

**Hearing their voices:  
Counsellors' perspectives on working with  
adolescent foreign students**

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## **Abstract**

The number of international students studying abroad increases most years and whilst the United States is still seen as the first choice for many international students other countries, such as New Zealand, also attract significant numbers of international students. International students are important to education rolls and national economies, and also in promoting empathy and cultural awareness, yet several sources express significant concerns for these students, describing them as vulnerable. The challenges these students face are numerous and complex. Due to the nature of globalisation, cross-cultural mobility and migration these challenges are faced by an increasing number of students, who this study suggests are better defined as 'foreign students'. Those foreign students who are adolescents, and therefore experiencing a range of changes and developments as they transition from childhood to adulthood, are potentially even more vulnerable.

This qualitative research study, which employed narrative research with a feminist lens, sought to explore counsellors' experiences when working with adolescent foreign students. The aim was to gather rich descriptions of their experiences, explore their understanding of the term 'foreign student' and discover what they describe as both helpful and challenging when counselling these students. Four counsellors, who have worked with adolescent foreign students in the past two years, participated in semi-structured interviews from which detailed data was gathered and documented as transcripts. Analysis utilised a dual approach of narrative analysis and analysis of narratives, or thematic analysis, so that the participants' stories were honoured and core concepts were identified across the stories. In addition to developing an account for each participant, four key themes emerged from the findings: 1) The importance of being foreign, 2) Layers of many overlapping complex challenges, 3) Developing a connection by making space for their unique experiences and 4) Possibility.

This study proposes that 'foreign student' is an important term to use to ensure that all adolescent students who are facing cultural and language challenges are supported. The findings of this study support the literature with respect to the complex challenges foreign students face and with regard to developing effective experiences for these students in counselling. This study contributes to the limited literature available in relation to counselling foreign students who are adolescents, in particular in New Zealand. Key findings that are relevant to counsellors working with adolescent foreign students include the importance of: engaging with a multicultural counselling approach, ongoing self-reflection about one's own identity and experiences of being foreign, considering the use of self-disclosure especially if one has a personal experience of being foreign, being flexible to the individual needs of each student, collaborating with other staff in particular through school counselling referral systems and being aware of the positive possibilities for adolescent foreign students. Working with interpreters and managing family tensions due to different cultural expectations are identified as key challenges for counsellors when working with adolescent foreign students. Implications for practice and recommendations for further research are discussed.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Background and context

This research explores counsellors' experiences working with adolescent foreign students. More specifically, it examines how counsellors understand the term 'foreign student' as compared to 'international student', and what counsellors describe as being helpful and challenging when working with adolescent foreign students. The term 'foreign student' has been adopted for this research as an alternative to international student. An 'international student' can be defined concisely as an individual who requires a visa to attend an educational institution in another country. Through my experiences as a counsellor I have found that the term 'foreign student' encompasses a greater number of individuals who are facing changes and challenges in their life similar to those faced by international students. The meaning of the term 'international student' as well as the reasons this research has chosen to use the term 'foreign student' is discussed in detail later in this chapter. Because this research focuses on foreign students who are adolescents, those who attend primary and secondary schools in New Zealand, the term 'adolescent' and the context of school counselling are also discussed later in this chapter.

Pendse and Inman (2017), in their literature review of research relating to international students<sup>1</sup> and counselling, describe international students as facing many unique challenges as they transition into a different cultural environment, yet international students under-utilise support through counselling due to cultural differences and are likely to terminate counselling prematurely if they do engage with it at all. As the international student population continues to increase globally there is also an increase in the need for support,

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'international student' is used in this paragraph as it is the term predominantly used in the literature. The term 'foreign student' is used for the remainder of this chapter where it relates to my experiences and rationale for this research, and when the reasons for choosing this term are discussed.

training and guidance for counsellors so they are equipped to work effectively with international students (Moore & Popadiuk, 2011; Pendse & Inman, 2017; Yakushko et al., 2008).

My research interest in this field has developed from my experiences as a counsellor with adolescent foreign students at primary and secondary schools. During my second year of placement as a Master of Counselling student I had a unique and enriching experience where at the secondary school I worked at I counselled only adolescent foreign students. As these students spoke with me I soon realised that as a teacher, my profession for fifteen years prior to counselling, I had no real appreciation of the many challenges they faced: culturally, academically, socially, mentally and emotionally – the list can seem endless. It was only in the privileged position of a counsellor that I began to understand how truly complex their lives can be. With this different perspective I began, and continue, to explore the context of adolescent foreign students' lives further, including how to support them meaningfully through counselling. My experiences from that year onwards suggest to me that it is unusual for most adolescent foreign students to be listened to in a way that counselling offers, yet counselling can be an empowering experience for them. And so the seed for this research was planted.

## **Rationale**

As I began to explore the challenges faced by adolescent foreign students, and continued to counsel them, it soon became apparent to me that I was making assumptions about what I felt was helpful for these students. For example, foreign students, particularly of Asian culture, are often identified as assuming hierarchical relationships with counsellors preferring to see the counsellor as the superior, authoritative figure who directs the students in a logical, non-personal way (Seo 2005; Snider 2001). This is not how I see myself as a counsellor as I believe my approach is more personal, affective and reflective, and ultimately



not what some of the literature would describe as suitable for most foreign students in terms of their culture<sup>2</sup> (Li et al., 2016; Seo, 2005; Snider, 2001; Yakunina & Weigold, 2011). I identify as being of New Zealand European, or Pākehā<sup>3</sup>, ethnicity. I am aware of my identity as a white person who does not identify as being part of a marginalised group comparable to that of adolescent foreign students. I acknowledge this privileged position and that I am therefore not necessarily the most suitable person to assess whether my counselling approach is helpful for adolescent foreign students.

I considered asking the adolescent foreign students I counselled if my approach was helpful or unhelpful. Even though I ask for feedback regularly with non-foreign students, I became cautious of doing so with adolescent foreign students given the language difficulties and cultural differences I was aware of through my counselling experiences with these students. For example, the literature notes that most Asian students will find it challenging to ask for help, particularly if they view staff members as being in authority or think it may affect them, such as impacting their academic grades (Ministry of Education, 2020a). How could I be sure that an adolescent foreign student would honestly tell me a counselling session was not helpful and risk offending me if they find it difficult even to ask for help? Providing constructive feedback is something I can find challenging as an adult, and so I can only imagine how challenging it can be for a foreign student, who is also an adolescent.

As a result of noticing these assumptions, and considering what I was learning in the literature, I became interested in the experiences of other counsellors when working with adolescent foreign students. There are few in-depth research studies which involve interviewing counsellors about their experiences working with adolescent foreign students.

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<sup>2</sup> For this research the term culture focuses primarily on factors such as race and ethnicity but also includes other aspects such as age, religion and gender.

<sup>3</sup> Pākehā is the Māori term for a New Zealander of European descent, or the white people of New Zealand. Māori are the indigenous people of New Zealand, or Aotearoa (the Māori name for New Zealand).

This study aims to provide insight into this counselling relationship. I hope this research can add to my own practice as a counsellor, as well as to the experience and practice of other counsellors, so foreign students, and in particular adolescents, can receive the best possible support.

## **Discussion and definition of key terms**

### **Foreign students**

The process of defining an 'international student' was more challenging than I first appreciated it would be for two reasons. Firstly, the literature or relevant websites rarely define what is meant by the term 'international student'. Secondly, available definitions do not satisfactorily extend to all students who would benefit from support. For these reasons I have chosen to use the term 'foreign student' for this research.

Of the literature reviewed for this research, only four articles provide definitions of an international student. Moores and Popadiuk (2011) describe an international student as being a person who travels abroad to attain an educational goal within a specific timeframe. Willis-O'Connor et al. (2016), when referring to international students in Canada, use the definition " ...individuals in Canada on a valid study permit" (p. 157). Kim et al. (2019) use this definition for international students: "students who have crossed a national or territorial border for the purpose of education and are now enrolled outside their country of origin" (p. 180). Similarly, Hsu et al. (2009) define an international student in New Zealand as any current student without New Zealand citizenship, who was not born in New Zealand, and who is currently engaged in tertiary study here. Not only are definitions scarce, they are also brief, vary from country to country, and often make the assumption that international students are at tertiary level.

In New Zealand, according to The Education Act 1989, Part 1, Section 2, an international student is defined as "...a person who is not then a domestic student" (New Zealand Education Act, 2020). As a domestic student is defined as someone who is a New Zealand citizen or holder of a residency visa, an international student is therefore a non-New Zealand citizen or permanent resident who requires a temporary visa, such as a Fee Paying Student visa, from the New Zealand Immigration Service (New Zealand Immigration, 2020).

Excluded from this definition are students who are often assumed to be international students but who are in fact domestic students. For example, a student's parent may be granted a work visa which allows their dependents, including children, to study in New Zealand with a Dependent Child Student Visa which classes the student as a domestic student. Another example includes students who may have moved here with one parent for the duration of the student's study, and as that parent will have a Guardian of a Student Visitor Visa, the student is again classed as a domestic student. Other examples of domestic students include those whose family have recently moved to New Zealand from another country and those students who are New Zealand born, but their parents are not. For many of these students the challenges they face are comparable to those of international students. For example, English is not their first language, it is not the language spoken with their families and New Zealand culture may not be the culture they are most familiar with. As this research aims to incorporate these domestic students, as well as international students, factors such as language and culture are important to consider when defining who a foreign student is.

Developing English language skills is a key reason why students study abroad. The international and domestic students mentioned above may be able to have a conversation in English, for example in the counselling room or playground, but they may have limited comprehension of written and spoken English. The Ministry of Education funds support for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students with eligibility based on a scoring system (Ministry of Education, 2020b). Both international and domestic students are eligible

for this support. By looking at the primary school I currently work at one can appreciate how ESOL support extends far beyond that of just international students. At the end of Term 1, 2020, there were two international students, 21 domestic students holding a visa which allows them to study in New Zealand and 49 domestic students who are New Zealand born but of a different ethnicity. Of these students, 47 received ESOL support in 2020, two being international students and the remaining 45 being domestic students. In most cases the students' ESOL teachers become key to their pastoral care as they work with them in small groups and get to know them in a setting where the students feel more confident and willing to share. In conversation with the ESOL teachers they described the majority of the 45 domestic students receiving ESOL support as presenting with very similar challenges to those of the two international students.

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority – Mana Tohu Mātauranga o Aotearoa (NZQA) is aware of the challenges facing international students and has introduced pastoral care requirements to ensure institutions support and protect international students (Ministry of Education, 2020a). The Education Code of Practice for the pastoral care of international students was implemented in 2016 and includes ten outcomes to ensure the achievement, rights and wellbeing of international students is supported by the institutions they attend (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2020). In particular, Outcome 5: Orientation, Outcome 6: Safety and well-being, and Outcome 7: Student support, advice and services, all address support in line with the challenges international students face. An illustration of this is that staff should be educated on cross-cultural awareness, understanding, for example, that most Asian students are unlikely to tell a staff member directly about an issue and may wait until the end of a conversation until they share any significant challenges they may be facing. Whilst it is pleasing, and necessary, to see this pastoral support in place for international students, domestic students facing similar challenges could be missing out on this support. A 2003 Ministry of Education report expressed concern that the code does not specifically provide for primary and intermediate aged students (Ministry of Education,

2003). So whilst the English language requirements of students is being supported, their pastoral care as they cope with cultural differences may not be. This research aims to focus on all students facing challenges of language and culture, regardless of whether they are classified as international or domestic students.

For the purposes of this study, therefore, 'foreign student' is the most inclusive and representative term because it addresses language and cultural differences and extends beyond only international students as defined by the Education Act 1989. This study sees foreign as referring to a country or language other than one's own and it can also mean something that is strange, different and unfamiliar. As the students discussed above are adapting to an unfamiliar country, culture and language that is not their own and are coping with different academic, social and environmental factors, foreign is a fitting term to use for both international students and domestic students. In line with this, Georgiadou (2015) describes international counselling trainees as perceiving foreign as feelings of unfamiliarity with local norms and customs, and being culturally different. This supports the use of foreign for this study. Khoo et al. (1994), Merta et al. (1992) and Sandhu (1994) all use the term foreign student in their articles and, even though they do not explain why, this also supports the use of this term. Arthur (2004), in her book which aims to guide those working with international students, and Pedersen (1991) use the terms international student and foreign student interchangeably in their writing but acknowledge there is an argument that the word foreign can have a negative connotation. In my opinion, this further justifies my use of the term foreign, especially because I am using it in an attempt to be more inclusive rather than as a negative term. The term foreign student will be used from this point onward in this thesis, excluding Chapter 2: Literature Review', and in doing so acknowledges that this term refers to international students, as discussed in the literature, but also to any student experiencing similar challenges due to language and cultural differences.

## Adolescents

Schools International Education Business Association, an organisation supporting international education in New Zealand schools, acknowledges that “the normal physiological and social pressures associated with moving into adolescence can also add to the stress that international students face.” (Schools International Education Business Association [SIEBA], 2020). Given that the focus of this research is on foreign students who are adolescents it is important to address how this research defines this age and stage of development. The term adolescent, from a western perspective, can be an age span anywhere between 9 - 24 years and is often split into sub-stages or categories based on the physical, psychosocial and social developmental indicators present at that stage (Christie & Viner, 2005; Curtis, 2015). This study defines an adolescent as aged 11-18. This combines the two sub-stages of early adolescent and adolescent identified by Curtis (2015) and extends the adolescent stage to 18 as this is often the age a student finishes secondary school in New Zealand. This incorporates the physical aspect of puberty, using the mean age of 11 for the onset of puberty, as well as the social aspect of transitioning into higher education at intermediate or secondary school (Curtis, 2015). Both of these levels of schooling have an expectation of increased independence and activities that progressively include more freedom, agency and a development of personal identity (Curtis, 2015; Jaworska & MacQueen, 2015).

Adolescents, as defined by this study as being age 11-18, are still developing their emotional and cognitive function and therefore their ability to be completely independent (Curtis, 2015; Jaworska & MacQueen, 2015). It is therefore commonplace that they will live with their parents or an alternative adult caregiver, such as an extended family member, a homestay parent or boarding house staff. This developmental stage and dependence on adults has implications for adolescents as they have limited agency and many decisions will be made for them by the adults in their life, which can lead to tension. A clear theme in the literature

and research is that adolescent brains are different to those of adults. For example, the emotional and cognitive function of an adolescent brain limits their ability to control impulses and delay gratification (Curtis, 2015; Jaworska & MacQueen, 2015). From a western perspective, parents and adults are often driven by moral codes or social conventions in comparison to adolescents who are driven by wanting to navigate new roles, establish independent thinking, be heard and have their opinions respected (Fuligni & Eccles, 1993; Steinburg, 2001; Steinburg & Cauffman, 1996). This helps to explain the tension that can develop between adults and adolescents.

## **Counselling and the school setting**

The New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC) describes counselling as forming a relationship to help a client increase self-awareness, explore options and to focus on experiences or behaviour that will bring about positive change (New Zealand Association of Counsellors [NZAC], 2020a). Counsellors have been working with adolescents in New Zealand secondary schools since the 1960s, providing a free service which supports students with a range of issues impacting on their mental and emotional wellbeing (Crowe, 2006; Knight et al., 2018). The 1989 Education Act (Section 77) requires school principals to take all reasonable steps to ensure that students have access to quality guidance and counselling (Miller & Furbish, 2013). Although there is no legal requirement to provide counselling services and no guarantee that all schools are able to employ the required number of counsellors, school counsellors help schools to meet this legal requirement to provide a safe emotional environment (Crowe, 2006; Knight et al., 2018; Miller & Furbish, 2013). Whilst school counselling is often available to students aged 13-18 in New Zealand secondary schools, the same cannot be said for 5-12 year old students in primary and intermediate schools. Starting in 2021 government funding will, for the first time, be accessible for primary and intermediate schools for the purpose of employing counsellors,

as well as supporting secondary schools who are underfunded in this area (Nicol-Williams, 2020).

Whilst there has been limited significant research associated with school counselling in New Zealand, it is a service which is described as offering young people an accessible and very effective means of support to bring about positive change (Crocket et al., 2015; Knight et al., 2018). It is also a service which is described as educational and developmental, not just remedial (Crowe, 2006; Miller & Furbish, 2013). Students can self-refer for counselling or may be referred by a teacher, friend or family member.

Counsellors who work in school settings are usually trained in a range of counselling approaches or modalities, including cognitive behaviour therapy, person-centred therapy, solution-focused therapy and narrative therapy (Gibson & Cartwright, 2013). Jones-Smith (2016), in her review of theories of counselling and psychotherapy, details at least fifty different theories or approaches to counselling across five stages of development of psychotherapy. Not only is there a wide variety of modalities for counsellors to choose from, it is recommended practice for practitioners to be skilled in a range of approaches (Jones-Smith, 2016).

## **Thesis structure**

This research is structured as follows: Chapter 1: 'Introduction' (this chapter) briefly provides the background and context for this study, including my personal interest in this topic and what has brought me to this research. It also includes the research aims, discussion and definition of key terms and thesis structure. Chapter 2: 'Literature Review' provides a critical review of the literature relating to this topic. I begin with a review of the literature on international students and counselling, both internationally and within New Zealand. This discusses the challenges these students face and related attitudes and barriers to



counselling, as well as recommended approaches for working with international students.

Gaps in the research, which this study will address, are identified.

Chapter 3: 'Methodology' describes how I approach this topic, how the research is planned and how findings will be sought, analysed and interpreted. My choice of a qualitative methodology, utilising a narrative approach with a feminist lens, is discussed both in terms of how it is fitting for the purpose of this research but also in line with my personal and professional views and values. The 'Method' section of the chapter outlines the research procedure, including sample size, participant recruitment and setting. Data collection, primarily in the form of in-depth interviews to capture each participant's story is explained, including my preference for using the term conversation for interviews. To ensure best research practice I also explain how I have approached ethical issues, trustworthiness and rigour and how I have engaged in reflexivity. Finally, data analysis is explained, including why and how I have taken a dual approach and utilise both narrative analysis and analysis of narratives in this study.

The findings of this research are shared in Chapter 4: 'Findings – Accounts' and Chapter 5: 'Findings – Themes and sub-themes'. Chapter 4 presents the findings through a narrative analysis in the form of four accounts, which put the story of each participant at the forefront treating their experiences and views as knowledge in their own right. Chapter 5 presents the findings in an analysis of narratives, or a thematic analysis, including four themes and thirteen sub-themes that emerged from the accounts and the analysis of the data. The four themes are: 1) The importance of being foreign, 2) Layers of many overlapping complex challenges, 3) Developing a connection by making space for their unique experiences and 4) Possibility. Each theme is explored using excerpts from the conversations with the participants to demonstrate the main findings.

The final chapter, Chapter 6: 'Discussion', discusses the findings in relation to the research questions and the relevant literature, including implications and recommendations for future practice and research, as well as the limitations of this research. From reading these chapters it is hoped that the reader can engage with the experiences of the participants and their stories, consider the importance of using the term 'foreign student' which identifies a broader group of students that need support, and gain knowledge and understanding of what is helpful and what is challenging when working with adolescent foreign students.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### International students

Sandhu (1994) describes the tradition of traveling abroad for adventure and knowledge as being as old as learning itself. Perhaps not quite as old as that, but certainly a long time ago, the first Chinese national graduated from a United States university in 1854 (Snider, 2001). Over 150 years later, the number of international students<sup>4</sup> studying abroad increases most years as noted across various journal articles (Hwang et al., 2014; Li et al., 2016; Snider, 2005; Yakunina & Weigold, 2011). Indeed, by 2013 the number of international students enrolled in tertiary education institutions around the world reached 4.1 million, doubling from 2 million in 2000 (Heng, 2017). The associated economic contribution of international students is significant, for example the contribution of international education fees to the United States' economy was estimated at \$36.9 billion in 2016 (Kim et al., 2019). Whilst the United States is still seen as the first choice for many international students other countries also attract significant numbers of international students (Li et al., 2016).

New Zealand has more than 125,000 international students enrolled annually in its educational institutions. Education became New Zealand's fourth largest export industry in 2017 providing an overall contribution of \$4 billion to gross domestic product (Hsu et al., 2009; Ministry of Education, 2020a; Edmund, 2020). As with other countries, international student numbers in New Zealand have grown significantly, with numbers in tertiary institutions increasing from 11,740 in 1999 to 60,810 in 2018 (Edmund, 2020). Whilst several authors acknowledge international education as promoting empathy and cultural awareness, enhancing understanding of diversity and cooperation globally (Arthur, 1997; Austell, 2013;

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'international student' will be used in this chapter as it is the term predominantly used in the literature. The term 'foreign student', in addition to its use in the introduction, will be used for this research from Chapter 3 onwards.

Kim et al., 2019; Pendse & Inman, 2017), others also describe educational institutions as competing fiercely to attract international students as a way of increasing revenue (Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011). This is due to the fact that international students pay significantly more in tuition fees. For example, an international student studying a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Auckland would pay approximately \$36,000 for their degree, not including accommodation costs, compared to approximately \$6,000 - \$8,000 for this degree for domestic students (Edmund, 2020).

Despite the importance of international students to university and school rolls, national economies and their role in promoting empathy and diversity, several sources express significant concerns for these students. International students are referred to as an "...underserved population of students" (Dipeolu et al., 2007, p. 64), and as a "silent population" (Yoon & Portman, 2004, p. 42). Moores and Popadiuk (2011) note that the literature describes international students as vulnerable, and both Sandhu (1994) and Snider (2001) use the term minorities when referring to international students. From a New Zealand based study, international students are described as having "...a variety of dreams, expectations, fears, concerns, frustrations, disappointments and successes. Their lives are complex, sometimes difficult, and combine a range of educational, psychological and social experiences" (Butcher & McGrath, 2004).

### **The challenges international students face**

There is a clear consensus across the literature that international students encounter many unique and demanding challenges (Arthur, 2004; Heng, 2017; Pendse & Inman, 2017). Pedersen (1991) provides a powerful summary of the complex situation international students face, describing them as having to suddenly and simultaneously learn a variety of competing and often contradictory roles. Some specific examples of these complex challenges, which Sandhu (1994) refers to as interpersonal factors related to the

environment, include: language difficulties (Arthur, 1997; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011; Sandhu, 1994; Seo, 2005); understanding different institutional and learning practices (Dipeolu et al., 2007; Heng, 2017; Hwang et al., 2014; Yoon & Jepsen, 2008); accommodation challenges (Yakunina et al., 2010; Yakunina & Weigold, 2011); diet differences (Pedersen, 1991; Pendse & Inman, 2017); adjusting to social norms and customs in the new environment (Clough et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2019; Ng, 2006; Yeh & Inose, 2003); financial sacrifices (Arthur, 1997; Yakunina et al., 2010; Yi et al., 2003) as well as relationship challenges, religious differences, gender role differences and possible new found freedom compared with having to conform in their own society (Heng, 2017; Khoo et al., 1994; Pedersen, 1991; Zhang & Dixon, 2001). Coping with these challenges can lead to what Sandhu (1994) refers to as intrapersonal factors, or relating to internal processes, such as: feelings of anger and irritability (Clough et al., 2020; Hwang et al., 2014; Pedersen, 1991; Yi et al., 2003); loneliness (Dipeolu et al., 2007; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011; Seo, 2005; Yakushko et al., 2008); homesickness (Arthur, 1997; Pendse & Inman, 2017; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Zhang & Dixon, 2001) and perceived hatred and racial discrimination (Khoo et al., 1994; Leong & Chou, 1996; Yakunina & Weigold, 2011; Yoon & Jepsen, 2008). These challenges can result in social isolation (Clough et al., 2020; Arthur, 2017; Yakunina et al., 2010); loss of self-efficacy and a sense of belonging (Sandhu, 1994; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Yi et al., 2003) and suicidal ideation and depression (Pedersen, 1991; Pendse & Inman, 2017; Yakushko et al., 2008; Zhang & Dixon, 2001). Yi et al. (2003) suggest that these many challenges and concerns can lead to “life-disrupting stress” (p.334).

The complexity of international students' lives can be effectively illustrated in light of the impact of COVID-19. There is a strong argument that the challenges faced by international students at this time are certainly greater than those faced by most non-international students. A long list of additional challenges encountered by international students due to COVID-19 includes: racial discrimination targeted at Chinese students when the initial travel ban to China was announced by the New Zealand Government in February 2020, limited

time to make a decision about staying in New Zealand or returning home once the lockdown was announced in March 2020 and stresses about the impact on their studies and the additional cost or accessibility of flights if they did return home (“Chinese students in NZ facing racism...”, 2020; Kennedy, 2020). If they chose to stay international students faced challenges including: anxiety about poor academic results due to the impact of lockdown on educational services and the potential impact of this on their visa being renewed, being seen as sources of money to bail universities out of this economic crisis, limited financial support from their own government and the New Zealand Government, loss of access to support such as face-to-face learning and the ability to see their families, and the potential significant mental health impacts of all of these issues (“Chinese students in NZ facing racism...”, 2020; Gill, 2020; Kennedy, 2020; Radio New Zealand 2020a; 2020b). It was not until November 2020 that the New Zealand Government announced extensions to students’ visas to help international students unable to return home to stay in New Zealand longer. At the same time it was announced that approximately 1,300 school age international students would be allowed to stay on in New Zealand as domestic students therefore not having to pay international fees (Education New Zealand [ENZ], 2020).

It is therefore not surprising that many authors describe international students as generally experiencing more problems than other students outlining physiological and physical symptoms, as well as cognitive and psychological conditions, which are caused by continuous exposure to stressful situations in the new environment and culture (Arthur, 2004; Hsu et al., 2009; Pedersen, 1991; Ward, 2001). Identifying the need for support can be complicated by the fact that international students are often successful in their home country, but then unexpectedly find themselves struggling in the host country without the usual cultural and familial support systems in place at home (Sandhu, 1994; Yeh & Inose, 2003). When in contact with home, support can be limited from family who often have unrealistically high expectations for students to be just as successful in the host country, despite language and cultural differences (Leong & Chou, 1996; Mori, 2000). When

international students will return home is often unclear and even when they do there is anxiety for students as there is an expectation they will be the same as when they left (Arthur, 2004; Khoo et al., 1994; Yakushko et al., 2008). This is often an impossible expectation as their overseas experience will have changed them significantly (Arthur, 2018).

A sense of identity is often a significant challenge for international students, especially for those who begin studying overseas as adolescents. They are described in the literature as having to negotiate the transition from adolescence to adulthood, but also the transition between cultures and languages (Arthur, 1997). They also have to rapidly acquire cultural skills and behaviours that non-international students have learned over a lifetime (Pedersen, 1991). This creates a complex inter-relationship between language, identity and migration and therefore their sense of self and who they are (Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011). This is compounded by that fact that many international students are in the majority group in their home country but are then in the minority group in the host country (Arthur, 2004; Dipeolu et al., 2007). The experience of an international student is often “trying and traumatic” (Khoo et al., 1994, p.1) because, even if it is only for a few years, dealing with personal growth in a different environment, where new roles and behaviours need to be learned, can lead to many questions about their identity (Khoo et al., 1994; Pedersen, 1991). The literature clearly suggests that international students face significant unique and complex challenges with a key theme being that more effective support needs to be provided for them.

### **Attitudes and barriers towards counselling**

Given the myriad challenges international students face one might assume they should automatically be offered support, such as counselling. Yet, the literature clearly points out that international students are usually unfamiliar with counselling (Clough et al., 2020; Li et al., 2016; Mori, 2000; Seo, 2005); less open to engaging in it (Yakunina et al., 2010; Yoon &

Jepsen, 2008; Yoon & Portman, 2004) and not likely to perceive a need for counselling unless the situation is at crisis point (Hwang et al., 2014; Yi et al., 2003). If they do attend counselling they are more likely to quit prematurely compared with non-international students (Kim et al., 2019; Pedersen, 1991; Pendse & Inman, 2017; Willis-O'Connor et al., 2016). Yoon and Jepsen (2008) noted that 38% of international students in their study did not return after the first session and Yakushko et al. (2008) noted that 33 - 70% of international students in their study terminated counselling after a single session. In comparison, a 2012 meta-analysis discovered the overall trend is that 20% of clients in the general population drop out of treatment prematurely (Swift & Greenberg, 2012). This is significantly less than the rate documented in studies regarding international students. Sue et al. (1982) suggest that the reason for this higher rate of early termination is that counselling often presents language and cultural barriers for minority cultures.

Language and communication difficulties are cited as one of the most challenging barriers for international students in terms of engaging with counselling (Kim et al., 2019; Mori, 2000; Ng, 2006; Willis-O'Connor et al., 2016). In day-to-day life, English proficiency adds anxiety in terms of academic performance and it can lead to lower levels of self-efficacy as students struggle to interact in the host culture with the constant worry that they will say something wrong (Arthur, 1997; Kim et al., 2019; Pedersen, 1991; Yeh & Inose, 2003). In terms of counselling, Snider (2001) provides a useful perspective from his cross-cultural research which asked international students about their expectations of counselling services. Some of these students pointed out "if I have trouble speaking English when I feel okay, how can I be expected to speak it when I am upset?" (Snider, 2001, p. 76). Coronado and Peake (1993) also support this point describing broken English as a patronising and complicated way to communicate, especially when discussing personal and emotional themes which are commonplace in counselling. Kim et al. (2019) suggest interpreters can be beneficial to address communication issues for international students but this can also create added concerns for students in terms of confidentiality. With regard to interpreters and counselling



in general, the literature stresses the importance of interpreters as there is an increasing likelihood that counsellors will not share the same language as their clients and interpreters can bridge any cultural gaps that may exist between the counsellor and client (Costa, 2017; Paone & Malott, 2008).

### **Cultural factors in relation to counselling**

Different cultural views toward counselling also help to explain the low utilisation of counselling by international students. Stigma associated with accessing counselling, not only for the individual but also their family, is a common theme across the literature, and in particular for Asian cultures (Arthur, 2017; Chen & Mak, 2008; Kim et al., 2019; Yakunina & Weigold, 2011). For example: ethnic Chinese students do not easily trust strangers (Arthur, 2017); place value on self-restraint rather than emotional expression (Chen & Mak, 2008); prefer to confide in only family and friends (Khoo et al., 1994; Kim et al., 2019; Pedersen, 1991; Yakushko et al., 2008) and are more likely to express problems as being academic or physical rather than psychological as the latter is perceived as weak, shameful and suggests a loss of face (Austell, 2013; Snider, 2001; Yakunina & Weigold, 2011; Yeh & Inose, 2003). In fact, some Chinese students have indicated they will not seek support from anyone, professional or personal, for their mental health (Yakunina et al., 2010). One study discovered Malaysian secondary school students were likely to talk to friends (77%), parents (60%) and siblings (48%) with only 3.4% preferring to talk to a counsellor (Daud & Bond, 2013).

Some students equate counselling with discipline issues and so the prospect of counselling often brings about feelings of fear and anxiety (Daud & Bond, 2013). This view is echoed in Brinson and Kottler's (1995) study where participants talked about those in counselling as "... bad, weak people. Problem child. If friends know you go to counselling, they stay away from you. The attitude really deep rooted in our minds" (p. 60). Austell (2013) describes

some international students as believing counselling equates to psycho-pharmaceutical therapies, which may risk immigration officials sending them home in disgrace. Other international students believe that problems are fated to occur and are beyond one's control to solve them, therefore it is chance or luck that will resolve a challenge rather than counselling (Khoo et al., 1994). These examples suggest a mis-match of cultural values with what is being offered through counselling.

It is not only culturally different views towards counselling that pose a challenge, several articles also identify differences in cultures themselves. The general belief is that the greater the cultural difference between the home and host culture, the greater the challenges faced by international students (Pedersen, 1991; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). In most Asian cultures, for example, the core values are collectivism, social conformity, filial piety and humility. These values are in contrast to western values of individualism, assertiveness and discussing problems all of which lead to counselling being more accepted in western cultures, such as New Zealand (Leong & Chou, 1996; Yakunina & Weigold, 2011). To illustrate this point, the above mentioned study of Malaysian students seeking counselling at secondary school suggests that the independent, emotionally expressive focus of the counselling offered is at odds with the Malaysian cultural values of collectivism, inter-dependence and self-control (Daud & Bond, 2013). For many Asian students, to access counselling they must make a decision which is unnatural and risks breaching their culture's social norms and values.

Some specific examples of challenges international students face due to cultural differences which are discussed frequently in the literature, include social alienation and understanding different behaviours or expectations across cultures. These challenges again highlight cultural differences such as the contrasts between collective cultures compared with individualistic cultures. In terms of social alienation, several authors describe international students feeling socially alienated as they grapple to understand what they see as the

superficial, materialistic and cold nature of friendships in a more individualistic culture, which places greater value on the individual, compared to the fewer but deeper friendships in a collective culture which places higher value on group affiliation (Arthur, 2004; Brinson & Kottler, 1995; Mori, 2000). Arthur (2004) references one international student who, in regard to their host culture, expressed: "People here ask how you are, but then keep on walking by!" (p.41). Other similar examples of misunderstood expressions which international students may interpret as sincere signs of interest, include: "Come on over sometime" and "I'll call you" (Mori, 2000. p. 138).

In terms of understanding different behaviours or cultures, a number of studies acknowledge the different expectations across education systems. Many international students come from collective cultures where students sit quietly and take notes which are then memorised for examinations. They are not familiar with school systems in individualistic cultures which expect students to research independently, read a significant amount, engage in informal discussions or even question their teachers or peers, and keep up with the frenetic speed of content delivery (Austell, 2013; Butcher & McGrath, 2004; Heng, 2017; Mori, 2000). How international students must deal with this is again discussed by Arthur (2004) who acknowledges that desirable classroom behaviour in individualised cultures may be seen as aggressive and disrespectful by international students from collective cultures. These two examples stress the complex challenges international students face as they attempt to navigate cultural differences, and it is these same cultural differences which often prevent them from engaging in support to help them, such as counselling.

### **Acculturation and counselling**

A key theme in the literature regarding international students generally is in relation to their rate of acculturation; adapting or adjusting to life changes as a result of moving to a culturally different environment (Han et al., 2017; Merta et al., 1992). A common belief is that

the best way for international students to thrive is for them to acculturate, or even assimilate by becoming absorbed into the host culture. (Khoo et al., 1994; Li et al., 2016; Yakunina & Weigold, 2011). Heng (2017) and Yoon and Portman (2004) describe this ethnocentric attitude as one which expects international students to adjust to their new environments, rather than developing understanding across both the host culture and the international culture. Conversations with international students to understand what they need, rather than just having conversations about them, is encouraged by Heng (2017) and Popadiuk and Arthur (2004). The more recent focus in the literature is to support international students functioning in the host culture, or gaining bicultural competence, rather than international students assimilating at the expense of their culture, unless the student chooses to (Yoon & Portman, 2004).

In relation to counselling, the literature regarding the influence of acculturation is contrasting. Chen and Mak (2008) note that students who are more exposed to western influences and norms, and are therefore considered to be more acculturated or similar to the host culture, hold more positive attitudes toward using mental health services as they understand the cultural beliefs of the host culture and what counselling offers. In comparison, Yakunina and Weigold's (2011) research findings in regard to Asian international students' intentions to seek counselling only partially support acculturated students being more likely to seek counselling. Their research discovered that some international students saw a lack of acculturation as being positive because they were more likely to confide with a counsellor who was not familiar with their culture as the counsellor would not view the students as "violating cultural norms" by talking with them (Yakunina & Weigold, 2011, p. 223). Arthur (2017) and Georgiadou (2015) observe that some international students appreciate the anonymity of talking to someone outside of their usual networks. Somewhat alarmingly, Khoo et al. (1994) in their literature review nearly thirty years ago, noted the perception that international students must decide whether they want to just get by, or assimilate into the host culture and do much better.

## **Recommended approaches for counselling international students**

International students can do much better if they are supported effectively, and there are many recommendations across the literature as to what is beneficial for helping international students to access and engage effectively in counselling. Despite mounting evidence against traditional models of transition and culture shock, as noted by Popadiuk and Arthur (2004), a number of authors promote sharing an understanding of the process or stages of acculturation with international students so they have greater awareness of their unique situation. For example, Kim et al. (2019) promote using the U-curve model of adjustment, one of many acculturation models, with the stages of a) honeymoon period b) culture shock c) adjustment and d) mastery, as a way of developing multicultural skills and interventions in counselling sessions associated with adapting to a different cultural environment. Several authors describe the helpfulness of students, or those supporting them, being able to see where they are at in the process as they move through it, so they can cope and so it is normalised for them (Arthur, 1997; Han et al., 2017; Siegel, 1991). Yakushko et al. (2008) and Heng (2017) believe all staff working with international students would benefit from training to support their understanding of the impact and patterns of acculturation so they can better support international students.

In contrast, Popadiuk and Marshall (2011) believe the previously dominant discourse related to concepts such as acculturation models and culture shock, the feeling of disorientation when subjected to an unfamiliar culture, is outdated and more focus should be placed on the relational process. Arthur (1997), who focuses on the positives of cross-cultural transition and intercultural learning, rather than the problems of culture shock, notes concerns about models of acculturation or culture shock if they do not focus on the individual experiences of the students. Moores and Popadiuk (2011) do not see culture shock as harmful and maladaptive, but rather as experiences which are an integral part of international students' transition and development, which can be positive.

A key theme in the literature places emphasis on encouraging counsellors to be proactive (Butcher & McGrath, 2004; Ward, 2005; Yoon & Jepsen, 2008) as well as creative and innovative (Arthur, 1997; Dipeolu et al., 2007; Yi et al., 2003) in their approach to helping international students, so these students understand that counselling can be compatible and culturally responsive to their needs even if their expectations are divergent. Sandhu (1994) recommends that for international students “counsellors must make deliberate efforts to help these students feel connected” and “should use proactive approaches of counselling to help this silent minority of at-risk students” (p. 237). Parr et al. (1992) stress the need for “creative efforts to convey the message that international students are cherished guests who enrich our college campuses” (as cited in Yoon & Portman, 2004, p. 42). Examples of creative and innovative approaches include using online resources and social media to engage international students, brief psychoeducational online intervention tools to help reduce stigma and creating walk in counselling sites for more informal consultations to reduce barriers to accessing counselling (Arthur, 2017; Boone et al., 2011; Clough et al., 2020). Popadiuk & Arthur (2004) describe such approaches as focusing on health promotion, rather than on problems, and as being more empowering for international students. A number of studies also support group counselling as a supportive and safe context for international students (Arthur, 2017; Dipeolu et al., 2007; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Yakunina et al., 2010).

Counsellors collaborating to create a greater resource network across the community is also recommended by many authors, with the belief that it takes “a village to ensure the care and success of international students on our campuses” (Austell, 2013, p. 229). Arthur (2017), in line with Pedersen (1991), believes “flexibility is essential for engaging with international students through formal and informal roles” (p. 891). Examples of the effectiveness of a collaborative and flexible approach, referred to as “a campus response” (Arthur, 2017, p. 892) include: counsellors participating in various non-counselling international student

activities, counsellors being hired due to their experience working with international students or their own background as an international student, counsellors acting as a liaison person across the organisation as well as in the community and training students to act as cultural mentors through peer programmes and workshops (Arthur, 2017; Pedersen, 1991; Yakushko et al., 2008; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Several authors emphasise the importance of counsellors collaborating with teachers or lecturers so international students feel supported by their lecturer or academic programme, and so academic staff can identify students who need support (Arthur, 2017; Burnham et al., 2009; Ng, 2006; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Heng (2017) points out that Chinese international students have improved motivation, self-esteem and psycho-emotional wellbeing if teachers connect with them, make them feel included and are interested in, and open-minded, about Chinese culture.

## **Multicultural counselling**

Underpinning all of the above recommendations, multicultural counselling is a significant theme in the literature concerning international students and counselling. Multicultural counselling is understood to be the knowledge, skills and awareness necessary for a counsellor to attend to culture, race and ethnicity within the counselling process, not only as part of effective practice but also as part of ethical practice (Arthur, 1997; Collins et al., 2010; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Shin et al., 2017). Delivering culturally appropriate counselling interventions is seen as an ethical obligation by most country's counselling codes of ethics (Burnham et al., 2009; Collins et al., 2010; Day-Vines et al., 2007; Hook et al., 2013). A counsellor's multicultural counselling competence (MCC) is usually defined and measured in three key areas: knowledge, skills and awareness (Burnham et al., 2009; Hook et al., 2013). Along the lines of MCC, the NZAC Code of Ethics advocates for culturally competent or responsive practice through the ethics and principles of respecting cultural differences and

the diversity of human experience by: counsellors taking into account their own cultural identity and biases as well as the diverse cultural contexts and practices of the clients with whom they work, working towards bi-cultural competence and working with clients in ways that are meaningful and respectful towards the clients' cultural communities (NZAC, 2020b).

For the past three decades multicultural counselling, often referred to as the fourth force in counselling (Ng, 2006), has grown in response to increased globalisation, internationalisation and cross-cultural mobility (Chen & Mak, 2008; Hook et al., 2013; Pendse & Inman, 2017; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). The resulting complex cultural environment has increased the need to understand a greater diversity of backgrounds and the unique needs of minority cultures. Miller and Furbish (2013) believe major influences for counselling in New Zealand will come from social and cultural factors with a rise in the Māori population, but also as the immigrant population increases as well. Some of the earliest literature addressing international students from a cultural angle comes from the early 1990s. Given that culture has a significant impact on the experiences of international students, Arthur (1997) and Pedersen (1991) advocate for counsellors to consider their own values, counselling styles and methods, and how these meet the unique needs of these students. Coronado and Peake (1993) advocate for culturally sensible therapy through which space is made for two stories to be heard: that of the individual's culture as well as the individual's experience in that culture, allowing the counsellor to work with the unique experience of the client in their culture.

More recent literature continues to advocate strongly for engagement in multicultural counselling so that counselling interventions meet the needs of international students, or culturally diverse clients generally (Arthur, 2004; 2017; Chen & Mak, 2008; Collins et al., 2010; Pedersen, 1991). Arthur (2004) encourages those who work with international students to consider how a lens of culture helps to explain the experiences of these students. When counsellors are responsive to multicultural issues, clients feel more



understood and respected, there are increased positive outcomes and greater likelihood of clients returning for further sessions (Burnham et al., 2009; Zhang & Dixon, 2001). Arthur (2017) acknowledges that if a counsellor develops a reputation for being culturally responsive to students from diverse backgrounds it will help international students to engage in counselling more easily. Zhang and Dixon (2001) and Chen and Mak (2008) discovered that Asian students rate culturally responsive counsellors as more expert and trustworthy than culturally neutral counsellors, with the counsellor's degree of sensitivity to diversity having a positive experience for a minority client. A multicultural approach to counselling helps to address what some still perceive as a western approach to counselling, or an approach that tends to educate and acculturate minority cultures, and which does not adequately meet the diverse cultural values and needs of international or culturally diverse clients (Day-Vines et al., 2007; Leong & Chou, 1996; Snider, 2005; Sue et al., 1982). Being culturally responsive, rather than expecting international students to become more westernised, will help these students to feel more comfortable and able to discuss concerns (Arthur, 2017; Coronado & Peake, 1993; Sue et al., 1982; Willis-O'Connor et al., 2016).

Several articles in the literature recommend approaches, such as Broaching and Cultural Humility, to engage successfully with multicultural counselling. Broaching refers to an ongoing ethical attitude of openness by the counsellor, actively addressing culture and power, so that the client is invited to explore issues of diversity (Day-Vines et al., 2007; King & Borders, 2019). The literature recommends broaching when counselling minority groups, such as international students, because it removes barriers to accessing counselling and increases client satisfaction and their willingness to return (Day-Vines et al., 2007; King & Borders, 2019). Broaching is also recommended by Kim et al. (2019) who believe "...addressing diversity is imperative when working with international students because culture permeates nearly all of their lived experiences" (p. 185). Hook et al. (2013) recommend cultural humility as a way for counsellors to engage in a culturally responsive manner by regulating any natural tendency to feel one's own beliefs and views are superior

when working with a client of another culture. Cultural humility involves an open and other-orientated stance in relation to cultural identity, emphasising respect for others as well as engaging in ongoing self-reflection (Hook et al., 2013). Culturally humble counsellors work collaboratively with clients to understand the unique intersection of clients' various aspects of identities, which develops a sense of trust and safety for the client leading to a strong therapeutic alliance and effective counselling sessions (Hook et al., 2013). McKinley (2019), in her study of supervision for international counselling students, supports cultural humility as an important part of multicultural support as it addresses power imbalances.

Developing a strong therapeutic alliance is important in counselling and multicultural counselling enables counsellors to do this effectively with international students, as discussed above in regard to the approaches of broaching and cultural humility. Carl Rogers, the dominant therapist in the development of psychotherapy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, developed a number of conditions for a strong therapeutic alliance which have been accepted and incorporated into most therapeutic approaches, including necessary and sufficient conditions such as unconditional positive regard and communication of empathy, as well as techniques such as active listening and reflection of feeling (Rogers, 1957). Feminist Therapist, Laura Brown, sees the current focus on multicultural competence as having its roots in Rogers' theory, "especially the aspect of genuineness that emerges when a psychotherapist is willing to admit what she or he does not know, inviting the client to be the expert and authority" (Brown, 2007, p. 259). A number of articles in the literature relating to multicultural counselling emphasise its strengths in developing a strong therapeutic alliance, through developing trust, openness and a safe environment (Collins et al., 2010; Day-Vines et al., 2007; Hook et al., 2013).

## **International students are not a homogenous group**

Clearly there are a range of supportive strategies in the literature regarding international students and counselling, yet there are some overarching messages as well. It is important to avoid generalisations or stereotyping when working with international students as they are not a homogenous group (Arthur, 2017; Heng, 2017; King & Borders, 2019; Pendse & Inman, 2017). International students in the United States in 2008-2009 came from more than 180 different countries of origin (Yakunina et al., 2010). This is staggering as it brings together a wide range of ethnic heritages, languages and cultural worldviews. In addition to this, students from the same country or region are likely to differ in terms of religious beliefs, moral values and cultural expectations. Fouad (1991) and Pedersen (1991) stress respect for the wide diversity of international students, emphasising that they are not all alike, as each international student is an individual with unique problems but also unique resources.

Referring to key patterns in the literature, Yoon and Portman (2004) believe there is an over-generalisation of research findings in regard to international students with insufficient emphasis on group, and even individual, differences. Arthur (2004) expresses concern about stereotyping international students when researching preferred counselling styles. As an example, international students, particularly of Asian culture, are often identified as assuming hierarchical relationships with counsellors preferring to see the counsellor as the authoritative figure who directs the students (Pendse & Inman, 2017; Seo, 2005; Snider 2005). This suggests that western approaches to counselling, which are described as more personal and often see the student as the expert on themselves, are not suitable for most international students in terms of their culture and values (Li et al., 2016; Seo, 2005; Yakunina & Weigold, 2011). However, Seo (2005) acknowledges that research findings are often contradictory and indeed their research found no overall preference for a directive or non-directive approach amongst international students. Yau et al. (1992) and Yoon and Jepsen (2008) also found no preference for a direct style. Help-seeking behaviours will vary

considerably across cultures within the international student group, and so counsellors need to understand international students in general but avoid stereotyping (Arthur, 1997; Ng, 2006; Yoon & Portman, 2004). Not only may stereotyping be inaccurate, it can also further marginalise and isolate international students (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). The challenge for those working with these students is to work with them as an individual, whilst also acknowledging their cultural background (Arthur, 1997; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Seo, 2005).

### **A focus on strengths and positives**

A greater focus on the positives that international students experience is a growing trend in the literature. Hsu et al. (2009) acknowledge that the majority of international students successfully adjust to the new culture and education systems of the host country. Many years earlier Pedersen (1991) pointed out the danger of stereotyping international students as helpless or bewildered. Several authors believe the literature provides an unbalanced view of international students' experiences by focusing mostly on adjustment problems and alleviating distress, which misses the opportunity to celebrate strengths, coping and resiliency factors, and successful facilitation of transition (Arthur, 2004; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Pendse & Inman, 2017). Heng (2017), in line with multicultural approaches, believes that international students possess agency and that institutions need to recognise the impact of social-cultural influences on these students, rather than judging them from a deficit perspective. Several studies encourage counsellors to view issues from a developmental perspective rather than a pathological perspective, so that international students can use their unique strengths and diverse perspectives as resources to overcome problems and utilise support, helping their cross-cultural transition and adjustment (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Ng, 2006; Yoon & Portman, 2004). For example, when looking at identity development rather than focusing on the problems of culture shock, Arthur (2004) and Moores and Popadiuk (2011) encourage attention on cross-cultural adjustment emphasising the powerful

cultural learning and personal growth that can happen as international students incorporate aspects of the new culture and develop cultural flexibility. Pendse and Inman (2017) believe paying greater attention to the positive aspects of student transition, or a strengths based approach, is an important area for future exploration.

## **Gaps in the research**

As outlined above, a review of the relevant literature on international students and counselling reveals three distinct areas of knowledge:

- research which outlines the unique and many challenges international students encounter;
- research studies assessing international students' attitudes and barriers towards, and utilisation of, counselling; and
- research which reflects on the challenges and offers approaches seen to be effective for counselling international students.

Pendse and Inman (2017) in their literature review of research relating to international student focused counselling, spanning a 34 year period from 1980-2014, note the increase in journal articles in this area but also that international student issues are still underrepresented in leading counselling journals. Whilst much has been contributed in these areas of knowledge there are also gaps in the literature and research.

The majority of the research on international students and counselling is from the United States and Canada. For example, Pendse and Inman's (2017) literature review only relates to articles about international students studying in the United States. Limited research has been carried out in New Zealand relating to international students at tertiary level or below. Butcher and McGrath (2004) note the lack of substantial research looking at international students' experiences in New Zealand or any longitudinal study. The focus of research in

New Zealand appears to be the educational or social experience, or the policy framework supporting these students (Ward, 2001). Those that do focus on the pastoral care of international students only make minimal suggestions relating to counselling (Ministry of Education, 2003; Hsu et al., 2009). Indeed, no recent studies were found that focused specifically on international students and counselling in New Zealand. Whilst organisations supporting those working with international students do provide advice in regard to supporting student wellbeing, there does not appear to be any specific information to support counsellors working with international students in New Zealand (ENZ, 2019; Nau Mai NZ, 2020; SIEBA, 2020).

Nearly all of the literature in this field reflects the experiences of tertiary level students, highlighting another gap in the literature. Pedersen (1991) notes that very little research relates to school students below tertiary level. More recently, Popadiuk and Marshall (2011) acknowledge a Canadian literature review carried out in 2009 which found only 1% of articles, across two school-related counselling journals, focused directly on adolescent international students and counselling. Pedersen (1991) and Popadiuk and Marshall (2011) call for more research focused on adolescent international students and school counselling to provide robust evidence on which to base counselling initiatives in schools. This is important given that a recent United States report identified a strong increase in the number of international students enrolling at secondary level (Farugia, 2017).

Another gap in the research, as it relates to international students, is that it does not allow for in-depth reflections. Of the literature reviewed, only two studies involved interviewing to gain more in-depth experiences in relation to international students although students were not engaged in regular counselling in either study (Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011; Willis-O'Connor et al., 2016). Across the literature most researchers used a survey, scale or questionnaire in relation to counselling or experiences as an international student (e.g. Han et al., 2017; Hwang et al., 2014; Li et al., 2016; Snider, 2005). Other studies involved a

survey, pre and post watching a video explaining what counselling involved at a university, or a rating scale and/or interview after taking part in simulated counselling styles using scripts (e.g. Merta et al., 1992; Seo, 2005; Snider, 2001; Zhang & Dixon, 2001). Arthur (2004) and Pendse and Inman (2017) note that quantitative methodologies, survey research and convenience sampling are the most frequently used research methods in relation to international students.

Several articles identify concerns about the lack of in-depth reflections in research studies. Arthur (1997, 2004) raises specific concerns about research methods in this field, for example using single session observations or the use of analogue stimulus for rating counsellor styles, as these may miss changes that occur during counselling sessions. Further to this, the majority of research in this field does not contribute to understanding the complex influences of international students' cultural backgrounds and the diverse experiences of navigating different cultures (Arthur, 2004). There is also a lack of empirical studies in this field due to an absence of instruments to measure unique issues related to international students seeking help, as well as methodological limitations and differences which create contradictions across research results (Leong & Chou, 1996; Pedersen, 1991; Yoon & Jepsen, 2008; Yoon & Portman, 2004).

A final gap in the literature is that very little of the research relates to counsellors working with international students on a regular basis. Leong & Chou (1996) note the scarcity of studies focusing on therapists working with international students. Articles that reflect the experiences of counsellors working with international students are based on personal reflections, reflections of colleagues and practical suggestions for more culturally responsive services in combination with a literature review (e.g. Arthur, 1997; 2017; Kim et al., 2019; Mori, 2000; Pedersen, 1991). Those articles surveyed that involve international students who were already taking part in counselling sessions are limited because they use only archival data or questionnaires and do not interview the counsellors or students themselves

(Yakushko et al., 2008; Yi et al., 2003) or they focus on only one aspect of counselling, such as group counselling (Dipeolu et al., 2007). A rare contribution to the research in this area is that of Wilk (2016) who completed a thesis case study of counsellors' and international students' experiences of working together.

In addition to the gaps in the literature and research relating to counselling international students, there are also gaps in the research relating to counselling adolescents, the age group this research will focus on. Arthur (2018) points out that international students in high schools have different developmental needs to those at tertiary level. Indeed, the literature suggests there is a clear need for support for adolescents as they navigate adolescence. Several studies report that during the distinct development period of adolescence the incidence of psychiatric illness rises significantly, with three-quarters of psychiatric illnesses being present by age 24 (Bradford, 2018; Jaworska & MacQueen, 2015; Kilford et al., 2016; Nearchou et al., 2018). Similarly to international students and counselling, adolescents can also experience high rates of mental health challenges; worry about stigma, embarrassment and shame associated with counselling; fear other people, including their parents, will find out they are engaged in counselling; prefer to manage issues by themselves; can be reluctant to engage in counselling unless the issue is severe; and are unlikely to return again if the counselling experience is not positive (Bradford, 2018; Knight et al., 2018; Nearchou et al., 2018).

Several studies point out that approaches and strategies to support adolescents are still largely based on research in relation to adults even though some of their needs are different (Bradford, 2018; Jaworska & MacQueen, 2015; Knight et al., 2018). The literature also suggests that more specific research is needed to ensure adolescents receive effective counselling support. Pattison and Harris (2006) identify the effectiveness of counselling in general for adolescents but also the lack of high quality research in support of counselling approaches other than cognitive behaviour therapy. The effectiveness of cognitive behaviour



therapy as a counselling approach for adolescents is well recognised due to the large body of research evidence for this modality (Pattison & Harris, 2006). The first study of the effectiveness of school counselling in New Zealand took place in 2019, even though counsellors have been a part of secondary schools since the 1960s. This research, which affirmed counselling as having a positive effect for adolescents of a range of ethnicities, was carried out by NZAC and the Ministry of Education to inform decisions about staffing levels of counsellors in schools, rather than focusing on particular modalities or what is helpful when counselling adolescents (NZAC, 2020c). While there has been some research into effective counselling approaches when working with adolescents in New Zealand, further research is required to fill this gap.

## **Research Questions and Rationale**

To address the research gaps identified in the section above this research will:

- be based in New Zealand;
- focus on adolescent foreign students, those at intermediate or secondary level, rather than tertiary level;
- focus on the experiences of counsellors who work with adolescent foreign students on a regular basis; and
- take a qualitative approach allowing for in-depth reflections which focus on actual experiences, rather than quantitative research involving surveys or questionnaires based on simulated experiences or situations.

This study aims to add to the body of existing research on counselling foreign students, that can be general in nature, risks stereotyping and is not based on those involved in regular counselling. This research will head in a different direction to most of the existing literature by interviewing counsellors about their experiences working with adolescent foreign students with the intention of providing a richer and more detailed understanding of what is helpful

when counselling these students. This aims to add to the emerging research in this field which utilises qualitative designs, such as semi-structured interviews, and gives a voice to individual experiences (Arthur, 2004; Pendse & Inman, 2017). Given that the education export sector is an area of rapid growth, particularly in primary and intermediate schools, with government statistics indicating there were 10,406 international students in New Zealand primary, intermediate and secondary schools in 2020 (Education Counts, 2021; Ministry of Education, 2003), more research is morally justified and of value for this group (Cornforth, 2011).

Primary research question:

- How do counsellors describe their experiences working with adolescent foreign students?

Secondary questions:

- How do counsellors understand the term 'foreign student'?
- What aspects of counselling are described as helpful when working with adolescent foreign students?
- What aspects of counselling are described as challenging when working with adolescent foreign students?

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Simply defined, methodology describes the ways research topics are approached, how research is planned and how findings are sought, analysed and interpreted (Taylor et al., 2016). Delving deeper than that, the methodology one chooses is influenced by one's assumptions, interests, perspectives and purpose (Creswell, 2013; Taylor et al., 2016). Crotty (1998) discusses how our choice of methodology stems from our theoretical perspective; how we understand and explain the human world, and our epistemology; our theories of knowledge. Theoretical perspective and epistemology therefore inform the methodology which in turn informs the choice of methods (Crotty, 1998). I feel the choice of qualitative methodology, utilising a narrative approach with a feminist lens, is not only fitting for the purpose of this research but it is also in line with my views and values. This chapter describes the methodology and associated methods. The rationale, philosophical justification and personal explanation for these choices will also be discussed.

### **Qualitative methodology**

Given the desire to research experience and perspectives a qualitative research methodology was employed. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe qualitative researchers as those who study things in their natural settings endeavouring to explain phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research frequently takes an interpretivist and social constructionist, or subjective, approach as it does not seek facts but is focused on understanding a person's experience and how they make sense of that experience (Taylor et al., 2016). In contrast, quantitative research usually employs a positivist, or objective, stance focusing on external factors and statistical analysis (Taylor et al., 2016). Of these two main research frameworks a qualitative approach is clearly appropriate in this study as counsellors' reflections on their experiences in the setting of their counselling practice is

examined, in particular what they believe is helpful when working with adolescent foreign students. As qualitative researchers are not interested in prediction and control, analysis is inductive working from the data to themes and findings (Morse, 2016; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Snape & Spencer, 2003). This is in line with the research question as no theory was offered as to how counsellors experience working with adolescent foreign students, rather it was envisioned that the research would uncover knowledge to answer this question. Butina (2015) describes a qualitative approach as being suitable when a more detailed understanding of an issue is required, when you want to develop an idea or theory, and when you aim to empower individuals, all of which are relevant to this research study's goals.

## **Narrative research**

As the goal was to collect and analyse rich stories of counsellor's experiences, the choice of a narrative approach is also fitting for this research study. Creswell (2013) offers this definition of narrative research, it "...tells the story of individuals unfolding in a chronology of their experiences, set within their personal, social, and historical context, and including the important themes in those lived experiences" (p. 57). Through this definition one can appreciate the philosophical underpinnings of narrative research. With roots within constructivist, interpretive and postmodern theories, narrative analysts reject the ontological realist idea of a single truth. Instead, they are interested in the idealist position that people narrate their own versions of reality, the truth being subjective, socially constructed and with multiple possible interpretations (Etherington & Bridges, 2011; Riessman, 2002; Snape & Spencer, 2003; Taylor et al., 2016). This research acknowledges that the counsellors' experiences, and the meanings they make of them, will be individual and influenced by their personal, social and historical contexts.

Through a narrative approach constant change is accepted and multiple layers of narrative across dimensions or spaces such as time, place, and personal and social contexts are acknowledged (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Speedy, 2008). This is particularly important for those working with adolescent foreign students who are constantly coping with change and many layers of narrative. Gergen et al. (2004) describe narrative methods as giving more voice to the views of those under study which is especially helpful with minority groups, such as adolescent foreign students. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) talk about the tension that can exist between grand narratives and narrative research. In the context of foreign students, a suggested grand narrative already discussed in the literature review is that acculturation is often seen as an important factor for foreign students to do well. A narrative approach creates space for alternative stories to this grand narrative.

Clandinin and Huber (2010) suggest that narrative questions frame a research puzzle so that one wonders about, rather than expects, a specific answer. In this respect 'talk about' and 'describe' are key words in the proposed research questions. Rather than completely directing the research I believe I was able to show respect to participants by providing them the opportunity to speak freely and therefore feel empowered (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

### **Utilising a Feminist Lens**

Respect and empowerment were also evident in the use of a feminist theoretical lens. This was combined with a narrative approach by following in the footsteps of researchers such as Riessman, Speedy and Etherington, who base research relationships on equality and collaboration. Many doors have been opened by feminist researchers in regard to power relations, with a commitment to reflecting on the complexities of social contexts for participants (Speedy, 2008). Feminist researchers create a sense of power for participants by giving a voice to their experiences (Etherington, 2017). This connects directly with the working title for this research and also highlights feminist research as advocating for

marginalised groups, in this case adolescent foreign students. By utilising a feminist lens I believe I was able to relate with the participants in a way that did not dominate but rather created space and acceptance for how they make meaning of their experiences with adolescent foreign students (Riessman, 2002).

It is not surprising that the use of a narrative approach and a feminist lens has been guided by my counselling background. As a counsellor my primary modalities are person-centred therapy and solution-focused therapy, the principles and values of which closely align with my own worldview and philosophical assumptions I hold in regard to life and living. The underlying assumptions of person-centred therapy are that clients' views are valued with a focus on the individual's experience and an egalitarian relationship between the client and therapist (Jones-Smith, 2016). Solution-focused therapy is associated with social constructivism, which promotes subjective rather than objective realities and the capacity that humans have for making meaning out of life experiences (Jones-Smith, 2016). My counselling influences have clear connections with the philosophical principles of qualitative and feminist research. Solution-focused therapy also allows the client to decide the goals of therapy, moving away from the role of the therapist as an expert. This fits ideally with narrative research as the researcher, like a solution-focused therapy counsellor, begins from a "curious, not knowing' position" (Anderson & Gehart, 2007, as cited in Etherington & Bridges, 2011).

Using a qualitative narrative approach, with a feminist lens, is appropriate for this research because not only do these approaches complement each other in terms of their philosophical and theoretical underpinnings, they also complement my beliefs and assumptions about the world. They offer a useful way of narrating experience through a collaborative, empowering and reciprocal journey. Most importantly, this approach will allow for rich and detailed experiences to be explored in regard to how counsellors talk about their experiences working with adolescent foreign students.

## Method

### Sample size

This study focused on four counsellors talking about their experiences working with adolescent foreign students. Terry et al. (2017) describe sample size as a “fraught, contentious and debated topic in qualitative research” (p. 9). In a similar fashion, Butina (2015) raises the issue of there being no straightforward rules in regard to sample size in qualitative research. Marshall et al. (2013) also express concern over the lack of guidelines and rigour when qualitative researchers justify sample size and recommend three approaches to add credibility. Firstly, recommendations from qualitative methodologists should be utilised (Marshall et al., 2013). The recommendation from Creswell (2013) of a sample size of four to five for this type of research was noted. Secondly, citing the sample size of similar studies is advised. Using similar studies as a guide, Etherington and Bridges (2011), Grafanaki and McLeod (2002) and Westergaard (2013), with samples sizes of three, six and five respectively, the number of four counsellors was chosen to focus on the quality and depth of the responses. This number was intended as a guide and there was always the option to re-evaluate if required as the study progressed.

Demonstration of saturation is the final recommendation of Marshall et al. (2013) and is also discussed by Saunders et al. (2018). Both authors see saturation as essential to qualitative research yet express concern that it is defined in varying ways. Taking on board the advice of Saunders et al. (2018) in regard to transparency and chosen research approach, this study chose to see saturation as an ongoing process which is unlikely to be achieved given the Masters level of this research and a limited timeframe. It is acknowledged that this sample size will only encapsulate some descriptions of experiences in regard to counselling adolescent foreign students rather than a broad and comprehensive investigation which achieves saturation. The realistic goal was to gather detailed stories from a small number of

participants so that rich, in-depth descriptions of at least some experiences can be gained (Butina, 2015; Grafanaki & McLeod, 2002).

Interestingly, Gergen et al. (2004), in their article about social construction and adolescent psychology, offer a different perspective in regard to saturation. As they look at qualitative research from a social constructionist standpoint they question traditional experimentalist's requirements of sample size as this presumes the need to detect generalisations and predictions for the future. Their research, like mine, instead presumes "that most behaviour is culturally and historically perishable" and so the aim is to sensitise professionals to ways of understanding and reforming the future (Gergen et al., 2004, p. 397). In this respect, they would argue saturation can be achieved through only four participants. True to the social constructionist ideology of this research I acknowledge this different perspective in regard to saturation.

### **Participant recruitment**

Counsellors were asked to volunteer for this research via the local NZAC group and the local school counsellors' network. An email was sent to members of both groups outlining the aims and process of the research, including an information letter and consent form (Appendix A). I also spoke about this volunteer opportunity at one of the NZAC monthly colloquiums, and two of the counsellor network forums which are held twice a school term. A total of eight counsellors expressed an interest in taking part in this study. Whilst the flexibility of this approach allowed the sample size to be increased, in the end only four of these counsellors were able to commit to an interview. As the required amount of participants was achieved I did not need to utilise random sampling or a snowball approach. The four participants all identify as female and represent a range of ethnic backgrounds and counselling experience. The ethnic backgrounds include one counsellor identifying as Fijian-Indian and Pākehā, two as Pākehā and one participant has chosen to keep her ethnic



background confidential. Years of counselling experience include four years, sixteen years, twenty-seven years, and forty years, mostly in high schools settings but also in community agencies for some of the participants.

Criteria for involvement included counsellors who had worked with adolescent foreign students within the past two years, at any intermediate or secondary level school or organisation which offers counselling services to adolescents, and using any counselling modalities. The focus of this study is on adolescent foreign students and counselling in general, not on a particular modality of counselling. I did not wish to make an assumption that one counselling modality will be more effective with adolescent foreign students than another. By incorporating all counselling modalities an inclusive approach was taken. The counselling modalities utilised and shared by participants include solution-focused therapy, narrative therapy, person-centred therapy and mediation support.

## **Setting**

Taylor et al. (2016) suggests that for qualitative research the ideal setting is easily accessible, convenient and comfortable for the participant, and one in which the researcher can build rapport and gain trust. Public places are advisable in ethical research practice, in terms of being culturally and socially sensitive, but also meeting in private homes can create issues in regard to vulnerability and safety. Examples of suggested suitable settings included the participants' natural, daily counselling setting at the school or organisation they work, or a location at Canterbury University such as Te Puna, the Central Library. Given the situation at the time in relation to COVID-19 interviews were offered via video communication options, if participants were comfortable with this and it was required. For this study conversations were held in public locations of the participants' choosing, which included the researcher's place of work at the request of one participant, a public library

meeting room for one participant, and the natural, daily counselling setting of two participants.

## **Data collection**

To ensure quality and a rich data set, data was gathered from three sources: interviews, or conversations, with participants, field notes made after the conversations and journal reflective notes recorded throughout the research process.

In-depth interviewing is a suitable qualitative and narrative method as it yields descriptive data and explores subjective experiences (Taylor et al., 2016). To ensure the feminist value of collaboration the term conversation was preferred to interview (Etherington & Bridges, 2011). Riessman (2002) notes the difference between standard practice interviews and the less dominating and more relational model of interviews: the “life world of naturally occurring conversation and social interaction ... following participants down their diverse trails” (p. 169). Indeed, qualitative interviews are better described as conversations between equals where the researcher and the narrator co-construct discussion, listen to each other and probe into experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Phoenix, 2017; Taylor et al., 2016). I was guided by Butina (2015) using a general guide approach for my conversations, so that it was more than an informal conversation and yet not simply standardised open-ended questions (Appendix B). I entered each conversation with six broad primary questions and multiple probing questions under each of these (Butina, 2015). A simplified version of this, focusing on the six broad primary questions, was shared with participants before the conversation so they had the opportunity to consider these prior (Appendix C). This allowed for detailed stories and flexibility in each conversation yet also ensured consistency for each participant, especially given the limited scope and timeframe of this research. With these principles in mind conversations ranged in duration from 60-75 minutes in length and were

audio-recorded or video-recorded at the participant's choosing. Conversations occurred from September 2020 through to December 2020.

Open-ended questions such as “tell me about your experiences when counselling adolescent foreign students” were chosen so there was no agenda and participants could elaborate in their own words. One of the first questions asked participants to tell me about themselves, which created space for the participants to share where they are from and who they are, or in other words, their story. I also shared information about myself so that the participants knew I was not asking them to do anything I would not be willing to do also. I believe that this not only developed understanding but also a respectful, genuine connection, as well as a culturally responsive approach from me as the researcher. Another question addressed terminology, for example allowing participants to explore and clarify what the term ‘adolescent foreign student’ meant for them. Like Georgiadou (2015), this acknowledged the study's ontological position of recognising each participant's subjective experience and perspective, as well as the interpretivist epistemological stance of the participant's experiences and interpretations being context dependent. A final question asked if there was anything else the participant would like to discuss, which allowed unanticipated topics or themes to be addressed (Georgiadou, 2015).

This study endeavoured to utilise flexibility in the research design so that questions evolved and refocused as understanding evolved (Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Nowell et al., 2017). For example, after it was suggested by the participant in the first conversation, I added the word ‘theme’ to a sub-question I asked in regard to noticing patterns or contrasts when participants worked with adolescent foreign students compared to non-adolescent foreign students. This was a useful term to use as it helped to develop more detailed discussion of the participants' experiences with adolescent foreign students in all of the conversations. Another example I have noted in my reflections is that I began to ask if the participants

intentionally raised particular questions with adolescent foreign students, as I noticed similar topics and questions being shared across the conversations.

Rich field notes were routinely made after the conversations, alongside transcription, to identify non-verbal gestures essential to the understanding of the participants' words and interactional details of how the stories were told (Taylor et al., 2016). For example, after my conversation with one participant I noted, "... was laid back and at ease; she sat back easily on the couch and used fluid hand gestures." This informed a later journal reflection: "comfortable is the word that keeps coming to mind for me, through her thoughtful reflections alongside how she lightly made jokes about herself as well". Whereas field notes turn outwards, journal reflections turn inwards. Journal reflections focus on feelings, responses, hunches and insights, and making meaning of the experience of conversations, as well as creating space for puzzling things over and acknowledging the researcher may be influenced or changed as part of the inquiry process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). A journal reflection noted this realisation of influence for me: "... why I feel so disappointed about Christchurch's racist reputation. I don't see it because I am not it, or at least as much as I can hope not to be it... but this conversation has helped me to realise how poor the behaviour of many others is and the significant impact it has." The term 'wakefulness' is used by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) in relation to the journaling process and it was important for me to be wakeful so that these softer, more elusive and reflective aspects of research were valued, rather than just assuming what is said or recorded is the only worthy data.

## **Ethical issues**

Cornforth (2011) emphasises the moral responsibility of ethical practice in research ensuring that it is justified in terms of benefiting individuals or the community. The findings of the literature review suggest that this research will be beneficial for adolescent foreign students

and those counselling them if its outcomes are incorporated into counselling practice. A clear process was followed so that the participants had every opportunity to understand completely what they agreed to, possible benefits or risks of participation, and how they were protected from foreseeable harm (Cornforth, 2011). In accordance with Te Tiriti O Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi, I endeavoured to work in a way that is meaningful in the context of, and respectful towards, the participants' cultural communities (NZAC, 2020b).

Etherington (2017) and Speedy (2008) stress being accountable and responsible toward participants and engaging in a relational ethic of care. As has been discussed above, the chosen research methods ensured a collaborative approach and a commitment to equality in the relationship. Of particular importance in the relationship was ensuring the participants were informed and supported, especially in regard to confidentiality and consent. This was explained in a letter and a consent form was signed by each participant before conversations started (Appendix A). The introductory letter explained key elements including expected timeframes, participation could be withdrawn at any stage, recorded data will be destroyed five years after research is complete, transcripts will be stored securely and participants will have access to their transcript and the completed research thesis will be a public document (University of Canterbury, 2020). Pseudonyms were used for the participants and they were given the opportunity to choose their own, honouring the feminist principles of the research. The findings have not required the use of names for clients participants spoke about but pseudonyms would have been discussed if this was necessary. I also made myself available if participants needed to ask any questions or discuss any aspects of the research.

There were a number of challenges and tensions I had to carefully consider to ensure an ethical approach to this research. Firstly, whilst acknowledging Te Tiriti O Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi, the participants I spoke with came from a variety of ethnicities. I was aware that for some participants my ethnic background was different as I identify as Pākehā,

and even though two participants identify as Pākehā I cannot assume that my experience of being Pākehā is the same as theirs. I endeavoured to be respectful of ethnic and cultural differences by including the following question in each conversation: “Can you please tell me a little bit about yourself, including whether there is anything you would like us to do at the start of this conversation to meet your needs?” Some example prompts for this question included beliefs and values, experiences in different cultures, experiences as part of a marginalised group, and multi-cultural approach to counselling. This question provided participants with the opportunity to include anything from their background that was important for them.

Another tension I faced was that I already knew two of the participants prior to their volunteering for this research. This was a possible dilemma in that I know these participants in a dual role, both as a colleague/friend and as a researcher. Cornforth (2011) suggests I am suited for managing this tension pointing out that ethical relationships are familiar territory for counsellors. Indeed, I have been able to manage and protect these dual roles by using my usual counselling practices. For example, in my researcher role I followed the participant’s lead in each conversation and did not include information or questions relating to what I knew about them outside of the conversation. In my colleague/friend role I have not discussed this research with these participants when I have met them in other settings.

A key element to managing these ethical challenges and minimising risk for the participants has been clear communication. For example, after writing each transcript and account, the details of which will be discussed in the ‘data analysis’ section of this chapter, I shared these with the participants. This was so that they could not only provide feedback in regard to the content but also indicate how much of their ethnic details they were comfortable to include in the account. In the draft account I used different coloured texts to highlight the content that acknowledged their ethnicity and details of their life experiences that could potentially identify them. It was through this process that one of the participants indicated she would

like to keep her ethnic background confidential and the remaining participants gave authority for their ethnic background, and other details, to be included in the final version of the accounts in Chapter 4. This communication has minimised harm for each participant by involving them in the decision making process in regard to confidentiality. A final decision I have made to support this is not to use any pseudonym in connection with the excerpts in the thematic analysis in Chapter 5, as I did not invite participants to review this chapter given the time they had already given in reading the transcripts and accounts. This is something I had to grapple with and feel this decision protects the participants from possible identification and at the same time does not limit quality discussion of the themes. Through clear and transparent communication I believe I have been able to honour the needs of each participant and carry out ethical research.

Planning for this research was guided by the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC) Human Ethics Policy, and the NZAC Code of Ethics, which defines research as part of professional counselling practice (NZAC, 2020b; University of Canterbury, 2020). By following the guidelines of these documents I ensured my research maintained appropriate ethical and cultural standards, provided respect and care for those involved and met current best practice standards. Ethics for this research was approved by the ERHEC in August 2020, with one amendment also approved in September 2020 (Appendix D).

### **Trustworthiness and rigour**

To ensure that findings are meaningful and useful research must be carried out in a rigorous, methodical and trustworthy manner (Nowell et al., 2017). Several aspects of the trustworthiness and rigour of this research have already been discussed in this chapter. This section connects these to the key advice provided in the literature so that it is clear exactly how and why each of these steps has been taken to ensure a trustworthy research process.

Credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness as the researcher is demonstrating that a true and accurate picture of the field under study is being presented (Shenton, 2004). Where its scope and timeframes allowed this research was able to meet a number of the provisions for credibility. Examples include adopting a well-established research method using recognised authors, processes and comparable studies; tactics to help ensure honesty so that information was freely offered were included, such as allowing participants to volunteer or withdraw; disclosure of rigorous and consistent recording practises and systems; and I engaged in a reflective commentary by journaling my insights and impressions (Butina, 2015; Nowell et al, 2017; Shenton, 2004). Shenton (2004) highlights Lincoln and Guba's (1985) view that member checking is the most important aspect of research credibility and I have engaged in member checking, as discussed above and also further in the data analysis section below, by being as collaborative as possible with participants.

Transferability is also important for trustworthiness. By providing details in regard to context the reader is able to decide if the findings of the research relates to their own practice or research and can therefore be confidently transferred. I have followed Shenton's advice and defined the boundaries of the study clearly such as numbers of participants involved and data collection methods and timeframes (Shenton, 2004). Transferability can be complicated in regard to qualitative research as such research is context specific and dependent on what the researcher identifies as important or unimportant. It is therefore not a straightforward process to apply findings from qualitative research to other situations. My desire to achieve a thick and rich description through narrative analysis has hopefully aided transferability and alleviated some of these complications.

Nowell et al. (2017) describe credibility as being enhanced if the data is analysed by more than one person. Given the timeframe and scope of this Masters level research I am the only



researcher yet collaboration with another colleague was intended to ensure quality of analysis. I had initially proposed to find a colleague to read the transcripts, notes and coding. Given their distance from the dynamics of the settings, they may have identified themes that I had not noticed (Taylor et al., 2016). Given the limited timeframe, especially when asking a colleague with their own commitments to volunteer their time, this was not something I felt was realistically achievable once I was in the process of carrying out this research. I feel that the rigorous data analysis process, described below, combined with journal reflections and regular supervision meetings has ensured credibility.

Dependability and confirmability are also important for trustworthiness. Dependability is created when the research process is explained in sufficient detail so that it can be repeated by another researcher in the future (Shenton, 2004). I have achieved this to the best of my ability, as detailed in this chapter, by describing the research planning and implementation, the operational detail of how data was gathered and engaging with reflective appraisal of the research project (Shenton, 2004). Confirmability ensures that the findings reflect the experiences and ideas of the participants, and so the researcher must acknowledge their own bias and predisposition. This is addressed in the next section: Reflexivity.

There are some concerns about trustworthiness and rigour in regard to qualitative research due to its interpretive and flexible approach (Clarke & Braun, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017; Shenton, 2004). In addition, Pendse and Inman (2017) note the lack of a theoretical framework or lens in research in the field of foreign students and counselling and stress its importance in terms of providing a context for the research as well as guiding how the research will be interpreted. This research has endeavoured to address these concerns by clearly discussing above the theoretical perspective and epistemology which guides this study.

## Reflexivity

Reflexivity encompasses being aware of the influence of different contexts and concepts, and how these shape one's personal identity and understanding of the world around us. As "the researcher is never a blank slate", they must be reflexive and consider their personal interest in this topic and how this will impact data collection and analysis (Terry et al., 2017, p. 9). It is for me, as it is for Etherington, "both a moral and a methodological issue" to acknowledge my role in the co-construction of knowledge (Etherington, 2017, p. 86). Applicable to me, Bager-Charleson (2014) notes that reflexivity is often traced to feminist principles and that it is a skill developed by counsellors in their training.

Of most significance to the way I view the research question is my own experience working with adolescent foreign students. I am aware of the empathy I have developed for adolescent foreign students and that I instinctively feel protective of them. Whilst acknowledging research, such as that of Arthur (2017) and Sandhu (1994), I am aware that it is still my assumption that adolescent foreign students need more effective support. I feel it was a strength for me to draw on my beliefs but I was also open to similarities and differences between the participants' ideas, as well as my own, and that my opinions were likely to change as I pieced the stories together (Bager-Charleson, 2014). I am aware of possible power dynamics and if I was not open I may have come across as an expert or an outsider. This was not an insurmountable challenge as being non-judgemental and accepting of others' practice fits with my worldview and practice as a counsellor.

Using my journal for reflective commentary I aimed to ensure confirmability and trustworthiness. I have noted my beliefs which helped to make decisions about methods, why certain approaches were favoured, and my developing experience and understandings during the research process (Shenton, 2004). For example, in my initial proposal I was leading with wonderings about my assumptions and feelings based on my experience

counselling adolescent foreign students and if this could be supported through the research. By ensuring trustworthiness and engaging in reflexivity I have been able to use this as a starting point rather than letting my goals influence the research outcomes. Nowell et al. (2017), Riessman (2002) and Speedy (2008) place significant emphasis on the responsibility of the researcher; the researcher is the instrument for analysis and so the researcher needs to be transparent about how their theoretical assumptions and interest inform what is analysed, which boundaries are put in place and what judgements are made. A reflexive journal was central to developing a clear audit trail of the decisions and choices that I have made (Nowell et al., 2017). Both Shenton (2004) and Nowell et al. (2017) see audit trails, whether they be through journaling or detailed process descriptions, as integral to trustworthiness.

A key theme in narrative research is "...the relationship between the researcher and the researched in which both parties will learn and change in the encounter" (Pinnegar & Daynes in Creswell, 2013, p. 57). By being aware of reflexivity, acknowledging my bias and possible tensions between narratives, as well as my growth through the process, I not only gained insight into my own experiences and honoured the stories of the participants, I also engaged in ethical and trustworthy research (Cornforth, 2011).

## **Data Analysis**

I have taken a dual approach and utilised both narrative analysis and analysis of narratives in this study. Creswell (2013) and Etherington (2002) credit Polkinghorne (1995) with providing a clear description of these two approaches. Narrative analysis refers to concepts being derived from data and analysis of narratives refers to concepts being derived from theory.

Narrative analysis sees social reality as constructed by the telling of the story. Butina (2015) sums this up effectively as "...the stories themselves become the raw data" (p. 190).

Narrative analysis in this study takes the form of "accounts", which will be explained in further detail below. Embodying the approach of Etherington and Bridges (2011) I have retained the integrity of each participant's story by including accounts with detailed descriptions of their experiences with adolescent foreign students, capturing their views and treating them as knowledge in their own right. McLeod and Elliott (2011) refer to this as narrative knowing; telling a story that is highly memorable and offers knowledge that is readily assimilated into pre-existing practice. Lindsay and Schwind (2016) believe narrative research is working when the reader is encouraged to ask questions about their own practices and inspired to see options that were previously not known. Narrative analysis also provides a way to acknowledge competing narratives, both among the different participants as well as within the descriptions of a single participant, therefore providing space for all perspectives in discussion. For some, these accounts may be all that is needed to start making adjustments in counselling practice, for others they may be the seed of change which will be supported through the analysis of narratives.

In contrast, analysis of narratives approaches the narratives as the starting point, locating common themes across the data. Analysis of narratives is also known as thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), and this study uses their step-by-step approach as a general guideline. Clarke and Braun (2018) stress the importance of actively underpinning thematic analysis with theory so that it is used effectively. They point out that they intend their approach to thematic analysis to be underpinned by qualitative research philosophy and that it can be used in approaches informed by social constructionism, allowing for rich interpretation of participant's stories (Clarke & Braun, 2018). This fits well with this research which takes a qualitative approach underpinned by social constructionist philosophy. Nowell et al. (2017) describe thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analysing, organizing, describing and reporting themes found within a data set" as well as "examining the

perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights” (p. 2). Terry et al. (2017) describe it as a process for ensuring rigorous and systematic engagement with data, to develop robust analysis, that is free of predetermined theories. These views support my choice of thematic analysis as a suitable method for this research methodology by focusing on understanding a person’s experience and how they make sense of that experience. Thematic analysis is described as “a good choice for researchers who feel confident that they know what they are trying to achieve” (McLeod, 2015, as cited in Clarke & Braun, 2018, p. 109). I am confident that I will utilise the full possibilities of thematic analysis by being aware of the philosophy I am underpinning it with. Through hearing the participants’ stories and then interpreting or writing about the ‘so what’ of the data, this will lead to a greater depth of understanding of what may be helpful when counselling adolescent foreign students. (Clarke & Braun, 2018; Westergaard, 2013).

Offering more than one way of knowing through both the accounts and a thematic analysis is fitting for a narrative approach and my philosophical position. My experience of analysis was that both approaches complimented each other and one did not work well without the other. Butina (2015) points out that there is no universal approach for thematic analysis, therefore a researcher can adapt analysis to the purpose of the research and the research questions, which is what I am doing through my dual approach. Clarke and Braun (2018) liken this to shopping at a “make your own bear shop” (p. 109). The eyes, nose, fur that I have selected for my bear is what best fits this research study and is informed by the theory and philosophy behind why I have chosen this methodology and method. Yet this dual approach could have stretched the limited timeframes and scope of this Masters level research and risked either not doing justice to both or going beyond what was realistically possible. This Data Analysis section will therefore explain how I utilised both narrative analysis as well as an analysis of narratives in a way that was meaningful for the participants and myself, was

realistic in terms of the scope of the project and fitting in terms of the purpose and philosophy of this research.

Analysis started with the conversations, field notes and reflective journaling discussed above. The next step was transcription of the video or audio recordings of each conversation. Given the Masters level of this research, and a limited budget, I transcribed the conversations. Despite the significant amount of time this took it ensured quality and rigour by allowing me to engage further with the data. Indeed, qualitative analysis is a time consuming process, yet it is also dynamic and creative (Speedy, 2008). After transcription, with the aim of being thorough in my approach, I read and re-read the data, listened to recordings again, amended transcripts as required based on feedback from participants, noticed patterns or quirks, started to ask questions and continued to note my own reflections as all of these evolved. After each conversation had been transcribed, I continued to ponder, muse and reflect, gaining a great deal from each participants' story. Based on Clarke and Braun's version of thematic analysis this is referred to as Phase One: Familiarisation with the data, which they describe as the bedrock for doing good thematic analysis (Terry et al., 2017).

Generating initial codes is the second phase of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding - words or short phrases assigned to sort data and facilitate analysis - happened for each individual narrative when the conversations had been completed. Open coding was used to ensure that codes emerged from the data. This is also referred to as inductive coding, taking a 'bottom up' approach and using the data as the starting point (Terry et al., 2017). This occurred by noticing particular vocabulary, recurring subject matter, emotions, or turning points, with codes being semantic as well as more conceptual. It was important to identify tentative, or even ambiguous codes, as well as utilising memos - conversations with myself about the data - as these became important as analysis evolved (Saldana, 2009). For example, one journal reflection noted the development of 'Hope' as a code: "Even though

they [the participants] did not use the word hope I was struck by their hopefulness when talking about adolescent foreign students who often seem so troubled to me ... sometimes I forget to see the hope.”

After familiarisation and generating codes I focused on narrative analysis by developing each participant’s story, or account, utilising the transcripts, codes and my reflections and journal entries. This was the obvious next step for me through what I see as my natural connection to narrative research. During familiarisation and coding I automatically began to bring the accounts to life in my mind, developing tentative ideas and story outlines from each conversation as I became increasingly familiar with them. Qualitative coding is “a process of reflection and a way of interacting with and thinking about data” which “allows the researcher to simplify and focus on specific characteristics of the data” (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 5). I found that planning and writing the accounts was my intuitive way of thinking about the data so that I could focus on its characteristics.

It was indeed a harmonious and organic process of meaning-making, as Etherington and Bridges (2011) describe it, as well as a sense-making process allowing for growth and change as described by Phoenix (2017). I use the words exciting and overwhelming equally when I reflect on the data analysis phase, which took place predominantly over the two month summer holiday period. Whether I was tramping or camping with my family, walking the dog, driving in the car, or simply doing odd jobs at home, pen and paper were never far away so I could jot down ideas, outlines or themes. Every week or so, I would sit down and collate my scraps of paper, journal entries and puzzle of ideas, enjoying the process of bringing ideas together and into order for each account, but then often creating just as many new notes and ideas in the process! Like Speedy (2008), I could not imagine doing it any other way.

A sticking point for me was that I did not wish to do an injustice to the participants by over-valuing my ability as a story teller or focusing too much on me, and therefore not honouring their accounts. Clandinin and Huber (2010) stress the importance of narrative inquirers continuing to think narratively during research so that they do not distance themselves from participants and dissect their stories. I have resolved this by deciding to write accounts rather than stories. I interpret an account as a description or interpretation of an event or experience. What I have developed are not simply stories in my mind but rather accounts which bring together the narrative of my experience of the conversations with participants, in which they shared their narratives of experiences, which is the 'account aspect'. The 'story-telling aspect' is that I have also included the participants' own words, which are in italics. I feel this captures their descriptions of experiences as well as what we co-constructed together. This approach is similar to that of Riessman (2002) who includes transcripts of speech from interviews so that readers can see the stories apart from the researcher's analysis, "so the selves of storyteller and analyst remain separate" (p. 176). Smith and Sparkes (2008) refer to this as a storied resource perspective noting that narrative identities are not individual but rather socio-cultural phenomena realised through relationships. By taking this approach I am clearly acknowledging the accounts are co-constructed, with the participants as the authors of their narrative and myself as the author of the experience of our conversation together.

Collaborating with the participants and actively involving them in the research was essential, especially in regard to the narrative approach and feminist lens being employed. A key aspect of analysis placed emphasis on consulting research participants and allowing them to negotiate text and content, stressing their role in the co-constructed knowledge which is also referred to as member checking (Etherington, 2017; Shenton, 2004; Speedy, 2008). In order to achieve this the transcripts and accounts were given to the participants to highlight the most important aspects from their point of view (Etherington & Bridges, 2011). The intention was not simply for them to confirm this is what they said but rather for them to revisit the



conversation, reflect and consider “Is this you?” or “Is this the character you want to be when this is read by others?” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 148). All of the participants responded positively to the accounts when they were shared with them and confirmed that they did reflect ‘who they wanted to be when the accounts were read by others’. When member checking I was prepared for responses that were affirming as well as disrupting (Clandinin et al., 2007). Overall, participants were very affirming and only suggested some minor corrections in the transcripts.

After completing the drafts, I developed a list of key codes for each account. Just as coding helped me to develop outlines for each account, developing each account helped me to identify themes. This is the first part of how I approached Phases Three, Four and Five of the thematic analysis: theme development, theme review and theme naming (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Themes bring together components which are important in relation to the research question and otherwise meaningless on their own (Nowell et al., 2017). Searching for themes occurred after coding and writing draft accounts with analysis looking across the conversations and accounts to identify similarities, contradictions, ambiguities and narrative threads between the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Etherington & Bridges, 2011). Referring to the work of DeSantis and Ugarizza, themes are described as active creations of the researcher rather than passive and simply appearing fully formed (Clarke & Braun, 2018). The list of key codes which were created for each account acted like a Master Code List. As Nowell et al. (2017) point out, the use of a code list forces the researcher to justify the inclusion of each code and how it should be used, as well as helping to ensure a consistent approach is used. The list of key codes developed from the accounts was used to search for broader categories which were then organised into themes which provided more detailed meaning and discussion of participants’ descriptions of experiences working with adolescent foreign students (Saldana, 2009).

The second part of theme development used what I call a 'brainstorm map'. Terry et al. (2017) encourage the use of a thematic map for postgraduate students like myself and I developed a brainstorm map which suited my needs. This involved a very large piece of paper on which I wrote down every code from the transcripts, using a different colour for each participant, grouping similar codes and identifying links or contrasts across codes. Once completed, I spent several sessions visiting and re-visiting the brainstorm map renaming and removing codes, as well as combining and collapsing codes into more meaningful patterns, categories and themes (Taylor et al., 2016; Terry et al., 2017). This eventuated into a second brainstorm map with a refined collection of codes so that a list of tentative themes and sub-themes was identified. By using these brainstorm maps I found I was able to better identify the relationships and boundaries between key ideas and themes, with little "bleeding of codes between themes", so that themes could be distinctive but also work alongside each other. (Terry et al., 2017, p. 19). For example, I originally identified Space and Connection as separate themes but realised there was a clear relationship with the sub-themes which were similar. Space became part of the Connection theme, which evolved into 'Developing a connection by making space for their unique experiences'.

Combining both the brainstorm map and key codes lists from each account together, was the final part of the theme analysis, or Phase Five: Naming and defining themes. I was helped by discussion of themes as being like key characters in the story we are telling about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Just as characters do, themes have their own personality and their own 'essence' or core concepts (Clarke & Braun, 2018). Writing the accounts and developing the refined brainstorm map helped to summarise the core meaning, or characteristic, of each potential theme. This acted like a quality control exercise, helping to decide if the themes worked well in relation to the coded data, the data set as a whole and the research questions (Terry et al., 2017). This process also helped to reduce the risk of naming themes too early on, ensuring themes were identified which provide the best

explanation for the data as a whole (Terry et al., 2017). The final stage of analysis, Phase 6, involves producing the report and in this case also the accounts. This follows as findings in the next two chapters.

## Chapter 4: Findings – Accounts

Embodying narrative analysis, which sees social reality as constructed by the telling of the story, I have chosen to write an account for each participant. Narrative analysis puts the story of each participant at the forefront treating their experiences and views as knowledge in their own right. My goal is that for some readers these accounts alone will be engaging and highly memorable. Reading them may be the start of positive changes in their counselling practice as they see new options and alternatives, as well as ask questions about what they are already doing (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016; McLeod & Elliott, 2011). I must acknowledge my personal bias in choosing narrative analysis as for me stories are how things become memorable, they are often how I make sense of the world and they provide clarity about what is important to me.

What is important to me is “talk that sings ... the expressions of life that have struck a chord...” (Speedy, 2008, p. 36). In choosing to write the accounts I have been guided considerably by the work of Speedy (2008) who talks about narrative meaning different things to different people. When I pondered what narrative means to me and the hopes I have in writing the accounts, I discovered that I see these accounts as celebrating differences, connecting with others, engaging imagination or possibility, and as Speedy (2008) expresses it “...providing different spaces from which to ponder the world or ponder the same spaces with different eyes” (p. 44). Most importantly to me, this narrative research is about honouring the experiences of those who bravely shared theirs with me and so I have ensured, as much as possible, that I have retained the integrity of each participant’s story (Etherington & Bridges, 2011).

As discussed in Chapter 3: ‘Methodology’, for the accounts that follow pseudonyms have been used for the participants, the text in italics is the participants’ words and the plain text is my narrative of our conversation together.

## A broader lens: an account of my conversation with Halima

Halima's world has always been diverse – her past, her present and her hopes for the future are all part of the broader lens with which she views the world. In Halima's world diversity is acknowledged, embraced and celebrated. *I just think it is really important to have diverse voices represented or explored, and their different realities and their experiences ... how we actually embrace other as a whole construct really.*

Born in New Zealand over fifty years ago to parents of Fijian-Indian and Pākehā descent, Halima herself is culturally diverse and has embraced many experiences through many different lenses. Some of those she shared with me include being brought up by a solo mother who instilled values of reading and the importance of learning, venturing overseas and studying for a year as a student and being impacted by significant events such as the Springbok Tour. I noticed that she talks about this event as bruising as *there was so much political stuff going on and it was really rigid ... you know like if you were brown you weren't supposed to go out with a Pākehā person*. Yet she also talks about it as a formative time for her. Halima chooses to see the possibilities out of each situation, she does not shy away from challenges or focus on the negatives. Halima's work history is also diverse; counselling at several different schools and community organisations, as well as in prison. I felt like asking, where haven't you worked, what challenge haven't you taken on?!

In her twenty-seventh year as a counsellor, Halima's work with adolescent foreign students at a secondary school is filled with cultural awareness. *I always introduce myself and my ethnicity and culture so I guess I am starting off from a place of visibility around ethnicity and culture and I invite the student to share a bit about their family and where they come from.* Halima is *aware of needing to cross a bridge ... making sure that I am being inclusive and positive and as culturally appropriate as I can be ... when they are coming to talk all of them is allowed to be visible*. A key part of crossing this cultural bridge is to learn as much as she

can about different cultures. *Not being a cultural expert in all of their cultures is a real disadvantage ... I just try to find out and learn from the people around them ... and trial and error!* (We both laughed at this point and when reviewing the transcript later I noted to myself that Halima's errors would likely still be a success due to her genuine interest, desire to learn and awareness of the importance of connecting with the cultures of adolescent foreign students).

Halima has noticed that this approach makes a real difference for adolescent foreign students as they have a higher energy ... *people want to share about their own culture and their own experiences. You know, so I try and greet them in their own language ... and know if it is coming up to Diwali ... or Ramadan.* Being aware that the lens is not just individual for adolescent foreign students is also key, as well as being flexible enough to accommodate this. *With students from the Philippines I felt like their identity was shaped more by a collective lens than an individual lens and so hearing their voices in a group of five or six seemed to be much more comfortable and authentic than doing a one-to-one counselling session.*

Ako<sup>5</sup> and delight are important aspects of Halima's work with adolescent foreign students. Halima speaks with passion when describing the reciprocal nature of working with adolescent foreign students; how much she learns from their diverse voices and the great joy she gains from working with them. *What I would love to do is to just learn more about the individual student culture ... you know, the differences and how we see things and connections and similarities ... There's some ako I guess, some learning and some sharing at the same time, in your role as a teacher and a counsellor – it's a delight ... I am enriched by the difference that they bring.* Halima recently led a group pastoral care project, hoping to develop empathy for different racial and cultural experiences of adolescent foreign students.

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<sup>5</sup> 'Ako' is the Māori concept meaning both to teach and to learn.

In this project the foreign adolescent students *just bubbled ... it was wonderful, it was a really nice thing to witness*. Halima welcomes, and finds pleasure, in the building of networks as well; *... every time I work with an international student there are usually two or three other people connected somehow ... when it is going well it can connect and bring communities together*.

To me it seems that working with students from different backgrounds is something that Halima not only finds enjoyable and important, but also something that is natural for her in terms of how she sees the world. *I think sometimes the fact that I bridge two cultures, well three cultures in some ways, that's helpful ... just that making sense of managing differences ... some shared lived experience at some level*. I added to the conversation that this was something I don't have. Halima's response filled me with hope, acknowledging that my experiences are simply different and she can never assume that her experiences are the same as those of adolescent foreign students anyway.

From her early years, her life of diverse experiences and strong role models, Halima embraces the need for a broader lens with the attitude of someone who goes out, creates networks and does not shy away from doing things that make a meaningful difference for others. *Best case scenario they feel more strengthened and a stronger sense of their own voice and their own needs*. I can see Halima in her own march, not the Springbok Tour and not a protest, but rather a positive gathering and an opportunity to let people know about the importance of a broader understanding of the experiences of others. I think her placard would say something like: "Embrace diversity and challenge the dogma! No job is too big, no dream is too small!"

## My unique positions: an account of my conversation with Serena

*I am in this unique position.* This is how Serena describes herself. As the only person of colour in the counselling department in the secondary school she works at, Serena has noticed a lot of the students that are not Pākehā are coming to see her as *they feel they can come and talk to her*. Although she sees herself as a Kiwi, when she acknowledges her ethnic background and experiences growing up in New Zealand with adolescent foreign students, they will say *Oh, you will know what that is like ... for some students there is a shift like, oh okay, we can tell you more*. Serena is an important person for them and they are important people to her. There is an instant connection for Serena when working with foreign students; *I feel a difference in my body language and the way I work with them ... I tend to be a little bit more sensitive with them ... just sitting with them, being really genuine, that's what I try to do and telling them who I am and where I come from ...*

I noticed other unique positions for Serena as well. She has the unique ability of being able to *completely empathise with where they are coming from, just having one foot in both camps*. Serena knows how it feels for adolescent foreign students managing the culture shift of living in a new country. Moving to New Zealand over fifty years ago in her childhood, Serena knows how hard it is *to kind of balance that keeping the family happy and following the expectations of their family, and yet still wanting to be true to themselves and being in school where their peers have a lot more freedom, and they would like to be doing those things but if they do they have to lie to their parents*. Serena understands that in moving to New Zealand an adolescent foreign student's sense of self and identity changes; they can realise *I don't have to be like that, other people [New Zealanders] don't have to be like that*. Serena also understands that she has *to be careful not to dig too quickly*. Some adolescent foreign students can see counselling as being shameful as they will say, *"we don't do that back home, we should be able to manage our emotions ... we don't need to talk to anyone*



*about things.*" No matter their cultural background or expectation, it is Serena's hope that what she offers to adolescent foreign students is *somebody that is giving them a voice.*

I felt I could hear Serena's own voice very clearly and that I was learning a great deal from her experiences, both as an adolescent foreign student herself and from her counselling work with these students. As Serena spoke with me there were many things I realised I found unsettling, from my Pākehā, New Zealand born and bred position. In describing her teenage years I was aghast that her father would listen on the other phone when she was talking to friends and I struggled to understand that adolescent foreign students often *don't know how to talk to their parents about what is going on for them* as there is a disconnection due to their different experiences. As Serena spoke, I found myself thinking of movies like "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" (a movie I enjoyed watching many years ago, about a young Greek woman who falls in love with a non-Greek man and the challenges of getting her family to accept him while she struggles with her own heritage and cultural identity). Even though I felt a little sheepish, I commented to Serena that this movie sounded quite real from her experience, and without batting an eyelid she replied that *"it is quite real"*. I felt confused. A movie I had laughed at, and saw as comedy and entertainment, to Serena is a reminder of how hard the cultural adjustment can be for young people. *Where do you go with that? You either hurt your family or you don't fit in. Yeah, they're sitting in this kind of scary place. I completely empathise with them and tell them about my experience and that can be helpful at times.*

Also unique to Serena, is a shift she is noticing and feeling in herself as she gains strength and inspiration from the adolescent foreign students she is working with. In the past Serena feels she minimised the fact she is a person of colour; *I would play it down rather than talk about it, you know play it down because I feel so assimilated ... just growing up in white New Zealand ... and now I've got these strong women coming to see me and they are really strong in their perception ... you know it is affecting me ... I should step up a bit for myself*

*and these young people who come to talk to me.* Sometimes it has felt too hard for Serena and she can see this with the students she works with as well, as others are not ready to change as much as they think they are yet. Still, Serena sees signs of hope. After the media coverage of Black Lives Matter, Serena has noticed a *slight awakening ... in the staffroom people that would never talk to me, would come and talk to me ... such a little change in the way they reacted ... it was like “maybe we are not as inclusive as we think we are.”* Her own experience helps her to be more sensitive and mindful with adolescent foreign students; her experience as an adult is challenging enough, and she knows it is even harder as an adolescent. *Sometimes I can’t be bothered ... and that’s why I can sit with those students and see where they are coming from.* Serena can see that the young students she is working with are living in a time where there is more likelihood of change; *I try to remind them they’re in a better place to actually make those changes, you know to push through this.*

Perhaps Serena is in a better place too. After retraining as a counsellor she is discovering her own inner strength from her work with these strong students, work which has clearly helped her to appreciate her many unique positions. I have no doubt the appreciation is reciprocal as she helps the adolescent foreign students she works with to see the many unique positions ahead of them, despite the cultural differences they face, as those cultural differences are always *hovering*. Serena knows this first hand, that is her strength and her unique position.

## **Journeys in the third culture: an account of my conversation with Shelley**

Shelley knows what it is like to be different in a different land. To be stared at because of her blonde hair, to stand out because of her Pākehā or *Farang* white skin, to not be understood because of her different accent. Shelley also knows what it is like to be different in her

homeland of New Zealand. To not have been part of her friends' experiences, to share her own overseas experiences but find it really hard because they were *experiences that no one else shared*, to be seen as showing off but really living in another country was just part of what her family did. Shelley knows what it is like to be 'other' in both places; *I probably have more of an understanding of what it feels like ... to have this mix of cultures ... I know what it is like to live in another culture and to have a love-hate relationship with that culture ... so I suppose I come into the room having all of that.*

Whilst Shelley's own journey is important, equally important is her journey with others. Growing up with parents who were both ministers, Shelley knows the value of service and helping others through roles including community and church youth work both in New Zealand and in Thailand, working as a youth pastor and then training as a counsellor. As a *youth worker I had lots of young people who would come and talk to me about their stuff and what was going on for them ...* In many ways her mission has always been to counsel others, which she has done most of her life, although she only describes herself as a qualified counsellor for the past sixteen years. Now in her forties, she brings her personal journey to the journey of the adolescent foreign students she works with in a secondary school setting.

On a journey of faith throughout her life, Shelley also literally journeyed as a *missionary kid*, living in Thailand from age eight to twelve. This experience helped her to understand what it is like to be in what Shelley calls the third culture. ... *Talking about their birth culture, their New Zealand culture and sometimes you have a third culture, which is a mix of both but very different as well. I like having those conversations, ... saying that having traditions in your birth culture that your parents come from is really important because that is your identity and who you are and not to be ashamed of that or embarrassed of that because that is what grounds you. But then also realising that there are parts of the New Zealand culture that will come into your life and then you have got this other part that can be really confusing.*

Shelley's experience as a *missionary kid* has helped her to appreciate that *the third culture* can be a challenging space, and a hard space, but it is also an okay space.

When working with adolescent foreign students Shelley journeys with them by firstly addressing and making space for the third culture; ... *with foreign students they have their traditions and their culture, and then they have got all of this stuff about identity and belonging, and who they are and pushing back on stuff they don't like, trying to figure out where their boundaries are ... So it's pretty confusing and really hard, and I guess normalising it, you know saying this is normal to be feeling like this, it is normal to have a little bit of anxiety, and it's normal to be feeling nervous about this.* Secondly, Shelley encourages adolescent foreign students to find pride in themselves; pride in who they are, no matter where they are and no matter how different they may feel. *It's being proud of who you are from the inside out, it's more than just wearing your traditional costume or traditional dress but you have got to be happy with who you are in here* [hand on heart].

What Shelley brings to counselling adolescent foreign students is her joint roles of "helper" and "other", and her ability to engage with both of these effectively. My journal reflections note my feeling that Shelley's challenges as an adolescent foreign student herself have sparked a fire in her belly. Her challenges are not for nothing as they help her in her service of others to intentionally ask questions about the third culture and to encourage pride in their position in it. Shelley believes meaningful discussion of context is important when working with adolescent foreign students. Raising their context, their third culture, means she creates the opportunity to discuss it, because if Shelley does not raise it with them they may not know about it and how helpful such a conversation can be. *I think if I was someone who hadn't had that experience I probably wouldn't have such an interest in it. But then maybe I go into that conversation when I think I shouldn't sometimes, about having a third culture, but my thinking is if I don't, who else is going to have that conversation?*

To me, Shelley has the strength of her convictions and a sense of determination. Shelley describes herself as journeying with people as she helps *them to achieve their full potential ... getting alongside them, encouraging them and giving them a little nudge to get them outside of their comfort zone*. Reflecting on this I thought of Shelley being cast in the next Hunting and Fishing advertisement as she is someone who is “Out there doing it” (not that Shelley would use such a Kiwi colloquialism because she knows adolescent foreign students would find that aspect of language challenging and would think “*what the hell is that?*” *because they don’t know what you are saying!*). Just as she has the strength of her convictions through her faith and involvement in the Church, she has the strength of her convictions and faith in knowing adolescent foreign students are helped by talking about and normalising their experiences in the third culture; *I won’t stop doing that ... for them to know that lots of stuff they are feeling is normal and there may always be a struggle and a tension there but that’s okay ... that’s just the way it is*.

## **The Runner: an account of my conversation with Bridget**

*Okay, so what do you need to know about me in terms of my various identities?* For Bridget, identity is key and being a runner is a key identity for Bridget. Actually, not just a runner but a *fanatical runner*, and may I add an impressive runner as she is still competing in her 70<sup>th</sup> year. My journal reflections later that day noted my visions of Bridget running down the driveway not long after my leaving her office, blood already pumping faster in her veins merely at the thought of heading out. Bridget’s identity as a runner is not only something important to her but something she is clearly aware of; she has a clear understanding of her identity and how important this is for her, both in her life and in her work with others.

Through her training as a mediator, Bridget knows she can use identity to connect with others; *we are not just one person but we are like an onion, we have all these different layers that are the individual parts and components of our identity so we can actually*

*connect with people if we can find which bits of our identity we share.* So when Bridget travelled and lived overseas she connected with others through her identity as a runner. The other identities Bridget shared with me, or that I noticed, include being *Ngati Pākehā*, a mother, a friend, a counsellor, a mediator, a wonderful host (partly due to her providing chocolate - *chocolate always goes with mediation*), quite a jokester but also, importantly for this research, a foreigner.

It is natural and obvious for Bridget to share her identity as a foreigner with adolescent foreign students she works with. *So I guess that my thing is, how do you connect? That's part of my process.* Bridget identifies with adolescent foreign students *on the basis of her own experience of being in a new and different culture.* Bridget has her *turangawaewae* in Christchurch, New Zealand, a land she has loved and lived on for over 40 years, which is also how long she has been counselling, but she also describes New Mexico as her second home. *That experience has given me an insight into what it is like to be a stranger in a strange land ... to have a foot in two cultures ... to have some understanding of what it is like to have to walk in different shoes.* Based on her time living and travelling in the United States for more than 12 years, Bridget usually explains to adolescent foreign students in their first counselling session that she has been in a similar situation. Bridget explores the experience of transitioning into a different culture with adolescent foreign students, knowing it is a part of their current identity; *I tell them a couple of stories about when I first got to Albuquerque so they know what I am interested in and so hopefully they will feel safer.*

Bridget's stories of arriving overseas include how she *found her tribe in New Mexico. I found all these people who had the same values as me, and the same belief systems and the same hobbies (aka running!).* Bridget's current tribe, on a professional level, is *the two lovely women in our international department* at the secondary school where she currently works part-time. Bridget describes them as a dedicated team of wonderful, hard-working women who go above and beyond what is required of them and from whom she has learned a lot.

Through their shared identity as helpers, and their connection working with adolescent foreign students, they continue to ask *what more could we be doing* so that through their tribe they can help adolescent foreign students to hopefully find theirs.

As a result of her life experience, Bridget is thoughtful and positive about her experience as a foreigner. *I have been foreign. It's quite all right.* Bridget noticed *it wasn't until I went to live in Albuquerque that I had a sense of my kiwi-ness* and was interested in what her *automatic pilot* was as a *Kiwi* and the things she found difficult to come to grips with. She noticed how things were easier for her because she was *Anglo* but there were also times when other Anglos accused her of moving to New Mexico to take their jobs. Learning from these experiences Bridget acknowledges that adolescent foreign students have a *worldview that is potentially different*. Bridget refers to this as their *cultural programming; different ways of doing and being and living*. For example, living in a collective culture and the family commitments and expectations attached to that, pressure and performance anxiety related to university entrance examinations, and not wanting to let family down. Yet, she is mindful of not making assumptions and makes sure she listens to each individual and their needs. *I just admire those girls for being brave enough to come and do what they are doing...* (just as she was brave when she moved overseas).

Through journal reflections after our conversation, I realised I felt a great sense of comfort and ease when I talked with Bridget. This came from Bridget herself. From her being comfortable with her foreign experience, her comfort at sharing what she hopes to do differently as a result of our conversation, her connection to her *turangawaewae* and to running. Bridget is comfortable with her experiences, her identities, her tribes, who she is, and what she can offer to others. *I like the work that I do. I believe passionately also in mediation.* My sense of comfort and ease with Bridget gave me an idea of how the adolescent foreign students who work with her may feel (to which Bridget would say, *you know that rests on the assumption that my interactions with them have been helpful!*). To

me, Bridget is someone who, through her own sense of comfort with her own experiences, foreign and otherwise, can alleviate a difficult situation for others.

Developing these accounts has allowed me to engage fully with the participants' stories.

Alongside coding and journal reflections, the accounts have helped me to identify four themes and thirteen sub-themes. In the following chapter these themes and sub-themes are presented through an analysis of narratives, or thematic analysis.



## Chapter 5: Findings – Themes and sub-themes

The findings of this research have been guided by the research questions which are:

Primary research question:

- How do counsellors describe their experiences working with adolescent foreign students?

Secondary questions:

- How do counsellors understand the term 'foreign student'?
- What aspects of counselling are described as helpful when working with adolescent foreign students?
- What aspects of counselling are described as challenging when working with adolescent foreign students?

This chapter presents the participants' descriptions of their experiences working with adolescent foreign students through a thematic analysis. From the conversations and the accounts, similarities across the findings have been identified in connection to the research questions. By focusing on common threads and core concepts, whilst also making space for differences and unanticipated insights, these similarities have emerged into themes and sub-themes, each of which have their own essence or personality. These are listed below:

Theme 1: The importance of being foreign

- 1a) Not just international students: *'It's a broader lens'*
- 1b) Foreign is a helpful term: *'Feeling different or not belonging'*
- 1c) Having an experience of being foreign is helpful: *'I know what it is like to have a foot in two cultures'*

Theme 2: Layers of many overlapping complex challenges

- 2a) Challenges are more complex: *'There are just so many layers of stuff'*
- 2b) Counselling is complex: *'It is a really strange thing to do'*
- 2c) It is tricky working with another language and with interpreters
- 2d) It is tricky working with families and their cultural expectations

Theme 3: Developing a connection by making space for their unique experiences

- 3a) It is helpful to talk about culture and context: *'When they are coming to talk all of them is allowed to be visible'*
- 3b) Self-disclosure can be helpful: *'Some shared lived experience at some level'*
- 3c) Be curious: *'Students want to share about their own culture and experiences'*

Theme 4: Possibility

- 4a) Passion: *'The delight of learning and sharing'*
- 4b) Collaboration and working as a team is helpful
- 4c) A flexible approach is *'much more comfortable and authentic'*

The following discussion of these themes is interconnected, weaving and overlapping, emphasising the many layers of this research topic. Indeed, throughout all of the conversations and accounts there is a clear description of the many complex challenges adolescent foreign students face, which are therefore also faced by the counsellors working with them. Yet, throughout all of the conversations and accounts there is also a clear description of the possibilities for adolescent foreign students and the counsellors working with them. This thematic analysis aims to capture these overlapping layers, complex challenges and possibilities.

## **Theme 1: The importance of being foreign**

Given the social constructionist and interpretive approach of this research I was interested in how the participants described the term 'foreign student' in relation to their counselling experiences with adolescent foreign students. Whilst there was a mixture of reactions to the term itself, there was agreement amongst the participants that 'foreign student' is an important term as it encapsulates the concept that the experiences of adolescent foreign students are different due to their different ethnicities, cultures and contexts. Awareness of the feeling of being different, and that this can lead to a feeling of not belonging, is something all of the participants shared as being important when working with this group of

students. The participants' descriptions also suggest that foreign can be a complex term to use. This theme includes both participants' descriptions of the experiences of adolescent foreign students in general as well as descriptions of their experiences when counselling them. This theme also includes participants' descriptions of their own personal experiences of being foreign.

### **1a) Not just international students: *'It's a broader lens'***

Looking at the findings, all of the participants described foreign students as being from a range of possible backgrounds much broader than simply that of international students. These include international, or fee-paying, students who come to New Zealand by themselves to further their education, as well as those students who are here with family or a parent for the duration of their study, those here with family on a variety of temporary visas or who are in the process of applying for residency, as well as those who are New Zealand citizens but their parents are not. Exchange students were also referred to as being foreign by participants, as well as immigrants such as first and second generation Pasifika students. Immigrants also included those who have chosen to move to New Zealand for a better life, such as refugees. In addition to describing these types of foreign students participants also talked about at least fourteen different cultures and ethnicities.

Some participants acknowledged that how they view a foreign student has changed over time, from being students of usually Asian ethnicity coming to New Zealand to study English to students from a wider range of cultures and contexts. The use of words such as ethnicity, culture and context is important and an example identified by one participant which relates to these terms is Filipino students living in Christchurch, many of whom have accompanied family who have moved here in the past decade to contribute to the construction industry for the post-earthquake rebuild period.

*...it has probably morphed a bit ... it's probably a much broader lens in terms of ethnicity but also maybe the context in which people are here, so not just specifically coming to study English but people who have immigrated ...*

I was aware that I may have influenced descriptions of adolescent foreign students extending beyond only international students as in the information letter to potential participants I explained why I was using the term foreign (Appendix A). Yet, two participants talked specifically about adolescent foreign students being much broader than just international students and including those who have immigrated to New Zealand. This excerpt highlights how one participant describes home life for these students:

*I think if you went into some of their homes, and ate some of their meals and they spoke in their first language ... you would think you were in another country, not New Zealand.'*

Participants conveyed that for these adolescent foreign students culture and context is important as whilst these students live in New Zealand because their parents believe they will have more opportunities and a better life, their home life is still very much rooted in that of their birth culture. The findings demonstrate that foreign is an important term as it identifies a broad range of students and their different cultures and contexts.

### **1b) 'Foreign student' is a helpful term: '*Feeling different or not belonging*'**

Participants describe the term 'foreign student' as a helpful term in recognising the feeling of being different or not fitting in. This sub-theme illustrates the participants' descriptions of how different life is for adolescent foreign students as they try to adjust to life in the host culture compared to that of their birth culture. It also illustrates how being foreign leads to "*feeling funny*", "*strange*", "*weird*" or "*not belonging*". A clear thread through the findings is that it is helpful for counsellors to acknowledge that differences in culture can lead to feelings of social alienation for some adolescent foreign students. This excerpt describes one participant's observations of some Brazilian students she was working with:

*... what I really noticed is they were so much more effusive and open and warm as a group, as a cultural dynamic, and so I think it was awful for them sometimes because they got this New Zealand reserve [both laugh], you know, no hugs, no welcome, you know and I would think "oh these poor kids" you know, and it was like I became very aware of the cultural difference ...*

Another common thread from all of the participants' descriptions is that it is helpful for counsellors to understand the tension created between family and adolescent foreign students due to these cultural differences. This is often because adolescent foreign students are exposed to many opportunities living in New Zealand society and have many similar interests to adolescent non-foreign students, yet the values and beliefs of their birth culture and family may be at odds with these interests and opportunities.

*...their family are still very set in their traditional ways and belief systems, and their children have been brought up here but are still expected to follow those traditional cultural values and beliefs.*

One participant illustrated this by sharing the worry of some adolescent foreign students when they are interested in developing a relationship with a boyfriend, due to the cultural expectations from their family compared to that of New Zealand culture:

*... they are interested in boys, however they are not allowed to have boyfriends. So, it's all very secret squirrel what they are doing ... "kind of like we meet at the library and we kind of study together ..." Yeah but so scared Dad will see or someone in the community will see.*

My clarification during one of the conversations sums up the helpfulness of acknowledging the term 'foreign student' when counselling adolescent foreign students as it is important in understanding the feeling of being foreign or not belonging:

*Okay, I am hearing that 'foreign student' works in that it is about them being different to this country's culture or having different expectations to their family's culture.*

It is important to acknowledge that whilst the findings highlight 'foreign student' as a helpful term it is also a term that is not used by most of the participants. Two participants talk about foreign being a word that is "*outdated*" and "*funny or strange*" or suggesting "*that something is wrong*" with a person. The other two participants describe the word foreign as "*useful*" and "*quite all right*", although only one of these participants would use the word in practice. Despite most participants offering other alternatives such as "*international student*", "*overseas student*" and "*culturally diverse student*", participants conveyed that they felt none of these terms were an effective replacement for 'foreign student'. The findings therefore suggest that 'foreign student' is a complex term to use, or as one participant describes it "*it is tricky to navigate*". Whilst it is not seen as a preferred term for most participants no other term is described as being better at helping counsellors to understand the feeling of being different or not belonging.

### **1c) Having an experience of being foreign is helpful: '*I know what it is like to have a foot in two cultures*'**

This sub-theme emerged from participants talking about their own experiences being or feeling foreign, with three of the participants acknowledging this as a reason why they had volunteered for this research. All of the participants have experienced being foreign or not belonging, as described in the accounts, and through their own experiences talk about the helpful influence this has when they are working with adolescent foreign students. Some participants talked about having insight, knowing what it is like to "*be a stranger in a strange land*", "*to have a foot in two cultures*", "*to have walked in different shoes*", to experience racism or marginalisation and to be able to manage cultural and language differences. This helps participants to empathise with adolescent foreign students because of their own previous experience bridging two or more cultures.

*... that experience of what she was going through kind of mirrored a lot of the stuff I remembered from my teenage years ... I feel like I can completely empathise with where they are coming from, just having one foot in both camps. I know how that feels for them ...*

*I guess I do become very aware of the otherness identity for those students, as I resonate with it at some level for myself. Even though I was born and bred here there is still the racism and you know the marginalising of a different cultural lens that I do identify with I guess.*

Other participants talked about their experiences as being helpful as they foster a real interest in working with adolescent foreign students and perhaps they would not be as interested if they had not had this experience. One participant's interest lies in using her experiences to help others embrace their differences and feelings of being foreign so that *"diverse voices are represented or explored"*. One participant even noted that her experience being foreign helped her to be more open to seeing foreign students than the other counsellors she worked with.

An interesting finding is that whilst all of the participants describe their own experience of being foreign as being helpful when counselling adolescent foreign students, their experience of having a foot in two cultures varies considerably depending on their ethnicity, culture and context. As the accounts suggest, for some participants their experience of being foreign, and reactions to using the word foreign in relation to themselves, is associated with some negative words or experiences:

*... you know they see something that is foreign and think it is strange or weird.*

*... in the past I wouldn't have been, I guess, maybe so aware of the fact that I was a person of colour and I would play it down rather than actually talk about it ...*

A contrasting finding is that one participant's descriptions of being a foreigner is more positive overall. Her experience being foreign has been influenced by her process of

connecting through identities, so regardless of whether an experience is positive or negative there is a chance to make a connection through a shared identity.

*I have been foreign ... it's quite all right... when I travelled I connected with people through my identity ... So I guess that my thing is how do you connect? Maybe that is why I don't see foreign as other ...*

These excerpts describe having an experience of being foreign as helpful for the participants when working with adolescent foreign students. Regardless of whether the experience was positive or negative it is the sense of a shared experience which is important. This is similar to the finding in the previous sub-theme, that whilst not all participants use the term 'foreign student' because some react to it positively and some negatively, all participants talk about it as being a helpful and important term. The findings again suggest that 'foreign' is a complex word to use, yet again the common thread is that it is important as participants' experiences of being foreign help them to develop empathy, interest and willingness to work with adolescent foreign students.

## **Theme 2: Layers of many overlapping complex challenges**

All four participants specifically used the term 'layer' at some point in their conversations when describing their experiences counselling adolescent foreign students. The use of the term layer builds on the helpfulness of recognising foreign as being about feeling different or not fitting in, with an emphasis on there being many layers of feeling different or not fitting in, overlapping and building on top of each other creating a complex series of challenges.

Participants talk about these complex layers as experienced by the students themselves and so it is something that needs to be acknowledged and navigated by the counsellors working with them. For example, there are the layers of ethnicity, culture and context already discussed in the previous theme, as well as the layers of language differences, parental influence because they are adolescents, the layers of adjusting to new systems and



environments, of navigating different expectations at home to that of outside of home, as well as students developing their own identity in relation to all of these previously mentioned layers.

*So you've got those layers of you know what the individual concern is, the context they are living in, you know which country they come from, which religion they are, you know sort of all of that overlay really ... if they are from a bi-racial family or not, you know Kiwi-mix or not, so lots of variables I guess.*

When writing about these layers I have often felt a struggle to express the descriptions of experiences clearly such is their number and complexity. This theme predominantly focuses on participants' descriptions of their experiences when engaged in the counselling process with adolescent foreign students, in particular those which presented across several of the participants' conversations.

## **2a) Challenges are more complex: *'There are just so many layers of stuff'***

Each participant described a number of examples of the presenting issues adolescent foreign students talk about in counselling, describing these as more numerous and challenging for adolescent foreign students. The findings demonstrate that this is because adolescent foreign students have to not only adjust to their new situation but also navigate between worlds; the different expectations between their birth culture and that of the host or new culture. As discussed in the first theme, 'The importance of being foreign', presenting issues need to be understood from the context of adolescent foreign students. The findings suggest that understanding the layered complexity of their experiences is helpful when working with them.

The collated list of presenting issues described by participants when talking about their experiences with adolescent foreign students is long: academic achievement, accommodation issues, anxiety generally, anxiety about letting family down, concerns about

communication with parents, coping with a different diet, depression, eating disorders, examination performance anxiety, family dynamics, homesickness, isolation, language difficulties, managing workload, quality of sleep, school suspension, self-harm, significant mental health issues, social behavior, social relationships and suicidal thoughts.

Whilst many of these presenting issues could be experienced by any student, participants talked about adolescent foreign students having to cope with more issues than other students and with many of these issues presenting at one time, layered on top of each other. The following excerpt highlights this as the presenting issue is connected to several challenges such as studying in a second language, parental expectations, and cultural expectations of attending a 'good' university, which leads to several health issues:

*... a number of the girls that I dealt with had real performance anxiety around their university exams ... they have to do very well in their exams when they get home in order to go to the university that their family expects them to. They are seriously stressed and that affects their sleep ... and most of them are doing online study for two to three hours a day on top of school, so it is like they have a second job ...*

This excerpt also highlights how these layers continue to build. Because the students are spending so much time studying, as it takes longer due to the academic work being in a language they are still learning and because the university examinations are additional to their school work in New Zealand, they do not have the time or energy to make new friends or experience the new culture, which is also something their parents expect them to do in addition to meeting the academic expectations. Because they cannot meet all of these expectations this further impacts their stress levels, anxiety and physical health.

The findings emphasise the importance and helpfulness of counsellors understanding that adolescent foreign students, because of their different culture and context, face a greater number of many layered challenges.

## **2b) Counselling is complex: *'It is a really strange thing to do'***

Another complex challenge described in the findings is that counselling is not something adolescent foreign students are described as being familiar or comfortable with, and not something that they feel they should be doing. So another layer participants describe is the obstacle of adolescent foreign students engaging in counselling. Even though the findings suggest most of these students will have many issues to discuss in counselling, due to their different cultural beliefs, it is not something they readily engage with.

Participants use the words “*uncomfortable*”, “*awkward*”, “*shy*”, “*reticent*”, “*uneasy*” and “*shameful*” when they talk about adolescent foreign students and their experiences in the counselling process. One participant described the uncomfortable and awkward body language she notices when she is working with some adolescent foreign students.

*... their body language is different, they'll sit on the edge of the chair, and they will sit often like this [modelled sitting on edge of seat with hands in lap, looking down] they don't make eye contact, they don't want to do eye contact.*

Another participant describes counselling as “*strange*” for adolescent foreign students, which is important to note as strange is also a word that some participants use to describe the term foreign. It can potentially feel strange to both be foreign and engage in counselling. The findings suggest that it is vital that counsellors understand these feelings and different views towards counselling.

*What is helpful is knowing that it is really uncomfortable for them to be seeing me ... that talking about your mental health and how you are is a really strange thing to do. So being really aware of that and knowing this is ... making them come into a really awkward space...*

Several participants talked about adolescent foreign students only coming to counselling if the situation is very serious, “*I think things got really bad before they talked to a counsellor.*”

Even if the situation is severe, counselling may still not be accessed by adolescent foreign students. Two participants spoke of the support they offered following the 2019 Mosque Shootings in Christchurch, including contacting all of the Muslim students, providing prayer rooms and support sessions, yet no Muslim students they were aware of accessed counselling support at the schools. In describing experiences with Muslim students one participant said:

*... they don't want their parents to know, they don't want the shame because that's how they see coming to counselling, it's shameful ... they will say that, that they don't like coming to counselling and when I probe them a little bit and ask "What is it you don't like about counselling?" they will say "We don't do that back home, we should be able to manage our emotions, we should be able to, we don't need to talk to anyone about things."*

The previous excerpts clearly highlight that in some cultures feelings, emotions and mental health concerns are not talked about with outsiders as it can bring shame or embarrassment to a student's family. In such cultures, participants describe the expectation that students should be able to cope with issues themselves and so by talking to a counsellor they have failed in this expectation and are showing weakness. The findings clearly illustrate the helpfulness of counsellors understanding these cultural differences and attitudes to counselling as it is a significant additional layer for adolescent foreign students and those working with them.

## **2c) It is tricky working with another language and with interpreters**

This sub-theme is the first of two which focus on specific challenges participants describe as being particularly challenging or problematic when working with adolescent foreign students. Language challenges were described by all of the participants as a clear obstacle when counselling adolescent foreign students and as a constant added layer of difficulty as it is required for communication to happen. Participants identify the need to be mindful of the

language they use but of particular interest were the more subtle, yet difficult, challenges associated with translating, such as whether the same words actually exist between languages and if so do they even have the same meaning?

*So you know when you are looking at words with connotations and you've got someone who does not speak your language. How do I know in Japanese that those words have the same connotations?*

Importantly, one participant also acknowledges the cultural layer associated with language. It is not easy for adolescent foreign students to ask a counsellor to repeat themselves, because they do not wish to offend in anyway, even if they are encouraged to do so.

*"... if I use a word that goes [gesture of it going over your head] then please ask me and I won't be offended." And that last bit is really important to say because they don't always like pointing out that you haven't been crystal clear.*

Further to these findings not only can language itself be tricky, working with interpreters and agents (who often act as interpreters) can add an additional layer of complexity through another person being part of the counselling process. As one participant describes it, "You have to have such faith in the translator [interpreter]." Some participants talked quite strongly and emotively about how counselling often becomes challenging, "horrible" or "hard" with an interpreter. This is either because of the cumbersome process of going back and forth to get the language correct or because an interpreter being present affected their ability to concentrate and engage.

*... yeah I found that really hard work. So I was writing English words on a piece of paper and holding them up and saying "this is the English word, what is it in Japanese?"*

*When I am working with an interpreter ... I could find myself switching off and zoning out in sessions which I don't normally do.*

Some participants talked about how their way of counselling was impacted because of the behaviour of the interpreter. The findings include communication problems such as the interpreter answering questions before the student had a chance to say anything, the feeling that what the interpreter was saying was not right as it did not fit with the student's body language and not being able to trust that the interpreter was saying exactly what was said either by the participant or the student. The findings also include cultural problems such as the interpreter minimising the student's concerns due to the interpreter's own cultural lens towards counselling and lack of understanding of the process, and the student feeling defensive with the interpreter being present particularly if they are also the student's agent who is often in contact with parents and may share information that is meant to be private and confidential.

*... you know it was hard because I wanted to ask questions about this young person's relationship with Mum and Dad, and it felt like with them there, I felt I was being intrusive but if they had been by themselves I wouldn't have felt that.*

*One of the things I find about different agents is that some of them are really pushy, you know, so some assume it is okay to be in the counselling sessions ... or that they have access to all of what is described in the counselling ...*

These findings and descriptions of counselling with interpreters and agents emphasises the complex layering when working with adolescent students. First, there is the language layer. Second, these students are adolescents and so have an agent or parent potentially involved. Third, there is the additional cultural layers which can impact understanding, as well as sometimes working within a health or medical context, which the interpreter may not necessarily have an understanding of. Finally, there is also what the individual brings to counselling in addition to all of this.

Whilst positive experiences were less frequent in the descriptions they were referenced and talked about as being “*like an alliance*” and helpful for students to be able to speak in their native language, taking away one layer of complexity.

*... under stress she didn't want to work in English, so post lockdown ... [due to the] stress, even though she can speak English, that was her request. So that was quite cool and she was a lovely interpreter ... very accurate and affirming.*

This discussion of the many overlapping complex challenges associated with language differences and interpreters emphasises that the complex layering when working with adolescent students is not only potentially challenging for the students themselves but also for those counselling them. The findings highlight that it is helpful for counsellors to be aware of these layered and complex challenges, both for the students they are working with as well as themselves.

## **2d) It is tricky working with families and their cultural expectations**

This sub-theme, which is a strong thread in the accounts, is the second which focuses on a specific challenge participants describe as being particularly challenging when working with adolescent foreign students. Due to the focus on adolescents for this research there is definitely an added layer of tension in regard to family expectations, especially for those who are living in New Zealand with their families, because many are expected to follow their parents' wishes at this age.

*... you want to respect your parents but also you want to see your friends and doing stuff that you want to do but your parents say no because it is not part of your culture or not part of your religion, so you know it is kind of having an understanding of that.*

A common concept in the findings is that part of this tension for adolescent foreign students is often the difference between individualistic and collective cultures. Participants talk about the helpfulness of keeping in mind that “*their programming is different*”, that they “*have a*

*different worldview”, “that it is more than a one to one relationship”, that “the lens is not just individual” and that these students will view counselling from the perspective of their family not just their own.*

*... I learned the really hard way that with Pasifika girls you cannot assume that they have an individual approach to life and that they will make a choice that is radically different from that which their family is telling them they should make.*

An additional layer some participants attached to this is that it is hard for adolescent foreign students to talk about cultural challenges because of the cultural difference itself; in many cultures you simply do not have those kinds of conversations at home because it is described as “*too hard*”, “*not comfortable*” and that there is a “*disconnection*” with parents due to cultural differences.

*Sometimes they just can’t talk to their parents because it just seems too hard for them ... because there seems to be a disconnection there where their parents don’t realise that school is not just about being in those periods in class, it’s about break time and what happens in those break times.*

Cultural differences is already a tricky layer for adolescent foreign students to navigate and once engaged in counselling this can become even trickier because you may be adding the layer of trying to achieve change. All participants describe change as very hard to achieve due to cultural differences.

*Gosh, the barriers are that their belief systems are so strong, you know, and they don’t want to rock the boat. So they are really, really nervous to make any changes. And yet change is what they come to counselling for and so it is really tricky.*

Yet another layer faced by adolescent foreign students is not wishing to bring shame on their family or trouble through talking in counselling, which has already been discussed in the earlier sub-theme, ‘Counselling is complex’. The intention of counselling, from the perspective of the participants in this study, is to bring about positive change not shame or



trouble, but due to the different cultural expectations participants described adolescent foreign students' concerns about counselling and the possible impact for their family. For example, counselling is being '*disrespectful to their parents and family*' and it causes anxiety for students just thinking about the possibility of their parents finding out they are engaged in counselling.

*... when you have a young person in the room you actually have that whole family with them, and for her, she didn't want to bring shame to her family or disrespect them by talking about them ...*

*... yeah, that becomes huge where the parents come in to have a conversation with the counsellor about their child being disobedient.*

A key message from the excerpts in this sub-theme is how difficult it is for adolescent foreign students, and the counsellors working with them, when their parents' belief systems are so strong and rigid. These students may not wish to rock the boat but they can also see different opportunities and expectations from their experiences in New Zealand culture, or as one participant described it, "*coming to New Zealand she has realised I don't have to be like that.*"

Participants describe many tricky layers and challenging situations for adolescent foreign students when it comes to family and cultural expectations. First is the layer of parental influence because they are adolescents. Second, the challenge of navigating different cultural expectations at home and outside of home. Third, the layer of often not being able to talk about managing these cultural differences at home. Fourth, the layer of change being unlikely to happen because of the different cultural expectations. Fifth, the worry or fear of bringing shame or trouble to one's family by engaging in counselling. Finally, the layer of impact on a student's identity in relation to all of the previously mentioned layers.

Participants talk about these complex layers as experienced by the students themselves but

also as something that needs to be acknowledged and navigated by the counsellors working with them.

Some other additional difficulties were briefly described by participants as being challenging when working with adolescent foreign students. Firstly, eating disorders are described as common presenting issues by two of the participants, which can be particularly difficult to manage alongside other challenges such as language differences.

*I would say ... a reasonably high proportion of the students that I have worked with, with eating disorders, have not been New Zealand born or from New Zealand...*

*So trying to work with an eating disorder which is one of the hardest things to work on anyway, through a translator [interpreter] was really, really challenging.*

Secondly, all but one of the participants talked about the belief that some adolescent foreign students are sent overseas because they are perceived to be “problematic” at home but this is not disclosed by their families as part of the reason they are sent to school overseas.

*Well, there is the stock standard reason that other people say which is ... they were sent away because they were problematic. I have heard people talk about that as not an unusual scenario.*

*... then sometimes you find out that they were actually really naughty and so they had been sent here ... but they don't even want to [be here].*

Another interesting finding in this study is how the participants themselves experience working with adolescent foreign students, which they describe as challenging at times.

*... and it's just kind of breaking those layers and it means I have to work at it as well, and I choose sometimes not to ... it feels too hard.*

*... you get these young Year 9s and ... they are really sad and you can see it and you know, the mother hat really wants to come on and you have to really avoid that and that's really hard because you can see how vulnerable and insecure they are.*

### **Theme 3: Developing a connection by making space for their unique experiences**

All of the participants spoke clearly and positively about how they develop a connection with adolescent foreign students. Participants talked about making space for students to be themselves, in terms of their cultural experience but also their individuality, as well as disclosing their own experiences of being foreign and being curious about the culture and experiences of the adolescent foreign students they work with. The findings describe these approaches as helpful for developing a connection with adolescent foreign students. This theme focuses on participants' descriptions of their experiences when engaged in the counselling process with adolescent foreign students.

#### **3a) It is helpful to talk about culture and context: *'When they are coming to talk all of them is allowed to be visible'***

Awareness of what it means to be foreign, as discussed in the first two themes, was an important part of each participant's descriptions when forming a connection with these students. Through this awareness participants describe developing connections through which students feel all of them is allowed to be visible, heard and present. Participants describe a number of ways they feel are helpful in creating such a connection, in particular acknowledging that each student is an individual as well as a member of their culture and by addressing the *"unique space between cultures"* they may now find themselves in.

Some participants describe sharing their background and offering the opportunity for the students to do the same as part of the counselling process so they can talk about who they are and what is important for them. This is similar to the approach they might take with any

student yet participants talk about intentionally addressing ethnicity, culture and context with adolescent foreign students.

*... I always introduce myself and introduce my ethnicity and culture so I guess I am starting off from a place of visibility around ethnicity and culture and I invite the student to share a bit about their family and where they come from so I guess that is an intentional thing...*

*... I guess it is working on and building that therapeutic relationship so they feel comfortable. ... it is just sitting with them, being really genuine, that's what I try to do and telling them who I am and where I come from ...*

Looking at the findings, a key part of establishing a connection is the awareness that these students are individuals as well as members of their birth culture, and there is no one method that best forms a connection with adolescent foreign students. One participant acknowledged that even if she was from the same culture as a student she was working with, or was counselling several students all from the same culture, this does not mean they will all describe their individual experience of that culture the same way. Participants talked about validating what each individual student shares and making space for adolescent foreign students to be themselves so that the counselling relationship is a safe space.

Alongside making space for each individual and their context some participants talked about how they address “*the third culture*” or “*the unique space between cultures*” when forming a connection with adolescent foreign students. As detailed in some of the accounts, participants describe talking about the process of moving to a new country and settling in, but also the ongoing management of different expectations from their birth culture to that of the host or new culture. Participants talk about the “*the third culture*” or “*the unique space between cultures*” to develop a connection but also to ensure adolescent foreign students feel safe in regard to what is described by some participants as a ‘*scary place*’ sometimes.

*... they are in a very unique space between cultures ... bringing all of themselves and learning how to function in another culture, so yeah I think that is really important because otherwise it can be completely invisible. So even just being there to mirror that and let there be a safe space for that to be present ...*

*... I will still have conversations with students around their culture, that that's their culture and their Kiwi culture, and I won't stop doing that because who else is going to have that conversation with them?*

For some participants making space was in regard to their own unique experiences, what they notice about themselves when they are connecting with adolescent foreign students in the counselling process.

*I do feel an instant connection which is quite different to when you are working with a Pākehā student, I sense a difference in my body language and the way I work with them ... I tend to be a little bit more sensitive with them.*

*I am probably a little bit more, not reserved, but aware of needing to cross a bridge and ... probably working harder I think to make sure that I am being inclusive and positive and as culturally appropriate as I can be.*

### **3b) Self-disclosure can be helpful: 'Some shared lived experience at some level'**

A key part of developing a connection with adolescent foreign students, as described by the participants, was disclosing their own personal experience of being foreign. It is a strong thread through all of the accounts and it has been discussed in the first theme in regard to understating the importance of the term foreign. The findings in this sub-theme refer to how participants intentionally disclose this experience to develop a connection. Some participants describe it as a way to empathise, develop trust and openness and to strengthen the counselling relationship through shared experience.

*I usually do explain to them in our first session that I have been in a similar situation so I have some understanding of what it is like to have to walk in different shoes.*

Several participants talk about self-disclosure as being very helpful as once an adolescent foreign students know they have a shared ethnicity, culture or other experience it helps them to talk more openly through a sense that the participant will understand where they are coming from.

*... when I disclose to them, because they may be experiencing something similar to my teenage years, for some students there is a shift, like "oh, okay we can tell you more".*

*... I think sometimes you saw their face light up when they knew that connection ... I have a little bit of understanding ... "oh okay, this person kind of gets this."*

Importantly, participants disclose their experiences even if they have been challenging so that adolescent foreign students know that all of their experiences, positive and negative, can be present in counselling; space is made for whatever their unique experience may be.

*... I know what it is like to live in another culture, and to have a love-hate relationship with that culture ... "stop staring at me, yes I know I've got blonde hair, stop making comments about me all the time."*

For one participant, as mentioned previously, a key approach to developing a connection is through identity. In this respect, disclosing her experience as a foreigner creates the opportunity to connect with adolescent foreign students through this shared identity.

*... we have all these different layers that are the individual parts and components of our identity so we can actually connect with people if we can find which bits of our identity we share.*

Whilst these findings clearly suggest the helpfulness of participants disclosing their experiences of being foreign to develop a connection, most of the participants also describe the tension they recognise between their feeling that self-disclosure is helpful yet this is based on an assumption. Participants describe it as a tendency they have, something that

they want to do but perhaps not something they should always do, and acknowledge that it is an assumption of theirs that it is helpful. Self-disclosure is described as helpful in establishing a connection through shared experience but possibly as challenging, or “something to keep clear of” if it detracts focus from the students’ experiences.

An important message in the findings is being intentional about disclosing to develop a connection with adolescent foreign students and having an awareness of the possible assumptions related to this, and therefore the possible positives and negatives in doing so. For one participant the benefits outweigh the possible negatives:

*I will probably still disclose about my family because that helps with the connection straight away.*

### **3c) Be curious: ‘Students want to share about their own culture and experiences’**

Finding out about different cultures, or being curious, is also something the participants describe as part of how they connect with adolescent foreign students in counselling. All participants acknowledge that, despite their own experiences being foreign, they cannot know what it is like for each individual and they cannot know about every culture in the world. Participants talked about taking the narrative stance of being curious and acknowledging different worldviews by asking lots of questions.

*“I don’t know anything can you please tell me and teach me? Can you tell me about ... what kind of stuff you do, and do you sit around your table at dinner time and do you have to look after your siblings?”*

*... not being a cultural expert in all of their cultures is a real disadvantage because then you don’t know what’s okay and what’s not okay, you know in terms even of what you discuss ... I just try to find out and learn from the people around them.*

Participants talked about the positive impact of these questions, noticing that students really like talking about their traditions and cultures with one participant describing the “*higher energy*” she observes in students when they are talking about their own culture. One participant makes a particular effort to ask, or find out, how to greet students in their own language and acknowledge important festivals or traditions in their culture, again describing the positive impact this has for the students she works with.

Two participants acknowledge that being curious and asking students to teach them about their context is the same approach they take when working with students in other contexts. For example, when working with students in LGBTQ+ communities they would also ask questions such as ‘*I don’t know what pansexual is, can you tell me what that means?*’ This kind of approach is respectful, inclusive and makes space for their unique experiences.

## **Theme 4: Possibility**

After each conversation, transcription of the conversations, analysis and then writing the accounts, the theme of possibility grew more and more apparent. This theme of possibility is clearly described in each participant’s story; it is the strongest idea I gained when I finished each conversation and it is the over-riding theme which developed through all of the accounts. All of the participants predominantly told stories of their work with adolescent foreign students that were positive and conveyed a sense of possibility, despite the challenges they face. Building on the possibilities around developing a connection, as discussed in the previous theme, the findings in this theme illustrate how participants are passionate in their work with adolescent foreign students, collaborative with others and flexible in their counselling approach, all of which create possibilities which are described as helpful for these students. In particular, a strong sense of possibility is described through the collaborative school referral processes which bring adolescent foreign students to counselling and increases the likelihood of them returning for further counselling sessions.



This theme focuses on participants' descriptions of their experiences when engaged in the counselling process with adolescent foreign students, as well as their experiences with other adults who also work to support these students.

#### **4a) Passion: *'The delight of learning and sharing'***

All of the participants talked about their passion, determination and purpose when working with adolescent foreign students using words and phrases such as *"admiration"*, *"it was wonderful"*, *"they just bubbled"* and *"I admire those girls for being brave"*. Most of the participants talked not only about what the students hopefully gain from the counselling experience but also what they gain personally as well, *"a sense of ako"* as one participant described it. The findings suggest a strong sense of the participants' willingness and passion to learn as much as possible to develop one's approach when working with these students and that through this process the participants grow as well.

*It's reciprocal, you know there is some reciprocity that happens in the counselling relationship, even though we are probably there for their needs often I am enriched by the difference that they bring.*

One participant talked passionately about her own personal growth and learning when working with adolescent foreign students based on her personal experiences and reflections of being foreign herself.

*I have also noticed within myself that there has been a shift ... now I've got these young women that are coming in to see me and they are really strong in their perception and you know it is affecting me because I am thinking '... they are quite right, I should actually be acknowledging the stuff that they are talking about, I should step up a bit more for myself and for these young people who come to talk to me'.*

Reflecting on one of the initial reasons I chose to undertake this research, my own personal passion and growth through working with adolescent foreign students, these words and

descriptions convey a strong sense of purpose and engagement for participants when working with these students. The findings suggest that passion is important and helpful in creating a sense of possibility for both adolescent foreign students as well as those working with them.

#### **4b) Collaboration and working as a team is helpful**

Most participants talked about the teams of people they work with, or others outside of their workplace with whom they connect, to support adolescent foreign students. These teams or networks are described, in particular in some of the accounts, as people who are also passionate, are admired by the participants, who go the extra mile for the students, people from whom the participants learn a lot, and who are willing to work with others and give up their own time for the best possible outcomes.

*... every time I work with an international student there are usually two or three other people connected somehow ... you then have a bigger network of people to draw on or ask ... when it is going well it can connect communities.*

Some participants shared examples of how they work collaboratively with the international dean, or international department, to set up activities and support networks for holiday periods, as well as developing clubs or groups so adolescent foreign students can come together and support each other. Some participants acknowledged the possible steps that could be taken to ensure collaboration is more effective, such as working with agents or homestay parents to ensure they feel adequately informed and supported to identify developing mental health issues for adolescent foreign students.

An important finding in this sub-theme is how collaboration between the participants and school staff, whether it be the international department or teachers, leads to adolescent foreign students being referred to counselling if a concern is noticed. Participants described the most common referral method for adolescent foreign students engaging in counselling

as being through a referral from a staff member at school, such as a teacher, dean or the international department, or sometimes a referral through an outside contact, such as an international student's agent. As a result of these referrals, through a collaborative approach, all of the participants talked about having ongoing counselling relationships with adolescent foreign students. This is despite the fact that counselling is often a foreign concept to these students and something they have reservations about, as discussed in the second theme. Some participants describe adolescent foreign students as engaging fully with counselling and seeing it is important for them, despite these cultural differences.

*... she sees counselling as valuable because it is a release for her, because otherwise she just builds it up and builds it up and she is going to explode and she knows that.*

Interestingly, two participants talked about working with students who “need” to engage in counselling, or require “ongoing support”, due to their challenges.

*... the only reason I have stopped working with three [students] is we have come to the end of the year ... I will be working with them again when they come back because they need ongoing support around their anxiety.*

This conveys the idea that rather than letting the student be the expert on themselves and decide if counselling is necessary or important, which is the approach of several counselling modalities such as solution-focused therapy and person-centred therapy, the participants see this as a need from their point of view and encourage an ongoing counselling relationship.

#### **4c) A flexible approach is ‘much more comfortable and authentic’**

Some participants talked about the helpfulness of being flexible in aspects of their counselling methods, including group work or organising events. This flexibility means their counselling approach not only creates possibilities but is also culturally responsive. One participant talked about setting up group counselling sessions as she felt this was a better fit

for some adolescent foreign students whom she recognised as coming from a collective culture.

*... I felt like their identity was shaped more by a collective lens than an individual lens and so hearing their voices in a group of five or six seemed to be much more comfortable and authentic maybe than doing a one-to-one counselling session.*

Another example of creating possibilities through being flexible relates to a participant's descriptions of organising an event to support Muslim students after the 2019 Mosque Shootings. By collaborating and networking with others outside of the school, a lunch was provided that was culturally appropriate and which aimed to support the wellbeing needs of the students.

*So in the end we did a lunch with all of the Muslim students. And one friend of mine who is linked into the El Noor Mosque ... she and I cooked and we bought some halal chicken so it was a lovely thing to do together and then she led some dua, some prayer, so yeah it was cool ... we broke bread together.*

This sub-theme illustrates the common idea of possibility as described by participants through passion, collaboration, and flexibility, all of which helps strong connections to be developed, creating further possibilities of support for adolescents foreign students through counselling.

Presenting these themes and sub-themes has allowed me to consider the most important threads that run through all of these themes. In the following chapter the themes and sub-themes, and the accounts, are discussed by addressing the most prominent concepts in relation to the relevant literature.

## Chapter 6: Discussion

The purpose of this research study was to explore counsellors' descriptions of their experiences when working with adolescent foreign students. Secondary to this purpose were questions about their understanding of the term 'foreign student', and aspects of counselling that are helpful and challenging when working with adolescent foreign students. The aim of this research was to contribute to the limited literature in regard to counsellors' experiences when working with foreign students, not just international students, and in particular with adolescents at intermediate or secondary level, not just tertiary students, in New Zealand. As discussed in Chapter 3, a qualitative research approach was used because the focus of this research was on gathering stories and descriptions of experiences. Through conversations, four participants were able to talk about their experiences when counselling adolescent foreign students. The conversations were recorded, transcribed and then analysed through narrative analysis and analysis of narratives. This dual analysis approach allowed findings to be presented through accounts as well as a thematic analysis, from which four themes and thirteen sub-themes were identified.

The findings are of value as they reflect some of the known research regarding the experiences of foreign students and counsellors working with them, as well as offering new insights and alternative understanding which extends the literature. This chapter discusses the findings of this research in relation to the relevant literature, concluding with implications and recommendations for future practice and research, and limitations of this research.

## **Theme 1: The importance of being foreign**

### **‘Foreign student’ is a more inclusive term**

All four participants, through their descriptions of their experiences, lend support to the use of the term ‘foreign student’ as being more inclusive than ‘international student’. This is due to the fact that whilst all of the participants describe experiences with international students, they also describe just as many experiences with students who are not international students but who still face similar challenges. Participants’ descriptions of international students are consistent with those in the literature (Hsu et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2019; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Willis-O’Connor et al., 2016), yet the participants’ descriptions also build on the literature by describing foreign students, not just in terms of their visa or immigration status, but in relation to factors such as culture and language differences, and their individual context as they navigate these differences. For example, it was not originally the intention of this study to include exchange students due to the shorter time they spend in another country and the perceived extra support they receive through staying with a host family. More than one participant, however, describes challenges experienced by exchange students due to language challenges and cultural differences they need to adjust to, regardless of their length of stay and living arrangements.

Importantly, participants describe international students in regard to their status such as fee-paying or coming from overseas to study English, but when describing foreign students participants speak more about the experience of managing differences and navigating these differences. This finding supports the literature which discusses the challenges foreign students face in terms of language proficiency and cultural differences (Kim et al., 2019; Mori, 2000; Ng, 2006; Willis-O’Connor et al., 2016). This finding is also supported by Popadiuk & Arthur (2004) who acknowledge that international students share similar issues

with students who are not international students but who live in a different culture or who are part of the non-dominant racial or ethnic group.

This research identifies the importance of using the term 'foreign student' as this focuses on experiences of language and cultural differences, and in doing so identifies a broader group of students for potential support. A great deal of the literature, in contrast, focuses specifically on groups of students such as international students or Asian students. Whilst not suggesting such research is not of value, this study reflects trends noticed in the literature that the population with whom counsellors work is increasingly diverse, complex and demanding due to the changing nature of globalisation and migration (Arthur, 2017; Chen & Mak, 2008; Hook et al., 2013; Paone & Malott, 2008). This study suggests that using the term 'foreign student' better meets the needs of the changing nature and range of students counsellors are now working with.

### **'Foreign student' helps understanding**

Participants talked about the helpfulness of understanding that being a 'foreign student' is about being different, or a feeling of not belonging or fitting in, and the difficulty of having to manage cultural differences and negotiate different worlds. By identifying 'foreign student' as a helpful term this study adds to the literature which emphasises the importance of focusing on feelings of unfamiliarity. Multiple sources in the literature discuss the difficulty foreign students face due to feelings of being different, including language challenges and worries, feeling alienated socially, adjusting to new systems and processes, adjusting to being in the minority group and coping with these challenges without their usual cultural or family support systems (Arthur, 2004; Dipeolu et al., 2007; Sandhu, 1994; Yeh & Inose, 2003). This study also adds to the literature which focuses on the challenges of developing a sense of identity for foreign students as they cope with language and cultural differences. In particular, the findings of Popadiuk and Marshall's (2011) study which described foreign students as often

struggling with “...what is at times an uncomfortable coming together of competing narratives, discourses, and identities of self and other” (p. 222).

By using the term ‘foreign student’, and including students who have moved to a new country with their family, this research also extends the literature as it highlights the difficulties of having to negotiate different worlds. The challenges of being culturally different and developing a sense of identity in a different culture are added to for adolescent foreign students. This is because they regularly need to adapt to the social and cultural expectations of the new culture outside of the home but also conform to the expectations of their birth culture which are often strictly adhered to and enforced at home. The importance of understanding the different challenges and experiences faced by adolescent foreign students is discussed further in the section ‘Developing connections by making space for their unique experiences’.

### **Reflection of personal experiences and perspectives of being foreign is helpful**

When examining the findings of this study and developing the accounts, it was interesting to note that all of the participants who volunteered for this research have their own personal experience and identity as being foreign. The participants describe this identity as shaping their work with adolescent foreign students and describe it as helpful as it creates a sense of shared experience, empathy and understanding. This links to Arthur’s (2018) belief that “it is useful for counsellors to seek points of connection with a client’s lived experiences and to reflect on points of cultural distance-similarity” to develop a bond and establish rapport (p. 278). The helpfulness of the experience of being foreign when counselling adolescent foreign students, such as having a multicultural background, similar worldview or an interest in foreign students, is supported across the literature (Sue et al., 1982; Wilk, 2016; Yakunina et al., 2010). Arthur (2004) advocates for hiring counsellors due to their experience working with foreign students or their own background as a foreign student. Yoon and Portman



(2004) also support recruiting counsellors based on their experience acknowledging that the availability of a counselor who has an experience of being a foreign student is meaningful, both in terms of practicality but also helping counselling to be seen as more acceptable to foreign students. This is supported by Georgiadou's (2015) study which identifies foreign clients as feeling a connection with, or being understood by, counsellors who are also foreign, regardless of their culture or ethnicity. Popadiuk and Arthur (2004) suggest experiential learning for counsellors who do not have an experience of being foreign, such as spending time in a non-English speaking country or volunteering for specific cultural organisations, so that counsellors can experience their own cultural norms and values in relation to a different group.

An interesting finding of this research is that the participants' own personal experiences of being foreign are contrasting, as are their views towards the term 'foreign student', yet all of the participants describe having an experience of being foreign, and using the term 'foreign student', as being helpful when working with adolescent foreign students. These contrasting views towards the term 'foreign student' are evident in the literature through the fact that few authors use the term at all, with only five noted across all of the literature reviewed, most of which were published in the early 1990s when the term was used more frequently (e.g. Khoo et al., 1994; Merta et al., 1992; Sandhu, 1994). Both Arthur (2004) and Pedersen (1991) use the terms 'foreign student' and 'international student' interchangeably noting that 'foreign student' can have negative connotations, which is echoed by two participants in this study. Arthur (2004) adds that whilst some have concerns it is a pejorative term, others see it as a positive or exciting term. This study aligns with these contrasting views of the term 'foreign student', and whilst it is not necessarily regarded as a positive and exciting term for all of the participants, irrespective of their personal view towards it or experiences of being foreign, it is seen as helpful by all of the participants.

This research adds to the literature by suggesting that 'foreign student' is an important and helpful term to use, even if it can be a complex word to use due to negative connotations and the often contrasting and emotive personal responses and experiences associated with being foreign. As a result of the findings I acknowledge that, alongside some of the participants, I am certainly one of those who consider 'foreign student' to be a positive or exciting term due to it being more inclusive, addressing feelings of being different and acknowledging the challenges of having to navigate different cultural worlds. This study suggests that understanding these challenging, often uncomfortable and complex feelings associated with the term 'foreign student' is helpful. The discomfort some participants feel in regard to the term 'foreign student', and their experiences being foreign, is echoed through its limited use in the literature and yet it is this discomfort which is often at the core of being foreign for adolescent foreign students.

## **Theme 2: Layers of many overlapping complex challenges**

### **There are many layers of challenges**

Through its qualitative and narrative approach this research has been able to provide detailed examples of the layered nature of challenges adolescent foreign students face adding to the comprehensive descriptions available in the literature<sup>6</sup>. It has felt overwhelming at times trying to express these complex findings in relation to the many descriptions available in the literature. It is that same feeling of being overwhelmed by the sheer numbers, complexity and layers of challenges that participants describe as being helpful to understand, and be aware of, when working with adolescent foreign students.

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<sup>6</sup> Several authors acknowledge that the challenges foreign students face include the pre-entry and re-entry periods. As the participants only shared descriptions pertaining to adolescent foreign students' experiences in New Zealand, and not the period before arriving in New Zealand or returning to their home country, this study does not discuss these challenges.

Multiple sources in the literature support the findings of this study in regard to the multiple layers of challenges foreign students face including: facing a greater number of challenges than other students, facing many challenges at one time, managing cultural differences on top of these many, simultaneous challenges and coping with cultural differences when engaging in counselling. Given that a focus of this research was exploring the experiences of counsellors working with students at the developmental stage of adolescence, this study builds on the literature by finding that adolescent foreign students experience many of the same challenges as foreign students at tertiary level. Challenges which are particularly difficult for adolescent foreign students because of their stage of development will be discussed in more detail in the sub-theme relating to managing family expectations. This research also adds to the literature by finding that the experiences of foreign students overseas, which is well documented in the literature, is comparable to the less well documented experiences of adolescent foreign students in New Zealand, as described by participants working with them in this study.

The emphasis from all of the participants in this research is that adolescent foreign students face a greater number of challenges compared with non-foreign students. This finding is consistent with the literature which describes foreign students as facing increased challenges compared with other students due to the plethora of differences they face, leading to both psychological and physical issues (Arthur, 2004; Leong & Chou, 1996; Pedersen, 1991; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Dipeolu et al. (2007) note that while foreign students "...have to deal with stressors common to all students, they also experience a variety of challenges peculiar to their minority status..." (p. 65). This study aligns with this view acknowledging that it is the complexity associated with being a foreign student which leads to the many challenges they face as members of a minority group in the host or new culture. Participants describe it as helpful for counsellors to be aware of this sheer number of challenges as one layer of complexity facing adolescent foreign students.

Another finding of this research, and another layer of complexity, is participants' descriptions of adolescent foreign students facing many challenges at one time. One specific example participants identified is in regard to language, with English often being a second language for these students. This finding is extensively supported in the literature, with low proficiency in English leading to many challenges such as increased workload and academic pressure, as well as friendship worries, all of which can result in mental or physical challenges such as anxiety or sleeping difficulties (Arthur, 2004; Pedersen, 1991; Yeh & Inose, 2003). This can be amplified by the fact that many adolescent foreign students are very successful in their birth country and as a result often lack support from home as their family expects them to succeed (Heng, 2017; Kim et al., 2019; Leong & Chou, 1996). Participants describe it as helpful for counsellors to be aware of the many challenges adolescent foreign students can face at one time.

In addition to coping with many challenges at one time, another finding of this study that emerged from the participants' descriptions is that adolescent foreign students must also manage cultural differences. Again, this is well supported in the literature. Austell (2013) is one author amongst many who describes the difficulty faced by foreign students who wish to access help for their English proficiency and academic work. By asking for help a foreign student is admitting they do not understand the work, which in some cultures is seen as a significant embarrassment, so much so that it would be seen as better to save face and not ask for help at all. This is what Pedersen (1991) talks about as the complexity of having to suddenly and simultaneously learn a variety of competing and often contradictory roles. In line with the literature, participants in this study identify that managing cultural differences is another layer of complexity counsellors need to be aware of when working with adolescent foreign students.

Yet another finding of this research, and yet another layer of complexity, is that adolescent foreign students have to cope with cultural differences when engaging in counselling.

Participants talk about adolescent foreign students finding counselling uncomfortable, awkward, shameful and something they are not used to and should not need to take part in. This is in line with the literature which identifies foreign students as having negative perspectives of mental health issues and therefore not engaging with counselling until a situation is severe, or choosing to seek informal support for example, from family and friends (Kim et al., 2019; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011). This research also aligns with studies which identify self-restraint and self-management as desirable qualities in some cultures, with the goal being that students manage mental and emotional issues themselves without needing to engage in counselling (Chen & Mak, 2008; Yakunina & Weigold, 2011). This research emphasises the helpfulness of counsellors recognising that there are different cultural expectations and perceptions towards counselling, and that counselling can be a difficult experience for adolescent foreign students.

### **The challenge of working with interpreters**

A particularly problematic layer and challenge highlighted by this research is working with interpreters when counselling adolescent foreign students. Three of the participants describe working in translation, and with interpreters, as very challenging due to the many language and cultural differences, as well as the impact of having another person present in the counselling session. Importantly, this research highlights the challenges of working with interpreters as an area which is not well recognised in the literature relating to counselling adolescent foreign students.

Beyond Kim et al.'s (2019) suggestion that interpreters can create added concerns for students in terms of confidentiality, there is limited information in the literature regarding foreign students and interpreters. By looking at the literature relating to interpreters and the counselling field generally, the experiences and concerns of the participants interviewed for this study are supported. Paone and Malott (2008) describe a limited understanding of the

challenges faced when counsellors and interpreters collaborate, and in particular, the dearth of research regarding interpreter–school counsellor collaboration which is particularly pertinent to this research. Costa (2017) describes counsellors as often unprepared to work with interpreters and that interpreters are often grudgingly accepted or even shunned by counsellors. The findings of this research suggest that those acting as interpreters are equally unprepared and may be acting grudgingly themselves, or at least at odds culturally with the intentions of the participant in counselling. The literature suggests that counsellors and interpreters need to work together to provide a positive experience for the client, especially as the available literature in this field suggests this creates a sense of belonging and greater likelihood that the client will continue counselling (Costa, 2017; Paone & Malott, 2008). This fits with a positive experience described by one participant and, given that the literature suggests several benefits of engaging with interpreters, this research advocates for further research to guide counsellors and interpreters when working together to support adolescent foreign students.

### **The challenge of being foreign and adolescent: managing family expectations**

This study, in particular through the accounts, has highlighted the layered nature of navigating cultural differences between the birth culture and the host or new culture. In particular, this arises where adolescent foreign students are living in New Zealand with their parents or are in regular contact with their parents in their home country. An additional layer in this respect, is the limited agency of adolescents who are expected to conform with their parents' cultural expectations. From a social constructionist point of view, agency is understood as not only the ability to make one's own choices and develop one's own identity but also as the social and cultural factors and interactions that allow or constrain the possibility of this happening (Gibson & Cartwright, 2013). Family expectations and tensions, beyond academic expectations and views towards counselling, are not discussed extensively in the literature relating to foreign students, yet some of the literature that

acknowledges family expectations is in line with these findings. For example, Yakushko et al. (2008) acknowledge that cultural tensions, such as the pressure on foreign students to acculturate, can create inter-generational conflict within families as grandparents and adults may not approve of adolescents or children adapting to the ways of the host culture.

In terms of support for family who move with foreign students, for example their spouse and children, the literature available on tertiary students suggests that the level of support provided needs to be improved, although this area is not well-researched. Pendse and Inman's (2017) literature review of research relating to foreign students and counselling only found one study which focused on the perspective of foreign students' families. Siegel (1991) advocates for the profile of foreign students to include their partners and families and Arthur (1997) stresses that the wellbeing of foreign students' support systems should not be ignored. More recently, Yi et al. (2003) recommended that more attention be given to supporting foreign students and their families. This is particularly important given that Moores and Popadiuk (2011) identify continued family support, which helps to develop a sense of belonging through their culture, as a positive factor for many foreign students as part of cross-cultural transition. The findings of this research support the assertion that greater support and guidance needs to be provided to families of adolescent foreign students, in particular parents.

The literature focused on adolescence in general, clearly identifies family expectations or conflict as being a pivotal part of adolescence. This is because while parents still play a critical support role for adolescents, changes occur for students during adolescence that mean it can be a difficult and challenging time for the whole family (Fuligni & Eccles, 1993). The literature stresses the importance of working with adolescents by identifying the context they live in, including their wider social and family context and culture (Barr & Sandor, 2010). In western individualistic cultures ideals of independence and autonomous decision making are promoted in adolescence. This is in contrast to the perspectives of collective cultures

which promote ideals of group harmony and affiliation, conformity and adherence to social conventions, meaning adolescents may be more socially introverted compared to those in individualistic cultures (Daud & Bond, 2013). If, for example, counsellors know that parents from collective cultures, such as many Asian cultures, promote conformity and are typically slow to grant autonomy, this will help them to understand family related issues for adolescent foreign students from this cultural context (Dornbusch et al., 1990). Whilst some connections can be made to the literature regarding foreign students and adolescence in general, this research suggests that, in relation to adolescent foreign students, managing family expectations is an area that requires further study.

### **Other complexities**

Two presenting issues described by participants in this research are not well supported in the literature and are worthy of discussion here. Firstly, eating disorders are described as common presenting issues by two of the participants. Secondly, all but one of the participants talked about the belief that some adolescent foreign students are sent overseas because they are perceived to be 'problematic' at home but this is not disclosed by their families. Problematic behaviour may in fact be a mental health issue, like an eating disorder, but may not be recognised by the family because of their cultural differences. Some research does indicate that Asian parents have difficulty identifying eating disorders, such as bulimia (Wang et al., 2019). This highlights that in fact there may be a cultural context to understand; what the participants describe as an undisclosed mental health disorder could in fact be unrecognised by the parents due to cultural differences. This study does not have the scope to research these particular findings further. It does, however, provide yet another example of the layers of cultural complexity that counsellors need to be aware of when working with adolescent foreign students.



Another interesting finding in this study is how the participants themselves experience working with adolescent foreign students. In-depth studies of counsellors' experiences working with adolescent foreign students has received limited attention within the current literature base. Some participants refer to the "*many layers of stuff*" adolescent foreign students bring to counselling and how hard it is for the participants to work through these layers in the counselling process, acknowledging that sometimes "*it feels too hard*". One participant spoke of how she notices her own emotional reaction with some adolescent foreign students as she tries to cope with their layers of challenges: "*the mother hat really wants to come on*". These descriptions are mentioned briefly in the literature. Arthur (2004) acknowledges that counsellors may be frustrated by their efforts to understand and support adolescent foreign students' issues as these are compounded by complex cultural differences. Austell (2013) talks about those supporting foreign students as being in a high-stakes game as these students grapple with the "ripping winds" of being in a different culture (p. 227). These honest descriptions of how hard it can be working with the layers of challenges faced by adolescent foreign students add to the limited research focusing on the experiences of counsellors who work with these students.

### **Theme 3: Developing connections by making space for their unique experiences**

#### **Making space for their unique experiences through multicultural approaches**

The literature examining what is helpful when developing connections with foreign students is broad and contrasting. This study is in line with the literature which promotes multicultural counselling as a helpful and essential approach, especially when working with foreign students (Arthur, 2004; 2017; Chen & Mak, 2008; Collins et al., 2010; Pedersen, 1991). All of the participants' descriptions of how they connect with adolescent foreign students aligns with a multicultural approach to counselling, through acknowledging key factors in the

students' lives, such as ethnicity, culture, and language, as well as the students' own individual contexts. A clear focus of this research is the helpfulness of ensuring adolescent foreign students can be themselves and share whatever they need to, including any cultural differences.

A significant focus in the literature regarding multicultural counselling is the key competencies required for this approach, usually referred to as multicultural counselling competencies (MCC), with the three key competency areas being: knowledge, skills and awareness (Burnham et al., 2009; Hook et al., 2013). The findings of this study confirm that these three competencies are important when developing a connection in the counselling relationship. This research adds to the literature calling for more research and training in the area of multicultural counselling so that counsellors can be better prepared for working with foreign students and the unique issues they face (Kim et al., 2019; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Pendse & Inman, 2017; Zhang & Dixon, 2001).

The MCC competency area of knowledge is defined as: the counsellor's familiarity and understanding of human diversity and culture, such as race, gender, and socio-economic status (Burnham et al., 2009). In regard to knowledge, the discussion of the first two themes from this research highlight how the participants use knowledge in their approach to counselling with adolescent foreign students. Participants' descriptions of the helpfulness of understanding differences due to culture and language, and a student's individual context as they navigate different worlds, as well as awareness of the many layers of complex challenges adolescent foreign students face, all strongly connect these findings with the research and literature that identifies knowledge as helpful for multicultural counselling (Arthur, 2004; Burnham et al., 2009; Hook et al., 2013). In particular, these findings are supported by Popadiuk and Arthur (2004) who believe counsellors require knowledge about cross-cultural transition and the unique needs of foreign students as part of their expertise in multicultural counselling.

This study also highlights that the competency of skill is important to multicultural counselling when working with adolescent foreign students. The competency area of skill is defined as: being able to translate their knowledge of the client's diversity and culture in the context of the therapeutic environment (Burnham et al., 2009). Participants describe their ability to connect with adolescent foreign students in regard to the competency of skill by asking clients to share their culture and background, specifically talking about "*the third culture*" or the "*space in between cultures*" and being curious by specifically asking students questions about their culture and context. Pedersen (1991) supports helping foreign students to "...define a third culture, which is neither their home- nor their host-culture" (p. 44). This study also highlights self-disclosure of the participants' experiences of being foreign as a helpful skill, which will be discussed in more detail below.

Both this research and the literature support the third multicultural counselling competency of awareness as a significant factor when working with adolescent foreign students. Awareness refers to the counsellor's own self-awareness around worldview, values, assumptions, biases and theoretical approaches that is likely to shape the counsellor's work and promote personal and professional growth (Burnham et al., 2009; Collins et al., 2010). Collins et al. (2010), in their article on reflective practice in multicultural counselling, describe the importance of awareness and reflective practice as being magnified when working across different cultures so that the client's specific needs can be met. This research has identified key aspects of awareness for the participants including: the awareness that even if participants are from the same culture as a student they are working with it does not mean their experience of that culture will be the same, the assumption that their self-disclosure is helpful, awareness of how they feel and respond differently when working with adolescent foreign students, knowing that their knowledge and skills does not make them an expert on all ethnicities or cultures, and an awareness that each individual, including themselves, has their own personal experience of their culture. By being aware of these views, assumptions

and possible biases, through self-reflection, the participants encourage awareness as a helpful approach when working with adolescent foreign students (Arthur, 2004; Burnham et al., 2009; Collins et al., 2010; Hook et al., 2013).

In relation to awareness, the findings of this study support the literature on the helpfulness of broaching and cultural humility, two recommended approaches to engage successfully with multicultural counselling. Broaching and cultural humility, in particular through awareness, increases the quality of the therapeutic alliance by enhancing counsellor credibility with foreign students through genuineness, empathy and positive regard (Burnham et al., 2009; Day-Vines et al., 2007; Hook et al., 2013; Zhang & Dixon, 2001). The participants describe helpful approaches including allowing all of the student *“to be visible”* and making space for adolescent foreign students to bring whatever they need into the counselling discussion. This shows the counsellor’s willingness to empathise with the student’s worldview by taking an other-orientated stance and not taking on a superior role as the counsellor (Hook et al., 2013; King & Borders, 2019). These qualities of genuineness, empathy, and the counsellor establishing a sense of equality or mutuality are also identified in the literature as being particularly helpful when working with adolescents (Knight et al., 2018).

### **Self-disclosure is a helpful way to develop a connection**

All of the participants identify disclosing their experiences of being foreign as a helpful skill when counselling adolescent foreign students, which is an interesting finding as there are contrasting views in the literature relating to self-disclosure. Therapeutic self-disclosure is described as a subject of particular controversy by Danzer (2018), as some literature describes it as a violation, whilst other research identifies it as a genuine and authentic intervention tool. This research supports the findings of several studies which describe self-disclosure as an intervention that validates the experience of the client, encourages reciprocal client self-disclosure, creates a greater chance of successful outcomes, as well as

being an approach that can build trust and credibility in cross-cultural contexts (Constantine & Kwan, 2003; Danzer, 2018; Kim et al., 2003; Somers et al., 2014). Participants describe self-disclosing as something that helps to develop a connection with adolescent foreign students, who feel their perspective is understood and so feel comfortable to share more. Indeed, the literature in regard to counselling with adolescents identifies self-disclosure and a sense of the relationship being reciprocal as important for adolescents (Knight et al., 2018). Further research, engaging with adolescent foreign students themselves, would be needed to affirm this view.

This research is in contrast to other findings in regard to self-disclosure, such as that of Sunderani and Moodley (2020) who discuss the choice to disclose as complex due to the risk of burdening the client or blurring professional boundaries. The lack of complexity of choice described by participants in this study may be due to the fact that two of the participants are not white, or Pākehā, and so there was already an established similarity and lower risk of creating burden through the shared identity of being non-white (Sunderani & Moodley, 2020). For the two Pākehā participants, making a connection through the identity of being a foreigner creates a sense of familiarity or similarity which is identified in the literature as being a positive reason to disclose, because it creates a sense of mutuality and common ground (Danzer, 2018; Sunderani & Moodley, 2020). Broaching, as discussed above, is also helpful when self-disclosing as it addresses similarities and differences relating to culture and power in the counselling relationship. Self-disclosure can be complex for white counsellors working with clients from a minority culture yet this research supports the literature, in that if it is brief, sincere and according to the client's needs, then it is helpful for clients (Constantine & Kwan, 2003; Danzer, 2018; Kim et al., 2003).

This research highlights that an experience of being foreign is helpful in terms of connecting with adolescent foreign students and disclosing this experience. Yakunina et al. (2010) suggest, however, that whilst a foreign background is helpful the counsellor's multicultural

competence may be more important. Similarly, Wilk's (2016) study of counsellors' and international students' experiences working together suggests that whilst a similar background or culture is helpful, counsellors respecting and acknowledging differences is key. This is because being open about one's background and experiences, regardless of what that may be, promotes trust and support. The literature clearly suggests that all counsellors need to intentionally engage with one's own identity as part of engaging with knowledge, skill and awareness through multicultural counselling. A helpful finding of this research is that being aware of your experience, and choosing to self-disclose, is particularly beneficial when working with adolescent foreign students. Whilst aspects of this finding are discussed in the literature generally, this research identifies a gap in the literature regarding counsellors choosing to disclose when working with adolescent foreign students.

### **A focus on the individual is helpful**

In addition to multicultural counselling approaches, the accounts and findings of this research identify the importance of treating adolescent foreign students as individuals. Being listened to, and having their experience acknowledged as a member of a larger group, as well as their individual experience of being an adolescent and a foreign student, is helpful for adolescent foreign students. This finding is supported in the literature regarding foreign students as it allows the counsellor to develop a connection and work with the unique experience of the student in their culture (Arthur, 1997; Coronado & Peake, 1993; Yoon & Portman, 2004). This finding is also supported by the literature on adolescence generally which identifies the importance of this age group being heard as an individual in counselling (Crocket et al., 2015; Knight et al., 2018).

With its focus on the individual needs of foreign students, this research has not identified that foreign students have a preference for a hierarchical relationship or a direct style of counselling based on their culture, or that acculturated students are more likely to seek

counselling (Merta et al., 1992; Chen & Mak, 2008; Pendse & Inman, 2017; Snider, 2005).

Because this research chose not to examine specific counselling modalities in relation to counsellors working with adolescent foreign students it does not add to the findings of multiple studies which found no preference for a particular style of counselling for particular groups of foreign students (Seo, 2005; Yau et al., 1992; Yoon & Jepsen, 2008).

This research has not examined discussion of models, stages and patterns of the transition or acculturation process as part of the counselling relationship (Heng, 2017; Kim et al., 2019; Siegel, 1991; Yakushko et al., 2008). This research does, however, suggest that addressing the transition process into the new or host culture is important yet the participants' descriptions do not support discussing particular processes or stages as part of transition. This could perhaps be a decision made due to language challenges or the stage of development at adolescence, as the brain is still developing the capacity for more complex emotional and cognitive function (Curtis, 2015; Jaworska & MacQueen, 2015). This is, however, only an assumption and was not discussed during the research conversations with participants. Heng (2017) and Popadiuk and Marshall (2011) encourage a focus on the relational process and conversations with foreign students to understand what they need, rather than discussing particular models or processes. This research supports this focus through participants' discussions with adolescent foreign students around "*the third culture*" or the "*space in between cultures*", which creates space for discussions that can normalise the experience without potentially stating what the experience should be, and maintains a focus on the individual needs of each student.

## **Theme 4: Possibility**

### **A passion for helping and learning**

The importance of possibility, the idea that something may happen that will make things better in the future, is a key finding of this research. It connects with the passion that all of the participants shared in their accounts about working with adolescent foreign students: the richness of their interactions, their admiration for how these students cope with the many challenges they face and their determination to work with them to help them feel okay about the unique space they find themselves in. This supports the literature that advocates for those working with foreign students to be proactive in supporting foreign students so they feel they are cherished and integral members of the school community, and that they enrich others by being in the host country (Arthur, 2004; Sandhu, 1994; Yoon & Portman, 2004). Arthur (1997) notes a counsellor's desire and genuine interest in working with foreign students as a key factor in the counselling relationship.

An important finding of this research is the participants' descriptions of being passionate about continually learning, both in regard to the students' cultures and identities as well as their own. Arthur (2004, 2018) describes working across cultures as learning together: through their encounters both the foreign student and the counsellor learn about each other's worldview, which in turn shapes their own worldview. Wilk (2016) supports this, identifying the counsellor's curiosity and excitement to learn about the client's culture as also leading to learning and support for the client. The participants describe this 'ako' or reciprocity as helpful for counsellors so they can establish a strong and culturally aware therapeutic alliance that creates possibilities for effective counselling outcomes. This builds on the previous theme of developing connections, and the importance of a multicultural approach, which encourages counsellors to be engaged in ongoing self-reflection and self-critique as lifelong learners (Collins et al., 2010; Hook et al., 2013). The helpfulness of a



passion for ongoing learning and reflection is supported in the literature because when counsellors are eager to learn about other cultures, as well as their own, and are responsive to multicultural issues, clients feel understood and respected, and there are increased positive outcomes due to an effective working alliance being established (Burnham et al., 2009; Collins et al., 2010; Zhang & Dixon, 2001).

A particularly interesting finding in this research is how counsellors feel an increased sense of purpose or call to action. At least two of the participants' accounts talk about the impact that working with adolescent foreign students has on them and how they feel they can or should be doing more for the students they are working with, such as making a stand against how these students are treated at school and celebrating diversity more. This links with the literature in regard to intersectionality. Intersectionality theory provides a framework to understand how each individual's multiple and intersecting identities combine, specifically in regard to how this creates different forms of marginalisation or inequalities (Arthur, 2018; Grzanka et al., 2017; Kivlighan et al., 2019; Shin et al., 2017). Several articles in the literature acknowledge intersectionality as an important framework to use to meet the diverse needs of foreign students, as part of multicultural counselling. The recent literature emphasises the need for intersectionality to go beyond simply talking about multiple identities and that its true intention is to achieve social justice and change (Arthur, 2018; Grzanka et al., 2017; Kivlighan et al., 2019; Shin et al., 2017). This is supported by the literature on multicultural counselling and approaches such as broaching which describe counsellors, including school counsellors, as advocates and leaders in ameliorating social injustices or as change agents in regard to social inequality (Burnham et al., 2009; Day-Vines et al., 2007). Arthur (2018) advocates for culture-infused counselling which incorporates personal reflections of cultural identity, reflections of the cultural identities of others, collaboration and actively addressing social justice. Further discussion of this aspect of the literature is beyond the scope of this research, yet it is important to acknowledge this finding and suggest that exploring intersectionality and counsellors as agents of change

when working with adolescent foreign students could add to the literature in this growing field. It could also support counsellors who notice this kind of reaction within themselves when working with adolescent foreign students.

### **A school environment helps with collaboration**

A clear finding of this research is that schools have dedicated and hard-working teams of staff collaborating with counsellors to support these students. This research describes collaboration in offering groups, clubs and holiday activities, as well as counsellors working with teachers to ensure adolescent foreign students feel supported. These approaches are supported by the literature which also identifies workshops, groups, social opportunities and collaboration with teachers as helpful (Arthur, 2017; Pedersen, 1991; Yakushko et al., 2018; Yeh & Inose, 2003). The literature additionally advocates for a proactive 'village' or 'campus' approach to supporting foreign students (Arthur, 2017; Austell, 2013). It also aligns with the belief that host schools need to take more responsibility to understand and meet the needs of foreign students (Heng, 2017). Creative approaches, such as meeting outside of the counselling room or centre (Boone et al., 2011), were not identified as being important and this may be due to the school environment itself. As adolescents attend school, there is an expectation that students abide by school rules and take part in school processes. This suggests that there may be less need for creative approaches as adolescents in school environments may be more likely to take part in opportunities, compared with tertiary level students. The impact of adolescents attending school is also relevant to further findings regarding collaboration.

When examining the findings from this study it was interesting to note that because this research focused on counsellors working with adolescent aged students, who are required to attend school, collaboration was often described in relation to other staff referring adolescent foreign students to counselling. This research suggests that being an adolescent

foreign student at a secondary school is beneficial in terms of these students engaging in counselling because some of the usual barriers to accessing counselling are removed. Common barriers, as described in the literature, include helping foreign students to understand what counselling is, how it can be helpful, how it can be accessed and how it can meet student needs despite cultural differences (Clough et al., 2020; Li et al., 2016; Mori, 2000; Pendse & Inman, 2017). These barriers relate to counselling at a tertiary level but because adolescents are at school, and can be referred to counselling, these barriers can be discussed as part of the counselling referral process, and in ongoing counselling sessions. As this study focused on adolescent foreign students, and not on tertiary level students, a clear benefit identified by this research is that it is easier to engage adolescent foreign students in counselling because of their age as adolescents and because they are part of a school system.

Another important finding of this research is that, because they attend school, adolescent foreign students usually develop ongoing counselling relationships. These findings are in contrast to those which identify foreign students as being more likely to quit counselling prematurely or after only one session, if they attend at all (Pendse & Inman, 2017; Yakushko et al., 2008; Yoon & Jepsen, 2008). Again, the fact that adolescents are required to attend school may be a mitigating factor here as they may feel expected to attend as part of the school rules or systems, although this was not specifically discussed with participants. Even though these findings describe adolescent foreign students as being part of ongoing counselling relationships the participants still had to manage cultural differences, such as shame and stigma, as discussed in the theme, 'Layers of many overlapping complex challenges'. Working with adolescents in a school was, however, helpful because the participants were able to engage with the students in the first place through the school referral process. This makes counselling accessible and intervention is likely to be earlier, two important factors for foreign students identified by Popadiuk and Arthur (2004). It also meant they were easily able to continue seeing students on a regular basis, as compared

with a tertiary environment. The positive impact of this possibility is that an adolescent foreign student one participant works with describes counselling as a “*release for her*” despite the cultural challenges she originally experienced with counselling. This finding again emphasises the possibilities and helpfulness of working with adolescent foreign students as part of a school system.

An interesting finding in this research is the view some participants have that the adolescent foreign students they meet with need to keep working with them on an ongoing basis. As this view was not discussed further in the research I am unsure if this was something the student had indicated, if it had been discussed mutually in the previous counselling session or if it was the perception and decision of the participants. In the school I work at I offer counselling to all adolescent foreign students, and whilst it is not compulsory, I do acknowledge that it is my assumption it is needed to support their pastoral care and wellbeing. This finding suggests that it is important for counsellors, especially those working in schools, to remain aware of our positions of power, and our assumptions and biases, by engaging in ongoing self-reflection and awareness through processes such as multicultural counselling. Even though it can be challenging and evoke strong feelings, Arthur (2004) encourages white counsellors, in particular, to examine their own identity so they can understand how power and privilege can influence counselling interactions with clients of other cultures.

### **Flexibility is a strength**

This research identifies a flexible approach as being helpful when working with adolescent foreign students. One participant describes offering group counselling for students from collective cultures, identifying this as more fitting and authentic for their cultural needs. This is supported in the literature with several sources identifying group counselling as being a beneficial approach with foreign students because it provides a supportive context to normalise concerns and reduce feelings of isolation, develops a social support system so

students can help each other, and an environment in which to share cultural information and help problem-solve (Dipeolu et al., 2007; Yakunina et al., 2010; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Yi et al., 2003). Flexibility is also identified through the example of one participant creating a lunch gathering for Muslim students to come together over a shared meal and support each other in a way that was culturally responsive. This involved staff at the school collaborating with experts outside of the school, being flexible, open to doing things differently and offering a more diverse manner of support beyond the usual methods such as one-on-one counselling sessions (Fouad, 1991; Pedersen, 1991; Wilk, 2016).

These findings of the benefits of offering flexible approaches to support adolescent foreign students align with the research that advocates for a greater focus on the positives or a strengths based approach. The above examples attend to cultural aspects of adolescent foreign students' lives, such as aspects of a collective culture, acknowledging these as important and as strengths for adolescent foreign students to support themselves and each other. This approach is supported in the more recent literature which advocates for using aspects of foreign students' culture to support them rather than trying to make western approaches fit their needs or expecting foreign students to fit into existing institutional structures (Arthur, 2017; Heng, 2017; Yoon & Portman, 2004). In Wilk's (2016) study, both counsellors and students describe sharing their diversity, and valuing and respecting differences, as a positive resource in the counselling relationship. This approach also focuses on what works or what is helpful, including students' personal resources, strengths and positive experiences, rather than seeing these students as lacking the resources to achieve positive change (Moore & Popadiuk, 2011). This finding in regard to flexibility and focusing on strengths supports the view of Pendse and Inman (2017) who believe more attention needs to be given to positives or a strengths based approach when working with foreign students. The passion of the participants when working with adolescent foreign students and the possibility of positive change for the future is a key finding of this research

and clearly highlights the benefits of working with adolescent foreign students from a strengths based approach.

## **Implications and recommendations for future practice and research**

A focus and strength of this research is the voice of counsellors working with adolescent foreign students. I believe this research has captured their experiences well with the findings adding to my own practice and, I hope, also offering some insight to the experience and practice of other counsellors working with adolescent foreign students. With its focus on adolescents, and New Zealand based foreign students in counselling, this research adds to two areas with limited coverage in the literature.

The findings of this research have identified the importance of the term 'foreign student' and its valuable implications for counsellors working with these students. This study suggests that using the term 'foreign student' identifies a broader range of students and better meets the needs of the changing nature and range of students counsellors are now working with. The need for greater understanding and research relating to counselling and foreign students is highlighted by this study, particularly given that these findings describe many students who are not international students but who still face similar challenges. Using the term 'foreign student' focuses attention on the experience of being foreign and managing cultural differences. This research identifies culture and language differences, and how individuals navigate these differences, as key factors that need to be understood further when working with foreign students. These findings suggest that counsellors' awareness and understanding of these challenging, often uncomfortable and complex feelings associated with the term 'foreign student' will have helpful implications for future practice when working with adolescent foreign students.

This research has identified many factors that are helpful when working with adolescent foreign students. A key finding of this research is that there are many layers of complexity in the lives of adolescent foreign students. This research suggests it is beneficial for counsellors working with adolescent foreign students to have an understanding of the layered nature of the challenges these students face. Understanding that adolescent foreign students face more challenges compared with other students, that they face multiple challenges at one time and that they need to manage cultural differences in relation to all of these challenges will be useful for counsellors so that they can appreciate the complexity of these students' lives. In particular, it is helpful to understand that what an adolescent foreign student presents with in counselling is likely to be only the tip of the iceberg in terms of what they are facing.

The importance of understanding how uncomfortable and awkward, or indeed foreign, counselling is to foreign students is something this research has taught me. It could be helpful for counsellors working with foreign students to be aware that in many cultures stigma and shame are associated with counselling, and that a common belief is that mental health issues should be managed individually or informally by talking with friends or family. In particular for adolescents, talking about personal issues in counselling can be seen as disrespecting family and something a student may be disciplined for if their parents find out. This research has identified the valuable implications of counsellors understanding these different cultural views towards western approaches to counselling.

A particularly beneficial finding of this research is what is helpful when developing a connection with adolescent foreign students, with this research highlighting two key areas: engaging with multicultural counselling approaches and making space for each student as an individual in the counselling process. This research, supported by the literature, indicates the helpfulness of multicultural counselling approaches, including broaching and cultural humility. These approaches acknowledge and make space for key factors such as ethnicity,

culture, and language in counselling, through the competencies of knowledge, skill and awareness. This research suggests it is useful for counsellors to consider how they engage their knowledge of the complexity of adolescents foreign students' lives and their culturally different views of counselling, with the skills of asking clients to share their background and being curious about their culture and context, alongside addressing the transition process, or "*space in between cultures*", from their birth culture to the host or new culture.

With regard to counsellors who have an experience being foreign, this research suggests that self-disclosure can be a particularly helpful skill to consider using when developing a connection with adolescent foreign students as it develops a sense of shared experience and understanding. Further research about self-disclosure specifically relating to counselling with adolescent foreign students, and engaging with counsellors of a greater range of ethnic backgrounds and experiences being foreign, would add to the understanding of the helpfulness of self-disclosure. Further research, engaging with adolescent foreign students themselves and how they experience self-disclosure, would also add to understanding in this area.

Alongside the multicultural competencies of knowledge and skill, this research emphasises the beneficial implications of counsellors engaging in awareness, by practising an ongoing learning process of self-reflection. Through awareness, for example, it is helpful to acknowledge that each individual's experience of culture is personal and will not be the same as someone else's, even if the counsellor and student are from the same culture. Equally, through awareness counsellors can consider that what they believe is helpful for adolescent foreign students may be based on their personal assumptions. This research identifies developing personal awareness as particularly valuable for counsellors who do not have an experience of being foreign. By being aware of their own worldview, assumptions and biases counsellors can take an other-oriented stance, avoid taking on a superior role, and make space for the student as an individual in their culture. A useful implication of this



for future practice includes being flexible with counselling approaches and considering methods beyond one-on-one styles of counselling, such as group counselling which may be more fitting for some students from collective cultures. Multicultural counselling has useful implications for counsellors working with a range of clients, and this research identifies adolescent foreign students as benefiting in particular from this counselling approach as it attends to culture as well as the experience of the individual.

Indeed, this research has helped me to reflect on my own practice and awareness. I have identified that I had potentially established a view of superiority by seeing adolescent foreign students as often helpless and as victims, thinking I could do more to help them from my place as a Pākehā and a member of the majority culture. By being self-focused and not reflecting on my assumptions I had developed blind spots based on my experiences. As a result I risked not seeing positives for adolescent foreign students, such as the advantages of being bicultural and the strengths these students bring from their own background and cultural framework, something multicultural counselling creates space for.

Collaboration is another factor this research has identified as being helpful when working with adolescent foreign students, particularly in school environments. It could be especially advantageous for counsellors, who do not already do so, to work closely with other staff who support and work with adolescent foreign students so that staff feel able to refer adolescent foreign students for counselling, if support is needed. By collaborating in this way, this research identifies the positive implications of adolescent foreign students being introduced to counselling in a supportive environment, and through being part of the school system as more likely to engage in ongoing counselling sessions. This research recommends that future studies look at the counselling experiences of adolescent foreign students in schools. In particular, the potential positive benefits that engagement in the school environment at this stage of development may have for engaging students in counselling at tertiary level and beyond.

Factors which are challenging when working with adolescent foreign students have also been identified by this research. This study has highlighted the potential difficulty of working with interpreters and, in line with the literature, stresses the importance of counsellors working collaboratively with interpreters, establishing clear delineation of responsibilities and considering possible dynamics in the counselling relationship involving the counsellor, interpreter and client (Costa, 2017). Further research is recommended to examine the difficulties of working with interpreters and adolescent foreign students. This echoes the views of Paone and Malott (2008) who describe the dearth of research regarding interpreter–school counsellor collaboration and a limited understanding of the challenges faced when counsellors and interpreters work together.

The difficulty of managing family expectations and cultural differences is another challenging factor highlighted by this research. Family tension or conflict is common, especially during adolescence, yet this study identifies it as particularly challenging for adolescent foreign students as they must develop their personal sense of identity alongside managing different cultural expectations at home and at school. A useful implication for future practice is for counsellors to recognise and understand different cultures and the impact this has for an adolescent foreign student. For example, a student from a collective culture may find it either too challenging, or simply not possible, to act in a way that is more individualistic or at odds with their family's expectations. This study advocates for more research specifically relating to managing family expectations and the impact of this for adolescent foreign students so that support and guidance can be provided to all involved: the families and adolescent foreign students, and those working with them such as counsellors.

A final implication to consider from this research is the rich range of possible experiences when counselling adolescent foreign students. This research suggests that engaging with these students is rewarding but it can also be hard working with the many layers of

challenges adolescent foreign students bring to counselling. It could be helpful for counsellors to consider how they manage possible emotional responses as they engage with these students, including the possibility of feeling an increased sense of purpose to act on behalf of these students to achieve positive change. It could also be helpful for counsellors to consider the passion they may feel, and the personal growth they may experience, from working with adolescent foreign students. This research emphasises the sense of 'ako' or reciprocity, that both adolescent foreign student and counsellor are enriched in the process of working together.

## **Limitations of this research**

It is important to highlight the limitations of this study to ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of this research. Given this is a Masters level research thesis I have needed to be realistic about what was achievable and acknowledge limitations as a result of this.

An obvious limitation is sample size, which with four participants has only allowed for some in-depth descriptions. I have endeavoured to be transparent about sample size and this study has utilised recommendations from qualitative methodologies and sample sizes of similar studies. A particular limitation in regard to sample size is saturation. Again, I have endeavoured to be transparent and acknowledge different views in regard to this. Whilst some literature suggests saturation is unlikely to be achieved given the small sample size, I also acknowledge that from a social constructionist perspective a sample size of four does allow for saturation to be achieved. This is because a lack of more participants does not necessarily weaken the value of the findings in terms of understanding and informing future practice (Gergen et al., 2004).

There are a number of limitations regarding the participants of this study. As all of the participants, as well as myself as the researcher, are female the potential to discuss this

research topic from different gender perspectives was not possible. Males might have described different experiences based on their gender. There was also a limited range of ethnicities represented by the participant group, with one counsellor identifying as Fijian-Indian and Pākehā, two as Pākehā and one participant who has chosen to keep her ethnic background confidential. Whilst there certainly could have been less ethnic diversity given the sample size, a greater range of other ethnic backgrounds could be studied.

Further research with a greater range of genders and ethnicities, as well as a larger sample size as discussed above, would be beneficial and would allow for generalisation of the findings. Replication of this study with other counsellors and staging this research in different settings would allow for comparison and transferability and would endorse the findings further (Shenton, 2004).

The fact that some of the participants knew me may have influenced how much they decided to share or may have resulted in coercive participation. Whilst I did not perceive any obvious differences in terms of engagement when comparing my conversations with the two participants I know and the two I did not know prior to the research conversations, it is not something I specifically discussed with the participants I know. While the risks of participation were outlined prior to participation, including participant confidentiality, and a debrief was carried out at the end of each conversation, I have no way of knowing how much of an impact this may have had on the participants themselves.

In addition, all of the participants indicated they had volunteered for this research based on their experience of being foreign, or having “*a foot in both camps*”, which is likely to have had an influence on these findings. The literature, and these findings, suggest that some counsellors find it difficult to work with foreign students. Interviewing counsellors without this background of experience could certainly be of value to guide counsellors who do not identify, or have an experience, as a foreigner.

My influence and bias as the researcher must also be considered as a limitation. Following the ontological and epistemological positions of this research, my own context is what allows me to engage with and interpret other people's experiences and is part of the research process itself. It is important to acknowledge this and to be transparent about this. To ensure integrity I have engaged in reflexive practice through ongoing journaling and supervision meetings.

A final limitation of this research is that this study has not worked with adolescent foreign students directly. It would be useful to hear their descriptions of experiences of counselling; their opinion of the term 'foreign student', how they talk about being foreign, and what they describe as helpful and challenging. Heng (2017) feels it is striking that so few studies ask foreign students directly to voice their opinions about how they would like to be better supported through their education experience. Popadiuk and Arthur (2004) believe gaining increased awareness of the opinions of foreign students will help counsellors to deliver appropriate and relevant interventions. This research hopes to have heard the voice of adolescent foreign students through the experiences of counsellors who work with them but acknowledges that a limitation of this research is that adolescent foreign students were not interviewed themselves.

## **Conclusion**

'Foreign student' is an important term for counsellors to use when working with adolescent foreign students for a number of reasons. Firstly, it identifies a broader range of students than simply 'international students', which better meets the needs of the increasing number of multicultural students that counsellors are now working with. Secondly, it focuses attention on the experience of being foreign, of managing cultural and language differences, including cultural differences towards counselling and the difficulties of navigating different cultural

worlds. Thirdly, awareness of the experience of being foreign helps counsellors to understand the many overlapping complex challenges adolescent foreign students face every day.

This research emphasises the importance of counsellors engaging with a multicultural counselling approach when working with adolescent foreign students, which makes space for each student's culture as well as each student's individual experience of that culture. Through the competencies of knowledge, skill and awareness, counsellors can attend to factors such as ethnicity, culture and language, as well as issues of power, in the counselling relationship. Self-disclosure is identified as a particularly helpful skill, especially if a counsellor has an experience of being foreign themselves. Ongoing self-reflection and learning, particularly relating to one's identity, worldview and culture, as well as personal assumptions and biases, is also helpful. These approaches enable counsellors to be flexible in responding to the needs of adolescent foreign students and to form strong therapeutic alliances based on genuineness and respect.

Collaboration is identified as an essential approach in this study, especially when working with adolescent foreign students as they are at school. School referral processes, where staff collaborate together to support students, increase the chances of adolescent foreign students engaging in counselling as well as their likelihood of engaging in an ongoing counselling relationship. This study identifies the potential positive benefits that engagement in school counselling may have for engaging foreign students in counselling at tertiary level and beyond.

Working with interpreters and managing family tensions due to different cultural expectations are both identified as problematic factors for counsellors working with adolescent foreign students. This study identifies these two fields as requiring further research so that counsellors have more guidance and help when working with adolescent foreign students in

these areas. Increased awareness of these challenging factors is important because, given the changing nature of cross-cultural mobility and migration, there is an increased likelihood that counsellors will need to work with interpreters and manage family tensions due to cultural differences.

Finally, this research identifies the rich possibilities for counsellors when working with adolescent foreign students. The seeds of this research were sown unexpectedly when I found myself counselling only adolescent foreign students for a year. That experience created a sense of passion and purpose for me when working with these students. The findings of this research have echoed this personal discovery. Adolescent foreign students have many, overlapping strengths due to their culture, their language, their differences and their ability to manage all of these. This research, based on the participants' rich and powerful descriptions of their experiences, creates a strong sense of what is possible for counsellors working with adolescent foreign students; a sense of purpose, personal growth and learning, a possible call to action on behalf of these students and a reciprocal relationship where both student and counsellor benefit, or as one participant describes it: *"...even though we are probably there for their needs often I am enriched by the difference that they bring."*

I feel the following quote sums up eloquently the unique experience of foreign students. "An international student is a sapling or a tree, depending on his age, but his roots are still there in his home country" (Siegel, 1991, p. 75). Adolescent foreign students are indeed saplings when they arrive in the host country, and how they grow into a tree and develop a sense of identity is shaped by both their experiences as a sapling in the host country but also from the roots of their experience in their home country or culture. Siegel (1991) goes on to ask how counsellors can support students to adapt as well as hold onto their cultural roots. This study has added to the research, literature, knowledge and, most importantly, the possibilities for

counsellors to consider in their support of adolescent foreign students, whether they wish to adapt, to hold onto their roots, to do both or to consider other possibilities altogether.



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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Information and Consent forms for participants



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ERHEC Ref: 2020/28/ERHEC

Hearing their voice:

Counsellors' perspectives on working with adolescent foreign\* students

### Information Sheet for participants

*\* The term 'foreign' is being used in this study to refer to students for whom New Zealand is not their country of birth; and/or for whom their main culture is that of another country; and/or English is not their first language. This includes international students, non-New Zealand citizens or permanent residents who require a temporary visa to study in New Zealand, as well as foreign domestic students. Many foreign domestic students are frequently assumed to be international students as they often face the same challenges as international students, including adapting to an unfamiliar country, culture and language that is not their own, and coping with different academic, social and environmental factors. By using the term 'foreign' this study includes both international students and foreign domestic students.*

My name is Jenelle Hooson. I am a Masters of Counselling student and a school counsellor. The focus of this research is on what counsellors perceive to be helpful when working with adolescent foreign students. I am curious about counsellors' experiences with adolescent foreign students: how these students respond to being listened to, and engaging with counselling which is often not promoted in their own culture. I hope to add to my own experience, as well as the experience and practice of others, so that this group of students can receive the best possible support, without feeling as though they need to acculturate or break cultural norms in doing so.

You have been approached, via email, to take part in this study because you are associated with the New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC), Canterbury and West Coast Branch, or you are a counsellor in a Canterbury school. I have requested access to your contact details through the secretary of the NZAC Canterbury and West Coast Branch, or I am emailing you as part of the Canterbury School counsellors email network. This study will include counsellors who have worked with adolescent foreign students at intermediate or secondary level within the past two years; incorporating counsellors using any counselling modalities and counsellors from any school or organisation which offers counselling services to adolescents.

If you choose to be involved with this study, your involvement in this project will be taking part in a semi-structured conversation of approximately 60 minutes, during which open-ended questions will be used to allow you to share your experiences when working with adolescent foreign students. Data will be recorded either by audio or visual recording, depending on your preference. As a follow-up to this, you will be invited to review the transcript of the conversation to ensure it is an accurate account

of the conversation and to allow you to highlight the most important aspects from your point of view. Another conversation may be offered to discuss your responses to the transcripts.

There may be some minimal risks associated with your involvement in this process, for example psychological risks as you reflect on your counselling work with adolescent foreign students. Cultural risks may also be present as you talk about cultural differences and attitudes, which may cause discomfort or unease. I will make myself available so that you can discuss any potential risks you may foresee as being part of this research. If at any stage you would like to talk to someone as a result of your participation in this research you could contact Petersgate Counselling Centre in Christchurch at 343-3391 or via their website: <https://www.petersgate.org.nz/>. Another option would be to use the website [www.talkingworks.co.nz](http://www.talkingworks.co.nz), as it provides contact information for professional counsellors, psychologists and psychotherapists.

Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any stage. You may ask for your raw data to be returned to you or destroyed at any point. If you withdraw, I will remove information relating to you. However, once analysis of raw data starts on 15 December 2020, it will become increasingly difficult to remove the influence of your data on the results.

A thesis is a public document and will be available through the UCLibrary but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation. To ensure confidentiality all documents will use a reference number to identify each participant, rather than your name. Pseudonyms will be used in the published results and you will be given the opportunity to choose your own.

Data will be stored primarily on my laptop which is password protected and only accessible by myself. Best security practice has been checked to ensure this laptop is as secure as possible in accordance with my work as a school counsellor. Data will also be backed up on the UC Server. In addition to myself, my supervisors may have access to the data and to ensure quality of analysis I intend to find a colleague to read the transcripts, as well as my notes and coding in relation to the transcripts. I will ensure that you are aware of this if it does happen and this colleague will complete their own confidentiality form before doing so. I intend to transcribe the conversations myself but if I were to utilise the services of a transcriber I would make you are aware of this and the transcriber will complete their own confidentiality form before beginning any work with the data. As this research is at Masters level the data will be kept for 5 years and then destroyed.

You will be provided with a copy of the summary of the results. Please indicate on the consent form the contact address you would like this sent to, or if you would not like to receive a summary of the results.

The project is being carried out to fulfill the requirements of a Master of Counselling by Jenelle Hooson under the supervision of Dr Kerry Vincent who can be contacted at [kerry.vincent@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:kerry.vincent@canterbury.ac.nz). She will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch ([human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)).

If you agree to participate in the study, you are asked to complete the consent form and return it to: [jenelle.hooson@pg.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:jenelle.hooson@pg.canterbury.ac.nz). Any further questions can also be directed through this email address, including requesting a time to meet with me or to talk over the phone.

Ngā mihi  
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**Hearing their voice:**  
**Counsellors' perspectives on working with adolescent foreign students**

**Consent form for participants**

- ☐ I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- ☐ I understand what is required of me if I agree to take part in the research.
- ☐ I understand that participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without needing to explain why. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information I have provided should this remain practically achievable.
- ☐ I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher, as well as those mentioned in the information sheet (supervisors, colleague and transcriber) if their services are utilised, and that any published or reported results will not identify me or my place of work. I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.
- ☐ I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities, and password protected for electronic forms, and will be destroyed after five years.
- ☐ I understand the risks associated with taking part and how they will be managed.
- ☐ I understand that I can contact the researcher: Jenelle Hooson, [jenelle.hooson@pg.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:jenelle.hooson@pg.canterbury.ac.nz) or supervisor: Dr Kerry Vincent, [kerry.vincent@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:kerry.vincent@canterbury.ac.nz), for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch ([human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz))
- ☐ I understand I will be offered a summary of the results of the project, unless I indicate I would not like to receive this.
- ☐ By signing below, I agree to participate in this research.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address (*for further contact and summary results, if applicable*):

\_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form to: [jenelle.hooson@pg.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:jenelle.hooson@pg.canterbury.ac.nz) Any further questions can also be directed through this email address.

## **Appendix B: Conversation Guide for researcher**

### **Hearing their voices: Counsellors' perspectives on working with adolescent foreign students**

#### **Conversation guide**

The following proposed questions are to allow participants to share their experiences and as starting points for conversation:

#### **Primary research question:**

How do counsellors describe their experiences working with adolescent foreign students?

#### **Initial tasks:**

1. Read through and sign consent form
2. Gather personal details:
  - a. Gender
  - b. Age bracket
  - c. Ethnicity
  - d. Years of counselling experience
  - e. Description of place of work
3. Explain gift/koha
  - a. the gift/koha does not need to be returned if you withdraw part-way through or if you withdraw after the conversation but before the write up.
  - b. The gift/koha is a token of thanks and appreciation.

#### **Question One: Getting to know the volunteer**

Introduce myself and my interest in this area:

I identify as a female in the 40-49 age bracket. I identify as being of New Zealand European/Pākehā ethnicity. I am in my second year working as a provisionally registered counsellor, and the sixth year of my study as a Master of Counselling student. I work, as the sole counsellor, in a single sex primary school.

My area of interest in foreign adolescent students has arisen from my second year of placement as a Master of Counselling student. I had a unique, and enriching, experience given that at the secondary school I worked at I counselled only adolescent foreign students. As these students spoke with me I

soon realised that as a teacher, my profession for fifteen years prior to counselling, I had no real appreciation of the many challenges they faced. It was only in the privileged position as a counsellor that I began to understand how truly complex their lives can be. With this different perspective I have been exploring the context of adolescent foreign students' lives further, as well as my ability to support them meaningfully through counselling.

I am aware of my place as a white female, who does not see myself in a marginalised group comparable to that of adolescent foreign students. I would like to acknowledge this before we start the conversation, and to acknowledge that our experiences will be different based on our own contexts and experiences.

**Can you please tell me a little bit about yourself, including whether there is anything you would like us to do at the start of this conversation to meet your needs?**

This could be to do with....

- Counselling and career experience
- Work environment
- Beliefs and values
- Multi-cultural approach to counselling
- Experiences in different cultures
- Experiences as part of a marginalised group

**Question Two: Talking about the term 'adolescent foreign student'**

- What made you interested in volunteering for this research project?
- Can you please tell me a little bit about your understanding of the term 'adolescent foreign student' and what it means to you?
- When you hear the term 'adolescent foreign student' what/who comes to mind?
- Would you use another term, or do you have another view on how to define this group of students?
- How many adolescent foreign students do you work with?
- What are the different ways adolescent foreign students are referred to counselling?
- What do you notice about yourself when you are working with this particular group of students?

**Question Three: Experiences with adolescent foreign students**

- Please tell me about your experiences when counselling adolescent foreign students
- Please tell me about aspects of your counselling you describe as being helpful when working with adolescent foreign students?



- Please tell me about aspects of your counselling you describe as being challenging when working with adolescent foreign students?
- What else do you notice when working with this particular group of students?

**Question Four: Comparing experiences with counselling adolescent foreign students and non-adolescent foreign students**

- Describe the differences you notice when working with adolescent foreign students compared with non-foreign students?
- Describe the similarities you notice when working with adolescent foreign students compared with non-foreign students?
- What other patterns or contrasts have you noticed when comparing these groups of students, or other groups?
- Are there other differences that have not been discussed yet? Such as the reasons why different students come to counselling, duration of counselling, understanding of confidentiality?

**Question Five: Changes as a result of counselling adolescent foreign students**

- In what ways has your counselling practice changed as a result of working with adolescent foreign students?
- In what ways would you like your counselling practice to change as a result of working with adolescent foreign students?
- In your experience, what is helpful in making changes?
- In your experience, are there any barriers to making changes?
- What else have you noticed about your counselling practice as a result of working with this group of students?

**Question Six: What else?**

- Is there anything else you would like to share that has not come up in our conversation?

**Debrief:**

- Has this conversation raised any issues or feelings?
- What can I do, or suggest, to support you further?

## **Appendix C: Conversation Guide for participant**

### **Hearing their voices: Counsellors' perspectives on working with adolescent foreign students**

#### **Conversation guide**

I prefer the term conversation to interview, as conversations occur between equals where the researcher and the participant co-construct discussion, listen to each other and probe into experience.

Whilst the proposed topics below will be useful starting points the intention is that the conversation will allow you to share your experiences and what is important to you in regard to this field, in your own words.

#### **Primary research question:**

How do counsellors describe their experiences working with adolescent foreign students?

#### **Proposed topics for the conversation:**

- Can you please tell me a little bit about yourself, including whether there is anything you would like us to do at the start of this conversation to meet your needs?
- Can you please tell me a little bit about your understanding of the term 'adolescent foreign student' and what it means to you?
- Please tell me about aspects of your counselling you describe as being helpful when working with adolescent foreign students?
- Please tell me about aspects of your counselling you describe as being challenging when working with adolescent foreign students?
- What are the differences you perceive when working with adolescent foreign students, compared with non-adolescent foreign students?
- What are the similarities you perceive when working with adolescent foreign students, compared with non-adolescent foreign students?
- What have you noticed about your counselling practice as a result of working with this group of students?
- Is there anything else you would like to share that has not come up in our conversation?

## Appendix D: Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC) approval



### HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Rebecca Robinson  
Telephone: +64 03 369 4588, Extn 94588  
Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

Ref: 2020/28/ERHEC

14 August 2020

Jenelle Hooson  
College of Education, Health and Human Development  
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Jenelle

Thank you for providing the revised documents in support of your application to the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. I am very pleased to inform you that your research proposal "Hearing Their Voice: Counsellors' Perspectives on Working with Adolescent Foreign Students" has been granted ethical approval.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your email of 14<sup>th</sup> August 2020.

Should circumstances relevant to this current application change you are required to reapply for ethical approval.

If you have any questions regarding this approval, please let me know.

We wish you well for your research.

Yours sincerely

pp. *R. Robinson*

Dr Patrick Shepherd  
**Chair**  
**Educational Research Human Ethics Committee**

*Please note that ethical approval relates only to the ethical elements of the relationship between the researcher, research participants and other stakeholders. The granting of approval by the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee should not be interpreted as comment on the methodology, legality, value or any other matters relating to this research.*

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HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Rebecca Robinson  
Telephone: +64 03 369 4588, Extn 94588  
Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

Ref: 2020/28/ERHEC Amendment 1

11 September 2020

Jenelle Hooson  
College of Education, Health and Human Development  
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Jenelle


Thank you for your request for an amendment to your research proposal “Hearing Their Voice: Counsellors' Perspectives on Working with Adolescent Foreign Students” as outlined in your emails dated 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> September 2020. I am pleased to advise that this amendment has been considered and approved by the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

Please note that should circumstances relevant to this current application change you are required to reapply for ethical approval.

If you have any questions regarding this approval, please advise.

We wish you well for your continuing research.

Yours sincerely

PP 

Dr Patrick Shepherd  
**Chair**  
***Educational Research Human Ethics Committee***

*Please note that ethical approval relates only to the ethical elements of the relationship between the researcher, research participants and other stakeholders. The granting of approval by the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee should not be interpreted as comment on the methodology, legality, value or any other matters relating to this research.*

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