

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PRIMARY-AGED MĀORI STUDENTS EXPOSED TO DISCIPLINARY EXCLUSIONS

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study aims to document the lived experiences of several primary-aged Māori students, and the impact on their caregivers, when these students have been stood down, suspended or excluded from their school.

In order to contextualise the students' narratives, data from primary school site personnel, the principals and Board of Trustees chairperson of the students' schools were gathered. The research also involved interviews with Ministry of Education and Group Special Education personnel, to gain an understanding of the Ministry's perspective on how it meets the differing needs of students, caregivers and schools. An analysis of the two schools' policy and procedures, and relevant documents, with regard to stand-down, suspension and exclusion of primary-aged students was also undertaken.

Qualitative research methodologies enabled me to explore the lived experiences of these young people excluded from primary school, from the subjects' own frame of reference. Data were collected using participant observations, document analysis, and in-depth semi-structured interviews. Kaumātua support for both the researcher, and the whānau involved, was sought with the aim of ensuring that the research proceeded in culturally appropriate and safe ways.

The research aimed to keep the students' stories central to the discussions.

One of the key themes that emerged from the students' narratives was the impact of being repeatedly framed by focusing solely on their behaviour. The impact of institutionalised racism evident within these educational life histories highlights the children's struggle to persevere and survive in what they describe as hostile, racist, uncaring school environments.

A key issue as outlined by the caregivers in this study has been the lack of understanding and support from or genuine partnership with their children's education providers. The caregivers spoke of the effect that the disciplinary exclusion had on their relationship with their child and on their lives. Eventually the caregivers too become angry about, disengaged from and

disillusioned with an education system that allows young people to be removed from schools, based solely on their behaviour.

The themes that emerged from discussions with schools centred on lack of support and follow-up from government agencies. School personnel were critical of the length of time it took to access support packages from the Ministry of Education. They discussed the impact of Tomorrow's Schools, particularly the current legislation on stand-downs, suspensions and exclusions. School personnel suggest their ability to manage high needs students is further complicated by the existence of kiwi suspensions and geographical school zones.

This thesis stresses that it is critical for the students' voices to remain central to discussions concerning their own education, so their creative ideas for possible solutions can help to create pathways forward.

CHAPTER ONE:

TE TĪMATATANGA: THE INTRODUCTION

RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

There has been a 37% increase in the number of primary-aged students exposed to disciplinary exclusions since 2000. The annual 'Report to Schools on New Zealand Student Engagement' for 2007 revealed 6,595 primary-aged students were excluded from school for varying lengths of time by way of stand-down, suspension and exclusion (Ministry of Education, 2008e). Quantitative data provided by the Ministry of Education are useful for informing us of the enormity of the problem.

Given the significant increase in the number of primary-aged students exposed to disciplinary exclusions in New Zealand it is crucial that we fully understand the impact they have on the lived realities of these young people. There is very little qualitative research available, either nationally or internationally, that specifically focuses on primary-aged students' experiences, and the long- and short-term effects that disciplinary exclusions have on them and their families. The voices most often missing within current debates and research findings in regard to student engagement in schools appear to be those of the people most affected by disciplinary sanctions: namely, the students themselves.

The key focus of this study is to document lived experiences of primary-aged Māori students when these students have been stood down, suspended or excluded from their school. The aim is to bring about greater understanding of the overall effect that school's disciplinary practices have on the lives of children and their families. I felt it important to frame these students' experiences by engaging in discussions with their principal and Board of Trustees chairperson, in order to provide a picture of the current issues facing schools when they implement disciplinary exclusions. This process also involved reviewing each school's policies, procedures and other relevant documents in regard to stand-down, suspension and exclusion of primary-aged students in their school. To contextualise the young people's stories it was equally important to enter into discussions with Ministry of Education personnel, as it emerged through the data collection process that each of the parties directly

involved in the exclusionary process often has needs, experiences and desired outcomes that conflict with those of the other parties.

From this point on I shall generally use the term ‘disciplinary exclusions’ to refer to stand-down, suspensions and exclusions, as the key focus of this study is on the impact of being excluded from school, regardless of the length of time involved.

Although discussion in this area could encompass the range of disciplinary practices used by schools, it is not within the scope of this project to critique all forms of disciplinary practice available to school personnel. Instead, this research project goes behind the statistics to tell the stories of four students who have been subject to a range of disciplinary exclusions from their school.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

There were several compelling interconnected reasons for exploring lived experiences of young people who were being excluded from primary schools. First, it has been within the last 10 years that I started to reflect on the disciplinary practices that are used in schools. Within my teaching career, and as a principal in a decile 2 bilingual school, I myself have engaged in disciplinary practices and disciplinary exclusions. In doing so I rarely considered the impact or consequences of such actions on the students. I simply wanted the problem removed. The problem, as I perceived it, was the child. Participating in a longitudinal research study through the University of Canterbury, which started in 1999, allowed me to reflect on my personal pedagogical beliefs and practices. This daunting but exciting opportunity fuelled my desire to complete a Bachelor of Education and then to continue with postgraduate studies in education. Use of reflexive practices and exposure to critical theories have helped me to gain new insights into and understandings of the contested functions and purposes of our current school system, and consequently to challenge my perceptions of the ‘child as the problem’.

A further motivation to undertake this research was fuelled by the increasing number of Māori students exposed to disciplinary exclusions who were enrolling in our school. Ministry of Education analysis of 2007 data shows students in the lowest quintile are nearly five times more likely to be suspended from school than students in the highest quintile (Ministry of Education, 2008e). In the past five years there has been a steady increase in the number of

approaches made by Ministry of Education personnel asking my school to enrol Māori students who have been excluded from other schools. Our positive response to such requests has led to greater contact with students who have been suspended or excluded from other schools.

The stories shared by these young people, and their caregivers upon enrolment, raised my awareness of how disengagement from schooling affects students. Disturbingly, a large number of these families have been advised by their previous school to enrol 'elsewhere' rather than risk having an exclusionary record attached to their child's file. These unofficial disciplinary practices are known as 'kiwi suspensions' (Human Rights Commission, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2008b).

A third experience that reinforced my resolve to undertake this research was attending a one day hui in 2005 instigated by the Ministry of Education. The hui was a response to the evidence that the Canterbury region had the third-highest rates of disciplinary exclusions in New Zealand. Ministry of Education personnel were particularly concerned that Māori students were up to three times more likely to be excluded than Pākehā students for the same incident. The forum had representatives from schools, Child Youth and Family, Ministry of Education, Boards of Trustees, and external agencies who work with youth. Although all of the participants agreed there was a serious problem with the engagement of students, particularly Māori tamariki, in schools, they differed markedly in their perception of the cause of the problem and its solutions. By the end of the hui two principles became evident. One was that when the problem is framed as the result of dysfunctional parents and children, there is no space for discussion about the complex and layered issues involved in supporting more successful engagement of all children in schools. Second, there is very little qualitative research that gives voice to how students experience disciplinary exclusion.

As I wanted to write educational life histories of children's experiences for this thesis, I completed a postgraduate life history course. I also completed Theorising Curriculum and Diversity, History of Education in New Zealand, and Feminist Issues in Education. These papers assisted me to focus on the skills and to gain the confidence necessary to begin my research project.

The Feminist Issues in Education paper involved an independent project, in which I explored and engaged with the theoretical, methodological, political and personal dilemmas that are associated with biographically driven research. This experience gave me a much-needed opportunity to critique my multiple positionalities, drawing on a range of theoretical perspectives. The present research benefited from my exposure to such a multitude of theoretical frames, allowing me understand the contested purposes and functions of schooling in greater depth (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this thesis is to document the lived experiences of primary-aged Māori students, and their caregivers, when these students have been exposed to stand-down, suspension or excluded from their school. In order to contextualise the young people's stories it was important to gain an understanding of their situation from the viewpoint of the students' school personnel, as well as the Ministry of Education's perspective on disciplinary exclusions.

The following were the key questions posed to the young people and their whānau, school personnel and the Ministry of Education:

1. What have been the individual experiences of primary-aged Māori students who have been exposed to stand-down, suspension and/or exclusion from their school?
2. What have been the effects, both current and ongoing, for primary-aged Māori students and their whānau, after exposure to disciplinary exclusion?
3. Why are Māori students more likely than other students to be exposed to disciplinary exclusions?
4. How does the Ministry of Education balance the needs and rights of every student to be in a school, the school's rights to a safe workplace, and parents' legal right for their children to receive an education?

I required statistical data from the school sites, the Ministry of Education and Group Special Education, in order to make meaning of the purpose, implementation and outcomes of disciplinary exclusions. To this end, I requested policies, strategies and relevant information that would help me to gain greater understanding of the ideology behind these measures. The

next step was to contextualise the specific legislation in regard to disciplinary practices used by schools.

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The New Zealand Education Act 1989 gives every person, who is not a foreign student, entitlement to free enrolment and free education at any state school during the period beginning on the person's 5th birthday and ending on the 1st day of January after the person's 19th birthday (Education Act 1989, No. 80). The Education Amendment Act (No. 21) 1998 formally defined the terms 'stand-down, suspension and exclusion' as disciplinary measures that schools can use for any breach of the school's rules. Section 61 of the Education Act 1989 requires all schools to have a clear discipline policy within their school charter. The change in legislation gave schools more options for managing behaviour.

The stated purpose of the provisions of the Education Act 1989 concerning the stand-down, suspension, exclusion, or expulsion of a student from a state school is to:

- a. provide a range of responses for cases of varying degrees of seriousness; and
- b. minimise the disruption to a student's attendance at school and facilitate the return of the student to school when that is appropriate; and
- c. ensure that individual cases are dealt with in accordance with the principles of natural justice. (New Zealand Education Act 1989, section 13)

This new legislation introduced stand-downs from school for a specified period. The glossary of terms for stand-down, suspension and exclusion, as set out by the Ministry of Education in its annual report, has changed over the last decade. However in the most recent report, *A Report to Schools on New Zealand Student Engagement 2007*, the Ministry of Education (2008e) defines these terms as follows:

- **Stand-down:** As a consequence of a serious breach of school rules a school principal can order a student to stand down from school for a period of up to five school days in any one term, or ten days in a school year. Students return automatically to school following a stand-down.
- **Suspension:** For very serious breaches of school rules a principal may suspend a student from attending school until the school Board of Trustees decides on the consequences for

the student. The board may decide to lift the suspension with or without conditions, to extend the suspension, or in the most serious cases, to either exclude or expel the student.

- **Exclusion and Expulsion:** Exclusion and Expulsion are both used for behaviour judged to be ‘gross misconduct’. When using exclusion a board may not allow a student to return to the school and the student must enrol in another school. Only students under the age of 16 (the legal leaving age) can be excluded. Students aged 16 and over can be expelled and are not required to re-enrol in another school, but they may choose to do so.

(New Zealand Education Act 1989, section 13)

The Education Amendment Act (No. 21) 1998 was written as a direct response to an increased number of students who received suspensions and exclusions. During the period 1991 to 1993 the number of students suspended from New Zealand schools increased steadily (Casey, 1993). Local research on truancy (MacDonald, 1991) suggests that there were also significant numbers of secondary-aged students who were attending school erratically, if at all. By 1995 the New Zealand Government was acknowledging that schools had a problem with disruptive students (Taylor-Smith, 1998, cited in Addis, 2002).

The Revell Report on the Inquiry into Children at Risk through Truancy and Behaviour (Education and Science Committee, 1995) recommended a number of initiatives in schools to address the problem of a growing number of disruptive students in New Zealand schools (PPTA, 2007).

One key aim of this new legislation was to improve student engagement. However, as noted at the outset, Ministry of Education statistics for 2007 reveal a 37% increase in the number of student suspensions and stand-downs from primary schools since 2000. This figure raises the question: have the aims of this current legislation been met? The Ministry of Education’s most recent statistical data and reporting on student engagement would indicate that for primary-aged students the answer is no.

STATISTICAL DATA AND REPORTING

Each year following the Education Amendment Act (No. 21) 1998, the Ministry of Education has been required to publicly report on information and data pertaining to student engagement. This annual report is based on the Ministry of Education’s stand-down and

suspension database, which was developed in July 1999 after the introduction of the Education (Suspension) Rules 1999. Since those regulations introduced stand-downs for the first time, statistics prior to mid-1999 are not comparable. The first report under the current system was released in September 2000, covering the July 1999 to June 2000 period (Ministry of Education, 2001).

In July 2008 the then Minister of Education, Chris Carter, released the eighth annual report on student engagement, heralding a fall in secondary school suspensions (Ministry of Education, 2008e). However, the statistics reveal a more complicated picture than the one proffered by the Ministry of Education. While it is true that overall there has been a decrease in secondary suspension, stand-down and exclusion rates since 2006, it is also evident that Māori students consistently remain disproportionately over-represented in every category since 2000, when annual reports first became available.

A closer investigation of the latest data available from the Ministry of Education reveals that while the number of suspensions has dropped in secondary schools, there has been a substantial increase for primary schools. The overall reduction in secondary school suspensions resulted largely from the 91 schools that joined the Student Engagement Initiative (SEI). These schools were specifically targeted by the Ministry of Education due to their high rates of suspension, early leaving certificates, and truancy. In the same period, the suspension rates of other secondary schools increased (Ministry of Education, 2008e).

The Ministry of Education annual report format has changed significantly over the eight years, meaning it has become increasingly more difficult to analyse and critique data pertaining to primary-aged students. Some raw data are simply not available and modification to the way the statistics are presented has made it difficult to analyse changes in the patterns and trends appearing since 2000. For example, deciles have been replaced by quintiles with accompanying new criteria, which makes comparisons based on school decile ratings impossible. The Ministry of Education website, Education Counts, which provides the data on disciplinary exclusion rates, has constantly changed its layout since 2000, shifting the information, indicators and analysis of disciplinary exclusions into different areas, and dividing them between the separate websites of the Ministry of Education and Education Counts.

The Ministry data now categorise students into the age groups of 5–9 years, 10–14 years, and 15 years and above (Ministry of Education, 2008e). This system of classification makes it problematic to tease out data pertaining solely to primary-aged students as the students in the 10–14 years category include those in primary, intermediate and high schools. The change has made it extremely difficult to source and evaluate relevant data.

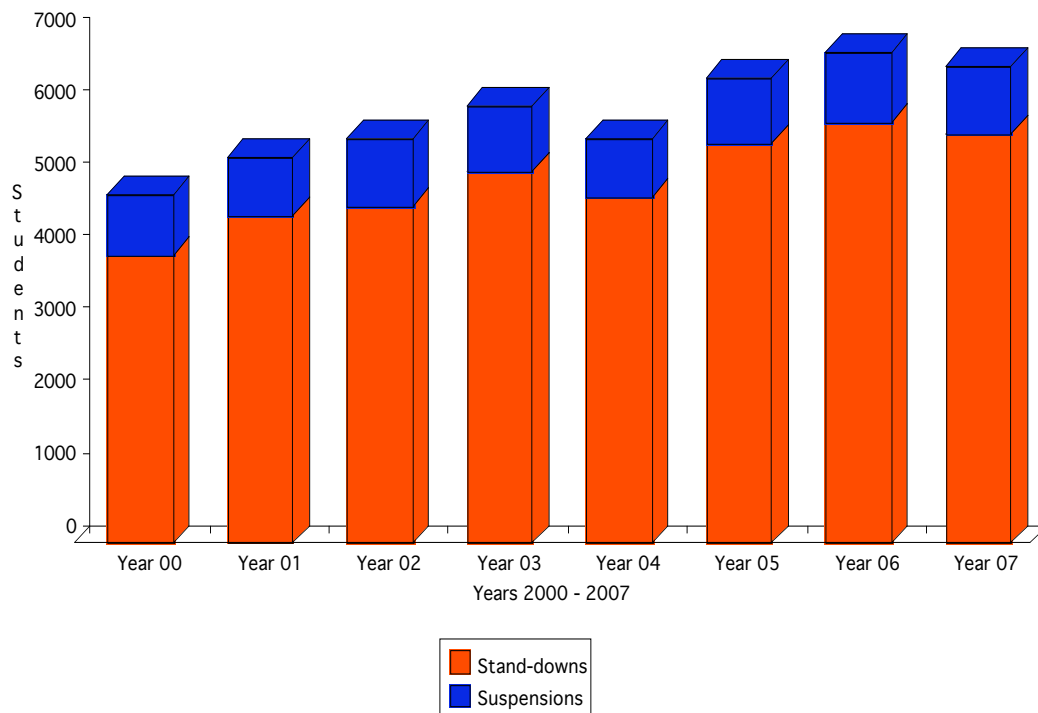
A controversy over the latest report on student engagement in 2007 emerged as the Ministry of Education failed to reveal the 37% increase in stand-downs, suspensions and exclusions of primary-aged students. A front-page newspaper article confirmed that primary school disciplinary exclusion figures were buried in a graph with no raw numbers and no commentary (Report veils junior school violence, 2008). In 2007 a total of 945 primary school students were suspended and 5,650 stood down. Primary school stand-downs represent 28% of the total number of students stood down in 2007. Family First National Director Bob McCoskrie, who pursued the Ministry of Education over the data, stated:

We need to be asking ourselves some pretty tough questions about why almost 1000 kids are being chunked out of primary schools for behaviour that is just so bad that schools have got to the point where they won't even work with it. (Report veils junior school violence, 2008)

The presidents of both the New Zealand Educational Institute and the Canterbury Primary Principals Association responded to the 2007 report on student engagement by expressing their concerns about the growing issue of extreme misbehaviour by students at increasingly younger ages.

I have graphed stand-downs and suspensions from 2000–2007 using Ministry of Education data to show the increased rates of these two types of exclusion (Figure 1). The 'rate per 1,000 students' is calculated by dividing the number of events by the total number of students enrolled and then multiplying by 1,000 (Ministry of Education, 2008e).

Figure 1: Primary-aged students stood down and suspended, 2000–2007



Source: Ministry of Education, Education Counts, 2008

The Ministry of Education engagement report 2007 states stand-downs have decreased since 2006. However, what is evident from Figure 1 is that stand-downs and suspensions have increased significantly since 2000. Data for 2007 show 5,650 primary-aged students were stood down compared with 3,961 in 2000, representing a 37% increase. Nearly 30% of all students stood down were primary-aged students.

STAND-DOWN, SUSPENSION AND EXCLUSION RATES OF MĀORI IN 2007

The key issues relevant to this thesis are the patterns and trends highlighting Māori disciplinary exclusions. More than half of all schools in New Zealand use stand-downs. Students in the lowest quintile (deciles 1 and 2) record the highest rates of disciplinary exclusions. What is evident is that Māori student engagement in primary schools has not improved; to the contrary, disciplinary exclusions have increased dramatically since 2000. The annual data reveal that Māori continue to have the highest stand-down rate, 2.6 times greater than the rate for Pākehā students.

In 2007 the age-standardised stand-down rate for Māori students was highest at 55.3 students per 1,000, followed by Pasifika students at 37.5 per 1,000. Southland, Taranaki and Canterbury have the three highest stand-down rates of Māori students in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2008e). It is significant that two of the three regions with schools most likely to stand down Māori students are in the South Island, yet Canterbury and Southland have the lowest percentage of Māori children nationally (Statistics New Zealand, 2008). This situation begs the question: why is it that schools with the lowest number of Māori students have the highest rate of disciplinary exclusion of Māori students? When data are analysed by gender, male students are 2.4 times more likely to be stood down than female students, although the rate of female stand-downs has continued to increase since 2000.

Similarly Māori are 3.5 times more likely to be suspended than their Pākehā peers. The age-standardised suspension rate for Māori students is 14.4 students per 1,000, followed by Pasifika at 8.7 students per 1,000, and European/Pākehā at 4.0 students per 1,000. Southland and Taranaki, followed by Canterbury and then Gisborne, have the highest stand-down rates of Māori students in New Zealand out of the total of 17 geographical regions (Ministry of Education, 2008e).

The number of exclusions has remained relatively constant over the last eight years. As with stand-down rates, however, Māori students continue to have the highest rate of exclusions. In 2007 the age-standardised exclusion rate for Māori students (5.0 students per 1,000) was nearly 1.5 times higher than the rate for Pasifika (3.4 students per 1,000), and 4 times higher than that for New Zealand European (1.3 students per 1,000) (Ministry of Education, 2008e).

Māori students also continue to have disproportionately high rates of early leaving exemptions compared with other ethnic groups. In 2007 the early leaving exemption rate for Māori students was 73 per 1,000 amongst 15-year-old students, which was 2.2 times higher than the rate for Pasifika (33 per 1,000) and 3.2 times higher than that for European/Pākehā (23 per 1,000) in the same age group (Ministry of Education, 2008e). Two-thirds of all early leaving exemptions granted in 2007 were for males.

The Ministry of Education has dramatically reduced the number of approvals for 15-year-old students applying for early leaving exemptions in a bid to reduce the number of students

leaving school by ‘imposing a stricter adherence to early leaving legislative criteria’ (Ministry of Education, 2008e).

So while the number of 15-year-olds leaving school early decreased in 2007, the reduction simply reflects that the Ministry of Education had declined over one-third of all applications in 2007. At the same time, however, the Ministry of Education acknowledges that 15-year-old students leaving school will face both social and economic disadvantages. Refusal to sign off early leaving certificates may in practice lead to a further increase in exclusions. Cotter (2002) suggests some parents and schools have used applications for early leaving certificates as an alternative to using disciplinary exclusions.

With the increased media attention, published Ministry of Education reports and the latest New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) response, it is easy to be fooled that disciplinary exclusions are on the rise primarily because of violence against teachers. Following an NZEI survey and special report in 2007, that showed that one in seven teachers and support staff reported being physically assaulted by students, NZEI developed and circulated to all schools ‘Disruptive Student Behaviour Guidelines’ (New Zealand Educational Institute, 2007). However, disciplinary exclusion data provided by schools certainly do not support the explanation that more students are being removed from the school environment because of increasing levels of violence against teachers. The data in Table 1 show the top three reasons students are removed from schools (Ministry of Education, 2008e).

Table 1: Top three reasons for stand-downs, suspensions and exclusions in 2007

Stand-downs	Suspensions	Exclusions
Continual disobedience 26%	Continual disobedience 27%	Continual disobedience 37%
Physical assault on other student 25%	Misuse of drugs 20%	Physical assault on other student 18%
Verbal abuse of	Physical assault on	Misuse of drugs

teachers	other student	14%
14%	19%	

Source: Ministry of Education (2008e)

Although these quantitative data show that the number of primary-aged students being excluded from school is growing, they fail to tell us how these disciplinary exclusions affect the students themselves. The aim of this project is to bring about greater understanding of the impact and effect that a school's disciplinary practices have on the lives of primary-aged Māori students, and their families, and to document the students' educational life histories when exposed to disciplinary exclusions.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Chapter Two explores the social, cultural and historical context of schooling by using a variety of theoretical frameworks. Contested notions of childhood and the purpose of school will be discussed using aspects of critical theory; inclusive of Kaupapa Māori paradigms and some poststructural thinking. I will outline selected aspects of Kaupapa Māori frameworks in relation to how each aspect can deepen understanding of the unequal power relationships between the dominant culture in New Zealand and Māori. The chapter will also discuss current research and literature that has a focus on students' experiences of schools and disciplinary practices.

Chapter Three describes the rationale for choosing qualitative research methodologies, in order to contextualise the four students' stories. It outlines the pathways chosen and the challenges within this study. Ethical considerations are outlined, inclusive of the role of the researcher.

In Chapter Four I present the narratives of each of the four young people who were the focus of this study. The issues explored with these young people centre on the effects of being exposed to any number of stand-downs, suspensions or exclusions. Findings are included from the perspective of each of the student's caregivers, the principal and Board of Trustees chairperson in each student's school, and the Ministry of Education, inclusive of Group Special Education.

This research proposes that it is the lived experiences and insights of the students, and their families, that can provide a new understanding of the impact on students when exposed to disciplinary exclusions. In Chapter Five, I explore the dangers of focusing solely on a student's behaviour without looking at the social, political and economic forces that may affect the young person's life. Key themes evident in the students' narratives are discussed including implications and interpretations of issues raised.

CHAPTER TWO:

UNEQUAL POWER RELATIONSHIPS

It is clear from the statistical data discussed in Chapter One that there is a serious problem in our schools in relation to disciplinary exclusions. Specifically, stand-downs, suspensions and exclusions are being used by schools to manage student behaviour. Despite various initiatives the Ministry of Education has established in schools to support student engagement, the problem continues to worsen. As discussed in Chapter One, the students most likely to be exposed to disciplinary exclusions are Māori and male and attend low-decile schools. The aim of this chapter is to offer a social and historical analysis, using critical, poststructural and Kaupapa Māori frameworks to explain why primary-aged Māori students are up to four times more likely to be excluded from New Zealand schools than their Pākehā counterparts.

The problem of increasingly violent children entering schools is most often attributed to dysfunctional parenting, a view that is reinforced by the media. Focusing the blame on the individual child and their family not only legitimises the disciplinary practices used in schools, but also firmly closes the door on discussions that explore alternative explanations as to why schools are unable to meet the needs of all children.

As a feminist and political activist, I am drawn to critical theories that create a space to understand the lived experiences of all people. To develop a better understanding of how and why various social groups are oppressed, I will be using the term ‘critical theory’ in its broadest sense, and Kaupapa Māori frameworks. Broadly defined, critical theory can be understood as including:

... all works taking a basically critical or radical stance on contemporary society with an orientation towards investigating exploitation, repression, unfairness and asymmetrical power relations (generated from class, gender or position), distorted communication, and false consciousness (Clegg, Clegg & Hardy, 1999, p. 186).

Kaupapa Māori frameworks as highlighted in the work of prominent Māori researchers (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Macfarlane, 2004; G. Smith, 1990; L. Smith, 1992) will be used to

contextualise how the function and purpose of schools in New Zealand were historically and arguably are still designed to determine who is included in and who is excluded from schools.

I will outline selected aspects of Kaupapa Māori frameworks in relation to what these can offer to an understanding of unequal power relationships between the dominant culture in New Zealand and Māori. These perspectives provide an alternative lens to the one used by the state, to explain why Māori students continue to be disproportionately over-represented in all three categories of stand-downs, suspensions and exclusions.

What follows is a historical overview of the construction of the identity category of ‘childhood’ and ‘school’, drawing on critical theories that make sense of how and why schools exclude particular children who are labelled as dysfunctional. Issues of power, and in particular unequal power relationships between children and adults, are central to the current problem, which resulted in 6,595 primary-aged students being stood down and suspended from schools in New Zealand during 2007 (Ministry of Education, 2008e).

THE ROLE OF THE STATE AND RELEVANT LEGISLATION

I will begin with an overview of the role of the state and current legislation to highlight the official Ministry discourse in regard to children perceived as ‘at risk’. Prior to the New Zealand Education Amendment Act (No. 21) 1998, principals acting within the Education Act 1989 were legally required only to advise the Ministry of Education of a student’s suspension along with the student’s name, the grounds for the suspension, the type of suspension and the duration of the suspension (Ministry of Education, 1999). Therefore, national statistics of the characteristics of the students receiving disciplinary exclusions, such as their age, gender and ethnicity, have only been available since 2000, with the effect that ‘Since those regulations introduced stand-downs for the first time, statistics prior to mid-1999 are not comparable’ (Kathy Phillips, in Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 1). Section 13 of the Act outlines that the purpose of the provisions of the Education Amendment Act (No. 21) 1998 concerning the stand-down, suspension, exclusion, or expulsion of a student from a state school, as follows:

- (a) provide a range of responses for cases of varying degrees of seriousness; and
- (b) minimise the disruption to a student’s attendance at school and facilitate the return of the student to school when that is appropriate; and

- (c) ensure that individual cases are dealt with in accordance with the principles of natural justice. (Ministry of Education, 2008)

One of the reasons for writing the New Zealand Education Amendment Act (No. 21) 1998 was to provide a greater range of options for principals deciding on disciplinary actions for cases of varying degrees of seriousness (Ministry of Education, 2008c). Under the old legislation for suspensions and expulsions, the number of suspensions increased steadily by nearly 100% in the four-year period 1992–1996: from 5,082 suspensions in 1992 to 10,016 suspensions in 1996 (Addis, 2002). In response, the Ministry of Education set up a database in July 1999 to monitor the trends of disciplinary exclusions.

Research commissioned by the Ministry of Education into the problem of student engagement in schools aims to contribute to an ongoing evidence-based discourse amongst policy-makers, educators, government agencies, researchers and communities. The report, entitled *The Complexity of Community and Family Influences on Children's Achievement in New Zealand* (Biddulph, Biddulph & Biddulph, 2003), is one of a series described by the Ministry as best evidence syntheses. The findings are summarised into four categories: family attributes; family processes; community factors; and schools, family and community partnerships. The influences of families and communities are identified as key levers to achieve high-quality outcomes for diverse children. In their research report, Biddulph et al. (2003) state that the focus is on children from early childhood through to the end of secondary schooling; however the report only discusses achievement levels at high schools. It highlights deficit thinking that seeks to blame individuals, rather than looking at alternative explanations for why many children are not, or do not want to be engaged in the school system in its current form. Biddulph et al. (2003) suggest:

Dysfunctional family processes (e.g. conflict, substance abuse, child abuse, negative modelling, disturbed parent–child relationships, deprivation of stimulation and affection) can affect children's performance and behaviour.

Children in such family circumstances are at increased risk of hyperactivity, truancy, mental health disorders (and suicide), delinquency, and low levels of literacy and self-esteem. The data also shows that the youth suicide rate in New Zealand is 2.5 times greater for Maori than non-Maori.

Research such as Biddulph et al.'s, suggesting the problem lies with families labelled as dysfunctional, justifies the increased surveillance and monitoring of all families. As a result many of the initiatives currently on offer either pertain to high school students or target the parents or the child.

1. Initiatives targeting student engagement include:

- restorative justice practices, available only in high schools
- the Student Reduction Initiative (SRI) funded to reduce the number of high school students not attending schools
- *Realising Youth Potential: Success through Education*, a report that provides a range of actions but they only apply within the secondary education system (Ministry of Education, 2008d)
- School Plus, which specifically targets high school students. The initiatives proposed include the removal of early leaving exemptions for 15-year-olds, education plans for all high school students by 2011, alternative education options such as free dual enrolment on Correspondence School and options that will allow for youth training and apprenticeships, aimed to be available to all schools by 2011 (Ministry of Education, 2008f).

2. Interventions targeting parents include:

- early identification of 'at risk' children
- early prosecution of parents with children labelled as truant
- Early Start programme.

3. School monitoring and surveillance includes:

- ENROL, the school student enrolment register
- Electronic Attendance Registers (eAR).

Labelling children as 'at risk' brings with it the danger of legitimising programmes, policies and practices developed to address the 'problem child'. Discourse analysis (Bakhtin, Holquist, Liapunov & Brostrom, 1992; Fairclough, 2001; Flax, 1987; Lemke, 1995) is useful when looking at how schools justify programmes targeted at students framed as dysfunctional and dangerous. These initiatives may shadow alternative ways of viewing the issues.

The Ministry of Education website promotes use of early interventions. In this approach, the Ministry may not necessarily be the agency intervening, but it acts as a ‘broker’ to ensure that a family gets access to the appropriate support services. For example, the Incredible Years programme has been designed by the Ministry to prevent, reduce and treat behavioural and emotional problems in young children (Ministry of Education, 2008d).

Amongst the school monitoring and surveillance strategies implemented was the introduction of electronic attendance registers in schools. ENROL is a central register that was implemented into every school in New Zealand in 2007. It was developed by the Ministry of Education, for schools to use via the internet. The Ministry promotes this system as a means of improving the overall enrolment management process and of increasing the visibility of students who fail to transition smoothly between schools. In introducing this system the Ministry also recognised the length of time from the point of non-enrolment to resolution is unacceptable (Ministry of Education, 2008a).

A national monitoring database (eAR) is now operational and will be mandatory in all schools by the end of 2009. This computerised system allows identification and monitoring of daily attendance of every child in every school in New Zealand for the explicit purpose of identifying children ‘at risk’ – that is, transient families and non-attending students. The Ministry of Education outlines the purpose of the legislative requirements on computerised attendance registers as follows:

Best practice suggests that a clear policy statement on attendance, coupled with the associated procedures on attendance management and truancy, lead to better student achievement, higher retention figures, community well-being, less youth crime and more positive life outcomes for students (Ministry of Education, 2008a).

I have drawn on critical theories and Kaupapa Māori frameworks to suggest that the way we construct and label children is symptomatic of unequal power relationships that ensure the social hierarchy remains uncontested. School structures have changed very little over time, regardless of the large body of educational literature that highlights the ways our current educational system is failing to meet the needs of all children. For this reason it is important to include an overview of how and why we arrived at the current educational system in New Zealand.

A CRITICAL FRAMING OF NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLING

Historically schooling has been financed and promoted on the assumption that its objective is to increase social equality (Jones, Marshall, Matthews, Smith & Smith, 1995). New Zealand's educational system parallels the system of English private and public schools. The social and educational ideas that the early colonists brought with them were prevalent in England during the first half of the nineteenth century. The settlers brought with them a tradition of church-controlled education (New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1972). The usual assumption, consistent with the English system and the thinking of the settlers themselves, was that schools would be established first for the children of those who could afford to pay fees; mainly the children of the upper and middle class settlers. 'Education of working class children would be undertaken, more or less as a charity, as means permitted' (New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1972, p. 11).

Unequal access to education mirrored the educational history of Britain. The difference in New Zealand was that colonists had the issue of the tangata whenua to deal with, who they categorised as savage and uncivilised. As Linda Smith (1992) argues, the New Zealand Government used the schooling of Māori as a means of both social control and assimilation, to allow the easy establishment of British law.

The earliest mission schools were taught in the Māori language. However from 1847, in order to get a state subsidy, mission schools were expected to teach in English. As schooling came further under state control, there was an associated shift in the ideologies used to rationalise state education policies. In reality, the New Zealand Wars testified to the break down of relations between European and Māori. Jones et al. (1995, p. 40) point out:

The series of devastating epidemics from the 1830's to the early twentieth century further impacted on the devastating lived experiences of Maori. In fact by 1865 Maori had all but completely withdrawn from schools.

The Education Act 1877 created the essential structure of our present education system. Its fundamental measures were to make schooling free, secular and compulsory (Jones et al., 1995). One effect of this mandate was to require all Māori children to attend school. Jones et

al. (1995) suggest that colonisation was as much about colonising the mind as it was about acquiring physical resources. Upholding this view, Shuker (1987, p. 29) adopts the view that contentious race relations are the outcome of colonialism reinforced by long-established social beliefs about physical and cultural inferiority or superiority:

These historical factors place particular racial groups in a subordinate position which is reinforced by continued racial discrimination and restricted access to markets, especially housing, employment and education.

In this thesis the ongoing issues related to Māori student engagement and their impact will be explored using Kaupapa Māori frameworks. Through the alternative lens that these frameworks provide, it is possible to gain a fresh view the problem of the disproportionate numbers of Māori who are exposed to disciplinary exclusions, as highlighted in Chapter One. Kaupapa Māori theoretical frameworks offer an extremely important and unique perspective that assists an understanding of the impact of colonisation on New Zealand, as it is Māori who have lived and experienced institutionalised racism in all its forms, including inside school gates. Kaupapa Māori represents a critique of the converging political, economic and cultural crises that affect Māori people. Its frameworks challenge the failure of liberal education to deliver equitable outcomes for Māori through schooling:

In almost every crisis index associated with Maori education, Maori students as a group are shown to perform worse, receive fewer opportunities and benefit least in comparison to their Pakeha counterparts. (Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1988)

In the 20 years since the Royal Commission's report was released, very little in this regard has changed.

Research demonstrating the existence and experiences of racism in the education system is both substantial and compelling (Awkward, 1995; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Bevan-Brown, 2000; Jones et al., 1995; Macfarlane, 2004; McCartney, 1992; G. Smith 1990). Racism is embedded in the individual interactions as well as institutional practices of schools. There is growing recognition that educational structures, policies and programmes have been mainly European in perspective and have failed to take into account the viewpoints, experiences and

needs of indigenous peoples. Kaupapa Māori frameworks, as suggested by Bishop and Glynn (1999), Macfarlane (2008) and Simon and Smith (2001), presuppose commitment to a critical analysis of the existing unequal power relations within our society. Power and control, these authors suggest, have been and continue to be dominated by the colonising culture of New Zealand.

Kaupapa Māori emerged from within the wider ethnic revitalisation movement that grew in New Zealand following rapid Māori urbanisation in the post World War Two period. This movement blossomed in the 1970s and 1980s with the intensifying of a political consciousness among Māori communities (Awatere, 1984; Walker, 1990, cited in Bishop, 1996). Māori demands for autonomy in this context are generally articulated as Tino Rangatiratanga, which was guaranteed to Māori in Article 2 of the Treaty of Waitangi. Māori demand the right to define what constitutes ‘treasures’, inclusive of culturally preferred knowledge and pedagogies.

Bishop and Glynn (1999) suggest that when researchers focus solely on a class-based analysis as the underlying cause of educational performance, as Chapple, Jefferies and Walker (1997), Nash (2003) and Poata-Smith (1996) do, they promote deficit theorising. Bishop and Glynn (1999) believe that this type of theorising perpetuates research that may be viewed as cultural abuse through research processes that render culture invisible. Graham Smith (1990) has warned that neither new right market nor neo-traditionalist Marxist analyses can satisfactorily account for Māori language, knowledge and cultural aspirations as major components of existing and developing educational interventions for Māori.

Kaupapa Māori as a set of frameworks offers a means of proactively promoting a Māori worldview as legitimate, authoritative and valid in relation to other cultures in New Zealand. Linda Smith (1992) argues that it is hard to deny the results of a century and a half of political and economic marginalisation. This ideology challenges the power relationships that exist as a result of colonialism at all levels in society. As Bishop and Glynn (1999, p. 66) explain, Māori:

... want collective advancement and development. They want to address the problem of Maori being economically positioned at the bottom of the heap, but they want to do so using solutions that are located within Maori cultural aspirations.

Although it is recognised the over-representation of Māori students in exclusionary data is a major problem, the problem persists. Critical theory allows space to challenge any ideology that blames individuals and that focuses on the perceived deficits they bring in contributing to the problem. It is important to understand that the problems that school site personnel face when implementing disciplinary action reflect practices that legitimise unequal power relationships in the wider society.

Noguera's (2003) critical analysis of the purpose of education helps to make meaning out of how and why children experience school so differently. He proposes that schools carry out three main functions: acting as a mechanism to sort children, socialising children by teaching the values that are regarded as central to civil society, and operating as institutions of social control. Each one of these functions is central to the operation of most schools, but Noguera (2003) emphasises that if a school does not maintain order and control, it cannot easily undertake the other two functions.

Bourdieu (1986) also suggests the principal function of schooling is to reproduce the hierarchical relationships among different groups or classes in society, and to legitimise them. This process occurs by legitimising the dominant group's system of values, norms and language. Writers influenced by poststructural approaches, such as Britzman (2000), build on the work of Bourdieu (1986) in relation to the notion of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1986) argues that postcolonial schools have rethought the concept of cultural capital, to account for its multiple and conflictive racialised dynamics; culture is analysed as a significant site for producing codes of whiteness and discourses of eurocentricity.

Critical theory is used next to explore the very notion of childhood because, without an identity or construction of a 'child', schools cannot justify the practices that take place within them. I support the views that suggest education is grounded in structured power relationships; serving the interests of the dominant classes, ensuring minorities and othered people are treated inequitably. For as long as children attend schools, then discipline is a legitimised task of those who run them. Patton (1998) suggests that the structures, processes, assumptions and beliefs of the dominant classes are deeply embedded in education, and that the curriculum writers, policy-makers and educationalists play an essential role in maintaining

some of the injustices evident in schools. In turn these self-perpetuating conditions make the theories, research and practice enormously difficult to change.

HAVING A CHILDHOOD AND GOING TO SCHOOL

There is no child in school until we have theories that enable us to talk of a childhood. Childhood normalises the way in which children are to be seen, talked about, and acted upon as ‘learners’ or as having a ‘developmental process’ (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998).

Baker (1998) reminds us that notions of childhood and schooling, as mutually reinforcing classifications and social practices, did not even exist until the nineteenth century. Present-day western beliefs that ‘children’ are dependent, vulnerable and requiring segregation represents, as suggested by Baker (1998), a modernist shift in views of the young, and as such defines the function of schooling as being to achieve socio-economic betterment, moral rescue and intellectual rescue. As a rule, children occupy the lowest levels of the social hierarchy, positions that are characterised by unequal power and fewer material rewards, fewer rights, responsibilities and privileges, and by lower prestige (Williams, Chuprov, Zubok & Zubok, 2003). This unequal status also legitimises the bullying, racism, silencing and disciplinary practices experienced by children inside schools.

During their integration into society, young people are conscious of their low social status. In all societies the notion of age is characterised by some notion of status, young people suffer from inequality of social position in comparison with adults (Williams et al., p. 93).

According to Baker (1998), educational discourse imported this hierarchy through the mechanisms of power that constituted the new scientific study of the child at the turn of the twentieth century. She goes on to argue that currently the developmental order of childhood is being extended and so too are its productive and repressive effects. Categories of deficit owe less to nature though and more to culturally specific practices. The impact of categories of deficit will be central to making meaning of the four students’ stories in this thesis. As Baker (1998, p. 139) reminds us:

Categories such as ‘ready to learn’, ‘at risk’, ‘attention disorder’, ‘emotionally disturbed’ and so on suggest the limits of a normal childhood at the end of the twentieth century.

As African American critical theorist Patton (1998) suggests, students who fail in general education are then viewed as defective, and consequently as needing some ‘special’ system to fix them. He suggests that African American youth are consistently misidentified and placed in special educational programmes as a result of racial discrimination:

In addition, the special educational labels borne by these students often serve as a stigma, producing negative effects on the bearer of the label and others interacting with the stigmatised individual. These students miss essential general education which continues the spiral of lower levels of achievement, decreased likelihood of post secondary education and more limited employment. (Patton, 1998, p. 25)

I suggest that when we view, categorise and label children as ‘at risk’, we can silence the very people who hold critical insights into the lived realities and experiences of being framed as such. Although there is very little national or international literature that focuses specifically on the effect of disciplinary exclusion on primary-aged students, the findings from those studies that do exist – which will be reviewed in the next section – are important to an understanding of how removal from school affects students.

STUDENTS, ADULTS, SCHOOLS: RESEARCH ON DISCIPLINARY EXCLUSIONS

As noted above, there is sparse research on lived experiences of students exposed to disciplinary exclusions in New Zealand since the Education Amendment Act (No. 21) 1998 came into force. I was only able to locate four studies connected to this topic, three of which relate to secondary schools. The first study focused on the process from the primary school principals’ perspectives. The other three were conducted prior to the passing of the Act but the findings are useful and relevant to this research as they place students’ experiences at the centre of the study.

With its principal-centred approach, the first study explored primary school principals’ views and management of implementing stand-downs, suspensions and exclusions in their schools

(Addis, 2002). In her conclusion Addis suggested that principals worked hard at maintaining an education for extremely difficult students, but that these students presented a dilemma for principals compounded by a significant lack of support and resourcing from the Ministry of Education. Principals perceived they had no other choice but to use the disciplinary exclusion process for young students who were seriously misbehaving. They also saw the current legislation as requiring a huge amount of work to implement.

Principals in the Addis (2002) study perceived that the rise in disciplinary exclusions was caused by the Government's market policy which put schools in direct competition for students, intensifying the need to present a good image. Their statements support findings of earlier studies in New Zealand that suggested a principal's attitudes and a school's status, policies and practices have a greater effect on the probability of exclusion than actual student misbehaviour does (Galloway, Ball, Blomfield & Seyd, 1982; Imich, 1994).

The second research study, by the Youth Law Project (1997), involved interviews with 18 secondary-aged students and their teachers. All of these students felt that the experience of suspension had impacted negatively on their lives. They felt they were not listened to, and that the schools just wanted to get rid of them. Disciplinary exclusions left students feeling bored, getting into trouble, falling behind in their schoolwork and then struggling to catch up when they returned to school. A consistent theme was the change in attitude towards their school after the disciplinary exclusion. They described how they became very angry and depressed, and how they felt 'stink' and unwanted.

The intention of the Youth Law Project's study was to allow young people's voices to be heard, particularly in relation to the legal and ethical issues raised within its discussion. The researchers were specifically interested in breaches of relevant legislation and international conventions, including the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990, universal principles of fair justice, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC), which was ratified by New Zealand in March 1993 (Youth Law Project, 1997).

The third study, a qualitative research project by Anne Overton (1995), focused on the lived experiences of secondary-aged students exposed to suspensions. Overton (1995) interviewed 35 students suspended from Christchurch secondary schools. All of the students interviewed stated that being suspended was extremely stressful. Many believed they were not listened to,

and felt picked on, victimised and put down by teachers. These experiences were found to exacerbate the students' sense of alienation from their school.

The findings of this study suggested many students did not view school as a positive helping environment; to the contrary, 'their experiences had taught them that schools and teachers were an additional source of stress and anxiety' (Overton, 1995, p. 47). The students had wanted to succeed at school but felt that it was impossible because the teaching they had experienced rarely addressed any of their specific learning needs.

The final study of relevance to this thesis, conducted by Lis Cotter (2002), highlights the experiences of high school students displaced from the education system. Cotter's focus was primarily on the steady increase in the number of students who have been granted early leaving exemptions from school. Under section 22 of the Education Act 1989, 15-year-old students can be exempted from the compulsory clause of the Education Act 1989 (section 20) on account of their educational and conduct problems, and upon recognition that these students will no longer benefit from attending school. Cotter (2002) argues that the increase in early leaving exemptions is simply an easier pathway out of schools than exclusion, as this process requires less management, time, paper work and emotional distress for all parties. Cotter (2002) suggests the disproportionate number of working class Māori students who were exempted was a cause for serious concern and an important focus for further research.

The key findings in all four studies discussed above confirm what the international literature suggests: that in a high proportion of cases, the suspension of a student with a history of behaviour problems is of no educational benefit to the student concerned, and may in fact have a deleterious effect by moving the student closer to a permanent exit from the school system (Denborough, 1996; Fine, 1991; Noguera, 2003; Parsons, 2001; Patton, 1998).

As with New Zealand research, international research into the impact of disciplinary exclusions on primary-aged students is limited. The connection between any study of potential relevance and the New Zealand context is further complicated by procedural and policy differences between New Zealand and other countries. However, in the international studies that do exist, what is consistent is the evidence that schools most frequently punish the students who appear to have the greatest academic, social, economic and emotional needs. Several researchers (e.g. Denborough, 1996; Fine, 1991; Noguera, 2003; Parsons, 2001;

Patton, 1998) suggest that disciplinary practices used in schools to control and punish students bear a striking similarity to the strategies used to punish adults in society. Not surprisingly, the students most frequently targeted for punishment often look – in terms of race, gender and socio-economic status – like smaller versions of those adults who are targeted for incarceration in society. It is also evident, however, that there are students who refuse to be controlled, who refuse to be treated as inferior, who do not wish to learn only one worldview and who certainly refuse to be silenced. Fine's (1991, p. 9) analysis of silencing is useful in assisting an understanding that:

Excluding children from school occurs within an institutionalised context that also comfortably purges the critical talk of students, educators, parents and activists.

There is very little evidence that disciplinary practices actually change or improve the behaviour of 'offending' students, and little thought, if any, is given to the long-term consequences for students (Hirschi, 1969; Noguera, 2003; Singer, 1996; Wacquant, 2000).

It is evident from a review of both national and international research literature the voices of primary-aged students are missing within educational research. The present study aims to address this imbalance and to create a new picture, to add a new voice to our understandings, by exploring the current and long-term consequences of being exposed to disciplinary exclusion for primary-aged Māori students. My hope is that this research will allow these students to tell their stories and their experiences in their words, and that they will be heard. How this research journey unfolded is outlined next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE:

TE ARA: THE PATHWAY

This chapter outlines the pathways chosen for this research project as the challenges that faced it unfolded, and it documents how and why particular choices were made. As the focus of this research was to explore the lived experiences of primary-aged Māori students, I will begin with an overview of why I chose to take a qualitative approach. I will share the journey, which resulted in the recruitment of four students who had all experienced their first disciplinary exclusion by nine years of age.

I provide a brief overview of the supporting data collected, followed by a synopsis of the issues related to power, status and positionality as established through the use of life history methodology. I also discuss the ethical considerations involved in the research that placed the students and their educational life histories at centre stage.

I felt it was crucial to interview all of the parties involved in the exclusion process – the students and their whānau, the schools and the Ministry of Education – in order to paint a vivid and textured picture of the complex issues surrounding the exclusion of students from school.

I met with each of the students and their whānau on three separate occasions, and the educational personnel twice. Conversations with whānau were far more informal and unstructured than the interviews with educational personnel. The findings from the latter interviews will be discussed in the following chapter. An overview of the participants interviewed is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: The 14 participants interviewed for this study, 2006

Riverbank Primary	Ngapura School	Ministry of Education
Hoani aged 12	Crystal aged 13	Group Special Education
Foster parents (Māori)	Mother (Māori)	Pouwhakarewa
		Mātauranga: Māori female
Principal:	Tama aged 9	
Pākehā female	Mother (Māori)	Ministry Development
		Officer: Pākehā female
Chairperson:	TK aged 10	
Pākehā female	Mother (Pākehā)	
	Principal: Pākehā male	
	Chairperson:	
	Māori female	

In order to contextualise the four students' stories, and following life history methodology, I have included discussions with the students' caregivers. This approach assists with understanding the impact and long-term effects on the extended whānau, when their children are exposed to disciplinary exclusions. It was also necessary to have a feel for the issues facing school site personnel, such as each student's principal and Board of Trustees chairperson, as the people responsible for making and implementing the disciplinary decisions under the legislation for stand-downs, suspensions and exclusions.

Information on issues involved with implementing current legislation, and balancing the needs and rights of students, caregivers and schools, was sought from the Ministry of Education. Two Ministry personnel were interviewed: a Ministry development officer, who works with schools to accept students who require reintegration after a suspension or exclusion; and a Group Special Education Pouwhakarewa Mātauranga, who works directly with Māori students labelled as having extreme behaviour and/or physical needs.

EMBARKING ON THE JOURNEY: CHOOSING A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design, within a qualitative model, is an evolving process in which the questions to be asked and the data to be collected emerge in the process of doing the research. The

questions and data are also contingent on the researcher, the research setting, the process and the researcher's theoretical perspectives (Atkinson, Coffey & Delamont, 2003; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Denzin, 1978; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). When choosing a study, qualitative researchers will often be driven by their own biography. This form of motivation shaped the research for this thesis, as discussed in Chapter One. As Bogdan and Biklen (1992, p. 59) suggest:

Particular topics, settings, or people are of interest, because they have touched the researcher's life in some important way.

Qualitative research designs are based on the belief that meaning and process are crucial to understanding human behaviour. The optimal approach is to analyse data inductively, and to use traditions such as observation, unstructured interviewing and document analysis, as suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1992). Qualitative research was chosen to underpin my thesis as this methodology enabled me, as a feminist researcher, to explore the lived experiences of young people excluded from primary school from the subject's own frame of reference. I explored these issues through participant observation, document analysis, life history research methodology, and in-depth semi-structured interviews. In support of this kind of approach, Bogdan and Biklen (1992, p. 27) suggest:

Qualitative research is seen to take seriously actors and categories of behaviour that had previously received little, if any attention.

Life history methodology, which I chose as the pathway for the participants to share their stories, focuses on the narratives people offer about their activities, their relationships with others, and the organisation(s) in which they have been or are involved with. Life histories provide an opportunity to explore the ways in which lives are both constructed by the individual and shaped by institutions, dominant discourses and particular historical moments. (Du Plessis, Higgs & Mortlock, 2004). Life history methodology as a qualitative research practice uses a variety of analytical tools to make connections between the particular and the general – between individual lives and social context (Du Plessis, 2006). As Cole and Knowles (2001, p. 11) explain:

Life history inquiry is about gaining insights into the broader human condition by coming to know and understand the experiences of humans. It is about understanding a situation, profession, condition, or institution through coming to know how individuals walk, talk, live and work within that particular context. It is about understanding the relationship, the context, interaction, between life and context, self and place.

Prior to starting this research project, I began writing a personal journal and I then continued to make entries in it during 2006 while I was completing the interview stage of the thesis. The journal served as a place for me to unravel my multitude of positionalities, and in particular my experiences as a principal and in my new role as a researcher. The journal was a powerful and safe way for me to process new concepts and learning throughout my research journey.

A number of factors led to the changing nature of this research, including time constraints, theoretical considerations, availability of participants, a shift in my own thinking, methodological considerations and the inclusion of two base schools rather than the one school that was initially planned. Ethical considerations were also deeply important in ensuring the emotional and cultural safety of the participants within this research.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical approval for completing this research was gained from the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was gained from all 14 participants, who comprised four students and their whānau, two principals, two chairpersons, and two Ministry of Education staff members. Covering letters and information sheets detailed the aim of this project and guaranteed confidentiality for the whānau involved (see Appendix One). Three of the students chose their own pseudonym; the fourth child did not wish to choose an alternative name so I called him Tama, the Māori word for young boy.

The students and their whānau were advised they could withdraw from the project at any time and that transcripts were confidential to the participants. Interviews were recorded with prior permission from the participants. All transcripts, along with the original tapes, were offered back to the participants concerned.

Methodologically and theoretically there have been ethical considerations that I struggled with in respect to my role as a Pākehā researcher, and the choice to use Kaupapa Māori research practices. Debate abounds regarding Pākehā involvement in Kaupapa Māori-driven research.

The argument ranges from views that Pākehā can and should do research that benefits Māori, through to those who believe Pākehā should not and can not engage in genuine Kaupapa Māori research. I acknowledge prominent Māori researchers such as Bishop (1996) and Smith (1992) who express concerns about how Māori feel about the impact of research in their lives. As Bishop (1996, p. 14) states:

These concerns focus on the locus of power and control over research issues such as initiation, benefits, representation, legitimisation and accountability.

Bishop (1996) and Smith (1994) both offer reasons, and solutions, as to how and why non-indigenous people should be involved in Māori research. In support of such involvement, Bishop argues that highly skilled non-Māori are becoming increasingly bicultural, and are willing to work within a Māori framework. He also contends that Pākehā researchers have an obligation under the Treaty of Waitangi to work in partnership with Māori. I have been conscious, as a Pākehā researcher, to question methodologies that blame the Māori people for their marginalisation. Smith (1994) discusses the damage caused by Pākehā researchers, whom she describes as ‘willing bedfellows of assimilationist victim blaming policies’ (Smith, 1994, p. 27). At the same time she offers realistic protection for Māori, by suggesting non-Māori can be involved in Kaupapa Māori research, provided that they do not conduct it on their own.

Throughout this research project I have endeavoured to meet this challenge by seeking help, support and guidance from local Kaumātua; before, during and after collecting data for this research. I have been privileged to have a strong and nurturing group of kaumātua and pakeke to support and bless this mahi, many of whom I met 25 years ago when my daughter started at Te Kōhanga Reo o Te Whatumanawa Māoritanga o Rehua.

Rekindling the emotional distress of the experience was a potential risk of the participation of the students and whānau in this research. I endeavoured to honour the whānau by ensuring

that I asked how their needs would best be met. In practical terms this meant allowing them enough time to share their stories, as well as offering them Kaumātua support, both pre and post interview. I followed appropriate Māori protocols, like taking kai (food) each time I visited families, taking off my shoes as I entered their homes, and sharing karakia at the start and conclusion of the interviews.

SELECTION OF THE STUDENTS AND THEIR CAREGIVERS.

A key dimension of this study was to allow the students to tell their own stories. The issues to be explored with the students centred on the effects, in both the short and long term, of being exposed to a range of disciplinary exclusions. The interview questions focused on which educational, emotional and cultural provisions were made for the students, in their view, before, during and after disciplinary practices. Suggestions for alternatives to disciplinary exclusions were also asked for.

As explained in later sections on the selection of particular schools and their personnel, the research involved two schools. The principals of Ngapura School and Riverbank Primary both gave me a comprehensive list of the children exposed to disciplinary exclusion in their schools during 2005 and 2006. From these two lists I selected 10 possible participants, five from each school. In making my choices I ensured there was a range of Māori boys and girls who had experienced each category of exclusion, which ranged from students who had experienced a single stand-down to students who had at least one exclusion from school.

The next step was to send out a letter to the 10 families, inviting them to participate in this research. Included with the letter were two consent forms; one copy for the students and caregivers and one for myself, for them to sign if they agreed to take part. In the letter (see Appendix One), I introduced myself, outlined the aims of my study and explained life history methodologies. I included the names and contact details of my two supervisors, Dr Baljit Kaur and Dr Kathleen Quinlivan from the University of Canterbury, so that the whānau could confirm the authenticity of the research study. The letter also outlined the process of the research, which involved three home visits, if that was where the participants chose to be interviewed.

The purpose of the first visit was to discuss the research proposal and collect the consent forms, if both the caregiver and the student wished to be involved. At the initial meeting, the whānau was reminded of the option of Kaumātua support, as discussed in the previous section (Ethical Considerations). I approached three Kaumātua, each a representative of a different iwi, who gave their blessing to this research. They also offered to support the whānau, if required. The three Kaumātua were Nannie Heeni Phillips, Taua Hukarere Omihi Te Karu and Matua Ruawhitu Pokaia.

The purpose of the second visit was to complete the interviews with students and their caregivers in an informal way. My hope was that the students and their whānau would feel free to talk about the issues that they saw as important, rather than feeling that their responses were defined by my questions. The caregivers were interviewed first during the day when the students were at school, and then later the students were interviewed on their own.

The third visit was conducted for the purpose of returning the transcripts to the participants and allowing them another opportunity to decide whether, once they had read through their story, they were comfortable with it being told. At this stage of the process I was unable to contact one whānau as they had shifted house and the student had changed schools. As a result I could not return their transcript.

The interviews with the students and their caregivers centred on the lived experiences of the students' exposure to stand-down, suspension and/or exclusion from their school. I asked about the current and ongoing effects of exposure to disciplinary exclusion, for the students and their whānau.

CRYSTAL

Mere's whānau was the first I met from Ngapura School. Mere's Pākehā mother had agreed to being interviewed at her home. Mere is a seven-year-old female Māori student who was labelled so 'at risk' by her school principal that she had been enrolled at the Ka Māhuri unit for one term. This unit was first piloted in the South Island in 2006 by a group of Canterbury school principals in low-decile schools, as a response to the growing number of young people perceived as having severe behavioural problems. The unit targets five- to eight-year olds and

uses a reward-based behaviourist model, as the management tool used to ‘modify student’s behaviour’ (Interview, Principal, Ngapura School, 2006).

After my initial phone call to Mere’s mother, we both felt that due to Mere’s age and recent experiences at school, it would be appropriate to spend the first of my three visits getting to know her. She could then make an informed choice as to whether or not she would participate in my research. After the first two visits with Mere, it was clear to me she did not want to talk about school. While we spent time playing at the kitchen table she happily talked about anything else but school. Each time I raised the subject of school Mere would immediately stop playing and leave the table. It was evident she had high levels of anxiety regarding the subject. Not wanting to cause her further distress, I expressed my thanks and packed to leave.

On my way out, I passed her sister Crystal, who had been sitting on the couch listening. ‘I’d like to be interviewed’, she stated quietly. When I explained I was only interviewing primary-aged Māori students, she responded, ‘I was excluded from primary school eight times – doesn’t that count?’

Crystal is Mere’s Pākehā sister, who at the time had just entered high school. As I talked with Crystal and her mother, I felt that her story was too important and I could not turn away. A week later, after signing the consent forms, I returned to interview Crystal’s mother. Crystal completed her interview when she arrived home from school. Although she said she felt shy to begin with and asked for specific prompting questions, by the end of our taped interview she appeared more comfortable and able to share her story. I was deeply moved:

I came home and cried after the interview, it really disturbed me what this talented, intelligent, amazing young girl had been through, yet no one knew or bothered to find out. Crystal is such a lovely, polite girl I struggle to imagine why she had been excluded from schools on so many occasions. As her story unfolded I was shocked and amazed on so many levels, but in particular her astuteness, her confidence, her understanding of herself and the fact she could tell a complete stranger her story yet never tell a teacher, even the one teacher she loved and trusted, raised many issues for me and deeply challenged my own thinking.

(Journal Entry, 24 July 2006)

TAMA

The second whānau I rang was Tama's. His mother felt anxious about the whānau's involvement in this research and she wanted to take some more time to think about the study and discuss it with her son. I asked her if she wanted to meet me to discuss her concerns kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face). She agreed to this meeting so she could make an informed decision.

Her preferred choice for this preliminary meeting was to meet at home. After I explained the kaupapa of the research, Tama's mother became very animated and wanted to become involved. She then asked her son if he would like to be interviewed, and he nodded. Both Tama and his mother signed the consent forms and I returned the following week to complete the interviews.

Tama is nine years old and had been out of school for over four months. During that time he consciously reversed his day/night sleeping pattern. Consequently when I returned for an interview Tama was either asleep or on his computer playing internet games. It seemed as though Tama had completely disengaged from communicating with adults. I found it extremely difficult to make any connection with him. All of my attempts to talk with him failed. I persevered as I felt his was an extremely important story.

On my third visit, I offered to take the whānau out to lunch, hoping this would remove the distraction of computer games, creating the space to talk. The interview took place after lunch, in Tama's home, and due to his monosyllabic answers, the interview was very short. To get any answers at all, I had to ask very specific questions. However, when he was not talking about school, Tama was vivacious and intelligent, engaging passionately about his interests, in particular World Wrestling Entertainment's WrestleMania. I only returned to the house once more, to deliver and discuss the transcripts.

TK

A student with a single disciplinary exclusion was the youngest child of the third whānau I contacted. TK had been stood down from Ngapura School. On the official notification sent to the Ministry of Education, the principal had identified TK as Māori, which was how he had been included on the list of Māori students that I had been given. TK's mother was keen to be involved in my study. It was after indicating her enthusiasm to participate that she informed

me TK was actually Filipino, although he had attended a kōhanga reo and was in a bilingual classroom.

Even though TK did not meet my research criteria, I felt I could not exclude him based solely on his ethnicity. Leaving any of these students voiceless and invisible would conflict with the kaupapa of my research.

TK and his mother signed the consent forms and, a week later, I returned for a semi-structured taped interview. I first met with TK's mother and after school sat with TK. He is a polite and bubbly boy who talked openly for an hour and a half about his educational life history.

OTHERS FROM NGAPURA SCHOOL

The children of the other whānau from the list of five from Ngapura School who I contacted were a girl who had received two stand-downs and was facing suspension and a boy with multiple disciplinary exclusions. After leaving two messages with the girl's caregiver and receiving no response, I chose not to pursue her whānau any further. The mother of the boy, speaking to me for 20 minutes, conveyed her anger that her son had been out of school for over five months. She wanted time to talk to her son and her husband about being involved in my research. She asked me to phone her back in a week. When I called back, she explained the whānau had decided not to be included as they felt it was too distressing. She then talked for further 20 minutes, revealing that they had gained approval for their son to be enrolled in a correspondence school, as they had given up hope of the Ministry of Education finding a school for their son. She discussed how the exclusion of her son had impacted on her job and her relationship with her son. She explained the whānau felt they had been through enough and wanted move on. I was moved by her story and her obvious distress.

At this time I moved on to contact the five whānau from Riverbank Primary, selected from the list of 15 provided by the principal of that school.

HOANI

Hoani's name jumped out at me from the list of Riverbank Primary students, as he was a student from a school where I had taught several years earlier. Hoani has a long history of exclusions from both primary and intermediate schools. I sent the information letter and

consent forms to Hoani and his foster parents, following up with a phone call a week later. The whānau was happy to be involved in the study and felt it would be beneficial for Hoani to talk to someone he knew.

Talking with Hoani, I was both saddened and a little unnerved. Throughout the interview Hoani would flex his arm muscles and punch his fist into his own hand, for no apparent reason. The number of scars on his arms saddened me. He had cigarette burns and raised lumps of skin, which had obviously been deep cuts allowed to heal with no stitches or medical treatment. There were not just one or two, there were many scars, which I was drawn to, and I felt sick as I wondered where he got them. Unhealed scars seemed an appropriate metaphor for this child.

(Journal Entry, 11 August 2006)

Hoani's caregivers were an elderly couple who cared for five other foster children, including two biological mokopuna (grandchildren). During my first visit to their home and after sharing kai, we discussed the research and they signed the consent forms. I stayed to conduct the semi-structured interview, which took three hours. They discussed many issues over that time, particularly in relation to their experiences of being foster parents. Maru and Wini were frustrated by the number of overnight emergency placements that Child, Youth and Family (CYF) made to them, because months later some of these children had still not been placed in long-term homes. They felt unable to manage Hoani's extreme behaviour in the long term but had accepted him back into their home on a trial basis. Hoani was well aware of this condition on his staying. I was humbled by his foster parents' genuine concern for children needing foster care. They were generous with their time and invited me back saying, 'Now you have been here, it is your home to visit whenever you would like' (Interview, Hoani's foster parents Maru and Wini, September 2006).

Hoani had been out of the school system for five months, prior to the Ministry of Education directive for a high school to enrol him. At the time of interview, he was attending an all-boys high school part time; however, his attendance was conditional upon his having a tracker, a Ministry-funded behaviour support person. Prior to the school placement, Hoani's tracker picked him up at 9 a.m. every week day and spent five hours with him at the local library. This unusual situation continued for the five months he was out of school.

After the interview, I was left feeling sad, angry and shocked at the story Hoani told.

There are times I feel genuinely distressed when recording these young people's stories, as I came to realise each one represents literally thousands of children who every year are exposed to disciplinary exclusions and who appear as numbers on a page. If children cannot tell, or are silenced from telling their stories, and schools are oblivious to what's really going on for these students, then how will any of this ever change?

(Journal Entry, 8 August 2006)

By this point, I felt distressed and uneasy at having six more whānau to meet and interview, being totally overwhelmed by the enormity of my task. I negotiated with my supervisors to focus my research on the four students I had already interviewed.

NGAPURA SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AND CHAIRPERSON

Ngapura School was chosen as a base school because I knew it to be a low-decile school that provides two bilingual classrooms, has a high number of Māori students, and has an experienced principal. I phoned the principal to discuss my research and he was more than happy to be part of this study. The consent forms sent to the school were signed by him and the Board of Trustees chairperson.

When we met in his office two weeks later, the tape-recorded interview was semi-structured and took approximately two hours. He appeared relaxed and reflective. I enjoyed this interview because I also felt relaxed, having met him before and I enjoyed our discussion with an experienced principal who I felt was honest and sincere about the issues raised. At the conclusion of the interview he stated he too had thoroughly enjoyed the interview as 'we rarely have such discussions with colleagues' (Interview, Principal, Ngapura School, August 2006).

His comment confirmed for me that my role as a principal, rather than as a researcher, had influenced the dialogue that took place between us. Initially I believed I was in the privileged position of being able to ask questions from a knowledge base that an 'outsider' may not have

had and therefore would not have known to ask them. However, as the study progressed, I came to wonder if this ‘insider’ perspective was a disadvantage.

The principal was generous with his time and resources. He had information ready for me to take away on the day of the interview. I was given personal data on students and their whānau, including names, addresses, disciplinary actions, and 42 notification letters sent to caregivers of students involved in disciplinary practices throughout the year. I also collected the latest Education Review Office (ERO) report on the school and copies of practices and procedures from the school’s behaviour management programme.

I looked forward to the interview with the Board of Trustees chairperson, as the principal had discussed their differing point of views in regard to disciplinary exclusions. The chairperson is a Māori woman whom I know personally. She is also very politically active in the wider Māori community. She was involved on Te Koru Puawai o Aotearoa, the Māori branch of the New Zealand School Trustees Association. After I was welcomed into her home, we started and ended the four-hour interview with karakia and kai. Her own children had attended Ngapura, one of whom had received a stand-down from the current principal.

RIVERBANK PRIMARY PRINCIPAL AND CHAIRPERSON

I knew that Riverbank Primary had a high number of stand-downs, suspensions and exclusions after an ERO report recommended statutory intervention by the Ministry of Education. After attempting to contact Riverbank Primary several times and not hearing back, I approached Ngapura School as an alternative base school as I had a limited timeframe for the interviews.

Shortly after the interview time was scheduled at Ngapura School, however, the principal of Riverbank contacted me to express her desire to be involved in the study, and apologised for the time taken to make contact. At this point I still believed I would be interviewing up to 10 students therefore I felt there was merit in gaining the perspective of a first-time, female principal. Consequently I chose to engage both schools in the research, believing it would offer the additional advantage of giving greater anonymity to the students and their whānau.

The interview with the principal at Riverbank Primary was more formal than the one with the Ngapura School principal as I had not met her previously. We met in the principal's office and started talking on a personal level which opened a space for honest and engaging discussion about principalship and our experiences as women within our profession. I gained an understanding of the range of dilemmas she faced as a new principal when making a decision to use exclusionary practices. She too had photocopied and made ready all the data and records that I required, including both signed consent forms. Her secretary kindly photocopied school policies as requested.

A week later, I interviewed the chairperson from the Riverbank Primary Board of Trustees. She was actively involved in the School Trustees Association. Her involvement with the school began as a position funded by the Ministry of Education to help support and train the school's Board of Trustees. At the end of her contract with the Ministry, she was co-opted onto the Board of Trustees and later elected as the chairperson. She was concurrently the chairperson of the Board of Trustees at a decile 10 secondary school that her own children attended.

THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

To make sense of the purpose and aims of the new legislation on stand-downs, suspensions and exclusions, it was crucial that I meet and interview Ministry of Education personnel. I wanted to gain an understanding of the Ministry of Education's policies and procedures aimed at meeting the needs of primary-aged Māori students who have been stood down, suspended and/or excluded from schools. As noted in Chapter Two, there are several new initiatives, including School Plus (Ministry of Education, September 2008), that the Ministry is funding to help support student engagement in high schools; however, the focus for my study was on the programmes being developed that specifically target primary-aged students.

The development officer in the Ministry's Student Support Team sought and gained approval from the service manager of the Ministry of Education to participate in this study. The tape-recorded interview, held at the local Ministry of Education office, was relatively structured as this was my first interview. Although the interview took approximately one hour, it was helpful in giving me a sense of how problematic and complex this issue is for everyone involved. However, as the Student Support Team rarely meet with students, I felt I also

needed to speak with someone who actually worked alongside students exposed to disciplinary exclusion. I was encouraged to meet with personnel from Group Special Education (GSE), physically housed downstairs from the local Ministry office. Both the Ministry and GSE personnel I interviewed asked for name protection; however, they also acknowledged that they could be readily identified within their respective professional fields.

The development officer was unable to provide me with pre-printed material about disciplinary exclusions of primary-aged students. Instead she directed me to the publicly available information on the Ministry's website.

Having gained permission from the service manager of GSE, I met with and interviewed the Pouwhakarewa Mātauranga. This recorded interview took four hours as we engaged in a discussion about the theoretical models that could be used to explain why Māori children are more likely to be exposed to disciplinary exclusions than Pākehā students for an equivalent incident. I have worked alongside this Ministry employee in a professional capacity before, and position her as a powerful and unrelenting advocate for Māori students and their whānau.

Ministry documents and ERO reports have been used in this thesis to highlight the government's discourse in relation to notions of discipline and behaviour management. The range and type of data collected from the Ministry website were reviewed to identify the textual discourse that educators use to legitimise behaviour management practices within school sites.

By using qualitative methodological research practices, I was able to draw on a variety of tools to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of the Ministry personnel in this study. These tools comprised personal experience, life history methodology, interviews, and historical analysis of the purpose and structure of schools, as well as analysis of textual data.

Combining multiple observations, research methods, and empirical materials helps to overcome the weakness or intrinsic biases and the problems that come from single method, single-observer, single theory studies. (Ministry of Education, 2006)

DATA ANALYSIS

The use and power of thematic analysis evolved throughout this study. From the students' stories there emerged consistent themes, such as voicelessness, repeated acts of resistance, power and dominance, resiliency, alienation, social control and hopelessness. Trueba, Spindler and Spindler (1989, p. 2) suggest:

Disciplinary practices are merely performances of the historical, social, political and economic forces that play a key role in what is played out in our schools.

Initially I assumed I would critique the students' experiences and those of their caregivers by looking for patterns of similarities and difference in the individual stories. I produced a cross-classification chart to review data from the participants and their whānau.

I made a matrix of all four caregivers and the students and had devised several categories as discussed by them in their stories e.g. their own personal experiences of school, issues of poverty, racism, number of children in their family experiencing difficulties at school. I took the chart along to my supervision meeting and said, 'I cannot just chunk these people's lives into boxes, into related themes or categories of study because it feels like I've lost their soul. They are silenced yet again, but this time by me.' It was a poignant moment when Baljit asked, 'Well, who asked you to do that?', and I nearly cried.

(Journal Entry, 6 November 2006)

I came to truly see that the power of this research lay within the students' stories. I threw out the cross-classification charts and used mind-mapping techniques instead to retell each student's story and immersed myself within them. I then used a timeline as an analytical tool to look for critical incidents as they impacted on these students' lives. The next step was to unravel the key themes requiring transparency within my research, which made thematic writing both exciting and manageable. Coding and categorising key themes within each student's story was made easier by using quotes to capture its essence. I then wrote these quotes on large sheets of paper and placed them on the walls – I was literally enveloped by the stories.

As I immersed myself in the four students' life histories, I was able to refine their stories by highlighting text pertinent to the themes. I reshaped their narratives to place each story in chronological order without changing any of the students' actual words, except in the case of Tama whose story I paraphrased, drawing on his monosyllabic answers and information from his mother.

One of the key areas I have struggled with particularly while completing this study is how to keep these young people visible. On many occasions I changed the design of this research because I felt the students' stories were buried in words they would not read. The more exposure I had to feminist poststructuralist theory, which I was completing concurrently to collecting the data, the more I was left feeling deeply challenged by my own discourse on 'giving voice' to the students. As Lather and Smithies (1997, p. 305) suggest:

Western feminist ethnographic traditions of romantic aspirations about giving voice to the voiceless are much troubled in the face of manipulation, violation and betrayal inherent in ethnographic representation.

THE RESEARCHER'S ROLE

The lone ranger approach as described by Bogdan and Biklen (1992), where the researcher single-handedly faces the empirical world, going off alone to return with the results, certainly described me at the start of this dissertation. It was extremely important, indeed necessary, to spend a year learning reflexive practices to explore the multiple positionalities that impacted on how I came to understand my role within this research. I was fortunate to have an opportunity to complete an independent project that exposed me to a multitude of theoretical frameworks that challenged how I viewed the function of schools. This part of the journey supported me to look again at the research data through new lenses. It was important to fully understand the impact of my power, status and multiple positionalities in the research:

My transition from principal to researcher has not been easy. I am in the place I am in because I spent a term still engaged at school, in school, thinking about school and sorting out school issues. The key issue is one of power and authority. I need to be in control, hold control and be the authoritative voice and by becoming

a learner again I feel I am not. The impact of being a failed student is back and walks alongside me every day now I am a student again.

(Journal Entry, 19 August 2006)

The multitude of frames I was working from became problematic. I needed to reflect on my insider/outsider status, the impact of my multiple positionalities within this research and the power derived from these. Judith Butler (1990) acknowledges that insider/outsider research orientations are social, historical constructions whose meanings are in flux. Where I had the most difficulty was staying in the role of ‘researcher’. For example, my status as a Pākehā completing research using a Kaupapa Māori research framework increased the number of potential opportunities to inflict more damage. This risk led to careful considerations of the implications of all of my positionalities within this project and the impact these had on the methodologies and theories that I was drawn to.

Feminist researchers (such as Haraway, 1991; Kobayashi, 1994; Madge, 1993, cited in Rose, 1997) have typically argued that when situating knowledge it is crucial to consider the role of the (multiple) ‘self’. These researchers suggest positionality in terms of race, nationality, age, gender, social and economic status and sexuality may influence the data collected and thus the information that becomes coded as ‘knowledge’. Haraway’s research has been important in theorising this notion of position, as she argues (1991, p. 193):

Positioning is the key practice grounding knowledge because ‘position’ indicates the kind of power that enabled a certain kind of knowledge. Knowledge thus positioned, or situated, can no longer claim universality.

What I have found difficult to grapple with are the consequences of researcher/principal positioning which meant unpacking my own insider/outsider status positionality before beginning this research. My central concern was to look for the dangers that arise out of this positioning. Autobiographical methodology as a feminist tool has helped me to understand the undesignatable field of differences within my identity categories of woman, mother, failed student, teacher, researcher, activist, feminist and principal. The significance of having to navigate multiple positions throughout this research project has been immense. This journey alone has been fraught with complexities, subtleties and paradoxes that mean every time I re-read this work; I see what I have written from many different frames.

Within a Feminist Issues in Education course I was given an opportunity not only to safely unmask my multiple positionalities but also to make meaning of those positions. I took up this opportunity by reflecting on how and why these positionalities were significant to my dissertation, both methodologically and theoretically. A feminist poststructuralist framework made the most sense to me while I explored how and why I positioned the participants within the project in the way that I did. Use of a weekly journal to reflect on my own personal responses to the participants within this research was extremely helpful. In doing so I was able to see that my multiple positionalities are interwoven and meshed together in untidy and sometimes unfathomable ways. However I have also learned that I have chosen to use certain methodological and theoretical frameworks because of my situatedness and positionality. Griffiths (1995) offers the possibility that critical autobiography makes use of individual experiences, theory and a process of reflection and rethinking that includes attention to politically situated perspectives.

I came to understand, and at times felt burdened by the knowledge, that this research required I scrutinise the very core of who I am and the influences of my multiple positioning, power and status within this project. Atkinson et al. (2003) have argued that it is coming to be expected of us as researchers to explore our positionalities and to make these more visible within our projects. They state that reflections and responses are 'integral to the work of analysis and representation' (Atkinson et al., 2003, p. 14). Through this work I came to understand that the historical context this ideology was framed within led to the risk that researchers would make inappropriate constructions of the 'others' on whom they work (Atkinson et al., 2003).

Rose (1997) also highlights the privileged position that a researcher holds by deciding what questions to ask, directing the flow of discourse, interpreting interview and observational material and deciding where and in what form it should be presented. It took me some time to fully understand the significance of my privileged position within this research.

What I discovered was that the potential to cause harm weighed as heavily upon me as a researcher as it did when I was a principal. Deconstructing the embeddedness of my own deficit theory thinking was slow, painful and exhausting. I found it paradoxical that at times I would align myself with schools and principals, well ahead of students and caregivers, and at

other times my position would be the reverse. I understand principals' discourse, having been one for 12 years; however I also know the lived experiences and long-term consequences of what it means to be failed by schools. I discovered there was potential danger in writing this research.

Being awarded a year's leave from my position as a principal gave me the much-needed time and space to focus on becoming a safer, more honest and ethical researcher. If I was to be the kind of researcher I hoped to be, I needed to name my multiple positionalities and look at their significance to the work I was undertaking. Only after critically engaging in self-reflexive practices, using feminist postcritical analysis, was I able even to begin this journey. Only then was I ready to start really hearing what children who are labelled 'at risk' have been telling all of us for a very long time.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE STUDENTS' STORIES

What we tend to do, as a group of principals ... as we are very open and honest, is say to each other, 'Is this child salvageable?' For some, I won't put a percentage on it, we say, 'Yeah maybe they could', or otherwise you say, 'Look I wouldn't touch this child with a barge pole'.

(Interview, Principal, Ngapura School, August 2006)

In telling their stories, four courageous and intuitive young people take us on their educational journey that at times filled me with grief and anger. At other times I marvelled at these students' ability to navigate school sites that they perceived as racist and hostile. Indeed what I found most edifying about the young people in this study were their repeated acts of resistance. Crystal, Hoani and Tama actively chose to '*get kicked out*' in order to be removed from schools where they experienced racism, hostility and physical manhandling by staff whom they perceived had set them up to fail because those teachers did not want them in their class. TK found less obvious ways to manoeuvre amongst teachers whom he described as the worst he had ever had, and amongst peers who had bullied him since he started school at five years of age.

It was crucial to me not to allow these young people's life stories to become invisible, which is why I am presenting this findings chapter as four individual case studies. Each case study will follow the same format. I will start with the student's narrative, followed by the findings resulting from the interviews with the adult participants – each student's caregivers, adults at their school, and Ministry of Education personnel. After these presentations I will discuss the themes that have emerged from the child's story.

Hoani

I think that they should all just understand more that, when I was like eight what else could I do, it's not much I can do. Just give them (kids) your time.

(Interview, Hoani, August 2006)

Hoani is a 12-year-old Māori student who has been exposed to a multitude of disciplinary exclusions since he was eight years old. At the time of interview he was attending high school part time; however, his attendance was conditional upon having a Ministry-funded behaviour support person, commonly known as a tracker, assigned to him. Prior to this Hoani had spent several months out of school, with the tracker taking him to the local library from 9 a.m. to 2.00 p.m. and then returning him to his foster home.

When I turned like eight, I went to my first foster home and they were like shit ay. I hated my first foster mum I hated her and I hated not being with my real mum. After that I went all naughty, got kicked out of school, coz I bopped my teacher, coz the first time my teacher was an asshole, as I walked in he like said, 'Here's Mr Dig a Hole, can't even get out of it, too naughty'. And then I said, 'Fuck up' and I grabbed the desk and threw it at him and then my teacher he grabbed me first and then I bit him and then I was running down the street and the cops grabbed me.

When I first got kicked out of school I felt real stupid, I just felt like real dumb because too much stuff was going on. I think that they should all just understand more that, when I was like eight what else could I do, it's not much I can do. Just give them (kids) your time. It's just like, get out. I just don't like schools that kicked me out. Because I've been through so much and they don't care. 'Nah you're out of our school.' I had no one to talk to. I've got my own lawyer now, but not then.

After that I went to West School but I got kicked out straight away. One day um the principal wanted to see me and he was calling me John and I said, 'Say my proper name is Hoani' and he kept calling me John ... I was like, 'What should I call you ... Mr Splat' coz his name was really Mr Splan. He pissed me off. He said, 'Get out of my office' and they didn't even have a meeting, they just kicked me out. I hated that school ... my teacher was an old lady and she was too yelly, she doesn't listen and she talked for too long.

After that I went to One Tree Hill School. I was there a year and a half. I was in a bilingual unit. I had a tracker there named Pere; he looked like this guy off a PlayStation game with the same name as well. Matua was my teacher, he used to come and watch me play rugby on Saturday. He was a fun guy. I lasted there a

year and a half and I was with the foster parents that loved having me.

At the moment I'm at a boys' school. The Ministry of Education, they enrolled me there. Normally I'm in the library but I went to assembly today. I like my tracker now, he's funny. The kids in my class know he's my tracker, I bummed this guy out, Whitu, coz he had a report slip and he goes, 'This is for naughty kids' and I pointed to Jacob and said, 'Nah that's for naughty kids'. (Laughs.) The kids go, 'What you got that fella following you round for?' I said, 'Coz I'm too much trouble.'

I only go to school till 2 o'clock coz, ummm, coz they haven't put up the hours yet. You can get some shitty trackers. I like the ones that talk, not just push you around, and they're not like, 'Just go and do your work'; it's better when they are like, 'It's up to you if you wanna do your work'. My tracker, he just, like with kapa haka I'm like, 'Can you find out where it is?' and he's like, 'Nup you ask'. I don't like asking questions. I don't know why I don't like asking questions. It would be better without a tracker though coz like in assembly, well like at assembly it's all right because he doesn't sit by me, he just stands by the side, but he sits by me in class.

I don't need a counsellor when I'm angry coz I do nothing. I just sit there, don't care, I used to smash stuff up, but now I don't because I don't want to be kicked out coz if I get kicked out of this school I got to go to boarding school up north. I normally tell my mum what's going on, but not guidance counsellors, they're dumb. They just listen, 'Oh yeah', not even listening. They're kaka. If they're not listening all they do is, 'Yip, hmm, oh, yip, yip, hmm'; if they're listening then they will respond. I don't care if anyone wants to call me dumb, then I don't care.

(Interview, Hoani, August 2006)

A multitude of issues could be explored within Hoani's educational life history. Among them, three key themes that I wish to discuss are: the impact on Hoani's life when schools repeatedly frame him by focusing solely on his behaviour; the level of agency this boy shows by determining which schools he knows intuitively will support him and which schools simply do not want him; and the impact of institutionalised racism, as he experiences it, and the role teacher's attitudes play in determining which children get to stay in school, and which students do not.

In Hoani's eyes, a single event when he was eight set in motion a trajectory of escalating problems. Hoani's entire life changed when he was made a ward of the state after Child, Youth and Family (CYF) removed him from his home due to care and protection issues. However, prior to this time, Hoani had managed three years at school successfully when living with his mother.

Hoani's record of managing school well while living in what has by now been framed as a dysfunctional family goes against the discourse used by school personnel and research literature offered by the Ministry of Education.

Hoani was able to successfully manage school during the time he was seen as most at risk. His first disciplinary exclusion happened after he had been removed from his so-called dysfunctional home, rendered unsafe and placed in foster care as justified by care and protection issues. Ironically it was in this foster home that he was first abused. Hoani astutely critiques his first disciplinary exclusion as the result of '*too much stuff going on*'; however, it also appears that it was the teacher's attitude and response to Hoani that played an important role in his exclusion.

Hoani's story illustrates how teachers' attitudes can play a significant role in ensuring who gets to stay and who gets kicked out of their classroom. Perhaps if the teacher had welcomed Hoani to his class with warmth and empathy, this exclusion might never have occurred. The teacher's pedagogical beliefs and behaviours play an important role in how he or she deals with the day-to-day management of students.

Reflexivity of our personal pedagogical belief systems is one of the key steps in identifying the role we play as teachers within this serious and complex problem. Teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices have been identified by Bevan-Brown (2000) as the real barriers to children's completion of successful educational journeys. The feedback from over 1000 principals, teachers, teacher aides, special education professionals and parents reveals a multitude of barriers to providing culturally appropriate, effective special education services to Māori learners. The top five barriers to emerge from Bevan-Brown's analysis show a shift from the teacher's deficit model to more critical analysis. She maintains that the barriers are attitudinal and pedagogical, and include:

1. negative and stereotypical attitudes towards Māori children, their parents and families;
2. low teacher expectations of Māori children;
3. failure by school personnel to recognise the importance of culture in the provision of programmes and services to Māori children;
4. principals' belief that culturally appropriate services need only be provided where there are large numbers of Māori students; and
5. school personnel blaming parents for their children's special needs. (Bevan-Brown, 2000, pp. 2–8)

If a teacher wants a particular student to leave the school environment, it is not difficult with high risk children to ensure their removal, as I have witnessed as both a teacher and a principal. I have also colluded through my silence during discussions with groups of principals and teachers as they have openly discussed getting rid of students framed as high risk or having high needs. The easiest option of removal of students is termed 'kiwi suspensions' where families are asked to move and enrol in another school before the student has an exclusion placed on their official school record. Hoani has experienced this type of exclusion.

Studies confirm that when schools view only a behaviour or a single incident in making a decision on whether to exclude a child from school, this approach may determine a trajectory of escalating problems. Herein lies one of the many dilemmas schools face when they place so much emphasis on managing behaviour. It can be overwhelming as a teacher to meet the needs of children who require a high level of energy and deep commitment. Many teachers feel ill-equipped to deal with students with multiple and complex needs. The issue of disciplinary exclusions is fraught with dilemmas for everyone involved, but the problem is that those who are most vulnerable are the ones who pay the price. What is significant within Hoani's story is that the impact of the first exclusion deeply affected him, and continues to do so. All four students in this study spoke of their first exclusion as being extremely traumatic.

The second suspension issued to Hoani occurred after a short period in a new school. Although he recognised that his disciplinary exclusion was both illegal and unjustified it occurred at a school he actively chose to be removed from. There are of course several possible ways to explain this chain of events. First, after Hoani had been suspended indefinitely from his last school for an incident that involved the police, the next school

principal may have viewed him so negatively as to want him removed as quickly as was practically possible. In the event, the principal refused to call Hoani by his given Māori name producing a response that resulted in him being told to leave. Second, it could be argued that Hoani showed agency in ensuring his removal instantly, given that he had a teacher he ‘hated’ because she yelled all the time, and a principal he perceived as racist. His removal ensured that he retained his mana, as his given Māori name is reflective of his whakapapa and his ancestry. A renaming with a Pākehā transliteration could be viewed as both ignorant and racist. Third, the incident could signify that his experience of being excluded led to a shift in how he perceived schools and school personnel, which was a very different view from the one he had before he was suspended.

While living with several changes in foster care homes and experiencing physical abuse at the hands of his new carers during this time, Hoani remained at his next school for nearly two years with no exclusions. His story shows that he is clearly able to manage school when he feels supported. Several interconnected factors seemed to contribute to his engagement in and enjoyment of school, regardless of what was happening at home. At this new school he was placed in a bilingual classroom environment that privileged his Māoritanga. He had a teacher whom he liked and he believed genuinely cared about him; for instance, the teacher went to watch him play rugby on the weekends. He was also in a school environment that refused to engage in exclusionary practices. Several studies confirm that teachers and schools can make a difference for children framed as ‘at risk’ (Bevan-Brown, 2000; Bilton, 1996; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Cotter, 2002; Fine, 1991).

Hoani moved on to intermediate school. By the time Hoani got to Year 6 he was constructed by adults both at school and at home as deviant, dangerous and out of control. The principal, chairperson, and Hoani’s teacher at Riverbank Primary all categorised Hoani as ‘a very bright child’ yet because of his behaviour, he was excluded from school yet again.

In Year 7 after another suspension he was given limited access to school. Although it is his legal right to get an education, he now had to ‘earn’ the right to attend school. The provisions outlined in his suspension hearing included his attendance at school Monday to Thursday until lunchtime. Research shows that the children most likely to be exposed to disciplinary exclusion are already the children deemed most at risk (Bilton, 1996; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Cotter 2002; Denborough, 1996; Fine, 1991; Noguera, 2003; Parsons, 2001). It is evident that

this arrangement, common to many schools, does not fit any of the purposes of the legislation concerning stand-down, suspension and exclusion. Asked if these conditions met the principles of natural justice, and minimised the disruption to a student's attendance at school, as outlined in the 1998 Amendment Act, the Riverbank Primary principal replied that the Ministry staff knew that this practice was used consistently after suspension meetings, and they were fine with the arrangement (Interview, Principal, Riverbank Primary, 2006).

Hoani stayed at the school until the end of the year but only part time. This arrangement had obvious implications for both his learning and his self-esteem. Limited access to education means that everybody in the school now framed this student as a problem and consequently he fell behind in his learning. It is difficult to ascertain how many students are attending school part time in this manner. As the Ministry development officer interviewed explained, it is not the job of Ministry staff to follow up what happens to students after they are returned to schools from suspension. The annual data on student engagement only show the number of incidents, instead of the number of students suspended and/or excluded from school. This method of data compilation makes it impossible to track how many times individual students are exposed to ongoing disciplinary exclusions.

In Hoani's first term of high school, he was excluded again and, as no school would enrol him, the Ministry of Education became involved. Hoani remained out of school for several months as the Ministry endeavoured to find a school to accept him. At the time of interview he had just been placed by the Ministry at a high-decile, all-boys school; however, most of his days were spent in the library with a tracker, and again he was allowed to attend school for limited hours only.

Theoretically the suspension meeting is an opportunity for the student and the caregivers to present a case to the Board of Trustees for allowing the student to stay at school. It is in this forum that Hoani's whānau might have been able to challenge the school's punitive responses in view of what this young person was dealing with emotionally. However, the opportunity never arose in any of his primary schools as Hoani's foster parents did not attend the meetings. At high school, after the Ministry's involvement, Group Special Education (GSE) personnel attended his suspension meeting. Their presence, though, did not change the outcome: he was still excluded.

Hoani's Caregivers' Experience of His Disciplinary Exclusions

School, student and family are considered the key parties engaged in a relationship that supports both student learning and student engagement in schools. How the adults at school and home view Hoani will have an impact on his chances of being successful. How Hoani comes to make meaning out of his experiences will affect his decisions too.

Hoani first came to live with Maru and Wini several years ago when CYF could not find a placement for him. Maru felt that Hoani was great as a member of the foster home when he was younger; it was just school he had a problem with. During the time when Hoani was first placed with Maru and Wini, he was stood down for five days. However, his foster parents said they rarely deal with schools in relation to any of their foster children. Maru knew Hoani disliked his own rules and punishments. He also knew Hoani could not contest the rules and had to abide by them as he had nowhere else to go. Maru understood Hoani did not like being stuck behind the fence, but he felt Hoani had to prove that he could be trusted before he could be given more freedom.

I already told him if he walks out that gate again then he'll stay out. He's done it twice, he ran away and he didn't need to. I told him, 'If you walk out that gate again you don't come back, it's the end of the road.' I'll just ring his caseworker.

(Interview, Hoani's foster parent Maru, September 2006)

CYF informed Maru that Hoani must stay off the streets or the police would remove him from their care. If Hoani, or any of their other foster children, broke the rules or were in trouble at school, the foster parents followed up with punishments at home: household chores such as cleaning the house, gardening and cleaning windows, and being sent to bed early with no privileges. It is evident from the interview that Maru had firm ideas that children like Hoani should be managed by strict discipline. Both Maru and Wini were clear that this was Hoani's last chance. They did not believe he would stay with them for long because he continued to run away, and they felt he was too big for them to handle any more. As Wini said:

The first time we had him he was good, he could get himself into trouble and that, but we tried to work around that and he was ok here. It was just, when he went to school he just seemed to change. He knows his stuff if he keeps his brain active he

is all right.

(Interview, Hoani's foster parent Wini, September 2006)

After Hoani's repeated suspensions and exclusions, coinciding with several shifts in foster care placements and a brief period back at home with his mother, he was sent back to Maru and Wini's foster home. They said in their interview that they did not actually want him back, nor indeed did they have room for him, but as no one would have him they felt they should. Maru acknowledged that Hoani did not want to go back to them either. Maru felt that Hoani's behaviour was impacting on his own grandchildren and had explained to Hoani that this was his last chance. He believed the next stop for Hoani was Kingslea (one of the seven CYF residential care facilities in New Zealand).

It would seem that it was not Hoani's behaviour that caused Maru and Wini to struggle to deal with him: the real issue was the lack of support they received from CYF, the Ministry of Education and GSE. Maru and Wini said that they could never get hold of Ministry, GSE or CYF staff, as they were either unavailable or away on leave. Another problem was lack of consistency with personnel. They found staff changed so often that no one ever built a relationship with Hoani or followed through on plans made, as the next new person would start again from the beginning. They both recalled someone coming out to meet Hoani from the Ministry once during the five months he was out of school, but that there was no follow-up and they feel that this staff member did not help Hoani anyway. As Maru highlighted:

CYFS they just give us the kids, and then we don't hear from them or see them or nothing, and they don't do anything. They just ring up once in a blue moon, or if you ring them they are always on holiday or leave, someone came from the Ministry and talked to Hoani but it didn't last, that person didn't stick with it so we just leave it up to his tracker now.

(Interview, Hoani's foster parent Maru, September 2006)

Home-School Partnership

Maru firmly believed that schools should not have to put up with children like Hoani, as it is their job to teach, not to deal with 'problem children'. This thinking increases the risk for students like Hoani as he receives little support, or the provision to access support if he needs it, which reduces his chance of being engaged in school. Maru and Wini believed that

disciplinary exclusions by schools were the result of the agencies' lack of support, rather than Hoani's behaviour. If, as critical studies would suggest, one of the functions of school is to sort out who is allowed to attend and who is not, then it makes sense that follow-up and support for children like Hoani will be a low priority.

The foster parents' experience of schools was very different from the experiences of the biological caregivers of Crystal, Tama and TK. Maru and Wini felt that the school understood that as foster parents they were trying to do their best, and made allowances for them due to their situation. They assumed schools felt sorry for them, rather than blaming them for Hoani's behaviour. Maru and Wini also maintained that as long as the foster children were good at home, what happened at home did not really affect what happens at school. Hoani's school viewed it differently.

The chairperson of Riverbank Primary Board of Trustees, where Hoani was one of 35 students suspended in one year, said that the decision to suspend those children was the new principal's decision.

It is not the Board's role to stand down; it's up to the principal. She is the only person who has the power to stand down and suspend.

(Interview, Chairperson, Riverbank Primary Board of Trustees, August 2006)

When I reminded her that the Board had to meet and make the final decision about the outcome of the suspension, I discovered that the Board of Riverbank Primary did not meet to make such decisions.

The new chairperson at Riverbank Primary wrote the terms of reference for the disciplinary committee based on her own experience. As noted in Chapter Three, she was originally contracted by the Ministry of Education to support Riverbank Primary Board of Trustees with training, after the Education Review Office (ERO) had identified a range of issues, including behaviour management, that the school needed to address. The behaviour management system was targeted for a full review and ERO returned a year later to check what actions, changes and procedures had been made to address the concerns as outlined in the report. The chairperson felt it unnecessary for the whole board to attend disciplinary meetings. She wrote a new set of guidelines and procedures that delegated authority to only three members, the

principal herself and one other member for disciplinary hearings after the principal had suspended a student.

The staff representative usually did not attend the meeting as the chairperson felt it compromised their relationship with the student. The process of disciplinary exclusions from her perspective is simple and clear-cut.

Sometimes it's not easy because there might be parents who are anti, there might be a bit of conflict if they're very grumpy or nervous, but I ignore that. I ask them if they understand the process, or if they have any questions and they hardly ever do. I then ask the principal to outline the reason for the suspension and then I'll ask the child, if they are there, and if they are very young it's, sort of, you have to skip that bit. I haven't had any occasions yet of a student or child denying what the principal said (laughs); it's really interesting, they might deny some fact, you know, of exactly what happened but they usually know when they get to this stage that something bad has happened. They've probably been stood down a few times before.

(Interview, Chairperson, Riverbank Primary Board of Trustees, August 2006)

This interpretation of the legislation appears to be at odds with the purpose of the Education Act itself, which states that it is the Board's responsibility to ensure that individual cases are dealt with in accordance with the principles of natural justice. It seems that an arrangement in which the only members of the disciplinary panel are just three of the Board members, two of whom hold the most power and influence in the school, fails to meet this obligation. Moreover, given that those two powerful members of the panel view suspensions and exclusions as both necessary and positive, it is difficult to see how a genuine and fair opportunity will be given to students to advocate for themselves or to whānau to advocate for their child.

Although the principal said that she found the suspension process hard to get her head around, she viewed the process of suspending children as a positive one. Every weekend the principal charted all of the privilege losses in the school for the preceding week. Privilege loss is a system whereby children who break the rules twice in one week are punished by not being

allowed to participate in privilege on a Friday afternoon. Having found patterns and trends through computerised weekly losses, the principal made structural changes to combat what she perceived as ‘the problem’. The first of these changes was to implement a shortened lunch break. Second, the Board now funds extra adults to be on duty at lunchtime to help reduce incidents that lead to privilege loss. Third, the health team meets fortnightly to discuss health issues that may have an impact on children’s behaviour. The committee also reviews the progress of students who have been placed on limited hours at the school, after suspension. The child’s behaviour is discussed in terms of reviewing whether his or her hours can be extended. Most students start back after suspension on two mornings a week.

I try to view it as a positive thing not a negative thing, so I see it as this is going to help this child learn the boundaries and um the stand-down in particular, I see it as a very strong consequence and a strong message about a strong behaviour, and it does work, they do stop doing it.

(Interview, Principal, Riverbank Primary, August 2006)

The principal and chairperson agreed to exclude Hoani at the suspension meeting, which his foster parents did not attend. It is problematic when only three people are on a panel that makes decisions affecting a child’s life and future. It is even more complicated when two out of three members of the disciplinary panel already believe that students such as Hoani cannot be tolerated at school. Prior to exclusion Hoani had returned to school after a suspension, with conditions attached. These conditions meant he was only allowed at school for the number of hours he was funded with a tracker, then he had to earn the right to attend school by being good’. Although the principal advocated children should be given a second chance, she was also wary about any return to school by students who place others at risk.

The child (Hoani) that we did exclude was actually taken into police custody and was put in lock-up facilities. He was out on the streets, he was coming into school totally drugged out of his head, he had been missing for three days, nobody was looking for him and managing it, and he was just off his tree – he was out of control and 12, he had been getting worse and worse; it was a really sad case, lovely boy but nobody could manage him in the end. We can’t do that; we can’t have that in this school.

(Interview, Principal, Riverbank Primary, August 2006)

Although both the chairperson and the principal framed Hoani as a very bright student academically, he is still excluded. His teacher Jude also commented on his lovely nature and intelligence. She felt sad when he was excluded from the school, as she felt she had built a good working relationship with Hoani. He too spoke fondly of her and felt she was one adult who listened to what he had to say.

FOLLOWING LEGISLATIVE PROCEDURES

Both the principal and chairperson of Riverbank Primary worried about the number of students who are not enrolled in schools after suspensions although they both viewed disciplinary exclusions as positive. They were also critical of the length of time it takes the Ministry of Education to direct a school to take a suspended or excluded student like Hoani.

I think it's disgraceful the number of children, out there, not in schools. And it's just a ridiculous amount of time between the child getting excluded and getting placed. It's absolutely ridiculous the amount of time the Ministry take to step in and do something about kids that haven't been accepted. As I've said, some children do not fit in to this particular school and if we could do it without excluding them, we would, but we can't because in the end that becomes a kiwi suspension. I don't think it's only the school's fault; I think the Ministry sit on their hands.

(Interview, Chairperson, Riverbank Primary, August 2006)

The official procedure dictates that after excluding a student, the principal must ask up to five schools to accept the excluded student in their school. As the principal of Riverbank Primary stated, it is very rare that any school will accept an excluded student from a decile 1 school. The legislation requires the principal to inform the Ministry of the reasons for each local school's refusal if no school will enrol the student. Thereafter it becomes the Ministry of Education's responsibility to place the student in a school.

The principal and the chairperson see the issue regarding placement of excluded students as problematic. They felt it was the right decision to exclude Hoani in his last term at primary

school, yet felt aggrieved when the Ministry asked Riverbank School to take an excluded student from another school in his last term.

I keep the Ministry out of it unless they are already involved. I don't inform them in any other way, I don't talk to them. We don't suspend to exclude. We suspend to manage first off. The Ministry tried to direct an eight-year-old boy to us – what are we going to do with an eight-year-old boy straight out of Kingslea, in a term and a half? It's just like really really unfair, it's really unfair.

(Interview, Principal, Riverbank Primary, August 2006)

The Ministry of Education had a different view on the current legislation. Its personnel saw it first and foremost as the school's responsibility to find another school to accept the student it has just excluded. The Ministry only becomes involved if the school suspending the student cannot find a placement. In the Ministry view, there are both advantages and disadvantages related to its involvement in placing a suspended student back into a school. The disadvantage is that the student is out of school for a much longer period as the process requires formal letters and requests to schools, to which there is a set timeframe to respond. On the other hand, the advantage is that the Ministry can broker a support package with Group Special Education when the student starts back at school.

For the Ministry personnel the bottom line is that they want students to be placed back in schools and to stay there and get on with learning. As the Ministry development officer interviewed for this study explained:

Well I guess that the process is the schools have an obligation to try and find a placement and a number of kids are placed in that way, so if all else fails they come to us. Sometimes we do whole process of placing an excluded student without even meeting the student, so it's all by phone and negotiation with the professionals and we don't actually meet the students.

(Interview, Ministry of Education development officer, August 2006)

ADULT INTERPRETATIONS OF THE PROBLEM AND SOLUTIONS

The principal and chairperson perceived that children are becoming more violent because parents do not monitor their time playing computer games or viewing TV and DVDs. They suggested that parents need support and parenting programmes to help them manage children's behaviours. They also thought that the Ministry personnel should play a greater role in supporting schools both financially and with resourcing to better manage students perceived as 'at risk'. However, the Ministry felt that more resourcing, money or improved parenting skills will not resolve the problem. The development officer firmly placed the issue back in the classroom.

That's what it all boils down to in the end, and the only thing that a school can have control over, so while you might want to have fantastic parents in your parent community, all parenting better and while you might have lots of help from other agencies in the end, what you can do is what you do in the classroom.

(Interview, Ministry of Education development officer, August 2006)

The solutions offered will be dependent on what educators, policy-makers and caregivers see as 'the problem'. A guiding principle of constructivism is that the way we view a problem is determined by how we construct and make meaning from our experiences. One question that most of the adults in this study struggled with was why Māori students, such as Hoani, are three times more likely to be suspended than Pākehā students.

The Riverbank Primary principal suggested that the most likely reason why Māori are over-represented in disciplinary exclusions lies in the conservative nature of the region in which the school is located. She saw a great deal less tolerance for Māori here than in the region where she came from. In other words, she saw the problem in terms of attitude. For me this construction is problematic in that this principal understood politically the impact of racism yet failed to transfer that understanding to school practices that she too engages in. Māori students were disproportionately involved in disciplinary exclusions at Riverbank Primary. Her understandings highlight how difficult it is to transfer what we know theoretically to what is played out in reality, when we are trained to see behaviour in isolation.

The Ministry and GSE personnel had conflicting views on why Māori are more likely to be exposed to disciplinary exclusions. As the development officer pointed out, a majority of Māori children (91%) are in mainstream schools in which 90% of the teachers are Pākehā. She thought, however, that finding an explanation for the disproportionate number of Māori exclusions was difficult and suggested further research was necessary to analyse what the hard data are telling us.

When you look at the figures for Maori there is a lot of work to be done in mainstream schools; the bulk is out there in your average school and they are the ones that need to deal with these kids and educate them properly. One of the key targets is the reduction of Maori and Pacifica suspensions, and not around the quick fix but what is actually happening in the classrooms.

(Interview, Ministry of Education development officer, August 2006)

The GSE Pouwhakarewa Mātauranga's key role is to liaise among whānau, school and the Ministry. One of her positions involves working with Māori students labelled as special needs. She is one of six Māori staff serving the South Island, working alongside approximately 200 non-Māori support team personnel.

Research-based knowledge, such as that from Durie (1994) and Bishop (1996), drives what the Pouwhakarewa Mātauranga saw as the key focus areas for all New Zealanders: to be culturally competent, culturally aware and culturally confident. She advocated focusing on the positive side of the changing nature of society rather than only seeing what the media portray. The rejuvenation of Māoritanga and language since the advent of kōhanga reo, she believed, has led to people of Māori descent being more aware of their culture and their rights. In terms of Māori, she suggested:

So with that awareness, they know what they need, and what they're not getting. And I think what used to be accepted in mainstream schools is not good enough any more. And they're saying, my child is Māori, I want my child to be acknowledged for who they are. I want them to learn all these things. I think that times are changing.

(Interview, GSE Pouwhakarewa Mātauranga, August 2006)

As to why some students are not engaged in schools, she believed that many are seeking their identity and if they do not have that self-knowledge then they become detached. That outcome is one of the fall-outs of urbanisation for Māori, in her view. She suggested that it is not enough to know and recite whakapapa: having an identity is about knowing and seeing the reality of being on your marae, seeing your mountain, being with your iwi, enriching the meaning of recited whakapapa by actually being kanohi ki te kanohi with your whānau. In her experience making that connection is often when the light goes on for Māori children. She had no doubt that Māori kids can handle the curriculum and academic learning. What some students find difficult to handle, she argued, is the lack of acknowledgement in mainstream schools of who they are, even if the students are themselves unsure of their identity.

While adults argued about the real reasons for Māori children's exclusions, Hoani was out of school for five months, going to a library daily with a man employed by the Ministry of Education. From the manner in which the school, the police, the Ministry personnel and his foster parents framed Hoani, it was evident that everyone expected the next placement for him to be in Kingslea or jail. Hoani knew this discourse only too well and he understood all the repercussions of running away one more time. He was angry and cynical, with no dreams or aspirations for his future other than to live with his mother. What Hoani did tell us was that kicking him out of school only added to the problem, and reinforced his belief that schools did not want him and that no one cared.

At the end of the interview when I asked him what he wanted to do when he left school, he replied, *'I don't know, haven't thought about it'*. However, he sighed deeply and hung his head as he spoke, and then the silence between us lengthened as we both contemplated his chances.

INSIGHTS INTO THE ISSUES FACING A YOUNG MĀORI PRIMARY-AGED STUDENT EXPERIENCING REPEATED DISCIPLINARY EXCLUSIONS

Part of Hoani's educational life history highlights his struggle to persevere and survive in what he described as a hostile, racist, uncaring institution. Although all who knew him described him as an intelligent, lovely-natured boy, this positive side to their perceptions was not enough to keep him in school. The number of disciplinary exclusions he was exposed contributed to his framing by school personnel as completely dysfunctional. Conversely

Hoani believed that teachers and principals found it simpler to kick him out, either legally or illegally, rather than working with him to find strategies that support his engagement in school.

The struggle to persevere and survive often results in behaviour that is perceived as deviant, destructive and dysfunctional by observers who are operating out of different contexts than those individuals being observed and evaluated. (Trueba et al., 1989, p. 2)

One long-term effect of being exposed to disciplinary exclusion at eight has been exposure to repeated and more serious disciplinary exclusions. It has meant months, and in reality years, of no or partial access to an education. For Hoani this approach to discipline led to involvement with the police and a multitude of foster care placements, as it was not just schools that refused to have him. At the time of my meetings with him, he lived with foster parents who did not really want him. Framing Hoani as violent and uncontrollable steadily reduced the options for his placement both in school and at home.

My concern is when schools focus solely on behaviour, they fail to see the student's resiliency, capabilities, intelligence, determination and resourcefulness that help them survive their day. This young person's entire 12 years of life is a testament to his resiliency and ability to navigate a life story complicated by poverty, racism, grief and loss, abuse and separation from his entire family. His discourse revealed a sense of powerlessness to change or control what happened to him; and yet he seemed to exercise agency by actively choosing behaviours that ensured he remained at or left particular school sites. The saddest and most damaging part of his story for me is that Hoani himself had come to believe that it was just a matter of time before he was put into a restrictive institution such as Kingslea.

As Noguera (2003) highlights, students who get into trouble frequently are typically not passive victims; many understand, particularly as they grow older, that the consequences for violating school rules can be severe. He adds:

As they internalise the labels that have been affixed to them, and they realise that the trajectory their education has placed them on is leading to nowhere, many simply lose the incentive to adhere to school norms. (Noguera, 2003, p. 345)

Hoani's educational life history supports what current literature tells us about older students. However, for a student who desperately needed support and help from adults paid to care, it seems school not only failed him but also added significantly to his negative life experiences. In this area, like everyone else seems to have done, it let him down.

However, in the middle of personal crisis Hoani had long periods – times when he had teachers who genuinely listened to him – in which he was still happily able to navigate school, regardless of what was happening to him at home. The positive message that his story highlights is that it is possible for students to remain engaged with school when school personnel work with them holistically. Many teachers enter the profession because they want to make a genuine difference in children's lives. Within Hoani's story is a strong message evidencing the difference teachers can make when they genuinely show that they care.

Subsequent to the interview I happened to meet up with Hoani again, when he was on the same course as a friend of my daughter. He told me he had been excluded from the all-boys high school for assaulting the principal in the first term he attended there. No school would take him after that incident so the Ministry granted him an early leaving certificate. He had been excluded from two training courses for violence since then. However, at the time we met again he had been in a sports academy for an entire year and felt happy and engaged in learning that brought him both success and a sense of mana. He had spent some time living with his mother again when he turned 14. However, that did not work out well, so he was granted an independent student allowance and was currently flatting with a friend. He was proud that he had turned his life around; however, he accepted it was still early days. His parting comment saddened yet also inspired me as he yelled out, 'Hey you make sure you write that thing about schools and how they treat kids; everyone needs to know, it's real important, whāea, coz no one listens when you're a kid' (Meeting with Hoani, October 2008).

The next case study highlights the experiences of a nine-year-old Māori boy who, like Hoani, had been out of school for several months. Tama's experiences of being left unsupported were similar to those of Hoani. For Tama I think it was the length of time that he had been out of school that led to his complete disengagement. Tama had no desire to even be in a school as unlike Hoani no provisions were made for his education during the 20 weeks he was at home.

His mother too was deeply affected by her son's disciplinary exclusion, to the point that she was forced to resign from her job to support her son.

Tama

<i>Yesterday was your first day at school; how was that?</i>	<i>OK.</i>
<i>How were you feeling?</i>	<i>I don't know.</i>
<i>Did you meet the principal?</i>	<i>Yip.</i>
<i>And what was that like?</i>	<i>Um, it was OK.</i>
<i>When did you meet your tracker?</i>	<i>Um, yesterday.</i>
<i>What's your tracker like?</i>	<i>OK.</i>
<i>And what's his job, what's he meant to do?</i>	<i>Um, I don't know.</i>
<i>What's his name?</i>	<i>Um, I don't know.</i>
<i>He didn't tell you his name?</i>	<i>No.</i>
<i>And what's your teacher's name?</i>	<i>Dunno.</i>
<i>Is you teacher a man or a woman?</i>	<i>Woman.</i>
<i>Is she young or old?</i>	<i>Old, granny old.</i>
<i>How old is granny old?</i>	<i>Sixty something.</i>
<i>And what do you think about her?</i>	<i>Nothing.</i>
<i>What's she like?</i>	<i>She always yells.</i>
<i>You've only been there an afternoon?</i>	<i>So.</i>

(Interview, Tama, August 2006)

As I mentioned earlier, I visited Tama on several occasions to try to build a relationship with him, as I struggled to make a connection with him. Initially I was unsure as to whether his mother's announcement that I was a principal, rather than a researcher, impacted on how he viewed me. On my second visit Tama was asleep. On my third attempt at an interview, we went out for lunch. Tama talked non-stop about the World Wrestling Entertainment and its superstars. There seemed to be very little this child did not know about wrestling, or the superstars that perform in this sport. I was amazed at how engaged and vivacious he became when sharing his knowledge on wrestling, compared with his monosyllabic answers when talking about his school experiences.

After lunch we all went back to his home and settled in for an interview. Tama drew a picture and remained focused on the drawing for the entire time. His answers mainly consisted of 'I don't know' (27 counts) and 'I don't care' (5 counts). He was very polite; yet spoke in what seemed to me to be a disturbingly quiet voice when talking about school. After he had been out of school for 20 weeks, the equivalent of half a school year, a school was directed by the Ministry to enrol him. He had attended this school for one day at the time of the interview.

When I first went to school I was there for four years. I went to Pam (a resource teacher of learning and behaviour: RTLB) coz I was so naughty. I had lots of friends there. I didn't get kicked out of there, but I got in trouble. I think it was for fighting other kids coz they piss me off. They usually hurt my mates or me or they usually get other guys to do it, so mother shifted me.

After that I went to another school, I liked it there but um this teacher pissed me off, so I got the cricket bat out of my bag and whacked him. Then I got expelled. I didn't care. The deputy principal, he was just like an old lady, and my teacher, Miss Morton, she was psycho, she just yells at everyone for no reason.

Yesterday was my first day at school it was OK. Um, I had a migraine before I started. I saw the principal for like two seconds. He used to be my mother and my aunt's old teacher. I met my tracker, he's OK, I don't know what he does, I don't know if I like him, he's old. I don't know his name. I don't know my teacher's name; she's real old, like a granny, maybe 60 something. She always yells. My mate said he hates his class and his teacher is mean as. I went to the school before, for one day, but I got kicked out coz I punched a guy in the face. This dick pulled the chair out from under me and I fell down, and so I punched him in the jaw and then I got excluded, but I didn't care. I can just be at home with mother, and my computer. When ya get kicked out it's good, coz you don't have to do any work.

Now I get up about, ummm, threeish and then get on the computer and play RuneScape. Sometimes I listen to music. Then I have tea and play on the computer again. And then I have the game on till 6 o'clock in the morning, and then go back to sleep. I watch telly, but only when wrestling is on. I watch Jerry Springer too. I love WWE. I love the fighting, and the superstars. Me and my mate are going to be

a tag team. We already play this game called 'give up', it's only submission rules. The winner is the person that makes the other person give up. My mate, he's 13 but I can do neck locks on him.

I don't know what I want to do when I leave school, maybe be in the army, coz if someone has a hostage, then you have to go kill the people, like the Iraqis. Coz the killing people has the guns.

(Reconstructed interview, Tama, August 2006)

Tama had been out of school for four months when I first met him. For me, his story highlights the level of damage that is possible when a student becomes so disconnected that they see no purpose in attending school. Tama had learned to meet his social needs by reversing his body clock so that he was awake when children finished school and slept in the daytime when his friends were not available to play. At nine years of age, his educational needs were of little concern to him.

As with Hoani, Tama experienced teachers that he perceived were old and yelled all day, and he too refused to remain passive and accepting of this situation. Rather than being silenced, these two students fought back, using strategies to get what they want out of what they perceived to be an oppressive and hostile classroom. The result of their response was that they were the ones removed from school. Tama showed agency by ensuring he was removed from those school sites he intuitively knows would not support him.

In providing statistical data on children suspended each year, the Ministry of Education website fails to report if and when these students are placed back in a school. It is therefore impossible to know exactly how many other primary-aged students like Tama and Hoani are not receiving an education as guaranteed under the Education Act 1989. It is disturbing that three of the five parents I spoke to, when seeking their permission for their child to participate in this study, had a child who had not been placed in any school for months following their suspension.

Tama was not exposed to disciplinary exclusions in his first four years of school. However, he still perceived he was naughty during those years, possibly as a result of having RTLB support for his learning and behaviour.

Tama's first experience of disciplinary exclusion was a suspension, with conditions, from Taylorville School. Tama ensured his removal from school after five months because he perceived his teacher as a psycho who yelled at everyone in the class for no reason. He also disliked the deputy principal, a male who he described as an old lady, and ensured instant removal from an unhappy school site by hitting him. It seems that Tama, like Hoani, worked out very quickly the odds of successful engagement with a particular teacher in a particular class.

As Tama was by far the most difficult child to engage with in conversation about school, his mother filled in the details of his story, as told to her by Tama. His mother believed that his first suspension was caused by a male teacher who pushed Tama over, causing him to knock his head on the corner of a desk. She believed that her son's response was to protect himself by getting a cricket bat out of his bag and hitting the teacher who he thought had assaulted him.

I had difficulty matching Tama with the student who engaged in a violent act, as he presented to me as a vivacious and polite boy. When I arrived on my third visit Tama was very excited about making me a protein drink in the blender. He explained step by step the process and ingredients he used. He talked proudly of his sporting achievements and showed off his cricket and league photos on the wall. He asked me a lot of questions about my research and my role as a principal. He asked for my views on schools banning skateboards and wondered why schools did not put up skate ramps to encourage kids to go to school. He also spent a generous amount of time showing me how to navigate his computer game that connects players worldwide, many of whom he considered friends. His behaviour record, which read more like a police record, seemed at odds with the child I was slowly getting to know. However, every time I raised the issue of his reintegration back into school, he withdrew almost immediately from our conversation.

Tama had been out of school for five months when the Ministry of Education placed him back in Ngapura School, which revoked his enrolment after one day. Tama genuinely did not care about being in school. A large body of research shows that labelling and exclusionary practices can create a self-fulfilling prophecy and result in a cycle of anti-social behaviour

that can be difficult to break (Izard, Fine, Schultz, Mostow, Ackerman & Youngstrom, 2002; Noguera, 2003).

It was after he had been out of school for many months that Tama's mother, who felt she was getting nowhere with the Ministry, had enrolled him at Ngapura School. She was encouraged by the advice of a school social worker to enrol Tama in another local school to give him a fresh start. Yet after Tama attended for one day, still on suspension with conditions from Taylorville, his previous school, Ngapura School revoked his enrolment. His mother admitted that Tama did hit a teacher, but only after the teacher tried to restrain him. The male teacher had been called for in response to a fight that broke out, when an older student pulled a chair out from under Tama on his first day at the school.

According to his mother, Tama's later return to Ngapura School only happened because CYF became involved. Given that Tama was not attending any school at the time, the referral was made by Taylorville School, which had previously suspended Tama. The Ministry directed Ngapura School to re-enrol Tama after 20 weeks out of school, although this was the school that had revoked his enrolment earlier. Tama's mother believed that this was the worse possible outcome – to be sent to a school that she felt would not give her son a fair chance – because of what happened last time he was there.

Now that he has spent so long at home, and established a routine that works for him, I am unsure how he will manage to transition back into any school.

While his mother was trying desperately to work on solutions that would get her son back into a school, Tama was quite happy to stay out. Unless Tama wanted to go to school, it seems likely that he would continue employing behaviours that ensured his removal. It is significant that Tama's educational journey never included having a teacher whom he perceived as liking him, nor was he ever placed with a teacher that he liked. I suspect the lack of these kinds of positive experiences also impacted on his resolve not to be at school.

THE EXPERIENCE OF TAMA'S DISCIPLINARY EXCLUSION FOR HIS MOTHER

The time it had taken the Ministry of Education to direct a school to enrol Tama weighed heavily on his mother and on her relationship with her son. Twenty weeks of having her child

at home meant she was forced to quit her full-time job and go on a benefit. Tama's mother decided that it would be just as easy for both of them if her son was enrolled in Correspondence School. However, she was told by the Ministry of Education that she could not enrol her son in Correspondence School as he was still legally enrolled in a school, regardless of the fact that he was on suspension with conditions from a school that she would never send him back to anyway.

Tama's mother was infuriated that the school made it a condition of Tama's return that she had to attend counselling at Whakatata House. The Taylorville School principal felt that she needed to attend a parenting course. After months of waiting for help and support a Ministry-appointed psychologist was sent out to see Tama and his mother; however, he too suggested a parenting course as the solution. Her response was to ask him to leave her house. Because schools see the problems related to a student's exclusion as belonging to the family rather than being due to the function of schooling, then logically they focus on fixing the family as the solution (Kearney & Kane, 2006; Nash, 2003). Tama's mother felt affronted that the psychologist assumed 'the problem' was her parenting when she saw the problem as clearly being the way school let her son down by not supporting his learning and behavioural needs. However, as Tama's mother stated:

There has been no change in family circumstances, there is no domestic violence in the house, and there is no alcohol or drug abuse. There are no problems needing fixing here; he simply hates school.

(Interview, Tama's mother, August 2006)

Even though she found the suspension meeting daunting, Tama's mother felt she was able to challenge the process of the suspension by pointing out that the school had put nothing in place to support her son when it was clear that he had some behavioural issues. She perceived that the principal and other school personnel were racist, and that Tama was left unsupported on purpose. Tama's mother also thought that Tama was bullied at the school, and that his behaviour was the result of being bullied. She saw her son as a leader, a kid who will not take bullying by anyone, child or adult. Tama's mother was extremely angry that school has let her and her son down. She felt that had academic support been put in place, as Taylorville School had promised upon his enrolment, then the situation might never have escalated to this point. As she explained:

At enrolment I told the school Tama was working with the RTLB at his last school, and the principal said, 'Yip, no that's fine we've got one here'. Tama never saw him once in that whole time he was there. Not once (sighs)! At his suspension meeting I said to the RTLB, 'How many times have you seen my boy?' And he goes, 'Well I haven't actually got to him yet.' And I was like, 'So in five months you haven't seen him.'

(Interview, Tama's mother, August 2006)

She grew more angry about and distrusting of what she saw as false promises to support her son's return to school. She had few avenues for advocacy and felt isolated and alone. She talked about feeling burdened: that the issues she and Tama had to deal with were a big weight for them to carry around.

The Ministry of Education are meant to have the final say but they are letting these schools decide what's going to happen to Tama. So all I can do is wait. I email them every single day, but every time I ring someone's on leave, or they are out of the office, or they have left or I get put through to the wrong person. I've read all the children's rights and it's their right to have an education, but he's not getting one, and that's just one child's story.

(Interview, Tama's mother, August 2006)

Tama's mother felt concerned about how far behind Tama was going to be academically if he was ever to be returned to school. She asked if he could have a tracker to support his learning through Correspondence School but the Ministry told her that it preferred the tracker to work in a school with a student like Tama rather than at home. According to her, the Ministry gave Tama no access to any educational support during the five months he was out of school. Missing out on such a long period of schooling at such a young age appears to have had the greatest effect on his life.

When Tama was first placed on extended suspension his mother openly admitted that she used to get very angry and frustrated at him being at home all day. Living on a benefit added to her frustration, as she felt there was nothing she could do with him. She had no schoolwork for him, and no money to entertain him. She accepted that it took a toll on their relationship.

As time went on, and the longer Tama was out of school, his mother feared he was showing signs of depression. She felt deeply concerned that Tama had stopped communicating with her and that he had stopped leaving the house altogether. He had even stopped going to visit his friends.

FOLLOWING LEGISLATIVE PROCEDURES

When Ngapura School received a directive from the Ministry of Education to enrol Tama, the Board chairperson called a Board of Trustees meeting, as legally required, to discuss his entry back into the school after two terms of being at home. The chairperson felt conflicted when the principal openly opposed Tama's return. However, the Board agreed to give Tama a chance. In reality a school must accept an enrolment if directed to do so by the Ministry.

I like to think I look at every child as an individual, but when a child comes in front of me as the chairperson, I always have that child's rights in the back of my mind. But I also have to think about the other 300-odd children and their safety. Our hearts go out to these whānau because they have no support. Sometimes when the whānau kōrero to us, it triggers our heart strings, sometimes and we can waver to keep the child but you can see on my colleagues' faces, 'No way is this kid staying in this school', and then it's like – now what do we do?

(Interview, Chairperson, Ngapura School, August 2006)

The Ministry of Education guidelines stipulate that when a student is suspended from a school, the principal of that school must ring five local schools to see if they will enrol the student. The principal must record why any of these schools refuses and send this record to Ministry. If none of the five schools will take the student, then the Ministry steps in to support placement in a school by requesting it and/or making a directive. The issue is complex, as the Ministry wants the student's placement to be at a school where they will be given a fair chance, but the time that it takes to negotiate may simply be too long in some cases. Directives are an option available to the Ministry when a school cannot meet its obligation to find another school to take the student it has suspended.

Sometimes it's almost that schools want you to direct because then they feel they had to do it and they don't particularly resist, then you get schools that resist but

when it comes down to it, the child is coming and that's that, the quickest thing is if schools say, 'Yip' straight away.

(Interview, Ministry development officer, August 2006)

The length of time Tama was out of school impacted enormously on any possible chance of reintegration back into the system; a system that he had come to feel had nothing to offer. When asked how the Ministry sees its role and obligations in relation to schools, excluded students and their whānau, the Ministry development officer was quite clear:

That's not our responsibility; we have quite a discrete job in this area, to get an excluded kid into a school. How that works out from there is then down to the school. We try to identify the 'best fit' for that child that we can possibly find with a school, and in terms of the support that we can broker in to go with that student. So whether its from GSE or RTLBs or other outside agencies, that's our job to try and pull all that together, put that into the school and then leave them to it.

(Interview, Ministry development officer, August 2006)

Herein lies one of the key issues that the principal of Ngapura School felt most aggrieved about. The 'best fit' school usually means a school that is not zoned. Schools without zones are usually low-decile, multicultural schools, and therefore must legally accept every enrolment, regardless of the number of high needs students they may already be supporting. Research by Addis (2002) suggests this was also a key issue of concern raised by the principals when implementing the new legislation. The Ministry development officer acknowledged zoning as an issue, although she discussed it only in terms of high school students.

What they (principals) express to us is that it's really stressful for them. So if you've got somebody excluded from say Hillmorton they can get on the Orbiter [bus] and come across to Linwood or Aranui (low decile). And Linwood or Aranui have to say, 'Yes you can come'. Whereas if they got on the Orbiter and tried to get off in Cashmere (high decile), they could say, 'No go away because you do not live in our zone', so there is a pressure there and there is no good answer to it really as things stand so that can be a difficulty.

(Interview, Ministry development officer, August 2006)

The principal of Ngapura School blamed the zoning scheme as the main reason why the most at-risk students were most often placed in low-decile schools, which he said, resulted in these students being excluded. Current research suggests that under a system of zoning, unless one can afford to buy a house in a 'desirable' school zone, the chances of attending that school are slim (LaRocque, 2005; Pearce & Gordon, 2005). LaRocque (2005) shows that low-decile schools offer a very different learning experience than do high-decile schools. The principal of Ngapura School advocated that suspended and excluded students should be placed in all schools, regardless of whether they were zoned or not. He saw zoning as an excuse for high-decile schools to avoid dealing with students with high needs.

The principal also criticised both the Ministry and GSE for a lack of support when working alongside schools. Further criticism was directed at the length of time it takes for a referral to be processed, and an actual support programme provided. He believed that the Ministry's time had been dominated by trying to place the increasingly large numbers of suspended and excluded students back into schools. He felt that the key issue was one of equity and fairness when it came to placing suspended primary-aged students. He was angry that decile 1 and 2 schools were '*dumping grounds for students labelled as out of control*' (Interview, Principal, Ngapura School, August 2006).

Neither of the principals interviewed for this study took responsibility for their own decisions to exclude or suspend a young student. As quoted at the start of this chapter the principal of Ngapura School stated clearly that the local principals discussed which children they perceived were salvageable and which were not (Interview, Principal, Ngapura School, August 2006). The end result was that principals decided who got to stay and who did not. Failure to see daily school practices such as exclusion as contributing to the problem highlights how difficult it is going to be for the other two parties in the partnership to even be heard as the needs of the school as an institution clearly far outweigh the legal right of every child to receive an education.

ADULT INTERPRETATIONS OF THE PROBLEM AND SOLUTIONS

The chairperson of the Board of Trustees of Ngapura School did not blame the Ministry of Education for its inability to meet the needs of Māori students as she maintained that it never

had. Her experience had been that the further up decisions were made within the Ministry, the less likely it would be that would be Māori input to them. She felt disappointed that, in the 12 years she had worked for the Ministry of Education in her role as chairperson, there had been no real evidence of partnership between Māori and Pākehā in the Ministry.

Tama's mother staunchly believed that Māori students' experiences of school were vastly different from those of Pākehā children – a view that has also been documented by numerous researchers (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Chapple et al., 1997; Macfarlane, 2008). She was angry that all of the professionals she had worked with to negotiate Tama's return to school had been Pākehā. She believed that school personnel who are racist target Māori children. As she saw it, the world out of which Pākehā teachers operated was so different from the world of Māori that they were not able to engage with Māori kids successfully. One example she highlighted related to Tama's involvement in kapa haka (performing arts). The one class Tama wanted to attend was kapa haka. His mother similarly thought it was a class he needed to attend, seeing it as an opportunity to stand tall and be proud of who he was, as Tama himself loved learning haka. However, Tama was only allowed to attend kapa haka if the adults in the school saw his behaviour as 'good enough'. She was extremely angry that this condition had been imposed. In her view, his cultural heritage should have been a right, not a privilege based solely on his behaviour.

Group Special Education and the Ministry of Education personnel held contrasting perspectives on how the Ministry could support improved Māori engagement in schools. However, both agreed that the shift needed to be made by teachers.

In order for our young Māori people to grow and blossom it may be our attitudes that have to change; it's not for them to change, they have to have something they can see that will make them want to do that; a lot of the time people think it's 'change the child' but it's not. Let's get on with the job, you know these kids have a right to be, live as Māori, and have health and wellbeing and be proud of who they are; educators are often ill equipped to deal with Māori.

(Interview, GSE district officer, September 2006)

It was the GSE officer's belief that the key to more successful engagement of Māori was not money, but rather people, resources and attitudes. The work she did in schools, and her

training of Ministry staff, followed Māori research-based principles. In particular she referred to the research undertaken by Mason Durie. She was also clearly driven and motivated by Treaty of Waitangi principles. She acknowledged that there is a lot of hardship in New Zealand, particularly for Māori, but the impact of schools using deficit theory thinking simply justified exclusionary practices.

The chairperson believed that the reason for high Māori exclusions was racism. In her view, the greatest problem was that Māori kids were asked to leave their identity at the gate when they walked into mainstream schools and operated in the white man's world. She was concerned for Māori students in mainstream schools as she felt that students in schools driven by kaupapa Māori, or in whānau classes, were much more likely to be strong in their tikanga and cultural practices. She felt that Māori students were most likely to engage when they were taught by Māori, as this approach would match the teacher's and students' understanding more closely and would increase the chance that the teacher and students would share the same worldview.

The principal of Ngapura School acknowledged that a disproportionate number of Māori were suspended from his school. He suggested a variety of reasons that might contribute to this over-representation. First, in his experience the majority of Māori children with problems, resulting in suspension, came from mainstream classes. The Māori students in the whānau classes had lower levels of suspension, which he thought was the result of several factors. In particular, he felt that caregivers of children in the whānau class showed greater levels of commitment, which was a prerequisite to enrolling in the bilingual unit. Whānau support must be assured by their commitment to meet the kawa (protocol) of the classroom, before a student was accepted into the unit.

The principal believed that a second factor linked to the disproportionate exclusion rate of Māori was that the majority of Māori were found in low socio-economic groupings. Thirdly he blamed the influence of black American rap music and the gangster culture. He saw this music and dance as hegemonic and violent, which was reflected in students' dress and attitudes inside schools. He believed that this influence was evil and had a strong negative effect on Māori children in particular. His solution was a complete ban on anything connected to American rap music, inclusive of hip-hop dance. He blamed the media, music clips and TV for glamorising gang lifestyles. He maintains:

What students do out of school is their business, but that there is no room in Ngapura School culture for students to portray gang affiliations to groups such as the Bloods and Crips.

(Interview, Principal, Ngapura School, August 2006)

The Ngapura School chairperson had a different view of the over-representation of Māori in disciplinary exclusions. She believed that society has changed so rapidly that schools have failed to keep up. As she saw it, the increased levels of violence portrayed on TV and other news media reflects the rapid changes taking place in society in general. She did not think there was any point in blaming anyone: 'It's just how it is'. She maintained that it was schools that need to be more responsive to what children see and hear. She advocated for whānau to watch Māori TV, as much of it portrays being Māori positively.

ISSUES FACING A MĀORI PRIMARY-AGED STUDENT WHO DOES NOT WANT TO RETURN TO SCHOOL

As the different perspectives of the participants indicate, the issues related to disciplinary exclusion are complex. However, it is always the children who pay the price. Tama's educational life story really disturbed me, as I had never met a student so disengaged in my 20 years of being an educator. My greatest concern, however, was about his future. He was nine years old and hated school so vehemently that being at home was a more viable.

It would seem, however, that it was not the exclusion itself that altered Tama's life path. Rather, the length of time he was out of school had the greatest impact on his educational life journey. The greatest impact for his mother could also be said to come from the same source. Tama's overall attitude was one of disengagement. School simply did not meet his needs: he viewed school as having little to offer and in his view he never had a caring teacher. When not talking about school, Tama was a vivacious and bright, alert young boy. I believe Tama will struggle to engage with school if teachers and other school personnel fail to see him as a person with interests, strengths and abilities, rather than as a student with difficult behaviour. Even if he found a school to see him as a whole person, his engagement could only be achieved, of course, if Tama came to believe that being at school is his preferred option.

The most frightening effect of his exclusion, from his mother's perspective, was that it prompted Tama's emerging interest in gangs and gang lifestyle. As the relationship of Tama and his mother experienced the tension of their being together day in and day out and as they experienced the impact of going from a full-time wage to a benefit, Tama spent a lot more time hanging out with older students in the community who were not attending school for a variety of reasons. This exposure to new, much older children worried Tama's mother, but she felt there was little she could do to prevent it.

The next case study covers the life history of a 13-year-old girl in her first year at high school. Like Tama, she had been exposed to several disciplinary exclusions since the age of nine. Similarly she had become disengaged from school as, in her view, schools do not want kids like her.

Crystal

You can just tell by the way teachers act; if they cared they would actually sit down and talk to you, make out like they cared, but they don't, they don't even care enough to pretend that they care.

(Interview, Crystal, September 2006)

When Crystal entered school, she was a happy, excited five-year-old ready to take on the world of learning. For four successive years she successfully managed school and, more than that, liked school a lot. She framed herself as 'perfect ... a well behaved little girl'. An incident when she was nine years old changed both how Crystal framed school and how school framed her. This is Crystal's story.

First time I ever got stood down was because I got into a fight with this guy. And we used to be friends, but then I ended up getting into a scrape with him after school and he cried and like ran and told the principal even though it was after school. And they didn't even let me explain why or anything, I admit that it was my fault for hitting him but he was bullying me so hard out at school it wasn't funny. He'd like tell people all this stuff about me and all my secrets and stuff, coz me and him use to be friends and it's like they just expect me to take it. They wouldn't even

let me explain it, like they said, 'You're stood-down and that's it'. I felt like crap, I felt like crying to be honest.

When I went back to school the first time I didn't know how everybody was going to be to me because apparently the teacher and the principal went into class and said what I had done to Troy and that I was not coming back to school and that it was really horrible what I did and all this stuff. And I wasn't there to back myself up. So they did that while I was away from school. My mate she goes, 'They came into class and they said that you beat up Troy and that, that you like, humiliated him in front of everybody and tore up his homework book and that you're not coming back to school and that you're a real horrible person and that we all shouldn't hang out with you.' That's what the principal kept on saying to the class. I don't reckon that was fair.

The first time is got to be the worst; second time I was like, scared what my mother would do, if she was going to get angry at me and stuff; but the third time I was just like getting used to it, not again, they had too much rules and stuff at that school. It was like they put the rules there on purpose so that they can be broken, so that we can get in trouble. It sucked. Like the yellow spot that you had to sit on all of playtime or all of lunchtime if you did something wrong. And then they had the yellow card, which means you didn't get to do privilege for the next two weeks, and you had to sit there and write lines for that whole time, and they had detention and everything. It sucked.

You weren't allowed to walk out of class and go to the toilet, the smallest thing like that, you weren't allowed to touch the shade cloth, we had to eat lunch under that, we weren't allow to touch the shade cloth. If you touched that you were put on the yellow spot. You weren't allowed to leave from under the shade cloth unless you got the permission from the teacher and if you went back to get something out of your bag or what ever without permission you got put in the yellow spot, stupid things like that, right up to like swearing at teachers and stuff like that. But I guess that's fair enough not to swear at teachers. Then they just told me, they go, 'We don't want you back at this school'. And then my mother had to come and get me but I didn't really care by then, I was so getting used to it. That was my last year at

primary.

Up north I got bullied hard out by the big, big chicks. Yeah I got bullied hard out, I would always take off from school and stuff and run home. I never got stood-down or anything there, I might have been sent to another class or something sometimes, but that was it. I didn't really even think of that as an option because mother was working every day and stuff and I knew I had to try and help her out. You know it's when I started hating school and I'd say I never want to go. I would always sit in the cloakroom by myself and start eating my lunch it was like, that's sad.

I decided after I got stood-down so many times I didn't have any respect for teachers any more. It was as if they didn't care about you at all; they were just there for the money and if they couldn't be bothered with you then they just had the right to tell you to leave, that kind of sucked. Coz you had to spend like every single day with them, and knowing that they didn't care about you at all because it is a career. Coz it's just like they don't even give you a chance, just like, 'Get out. I can't be bothered with you, get out', it sucks that they can do that. They don't actually realise that it, it's like, I don't know, it sort of hurts, I don't know, sort of.

That's when I went like suicidal and stuff. Not cool. It was around everything because it was when Barry was ringing up saying, 'I'm gonna kill you, I gonna fucken come up there and get you' and stuff and I had to deal with bullying every single day and not having any mates and stuff. It sucked and knowing that we didn't have any family and stuff, we were like pretty much all alone. Kind of sucked. So we came back to this city.

So I got sent to the principal and the principal was like, 'Just got the letter sent home, see ya later'. And then, I'd try hard and be all good. I can't remember how many times I got stood-down from that school. And then I remember I got asked to leave maybe two weeks before school finished. The principal goes to me, he said it straight to my face, 'We do not want you back at this school, we do not want people with your kind of attitude here, you're not welcome any more.' I was just like sweet as then, but I remember my mother was angry at me. It sucked.

Then I went to high school but I was kind of a bit scared about it coz I knew that high school was the last thing before you go up and get a career but now that I am at high school it's just like, it sucks. I've been stood-down there once, had an in school suspension. Now it's sort of like, why should you put the effort in if you know that they don't even care anyway? If you do one little thing wrong, it's just gonna be, all the effort you've put in is just gonna be, I've been falling by the way. I failed all three terms.

I have a problem with authority, yeah it's, I don't trust any teachers and stuff, because it's been made so obvious to me before that they don't care. They like don't give a fuck about you. So it's just like, I won't try and be nice to them. Teachers, they base it on attitude, all the teachers I have ever had. If you've got an attitude that they like, then even if it changes they decide that they like you and you're in their good books. When you first meet them or something if you're exactly not that friendly and if you sit there and be all shy I think they decide that they like you because you're quiet. They know that they can boss you around and stuff because they know that you're scared. If you sit there and try and be all confident, try and pretend that you're up there with them or something, they decide that they don't like you and they got to try and push you down. I'm not like most girls; I like to be straight up with teachers.

(Interview, Crystal, September 2006)

The powerful and positive message from Crystal's story is that students do not necessarily require their teacher to be someone that they share their life story with; they simply need a teacher who shows they care (Chick, 1999; Johnston, Cant, Howitt & Peters, 2007; Krause, 1996; Whitehead, 2006). Crystal had a teacher she loved, and felt that the teacher favoured her too. Even though as Crystal said:

I had so much stuff going on at home when I was at that school, and stuff that nobody knows about, that's why it was sad when Mrs Fleece left because I talked to her about everything. She used to favour me in class, it was awesome. She loved me to bits, it was awesome. She knew everything but I wouldn't tell her about when I got hidings and stuff coz I thought that she'd get my mother in trouble. I didn't want to get taken from my mother.

(Interview, Crystal, September 2006)

Crystal was still able to successfully manage school because she had a teacher she felt safe with and supported by. This is a theme educational research confirms: the quality of the relationship between the teacher and student can make a genuine difference to a student's life chances (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Brown, 2000; Overton, 1995; Sidman, 1989). It is telling, however, that even though she felt safe and supported by her teacher she still chose to keep silent about what was happening at home.

It was her experience of a new teacher, a teacher who had stood down Crystal's brother in the previous year, that changed how she came to view school. Rather than school being somewhere she was excited to be, and excited about learning at, she had a new understanding. Crystal believed that the teacher had set her up and that she knew instantly that the teacher did not like her – as she said, the teacher 'egged me on'.

This was a pivotal moment for Crystal in gaining a new understanding about schools and the purpose of education. Crystal was punished by being stood down for five days.

As Denborough (1996) highlights, we live in New Zealand, a punitive culture where notions of punishment have at times been synonymous with discipline:

From child rearing practices, to the schoolyard, to the courts, we are steeped in notions of punishment - that somehow, in order to 'resolve conflict'; the punishment of those who have caused harm or displayed disobedience is all important (Denborough, 1996, p. 98).

The message Crystal got from her first disciplinary exclusion was to never trust school personnel. Crystal too knew clearly and instantly which teachers liked her and which teachers would never give her a chance. Crystal also knew intuitively that if she told a teacher about what was happening at home then through perhaps one phone call to Child, Youth and Family her entire family could be dismantled. This knowledge kept her both as silent and as invisible as possible. While Crystal was experiencing both violence and abuse at home, throughout the year she was with a teacher who she felt genuinely supported her and she was not exposed to

disciplinary exclusion. As Fine's research suggests, in relation to adolescents, teachers can play a vital role in valuing and supporting who students are:

The room for possibility and transformation lies with the energy of these adolescents, and with those educators creative enough to see as their job, passion, and responsibility the political work of educating through diverse voices and nurturing communities. (Fine, 1991, p. 52)

After Crystal's experiences of multiple exclusions she came to see school rules in a new light. In her view the intentional purpose of rules was to sort out the children who were willing to obey rules from those who were not. She appreciated the reasoning behind some rules, such as not swearing and those concerned with safety, but failed to see any rationale behind not being able to go to the toilet, or to touch the shade cloth at lunchtime. She received a variety of punishments, such as detention, privilege loss, and sitting on a coloured spot, for breaking rules she felt were senseless. Consequently she felt powerless and grew angrier given her new understandings of the purpose of school rules.

Crystal exercised her power, and vented her frustration and anger, by hitting a boy who betrayed her secrets to the class. These were secrets that if revealed could result in intervention by Child, Youth and Family; secrets that could destroy her family unit as she saw it. Yet still no one saw beyond her behaviour or the incident, to consider what this student might have needed. She was angry that a male staff member was sent to physically remove her from class. The use of physical restraint led Crystal to feel panicked and she lashed out.

Her mother could not understand why a school would restrain any student in this manner. She would have preferred the school to have rung her to come to the school and deal with the situation. She believed that the use of such restraint merely escalated the problem. GSE supports schools by providing teaching staff who have high needs children in their class with tutoring in skills for de-escalating volatile situations (Interview, Principal, Riverbank Primary, August 2006). Restraint is meant to be used if a student is at risk of harming themselves or others. The school framed Crystal as out of control; however, she viewed the cause of the problem as the teacher's behaviour. As Noguera (2003, p. 349) suggests:

When children are presumed to be wild, uncontrollable and potentially dangerous

it is not surprising that antagonistic relations with the adults who are assigned to control them develop.

The real lifelong damage that arises from being told you are worthless gets exaggerated every time a student is repeatedly excluded from school, as Crystal's experience makes clear. If anyone had really listened to Crystal's story, had she been able to tell it, then surely it would have been established that punishment was the last thing this student needed. Her mother believed that the school did know what was going on, but that it simply chose to ignore it.

In the space of three years, Crystal was stood down eight times and suspended twice officially and several times unofficially. The unofficial suspensions were the so-called 'kiwi suspensions', which make children and their whānau both voiceless and invisible, as well as concealing from the public data on the actual number of children being excluded from schools. Kiwi suspensions allow a principal to remove a student permanently from the school without having to complete the paperwork, find another school to accept the student, or call the Board of Trustees together to hear the case. The end result is that the school resolves 'the problem' without anyone in the school, community or the Ministry of Education knowing about it. Caregivers are offered this alternative to having an official disciplinary action cited permanently on their child's school record. Some whānau simply withdraw their child from the school and endeavour to find another one to support their student.

THE CURRENT AND ONGOING IMPACT OF BEING STOOD DOWN, SUSPENDED OR EXCLUDED

Several interconnected factors led Crystal to believe that the only way out for her was suicide. Her family had relocated to a different island to a school where she felt isolated and alone. She was bullied daily. On top of everything her stepfather had tracked down the family and was making death threats to Crystal over the phone. Her mother recognised that Crystal had developed an eating disorder and that she was suicidal. She moved the family back to their home town, to seek support from whānau. However, Crystal remained silent at school about how she was feeling. She stated that what she learned from all of her previous experiences at school was that she had no respect for teachers. She believed that they did not care and that many were only there for the money.

How is it that an 11-year-old student's life became so hopeless, and rendered her so powerless, that she thought that the only way out was to kill herself? As New Zealand has one of the highest teenage suicide rates in the world (Ministry of Health, 2006), I wonder if anyone, apart from her mother, had any idea that Crystal had reached this point? She was found daily hiding in the cloakroom crying, yet the school's only response was to ring her mother. No support or access to help was given. Given that the New Zealand youth suicide rate has increased by 50% in the past 30 years alone (Ministry of Health, 2006; Ministry of Social Development, 2006), it is clear that young children can easily become another statistic. What is so important about Crystal's dialogue is that she articulated for us that, in her experience, school was a place where she was not wanted, and a place she came to believe that teachers do not care. Her solution was to get out of school as quickly as possible, one way or another. The message she received loud and clear from her teacher, principal and Board was that she was not welcome or even part of the school community. As Noguera (2003, p. 350) points out:

Keeping in mind that one of the primary functions of schools is to sort students according to some measure of their ability by separating those with promise from those without, it might seem that excluding the most vulnerable and difficult students would make perfect sense.

In light of this observation, Crystal's analysis of her situation was astute. Crystal was already failing at high school, which made her life problematic and more complicated. When students are failing academically, punishing them by removing them from school will put them at even greater risk of failure.

Crystal appeared to be hostile in her dealings with high school teachers. How she saw teachers, schools and school rules changed dramatically after her experience of being suspended. Subsequently Crystal refused to be silenced and was critical of how schools operate. Fine's (1991) analysis of silencing is useful in understanding why students like Crystal are removed from school sites. As Fine's (1991, p. 9) research with high school dropouts suggests:

The quite literal, corporeal discharging of most adolescents' bodies from schools occurs within an institutionalised context that also comfortably purges the critical

talk of students, educators, parents and activists.

The illegal kiwi suspension Crystal experienced at the end of primary school, although saving her 'record', still reinforced the message that school did not want her and that she was bad. The resulting deficit-based discourse around children, and the experience of teachers who violate students' trust by repeated use of disciplinary exclusions and lack of support, in this case, nearly ended in suicide.

EDUCATIONAL, EMOTIONAL AND CULTURAL PROVISIONS BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER DISCIPLINARY EXCLUSIONS

According to Crystal no provisions were made for her educationally, emotionally or culturally during the exclusionary process. Instead upon her return after her first stand-down she experienced significant betrayal by adults in the school. She was already feeling anxious about her return when she found out that the principal in her absence had told her class about what she had done, and that she had humiliated Troy and therefore the students should not associate with her. It is of little surprise given this situation that she was excluded two months later, albeit illegally. Left unheard, Crystal exercised her power in the only way she could.

Although the purpose of stand-down legislation is for students and whānau to reflect on behavioural choices (Ministry of Education, 2008e), the students in this study did not share the same view of the process. Crystal talked about being bored at home and that it 'sucked' because she had enjoyed going to school to be with her friends. Upon her return she was informed she was a Year 8 not a Year 7 student, which meant that she had one term to go until she went to high school, although she believed she had a year and a term. It seems strange that a student's legal year, assigned at the time of enrolment, would not be discovered until eight years down the track. Another student in this research project had the same experience when he attended Ngapura School: Tama too was 'put up a year' resulting in a shorter than anticipated period at the kura. For Crystal, the change heightened her fear and anxiety. She suddenly had to come to terms with going to intermediate, which was outlined in frightening terms by her teacher. She was powerless to negotiate or challenge these decisions – decisions that may or may not be based in truth.

From Crystal's interview I got the sense that school as an institution is most closely aligned

with the institution of prison. The punitive practices of isolation, removal, loss of privileges, gaining permission to move from one area to another, and being made to go to a specific 'spot' are not rules negotiated by children. Basic human rights like going to the toilet are controlled by an adult. Controlling children's movements as a form of surveillance is yet another technique that teachers use to have power over children. These practices ensure that children are silenced, made voiceless and remain passive, as there is no possibility of negotiating all of these rules designed to regulate and control behaviour, the same practices that are used in prisons. As Crystal explains:

I decided after I got stood down so many times I didn't have any respect for teachers any more. It was as if they didn't care about you at all; they were just there for the money and if they couldn't be bothered with you then they just had the right to tell you to leave, that kind of sucked. Coz you had to spend every single day with them, and knowing that they didn't care about you at all because it is a career.

(Interview, Crystal, September 2006)

Crystal's experiences led to her conviction that teachers fall into two categories: those who care and those who collect a salary. Her insight is deeply significant to this research, as she pinpointed the perspective of the four students in this study, all of whom were framed as at risk. When they have teachers who care, students are able to remain engaged in school for years, regardless of what else may be happening in their lives. However, when they have teachers who do not care, the converse applies. Is this the reason that Ministry initiatives fail to make a difference to the number and composition of students being excluded? If teachers and principals conspire to remove a student, what chance do these young people have?

Crystal raised another important issue to do with the level of effort it requires simply to remain in school after being exposed to disciplinary exclusion.

Now it's sort of like, why should you put the effort in if you know that they don't even care anyway, and if you do one little thing wrong, it's just gonna be all the effort you've put in is just gonna be gone. (Interview, Crystal, September 2006)

If one of the purposes of school is to sort who stays and who goes, then Crystal has a point. There was probably very little she needed to do as she was labelled as bad, devious and dysfunctional, and if she felt most teachers did not care, then what possible motivation would she have to stay? However, she stayed as she desperately wanted to gain qualifications for her future; because she wanted a different outcome from the one her older brother had; and because school is compulsory.

Asked about her future, Crystal responded that in the short term she wanted to be anywhere but school. Current research gives some clues as to the final outcome for alienated working class youth exposed to exclusion from schools. Michelle Fine (1991, p. 259) notes in her research:

Many dropouts from (high) school, moving away from an environment they find hostile, initially feel a sense of relief and well being; within three or four years of leaving school this sense of well-being diminishes and is replaced with self blame, depression, and a sense of diminished life chances.

Crystal's conviction that gaining a qualification will ensure both upward mobility and a secure financial future reflects the embeddedness of the historical myth that education is the great equaliser (Jones et al., 1995). Her experiences of school so far have clearly taught her that education is not neutral, is not equitable and is not an equaliser. Her story, and those of other children in this research, suggest that to a large extent it is teachers who decide who will stay and who will go, based on their preferences regardless of the student's offending behaviour.

DEALING WITH THE FALLOUT: THE PERSPECTIVE OF CRYSTAL'S MOTHER

After Crystal's mother completed 6th form (Year 12), she left school to go to work. She had enjoyed school but often felt bored. Throughout our conversation it was clear that she valued education and wanted to support all of her children to get the most out of school. Prior to stand-down her daughter had been sent home and placed on unofficial stand-downs. She would receive phone calls from the principal to come and pick up her daughter and take her home. Crystal's mother believes the main problem leading to her daughter's stand-down was that a staff member physically restrained her. She felt that things then spiralled out of control

and her daughter hit and kicked out, which in turn resulted in exclusion. She used to feel extremely upset to see teachers dragging and pulling her daughter to the office. She felt frustrated that the school did not know how to deal with her daughter to de-escalate the situation. At first she found it hard to cope with the school sending Crystal home, which affected her relationship with her daughter as she felt so angry with Crystal for what she perceived then as Crystal 'being in trouble'. As time went on, though, her anger was directed more against the school.

For Crystal's mother, the fallout of feeling angry with school was that she had covered up a lot of what was going on at home. She believed that now she would be more open about what was happening in future, but did not feel safe enough to share her personal life with the school. She thought that they knew anyway as her daughter's behaviour changed dramatically. Her mother was very proud that her daughter was strong-minded and that she was able to be direct about her wants and needs. She perceived that her daughter's behaviour was the key to her physical and emotional survival, and that schools had struggled to support Crystal.

In Crystal's last two weeks of primary school she was issued with an unofficial trespass notice – a letter stating that she was not allowed on school grounds due to an ongoing battle over a t-shirt that Crystal's teacher felt was inappropriate. Crystal's mother stood her ground on the issue which resulted in Crystal being asked not to return to school for the last two weeks of the year. All of the girls were wearing the same t-shirt; however her mother believes Crystal was targeted as she was framed by the teachers and principal as the 'ring leader'. When Crystal was shifted up a class with one term to go, she also changed teachers. Her mother suggests the type of discipline and punishments Crystal was exposed to were all determined by who her teacher was.

The other caregivers in this research project echoed Crystal's mother's comments in regard to the lack of support given by schools and external agencies. She pulled her daughter from school for six weeks until resources were put in place to support her engagement back in school. Crystal's mother was also upset that her daughter was put up a year, and placed in a class full of targeted 'at risk' children. The principal explained that because she already had two stand-downs the next level would be suspension. As Crystal's mother did not want her daughter to be suspended, she refused to send her back to school until GSE was on board and

ready to support Crystal. When asked how the school responded to her stance of refusing to send Crystal to school, she said she felt the school was pleased as it did not really want her daughter there anyway. She felt let down by GSE, as it never turned up for Crystal's first day back at school. The Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour (RTLb) set plans in place for Crystal's return, but her mother said that none of the plans were followed through by the school.

It was evident during the interview that Crystal's mother felt both disappointed and angry at the way in which she felt judged by others, in particular the school personnel. She felt that she had become a failure, and also was saddened that her daughter was failing at school when she wanted her to do well educationally. Crystal's mother discussed how humiliated and embarrassed she felt, particularly when she had to pick up her daughter from school after an incident. She felt that school personnel were not only looking at her but also judging her. She managed this issue by keeping her head high and reminding herself that it was simply the reality for now, but not necessarily forever. She held that her own past life had contributed to her daughter's distress. However, she was critical of the stated purpose of stand-downs as being time out to talk about what is going on: five days, she argued, was a ridiculous length of time to 'discuss' what happened.

Within Crystal's mother's story, it was clear that Crystal's exclusions had impacted on all of the family members in different ways. Crystal's siblings got angry with Crystal every time she was exposed to disciplinary exclusions, such that her mother felt that she had to protect Crystal from their anger. When Crystal told her stepfather how she was restrained and carried from class by two teachers, his response was that she should hit the teachers trying to restrain her. Although her mother knew this advice was unhelpful, she understood his thinking as she shared this view. Crystal's biological father grounded her for three months during her weekend visits because of her suspension, and her mother felt his punishing response simply added to the problem.

After several failed attempts at contact with Whakatata House for support and secure counselling for her daughter, Crystal's mother was told that the waiting list was six to nine months. As Crystal's mother felt her daughter needed help immediately, Whakatata House referred her on to He Purapura Whitu. This organisation, while supportive, could not give the

kind of support her daughter needed. Disciplinary exclusion, she believed had led to a pathway of mistrust, anger, depression, alienation, and even suicidal thoughts for Crystal.

Crystal was trying to navigate a path somewhere in the margins between school and home. Her mother asked for greater understanding and support for when times were difficult for her whānau. She saw that the whānau would come through this challenging period eventually and that only a particular time in their lives needed careful navigation and support. However, the school system focused only on Crystal's behaviour, rather than looking at the school itself and its approach to discipline. As Crystal's mother saw it, the school should consider alternative ways of managing her child's behaviour. She asked her daughter's teacher not to take every negative behaviour personally.

Crystal's mother did think that punishment for her daughter's misbehaviour was appropriate but that it should be applied at the school. She would like to see her daughter have one-on-one support time with a teacher aide, or in a specialist class with other students who needed more support. She believed the key to supporting students who are having a hard time is to have someone they can talk to. She also believed, however, that such support needs to come from a person who is apart from the school system, as these students have learned a powerful lesson from which they cannot trust teaching personnel.

Crystal's mother discussed the similarities she saw between the school and justice systems. Her concern was that government agencies always put support plans in place after an incident. To be effective, she believed, the support should be made available before tensions erupt into an incident. She advocated that schools and families work more closely together in a mutually respectful way. Part of the solution, Crystal's mother believed, is for schools to look at their approach to children. She felt that the current emphasis is on obeying a multitude of school rules, with a negative rather than positive focus. With her new awareness of what happened in New Zealand schools, Crystal's mother wished she could parent all over again, in which case she would home school all of her children.

MINISTRY AND SCHOOL PERSONNEL FRAMING OF STUDENTS EXPOSED TO DISCIPLINARY EXCLUSIONS

There was no doubt that Ministry and GSE personnel were concerned about the possible long-

term impact of the exposure of students such as Crystal to multiple exclusions from school. The problem seemed to be that everyone saw the solutions through different frames.

Students experiencing a number of disciplinary exclusions, such as Crystal, would attract some level of support from the Ministry or GSE. Throughout our conversation it seemed clear that one of the Ministry development officer's main roles was to broker a package with agencies such as GSE. However the excluded student does not get GSE support by right; for example students excluded due to drugs would not qualify for support, according to the Ministry of Education. GSE's key role is to reduce the number of students not engaged in schools. In particular, the student engagement initiatives target schools with high truancy levels, high suspension rates and a high number of early leaving certificates. The support offered is mainly around best practice models and restorative justice. The schemes being offered to schools are voluntary and meant for high schools. The Ministry's development officer saw that a lot of the development teamwork was concerned with 'persuasion, influencing and encouragement'.

Although the Ministry of Education agrees with the New Zealand Primary Principals' Federation that schools are concerned that children are showing severe behaviour problems at a younger age, the Ministry argues that schools cannot simply give up. The development officer highlighted a number of cases where secondary schools were engaging with the families and communities, a strategy that she suggested was having an impact on parenting skills. However, there were no specific initiatives targeting primary schools. The key message the Ministry of Education wanted to get out to schools was that schools control what happens inside the classroom. As suggested by the Ministry of Education development officer:

The only thing that a school can have control over is what you do in the classroom.

So while you might want to have fantastic parents in your parent community all parenting better, and while you might have lots of help from other agencies, in the end what you can do is what you do in the classroom.

(Interview, Ministry of Education development officer, August 2006)

The Ministry of Education development officer acknowledged that schools were reporting growing numbers of children who were displaying severe behaviour difficulties at an earlier

age. She attributed this trend to students themselves and their families, rather than exploring alternative causes within schools and school staff.

These children display both social and academic difficulties; they have problems forming social relationships and are often rejected by their peers. The focus of the behaviour service is to work with these people to understand the reason for a child or young person's difficult behaviour and develop programmes and interventions that enable them to learn new and more positive behaviours and ways of being with others.

(Interview, Ministry of Education development officer, September 2006)

Schools too locate the problem within the student and/or the family. The principal and Board chairperson of Ngapura School had conflicting views on both the causes of the increase in students framed at risk and solutions needed to address this issue. The principal was a supporter of using alternative education providers to deal with students such as Crystal. Like the Ministry, his rationale was to fix these children while they are young. As he explained:

The idea is to get them between the years of age five and eight and actually fix it not just move the problem all over, but actually provide them with behaviour modification programmes and incentives to actually sort them out.

(Interview, Principal, Ngapura School, August 2006)

In the interview the principal shared his conflict over having high needs students in the school and his frustration when the Board allowed students like Crystal to return to school after a suspension. He maintained that the principal and the teachers had already done so much work to support these students that nothing more could be done. He also justified exclusion as in the best interest of other students' safety.

The Board has allowed four out of seven suspensions back into the school because when we get to hui the parents plead, the social worker pleads, the RTLB pleads, the whānau pleads and the Board being nice, loving, kind parents say, 'Oh you poor darling, we'll let you back with conditions'.

(Interview, Principal, Ngapura School, August 2006)

The chairperson, on the other hand, saw it as the school's responsibility to ensure all children get an education. She had personally supported children by meeting them daily to ensure that they made it through the year. She said she has seen the difference support can make to a child's level of engagement in a school. She viewed education and learning as lifelong opportunities that were not confined to school age. From personal experience with her eldest son, she also believed that schools just did not cater for students who were critical of a system that fails them. Her son was eventually successfully engaged in alternative education and was successful in what he was doing as he was granted an early leaving certificate. It was her life experiences, and how she viewed school consequently that drove her to be proactive in trying to keep younger children engaged in school until they were old enough to leave. As she said:

If there's just some wee bit of hope that we could just try one more thing to keep this child in our school then we go for it.

(Interview, Chairperson, Ngapura School, August 2006)

However, ultimately it is the principal who makes the decision to discipline students by implementing the legislation, and the Ngapura School principal firmly believed students like Crystal should not even be in school. This possibility raises questions about Tomorrow's Schools and the ways Board of Trustees and principals work.

The next and final case study highlights the lived experiences of a 10-year-old student from Ngapura School who had received his first stand-down at the time of interview. TK is a vivacious, fun, sociable and polite young child. His story is both interesting and important as his stand-down altered how both he and his mother viewed school, and indeed school personnel. School-family partnerships alter dramatically when whānau are silenced by schools. The damage of even a single disciplinary exclusion goes far beyond the perceived purpose of implementing disciplinary exclusion. TK found alternative ways to navigate school sites when he was faced with experiences that frightened him, yet he too remained silent.

TK

I used to be like real fat and the kids they were always little and all these fellas

made fun of me and it just, I don't know, I didn't tell anyone they called me names, coz I thought that I could just take it.

I arrived at the brick house and was invited in by TK's tall mother with flaming red hair. We went through the kitchen and lounge and into the sunroom facing an overgrown back yard. The room was encased with Māori carvings, kete, patu and taiaha. There was a Māori adult male in the lounge playing Xbox and a teenage girl doing dishes. TK had not arrived home from school yet. I explained that I was hoping to share stories of primary-aged Māori tamariki exposed to a range of forms of disciplinary exclusion. Her son had been selected as he had only had one stand-down.

TK's mother explained that both her children were Filipino and Pākehā, not Māori, and was incredulous that the principal had identified TK as Māori on the official stand-down form (SDS1a). This new discovery raised several questions for me: should I continue with the interview, why had the principal not checked this student's ethnicity and what does incorrect categorisation of ethnicity mean for the reliability of national data? I felt this particular student's circumstances would make an interesting story but decided I would wait to see what TK wanted to do. When he arrived home, we discussed the project and he cheerfully agreed to be a participant. TK is a softly spoken, polite and talkative child. This is his story:

My first school was cool, I liked my teacher, he had a big beard and he always had 'food' in it and he said he was saving it for later, but it wasn't real food, it was like paper and stuff and he was real funny. I used to be real big back then, I used to be like real fat and the kids they were always little and like all these fellas made fun of me and it just, I don't know, got hard out annoying and stuff. They were hard out fast, they could sprint away from me. I didn't tell anyone they called me names, coz I thought that I could just take it.

My teacher that year was a yellor, like when you wanted to go to the toilet she wouldn't let you; this boy he needed to go to the toilet and then he started to pee himself and then she like hard out yelled at him and said it was his fault; he was hard out embarrassed and the other kids just laughed. She was the worst teacher cause I've never been that much yelled at before, and I'd be like out of my desk and she would yell, 'Why are you out of your desk?' She yells at the boys, but when she

turns to the girls she's like, 'Don't do it' but when it was us boys, it's like 'DON'T DO IT'.

In year 6 I had two fights: one boy threw an ice ball at my face and so I hit him and the other boy threw a pie at me and it got me and so I started getting him, but they just blamed me and I got into trouble and I got more step letters [in the school's behaviour management programme: see below]. I was sorta peed that only I got into trouble. I didn't tell Whāea what really happened though coz then my friends would call me a wussy or something and then they'd hard out say that I'm a nark and stuff and then they wouldn't be my friends and stuff. If we are naughty we have to stay in at morning tea. If you break the rules then you get sent to the principal and then you have to do work; he'll just give you work till your bored. Sometimes you have to pick up rubbish.

I got suspended this year for a week. I got dared to fish slap the reliever by my mates. I went like this [pressing his hands together like a fish tail] to Whāea and I got suspended. I was scared Mother would be angry, and she was. When I went back I had to go and see the principal and he said, 'So what did you do?' and I told him and I told him it was a dare, and he like hard out told me not to listen to dares.

There was this other time this man came on his bike and he came to visit his son and I got dared to take his bike. I got his bike and rode it around school and I put it somewhere different to where he put it. He hard out came after me and he said, 'Did you steal my bike?' and I was like, 'I didn't steal it, I was like dared to take it for a ride' and he was hard out pushing me and he hard out elbowed me, and he pushed me and he pulled me. I thought I was in big trouble and then a teacher came and the man let go of me before the teacher saw him. The man talked to the teacher and said, 'Can you take this boy to the principal'. I like didn't go coz I talked to the teacher and told him that the guy hit me. The teacher just let me go and I didn't get into trouble. The teacher told me not to listen to dares coz it was a girl who told me to do it, but I don't want to be a wuss, we don't play dares any more.

Sometimes we get hard time in the bilingual unit; like today we had this mean

dance competition and like, and all the teachers thought we were being naughty, it was like all the Māori and Samoans. All the Māori were over here and all the Samoans were over there, and we were like hard out krumping [a form of dancing: see below]. All the teachers thought we were hard out fighting and stuff coz they don't even know what krumping is. So they rang the bell early, before the actual time we finish at 1.30, and they did it at like 15 minutes past one because we were just like dancing. Our teacher came in after lunch and she was like, 'All of your behaviour was disgusting and that's why we rang the bell early'. We said we were just dancing, but they just didn't believe us, cause I think it's just what they see. I think teachers just think it's only what they saw, not like, we actually know what happened, they just see what they saw.

(Interview, TK, September 2006)

TK's story shows that bullying rendered him silent. It was only after his peers bullied him into actioning a dare against a relieving teacher, only after the disciplinary exclusion, that he revealed what had actually happened. Although in the subsequent interview TK appreciated that he had not made the best possible choice, his decision needs to be viewed within the perspective of his experience of bullying. It is perhaps of little surprise that TK carried through on a class dare, as he had consistently experienced bullying and teasing by peers since he was five years old. TK viewed the incident as responding to a dare; the school viewed it as an assault. Until that point he had not been exposed to any form of disciplinary exclusion.

TK had successfully managed his way out of particular classrooms and problematic settings before. When he experienced a teacher at Ngapura School who he described as the worst teacher ever, he navigated a way out of her room: he asked to be placed in the bilingual unit and was accepted as he was a kōhanga reo graduate. Although he felt frustrated and disappointed that the teacher mainly spoke in English in the whānau class, he was happy that he had a teacher he felt genuinely cared for him.

A year later he was involved in two fights at school, but failed to tell anyone the details of what actually happened. His silence earned him two more step letters, which bought him closer to exclusion. To be labelled as a 'wuss' and a 'nark' by peers was deemed by TK to be

worse than going up a step in the disciplinary system used at the school. The use of gendered language, such as ‘wuss’, speaks to the power of peer learning (Nuthall, 2001).

The school-wide behaviour management system was introduced at Ngapura School after the Education Review Office (ERO) made it a compliance issue that the school review its systems. The resulting Five-step Behaviour Consequence Programme moved students through step one to step five, each time they broke a school rule. A step letter was sent home to keep caregivers informed as to where their student was placed on the disciplinary continuum. The principal explained that the Five-step Behaviour Consequence Programme was used for incidents over and above the classroom and playground discipline structure. It was the principal’s decision as to when a student moved from step to step. Regression down the stepladder was possible if the student maintained good behaviour for one term.

Ngapura School spent a great deal of time, money and resources on writing this behaviour management system. Behaviourist models of punishment and rewards are recommended as the key to changing children’s behaviour and are offered as clear examples of ‘best practice’ in performance. As with Riverbank Primary, Ngapura Primary and its Board were given one year to ‘fix’ the behaviour management problems as identified in the ERO report. A year later, after 15 students were stood-down, suspended and/or excluded, ERO concluded that, ‘The focus for teachers now is on student learning rather than dealing with disruptive behaviour’ (Education Review Office, 2006).

When asked what provisions were made available to support children on the school’s five-step programme, the principal replied that it was a hard question to answer, and that at the moment few such provisions were made. He suggested RTLBs were often involved with this type of student before disciplinary exclusion, and that they put in place programmes alongside the classroom teacher. In fact step 2 of the school behaviour management programme stated:

Step Two: Pupil detained for two forty minute lunch periods. Discussion and counselling. RTLB involved and parent notified.

(Ngapura School Behaviour Management Programme, 2006)

However, none of the children in this study who attended Ngapura School received RTLB support prior to disciplinary exclusion. TK was on step four at the time of the interview.

However, he still had no support from the RTLB service, nor had he been provided with any counselling, although he had been detained for lunch periods. In the interview, subsequent to being asked about the support available to children on his school's behaviour management programme, the principal said he did not view the RTLB service as having the effect that it should anyway as the lines are blurred between its role of resourcing students with learning needs and its role of those with behavioural needs.

TK was frightened that his mother would be angry with him for getting stood down, as indeed she was. Herein lies the danger when students are not heard, or in fact are even asked for their account of what led up to the particular incident that resulted in disciplinary action. I would suggest that had TK been able to tell his story to the school, then the issue of peer bullying could have been addressed for him as a school-wide issue. More importantly TK would not have been moved up the disciplinary ladder, closer to exclusion.

Previously a caregiver had assaulted him on the school grounds for riding the caregiver's bike. It was another instance in which he had responded to a dare that involved riding the man's bike, putting it in a different place and then watching what would happen. Unfortunately for TK he was caught by the man while still riding the bike. He implicitly assumed that the school authorities would listen to the adult who assaulted him before listening to him, which is exactly what happened. After the assault he was relieved that he did not get into trouble. The teacher let him go and said, 'Don't listen to dares'. This example highlights the unequal power relationships that were evident in school sites and that ensured TK continued to remain silent. The teacher failed to respond to the fact that TK had been assaulted on school grounds yet TK was relieved he did not get into trouble.

TK identified the different ways that Māori children in the bilingual unit were treated compared with students in mainstream classes. He described an incident that involved 'krumping', a dance competition, where teachers and students had different worldviews, and indeed knowledge of what this dance style means, yet the adults' view is the dominant one. The children were chastised for their behaviour. The adults within the school saw krumping as a form of fighting even when the students tried to explain what krumping was; again no one listened.

Krumping originated from clowning, which was developed by Tommy Johnson, a gifted black dancer with passion and commitment to get American black kids off the streets. He developed a dance school that inspired children to use dance as a means to express anger and oppression, rather than using violence. As he says, 'No kid deserves to grow up in a life of oppression and criticism' (Johnson, 1998).

He started the dance phenomenon in West Los Angeles, the area with the most prolific gang problem in the United States. This dance style is purposefully non-contact, and had the teachers listened, or in fact asked the students what krumping was they would have realised what a powerful and positive art form it was. The students never got a chance to educate the adults by sharing their knowledge; rather the school simply banned this dance style outright.

TK insightfully noted how we construct our own meaning of any given situation is based on our own set of life experiences, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and religious beliefs (Baker 1998). If the life experiences of children and their teacher are at opposite ends of the continuum, it becomes challenging for students like TK to risk trying to explain their truth about a given situation.

Recent media attention has focused on the severity of peer bullying via text and corresponding teenage suicide in New Zealand (Hope, 2004; Taylor & Thomas, 2002). Media attention has also focused on students bullying teachers, yet as a society we fail to enter discussions on teacher/adult bullying of young people. I have scoured educational sources and failed to find research centred on the impact of bullying by school personnel. I assume that silence was because punishment is promoted as discipline, and rarely exposed for what it is, and what it does, by keeping students silenced. The mandate for doing so is school rules.

When school personnel silence students they make assumptions – just as TK says, 'based on what they saw'. It is virtually impossible for children sitting under the threat of exclusion to maintain 'good behaviour', if teachers have already made up their mind as to what constitutes good. If one of the purposes of schooling, as suggested by Noguera (2003), is to identify, sort out and get rid of the children constructed as 'bad' then it is of no surprise that 20,910 children in New Zealand, such as TK, were stood down in 2007. Although TK had only one stand-down at the time he was interviewed, a month later he was stood down again for smoking after school in a local park. He denied that he was actually smoking, but admitted he

was with older students who were. Having received two stand-downs, the next level he faced was suspension.

TK's story suggests that not all children were disciplined by right if they were perceived as violent, deviant, bad or naughty. He had been involved in behaviours like fighting before, yet he had not been exposed to disciplinary practices until then. He had navigated a pathway as best he could, negotiating the bullying and violence he had experienced from peers, teachers and other adults within school.

When schools focus solely on behaviour and fail to take the time to find out what is really going on for students, or students do not feel safe to share their stories for fear of not being heard, then the consequences can start a trajectory of new and greater problems.

INSIGHTS INTO HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS BY TK'S CAREGIVERS

TK's mother experienced an incident at intermediate school that humiliated her in front of the entire class, and that still affects her to this day. The incident, which she did not want recorded, influenced how she came to view school and teachers differently. She was a mother who fought for her children and refused to be silenced, although she was careful about which issues she fought for. She felt unsupported by the school and felt staff was constantly judged her. She felt much of TK's behaviour was just 'kids being kids' rather than behaviour that indicated any serious underlying issues.

She was shocked, and angered, to discover that the principal had failed to get TK's ethnicity correct as TK and his sister had been at the school for three years. She believed the principal assumed TK's ethnicity was Māori because TK had been enrolled in the bilingual unit. This would account for TK's ethnicity being identified as Māori on the official stand-down form sent to the Ministry. However, as she completed the enrolment with the principal, she failed to understand how it was possible he would wrongly identify her son on an official form. She was going to take this issue up with the principal and Board of Trustees. As the whānau had been at the school for three years, the school personnel's lack of knowledge of where this student came from signified how little they knew about the students in the school.

TK's mother was extremely angry that there had been no support available or even offered to her. She dismissed the steps letters for minor infringements of the rules, as she perceived TK as a good kid. She demanded that the school supply TK with school work K during his five day stand-down and was told that the school did not have to supply it. She refused to leave without school work, as she did not want her son to be behind academically when he returned to school. Such actions, she believed, were used by the principal and staff to label her as 'one of those mothers that the school would rather not have to deal with' (Interview, TK's mother, September 2006).

TK's mother was frustrated at having to take a week off work during TK's stand-down period, and consequently lost a week's pay, which as a single parent had huge implications for her family. She felt ashamed that her son has been excluded from school as she felt there were better ways to deal with the incident than giving him a stand-down. She also felt powerless as she tried to fight the stand-down, but in the absence of a meeting or hearing there was no procedure to challenge the punishment. The principal refused to meet with her until after the stand-down period. She contacted the Ministry of Education to find out if the principal could act in this way, and discovered that indeed the principal could stand down any child for up to five days with no legal responsibility to enter discussions with the caregivers/parents.

TK's mother was the only caregiver in this study who was upset that the school principal had given me her child's educational and behaviour file without seeking prior permission from her. She contacted the principal and the chairperson to complain and asked for a copy of the school Privacy Act policy. Although she wanted her son to be included in the research, she was angry at the process the school followed. She felt that she had to pick and choose her battles carefully at the school as she worried that the more she challenged processes and procedures, the more likely it would be that staff would target her son. She wanted her son and daughter to achieve success in their education.

The ongoing effects of dealing with her son's disciplinary exclusion were both financial and emotional. As she saw it, the only option was to change schools so that he got a new start. At the time of her son's stand-down she was dealing with personal issues with her partner and she was studying part time to complete her social work diploma. She felt that she needed to withdraw from her studies to focus on her son. Her greatest fear was that he would be suspended and that this would impact on how other schools viewed him, particularly when he

tried to enrol in high school.

TK's mother also felt hurt because she had been the first to lend a hand every time the school needed help with transport or school-wide fundraising, yet when it came to disciplinary practices suddenly 'the partnership' between schools and home ended. It felt to her as though it was the school that was making all of the decisions. Research by Izard et al. (2002) supports TK's mother's understandings in terms of her experiences of how schools treated parents. Fine (1991, p. 223) suggests:

With the exception of standard and hackneyed throwaway lines about parental involvement, public as schools in general seek little serious renegotiating of power with parents / communities.

TK's mother firmly believed it was the school's responsibility to ensure that children receive an education as school is compulsory: there is no choice for parents, they legally must send their children to school. In undertaking their job of educating children, she argued, schools were paid and paid well. She believed that while school is compulsory in New Zealand, students' legal rights are being violated every time a school refuses access to education because of discipline issues.

INSIGHTS INTO THE ISSUE OF BEING STOOD DOWN FOR THE FIRST TIME

After being stood down, TK viewed the school rules and injustices that arose from adherence to these rules in a new light. He struggled to understand the purpose of many of them. The rules did not exist in isolation; they were part of the day-to-day code that ensured law and order out in society. As Noguera (2003, p. 344) explains:

As is true in society, an implicit social contract serves as the basis for maintaining order in schools. In exchange for an education, students are expected to obey rules and norms that are operative within school and to comply with the authority of adults in charge.

Removal, isolation or exclusion of children was justifiable punishment to be inflicted because of the school's focus on rules to control students. Isolation from the classroom, in whatever

form, implicitly privileges punishment over education. Removal from class to complete what TK described as unrelated, boring worksheets or to pick up rubbish directly contradicted the assumed purpose of being at school. Schools rely on some form of exclusion to control the behaviour of students (Hope, 2004). The purpose of removal seems clear to everyone except the student who has been removed.

One of the key problems, however, is that disciplinary exclusions do not support or help any change to behaviours employed by students, and in practice some students see them as preferable to being in a classroom (Nuthall, 2001). At five years of age TK was bullied by peers because of his size, yet he chose to remain silent. Peers it would seem were powerful reinforcers of the code of silence (Fine, 1991). It seemed an internalised, gendered response stopped TK from telling school personnel that he was being bullied by his peers: TK remained silent because to tell would mean losing friends and being branded as a ‘wuss’ or a ‘nark’ – interestingly both terms are devalued forms of masculinity. This discourse is identical to that found in prisons (Denborough, 1996; Noguera, 2003).

TK found his own way to navigate what was happening to him: he lost weight and ‘got fast’ so he could out-run the school bullies, which gave him a sense of control and satisfaction. The added bonus of getting fit and losing weight was that he then perceived he had *mana* as he was selected for the school rugby team. It did not matter any more if the teacher ‘saw’ what happened to him because he had already learned not to be a nark, and he had also learned that teachers did not do anything in response to student complaints anyway.

TK followed through on a dare issued by his peers because he did not want to be perceived as a ‘wuss’. The dare resulted in TK being assaulted by a parent and even though he tried to tell both the adult abusing him and a teacher that his actions were merely a response to a dare, he was still relieved that the teacher let him go and *he* didn’t get into trouble. Even though TK knew the repercussions of going up another level of the disciplinary chain on the steps system, he still believed the most viable option was to remain silent. The problem therefore became increasingly more complex because if children were silenced by each other, as well as teachers, then how would it ever be possible to move towards an education model that meets everyone’s needs? The existence of disciplinary exclusions in the education system at all may be one of the key factors explaining why some students choose silence.

The school rules at Ngapura School dominated not only the buildings but also, it would seem, the lives of those who are on site. The first thing one sees when entering the school office is an extraordinarily large copy of the school rules. Students' silence was both guaranteed and maintained by rules such as, 'You must do what an adult tells you'. The rules, which were imposed by adults rather than negotiated by the students themselves, influenced the extent to which control and power over children could be exercised. Rules were justified to keep children safe; however the children saw it in a different way. A rule that states that you must do everything an adult tells you can potentially ensure children such as TK remain unsafe.

There was no place for discussion when TK 'fish slapped' a relieving teacher on a dare. The principal suspended him first and asked him *after* his return what had happened. The damage was already done. Punishment is so embedded in our thinking in society it was of little surprise to discover that the way in which the state and school institutions saw this process, and the view of the child exposed to it, are constructed very differently.

The principal felt that, of all the school personnel, he personally was the most directly involved with the students and whānau, but that this meant he was often viewed negatively as a lot of what he did involved punishments. He believed that provisions made available at Ngapura School were 'pretty much the strategies that most schools use'. He felt frustrated that the students he termed as 'at risk' made up 5% of the whole school population yet he estimated that 40–50% of his day was spent with 'at risk' children. He saw this as an inequitable use of his time, deflecting from teaching and learning, but that at end of the day someone had to do it.

When explaining the school behaviour management system, the principal said that when children reach step five the system specified suspension, but actually it was a stand-down. As he explained:

Stand-down is not a good term to use with the kids coz it's sort of, 'Hey so what, it's just a couple of days off'.

(Interview, Principal, Ngapura School, September 2006)

TK however did not see his five-day stand-down as a couple of days off. He was left to navigate five days with an extremely angry mother, who had to take five days off work

because of it. Stand-downs, introduced to the New Zealand education system in July 1999, were deemed a short-term measure. The stated rationale was that stand-downs allow the school, students and their families time to evaluate the problems that have arisen and determine how to prevent recurrence, and that students can then return to their schooling (Ministry of Education, 2005). Again, the margin between theory and practice, in terms of how the Act is followed through in the everyday school environment, was the space these students got trapped in. I sensed that TK, in his presentation as a very polite, calm and an engaging child, was just trying to manage teachers and peers in the best way he was able, by remaining silent. The question was, would his measured approach be enough to keep him in school?

TK's story suggests that it is not necessarily the level of sanction placed on a student that impacts on their self-image, but how they come to make sense and make meaning of the labels assigned to them. This story highlighted how children can be rendered silent because of bullying. Unlike Hoani, Tama and Crystal, who verbalised and reacted with anger, and got removed from the school they viewed as oppressive, TK remained silent but it appeared that this response could be equally dangerous. TK's experience of primary school showed what happened when a young person was silenced by their peers, school personnel, other adults and indeed themselves. The reasons for his silence were complex. The outcome remained the same as the other students in this study: he was stood down and placed on the final step of the behaviour management programme operating in the school.

CHAPTER FIVE:

DISCUSSION, INTERPRETATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

When reading these students' stories it would be easy to slip into the trap of assigning blame to the child, or their whānau, or the school, or teachers, but these narratives should challenge us to see the real problem with new eyes. They suggest that schools are failing our young people and only do so for political, social and economic reasons – concepts our tamariki have little care for. Critical theory encourages us to ask, 'Why is it that most disciplinary exclusions are experienced by students who have the greatest needs?' I take the discussions surrounding the contested purposes of schooling as the starting point, to help us understand the reasons (Baker, 1998). The students' stories allow us to gain an understanding of the lived realities of being told by a school that no one wants you, that you are bad.

It was all too easy for me to engage in old thinking throughout the writing of this thesis, as I was surrounded by reams of paper reinforcing deficit theory. As Trueba et al. (1989) remind us, the child deficit models have influenced much of the professional thinking and action within our schools. This model ascribes a school's failure to the deficits that a child brings to school, and not the total context within which a child lives and functions.

This study proposes that it is the students exposed to such practices, and their whānau, who can provide new understandings of what happens to students and why. While stand-down, suspension and exclusion legislation remains in place, I wonder how it is possible for young people to ever be heard. Framing the problem within student deficit discourse prohibits the possibility of critiquing and exploring alternative explanations. Critical theory, with its understanding of the way schools operate as sites of social and cultural reproduction, and Kaupapa Māori research open a space where deficit thinking is currently being challenged (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Macfarlane, 2004; Smith, 1990).

In 2000 when student engagement data first became available from the Ministry of Education, 20% of stand-downs and suspensions occurred in primary school. As at the end of 2007 the proportion was nearly 30%. The figures will inevitably keep rising if educationalists continue to work within child deficit models to find explanations for what is happening in our schools. If we really want to understand and discover what happens when we construct students as 'at risk', then listening to these young people's stories, and understanding the effects of disciplinary exclusions for both them and their whānau, is a valuable place to start.

What is evidenced by these students' stories is the enormity of the damage that schools inflict by framing and labelling them as deviant, dangerous and dysfunctional. When schools focus only on a student's challenging behaviour rather than on their potential, resiliency and strengths, that behaviour will continue and, as national data indicate, will only get worse. These students refuse to be silenced when faced with racist, hostile and uncaring teachers. We live in a rapidly changing world, one where schools will continue to be challenged by students, and indeed whānau, if we do not start working together in genuine partnership. Poststructuralist thinking helped me to understand that power is constantly moving; it is fluid, mutating and certainly not just evidenced from a top-down hierarchy (Ellsworth, 1997; Fine, 1991; Foucault, 1990).

Some key themes were repeated and evidenced across the students' narratives, regardless of whether the student had received one or a multitude of disciplinary exclusions. This chapter discusses the themes arising from the experiences of the students, their whānau and caregivers, schools and the Ministry of Education. The issues, causes and solutions offered by school personnel and the Ministry of Education include discussion of the current initiatives being offered to address what is seen as the problem, as defined by the state. This chapter starts with the students' voices, and their perception of solutions that could help to change how we view, deal with and remove students who refuse to be silenced or controlled by adults – that is, by teachers who the students perceive as hostile, racist, and motivated by agendas that have little to do with educating students.

The issues raised by the students include: the significance of the relationship between student and teacher; the impact of racism; the damage caused by labelling students as 'at risk'; and the impact of bullying at school by peers, teachers and other adults, resulting in their sense of voicelessness. The length of time that students are excluded from schools also impacts enormously on students' perception of schools and school personnel. The compounding effect of numerous exclusions is student alienation and disengagement from school, confirmed by the perception that no one cares and no one listens. What is clear is that disciplinary exclusions do not meet the purpose of the legislation. The students in this study became angry, aggrieved, silenced, hurt, non-communicative and distressed to the point that one student contemplated suicide by the age of 10.

The key issues discussed by the caregivers centred on the lack of support from, access to and follow-through from external agencies, at the time when those caregivers most needed help. They also shared a sense of powerlessness, reflected in unequal power relationships between home and school, experiences of racism and the implication that the problem lay at home, with the result that they felt constantly judged by school site personnel. When primary-aged students are excluded from school, whānau are also deeply affected – financially, emotionally and most importantly in their relationship with their child. The long-term effect is that caregivers, like their children, come to see the purpose and role of school and schooling in a different light.

The issue is fraught with complexities as schools and Ministry of Education try to grapple with the problem that low decile schools are facing. School personnel feel unsupported, particularly by the Ministry and associated external agencies. They are under-resourced, under-served and concerned about the way ‘at risk’ students are shunted from one low-decile, non-zoned school to the next. Because of the energy and resourcing required to maintain and work with students who are critical of a system they have been thrown out of, schools refuse to deal with high needs students, and use alternative practices such as kiwi suspensions.

More schools are adopting ‘zero tolerance’ policies. One such school has, Riverbank Primary, whose stance has resulted in 32 students being exposed to disciplinary exclusion. The aim of zero tolerance, as suggested by the principal of Riverbank Primary, is to give a loud and clear message that disruptive behaviour will not be tolerated under any circumstances (Morrison & D’Incau, 1997; Skiba & Peterson 2000; The Civil Rights Project, 2000). The adoption of such policies has directly contributed to the rising number of exclusions and leaves virtually no space for students to give voice to the circumstances that may have resulted in an incident. TK highlighted the damage done when teachers ‘only see what they want to see, not what really happens’ (Interview, TK, September 2006).

The Ministry of Education appears to be oblivious to the voices of schools, caregivers and the general public, all of whom argue that schools are under-resourced and under-served, particularly low-decile schools. The Ministry, in contrast, states the problems and solutions are issues that need to be addressed by the schools themselves – the problem is in the classroom, so the schools must provide the solutions.

The Group Special Education district officer interviewed for this project believed educators were often ill equipped to meet the needs of Māori students in this rapidly changing society. The Ministry initiatives designed to support greater student engagement, and currently being implemented under School Plus, only pertain to high school students.

The Ministry of Education development officer stated that no plans, initiatives or support packages that specifically target primary-aged students are available.

WHOSE VOICE COUNTS?

Teachers know that they can boss you around and stuff because they know that you're scared. If you sit there and try and be all confident, try and pretend that you're up there with them or something, they decide that they don't like you and they got to try and push you down.

(Interview, Crystal, September 2006)

A clear message from these students' stories is about the relationship established between the student and the teacher. Students' work, attitude to school and achievement levels increase in classes where students feel liked, accepted and respected by the teacher (Lewis, 1996). While research highlighting the importance of teacher–student relationships abounds, the translation of that theory into practice has not worked well in the experiences of these students. There is an obvious discrepancy between what teachers believe are effective strategies and what they actually practise (Nolen & Nicholls, 1994).

The students' stories highlight the lived experiences of the difference between theory and the reality of what happens inside classrooms. Each of the students interviewed stated that they knew on their first day in a new classroom whether the teacher would be supportive or would discredit them. Regardless of what was happening in their lives outside of school, these students remained in schools when they had a teacher who cared. But they have all had a significant number of teachers who they perceived as not wanting them or as not wanting to accommodate them in their classroom. Teachers singled these students out. Some teachers even had less favourable attitudes towards boys than towards girls, unless of course they were girls like Crystal. The teachers appeared to view passivity and silence as highly prized

attributes in the classrooms and playgrounds of most of these students. From these students' stories it would appear that it was not their behaviour that caused the disciplinary exclusions, but their refusal to be silenced or remain passive when exposed to ineffective, hostile and/or racist teachers. Once they realised they were targeted, all of these students found strategies to ensure their expedient removal.

Making a Difference in the Classroom, a research report contracted by the Ministry of Education in 2000, highlights effective teaching practices in low-decile, multicultural schools. The Achievement in Multicultural High Schools (AIMHI) project was set up to raise the achievement levels of Māori and Pacific Islands students in low-decile secondary schools (Hill & Hawk, 2000). The research, which began in 1996, identified classroom-based practices and effective teaching strategies used in classrooms. The research supports what the students in this study already intrinsically know.

One of the most important dimensions to the relationship is the respect the teachers have for the students. If a teacher has not been able to form a positive relationship of reciprocal respect the students in that class will find it very, very difficult to be motivated to learn. (Hill & Hawk, 2000, p. 7)

The students in the AIMHI project described attributes that they saw as intrinsic to positive relationships, based on notions of reciprocity. They identified teachers that students valued because they were positive, optimistic, confident and hard-working and created a sense of urgency and purpose in their classrooms. The students felt these teachers were not afraid to share power with students and worked hard to divest the locus of control to students rather than keeping it all to themselves. It was the norm in these classrooms that behaviour issues were handled in a quiet, non-confrontational way. The students also noted that the use of humour is of great importance (Hill & Hawk, 2000).

This Ministry-funded research identified certain attitudes and behaviours of teachers that destroyed relationships and had a negative impact that reached much more widely than their learning (Hill & Hawk, 2000). The attributes that the high school students in the AIMHI project listed as impacting negatively on them included racism, hostility, not listening and making students feel scared. Lazy teachers, angry teachers and teachers that did not get to know the student were also identified as problematic.

As noted in Chapter Four, the students in this study had many of the same issues with teachers, as well as sharing the experience of diminished motivation, confidence and self esteem. However, unlike high school students who have different teachers for each class, primary-aged students have to deal with their teacher day in and day out.

Issues of ethnicity, class and gender further complicate teacher–student relationships. The focus for my research was to explore, share and critique the experiences of Māori primary-aged students. Hoani and TK both positively viewed their experiences when they were situated in bilingual classrooms with teachers they felt cared. However 91% of Māori students attend mainstream classes and their experiences reflect both the social and cultural reproduction evident in school sites. The fact that Māori students are three times more likely to be exposed to disciplinary exclusion does not arise in isolation. Rather, issues pertaining to Māori students reflect how Māori experience society in general.

Māori continue to have restricted access to markets, especially housing, employment and education (Bevan-Brown, 2000; Bishop, 1996; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Jones et al., 1995; Macfarlane, 2004; Shuker, 1987; Simon, 2002; G. Smith, 1990; L. Smith, 1992). Research undertaken on Māori educational issues not only highlights the danger of equating cultural difference with deficit but points out that deficit thinking is what leads teachers to negatively stereotype minority students. Māori researchers such as Bishop, Glynn and Macfarlane strongly advocate fostering culturally responsive teaching and teachers. The Educultural Wheel, designed by Macfarlane (2004), suggests the key to achieving cultural competence in the classroom centres on four areas: Whanaungatanga (Building Relationships), Manaakitanga (Ethic of Caring), Rangatiratanga (Teacher Effectiveness) and Kotahitanga (Ethic of Bonding).

Another framework that responds to inequities and offers alternatives to mainstream knowledge is the Pounamu Framework, developed by Durie (1994), Pere (1991), Reedy (1993), Macfarlane (2004) and Glynn Cowie, Otel-Cass and Macfarlane (2008). These prominent Māori researchers offer alternative models based on Māori epistemologies that challenge Eurocentric, middle-class beliefs and practices (Howitt & Bempah, 1994). The impact of racism on mental health is discussed by Kamaldeep Bhui (2002), who insightfully points out:

Racism is pretty much endemic to the human condition, however, where racism pervades public institutions, and where these institutions are invested with power then there is potential for systematic bias in the way particular non-represented groups are handled by these institutions (Bhui, 2002, p. 101).

It is institutionalised racism that these students and their whānau see as the explanation for why Māori are more likely to be excluded from school and goes some way to explaining the lack of support for their reintegration. The suffering caused by racism impacts deeply on the lives of Māori whānau. These students navigate the challenges of a schooling system that appears to privilege the white middle classes, framing Māori students as failures. Schools claim to be inclusive, culturally responsive environments where diversity is valued. What is evident from these young people's stories is that the rhetoric and policies are not reflected in schooling practices, as students discover once they are inside the school gates. The findings in this thesis reflect those of international studies showing that minority students are most likely to be exposed to disciplinary exclusions (Parsons, 1999).

While we continue to have legislation that allows young people to be excluded from education, then we will also continue to have students who will challenge the system and refuse to be bullied or silenced. The key focus of this study has been to uncover the impact and lived realities of being framed as unsalvageable. What these students tell us is that when exposed to disciplinary exclusion even once, the result is low self-esteem and a change in attitude towards teachers and schools due to mistrust and anger, resulting in alienation and stress. The real damage and lifelong effects of being told you are worthless are intensified every time a child is excluded from school, as illuminated by the experiences of Crystal, Hoani and TK.

ISSUES RAISED BY THE CAREGIVERS

The consistent issue raised by all four caregivers in this study was the lack of support and follow-through on promises made by schools and government agencies such as CYF, Group Special Education and the Ministry of Education. At a time when caregivers felt they most needed support, it was not available. All expressed their frustration at the repeated unavailability of staff from these agencies, making it impossible to access help from

anywhere. If and when help was made available, either it was too late as their child had been out of school for up to six months, or the solutions offered were not followed through.

The impact of these experiences with government agencies was a growing sense of alienation, anger and mistrust of those agencies. Some caregivers suggested that the lack of support was intentional as schools would not want their child anyway. Issues regarding the reintegration of their child after suspension were rarely addressed due to the unavailability of staff from the different sections within the Ministry, as well as the high staff turnover, as perceived by caregivers.

The caregivers felt a sense of powerlessness, unable to engage with schools or be an advocate for their child so they were genuinely heard. As with the students, the caregivers found alternative ways to exercise agency, ranging from withdrawing their child completely from school until support was put in place, shifting their child to another school, and sitting in class with their child. Those who chose to stay and fight for their child's rights feared how they were perceived by staff and the impact this would have on their child later.

Certainly schools were not places that these caregivers felt safe or comfortable to share the realities of their life. The schools either had no idea of the issues families were facing, or chose to ignore them. Backing up the experience of the caregivers in this study, Overton's (1995) study revealed that school personnel knew very little about what was actually going on in families' lives, inclusive of issues that impact enormously on students' lives, such as death in a family.

The Māori caregivers I interviewed felt that institutionalised racism was evident in both the policy and practices of school sites, regardless of which school their child attended. Their analysis was based on their experiences of dealing with schools, Ministry of Education, Group Special Education and external agencies such as CYF. One parent felt particularly aggrieved that every single professional sent to work with her and her son was Pākehā. She too believed that her son was kept out of school because he was Māori, and that no action was followed up or taken because he was not deemed a priority. She suggested that Māori students are framed as having a deficit by schools and these understandings largely determine what happens to them.

I just think they pin Māori kids as naughty straight away, and look for anything, any way to get rid of them.

(Interview, Tama's mother, September 2006)

Another issue caregivers felt impacted on Māori engagement in mainstream schools was the lack of Māori personnel, including male Māori trackers. Māori caregivers felt there were often no Māori role models in schools and certainly not at management level, where disciplinary exclusion decisions are made. Students acknowledged that Pākehā teachers and Māori teachers differed considerably in their view of students; however, they did not care if staff were Māori or non-Māori – it was the teacher's attitude towards them that they considered the most important factor in terms of whether they remained in a class or not.

Another issue that was common to the caregivers, with the exception of Maru and Wini who were foster parents, was that they felt judged by school personnel, Ministry and external agencies. Contradicting studies such as Biddulph et al. (2003) that blame dysfunctional parenting as the reason for students' perceived maladjustment, all four caregivers in this study certainly did not match these stereotypical profiles. The caregivers in this study were all intelligent, caring, organised and hard-working adults. All three biological parents were in paid employment and two were completing study towards a diploma, one in nursing and the other in social work. Having their child out of school for months meant two caregivers were forced to give up full-time work and their study.

All the caregivers said that disciplinary exclusion had a toll on their relationship with their child. Rather than blaming the child, parents viewed the problem as the school's inability to meet the needs of their child. They felt judged by schools, and felt that schools blamed them for their child's perceived difficult behaviour. It never occurred to me as a principal that there are serious implications for caregivers when students are stood down, suspended or excluded. When the problem is seen as the child and the problem is then removed, little thought is given to the impact on the caregivers. Single parents work extremely hard to meet the needs of their child, so losing their job, ceasing their study and putting their career on hold have serious implications for everyone.

There is now a substantial body of research that suggests children who are most 'at risk' of subsequent offending as adults are those who have a history of serious behaviour problems in

their childhood years (Church, 1994, 1997; Patterson, Debaryshe & Ramsay, 1997). The data from these studies lead to the conclusion that the existence of behaviour problems during the school years is one of the strongest predictors of later adolescent offending. Critical theory would suggest that it is through labelling these students and framing them using practices such as disciplinary exclusion that we create a self-fulfilling prophecy (Izard et al., 2002).

The caregivers want their child to be engaged in learning and fear for their future as a result of the exclusion. The longer these students remain out of school, the more the caregivers become angry, disengaged and disillusioned about an education system that allows children as young as nine to be left waiting for support.

THE SCHOOLS' POINT OF VIEW

The issues from the schools' perspective also centre on support and follow-up from government agencies. Schools were critical of the length of time it took to access support packages from the Ministry of Education. They discussed the impact of Tomorrow's Schools, the current legislation on stand-downs, suspensions and exclusions, kiwi suspensions and school zoning.

Both schools in this study were required to rewrite behaviour plans and policies, resulting in large numbers of students being stood down or suspended. There were also restrictions placed on the number of hours some students are allowed to attend school each day, as a direct result of Education Review Office findings. Both principals felt that disciplinary exclusion was positive and necessary, as it sent a clear message that students' challenging behaviour would not be tolerated, and they did not hesitate to exclude large numbers of students from their own school. The principals then felt aggrieved and angry at the number of excluded students the Ministry enrolled in their schools, without seeing any correlation between these enrolments and their own contribution to the problem.

The chairpersons from these two school sites contrasted in their views of their role and responsibilities and in their understandings of the problem. In one school the chairperson felt that disciplinary exclusion was a management issue not a governance issue and they had little to do with the process other than to support the principal's decisions. The Māori chairperson in the other school believed every child deserved another chance, due to her personal

understanding of how disciplinary exclusion can have lifelong consequences. She had overturned the principal's decision to suspend on many occasions and supported students to remain in schools by meeting with them daily and empowering their whānau to access support from Māori agencies.

Both principals discussed kiwi suspensions as a cause of stress. Although they both said they did not condone kiwi suspensions, each gave a clear message to their students that if they did not like the rules and regulations of the school they were welcome to find another one. Both schools had asked certain students to stay at home to provide 'time out' for school staff. This measure is just as problematic as a suspension as the student is still excluded from receiving an education.

As shared by the students in this research, being forced to stay at home results in a sense of alienation from the classroom, and often further punishments await at home, impacting on the relationship between the child and their caregiver. Kiwi suspensions also conceal from the public data on the actual number of students being excluded from schools each year. Riverbank Primary allows only limited access to education for students who have been suspended, resulting in some students falling behind academically. These types of practices violate the Education Act, which guarantees the right of every child in New Zealand to have access to education.

The chairperson of Ngapura School saw the growing number of students exposed to disciplinary exclusions as resulting from schools simply not wanting to deal with students framed as 'at risk'. She believed some schools use kiwi suspensions to make sure their school has a clean record with the Ministry and the public. She believed further that teachers do not like Māori kids who stand up for their rights, but that it is now time for teachers and schools to change and begin to work in more genuine partnership with whānau.

The school personnel from both schools and the caregivers criticised the Ministry of Education for the lack of support, timeframes, staff availability, funding and resourcing for students labelled as 'at risk'.

THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION'S POINT OF VIEW

Research issues explored with Ministry of Education personnel, inclusive of Group Special Education, centred on how these personnel balance the needs and rights of every student to be in a school, the rights of school staff to a safe workplace, and parents' legal right for their children to receive an education.

All initiatives discussed by the Ministry pertained to secondary schools. Research-based initiatives used to support Māori engagement in schools, such as the Kotahitanga project, the Student Reduction Initiative, School Plus and restorative justice training, are offered to and funded for secondary schools. The Ministry development officer discussed the impact of Bishop's (1996) research; however, she explained this model was only being offered in secondary schools, and was mainly confined to the North Island. She did not think research had been done yet to answer why Māori are more likely to be suspended, stood down or excluded for schools than their Pākehā peers.

When the Ministry of Education heralded a reduction in stand-downs, suspensions and exclusions in New Zealand in the latest report for 2007, it failed to discuss the increased number of primary-aged students exposed to disciplinary exclusion. Closer investigation of the data reveals alternative reasons to account for the apparent decreases. Specifically in 2007 the number of early leaving exemptions dramatically reduced because the Ministry declined nearly half of the applications (Ministry of Education, 2008e). Moreover, although there was a significant reduction in disciplinary exclusions in Student Engagement Initiative (SEI) schools being supported by the Ministry, in 2007 there was an overall increase in the number of schools using stand-downs, suspensions and exclusions (Ministry of Education, 2008e). These figures suggest that the problem is not being addressed by the Ministry and is actually getting worse.

Research by Parsons (1999) shows the trends in New Zealand were also found in England. 'While the rate for primary school exclusions is accelerating, the rate for secondary school exclusions is decreasing' (Parsons, 1999, p. 24).

The latest initiatives discussed by the Ministry development officer include reform to the truancy services and early prosecution of parents whose children are labelled as truant. A

computerised data-based system became operational, and is compulsory, in every school by the end of 2007 to ensure that the Ministry of Education can track every school-aged child in New Zealand. This system, the development officer argued, will ensure automatic referrals to Non Enrolment Truancy Services (NETS) for non-enrolled students. The Student Development and Data Exchange (SEDEX) project focuses on reducing schools' administration costs and time as well as allowing quality sharing between schools, the Ministry and education sector agencies (Ministry of Education, 2008a).

The next stage of development for this national database is to include daily attendance registers electronically so that students' attendance at school can be monitored, not by the school, but by the Ministry. This system will allow the Ministry instant access to details needed in order to prosecute families whose children are not attending school, for whatever reason. Ministry policy states:

Best practice suggests that a clear policy statement on attendance, coupled with the associated procedures on attendance management and truancy, leads to better student achievement, higher retention figures, community well-being, less youth crime and more positive life outcomes for students. The Attendance Codes 2008 are aimed at providing schools and the Minister with greater detail on student absence, to reduce truancy. From 2008 schools are able to record the reasons for student absences and to analyze that information (in terms of individual students, cohorts of students, and groups based on ethnicity, gender, age, etc.; and in terms of absence from specific lessons or at specific times of the day, or days of the week, etc. (Ministry of Education, 2008e)

When students are excluded from schools, the development officer supports more informal discussions between local schools in order to negotiate a better fit between the student and the school. This approach is problematic, first, when the Ministry personnel do not meet with the students, or their whānau, to learn which type of school the student would 'best fit'. Secondly, a system of informal placements, rather than one in which the Ministry issues a directive for a school to immediately enrol an excluded student, seems at odds with the aims and purpose of the 1989 Act. It also means students such as Hoani and Tama remain out of school for months on end which places them at greater risk of failure. It is clearly not just the exclusion that

causes such damage to these students but its impact grows with the length of time that students are excluded from attending school.

Group Special Education provides for learners with disabilities and learning difficulties, communication or behavioural difficulties or sensory/physical impediments. Three per cent of all school students are defined as having high needs. From 2000 students with physical and intellectual disabilities have had to compete for resourcing and money with student identified as having high needs because of learning and/or behavioural issues. The Pouwhakarewa Mātauranga said she was the only Māori on a team of 25 in this region's local office, tasked with addressing the needs of whānau with special needs or behavioural needs.

The GSE advisor had a number of ideas, strategies and indeed challenges for what schools, families and the Ministry could be doing to support the engagement of Māori students in schools. However, if we continue to look for solutions by focusing solely on behaviours, regardless of whether they are the student's or the teacher's behaviours, we fail to see the big picture: the contested purposes of schooling that all of the students and their whānau in this study had to negotiate. The GSE advisor advocated and promoted Māori research-based models including Mason Durie's (1994) Te Whare Tapa Whā framework.

WHY ARE MĀORI STUDENTS MORE LIKELY TO BE EXPOSED TO DISCIPLINARY EXCLUSION THAN PĀKEHĀ STUDENTS?

This was the one question many participants in this research struggled to answer. The Ministry of Education development officer, the school principals and the chairperson of Riverbank Primary said they did not know the answer. They offered analysis suggesting a link between Māori students' behaviour in schools and the impact of TV, computer games and music videos that they perceived as glorifying an American gangster mentality. These ideologies run the risk of reinforcing child deficit theory to account for the behaviours students exhibit.

All four adult Māori participants – two caregivers, the Group Special Education Pouwhakarewa Mātauranga and the chairperson of Ngapura School – discussed the impact of racism and colonisation as the reasons why Māori students are more likely to be excluded in New Zealand schools. They also offered creative and positive ideas on how whānau, schools

and the Ministry of Education could start addressing the problem. The solutions offered by these Māori participants encompassed a more genuine partnership based on Treaty principles from the ground floor up – a partnership that included the Ministry of Education.

The principals of both schools were critical of the impact of zones, which in essence guarantee that high needs students are moved from one low-decile school and placed in another until there are no further alternatives. LaRocque (2005) suggests that the abolition of school zoning would be one way of providing families with increased choice in schooling. He cites research carried out by the Smithfield Project in New Zealand, which showed that the biggest beneficiaries of the removal of zoning in the early 1990s were Māori and Pacific families. The Smithfield Project research showed that Māori and Pacific families, not Pākehā, were the ones who responded the most to the removal of zoning. Both of these groups were more likely than Pākehā to attend out of zone schools after zoning was removed.

The Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) warns that the situation is getting worse: Tomorrow's Schools has created a culture of competition and mistrust and a distinctly two-tiered system of schooling. The PPTA recently called for an independent inquiry into the Tomorrow's Schools policy because it believes there has been a systematic polarisation of schools along ethnic and socio-economic lines, which it suggests is a result not so much of white flight as of middle-class flight (Union takes swipe at New Zealand education, 2007). However, this focus on middle class flight potentially renders Māori invisible, yet again. Research suggests that white flight moves past simple stereotypes, to explore the meaning of white resistance (Avila, 2006; Kruse, 2005). Kruse (2005, p. 10) suggests white resistance 'gave birth to several new conservative causes, like the tax revolt, tuition vouchers, and privatization of public services'.

Critical theory and research literature argue that one of the principal functions of schooling is to reproduce the hierarchical relations between different groups or classes. Certainly the effects of colonisation and institutionalised racism are part of the reason for the disproportionate number of Māori students being excluded from education in New Zealand.

The contested purpose of disciplinary exclusions clearly is not being met. What this research shows is that such practices can have lifelong implications for both the student and their whānau. If the desired aim and purpose of such practices are not being met, then we need to

ask why we continue to use it and who benefits from its implementation. How we view the current problem facing our schools will be dependent on the lens we employ. Labelling kids as dangerous, deviant and out of control merely adds to the problem. The students in this study presented as vivacious, intelligent and polite – and also as deeply damaged because of the message they received from schools.

Jones et al. (1995) argue that trying to understand the processes, principles, practices and outcomes of state schooling in New Zealand is problematic. Critical analysis of the history and function of schooling, inclusive of Kaupapa Māori frameworks, has been helpful to theorise about how and why schools identify, justify and legitimise who is to be included and who is not. The problems we face as a nation are universal problems associated with power relationships, and the definition and control of knowledge. Jones et al. (1995) advocate that as educators we have a responsibility to explore the difference between the realities and the myth that exists within the current educational model. In order to explore the difference between the realities and the myth, we need to be talking to the very people most affected by schools' disciplinary practices. Disciplinary exclusions result in the removal of thousands of students every year as punishment for not obeying school rules; rules designed and implemented by the dominant culture. It is from these students' stories that we need to find the courage to say enough is enough.

Although schools and caregivers see it as the Ministry of Education's responsibility to ensure fulfilment of the Education Act, the Ministry sees it as the schools' and caregivers' responsibility. How the legislation is constructed, interpreted and enacted varies dramatically among these three parties involved in the education partnership. School personnel feel unsupported by the Ministry and overloaded with the bureaucratic paper war that stops them from focusing on the job they are paid to do. All four school personnel were critical of the Ministry's lack of resourcing and failure to provide support in engaging all students in schools. However, school personnel also failed to see the relationship of their own school policy to practices that alienate students and their whānau. When principals decide amongst themselves which students are salvageable and which are not, it places the needs of the school as more important than the legal right of every child to receive an education.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

There is no time for blame: young people's lives and futures are at stake. Instead, it is clearly time to listen and as adults reflect on our role within this complex issue. The GSE Pouwhakarewa Mātauranga saw the responsibility as belonging to no single group or individual, but rather to everyone, including the student. Critical theory would suggest that it is the labelling of these students and framing them through practices such as disciplinary exclusion that creates a self-fulfilling prophecy (Izard et al., 2002).

This research provided a unique and exciting opportunity for primary-aged Māori students to tell their stories, the stories that are currently missing in discussions of 'the problem' of students' behaviour, resulting in increased numbers of students being exposed to disciplinary exclusions. What is missing in discussions surrounding the problem in primary schools, within both national and international research studies, is the voice of the very people experiencing the implementation of the Education Amendment Act (No. 21) 1998.

From the Minister of Education through to the teachers' union, everyone has publicly expressed their ongoing concerns about what they perceive is the issue of having to manage students behaviour inside schools. However, this research provides a new window from which to view a very different reality: a window offered by the very students that educationalists are all talking about, the students they frame as so violent and out of control they have to be removed from school.

What is obvious from talking to all the parties involved in disciplinary exclusions is that the aims and purpose of the Education Amendment Act (No. 21) 1998, in terms of the provisions that allow schools to exclude students, are not being met. It is critical that students' voices are central to discussions that could potentially lead to transformative education models, where everyone involved in the partnership has a voice and is listened to.

There is an enormous gap in current research in terms of studies that place students' experiences, knowledge and realities at centre stage. In order to know what it is that students want and need to be successful, and reach their potential, we all need to listen to what they have to tell us. There is an exciting opportunity, and a need, for longitudinal research to study the long-term impact on students' lives when exposed to exclusion at primary school. It would

be useful to research teachers' views and understandings of the issues their students, particularly high needs students, face.

While we continue to exclude these students, literally and figuratively, from such conversations, little will change. Teachers, principals, Ministry of Education personnel and whānau need to welcome and be open to hearing what these students tell us, in order for genuine transformatory models to be available and negotiated with and by students, schools and caregivers. Knowledge and understanding of Māori worldviews will support teachers and educators to understand the real problem and to find genuine solutions. In the meantime, there will be another 7,000 primary-aged students like Hoani, Tama, TK and Crystal being excluded from primary schools next year.

Ka titiro anganui tonu atu ki te ao kei mua,
Engari, kia mōhiotia ai e ngā pēhia ana tātou,
Kia mahara i ahu mai tātou i hea.

Live not in the past; look forward to the future,
But in order to know where we are going
It is well to look back to see where we have been.

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APPENDIX ONE:
**INFORMATION SHEET TO ALL PARTICIPANTS – STUDENTS, THEIR
CAREGIVERS, AND THE SCHOOLS**

Annie Bowden

Christchurch

(Phone and email address provided)

Project Title:

**So what's really changed? Lived experiences of Schools disciplinary
practices on primary-aged Maori students.**

Lessons Learned.

Letter for potential research participants / narrators and whanau

Kia ora te whanau,

I am a Masters of Education student currently at the University of Canterbury. As part of completing this degree I am working in the area of Maori Education, I am looking at primary school age students involved in stand downs, suspensions and exclusions in ----- Schools. I am specifically interested in understanding the impact / effect of this process on Maori pupils and their whanau, and their further engagement in the education system.

I want our tamariki to have an opportunity to really talk about what it feels like to be stood down, suspended or excluded from a school. I would like you and your whanau to be involved in this project by talking about the impact, both short term and long term, and effect on your whanau after being engaged in this process.

I would also like to find ways we could be doing things differently in our schools', from the perspective of our children.

The focus of the interviews will be you and your experiences of the stand down, suspension and exclusion process. The interview would take two approximately two hours. Those who agree to be interviewed can withdraw from the project at any time, and, if this happens all information given during the interviews will be returned.

I would be happy to explain the project to your whanau and answer any questions about this research before you consider taking part. The second meeting is expected to be the main interview in which your story is told.

The final meeting of the project will take place once you have had an opportunity to read the draft narratives, the story you have told. The final version will be available in February 2007.

I would prefer to audio tape the interviews however you may be assured of complete confidentiality of data / information gathered in this study. The project results may be published however, the identity of participants will not be made public and to ensure anonymity and confidentiality code names will be used for the student and whanau. All data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet inside the School of Education, which is also locked. At the conclusion of the study all data will be shredded and audiotapes returned to participants.

I would like to interview students and their whanau at a time and place to be negotiated by you. I am happy to meet you together as a group or individually, which ever suits your whanau.

Dr Baljit Kaur and Dr Kathleen Quinlivan at the University of Canterbury, who can be contacted by email at, are supervising the research project
baljit.kaur@canterbury.ac.nz and/or kathleen.quinlivan@canterbury.ac.nz or phone 366 7001
. They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about your participation in the project.

The project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

If you agree to participate this would help my understanding of the effects of disciplinary policy on children and I would treat this information as a toanga. I would also require your

written consent. A copy of the consent form has been included and copies will be provided so that they may be retained by you.

Thank you for the time taken to consider this request for your participation.

Yours sincerely,

Annie Bowden
Masters Research Student

Education 695 : Masters of Education Dissertation

Consent Form for Caregivers and Students

I have read and understood the description of the project. On this basis I agree to our school participating in the project, and I consent to publication of the results, with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from the research project, including withdrawal of any information that I have provided.

Signed..... (Caregiver/s)

Date

Signed..... (Student)

Date

Information sheet for Board of Trustees and School Principal

Annie Bowden
Christchurch
(Phone and email address provided)

Project Title:
**So what's really changed? Lived experiences of Schools disciplinary
practices on primary-aged Maori students.**
Lessons Learned.

I am a Masters of Education student currently at the University of Canterbury. As part of completing this degree I am working in the area of Maori Education, I am looking at primary school age students involved in stand downs, suspensions and exclusions in ----- Schools. I am specifically interested in understanding the impact / effect of this process on Maori pupils and their whanau, and their further engagement in the education system.

As a Principal of a Christchurch Primary school I am aware there has been an increase in the number of primary aged pupils being excluded both locally and nationally from primary schools. I would like to discuss this further as I am interested in the current issues facing primary school Principals and I would expect this to take approximately an hour and a half.

As part of the research I may need to talk to other school personnel involved in the stand down, suspension and exclusion process, for example, a Board member or a students teacher. Specific permission from each participant will be sought separately.

I would also need access to your school's policies / procedures and any relevant documents used in the stand down, suspension and exclusion process in your school.

Your school is invited to participate in this research project.

If you agree to your school being involved, I would prefer to audio tape the interviews with the Principal and school personnel, however you may be assured of complete confidentiality of data / information gathered in this study. The project results may be published however the identity of participants will not be made public and to ensure anonymity and confidentiality code names will be used for the principal and your school. All data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet inside the School of Education.

At the conclusion of the study all data will be shredded and audiotapes returned to participants.

I am happy to meet with your Board of Trustees to explain the project and answer any questions about the research.

Dr Baljit Kaur and Dr Kathleen Quinlivan at the University of Canterbury, who can be contacted by email at, are supervising the research project

baljit.kaur@canterbury.ac.nz and / or kathleen.quinlivan@canterbury.ac.nz or phone 366 7001. They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about your participation in the project. The project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

In order to proceed I require your written consent. A copy of the consent form has been included and copies will be provided so that they may be retained by you.

Thank you for the time taken to consider this request for your participation.

Yours sincerely,

Annie Bowden

Masters Research Student

Education 695 : Masters of Education Dissertation

Consent Form

I have read and understood the description of the project. On this basis I agree to our school participating in the project, and I consent to publication of the results, with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from the research project, including withdrawal of any information that I have provided.

Signed..... (Principal)

Date

Signed.....(Board of Trustees)

Date

APPENDIX TWO:

INTERVIEW GUIDELINE QUESTIONS

Informal Research Questions:

Students and Caregivers

School Principal and Chairperson

Ministry of Education and Special Education

Questions for Students

How did you feel about your first day at school?

Can you tell me about your early experiences at school?

What do you enjoy about school?

What teachers do you remember fondly? What is your picture of a good teacher?

What was your first disciplinary exclusion for?

What was happening for you at this time and did you discuss the incident with the Principal, teacher or your caregiver?

Did you receive the information from the school informing you of your rights? Did the principal meet with you after the disciplinary exclusion?

How did you feel about being excluded from your school?

How did feel about returning to your school?

What impact did the disciplinary exclusion have on your family?

What supports were put into place from the school before disciplinary exclusion?

What was happening for you at this time?

Did you receive the information from the school informing you of your rights? Did the principal meet with you after the disciplinary exclusion?

What impact has it had on the family now?

What chance did you have to discuss what happened - i.e. their side of the story?

Did you feel listened to?

What happened next?

What alternative to disciplinary exclusions do you think the school could have used?

What would you like to see happen when children are involved in conflict at school?

Whose responsibility is it to keep children in schools?

Why do you think there has been such an increase in the number of young children involved in disciplinary action?

Why do you think Maori children are more likely to be excluded than pakeha?

What alternatives do think could further help support student engagement in schools?

Did you receive any further disciplinary exclusions?

How do you view schools now?

If you could change one thing in schools what would it be?

Questions for Caregivers

What was your experience of school?

Why did you send your child to this particular school?

How long has your child attended their current school?

Where you involved with your child's schooling before this incident i.e. what relationship did you have with the school? (Parent help, trips etc.)

Did you know your child was having problems before the stand down letter? How many times had you met with the teacher/principal before disciplinary exclusion?

What supports were put into place from the school before disciplinary exclusion?

What was your child's disciplinary exclusion for?

What was happening for your child at this time and did you discuss the incident with the Principal?

Did you receive the information from the school informing you of your rights? Did you follow up on receiving any external support? Did the principal meet with you after the disciplinary exclusion letter or keep in touch after the first instance?

How did you feel about your child being excluded from school?

How did your child feel about being excluded from school?

What impact did the incident have on your family at the time?

What impact has it had on the family now?

What involvement have you had with social workers in school or other school support people?

How did you feel about that help? What assistance have you sought for your child?

Has the stand-downs achieved what they are meant to - a time to reflect on what has happened etc.?

What chance did your child, or you have to discuss what happened - i.e. their side of the story?

Did you feel listened to?

What happens next? Do you see things have improved for your child?

What alternative to disciplinary exclusions do you think the school could have used?

What would you like to see happen when your child is involved in conflict at school?

Do you have any other children that had been exposed to disciplinary action by schools?

Whose responsibility is it to keep children in schools?

Why do you believe there has been such an increase in the number of primary aged children involved in disciplinary action?

Maori children in our region are three times more likely to be excluded than their pakeha cohort. Why?

The key issue as quoted by Pat Newman is resourcing. He states 'the bottom line is everyone needs to be safe, we need to have money to employ people to look after them while they get help'. What is your response to this?

Principals interpreted the rising trends in disciplinary exclusions to be caused by the Government's market policy, which had put schools in competition with one another for pupils and the need for schools to promote a good image. What is your response to this?

What alternatives do you think could further help support student engagement in schools?

Questions for the Principal and Chairperson

How did you come to this position, what do you want to achieve and why?

What is the greatest stress you face as a Principal and has that changed?

What programmes do you have in place to deal with 'at risk' children?

Are these programmes successful?

How many students have you stood down, suspended or excluded during 2005/6?

How did you as Principal deal with the differing needs of everyone involved, the pupil, the whanau, staff, other pupils and Ministry?

What choices other than stand down, suspension or exclude are available to you?

What had already been put in place to support these pupils (staffing, funding, behaviour programme, whanau support etc.) before disciplinary action was taken?

Which outside agencies were involved before and during the incident resulting in disciplinary exclusion?

What involvement did you have with the whanau before during and after the? Did the whanau request or ask for representation and support during the disciplinary process?

How do you find the new legislation when dealing with exclusions? Were you able to find an alternative school for the pupils concerned?

What does your school do to engage / maintain children that have been excluded from other schools when they enrol in your school? What support is currently available?

Why do you believe there has been such an increase in the number of primary aged children involved in disciplinary action? Has the behaviours been displayed in schools changed over the past five years?

What educational responses do you think could reverse the trend of increased disciplinary actions, particularly for Maori pupils?

Maori children are three times more likely to be excluded than their Pakeha cohorts. Why?

The key issue as quoted by Pat Newman is researching. He states 'the bottom line is everyone needs to be safe, we need to have money to employ people to look after them while they get help'. What is your response to this?

Principals interpreted the rising trends in disciplinary exclusions to be caused by the Governments market policy, which had put schools in competition with one another for pupils and the need for schools to promote a good image. What is your response to this?

Where do we go from here? Whose responsibility is it at the end of the day to ensure children receive an education? Any further comments?

Questions for Ministry and Group Special Education Personnel

How did you come to this position, what do you want to achieve and why?

What is the greatest stress working within this sector?

What in initiatives and specific programmes/strategies have the Ministry put into place to help lower the number of students suspended from school, in particular what support is provided in primary schools?

Why is the number of children involved in disciplinary action increasing every year?

How does the Ministry balance the needs and rights of every pupil to be in a school, schools rights to a safe workplace and parents rights to their children receiving a free education?

What type of research or data do the MOE use to be informed about which programmes work or do not work?

The New Zealand Primary Principals' Federation Pat Newman said that schools were concerned that children were showing severe behaviour problems at younger ages. He states the problems being 'there are more dysfunctional children in society not being cared for by their own families'. What is your response to this?

The 2005 engagement report from the Ministry of Education showed 7,200 pupils were stood down or suspended for physical assault on staff or students. How many of these children per annum are directed to other schools by the Ministry and how many of these students re-integration is successful?

The key issue as quoted by Pat Newman is resourcing. He states 'the bottom line is everyone needs to be safe, we need to have money to employ people to look after them while they get help'. What is your response to this challenge?

In research by Addis (2002) Principals interpreted the rising trends in disciplinary exclusions to be caused by the Governments market policy, which had put schools in competition with one another for pupils, and the need for schools to promote a good image. What is your response to this?

Research suggests a variety of educational solutions as proposed by Principals to the problem which included :

- alternative schooling structures

- more researching for schools

- better training for teachers

- special support structures being established within schools

Ministry support in dealing with the transient nature of these pupils and

Early intervention to identify and help at risk pupils and their families.

What are your thoughts on these solutions?

With respect to exclusions, principals did not like the legislative provision of trying to find other schools to take their excluded pupils and, similarly, did not always take on other schools excluded pupils. They felt the Ministry was not taking responsibility for these pupils and that it was just transferring the problem to other schools. How does Ministry view this?

What was the purpose and or rationale for the new legislation which included stand downs?

How does the Ministry combat 'kiwi suspensions' where caregivers are asked to remove their child from a school rather than have an official stand down/suspension on the child's record?

The govt provides legislation, policy guidelines and support programmes to schools for the disciplinary exclusion process but it also puts schools in competition with one another for pupils, which affects the way in which schools deal with these seriously misbehaving pupils. The New Zealand Trustees Association President Chris Haines says the increase in stand downs and suspensions could be because schools were taking a harder line on violence. Your response?

Many principals spoke of the transient nature of at risk children. How do the Ministry know how many children are transient. Does this make the problem even more difficult to address?

Kathy Phillips states male students continue to represent the majority of stand down and suspension cases. Students aged between 13 - 15 years continue to be the most likely to be stood down. This of correlates to the time students are moving on to high school. Is there a corresponding link here, if so why and how does Ministry hope to address this issue?

Why are Maori more likely to be exposed to disciplinary exclusions than pakeha?

In our local region Maori children are three times more likely to be excluded than their pakeha cohorts. Why?

What research and researchers do the Ministry use to inform policies, practices and procedures?

Whose responsibility is it to ensure children's needs are met and that all children receive an education?