice, Nga Maata Waka work from two key sources that focus on addressing young people's needs through talk. Linked with these sources was 30 years of YS history to highlight how important the *Code of Ethics* as a guide to best practice is to youth workers in Aotearoa-New Zealand. As well as the importance of seeking feedback from young people who use the YS. I suggested that the reporting mechanisms stipulated by MSD add to Nga Maata Waka's *voice of knowing* in their work with young people. I also discussed the findings from the YG study from Gordon et al (2014) who addressed the policy requirements and reporting mechanisms for YS providers that can take vital funds away from the needs of young people. In their study, Gordon et al (2014) highlighted that the primary purpose of the YS is to assist 16 and 17 year olds so that

they do not graduate to the unemployment benefit at age 18. Part of the YG initiative is also to help young people achieve NCEA Level 2. Another aspect of Gordon et al's (2014) study highlighted the perception from YS providers that there are no jobs for young people even when they do finish their education or a vocational training programme. However, as Andrew noted there is uncertainty surrounding Christchurch's employment and education market for the future as most providers have focused on the rebuild and relied on the employment growth it has contributed. I also explored the role of the AE provider who enrolls students identified as not suitable for mainstream schooling. Many young people, who attend an AE provider, attend due to truancy or other behavioural issues that suggest they are no longer suited to a mainstream schooling environment. I also noted that recent truancy figures from the TEC suggested that truancy is decreasing but that schools are standing down more Māori students than any other ethnic group in the 13-15 year age group. How AE providers assist young people and the recent truancy figures offer an opportunity for further research to explore why young Māori are more likely to be truant and attend an AE provider in contrast to their NZ European peers.

I drew on the concept of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1977, using also Parkin & Coomber, 2009, Fivush 2010, and Hendricks, 2014) to highlight that the *voice of knowing* has the potential to impact negatively on a young person's emotional wellbeing leading them to use their *voice of silence* in that they are 'being silenced' by others. I also drew on the work of Bishop et al (2007) to explore the problematic relationships between young people and teachers are a major issue in educational attainment for Māori. Therefore, the concept of *whakawhanaungtanga*, (the importance of relationships) is fundamental to a young person's wellbeing, sense of connectedness and feelings of belonging at school. The *voice of knowing* plays a role in whether young people choose to use silence as an emotional barrier or a form

of resistance leaving their voices unheard, insignificant, and unvalued from within the context of a mainstream secondary schooling environment. In the following chapter, the last chapter of this thesis, I link these concepts of powerlessness with the work of bell hooks (1989) who suggests that not speaking can be the result of fear for those that feel exploited or oppressed. I also discuss what the young people told me about their schooling experiences and the ways these experiences have influenced their choice to stay or not stay engaged at school.

Chapter 6: ‘Looking back’—a reflective discussion of gathering young people’s voices

In this final chapter, I ‘look back’ and summarise what the voices of the 11 young people told me about their experiences of mainstream secondary schooling. Their talk addresses the multiple factors that constrain or enable their concept of choice, which influences the life-changing decision they make to leave school early. I reflect on the voices of Fine (1991) and bell hooks (1989) further discussing the influence the *voice of silence* has on young people and the concepts of silence and silencing. Prior to concluding the chapter, I explore what I found to be the unexpected methodological limitations of my theoretical framework particularly from using voice as a research approach and engaging in the Māori centred paradigm, Kaupapa Māori. I reflect on the differences of my methodological approach in comparison with Nairn and Higgins (2011), Smyth, Hattam et al (2004), and Tuhiwai Smith et al (2002). Last, I conclude the thesis with a discussion on my thoughts of disengagement and the impact this has on young people and their schooling experiences. As well as some ideas for future research projects that have emerged from gathering the voices as shared knowledge from the young people and the staff at Nga Maata Waka.

A retrospective view of gathered voices—the power behind the voice of knowing and the implications of *silence* and *silencing*

In the focus group and the unstructured interviews, the voices of the young people expressed many intense emotions through their contrapuntal voices, the *voice of engagement* the *voice of uncertainty*, the *voice of regret*, and the *voice of silence*. They spoke of feeling harassed by teachers, evidenced by their use of strong descriptive language to express feelings of social exclusion and alienation from the classroom environment. Through their *voice of engagement* I heard young people taking control of their learning opportunities “*I can*”, “*I did*”, “*I would*”, “*I could*”, and “*I have*” as they felt their teachers constrained their learning

opportunities. In response, they took control of achieving their NCEA credits by enrolling voluntarily with the Correspondence School. Therefore, they expressed through their *voice of engagement* their resistance to the *voice of knowing* that determined they were unsuitable for a mainstream schooling environment.

The *voice of uncertainty* signified their lack of ‘knowing’ about why they had disengaged from mainstream secondary schooling. I interpreted their reluctance or resistance to disclose any ‘real’ information, which resulted in their talk of “*I don’t know*”, “*I guess*”, or “*I just don’t*”. In Chapter 4, I explored their introspective voices that emphasised their uncertainty and regret, which they exhibited through embodied knowledge, and I considered the ways in which this intersected with silence as a form of resistance. For example, YM1 and his staunch demeanour provided an unspoken message to me not to push him for information, or the girls in the focus group with their closed body language; the sunglasses, or sitting very close together with their hands deep in their jacket pockets. Their non-verbal methods of communication allowed me to ‘read’ or interpret what Nairn et al (2005:224) have described as the specifics of embodiment or ‘the affective relations of power’. These non-verbal communicative repertoires led me to ‘knowledge’ that encompassed the ‘uncertainty, ambiguity, and the messiness of [their] everyday life’ which is linked with the ways they non-verbally told their narratives during the research process (Ellingson, 2008:245). The resistance that the participants communicated through their non-verbal communication highlighted their ‘unapologetically subjective’ or individual complexities of voice (Ellingson, 2008:245). However, how I sought to make meaning from their verbal and non-verbal communicative repertoires together with what they say highlighted the ways in which using voice as a research approach is complex and at times confusing.

Chapter 4 found me grappling with the analysis trying to find reasons as to why the participants, in particular the girls, did not speak or speak much. To explore this reticence I looked to the voice of bell hooks (1989) where she writes of having many voices because she was afraid to have her voice stand-alone and afraid of saying the wrong thing. hooks (1989:161) argues that ‘fear of saying or doing that which will be considered “wrong” often inhibits people who are members of exploited and/or oppressed groups’. Like hooks, young people within a mainstream schooling environment may also feel they are unable to say what they need to say for the fear of saying the wrong thing or feel ridiculed in the classroom environment. hooks (1989) also suggests this fear can lead people not to speak up through a fear of punishment. The impact of this fear for young people is that they will guard their voices and use their *voice of silence* in response to the being silenced by others. In this context, staying silent may lead to feelings of approval from others when silence appears as a positive behaviour, and may lead young people to fear self-expression. They may then deny themselves the right to speak in ‘I’ statements, therefore constraining their opportunities to fully engage at school.

The young people’s talk from the unstructured interviews also identified a reluctance or resistance to talking to their families about their schooling experiences, highlighting that taking responsibility has contributed to their feeling guilty about being perceived as unsuccessful or a failure at school. Those that did not want to talk about school with family were unable to articulate why this was so. I would like to add to this debate by suggesting the ‘hidden curriculum’ has influenced the ways young people in this case study use their *voice of silence* as a defense mechanism to hide their negative schooling experiences from their whānau.

Adams, Clark, Codd, O'Neill, Openshaw, and Waitere-Ang (2000) suggest that Māori are 'affected' by the hidden curriculum through the messages the school or teachers send of 'inferior behaviour, values and beliefs that are consciously and unconsciously transmitted' by dominant groups (Adams et al, 2000:244). The talk in the focus group where they talked of "*being singled out*" "*teachers being ratchet*" or "*bullies*" and "*fucked up*" provides an insight into how these young people felt at being socially excluded in the schools they attended. There is an assumption that the young people who spoke of their negative experiences felt as though their interactions at school were decided by the schools without giving the young people "*an opportunity to prove themselves*". Their talk also suggested that they were no sooner in the classroom than they "*were asked to leave*" emphasising to the young people who perceive an attitudinal bias from the teachers, making them feel like they are seen as trouble and need to be removed from the classroom environment. In these instances, teachers may not be aware of how they use their *voice of knowing* which they use to assert their power or dominance over young people in their classrooms.

In Chapter 5, I discussed the way the *voice of knowing* evolved from sifting the voices of the youth coaches, as I examined their relationships for how young people found meaning from their interactions with the youth coaches in their day-to-day lives. I also drew on the idea that the *voice of knowing* perpetuates symbolic violence on young people. Therefore, while the *voice of knowing* does not leave physical bruises, or cause any bleeding, I suggest that symbolic violence is a powerful method of communication that portrays the effects of violence that silences or stops young people from talking. I then explored the power that lies in the relationships through the additional lenses of voice—Kaupapa Māori, and critical ethnography—highlighting the ways aspects of power work in behind the counterpoint voice; the *voice of knowing*. The concept of *knowing* drew attention to the suggestion that not only

the youth coaches but also others in a young person's life may have predetermined attitudes, ideas, or beliefs towards young people and their learning experiences.

The *voice of knowing* and the influence of policy

The *voice of knowing* is also influenced by much of the policy and contractual obligations I have discussed in Chapter 5, which contribute to the ways Nga Maata Waka staff *know* what young people need and how best to meet those needs. This 'knowing' is prescribed by the policy requirements of MSD and in Nga Maata Waka's relationships with schools and MOE. For Nga Maata Waka to be a viable organisation they need to have a predictive quality to their thinking with their ability to pre-empt any issues that may interfere in the continuity of their organisation. Continuity, as I discovered with Matua Willy and the He Ara Tika programme, is especially important when building relationships with young people and their whānau.

From the semi-structured interviews, the theme of building better relationships emerged from the voices of Linda, Andrew, Matua Willy, and Chantel. Two key themes emerged, whakawhanaungatanga, (the importance of relationships for young people) and the role and ethos of the youth coach. Linda highlighted the need for more grandparents to be involved with the younger members of their families to help busy parents keep young people engaged at school. Linda talked of the support and the time that grandparents may have at their disposal, which could alleviate young people's feelings of struggling at school.

I discovered that the youth coaches at Nga Maata Waka play a vital role in looking after disengaged young people, not only at the marae, but also in young people's homes, community centres and out in schools around Canterbury. While most if not all the young people in this case study had strong family relationships, the youth coaches provided a

neutral or non-judgmental support base through their mentoring relationships. Young people and the youth coaches facilitate best practice from the *AraTaiohi Code of Ethics*, which creates a safe environment for both parties, contributing to young people's empowerment under the concept of Hakamanatia. Through talk, the participants are able to access information that may lead to further educational opportunities or vocational pathways. The *Code of Ethics* achieves this by guiding youth workers to maintain professional boundaries through being transparent and youth driven. My reflexive approach enabled me to observe the *Code of Ethics* in practice assisting in my awareness of how young people negotiate authority, set boundaries, and are encouraged to demonstrate respectful behaviour.

Researcher reflexivity and methodological limitations

From the moment I made the telephone call to Andrew in November 2013 and up until the conclusion of my semi-structured interview with Chantel, my entry into the YS NEET environment proved to be an enriching experience. As part of our co-research design and as previously discussed in Chapter 2, Andrew provided a *Proposal for Consideration* that outlined the operational aspects of the research. During the past 18 months, I have presented this thesis research at two conferences and have mentioned Nga Maata Waka's co-research support with many interested parties. In discussing this research, I feel I have sought to provide an additional voice for young people. As I discussed with Andrew during his interview, next time I decide to run a focus group, I will organise with his youth coaches a brainstorming session on how best to engage young people in a focus group. I have determined I have much to learn about young people and more importantly, how to encourage young people to talk.

A key strength of this research has been working collaboratively with Linda, Andrew, Matua Willy, and Chantel and this was largely due to their openness to gathering shared knowledge. Nga Maata Waka generously supported the research process in a number of ways, including the use of their resources to provide cars and allocating space on the marae for the interviews. However, at times I had mixed feelings with what Shacklock et al (1998) argues are the tensions between pursuing a research agenda and the need to honour voices. This tension between meeting the time constraints of a Master's thesis and requiring a certain amount and type of data has the potential to create an ethical minefield. However, as I previously discussed in Chapter 2, I was vigilant over my concerns about the young people's emotional safety and employing my training from the *AraTaiohi Code of Ethics* meant I kept myself informed of the professional and cultural boundaries when working with young people.

In Chapter 2, I also discussed the need for young people to be articulate and I outlined in the co-research design why recruiting young people who felt comfortable talking about their experiences of being disengaged was so important. I thought articulate meant chatty, with lots of cross talk between the young person and the youth coach and myself, when I joined in. What I did not expect and concerned me was how little the participants spoke and their use of one-worded responses. While this meant the quantity of data was minimal, I eventually discovered the quality of the data spoke volumes. From this lack of talk, the concept of silence evolved for the ways young people use silence, which then became its own communicative repertoire. Silence, I soon discovered, tells a narrative of its own. Furthermore, my journey highlighted to me the ways young people's voices are multi-dimensional, complex, and unique. At times, I found that gathering voices was perplexing (what they said and how they said it, and is that what they meant?) as well as enabling me to come to understand the concepts of *silence* and *silencing*. I did discover some unexpected

limitations, which I address below that came from my multiple theoretical and methodological approaches.

From my analysis of the focus group, I listened to the audio recordings and my voice sharing my experiences of disengagement and heard the young people repeatedly agreeing with me. This form of agreement is what Smyth, Hattam et al (2004) suggests is my trying too hard to make connections or resonances that are only relevant to me. I unintentionally told my experiences to bridge the gap or break down the silence in my attempt to make a connection with the participants, which was problematic given my age in comparison with the young people from the focus group and unstructured interviews. Smyth, Hattam et al (2004) query the possible effects of age within the research encounter, highlighting the issue that trying to connect through shared experiences does not bridge the age gap given the temporal specificity of the experience of youth. I had not taken into consideration how the young people would view me as older, white, socially advantaged and with the authority that they associated with the teachers they left behind at school. Unlike, for example, the ways they view the youth coaches as the youth experts.

My lack of opportunity to do critical ethnography in the traditional sense of hanging out on the marae meant I was unable to have casual conversations or observe young people interacting with others. This limitation created a lack of observational data, which restricted my analysis of the transcripts. As well, at times during the analysis, I felt conflicted at doing a critical analysis on their voices. I felt that analysing their voices clashed with the Kaupapa Māori principles of empowerment and the *Code of Ethics*, Hakamanatia, as I found myself interpreting or overlaying my *voice of knowing* onto theirs. I realised that my desire to hear their authentic voices was, as Tuhiwai Smith et al (2002) suggest, problematic.

Another limitation I experienced was the politics of initiation, of being a Pākehā in a Māori centred paradigm. As I discussed early in the thesis I found the Kaupapa Māori research strategy of Russell Bishop and Ted Glynn (1999) and the questions on the issues of initiation, benefits, representation, legitimacy and accountability helped me to be reflexively aware of my role in the research process. The questions uncovered the methodological limitations for a Pākehā novice researcher engaging in a Kaupapa Māori research process without insider access from an academic perspective and not from working with an indigenous organisation. For example, I found myself trying to meet the recommendations of the HEC and their requirements for Māori consultation when Nga Maata Waka did not want to conduct a hui with the local Māori community nor did they feel I needed to have a meeting with their Kaumātua. This gap in expectations created some tension between me, Linda and Andrew. I was fortunate in my relationship with Nga Maata Waka that they were not concerned that they might perceive their organisation lacked Māori culture and Nga Maata Waka did not consider my being Pākehā to be a limiting factor in our collaborative relationship.

I drew on Eketone (2008) who proposed that Kaupapa Māori has two (what can be considered as) opposing viewpoints. The first focuses on Māori communities and their interpretation of Kaupapa Māori as a group or organisation and secondly, in academia Kaupapa Māori is referred to as a Māori philosophical approach. These two viewpoints highlighted to me the difference of being involved with a community organisation that practices Kaupapa Māori throughout all the levels in the organisation as opposed to those who draw on Kaupapa Māori as a theory. The problem I discovered was that these viewpoints found me trying to put Kaupapa Māori (the academic theory) into practice in an organisation that already practiced their own unique brand of Kaupapa Māori.

The differences between my research approach and the approaches of Nairn and Higgins (2011) Smyth, Hattam et al (2004), and Tuhiwai Smith et al (2002), had a great deal to do with their experience and their knowing of young people, the education environment and in Tuhiwai Smith et al's (2002) methodology, their insider status within Māori culture. At times, the approaches of the above and their combined expertise and knowledge in the education environment as well as their experienced research approaches made me feel frustrated, that in comparison, I gathered such a small amount of talk. I was also aware of the differences between Tuhiwai Smith et al's (2002) Kaupapa Māori approach and my own. What this work highlighted was my Kaupapa Māori approach as an outsider, working alongside Nga Maata Waka as opposed to an "insider" approach. While at times I struggled with *Pākehā Paralysis*, I sought to meet Treaty of Waitangi responsibilities as a non-indigenous researcher through collaboration and partnership with an indigenous YS NEET provider.

I also discovered that young people are not always as vulnerable 'we' as 'others' think they are, just because they are not attending a mainstream school. I found that most if not all the young people in this case study were not the victims in their current situation, but were instead taking responsibility in a situation that was not necessarily of their making. However, I acknowledge that I can only discuss this small-handpicked sample of young people the coaches thought would be responsive in an interview.

There is one aspect of the co-research design I would like to change if I could and that would be to go back and run a focus group to help shape the type of questions young people may like to answer. Then having asked these questions, I would like to go back with their transcripts and discuss their responses. Going back with their transcripts may help young people feel more a part of the research process—that is, doing research *with* young people as opposed to doing research *on* young people.

Concluding thoughts and recommendations

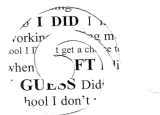
In Chapter 1, I drew attention to a question that Smyth, Hattam et al (2004) asked as to whether young people have given up on school, or have schools given up on young people? I would like to close this thesis with an attempt to answer that question. First, I think it is disingenuous to make young people feel responsible for their ‘unintended’ disengagement from mainstream secondary schooling (Middleton, 2008:5). If this thesis has achieved one thing, it has illustrated that the reasons for young people disengaging are incredibly complex.

In the analysis, the powerful counterpoint voice emerged—*the voice of knowing*—highlighting the role this voice plays in affecting young people’s futures through the power this voice wields. This *voice of knowing* provides significant insight into a range of complex phenomena, which have led to different levels of engagement for young people. I used concepts such as ‘intersubjectivity’, ‘emotionality’, and ‘embodiment’ in relation to young people’s verbal and non-verbal methods of communication as ways of further understanding these complexities. In future research I would like to take the interactive analytic framework I used, into the classroom environment to explore how young people communicate their struggles in the classroom environment with their teachers and their whānau. Last, I would also like to explore the role of the youth coach concerning Andrew’s discussion ‘that not all youth coaches are social services trained’ and investigate the issues of best practice in the work youth coaches facilitate with young people from multiple service providers.

In closing, I feel that the young people who participated in this case study have made a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate on why young people leave mainstream secondary schooling early with few or no NCEA credits. They have spoken of their experiences in ways that revealed their thoughts and feelings about why they disengaged from mainstream secondary schooling. At the completion of gathering their voices, all were

looking forward to using their strengths and talents in ways that lead to a brighter and better future than their mainstream secondary schooling experiences had predicted.

Karere te reo o nga rangatahi tatou



“Young people’s voices fly free”

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Appendices

15/05/14



Alison McCormack
Canterbury University
CHRISTCHURCH

RE: Research Project Ethics Requirements

Dear Alison,

As previously discussed, as part of your thesis towards completing a Master of Arts Degree in Sociology you are seeking access to youth with regards to having them assist with a peer research project: **'Why Aotearoa youth are falling through the cracks of our education system'**.

To clarify, we understand that your project is mostly an exploration of youth voices in order to get an understanding from a sociological perspective of the push/pull factors of why some youth are leaving school early.

You have outlined that your research will involve the following:

- running focus groups with youth following a topic guide
- shadowing of youth coaches during their mentoring sessions
- audio recording of youth during mentoring sessions with transcription at a later date
- interview Youth Coaches about their work, their clients, trends etc.
- interviews with Linda Ngata (Executive Management), Andrew McHutchison (Operations Manager), Matua William Motu (Community Services), and Chantel Harris (Head Youth Coach)

Our requirements are that this will only occur where understanding of the purpose, understanding of what information will be recorded and prior consent from the youth involved has been obtained. Further to this, that any information gathered by you will be anonymous and that no youth details such as name will be recorded.

Executive Management at Te Runanga o Nga Maata Waka agrees to engage with you and to facilitate contact with some of your target group. In principle, we are more than happy to be involved in studies of this nature and I am happy to give our approval for you to be on the marae while undertaking some of your research.

Regards,

Linda Ngata
Executive Management
Te Runanga O Nga Maata Waka
PO Box 15057, Aranui, Christchurch 8643
Email: linda.ngata@maatawaka.org.nz
Telephone: 03 3826628. Mobile: 027 2491981

Appendix A

HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE
Secretary, Lynda Griffioen
Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

Ref: HEC 2014/72

30 July 2014

Alison McCormack
Department of Sociology
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Alison

The Human Ethics Committee advises that your research proposal “Exploring young people's experiences of disengagement in schooling” 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 28 July 2014.

Best wishes for your project.



Yours sincerely
Lindsey MacDonald

Appendix B

PROPOSAL FOR CONSIDERATION:

Alison McCormack: Master's Thesis Research

From

Nga Maata Waka Youth Services

Background:

Alison McCormack, a graduate from University of Canterbury is seeking access to youth with regards to having them assist with a peer research project: '**Why Aotearoa youth are falling through the cracks of our education system**'. Alison is undertaking this project as part of her thesis towards completing a Master of Arts Degree in Sociology.

Discussion:

The research will involve identifying youth to participate in focus groups and conducting a questionnaire with them. It will also involve some shadowing of youth coaches and there will be some recording with an audio device of youth/youth coach session, transcription to be done at a later date.

The project is mostly an exploration of youth voices in order to get an understanding from a sociological perspective of the push/pull factors of why some youth are leaving school early.

Te Runanga o Nga Maata Waka has agreed to engage with Alison to facilitate contact with some of the target group of her study. In principle, the organisation is very receptive to being involved in studies of this nature. Nga Maata Waka's only proviso is that there is some benefit to the organisation in participating. The benefit as we see it is having access to the information Alison collates and using this to increase our knowledge of youth and helping us to further develop our services, identify gaps etc.

Method:

Plan is to give Alison access to youth who are engaged with a Youth Coach in the delivery of the NEET Service.

There are two main mechanisms by which this access will occur.

1. Alison will shadow a Youth Coach during their appointments with clients.
2. The Youth Coaches will identify youth who are willing to participate in group forum discussions run by Alison.

Any involvement by Alison in either of these two ways will only occur where understanding of the purpose, understanding of what information will be recorded and prior consent from the youth involved has been obtained.

Any information gathered by Alison will be anonymous – no youth details such as name will be recorded against any information gathered. The intent is to record (audio) the youth when possible.

There is also intent by Alison to talk with Youth Coaches about their work, their clients, trends etc. for purposes of her project.

As part of the University of Canterbury's research ethics, a letter from executive management at Te Runanga o Nga Maata Waka giving their approval for Alison to be on the marae while undertaking her thesis research is required.

Summary of Benefits:

- Increased exposure & profile for Nga Maata Waka and it's services
- An additional voice for youth
- Offers opportunity for youth coaches to be exposed to research projects
- Opportunity to identify and develop additional forums for youth support
- Nga Maata Waka access to information collated as result of research
- Cross-fertilisation/strengthening relationship between NMW and University
- Identify trends and advocate for change/additional service with government

Risk Matrix:

Risk	Mitigating Factor(s)	Responsibility
Youth Coaches/Research Project Co-ordinator unable to allocate resources to be available at times allocated.	Gain commitment from both parties on availability. Ensure all appointments are organised, communicated and scheduled in calendar.	Research Project Coordinator and Youth Coaches/Team Leader
Youth information remaining confidential.	Set clear guidelines around what information will be gathered. Emphasise anonymity and obtain youth consent prior to participation.	Research Project Coordinator, Youth Services Manager, Youth Services Team Leader, Youth Coaches.
Not enough client up-take to make data collected of use as part of a research project.	Ensure that purpose of research and anonymity is clearly communicated to youth. Review at 6 weeks to determine feasibility/sustainability.	Research Project Coordinator, Youth Services Manager and Youth Services Team Leader.

Cost Implications:

Resource	Approximate Cost
Rental	Nil
Staffing	Nil
Equipment:	Nil
Facilitation of group forum	Nil to hourly rental for use of classrooms*
Travel	Nil
TOTAL PROJECT COST	Nil

*Use of class rooms is an option to run group forum. There **may** be an hourly charge if this is required. Details can be worked out later.

Recommendations:

- Gain approval from Executive Management to progress Project
- Executive Management to write letter of approval to university

Then:

- Detail consent process
- Detail review process at 6 weeks
- Document process for introducing idea to youth
- Design clear communication to youth outlining purpose and anonymity
- Research Project Coordinator/YS Manager to follow through with mitigating actions from Risk Matrix
- Draft a plan for facilitating youth group forum
- YS Manager submit to management for final approval
- Research project Co-ordinator submit to ethics committee for final approval

If approval is given – Research Project Coordinator/YS Manager to implement as above.