CREATED FOR A PURPOSE

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE LIGHTHOUSE PROGRAMME

Student Talent Identification and Exploration as a Means of Increasing Collaboration and Lifting Academic Self-Concept

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Practice at UNITEC, Auckland

Teri Ann Harnell 2013
DEDICATION

Embarking on such an endeavour as this would have remained a figment of my imagination had it not been for the hope, strength and courage given to me by the grace of God, and the love, encouragement and support of my family and friends.

No words are adequate to express my gratitude, but I thank you all from the bottom of my heart for your unfailing belief in me.

I dedicate this thesis to you and to my Lighthouse

To God be the Glory
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ABSTRACT

‘Lighthouse’ is a strengths-based programme aimed at students with 9 – 13 year old cognitive learning levels which, through the use of a Lighthouse metaphor representing self, leads students through a nine week journey of discovery, designed to expand thinking around their natural talents, aid the development of those talents into strengths and collaboratively encourage enhancement of student academic self-concept within a classroom environment. The programme applies Gallup’s philosophy within its creative methodology as means of developing student strengths and improving academic self-concept. The traditional paradigm of perceiving the process of teaching as the imparting of knowledge from one more knowledgeable source to another has been challenged. The research undertaken demonstrates the power of student self-talk around talent and how raising student voice from its obscure status to its utilisation in building collaborative classroom relationships, benefits students, teachers and the learning process. As results of this evaluative research indicate, connections between student perceptions of talent and the formation of academic self-concept are strong and highlight the need to reject single minded focus on subject performance in favour of the Lighthouse Programme’s balanced approach where talents are used as a potential pathway to address behavioural and academic standards required for development of healthy, happy, collaborative and resilient young people.
ABBREVIATIONS

ERO  Education Review Office
MALS  Myself as a Learner Scale
MOE  Ministry of Education
MSD  Ministry of Social Development
NZEI  New Zealand Education Institute
NZPA  New Zealand Principals Association
OECD  Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
RPS  Randwick Park School
TOW  Treaty of Waitangi
UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNCROC  United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNUDHR  United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights

GLOSSARY

KAUPAPA  Underlying vision or philosophy on which Maori culture is based
KOTAHITANGA  Unity, Oneness, Harmony
KETE  A Maori basket, usually woven from flax
WHANAU  Family
WHAEA  Term of respect for female adult, meaning ‘Aunty’
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The seed of the Lighthouse Programme

Sitting quietly, I watched as the young student’s hands moved deftly over the clay. A picture was beginning to emerge around where his 10 year old thoughts were taking him, but not wishing to jump to any conclusions, I waited for him to speak.

“What do you think of my snowman?” the student asked.

Then without waiting for an answer and looking at me intently, he added,

“I wish I was a snowman”.

“Why is that?” I responded.

“Because snowmen are created for a purpose. The snow falls, you make a cool snowman out of it, he makes people smile just by being himself then he melts and feeds the grass. He’s happy ‘cause he’s done what he was meant to do, I like that.”

I have to say, I liked it too.

Now although this student had crossed my path due to behavioural issues, I had not been privy to any angry frustrated displays, only to ongoing reflections of a young person who had been struggling academically for quite some time and now felt like he was not good enough and did not fit - not in class, not in school, not in life.

His quiet words resonated with me like a gong, presenting a powerful illustration of something that had been alluded to many times before. Creatively described this day, it was the expressed desire to know there is a reason for your existence and the understanding there is joy to be found in connection to others through being who you are.

Personally, this moment in time was the watering of a seed that had already been planted years earlier. The seed began to come to life.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Albert Einstein once said, “I never teach my pupils, I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn” (Moncur, 1985, p.1). Reflecting on this quote many years ago I marvelled at the simplicity of his statement and yet the complexity of the task. While many would agree that teaching implies the imparting of knowledge from one to another, I was in awe that one such as Einstein would choose instead to place himself in the role of co-discoverer, supporter and facilitator of an environmental learning space that was able to meet the various needs of his pupils, and yet encourage them to lead their individual learning processes.

Einstein’s insight implies a level of teacher commitment is required to begin the teaching journey as a learner seeking to connect with students and gain understanding around how best to help them move forward. He speaks not of pointing out what his pupils cannot do, but an attempt to discover what they can as the way to empower their learning. It is here in Einstein’s honest pledge to seek the path to student empowerment through his own enlightenment that my personal belief around the role of an educator connects. It is here the Lighthouse Programme finds its niche, establishing itself as an advocate to this discovery process through the introduction of a new language, the language of ‘talents’.

This thesis begins its journey of discovery much like that of the Lighthouse Programme itself. Beginning with insights into what drives my passion for this programme, I reflect on how personal experiences became instrumental in igniting my desire to identify how best to support children in their learning endeavours. As I sought books and experts on the subject of learning difficulties I noticed many historical heroes such as Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison and Winston Churchill struggled with learning at school, and yet each were described later in life, as brilliant, ‘gifted’ and ‘talented’ individuals. I believe these men provide through their lives, a testimony to the existence of talent, the power of individual self belief and the resulting impact of ‘inner whispers’ that are the key to individual choice and the will to overcome.
This research describes the journey Randwick Park School Room 11 took as they participated in Lighthouse Programme. Various professional voices and views around ability assessment and ‘gift’ or ‘talent’ identification from education, political and psychology fields are identified. Research is designed to seek a level of student insight not encountered before, as student narratives that have remained hidden until now, come into view. It is through the voices of these students that Einstein’s goal to empower all learners connects with mine and as student self-talk is identified, the essential ‘mortar’ needed to build and support the creation of a positive purposeful learning environment in New Zealand classrooms is provided.

PERSONAL CONTEXT MEETS PROFESSIONAL LEARNINGS

As a mother of three children each labelled by various education professionals as dyslexic, years of navigating New Zealand’s education system meant seeing first-hand the results of failed attempts to negotiate terrain embedded in the written word. From early on my husband and I had dealt with emotional ‘fallout’ as our children brought their classroom frustrations home. Tears and the continual lament of children who are finding navigation through literacy learning difficult, provided early warning signs that they were beginning to believe they may never measure up to classroom expectations. Subsequent conversations with teachers, education professionals and many within the community indicated clearly to us the importance of our children knowing how to read and write well to cope in society. Thus, believing strongly in our children’s ability and value, we began to make several misguided attempts to prove their worth to others.

As we became well versed on various methods of learning, support provision and advocacy, little did we know that our children were unwitting guinea pigs to our constant attempts at ‘helping’ to lift their academic performance and ‘hopefully’ their perceived value to others in and out of the classroom environment. It was after one particularly gruelling term of being regularly removed from class for continued various literacy support provisions that the true impact of our approach emerged. Arriving home weepy and tired, our 9 year old son when asked “what’s the matter”, responded quietly,

“Nothing, I just wish all you guys would stop helping me and just let me be me” (R.Harnell, March 7, 2010).
I baulked at the apparent impact of what we were doing and questioned; by trying to push the improvement of his academic performance, had we inadvertently aided the formation of destructive messages around our son’s value, ability and strengths?

Since they were young we had guided our children through beliefs anchored in a strong spiritual pedagogy and a conviction that all individuals have unique talents, value and purpose under the eyes of God. However this day, communicating with our children, we began to understand that our choice to follow professional advice and place intense focus on lifting areas of literacy weakness had unintentionally resulted in reinforcing school messages. Listening, it appeared these overt and implied messages indicated to our children that current and future worth was measured by classroom achievement and talent or potential was identified by proving you are valuable through your performance against others.

I soon realised our family situation was not unique.

As I became more widely known as a mother of children with learning difficulties and a school counsellor, frequently parents whose children were struggling with reading and writing would approach me wanting reassurance and guidance around how best to support their children. Often these parents or caregivers felt helpless, speaking of behavioural repercussions in class and/or at home as their child voiced feelings of frustration and inadequacy around their learning ability. Equally as often, these children were described as talented, articulate and highly creative individuals. So why did they appear to be falling through gaps in our education system?

The following questions began to form in my mind:

- What messages were students receiving within their class environment around talent and individual ability and how important were these messages?
- Did these messages impact relationships within the classroom environment? How?
- What role did classroom perceptions of talent and ability play in the establishment of student academic self-concept?
- Was it possible that a low academic self concept aided in building literacy difficulties?

As I slowly unpacked the concept of talent within education and approach to its identification and exploration within the New Zealand school curriculum, a theme emerged. While
curriculum guidelines left room for individual school community interpretation, talent identification and assessment, was predominantly teacher-driven and largely recognised from a performance based perspective. I considered different ways the identification and assessment of talent could be addressed to support classroom curriculum indications, Treaty of Waitangi foundations and human rights education ideals that encourage equality, child inclusiveness and strength-based reciprocal learning.

**THE PROBLEM: MEANING AND METHOD OF TALENT IDENTIFICATION**

**Why is identifying and nurturing talent important?**

Considering the impact of messages students receive within a classroom environment, I investigated how a child’s academic self-concept is formed and if there was any connection to talent and ability identification. Robert Burden’s (2005) findings specific to the creation of academic self-concept indicated that as children begin to shape their sense of identity, messages sent and received through classroom interactions around characteristics, talents and ability, aided significantly in the construction of their academic self-concept (Rogers, 1951). Burden (2005) discovered that student belief around what was valued within their school environment provided a foundational element in the formation of their academic self-concept. He noted that overt or implied messages received within the classroom about ability in relation to others, was “vitally important in determining whether the child constructed a view of themselves as a person of worth and capable of learning” (p.47).

Purkey (2000) noted that school often provides children with their first taste of life as part of wider society and culture tends to originate from roots of origin outside the classroom but I questioned what the impact would be if cultural definitions of talent already assimilated by children, differed from the way talent was defined and identified within school. Did this impact academic self-concept in any way?

The National Government’s introduction and implementation of National Standards, a tool for evaluating and assessing ability and achievement in New Zealand education, sets the backdrop to the Ministry of Education (MOE) distinction between talent and giftedness. The MOE states that talent can be physical, emotional or intellectual and can appear at any time. Defining a ‘talented’ learner as someone who has a high level of *performance* in areas such as music, art, craft, dance or sport, (MOE, 2012, emphasis mine) and a ‘gifted’ learner as
someone who has a high intelligence, or aptitude to show (through their *performance*) that they learn quickly within their area of special ability (MOE, 2012, emphasis mine), both roads lead to the idea of talent or giftedness as performance or action based.

Founded initially in a common westernised pedagogy, the MOE (2012) explains that talents can differ within the context of ethnicity or culture and gives examples of Maori and Pacifica pedagogy where talent goes further than performance or ability, having a spiritual context that is founded on purpose or potential (MOE, 2012; Bevan-Brown, 2009; Galu, 1998). The MOE’s (2012) broadened description encourages Māori Kaupapa concepts and definitions to be considered where talent definitions are varied and evolve from a multifaceted cultural lens that includes *personal qualities* such as spiritual intuition, leadership traits and cultural qualities as well as abilities (Bevan-Brown, 2009).

The MOE (2012) notes that in Pacifica cultures, talents are considered a gift from God, something you were born with to use predominantly for the service and benefit of others rather than the promotion of self (Galu, 1998). This may pose an interesting dilemma. If Pacific Island thinking dictates a level of humility be displayed around talents, is it possible that potential, ability or talent for Pacifica students may go undetected (Bevan-Brown, 2009; Galu, 1998)? It appears that what MOE (2012) is alluding to is that various cultural meanings of talent indicate difficulty in ascertaining a one size fits all definition or set method of identification in students.

Defining talent as a gift from God or a personal quality is not exclusive to Maori or Pacific cultures. For other cultures based on Christian biblical foundations, the word talent originates from parables in the books of Matthew and Luke where it was presented as a gift or skill given by God to be utilised for current purpose and further potential (Bible, New International Version, 1995). Internationally, after over fifty years of extensive research on the subject of strengths-based practice and talent identification, the Gallup Organisation founded in the United States in 1958 by George Gallup, built on this idea of talent as potential or purpose based. Challenging and expanding thinking around what is talent, Gallup believes talent identification is a key connector to hope, encouraging purpose and enhancing future effectiveness as an active member of society in a way no other skill can (Fox, 2008). Gallup suggests that talent identification is the essential ingredient that aids the formation and building of strengths.
Through the creation of the Gallup Adult Strength Finder Talent Assessment and subsequent Clifton Youth Strength Explorer Assessment, Gallup connects the following definition of talent; “any naturally recurring pattern of thought, feeling or behaviour that can be productively applied” (Clifton & Harter, 2003, p.111) to the questionnaire process of identifying it, utilised within the Lighthouse Programme itself.

PLURALITY OF TALENT

Various views on talent pose several challenges within New Zealand’s multi-cultural education environment. This year, in an extensive report on meeting the needs of gifted and talented learners in New Zealand schools, the MOE stated, “While many theories and definitions of giftedness and talent have been developed, there is no universally accepted theory or definition” (MOE, 2012, p. 22) around what characterises a talented or gifted learner in New Zealand education.

Tomorrow’s Schools 1989 educational reforms acknowledged cultural influences within education and as a response gave schools the right to set their own policies and procedures around best learning practices, evaluation and assessment (Langley, 2009; Wylie, 1999). When this is considered alongside MOE’s suggestion that the most effective approach to talent and ability identification is for individual school communities to develop meaning and methods of assessment for themselves (Riley, Bevan-Brown, Bicknell, Carroll-Lind, & Kearney, 2004) it would appear room is created for new visions or approaches into how talent could be defined and recognised within a school. Correlating to MOE’s statement, the New Zealand Working Party on Gifted Education (2001) guide to talent identification (MOE, 2012), encourages schools to define talent through school community consultation. This framework of criteria indicates that a ‘one size fits all’ school community talent definition for culturally diverse low decile classrooms such as the one identified in this research, is no easy task.

As this thesis discovers the impact of messages around talent, its findings question if it is necessary to have a set definition of talent for it to be identified within a student. With academic testing and the National Standards rubric as the predominant student assessment measure used to inform about student education attributes, performance and potential, I
wondered how many opportunities were given for students to investigate and provide feedback to teachers on their understanding of their own talent and ability.

My past experiences as a counsellor highlighted a distinct connection between student academic self-perception and disengagement. Listening to student self-talk within the counselling space, often perceptions of their ability directly correlated with feedback they believed they had received from their teacher. You will note I say believed, as this feedback does not need to be vocal to impact. Often it is indirect, either through body language or teacher behavioural responses. It appears students will accept teacher feedback regardless of whether they agree with it or not and regardless if they believe the teacher understands their implied message or not. Frequently I have questioned students if they would like an opportunity to provide feedback to their teachers around their preferred learning styles, talents or difficulties and the answer has been a resounding ‘yes’.

As a counsellor, my insight into disengaging student narratives highlighted a theme. Students felt learners with high achievement in reading and writing held an exclusive place within the classroom that came with strong teacher relationships and unique leadership opportunities. While these student perceptions represented one predominant student dynamic I noted that student belief of the assigned value to certain talents and abilities were frequently a roadblock to the building of strong, positive relationships within the classroom and to the building of individual healthy academic self-concepts. Thus, I began to develop the Lighthouse Programme as a tool I hoped would aid the increase of student participation in their learning process, encourage student and teacher reciprocity, reflection and dialogue around talent and ability in a creative and unobtrusive but meaningful way.

Alton-Lee’s (2003) report on quality teaching, notes that teacher quality, classroom context, student development and cultural context are fluid, forever changing in such a way that student ability or talent may evolve at any time within varying contexts. This signifies another major challenge for talent identification within New Zealand’s diverse education environment and highlights the importance of effective talent identification being an ongoing collaborative teacher and student personal development process.

I believe this indicates a valid area for further investigation in the form of piloting the Lighthouse Programme’s alternative method of identifying and exploring talent within the classroom. The diverse nature of talent definitions alongside the belief held by the MOE that there is room for school expansion around identifying gifted and talented learners, provides
an open door to the philosophy underpinning the Lighthouse Programme’s approach and this research methodology.

BUILT BY CHOICE: THE LIGHTHOUSE PROGRAMME

*If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.*

Henry David Thoreau (2008)

The above quote indicates the importance of not trying to tell someone how to walk in their own shoes. For me, it begs the question, if my talents are distinctly different from yours, how could you possibly know how best to recognise, value and encourage me to reach my potential? The Lighthouse Programme provides a collaborative method of empowering student learning ownership through talent identification, assessment and the strength building process.

Originally called, *Who Am I?* I conceived the initial format of what was to become the Lighthouse Programme after identifying a need in the decile one school where I worked, for a programme that encouraged personal discovery, self acceptance and the recognition of choice with kids aged 10-13 years. As a strengths-based counsellor, I developed the initial framework from a diverse collection of creative exercises I had used or adapted over previous years and found effective in achieving programme aims within various group environments. With the initial programme design, I met with a Maori counselling colleague to talk over the programme format and discuss any possible cultural safety issues and areas for fine tuning.

After my colleague and I ran the programme with two diverse Year Eight groups, student evaluative feedback indicated the programme encouraged and engaged students who had previously shown a lack of participation within their class environment. All but two of the 12 students involved felt their classroom confidence to ask questions had improved. However, teachers noted that while student participant engagement improved while attending the programme, it began to gradually drop away after programme completion. As the programme intention was to open the door to continued student personal development, this highlighted a dilemma as to how group learning could be carried into the classroom environment to ensure positive changes were supported and extended.
I was approached individually by several participants to request that weekly group interactions continue, students indicated they enjoyed the collaborative learning and spoke of feeling important in being part of this ‘selected’ group. As understanding around the power of collaborative group learning increased, I looked into ways the programme could effectively be designed to fit within a classroom setting. I considered the improvements in our children’s confidence and learning achievement once my husband and I had shifted our focus to teaching them how to use their talents effectively to support areas of weakness. Once our children realised they could use talents, strengths and skills they had identified in one context to support them in another, their confidence grew, they began to take more ownership in their learning, to voice to teachers any problems they were having and successes ensued.

I explored methods of talent identification and exploration as a foundational block to the Lighthouse Programme, searching and trialling creative ways of evolving the programme to encourage individual curiosity, choice and the sharing of ideas and talents within a classroom environment. My journey led me to be part of a conversation around the strength-based adult Gallup Strength Finder Talent Assessment. It was through the discovery of this tool, I found the newly developed Clifton Youth Strength Explorers Talent Assessment (Gallup, 2007) and the programme began to take on an entirely new direction.

The desire behind this new perspective was to create a programme that would instigate the identification and discovery of individual talents while at the same time, providing a platform for the empowerment of student ownership around learning and choice. Named Lighthouse Programme after a visual metaphor that aptly represented the biblical reference “Let your Light Shine” (Bible, New International Version, 2005), the Lighthouse programme outlined in Appendix A, is strongly influenced by Glasser’s (1998) Choice Theory, which is grounded in the following three key elements:

1) Individuals constantly compare perceptions of the world around them and behave according to those perceptions.

2) Information cannot make people feel anything as they always have a level of choice about what they decide to believe and how they respond.

3) The belief people are internally motivated by the following basic needs:

   - To belong, be loved and accepted. Glasser (1998) suggested that internally, people are driven to connect with others, wanting to be valued for who they are.
To achieve a sense of personal power. Describing it as a “distinctive human need” (Glasser, 1998, p.37). Glasser suggested that this desire for personal power is shown through leanings toward competition and is driven by an internal need to achieve and prove our competence to others.

The need for freedom. Glasser (1998) noted this relates to freedom of choice and only becomes concerning when individuals feel others enforcing their power to such a degree, it becomes oppressive and threatening to an individual’s ability to make choices for themselves.

To experience fun and joy. Believing that “the day we stop playing, is the day we stop learning” (Glasser, 1998, p.41), Glasser believed a sense of fun is central to the learning process as it is indicative that each party involved is gaining something from the process.

To survive.

The Lighthouse Programme is designed so that the entire process of talent discovery evolves fluidly within a culturally safe environment. As Glasser (1998) would suggest, this environment is designed to offer continual avenues for student choice that attempt to expand student freedom and empower autonomy. Creative individual activities aim to encourage student imagination and fun while at various times, encourage connection through team building and projects designed to aid student sense of belonging. Through programme processes that utilise various learning languages, individual and small group activities alongside classroom discussion and collaboration enables students to ‘own their talents and learning’ while becoming part of the wider classroom environment. Using the lighthouse metaphor as a pictorial representation of themselves, the programme takes each child on a nine week journey of creative discovery (Figure One, p. 11) that identifies continual areas of choice and builds talents step by step to the potential and purpose of “Letting your Light shine” as depicted in the Bible (Matthew 5:16, New International Version Bible, 1995).
Through the provision of an environment that encourages investigation, discussion and individualised identification around various ideas of talent, the programme builds a platform of student understanding around the impact of past influential messages they feel they have received about their particular talents and abilities. Students are then supported weekly to identify alternative pathways to thinking around their talent and ability and are encouraged to choose how best to define their talents and utilise them to attain their dreams and fulfil their potential.

The Lighthouse Programme aims are:

**Figure 1:** The Lighthouse Programme Class Visual Aid (2012).
- Aid the building of a collaborative safe learning environment
- Encourage student ownership and choice around talent identification and the process of learning
- Build student competence, confidence and classroom relationships
- Encourage hope

The process provides a window for teachers to identify talent discovery in action, opening up the door to increased understanding of their students and enabling teachers to take on a new role as a collaborative advocate to their students instead of placing them in the position of decision maker or ‘judge’ around whether an individual child has talent or not. This research considers the impact on academic self-perception when room is given for a child to discover the ‘beat’ of their own talent and is no longer stepping to the beat of someone else’s perceptions.

This thesis now provides a valuable contribution to the existing basket of knowledge concerning processes of talent identification and exploration and the relevance of it as a supporter to possible academic self-concept issues. This research journey highlights the impact of foundational beliefs held by education decision makers on how talent has been defined and how literacy has been considered in New Zealand. Government policies have made a resounding difference as they underpin selected student achievement and progression assessment tools and guide how future education goals and strategies have been set. This encourages deeper consideration of the effects of individual literacy difficulties on student academic self-concept and talent identification and requires a shift of one’s perspective from focus on ‘performance’ to focus on ‘potential’.

**CONCLUSION**

It is not the intent of this research to focus on positive correlations found between academic self-perception and academic achievement levels by education experts such as Hansford and Hattie (1982). However, as this is a key consideration within the development of the Lighthouse Programme it is important to acknowledge extensive research around such positive correlations (Burden, 2005; Marsh & Craven, 2006; Marsh & O’Mara, 2008). This chapter has outlined reasoning behind the creation of the Lighthouse Programme and identified the uniqueness of its approach to talent and the issue of supporting literacy
attainment. The Lighthouse way is intended to provide strength to the evolution of a positive student academic self-concept and a more equitable balance within New Zealand’s performance-based, weakness-driven classroom culture.

As discussion and findings are now unpacked, this research moves on to show that by providing avenues for varied communication, inviting students to view talent as substance to be nurtured within self and others and by encouraging students to lead their own learning journey, new awareness occurs. Through the informative offerings of Randwick Park School students, staff and facilitators this research’s discoveries are unique and highlight the connection between talent and the healthy development of student academic self-concept in a way my own words never could. As thesis conclusion displays increased student confidence, collaboration and a renewed connection to hope, ultimately research findings concur with UNESCO’s (2004) belief that a single model approach to literacy and student assessment is far too limited to promote individual and societal well-being. Suggesting instead, the necessity in seeking communication with those most affected by current societal education narratives, those on who New Zealand’s future potential on the world stage depends; the students themselves.
CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides insight into the context for this study. Firstly it takes a look at Randwick Park School, the South Auckland Primary/Intermediate School chosen for this research. School dynamics and strengths are briefly discussed and a snapshot into an area of issue within the school is provided. As school leadership looks to embrace every opportunity to increase school inclusion and provide avenues for student voice to be heard, the forming of the Lighthouse Student Advisory Group as a pre-cursor to the classroom pilot is supported and introduced here.

“Nothing about us….without us.” (D Kenkel, Human Rights Lecture, June 30, 2011)

This quote encapsulates my reasoning behind the establishment of the Lighthouse Student Advisory. It serves as a continual reminder to me that in order to provide aid and advocacy for students I must always be primarily alert to the voices of those I am trying to support.

Thus, the second part of this chapter details the forming of the Lighthouse Student Advisory Group, an informal group established not to gather research data, but for the purpose of encouraging student participation, collaboration and feedback around the Lighthouse Programme development prior to the classroom pilot research. As students met together weekly to participate, reflect and discuss the programme, insight was offered into underlying student learning narratives, possible issues with engagement and areas for improvement within the programme itself. Data gathered through this Advisory Group is presented here as this process precedes the actual research giving students opportunity to have input into Lighthouse Programme design. The purpose of taking this approach was to ensure programme effectiveness and relevancy in meeting its aims and being able to stand up under the scrutiny of the students themselves.

Neil (1977) believes that it is only when students are encouraged to participate in decision making that decisions will be made in their best interests. Lighthouse does not encourage student participation as an act of tokenism but works towards empowering student active involvement and ‘active citizenship’. I utilised precepts provided by Hart’s (1992) Ladder of Participation (Appendix B) as a decision making guideline when choosing research methodology and data collection methods (Hart, 1992). Hart describes rung six as a stage
where ‘true participation’ takes place highlighting that although the process is initiated and guided by an adult the decision-making process is shared with the children. The primary objective of the Lighthouse Student Advisory Group was to ensure the programme stayed accountable to student’s participatory rights and offered opportunity for students to have a say in programme dynamics and decision-making prior to rollout of the first classroom pilot.

RANDWICK PARK SCHOOL: ENCOURAGING COLLABORATION

To truly understand and define talent within a community, one really needs to walk alongside those who live, breathe and experience it every day. McMurray (2007) describes community as “that which is common” (p. 10). Within Randwick Park, whether interwoven relationships are evident or covert and community members are bonded by choice or necessity, the school plays a key role as a community hub bringing those from diverse physical, psychological, social, spiritual and cultural backgrounds together on common ground. While the 2006 Census figures support a 17% increase since 2001 and Manukau City Council’s claim as the fastest growing city in New Zealand, Randwick Park’s population has increased by 48.5% since the 2001 Census. As the school meets population demands, further pressure to provide an effective and relevant learning environment comes in the form of a population dynamic resembling that described in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) 2011 Education Review report (Nusche, Laveault, MacBeath & Santiago, 2012) ‘tail of underachievement’. With 33% of Randwick Park’s population under fifteen years old, the 2006 Census indicates that the most common ethnic groups that individuals identified with were, European (32.9%), Maori (28.7%), Pacific Peoples (28.3%) and Asian (22.5%). However these figures representing the area ethnic breakdown do not accurately depict the current student population dynamic the local Randwick Park School serves (Table One).

Table 1: Randwick Park School Ethnic Population Breakdown .(Education Review Office, 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maori</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoan</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tongan</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook Island Maori</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Ethnicities</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although English is the most commonly spoken language, 40% of Randwick Park’s population speak two or more languages compared to 29.3% for all Auckland Region. The extensive population growth of Maori and Pacifica families to the area comes with the following statistics:

- 30.4% of the areas youth leave school with no qualification compared to 20.3% for the Auckland region.
- 7.9% of people aged 15 and over are unemployed compared to 5.6% for Auckland.

The underlying culture of language diversity, low education and poverty is recognised in the low decile rating of the school and means Randwick Park School has extreme pressure to deliver in education for approximately 650 students in a way that is culturally varied and valid. Randwick Park School 2012 ERO Report identified many areas of strength within the school. A Maori bi-lingual unit, the establishment of Maori, Samoan and Indian cultural leaders and improvements in literacy have all added to the continued building of a culturally safe learning environment. Leadership continues to look for ways to include community and offer a diverse range of teaching methods to meet the needs of its students. As a result half the school is currently achieving on or above the National Standards (ERO, 2012). However, results from National Standards also indicate that there are significant drops in literacy attainment from Year Six to Year Seven, indicative of a level of disengagement, especially for Maori and Samoan boys (Figure Two, p. 17).
In my capacity as Randwick Park School Counsellor and the Lighthouse Programme developer, I realised that to form a true picture and gain understanding into the narratives of what was going on for Year Six and Seven students a good place to start was to hear the stories of students who had already experienced these years at Randwick Park.

Believing in the Lighthouse Programme myself, I sought to find answers to the following:

1) How did students perceive themselves as learners?
2) What messages were students receiving around talent?
3) What themes or issues emerged through informal discussion with the students?
4) Was the Lighthouse Programme a valid method of encouraging reflection and engaging students?
Seeking a collaborative programme approach ‘with’ children is no easy task. Programmes and research involving children have always been over-shadowed by varied understandings around the freedoms and rights of children, how much they should be included and belief around informed consent (Gray, 2002).

My foremost consideration as a counsellor and researcher studying children whose ethnicity varied from my own, meant ethical issues outlined by Ludbrook (2003), Geldard and Geldard (2002) and addressed further in this thesis, were discussed right from the start. I sought parental consent and invited student voluntary participation in the Student Advisory Group platform. I received professional supervision both inside and outside the school and adhered to Gray’s (2002) suggestion that the formation of an informal group such as the student advisory group, would support student cultural safety, encourage peer collaboration, ensure I considered student accountability and lessen the impact of me within the research.

Gray’s (2002) extensive research informing the New Zealand Ministry of Social Development and Youth Affairs around methods of increasing the participation of children and young people in decision-making claimed that it is important to distinguish between these two elements when aiming to empower student dialogue, Consultation and Participation. Gray (2002) defines consultation as asking students to express their viewpoint on any given subject and participation as the extent to which you seek children’s participation directly in decision making processes. Her findings suggest that while consultation and considerations of student view can often result in changes to processes, study of New Zealand literature predominantly suggests that traditionally a consumerist approach has been taken when involving children in decision-making.

### Power dynamics within student participation

The consumerist approach “uses participation as a means to an end” (Gray, 2002, p.66) and focuses more directly on the needs of government and policy makers than the needs of the children concerned. This tactic by policy decision-makers alludes to ‘power over’ as opposed
to ‘power with’ children and is contradictory to the Treaty of Waitangi (1840) principles of inclusion and partnership. Treaty of Waitangi articles align with 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC), principles which present a constitutional foundation towards the empowerment of all children to reach their full potential. These documents encourage that the needs of the children and young people be the predominant focus in decisions concerning them.

The Lighthouse Student Advisory Group is the first step towards seeking student voice and feedback around programme development. Correspondingly, as the Lighthouse classroom pilot concludes, data gathered is predominantly reflective of various student voices. From programme design to evaluating programme effectiveness, the Lighthouse programme aims to encourage student participation from a position of shared power with children and thus identifies itself as a programme created with children for children.

Now, as this thesis unfolds through introduction of the Lighthouse Student Advisory Group, my intent to empower student active participation in the programme results in clearer insight emerging as student inner perceptions are voiced. Subsequently, as their journey through the Lighthouse Programme comes to an end, the Room 11 research begins with a notion of how insightful empowering true participation with students can be.
THE YEAR EIGHT LIGHTHOUSE STUDENT ADVISORY

Photo shows members of the Year Eight Student Advisory taking part in a Lighthouse Programme team building activity.

Background

The predominant role of this student advisory was to ‘offer opportunity’ for Year Eight students to:

- Take an active part in the evolution of the Lighthouse Programme
- Participate in the Lighthouse Programme
- Explore and reflect on the effectiveness of programme methods of increasing collaboration, engagement and achieving programme aims
- Provide feedback around experiences of the programme
- Communicate issues they identified within education around talent, ability and learning.

Building rapport with students takes time and can be established more quickly with some than others (Geldard & Geldard, 2002; Gray, 2002). I entered this collaborative part of the programme with the aim of empowering student participation as much as possible. I kept an open mind as to how this process would transpire.

- 20 -
Geldard and Geldard (2001) propose that the use of groups when working with children is an effective way of bringing people together for discussion that lessens power differentials and provides children with a simulated environment that is a snapshot resemblance of their wider world. The level of safety groups provide can increase a sense of belonging through providing an opportunity for children to come together with peers and interact in a way that is socially already programmed into their developmental process (Geldard & Geldard, 2001).

Power differentials due to adult and child age and understanding are already present when an adult facilitates a group with children (Geldard & Geldard 2001; Smith 2005; Bishop 2005; Gray 2002). Bishop (2005) argues that when working with Maori, researchers need to be aware of this power dynamic at all times and need to position the way they work with Maori children to be participant driven and include understanding of the value of whanaungatanga and the power behind collaborative story telling. Placing an emphasis on Aroha ki te tangata (a respect for people) and the need to Kanohi kitea (present yourself face to face); Bishop (2005) and Tuhiai-Smith (1999) believe platforms for participation should nurture cultural safety, active listening, humility and accountability. Rose and Edleson (1987) point out that as student learning is predominantly motivated through interaction, observation and listening to peers, opportunities for peer reinforcement can be a powerful advocate for voices to be heard and increased dialogue to occur.

**Student advisory group establishment**

Discussions with the Principal and leadership team resulted in the selection of students they felt would benefit from participating in the student advisory. My brief to leadership around student selection was limited to:

- The selection of six girls and six boys – four from each Year Eight classroom
- A diverse ethnic group representative of the school
- Students representative of mixed academic and cultural abilities

Over an afternoon tea visual presentation that included a handout about the role of the Lighthouse Student Advisory (Appendix C), students were informed that taking part was voluntary and then invited to participate. After being told they could decline/withdraw at any time those wishing to be involved were told to discuss with parents/caregivers and get a consent form signed. Thirteen students were invited and all thirteen participants returned consent, volunteering to be part of the student advisory process.
My intent with the Advisory Group was to encourage the process to be student driven as much as possible. Geldard and Geldard (2001) suggest that smaller groups of 6-8 work well, so I met with the students prior to beginning the programme to discuss how they thought the groups should function, evaluation measures and seek their decision in how small groups should be formed. After deciding through a vote on a secret ballot that they would like to have mixed gender groups, the students formed two groups in what appeared a natural process, with students gravitating to what group they would like to be in. Observing this process meant putting my ‘counselling hat’ aside as I noticed group dynamics appeared to represent the more outwardly confident students together and did not lean towards single sex grouping as Gray’s (2002) research suggested was ideal. All students appeared to connect towards established friendships and/or class placing, suggesting their connection to a level of safety amongst each other (Willow, 1997). The student-led process resulted in a group of six and a group of seven, ethnic and gender breakdown in Table Two.

Table 2: Ethnic breakdown of Student Advisory Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Student Advisory</th>
<th>Group One</th>
<th>Student Advisory</th>
<th>Group Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BOYS</td>
<td>GIRLS</td>
<td>BOYS</td>
<td>GIRLS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maori</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook Island/Maori</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European/Maori</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adhering to Gray’s (2002) belief that the provision of a setting for an informal pre-meeting get together aids the clarification of any issues and encourages students to speak more freely, I suggested meeting for lunch before the initial Lighthouse advisory session. However, students were keen for this to happen every week so after the first meeting’s shared lunch I provided light refreshments prior to every meeting.
Informal group discussion

The Student Advisory was not intended to be an interview group, but a platform for informal discussion, so I was aware that having a formal context with many pre-designed questions could stifle or shut down student participation (Geldard & Geldard, 2001). I drew on my experience as a counsellor to facilitate conversation as much as possible through open-ended questions, active listening and providing creative avenues for student expression (such as drawing). Undoubtedly, I found that having a relaxed approach and a good sense of humour were the two key ingredients that enabled me to oversee group discussion in a relaxed manner and respond quickly as any issues arose.

A high student level of safety and trust and a greater sense of belonging with other group members (including myself) strengthened communication lines. For all but one of the students, week four indicated a distinct shift to increased confidence to speak out honestly in their feedback and much informal dialogue instrumental to the context of this research resulted. We discussed the upcoming Room 11 research measures and the Year Eight students were keen to grab a camera and have the opportunity to try Photovoice. Following are some of the resulting student photos when they were asked, “How do you see yourself as a learner?”

“I accept learning because I have no choice, my brain is like this rubbish bin, it is constantly receiving useless irrelevant rubbish.”
(Boy, Maori, Age 13, Above Literacy/ Numeracy Standards)

“I feel like there’s a mess of information in me that mostly I don’t get or care about.”
(Boy, Maori, Age 12, Below literacy/numeracy Standards)
“Sometimes I find learning hard but I like maths and if I take one step at a time I get there in the end.”

(Girl, Age 13, Achieving Literacy /Numeracy Standards)

“I hate school but I’m stuck with it. This is the first time I be selected to do something fun.”

(Boy, Maori, Age 12, Below Literacy and Numeracy standard)

“I like Bart, sometimes I’m naughty because school is boring, but I’m smarter than everyone thinks’.

(Boy, Age 13, Below Literacy, Achieving Numeracy Standard)

“I like learning, even though sometimes it’s difficult it’s fun.”

(Girl, European/Maori, Age 13, Above Literacy standard, Achieving Numeracy standard)
While some students did not wish their photo to be included in this report, overall results of this photographic exercise indicated a level of disillusionment in learning especially from the boys. This was backed up by the following reflective quotes I noted from several boys over the nine week group discussions.

“I was surprised to be asked to be part of the Lighthouse Advisory cause there are heaps of kids smarter than me in class and I never get chosen for anything”  (Maori)

“Theres not really any programmes I would like to be in because they are all sporty. I really like art and cartoon drawing but that’s not really the thing around here, you kinda need to be smart or sporty”   (Samoan)  

“I find it really hard to tell the teacher if I don’t get something especially if I have asked lots of times. It’s easier to laugh and joke with my friends.....I usually get in trouble.”   (Indian)
“At school you’re okay if you’re good at sports or good at school work, if you aren’t it sucks. I don’t even want to go to high school its guna be even worse.” (Maori)

“I love sports at school and I like maths because I’m quite competitive.” (European)

**Perceptions of talent**

What messages were the students receiving about what constitutes talent at school?

Here are some of the direct quotes when I asked, “How do you think talent is defined/described at school?

- “Someone who is good at everything and confident.”
- “People that are brainy and sporty.”
- “A person who is good at reading, writing, maths, topic and sports.”
- “A person who is smart.”
- “Someone who is brainy and confident.”
- “Someone with talent gets picked for lots of stuff.”

Listening to student reflections it became apparent the word ‘talent’ was not something they were familiar with directly, however as discussion ensued the students concluded talent and ability was the same thing. Unanimously the students also decided that confidence was a sure sign of a talented individual. Interestingly when students completed week two of the Lighthouse Programme which involved the Clifton Youth Strength Explorer Talent Assessment (Gallup, 2007a), confidence was the only one of the ten talent themes that not one single student had in their top three talents (Appendices D and E).

**The lighthouse programme evaluated**

The formation of this informal Student Advisory Group enabled a platform to be provided where students could assess the Lighthouse Programme before it was more formally implemented and evaluated. As the programme was designed to encourage student participation, I sought student advice around design effectiveness. My choice not to include this process as part of the research ‘formal’ data-gathering was due to the importance of this process placing no pressure around student response and provision of feedback. Subsequently
as individual’s relaxed and weekly sessions progressed, power differentials often present between child/adult (McCashen, 2005; Geldard & Geldard, 2002; Ludbrook, 2003) lessened and students became more reflective and comfortable to verbalise their critique of the Lighthouse Programme. This resulted in the following valuable suggestions being offered by the students around Lighthouse Programme design.

- The introduction of music when completing individual creative activities
- Ending each weekly session with a team building activity
- Making sessions longer by 15 minutes
- Allowing further time for session one discussion around the Lighthouse metaphor and how it connects to the students themselves
- Adding an element of competition to the team building session.

After I had explained to the students how results would be gathered for the classroom pilot, discussing issues around data gathering measures and confidentiality (Ludbrook, 2003), the students proposed the Room 11 programme evaluation questionnaire should not be too complicated. They decided the Likert rating scale questions used in the talent assessment were the easiest for younger students to understand and respond to. At Lighthouse Student Advisory conclusion, 12 out of 13 participants indicated being involved in the advisory made them feel more valued at school and 11 agreed their confidence had increased significantly. I noticed a significant change in the language the students were using as they had begun to ‘own’ their individual talents, talk about them and consider how to use them in the future. This was confirmed when eleven participants indicated “strongly agree” to the question, “the Lighthouse Programme encouraged me to be more hopeful about my future.”

CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided an overview into the context of this research and aided in highlighting a principle fundamental to the development of the Lighthouse Programme – the principle of inclusion. Randwick Park School’s commitment to increase opportunity for student voices to be heard and for student learning ownership to be encouraged makes it an ideal research location for this thesis. The Lighthouse Student Advisory participants set the scene for this thesis as their voices echo within this chapter, establishing a research foundation of student inclusion and showing that levels of change occur when the concept of
talent is explored and students are empowered to be active participants in the co-creation of their own learning pathways.
CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

As our world becomes increasingly technologically advanced and knowledge driven, the attainment of literacy and numeracy as a basic necessity, impacts many aspects of everyday life in New Zealand. Historically, the ability to read and write has been essential to the evolution of civilisation, opening doors to hope and possibilities in a way no other skill can. Langley (2009) asserts that “outside family life, no institution has a more significant impact on the shaping of our societies and world than our education system” (p.5). This alludes to the significant pressure policy makers and educators are under in attempting to identify and implement effective education strategies within New Zealand and internationally.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the contextual narratives that have supported New Zealand education pathways until now. Alternative to recent government ideals of subject focus the heart of the Lighthouse Programme centres on identification and utilisation of talent to support the development of healthy student academic self-concept. As this approach is strength-based and the predominant tool is talent, this review anchors itself to discussion and discovery of such a practice and in doing so, highlights the connection to constitutional documents such as the Treaty of Waitangi, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) and United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNUDHR). As theories and arguments are presented through subject matter, the Lighthouse Programme’s pedagogy and relevancy as a cohesive fit within the existing New Zealand education curriculum aligns with MOE intent and subsequently, this chapter ends as the power of the learning environment, social impacts and the significance of belonging and hope are recognised.

The issue of literacy

While there is no dispute that literacy is an essential life skill, best practices around how to support it have created dissonance from state through to civil society levels both within New Zealand and internationally (Clark, 2010; Gardner, 1993; Gordon & Crabtree, 2006; Elley, 2010; Hartevelt, 2010; Key, 2010; Laxon, 2010; New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI), 2010a). For countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom pressure on the state
to lift education performance for low academic achievers has driven the focus to subject centeredness and subsequently resulted in solutions like the National Standards assessment regime (Barton, 2010; Gordon & Crabtree, 2006).

Within New Zealand, this move to lift student performance through a National Standards approach has been met with ongoing debate around its credibility and effectiveness. Facts like the decommission by the 2009 United Kingdom Cambridge Review of the United Kingdom National Standards system has only proved to strengthen arguments by National Standards opponents. A key finding of the Cambridge Review (2009) was that placing too much emphasis on ‘subjects’ such as reading and maths came at the expense of empowering student creativity, innovation, problem solving and children’s love of learning (see also Hammonds, 2009).

The OECD (2011) Review on New Zealand Education confirms high average student learning outcomes that place New Zealand as one of the top twelve countries in the world for levels of literacy attainment. However, the report also identifies concerns about the disproportionately high amount of students who are currently underperforming (Nusche et al, 2012; Hattie, 2009b). As New Zealand’s prime minister John Key has spoken many times of his government’s desire to lift this tail of underachievement (Key, 2010; Kohn, 2010; NZEI, 2010) it may be as Ife and Tesorio (2006) state that the results of such a focus means needs are being “determined and defined by people other than those who are supposedly experiencing them” (p. 71). With limited evidence from the United States and Australia that National Standard assessment improves student academic achievement (Hattie, 2009b), concerns by the MOE that such an initiative may shift teacher focus away from embracing student individuality and talent and towards pushing students to the state’s set literacy expectations, are not unfounded.

**RESEARCH CLIMATE**

Demographically representative of the State described tail of underachievement (Key, 2010), Randwick Park School in the city of Auckland provides the context for this research and is a school committed to New Zealand standards methodology and implementing an effective student performance environment.
This research is transdisciplinary, crossing between social practice and education. It explores the evolution and impact of the Lighthouse Programme which is founded on social practice ideas, made to aid student ability to learn and designed to fit within a New Zealand school curriculum environment. As this review examines the meaning and intent of strength based philosophy on which Lighthouse is formed; it examines the theories underpinning the programme and highlights reasons for its direct connection with a similar programme being run by the Gallup Organisation in schools within the US, the Clifton Youth Strengths Explorer (Gallup, 2007b). The Lighthouse Programme’s vision is to build academic self-concept through empowerment and confidence, building motivation and connection to hope for the future through increased classroom collaboration and talent identification, thus this review concludes with the ideology behind such an approach considering the significance of hope as a bridge to unlocking future purpose and potential.

**National assessment initiatives impact local context**

Educational research conducted in New Zealand has found that children’s educational achievement in literacy is closely related to their cultural environment and the skills they already have when they enter school (MOE, 1996; Pitches, Thompson & Watson, 2002). Underpinning this finding is the belief that children have very different literacy skills before they enter New Zealand’s ‘formal’ primary environment (Pitches et al, 2002). Clay (1998) and Pitches et al (2002) believe that the challenge for teachers therefore is not in the implementation of a standardised approach, but to identify and build on the existing foundational skills and strengths that each child brings with them in a way that empowers future development and quality of life. It may be that for children whose home language is not English, the move away from their preferred cultural learning language to an environment driven by the preferred literacy societal norm may fail to be conducive to their education.

Historically, New Zealand has long sought to enhance societal wellbeing through an emphasis on education (Langley, 2009) and the provision of education in New Zealand, theoretically, has long been supportive of equality (Spoonley, Pearson & Shirley, 1994). The introduction in 1989 of *Tomorrow’s Schools* reforms alongside the 1989 *Education Act* was intended to provide pathways for schools to be largely self-governing and able to make
decisions at a local level that did not require bureaucratic involvement. Responsibility for improving relationships between home and school, and for the creation of a learning environment that meets varied cultural expectations, is squarely on the school. However there are issues evolved for school leadership around just how to achieve this (Reid, 2008).

McQueen (2009) and Wylie (1999) point out that Tomorrow’s Schools intent to encourage reciprocity between school and community, provide equal educational opportunities, and promote education achievement especially for disadvantaged groups has not been effective. Results from reports such as the OECD (1997) Adult Literacy Survey show that despite high student average achievement levels, potential remains unidentified as a disproportionate level of Maori, Pacific Island and minority group students still continue to disengage in education or perform well below accepted international literacy and numeracy levels (Nusche et al, 2012).

Barton (2010) believes the recent introduction of a national benchmark on literacy and numeracy education standards as a way of lifting student achievement is a one-sided approach that is failing due to a lack of teacher consultation. He suggests that the government taking such an approach has meant the attention of all has been shifted to individuals falling short of societal literacy expectations. Barton (2010) believes this shift has created an education environment that focuses on weakness fixing, performance and student minimums. Proposing that teacher exclusion around developing National Standards expectations has made implementation difficult, Barton (2010) suggests Standards have aided in supporting the creation of a school environment that is inharmonious and unreceptive. Hammonds (2009) concurs claiming that a focus on performance based National Standards creates a “crisis to solve” (p. 7) undermining the teacher/student relationship, creativity, and directing valuable teacher time and energy away from identifying student individuality and future potential and from meeting the needs of a diverse classroom.

When we consider the high proportion of Maori and Pacific Island students disengaging early in education we become aware a choice has been made at some point, to reject the learning environment in favour of an alternative option. Gray’s (2002) extensive research around increasing student participation in decision-making, found that children are far more likely to remain involved in a learning process where reciprocity is encouraged, expectations are agreed upon, mutual understanding is clear and the route is real and relevant to them. Gray’s (2002) findings highlighted the following points:
- Maori students believe they should have input into processes that concern them as per the Treaty of Waitangi principle of partnership
- Maori and Pacific Island students see learning as a holistic process that includes consideration of them as part of a family and wider community unit. They believe the learning relationship and establishment of trust is very important in creating an environment that encourages student collaboration.

These observations highlight further areas for questioning and classroom focus when contemplating methods of re-engaging Maori and Pacific Island students within a learning environment.

**Creating an inclusive education system**

Teaching representative organisations such as the New Zealand Principals Federation (2012) and the New Zealand Education Institute (2012) continue to express displeasure at their lack of teacher inclusion and consultation in National Standards processes, however according to the current government National Standards are here to stay. This ongoing debate highlights that National Standards decision making began far away from those at front line classroom implementation and that many at a professional level do not appreciate decisions being made that concern them without them. With this lack of participation alluding to a ‘power over’ as opposed to ‘power with’ scenario (Glasser, 1998; McCashen, 2005), it is interesting to note recent recommendations from the 2011 OECD Education Review (Nusche et al, 2012) accentuate the following essential fine tuning needed within the new education National Standards culture:

- Increased teacher inclusion in education processes
- Building teacher capacity to fairly and accurately assess students
- Strengthening of internal and external school community relationships
- Ensure all elements of student learning are considered
- Ensure that evaluation and assessment responds to diverse learner needs.

The idea of increased collaboration at a local and national level to improve education engagement and achievement is not new. In 2008 the City of Manukau Education Trust (COMET) working alongside the Manukau City Council, compiled a report entitled “Working Together: Mahi Tahi Tatou” that outlined recommendations for an effective
education strategy within the Manukau area, of which Randwick Park School is a part. Acknowledging the vast kete of knowledge held within the community, the vision behind the strategy was the empowered increased collaboration of all stakeholders within education, from students and their families to those involved in education at a local and national level. Beginning at an early childhood level and advocating a ‘whole community approach’ through to tertiary schooling, the COMET report (2008) encouraged focus to be placed on the desired outcome of “communities and schools working together for student achievement” (p. 19). No easy task but with the ultimate goal of raising student achievement, recommendations from the trust were that programmes be designed by schools (alongside relevant experts), to help teachers become more informed about their students and provide teachers with an opportunity to improve their teaching practice.

Nationally, with government focus specifically on increased collaboration with Maori, Pasifica and minority groups, both the COMET (2008) and the OECD (2011) report directly identifies the need for a larger school community focus. With both reports highlighting the need for increased conversations between school and State, increased school community participation, improved cultural sensitivity and a clearer understanding of student linguistic profiles it may be the Lighthouse Programme’s direct correlation with these intentions provides a way to expand National Standards effectiveness and meet OECD expectations. Current education conversations indicate a cohesive level of partnership within school national and local environments has not yet been obtained. The Lighthouse method of increasing partnership and reciprocity between teacher and student at a classroom level may be a viable place to start in our journey towards improving student education outcomes.

UNCOVERING TALENT

Inclusive participation

Cullingford (2006) proposed that in order to achieve true participation, one must first understand the principle of inclusion. He suggests that central to this notion, is the feeling of belonging or being part of an organisation or community and understanding that you are appreciated, respected and valued for who you are and what you have to contribute. While standards assist in indicating to education professionals an element of individual academic progression (OECD, 2011), the focus of teachers and schools taking a one sided view to
student ability, may result in students feeling (and believing) that the accumulation of knowledge is the only thing valued within their school (Cullingford, 2006; Thrupp, 2010).

Gordon and Crabtree (2006) and Dweck (2003) express concern with such an approach, noting focus on specific subject matter is often to the detriment of other individual attributes. They believe students may begin to lose motivation to develop other existing talents or skills that may have not yet been identified in the classroom if they believe they are unimportant or irrelevant. Experts such as Hammonds (2009) and Renzulli (1978) suggest that in order to increase participation in education, education professionals must understand that effective methods of learning and areas of ‘gifting, talent or strength’, vary for every learner. They suggest, like Hemara (2000), that participation and inclusion in education is about taking a more holistic view of students and helping them discover how to learn in potent ways that are culturally supportive, relevant and develop their individual talents and gifts (Boyle & Colheart, 1996; Fox, 2008; MacFarlane, Glynn, Cavanagh & Bateman, 2007).

Proponents of improving Maori inclusiveness within education, such as Bada (2003) and Durie (1998a), suggest past legacies of educational underachievement are a direct result of government policies and practices immersed in westernised philosophies. They believe these philosophies are marked with strong performance competitive attitudes, lack cultural consideration and need the input of those most affected (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Hemara, 2000). Traditional western views of literacy attainment and human development have often considered cognition and the process of learning as entirely independent of social and environmental context (MacFarlane et al, 2007). On the contrary, Hemara (2000) identified two key findings within Maori pedagogy that opposes this approach, placing the student and teacher as co-operative central drivers to the reciprocal learning processes.

Considering Hemara’s (2000) belief that learning is “closely related to the spiritual, intellectual, social and physical well being of the community and individual” (p.9), it is possible that a lack of student/teacher/whanau collaboration has led to a lack of strength identification and learning relevancy for Maori learners within New Zealand.

**Participation as a rite of passage within New Zealand education**

In 2002 the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) considered the effects of possible cultural power imbalances within New Zealand government policy and thus developed
through New Zealand’s Agenda for Children, a government strategy called “The Whole Child Approach” (MSD, 2003). Key aims of this approach were:

- Focus on what children need for healthy development
- Inclusive focus on the child’s whole life, environment and culture
- Encourage collaboration within and between government organisations to work towards the healthy development of the child.

Indicating the need for cultural safety, individual difference and learning styles, two fundamental characteristics of the “Whole Child Approach’ were the importance of “viewing children as having valuable knowledge to contribute” (MSD, 2003, p.5) and ensuring children and young people became involved in education policy and decisions concerning them. This decision was grounded in the following human rights documents and principles:

1840 Treaty of Waitangi – Promotion of crown responsibility to ensure equal participation and protection of rights for Maori


1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC): Article 29 directs that:

‘Education should develop each child’s personality and talents to their fullest potential. It should encourage children to respect their parents and their own cultures’ (Emphasis mine)

To provide a platform for human rights accountability within education, learning is connected directly to socio-cultural environments and talent is considered the ‘path to potential’ as opposed to performance. Acknowledging the difficulties noted earlier around defining and identifying talent and Gray’s (2002) suggestion to increase child collaboration, Fox (2008) proposes that if an individual’s strengths, learning or literacy language is not the current societal “norm”, should we not be asking children for assistance in discovering where their talents lie in order to aid their educational growth? If we do not, Burden (2005) proposes the resulting emotional effect on a student’s academic self-concept when their literacy identity remains unconsidered or rejected in favour of a language chosen by the greater societal good may result in their subsequent academic disengagement.
It is here that the Lighthouse programme research finds its fit. Through first using *Photovoice* and Burden’s (2005) *Myself as a Learner Scale* (Appendix F) to identify any existing issues around student disengagement and academic self-concept, the Lighthouse Programme method of talent identification and exploration then utilises varied learning styles to explore this connection to academic self-concept further.

**INCREASING COLLABORATION – CHILDREN’S RIGHTS IN EDUCATION**

While children and young people have the same basic human rights as adults (Article 1, UNUDHR, 1948), often acknowledgement is hindered in society by the recognition of their vulnerability and special need for protection (Ludbrook, 2003). Although this protective decision-making evolves from principled intent, an objective of the Lighthouse Programme’s approach is to encourage increased commitment by those meeting the education needs of children to provide a learning environment that evokes student voice. The aims of this strategy are:

- Encourage student learning ownership
- Aid improvement of the student/teacher relationship through increased dialogue
- Gain greater insight into how students view themselves, their areas of strength and weaknesses
- Gain understanding around what students believe are their choices, learning needs and goals.

This tactic aligns with Corey, Corey and Callanan’s (2007) view that it is important as an adult not to guess the messages children are receiving on any given issue or to presume what they are thinking. Corey et al (2007) also comment that adult perceptions have the power to strongly impact a child’s thinking. They believe that increased reciprocal conversation aids in avoiding the creation of an adult ‘power position’ or a ‘clouding’ of perceptions by adults when working alongside children.

Within New Zealand, “*Mana Ki te Tangata – the New Zealand Action Plan for Human Rights*” (Human Rights Commission, 2012) acknowledges the vital place of human rights within policy for all in New Zealand. Acting as a guideline that encourages consideration of human rights as a priority, this document provided a platform for the current Right to Education Framework. This is designed to steer education decision-making towards
consideration of children’s rights principles of Provision, Protection and Participation (Treaty of Waitangi, 1840; Human Rights Commission, 2010). The Right to Education framework states:


This speaks of the need to recognise the powerful impact a child’s learning environment has on their overall well being. With the word ‘nurture’ a clear indicator of a move towards growing stronger, this review now unpacks arguments around a strength based approach and outlines the necessity in understanding a child’s wider socio-cultural environment. The impact of classroom dynamics on academic self-concept and student perceptions of their talent, capacities and resources is also emphasised.

STRENGTHS-BASED PRACTICE: TALENT IN AN EDUCATION SETTING

The strengths movement is an effort to encourage a personal change in thinking that means purposefully shifting self focus from an emphasis on weaknesses to viewing life from a positively influenced platform that empowers hope through the encouraged recognition of talents/strengths. For a strength-based practitioner this means the following:

- Commitment to a belief that every individual has valuable talent and something worthwhile to offer the world (Anderson, 2000; Dweck, 2003; McCashen, 2005; Saleebey, 2001).
- Shift focus from being weaknesses driven to develop, identify and build strengths (Gallup, 2006; Lopez & Louis, 2009; McCashen, 2005).
- Increase awareness that there are many learning styles and not all learners learn by traditional methods (Fox, 2008).
- Provide opportunities for individuals to view themselves from a platform that accentuates positive attributes, abilities and capacities (Dweck, 2003).
- Believe that individuals are experts in their own lives and providing conditions that empower an individual’s ability to become their own agents of change (Anderson, 2000; McCashen, 2005).
- Acknowledge/address power dynamics within relationships (McCashen, 2005).
Strengths-based philosophy does not mean ignoring areas of weakness (Dweck, 2003, Fox, 2008). Gordon and Crabtree (2006) believe that a preoccupation to fix student weaknesses in a classroom may come from a paradigm that dictates that we all learn in the same way and therefore should respond to learning approaches similarly. Strength-based practice focuses on talents by exciting students to learn and teaching them to manage weakness areas by using their talents to address them. Strength-based practice does not imply that simply focusing on an individual’s strengths is going to be enough. Instead McCashen (2005) believes the success of this movement is its utilisation of strengths as a connector to hope and a driver towards future aspirations.

I am interested in how well the strength-based approach would work in a low decile school like Randwick Park that is situated in an area where family narratives and participation around education are often negative and children frequently enter school without the basic skills that early childhood education provides. Clabaugh (2005) notes, strengths can only be built in a school environment if school commitment level is high and outlets are provided for student potential to reach full fruition. While this process of shifting school philosophy may be lengthy and slow he asks the question, “If obstacles are apparent does that mean we should not try?” Does New Zealand’s current national standards performance based focus mean schools trying to implement a strengths–based approach will face the difficulty of finding time and energy to embrace a shift to strengths-based school culture?

Lopez and Louis (2009) believe that education decision makers will measure whatever it is they value most and work towards improving whatever it is that they measure. While it may be difficult at a government level to predict within any school environment what is valued most, the National government’s directive to schools to place a focus on achievement performance indicates the following question, ‘has government formed a picture as to the strengths of the varied New Zealand school cultural environments before deciding what the most valuable and productive thing is to measure in each school, or is this omission indicative of government belief that school communities, like their students have no relevant voice to offer the process of lifting student academic achievement?’

Carey (2004) believes that achievement tests have their place. He notes they have provided educators in the past with good reliable data that has informed perceptions of what makes a good teacher and aided in defining good school performance. However, Lopez (2004) challenges that now “strengths and other positive personal variables can be measured with
confidence” (p.3) should we not be using this process to enable teachers to form more accurate individualised perceptions of their students? He suggests that through the provision of a strengths-based talent assessment, educators can establish a more robust and detailed picture of what impacts student academic success in a way that encourages more long-term benefits towards aiding student development as a learner and a future productive member of society. Aspects of performance measurement have always existed on some level. Lopez (2004) believes that engaging in conversations that encourage individuals to tap into what they do best will lead to increased levels of engagement and improved performance (Lopez & Louis, 2009). This aligns with Fox’s (2008) research conclusion that “children’s strengths won’t develop unless they are able to participate in conversations around their talents and learning expectations” (p.24).

This strength-based philosophy means making an effort to move the focus to primarily labelling what is right with students instead of what is wrong (Anderson, 2000). Anderson (2000) notes a strength-based student-centred approach to talent identification becomes a process that encourages the primary education goals to be an improved learning environment for all involved in the learning process as well as the transformation of students into “confident, efficacious, lifelong learners whose work is infused with a sense of purpose” (Anderson, 2000, p. 2).

A visit to Randwick Park School website will immediately give an individual a sense of what the school environment is all about. It states as follows:

“*Randwick Park School is a learning community that respects and celebrates cultural diversity, where we all strive to achieve excellence in our lives through growing and learning together.*” (Randwick Park School, 2012, p. 1)

School values of respect, equal participation, appreciating diversity and valuing community involvement towards achieving learning outcomes is apparent and backed up through the many community-based initiatives and diverse programmes available.

Talent identification as a method of building strengths was well received by this school as it fits well within their existing strengths–based school culture. Recognising National Standards implementation has meant an increased school focus on academic performance, management was keen to trial a programme that provided a cohesive means of maintaining a balanced teacher perspective of the students and ensuring that the school’s existing holistic perspective
of its students be maintained. While management acknowledges that maintaining balance is more difficult in a National Standards climate, their commitment to a student-centred approach continues to aid school growth as more is learnt about student behaviour and engagement and teachers gain greater insight into the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of their students.

As reflected by Randwick Park School, the strengths-based philosophy is a choice that an organisation makes around how it will position itself in relation to how it views others (McCashen, 2005). Madsen (1999) notes this choice requires a level of commitment to a cup half full type philosophy and having values and beliefs that influence a resulting positive outlook on how you view people. McCashen (2005) describes the shift as moving from a weakness deficit driven process to a competency driven strength-based philosophy. This is outlined clearer in the following diagrams.

*Figure 3.* The Deficit Cycle. (McCashen, 2005, p.10)
An emphasis on deficits does not provide the insights, learning and hopefulness that a focus on strengths and capacities does”  (McCashen, 2005, P.10)

Believing that a strength-based practice empowers an individual or organisation to focus positively on their attributes and experiences moving forward, McCashen (2005) argues that choosing to approach individuals from a positive strengths-based belief system helps to encourage higher expectations and diminish the possibility of possible power imbalances within a relationship. McCashen (2005) claims that the sharing of power within processes is the most important element of the strengths approach. Driven by the underlying belief that everyone has talent and something valuable to contribute, this sharing of power is also referred to as having ‘power with’ someone as opposed to having ‘power over’ someone. Not alone in his perceptions, the merits of choosing to take such a stance has been extensively investigated over the last 50 years by an organisation in the United States now considered to be one of the world leaders in strengths-based development, the Gallup Organisation.
THE GALLUP ORGANISATION

Background

Founded by George Gallup and guided by Dr Donald Clifton, the Gallup Organisation has extensively investigated the nature and role of human talents and strengths in building hope, engagement and wellbeing. With research direction based on Clifton’s inquisitiveness around what would happen if they studied what was right with people rather than what was wrong, Gallup’s journey into what motivates and encourages people has led them to be leading experts on the world stage in the field of strength-based development (Hodges & Harter, 2005). According to leading expert and Senior Scientist with Gallup, Dr Shane J. Lopez, the commitment by a school to implement a strengths-based education programme that develops student talents can enhance hope and increase student engagement (Lopez, 2004).

By interviewing over two million people, Gallup’s researchers discovered that the identification and strengthening of talents provided the greatest opportunities for success (Clifton & Harter, 2003). However as alluded to in the opening quote, a commitment once again implies choice. Outlining Gallup’s development basic pedagogy, Sorensen and Crabtree (2012) propose that the following guidelines are essential when working towards the creation of a strengths-based environment:

- A choice to focus on strengths and not limitations
- A choice to encourage ownership of development
- A choice to empower recognition around the importance of belief in own talents/strengths and that you can achieve success because of who you are
- A choice to encourage understanding that we are all part of a wider picture and cannot achieve success on our own
- A commitment to ensure individual choice is empowered as much as possible.

Taking the philosophy more specifically into education, Gallup’s (as cited in Lopez & Louis, 2009) 2003 approach to working with students encourages the following:

- Encouragement of students to identity talents and set goals based on their strengths, teaching them how to apply their strengths in an area they would like to develop
- Emphasis to be placed on student unique qualities and opportunities provided for increased dialogue and feedback between student, teacher and class around talents and strengths
- Student networking with people who support and affirm their strengths
- Provision of varied experiences for students to foster strengths both in and outside the classroom.

In strengths-based philosophy, ‘choice’ is an emerging theme. For some schools such as Randwick Park which find themselves in an area where a lack of motivation is a key weakness driving the choices of many, Clabaugh (2005) suggests it is important to understand that a strengths approach is no quick fix solution. However, Gordon and Crabtree (2006) argue that schools must recognise that they cannot influence the culture around them and encourage positive change unless they lead in making the choice to initiate a strength driven education culture. The hope behind such a move is that, through encouraging student talent identification, strengths building and linking into the support of others the family connection with the school is strengthened and subsequently the school begins to positively influence their local community (Gordon & Crabtree, 2006).

In 1998, Clifton’s creation of the online Adult Strengths Finder Assessment aided individuals to identify their main themes of talent. Now utilised in a vast array of settings, this tool has helped many all over the world release their potential through the discovery of their natural talents. As Gallup’s tool has become more widespread, recognition of their method as an effective way of building strengths and increasing hope resulted in feedback that indicated a need for a children’s version of this talent assessment. Now being used in schools all over USA, this tool is called the Clifton Youth Strengths Explorer – CYSE (Lopez & Louis, 2009).

**Clifton Youth Strengths Explorer**

Using the Adult Strengths Finders framework, Dr Clifton set about examining ways the existing tool could be adapted to children aged 10-14 years. After his death in 2003, a team from Gallup continued to evolve his ideas, eventually creating the Clifton Youth Strength Explorer. Taking several years, numerous interviews with students
and educators to develop, this tool was launched in 2009 and is currently being rolled out in schools all over USA. The idea of this product through Gallup is to offer education professionals a tool that aids in uncovering talent and future potential while empowering students to consider their abilities and talent from a platform founded on expectations around their future potential (Gallup, 2010). Requiring a high level of written response, it is Gallup’s belief that this tool assists in reconnecting students to feelings of hope in their future (Lopez, 2010).

Described more extensively in the next chapter, CYSE assesses a student’s top three talents from 10 possible talent themes (Appendix G) through their online questionnaire. Once the student’s three strongest emerging talents are identified, a student and parental workbook provides an ongoing opportunity for the student to explore his/her talents reflectively alongside a significant other. The parental workbook’s intent is to provide a means of encouraging child/adult relationship building and reciprocal learning as adults help students gain insight into their greatest talents and begin to build together towards future success (Gallup, 2010).

Providing students, teachers and parents with a common language that is based on a positive view of the student as having valuable talents on which to build their skills and develop (Gallup, 2006), the CYSE Program takes an approach that encourages the student to consider themselves in the context of their wider socio-cultural environment. Since the tool’s official launch in 2009, feedback provided from students, educators and parents alike has been positive and indicates that the CYSE tool helps to identify and construct strengths from the platform of student talent. Feedback also indicated that through programme emphasis on reciprocal learning and understanding yourself as part of a wider environment classroom, capacity building is enhanced through the further creation of individual learning programmes. These processes are more responsive to meet the needs of a diverse range of students and thus provide an environment that is conducive to development of skills for both student and teacher alike (Gallup, 2006; Lopez & Louis, 2009).

SOCIAL-CULTURAL THEORY

A socio-cultural approach to learning proposes that personal development and learning cannot be separated. It also suggests that ‘good learning’ is the developmental advancement of children as they are stimulated to move outside their current skill limits, through
exploration, encouragement, and being challenged and extended by others (Smith, 2005). Tharp and Gallimore (1988) maintain that the socio-cultural perspective profoundly impacts education and teaching as social interactions have the power to deeply influence child internal understandings and self-perception. Influenced extensively by experts such as Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Vygotsky (1978), socio-cultural understanding theorises that to accurately understand human development one must first recognise the extent to which an individual’s social environments extensively influence their development (Pienaar, 2007). Smith and Taylor (2000) believe that as childhood is continually being socially constructed in an environment that is not static, it is important that children’s cultural and social environments are placed at the forefront of inquiry when empowering development (Elder, Modell & Parke, 1993; Rogoff, 1990; Smith & Taylor, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978).

While experts such as the above concur on the necessity of recognising the influence of the environment on child self-perception, the Lighthouse Programme approach to student development brings student cultural context and social environment to the forefront and focuses specifically on the impact of these socio-cultural environments on the establishment of the child’s academic self-concept. Recognising that these environments have the power to negatively or positively impact student cognitive processes on a daily basis, Lighthouse methodology aligns with Butler and Williamson (1994) findings that children need opportunities to identify choice, problem solve and make decisions within their social environments in order for them to fully develop the cognitive skills they will need to be a future active member of society.

Unique to New Zealand, the Lighthouse Programme is designed so that writing limitations do not hinder the talent identification and exploration process, using alternative creative methods to open communication around strengths and aid development that is directed by the children themselves and inclusive of their cultural holistic health and well-being. This chapter now identifies connections between theories of socio-environmental context and the formation of academic self-concept, taking a look at Durie’s (1998b) Te Whare Tapa Wha strengths-based model already long established and utilised in New Zealand.

Lev Vygotsky – Zone of proximal development theory

Widely known as an educational psychologist who formed a socio-cultural theory called the ‘Zone of proximal development’ (ZPD), Vygotsky (1978) believed that intellectual and
interpersonal learning was intertwined and began from birth (Gallagher, 1999; MacFarlane et al, 2007). His theory proposed that individual development begins first at a social interaction (inter-psychological) level and then at a cognitive (intrapsychological) level. Vygotsky’s ZPD theory focused on the area of potential that is created when a child interacts with a more capable other (Figure 5). He felt this area or ‘zone’ had the most potential to positively impact the children’s learning. Believing the zone enabled individual problem solving skills to be activated and personal development to occur when a child is encouraged to problem solve with adults or more capable peers, Vygotsky felt the ‘zone’ spoke of the increased capability of a child to learn when put alongside another as opposed to attempting to learn on their own. Vygotsky’s research illustrated his findings that children’s skills come first, externally through the quality of their interactions with others, and then through internal processes as they assimilate thoughts and experiences within their environment (Pienaar, 2007).

![Diagram of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development interaction process](image.png)

**Figure 5:** Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development interaction process. (Pienaar, 2007)

Suggesting that children should not be segregated according to their abilities but be encouraged to work together, Vygotsky (1978) declared that placing students in situations where they can draw on each other’s strengths enhances their development. Rogoff (1990) and Vygotsky (1978) concluded that as children learn through the process of collaboration, various adult meanings and behaviours have the power to profoundly affect student thinking and aid the formation of foundational beliefs. It is these beliefs that underpin the student’s thinking around how they see themselves in the context of their class or wider environment (Gallagher, 1999; Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978;). Bandura (1986) supported these
conclusions noting that through purely listening and observing the behaviour of others within a classroom context a child’s perceptions and behaviour could alter significantly.

**Bronfenbrenner – Ecological systems theory**

Regarded as one of the world’s leading psychologists, Urie Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory proposed that child development takes place within a system of intertwining varied ecological systems that influence their thinking, behaviours and characteristics. Placing emphasis on recognising the significance of the bi-directional influence of others, Bronfenbrenner (1979) claimed that a child’s ecological system was made up of a series of systems that each had the power to impact a child’s cognition and choices. Bronfenbrenner (1979) accentuated the importance of realising that even environmental systems that did not directly contain the child, such as government agencies, had the power to profoundly influence their development (Smith, 2005).

Similar to Vygotsky, Bronfenbrenner (1979) felt that methods designed to empower children’s learning development could not be considered in isolation from an understanding of the impact of existing assimilated cultural and social messages.

**Albert Bandura – Social learning theory**

Bandura (as cited in Pienaar, 2007) believed that external environmental re-enforcement was only one of the factors that influenced child learning and behaviour (Pienaar, 2007). Bandura (1986) claimed that as children observed others they identified alternative courses of action and formed ideas that expanded their alternatives for future action. He acknowledged the impact of children’s socio-cultural environment through understandings gained by their observations, and the modelled behaviour of others, was only part of the equation as he also noted another driver to internal motivation was intrinsic rewards such as a sense of pride and accomplishment (Bandura, 1986). Extensive research by Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara and Pastorelli (1996) found children’s perceptions around their academic capability and potential was directly linked to their parent’s sense of academic self-concept and the aspirations they held for their children.

Connecting this learning theory to previously identified recommendations of increased child partnership in their learning processes and encouraging ownership, Bandura (1986) found that a child’s belief in their own ability to autonomously direct their learning and improve
their academic attainment directly contributed to their hope for the future and level of 
academic achievement (Bandura et al, 1996).

**Erik Erikson – Eight stages of psychosocial development**

Seeing development as a function of both cultural and individual factors, Erik Erikson’s 
psycho-social research identified eight stages of psychosocial development that he believed 
an individual must pass through from birth through to late adulthood in order to develop 
healthily. Erikson’s (1959) theory recognised individuals as a part of an ever changing 
society and felt right from birth individuals had challenges to overcome at various ages that 
were social in context. The successful navigation of each stage was influenced strongly by 
experiences, learning and interactions with others (Peterson, 2004).

Erikson (1959) proposed that the establishment of a positive and secure sense of personal 
identity was fundamental to the empowerment of individual development, well-being and 
future engagement in society. He suggested the period between 9-12 years of age signified a 
time when a child’s predominant need was to achieve Industry over Inferiority. As newly 
acquired cognitive skills began to evolve, Erikson (1959) noted this age signified an 
increased capability to reflect and self-evaluate in relation to one’s own ability within the 
wider context of the environment. Thus, he believed it was at this point, as children 
considered messages received within their various socio-cultural environments, they decided 
whether or not they felt they “measured up” against whatever societal achievement messages 
they believed took precedence. Erikson (1959) stated that if a child felt they did not “meet the 
grade” a sense of incompetence or inferiority could arise in the place of a sense of industry or 
amplishment, which then resulted in low self esteem and an inability to move successfully 
through to the next stage of development (Peterson, 2004; Pienaar, 2007). This suggestion 
concurs with the findings of the Gallup Organisation (2010) and Dweck (2003) who suggest 
it is within this age range that student ideas and behaviour around their ability impacts their 
motivation.

As Erikson (1959) claimed that the following stage of development is one of establishing a 
secure sense of identity and responding to the inner question “Who am I”, this brings me to 
an important research question behind this thesis intent, “Rather than attempting to judge or 
guess, should education professionals be asking students within this age group just how they 
measure themselves within their school environment?” These socio-cultural theories and
subsequently, this question, support the fundamental vision to the Lighthouse Programme and explain as to why it has been designed for those of 10-13 years.

Specific to this research at Randwick Park School, the disproportionately high representation of children around this age that seek counselling within the school, means that issues involving low self esteem, poor academic self-perception and behaviour are a constant theme. These personal observations are backed up by Randwick Park School truancy figures and current National Standards results (Randwick Park School, 2012) which show this age to be an area of concern maintaining student engagement and subsequently achievement. It is interesting to note these reflections support Erikson (1959) and Dweck’s (2003) findings that students are indeed at risk of low self esteem, limited motivation and inferiority issues if this stage of development is not successfully traversed.

**Mason Durie – Te Whare Tapa Wha**

Specific to New Zealand, the *Te Whare Tapa Wha* approach to Maori holistic health and well-being was designed by Durie (1998b) and uses a ‘wharenui’ (meeting house) to show how individual ‘hauora’ (well-being) should be considered and achieved for Maori. Durie (1998b) uses a wharenui metaphor, to symbolise ‘hauora’, illustrating that the four corners of the ‘wharenui’ each represent an area of individual health and must be strong and balanced for an individual to achieve developmental growth and well-being (Hay & Campbell, 2012). This holistic model by Durie (1998b) was considered during the development of the Lighthouse Programme where weekly sessions encompass the four essential dimensions to the wharenui as included as follows:

- **Psychological health (te taha hinengaro)** – Lighthouse worksheets and activities are designed to draw out thoughts and feelings, aid resilience and build problem solving skills
- **Spiritual health (te taha wairua)** – Lighthouse encourages students to explore their beliefs and how they shape their actions
- **Physical health (te taha tinana)** – Lighthouse provides opportunities for individual physical activities and group team building, encouraging healthy choices
- **Family health (te taha whanau)** – Lighthouse connects weekly to whanau through homework exercises and devotes one entire session to recognising the value of support networks.
Essentially, *Te Whare Tapa Wha* philosophy asserts that awareness and balanced attention to these four pillars of health is needed to support and strengthen overall individual well-being.

**SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM**

Formation of this theory is generally linked to developmental psychologist Piaget (Ginsburg & Opper, 1988) who suggested that learning happens through a process of assimilation and accommodation of information as humans generate knowing and meaning from their daily lived experiences. Strongly influenced by Vygotsky’s (1978) theory that knowledge is first introduced and assimilated within a social context, social constructivism views each learner as complex and unique with very different ways of learning and very different learning needs. Thus, social constructivism encourages the ideology that learners should be encouraged to be autonomous in their learning as they establish their own knowledgeable truth (Wertsch, 1998).

Claiming that individuals make sense of their world through language and practice that is influenced by their individual reality (Mead, 2003; Payne, 1997), a key element to constructivism is that although collaboration with others is necessary, responsibility for learning processes should be with the learner and thus it is of utmost importance that the learner is involved in the education processes concerning them (Marsden, 2003; Wertsch, 1998). Believing in Vygotsky’s notion of providing circumstances that empower learning and confidence, von Glasersfeld (1989) emphasised the importance of learner inclusion as it is through this ownership process that learners achieve relevancy and improve cognition.

**ACADEMIC SELF-CONCEPT**

**Defining self-concept**

Erikson (1959) believes self-concept is formed through developmental processes that are weighed and measured by the social and cultural context in which a person lives and culminate in the identity question “who am I?” Burden (2008) describes this process of shaping identity as construction of individual self-concept (Burden, 2008). Rogers (1951) considered self-concept to be made up of many factors such as, individual perception of one’s ability, capability and characteristics, perception of self in relation to others, and various social environments. He believed that a child’s sense of identity could be negatively or
positively affected by whatever their society and culture values. Purkey’s (2000) findings support this, indicating that academic self-concept is directly affected by the nature of ‘self-talk’ students speak to themselves as a result of interactions with significant others such as parents, peers and teachers. Burden (2008) expands on this idea further proposing that now that literacy is considered such a highly valued characteristic, those having difficulty in becoming literate to society’s standards may default to negative internal narratives and find it difficult to develop positive academic self-concepts.

Often within New Zealand, levels of literacy are the predominant driver behind perceptions of intelligence (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Elley, 2010, Key, 2010, NZEI, 2010). However, Dweck (2003) identified that there are many various definitions that change significantly within various cultural environments. The source of much discussion, it’s very definition (much like talent), is socially constructed and therefore it makes sense that more than one legitimate construction is not only likely but inevitable (Wagner & Sternberg, 1984). Dweck (2003) proposed that as a child forms an idea of what intelligence is within their environment, they will seek feedback through observation and/or voice around the accuracy of their understanding. Although their theories are open to change with intervention, Dweck (2003) believes that student perception of their intelligence is the core motivating factor as they consider moves towards education outcomes.

Burden (2005) noted that if how children answer the question, “who am I?”, is founded on the strength of their learning understandings, relationships and experiences, then the quality of student classroom interactions and messages received from significant others such as teachers and peers, would hold considerable influence on a student’s academic self-perceptions and achievement. Cooley’s (as cited in McIntyre, 2006) theory ‘the looking glass self’ where he concludes that an individual’s academic self concept is founded and evolved from their perceptions around how others see them, reflect them and judge them, supports this concern. In their research on the impact of mattering, Dixon and Tucker (2008) found also that the need to matter and be valued and accepted by others was integral to a student’s healthy emotional and social development (Dixon Rayle, 2006).

Burden’s (2005) extensive studies of self-concept found there was a resource gap for assessing the way children construct an image of themselves as learners, thus he created a method of measuring academic self-perception called the Myself as a Learner Scale. Using a Likert questionnaire format to obtain a score indicative of results, is one of the tools of choice...
I have used to assess academic self-concept and to give students a means of communicating how they see themselves as a learner within their school environment.

Within New Zealand, John Hattie (2003) discovered that the two highest predictors for variances in student achievement were, the correlation between student perceived ability and their achievement, and the teacher’s relationship with the student, what teachers do, know and care about made a difference to students.

**Teacher’s influence on academic self-concept.**

Smith (2007) argues that whatever happens within a child’s educational environment, gives meaning to children’s experiences and understanding of what is expected of them and what it takes to be an accepted, valuable and actively involved member of community. In a classroom setting where the predominant facilitator to learning processes is the teacher, Bandura’s (1986) theory that children learn through the observation and modelled behaviour of others directly indicates the possible power teacher’s perceptions and behavioural response may have on student daily educational experiences, perceptions of talent, and valued classroom capabilities.

Bandura (1986) and Stipek (1998) believe that teachers have the power to influence the student’s academic self-concept, and that a positive academic self-concept is the key ingredient to each student’s academic success. This is confirmed by Hill and Hawk (2000) who argue that the academic performance of low achieving students will not improve without a positive teacher relationship. Gipps (2002) notes that in order to achieve this relationship, avenues for reciprocity and communication lines that respect both student and teacher perspective must be encouraged so students know their teacher believes they have value and views them as having knowledge to empower partnership in their own learning.

Hattie’s (2003) research around variances in student achievement, found that teachers accounted for approximately 30% of the variance (Figure 6, p.54), proving that teachers powerfully impact student learning and perceptions.
As teachers within New Zealand have voiced their concerns around being put into an unbalanced position as imposers of information as opposed to nurturers of information, Woolfson and Brady (2009) and Kagan (1992) believe it is important to understand that whether messages sent to students are intentional or not, teacher beliefs will influence teacher behaviours. Alton-Lee (2003) believes that although a good quality teaching practice has substantial influence over learning environments and encourages student and teacher co-construction of processes, it is important to recognise that daily classrooms are impacted by unforeseeable unconnected outside influences that can breakdown student learning processes and interrupt or completely derail a teacher’s practice that may normally be considered outstanding.

From the perspective of talent, Fox (2008) notes that traditional philosophy within schools around student learning difficulties often assume the child, rather than the teacher or parent, are the issue. Often parents and teachers are unaware of the influence their own talent and learning style has on the way they view each student’s approach to tasks and learning. Fox (2008) believes what is often labelled as a weakness in learning is simply that the child has not entered the classroom with the same learning style, talent or passion as their teacher.

Appreciating the impact of differences between teacher/student learning styles, Kohn (2010) suggests this may have at times resulted in the sorting or labelling of children within a
classroom as a teacher has found difficulty in connecting or identifying the learning style to which a student best responds. With labelling becoming one of the most destructive practices impacting student confidence (Mamary, 2007), research by Kohn (2010) found that students will disengage and reject their learning environment if they fear failure or possible rejection from teachers or peers.

In an effort to address possible misunderstandings within the classroom, the Lighthouse Programme takes students on a journey of discovery, examining different learning styles as outlined by Howard Gardner’s *Multiple Intelligence Theory* (1993). The idea behind this approach is purely to encourage student consideration and identification around the learning style(s) they most respond to. Gardner’s (1993) extensive work on multiple intelligences already influences elements within the New Zealand curriculum as MOE indicates necessity to develop all areas of a child’s learning such as: visual, linguistic, mathematical and musical leaving room for the easy implementation of this approach as part of the programme flow.

**POWER OF FEEDBACK: AN ENCOURAGER TO INCREASED COLLABORATION**

The Lighthouse Programme intent to provide avenues for increased communication between teacher and student is informed by research such as that by Hattie and Timperley (2007) around the power of teacher feedback.

Hattie and Timperley (2007) discovered solid evidence that feedback is “the most powerful single influence enhancing achievement” (p. 3). Like Darling-Hammond et al. (2008) and Hemara (2000), Hattie and Timperley (2007) found that feedback works best when avenues are opened to encourage a reciprocal process that encourages teachers and students seeking and learning from each other. Recognising that if Hattie and Timperley’s (2007) research is considered as a consequence of performance, their proposed feedback model designed to improve communications around learning understanding and expectation between teacher and student, accentuates three major feedback questions that can be intertwined to open up dialogue,

- Where am I going?
- How am I going?
- Where to next?
Taking this model into consideration, and their proposal that the quality of feedback questions is what aids increased effectiveness enhancing student/teacher understanding, I considered the above questions within the design of the Lighthouse Programme. Realising that Hattie proposed that feedback was only one element of the learning equation, I felt that another key to unlocking more feedback potential may lay in the programme’s first intention; the provision of an environment that supports student and teacher discovery and development. I considered the view of Smith and Taylor (2000) that teachers need to gain understanding around the impact of their own values, beliefs and perspectives on their teaching and thus I propose this possible fourth question to encourage feedback, “Who am I in relation to self and to others?” This question was considered when creating resources and mediums for the Lighthouse programme that encourage classroom dialogue around personal value and appreciating the value of others.

Considering Hattie and Timperley’s (2007) finding that feedback is most effective when both teacher and student receive feedback, it was interesting to note that in a recent Randwick Park School classroom poll, 93% of students felt they would like the opportunity (under ‘safe’ conditions) to provide teacher feedback. As the Lighthouse programme provides opportunity for the teacher to observe students and for students to reflect on feedback received around their learning and respond, it is hoped increased awareness results for both parties and the talent discovery process evolves into communication that can be built upon and purposefully used to enhance future potential for teacher and student.

In 2003 a group of Manurewa Principals joined forces to form the Truancy and Transience Working Party. The purpose of this group was to consider student disengagement from the perspective of truancy and report on issues within New Zealand and internationally. Many principals were dealing with this issue in their schools and they wished to expand knowledge around cause and effect and explore possible solutions. Subsequently, they discovered the two highest influences of disengaged truant students were, peer influence and poor student/teacher relationships (Manurewa Truancy and Transience Working Party, 2003, Discussion Handout). This information presented to the Manukau City Council Youth forum, found that the majority of young people questioned did not connect to their teachers style of teaching or the teachers themselves. These same students however, indicated learning was the best thing they liked about school (Manukau City Council, 2004).
Notably, Epstein and Sheldon (2002) found that truancy issues during high school years can be avoided if disengagement is managed better in primary and intermediate school. This Lighthouse Programme research and exploration of student academic self-concept, may aid in identifying possible potential reasons underlying current disengagement issues at a primary/intermediate level.

THE POWER OF HOPE

In 2009 – 2010 the Gallup organisation through the use of an online Student Poll, asked 450,000 American young people to “convey their daily experiences and aspirations for the future” (Gallup, 2010, p. 1). Specifically tracking student engagement, hope and well-being their key findings were:

- Hope, engagement and a holistic approach to student wellbeing are solid indicators of future success
- Students who feel ready for the future have hopeful aspirations for the future
- A direct correlation between education processes and student motivation
- Students see their learning environment as a key factor to their engagement
- Students with unidentified learning issues begin to lose hope and disengage between the age of nine and thirteen.

Correlating with beliefs held by Erikson (1959) and Snyder et al. (1997), it appears that hope can be diminished for children when natural progression towards development goals are interrupted. Defining children’s hope specifically as a belief in their capabilities to proceed towards goals, Snyder et al. (1997), noted that an important contributor to the establishment of hope in children is how they perceive themselves in relation to the obstacles they encounter. Finding a direct connection between hope and academic self-concept, Snyder et al. (1997) recommend that educators should spend more time on providing students with avenues to aid goal attainment than focusing solely on raising self-esteem. Gallup (2010) also suggests that hopeful thinking assists in building student strength to cope with difficulties that arise and thus believes empowering hope is a powerful tool to aid raising student achievement.
CONCLUSION

Beginning with an overview into education narratives underpinning ability and talent identification in New Zealand, this chapter provides insight into the necessity of increased understanding around the impact a student’s environment has on their learning and emotional well-being. As the literature review examines the influence of strength-based practice through the empowerment of talent, awareness emerges around correlations between the creation of student academic self-concept and student interactions with teacher and peers. This new awareness highlights research relevancy in seeking further understanding around classroom perceptions and the impact of ‘perceived’ messages on relationships and the development of student positive academic self-concept.

As this thesis now moves towards discussion of findings, literature derived from this review is considered alongside research results and underpins my own conclusions surrounding the influence of the Lighthouse Programme and subsequent impact of talent on student academic self-concept.
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores reasoning behind the methodology framework and methods of data collection I have employed within this research. Due to the nature of the research question, “Does the Lighthouse Programme, through talent identification and exploration, assist in improving a student’s academic self-concept?”, a mixed methods approach has been used to enable a more complete picture to be formed and to increase the accuracy of data findings from information collected (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Descombe, 2008). As the context of this study was to provide opportunity for increased student dialogue around talent and ability, methodology structure is designed to gather quantitative and qualitative information in such a way that varied opportunity for student expression and response are created.

Describing now in further detail the rationale behind this research design, this chapter also discusses participants, research measures and process, concluding with discussion on method reliability, validity and relevant ethical considerations underpinning the data.

METHODOLOGY RATIONALE

Aims

Crossing between various paradigms, philosophically this research finds its place in idealism and an understanding that individual realities are constructed in very different ways. As this research seeks to both inquire and evaluate, the methodology encourages the communication of student narratives and method selection is intended to empower narration of student ‘truth’ (Corey, Corey & Callanan, 2007). Subsequently the plan for inquiry is collaborative, and indicates my conviction that to understand a student’s ‘standing place’ I must not presume to understand the mindsets or possible thinking pathways that a set of purely quantitative data may purport. Methods selected encourage participants to express their social reality while meeting the following research aims:

- Increase understanding around the impact of messages students are receiving at school around talent and ability
- Identify possible academic self perception issues
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the Lighthouse programme, including impact on hope.
Quantitative and qualitative methodology

Taking a post-modernist approach, this research sets out to look for interrelationships, connections and themes from a student standpoint within education. I was not only interested in identifying various narratives within education but wished to understand their impact at a classroom and school community level. Fox (2008) believes that the current educational paradigm is that academic performance or accomplishment is the sole indicator of a well-lived life and I was keen to hear from the students themselves just how hopeful they were about their future wherever they may be on the current academic scale.

Greene (2008) suggests that taking a purely qualitative stance in research, leads to partial understanding of the subject matter whereas the use of both quantitative and qualitative data aids the building of a stronger case in circumstances where change is sought (Yin, 2006). With this in mind, quantitative measures included in this research take the form of MALS questionnaire (Likert question responses), CYSE talent assessment data statistics provided from Gallup online web and the Lighthouse programme student evaluation form. This statistical evidence provides an alternate perspective to the qualitative research gathered through Photovoice, student evaluations and teacher/facilitator observations aiding in highlighting strong data correlations and helping to diminish the impact of any researcher bias impacting the qualitative research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Patton, 1990).

Research Paradigms

The Lighthouse Programme is supported through research methods that support the following paradigms:

**Critical educational research** – This research suggests that positivism might provide insight into the careful consideration of the political impacts and ideological contexts that embed educational research (Cohen et al. 2011). Similar to the transformative paradigm, the process identifies a need for change. As research describes an intention not only to understand societal behaviours, but to critically consider the societal impact of outcomes in the context of equality, the hope is that a shift in perceptions may result.

**Interpretivism** – using phenomenological inquiry this research walks alongside students, empowering student discovery and providing a platform for students to voice their ‘lived learning experiences’ within education. Taking an interpretive stance where there is scope for
more than one interpretation to be considered, I take the role of translating the varied interpretations and look for the socially constructed realities that begin to emerge (Bryman, 2004). In this study, data gathered from “Photovoice” (Wang & Burris, 1997) and Burden’s (2005) *Myself as a Learner Scale* (MALS) is analysed together to see what correlations and themes emerge. In doing this insight is gained into learning messages within the classroom and the impact of the Lighthouse Programmes talent identification and exploration method.

**Transformative Emancipatory** – The Lighthouse Programme is a tool designed to open new pathways to thinking through children’s increased participation in their learning processes, empowering student/teacher reciprocity and a more balanced approach to power issues within the classroom (Mertens, 2009). My hope underpinning this research is that as student narratives are identified a greater understanding of their perspectives will emerge, evoking change at a school classroom and community level.

**NEW ZEALAND CURRICULUM**

**Inclusion from a Ministry Of Education standpoint**

Accentuated within the curriculum vision is the MOE intent to ensure that children are “actively involved” in directions for learning. As education decision makers within schools consider processes and programmes, *inclusion*, is an important consideration and one of the eight foundation principles of the New Zealand curriculum (Figure 7, p.62). This inclusion principle indicates a need within education for research such as this to:

- Fit cohesively within the school routine
- Honour diversity, be non-discriminatory and maintain student safety
- Ensure learning needs are addressed
- “Ensure student identities, languages, abilities and “talents” are recognised and affirmed” (MOE, 2007, p. 9, emphasis added).

**The Lighthouse Programme**

In addition to the principle outlined above, the Lighthouse Programme design is present and future focused and supports partnership principles embedded in the Treaty of Waitangi, embracing the New Zealand Curriculum commitment to value cultural diversity, community engagement and empower student and education professionals to “reflect on their own
learning processes” (MOE, 2007, p. 9) in learning how to learn. Believing in the necessity to move students towards a greater sense of autonomy, the Lighthouse programme method of encouraging student individuality is through identification of own beliefs, exploration of individual cultural understandings and provision of opportunities for collaboration with others. These principles inform Lighthouse and link it directly to the NZ Curriculum.

Figure 7: The New Zealand Curriculum (MOE, 2007, p. 7)
The focus of this thesis now moves to Room 11, the Randwick Park school years six and seven classroom where this research was carried out.

THE LIGHTHOUSE PROGRAMME RESEARCH: ROOM 11 - RANDWICK PARK SCHOOL

These photos show Room 11 students participating in some of the Lighthouse Programme’s many activities. Together they are discovering and using their talents

Sample

In order to answer the research question outlined early in this chapter and enable robust data to be gathered around the effectiveness of the Lighthouse Programme, a participant sample was needed to provide a varied arrangement of student perspectives and data collection
measures and procedures needed to support the achievement of the research aims. With Nusche et al.’s. (2012) OECD Review of NZ Education in the back of my mind, I consulted with Randwick Park School Principal Karen McMurray around seeking a research sample inclusive of specific characteristics (Cohen et al., 2011) found represented in the OECD’s described NZ ‘tail of underachievement (OECD, 2000; Nusche et al., 2012). I also sought a classroom whose dynamic was diversely representative of many low decile classrooms in New Zealand.

Beginning with the sample selection, this classroom research project entailed the following steps:

- Selection of participants
- Research measures: Photovoice and ‘Myself as a Learner Survey’ (MALS)
- Introduction of two additional facilitators and participation in the nine week Lighthouse Programme
- Repeat of MALS and Photovoice
- Completion of Lighthouse Programme student evaluations.

**Participants**

**Background**

After several conversations with the Principal, it was decided the classroom selected would be Room 11, a Year Six and Seven class of 25 children consisting of a diverse range of boys and girls aged 10 – 12 years, from the following ethnic groups outlined in figure 8.

![Figure 8: Ethnic and Gender details for Room 11 Participant sample](image)
Through the manifestation of student behaviour and relationship issues, school leadership had identified that support was needed within this classroom. It was suggested that the Lighthouse Programme research may aid in identifying how best to support the individuals involved to move forward while possibly strengthening overall teacher/student relationships, improving classroom collaboration and tackling possible engagement issues out in the open class forum. It was also hoped that results gathered from this group representation, would also be utilised to indicate to school Board of Trustees the merit in management continuing to support the Lighthouse Programme’s method of talent introduction within the school.

*Student selection process*

Prior to meeting students, I met with the class teacher, Miss V to discuss any concerns and questions around the Lighthouse Programme implementation. Completely aware of dynamics that were proving to be destructive to relationship building within her classroom, Miss V appreciated the support and chose to take the role of an ‘active’ observer whom would be making observational notes around the programme while actively participating in it herself. It was also Miss V’s suggestion that the programme would be more successful if she participated in activities and introduced Lighthouse philosophies into her daily class routines. The willing helpfulness of her approach contributed significantly to the results of this research and is re-enforced in Gordon and Crabtree’s (2006) suggestion that the effectiveness of strengths-based programmes in schools increases significantly when teachers believe in them and are fully committed to support.

Students were introduced to the Lighthouse Programme research as a class and given a handout that was written in a way they could clearly understand (Geldard & Geldard, 2001; Ludbrook, 2003). The handout detailed what the programme was about, the point behind the research and what the student role in taking part entailed (Appendix H). Followed by a group discussion where students were encouraged to ask questions if they wished. I explained that participation in the study was completely voluntary, requiring both student and parental consent. I discussed confidentiality and detailed that students were able to look at their responses to research measures on their request but results would remain anonymous with no identities revealed in the final report. Students were reminded they had the opportunity to ‘opt out’ at any time and we discussed this process at length. It was decided as a group that
use of the Randwick Park Schools Responsible Thinking Classroom (RTC) where students
can go to work if they wish, would enable this provision of ‘opting out’ to be addressed no
differently than normal Randwick Park routines. Group consensus around this decision aided
any potential pressure surrounding a decision to leave, was kept at a minimum.

Following this discussion, a copy of the Room 11 handout was sent home with students along
with a parental consent form and an invitation attached. As parental support for programmes
had historically been an issue, I had decided after consulting with the principal, to offer
parents an opportunity to attend an evening of light refreshments and a brief visual
introduction to the research. However although signed parental consent was 100% with 10
parents indicating they would be attending the information evening, only one parent arrived.
Although disappointing, this is not an unusual occurrence at Randwick Park School.

_The role of classroom participants_

The predominant role of the Room 11 class students was to participate in the nine-week,
Lighthouse Programme. It was presented this way as neither the school principal nor I wished
to place any pressure on students to take part in the research. After extensive discussions
around what the research measures entailed, students were offered opportunity to ‘opt out’ of
the research itself, under the understanding they could still participate in the Lighthouse
Programme.

With all 25 students committed to experiencing research design and providing feedback, their
role was extended to include completion of the Photovoice exercise, MALS questionnaire at
the programme beginning and end and a final Lighthouse Programme Evaluation form at the
programme’s conclusion.

_Lighthouse programme facilitators_

Garbarino, Stott and the Faculty of the Erikson Institute (1989) suggest that it is important to
move with caution and not overestimate your ability or overvalue your hypotheses when
working with children. Understanding it is often beneficial to bring in outside skilled
facilitators to assist when working with large groups and when researcher has dual roles
(Gray 2002), I invited three others to be part of this research. Consequently, I was joined by
three co-facilitators, Sunia Pasi, (Tongan) a male sports recreation and programme development graduate, Maree Beaven (European) community family facilitator from the local Manurewa community Whanau Hub and Whaea Rochelle Hartley (Maori) Randwick Park School’s Social Worker.

It was the role of these valued volunteers who have vast experience in facilitating various child and adult groups, to learn about the programme and act as facilitators alongside myself. As the Lighthouse Programme had not been implemented in a group of this size before, I wanted to ensure that students had varied avenues for support and encouragement and extra staff were on hand to help if and when required. Unfortunately due to school commitments Whaea Rochelle was unavailable after the first three sessions, however her support as a valuable sounding board, ensured creativity was relevant and cultural safety was respected at all times.

**RESEARCH MEASURES**

**Photovoice**

The main purpose of Photovoice was to offer students a data gathering method that encouraged self expression in a way that could be fun and engaging and largely unobtrusive (Wang & Burris, 1997). Students in the earlier Lighthouse Student Advisory had expressed enjoyment in using this method to creatively express and I hoped the Year Six and Seven students would also embrace this opportunity to try something new.

Within this research, using photography as the predominant means of self expression, students were asked to respond through pictorial representation, their answer to the question, “How do you see yourself as a learner?” A camera was then entrusted to students who were sent out around the school, enabling them to be the recorders of their own voice through photography. This method developed in 1992 by Carol Wang and Mary Ann Burris has been found to effectively provide an alternative method of sharing ones perceptions especially for individual’s such as students, who seldom have access to those who make decisions over their lives (Wang & Burris, 1997; Strack, Magill & McDonagh, 2004).

Understanding that children often learn more through visual learning interactions (Gardner, 1993), I added Photovoice to give students an opportunity to comment on their perceptions
and experiences in a visual way. In a school such as Randwick Park where for some English is not their first language, Photovoice honours individuality, encourages creativity, promotes reflection and provides a bridge to future dialogue (Wang & Burris, 1997). This method aided the identification of themes within this research and provided visual and qualitative material to support findings.

*Myself as a learner scale (MALS)*

Burden’s (2009) MALS questionnaire is, “Specifically designed to assess young people’s perceptions of themselves as learners and problem-solvers within the academic context” (Burden, 2005, p.31). Proposing that how a student sees themselves as a learner is a key factor to their motivation and attitude, Burden (2009) created the scale to enable analysis of student academic self-concept. Presented in the form of a reflective 20-question Likert questionnaire, Burden’s (2009) measure provides statistical data from which comparisons can be made and possible correlations can be drawn. The five-point Likert scale, asks students to indicate one of the following responses:

- a) Yes, definitely true about me
- b) Yes, a bit true about me
- c) Not sure, Sometimes true and sometimes not
- d) Not very true about me
- e) No, definitely not true about me

While the reading and comprehension level of this assessment is aimed at an average nine or ten year old level, after initially choosing to complete the assessment individually, intermittent student expressions of difficulty understanding the questions, resulted in the assessment being completed as a class group. This could be seen as a disadvantage of the tool when working with students of various literacy levels, however once questions were read slowly and clarified as needed, students who had already completed, indicated they appreciated the extra time to reflect.

This also acts as a measurement tool to identify changes in academic self-concept from beginning to end of the Lighthouse Programme.
**MALS Scoring**

Once respondents have answered all questions on the MALS questionnaire, a score sheet allocates points to each question ranging from 1 to 5. Most questions score 1 (most negative) and 5 (most positive) however this scoring is reversed for negatively worded items (Burden, 2009). Responses are scored and added together to achieve an overall score out of 100 which is then compared with Burden’s (2009) standardised sample score (71 +/- 10.5). As Burden’s (2009) MALS assessment originates from the United Kingdom, it should be noted the standardised sample score was achieved after being administered to a diverse group of 217 boys and 172 girls in year seven and eight at a school West of England. Although the origin of the standardised sample score could be seen as a limitation to this research, its consistent use as a ‘guide mark’ to before and after MALS scores still assists in accentuating changes to self-concept scores for each student and within the class overall.

Standardisation procedure data follows.

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</thead>
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<td>Males</td>
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<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Mean Score</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Standard error</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average score range</td>
<td>60-82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.* West England Basic Standardisation Data for MALS (Burden, 2009, p. 6)

Corresponding results of a principle components factor analysis indicated the MALS scale meets requirements of construct validity in “assessing confidence and enjoyment in learning and academic problem solving” (Burden, 2009, p. 6). Further analysis of the standardisation data found the number one element contributing to a positive self perception as a problem solver and learner was a confidence in the student’s own ability to do well in various
academic learning situations. These understandings add validity to claims made within data findings chapter.

**Clifton Youth Strengths Explorer Talent Assessment**

This online talent assessment tool is part of the Lighthouse Programme and is completed in week two of the programme. Requiring individual student codes to assess Clifton’s US online web-site, I had pre-purchased the codes from the USA in bulk after extensive conversations with Gallup. Initially offering to supply a mentor to aid this research journey, Gallup’s offer did not come to pass despite my attempts to connect. This may be due to the programme still being relatively new in the USA, however a representative from Gallup Australia did provide increased insight into their experiences of the product and offered to maintain connection with me around any Clifton programme changes and opportunities for me to attend Gallup Strengths-based training in Australia in the future.

Prior to student completion of the assessment, I discussed at length the nature of this tool, which is geared to draw out a student’s top three themes of talent from their responses to 78 Likert questions. Ensuring that students understood this measure is designed to act as a “door opener” to introducing talent self-assessment, I re-enforced the product’s reliance on student honesty in answering questions, dictated accuracy of the results. As part of the programme, this measure is used to introduce the concept of talent, and students are encouraged to expand on these themes through Lighthouse creative activities and worksheets that support past reflection around talents and discussion with significant others.

Although Gallup had indicated assessment took approximately 15-20 minutes, my awareness of the various student literacy levels meant 45 minutes was provided. Moving through the 78 Likert questions, designed to evaluate and identify student meaningful talent themes, choices offered for student response were, 1- almost always, 2- often, 3-sometimes, 4- almost never or never, 5-this question does not make sense to me. Providing the students with time to read and assess accuracy as they went, this measure provided on completion a certificate outlining each student’s top three talent themes, a personal report and a teacher/researcher copy of class results. This data provided another source of quantitative statistics around student dynamic, from which comparison can be made and themes can be identified from a student point of view (Lopez, Harter, Juszkiewicz & Carr, 2007).
The Lighthouse Programme evaluation forms

Smith (as cited in Owen, 1993) describes a programme as a “set of planned activities directed toward bringing about specified change” (p. 5). The introduction of evaluative questionnaires at programmes completion (Appendix I) was designed to measure changes and report on Lighthouse programme effectiveness in meeting programme aims. This method of measure provided further qualitative and quantitative data that was assessed extensively and compared against that already gathered from other research measures. The evaluation included Likert questions and opportunity for student comments around their observations, concerns and any aspects of the Lighthouse journey they wished to share.

An alternative evaluative questionnaire was also provided to the facilitators and class teacher (Appendix J) to enable further observational data to be gathered. The encouragement of facilitators and teacher to act also as observers to the programme ensured feedback provided varied perspectives and aided in reducing researcher bias (Delamont, 2002). Responses also aided in highlighting areas for programme improvement and will assist in ensuring programme outcomes remained accountable and relevant for all stakeholders involved in the project (Guion, 2002).

Recognising that no matter the skill of the observer, observations have an element of subjectivity, we met as a group before every Lighthouse weekly session, to discuss any issues or concerns that came up. This, alongside weekly de-briefings at programme end, aided increased group cohesiveness and understanding and enabled undercurrents between group participants to be identified and dealt with in need (Conran-Liew, 2004).

The class teacher’s willingness to keep a weekly diary around her Lighthouse session observations, aided extensively in ensuring time constraints were accommodated as much as possible and provided a valuable measure of accountability to ensure the programme was effective in meeting weekly aims. Miss V’s predominant role as the primary observer provided Lighthouse facilitators and me with increased insight into individuals and existing dynamics within the classroom and also provided guidance around strategies she had found effective in teaching her class thus far. I found seeking feedback at the end of each session, from students and teacher strengthened the Lighthouse process, aiding the principle of
inclusion and providing the essential ingredient to establishing a positive synergy within the group.

**RELIABILITY**

Taking a qualitative approach to research can open a researcher up to criticism due to researcher bias and subjectivity that can impact this method. However Patton (1990) and Bryman (2004) argue that approaching methodology from a mixed method standpoint that includes quantitative data to ‘back up’ or support findings, adds rigour to this method and provides insight that quantitative data would not. While the nature of the informal advisory environment and use of researcher observational data makes exact replication of this data gathering process impossible, it is important to note the object of this part of the research was to gather data in a way that allowed for the process to flow and be more student-led. In the role of data gatherer, attempting to prove a theory through reliability of pre-determined responsive questions was not the objective of this part of the research. However use of the written evaluations alongside observational findings aid in providing a more complete picture from various vantage points.

**VALIDITY**

Cohen et al. (2011) propose that qualitative data validity may be measured through assessment of the “honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved” (p. 179). The use of qualitative data provided insight into internal narratives that enabled various student expressions of “real life” to be gathered and provided data imagery that was then able to be aligned with quantitative measures to aid finding validity and limit the impact of my opinion (Cohen et al. 2011). Campbell and Fiske (1959) assert that *Triangulation* (the use of more than one data collection method to study a research construct), provides a way of proving concurrent validity especially when using a predominantly qualitative approach. The Photovoice and MALS process not only enabled me as a researcher to gather valuable information for analysis but as the developer of the Lighthouse Programme, this forum along with facilitator and teacher observations, helped ascertain student response and provided insight into the need for such a programme from student viewpoint.
DATA ANALYSIS

The collection of qualitative and quantitative data gathered through the use of these methods, enabled the study of correlations within the data to occur and themes through the findings to be identified. Use of the Clifton Youth Strengths Explorer Talent assessment alongside MALS results, provided further measurable insight into the significance of talent and aided the possible impact of internal narrations on the lives of these year six and seven students in a way that purely qualitative data alone would not. Reflecting on the data-gathering measures and processes, selecting a mixed method approach with both written and visual elements supported the accommodation of differing learning languages within the classroom, providing varied avenues for student response and remained true to the ethos underpinning the Lighthouse Programme that of upmost importance is the honouring of student individuality and diversity.

Taking a mixed method approach has enabled the New Zealand Curriculum principles to be upheld as data gathering methods have supported student diversity and provided a varied arrangement of student perspectives around what it is to be a learner in a low decile New Zealand classroom. Identification of class group consistencies made possible through the varied research measures, not only informs themes highlighted further on in this thesis, but provides essential insight into the validity of understanding and supporting expression of student narratives as a pathway to the empowerment of learning.

ETHICAL ISSUES

As Randwick Park School Counsellor, I maintained awareness around my various roles at all times, remaining within counselling ethical guidelines and seeking supervision throughout the process not only through external supervisors but remaining accountable to school leadership, teachers and the students themselves within the school. If I was unsure of something within the group process I asked the students themselves who in turn, appeared to become more empowered patiently describing practices of culture dear to them. Issues incurred were around speaking publically and peer confidence, counselling skills aided the process immensely enabling me to ensure taking part in this research did no harm to
participants (Corey et al. 2007; Ludbrook, 2003). Tolich and Davidson (1999) believe there are five ethical principles to consider in student research as follows:

1) Do no harm to any participants
2) Seek informed consent
3) Voluntary participation
4) Avoid deceit
5) Adhere to confidentiality/anonymity agreements

To the best of my ability I ensured all principles were followed right from the onset attempting to ensure that those involved in all processes surrounding Lighthouse felt no pressure to take part. Agreed safety guidelines, essential to any successful group research project (Gray, 2002; Leadbeater et al. 2006), were created in the first session of the Lighthouse programme. This class “Treaty” (figure 9) outlined group behaviour expectations, rules and consequences and aided in building a collaborative, culturally safe learning space.

Prior to this research being conducted within Randwick Park School, authorisation for the research was gained from school principal and approval was obtained through the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee who ensured all relevant forms and ethical requirements were met.

Parental consent was obtained in all instances (Ludbrook, 2003; Corey et al. 2007) and all research stakeholders were kept informed throughout. Weekly session overviews were sent home to parents with a homework activity designed to engage friends and family as much as possible. Although students expressed disappointment at the level of parental engagement, this served as an opportunity to remind them about the power they hold around their own learning (Ludbrook, 2003). Confidentiality was regularly addressed and reassurance provided that data presented would remain anonymous. Students were keen for their class Lighthouse photos to be shown and this wish was honoured by the school in the Randwick Park School 2012 Yearbook (Appendix K).

Figure 9: Woven class treaty (representative of class accepted standards of behaviour), created by Room 11 students.
CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided an overview around why a mixed method approach to research was chosen. The nature of the research question and aims of the Lighthouse Programme itself, require that student voice is encouraged at every opportunity, and thus important in doing so, is the recognition that not every student learns or responds the same way. Various research measures respond to Treaty of Waitangi intent, embracing student individuality and diversity and research design is responsive to the New Zealand Curriculum principles. The chapter concludes with discussion around validity, reliability and ethical issues. This thesis now presents findings for discussion.
CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and analyses the data gathered at various stages of the Room 11 Lighthouse Programme classroom pilot, introducing findings through emerging themes and the resonance of various voices within the classroom. Evaluation data gathered through programme discussions and student, facilitator and teacher questionnaires, offer quantitative and qualitative results for analysis. Quotes provided have been authenticated by individuals concerned and provide ‘essence’ to the threads of data that have formed the research conclusions. As this thesis design and methodology has sought to empower the student voice as much as possible, I begin by introducing the participants of Randwick Park Schools Room 11, through a visual presentation of the data gathered from each student before and after the nine week Lighthouse Programme.

THE PARTICIPANTS

Background

Utilising two very different mediums, Photovoice and Burden’s (2009) Myself as a Learner questionnaire, students were asked to respond to the question “How do you see yourself as a learner?” After being fully briefed on all aspects of both methods, students were provided with cameras and given half an hour to walk around school grounds, take several photos and decide which one they felt best described them as a learner. Use of their classroom items or any figurines from my office was also offered as a medium to help them express their ideas.

After students had taken their photos, they returned to me one at a time, displaying the specific photo they had chosen and providing me with their narrative of what the photo meant to them. Once all students completed this photographic exercise they were then re-assembled as a class and we discussed how they had found expressing themselves in this manner; several quoted student responses are quoted further in this chapter.

Following this discussion I re-introduced the MALS questionnaire, explaining in detail my reasoning behind questionnaire completion and answering any questions that arose. Students were then instructed to find a nice relaxing place nearby to sit and complete their questionnaire alone. Students had been allocated a number to enable results to be correlated and thus names were not added. They had also been fully briefed on the scoring of the
questionnaire and understood that it was not a test. Interestingly, once students understood
that the MALS score did not represent a result that could be ‘competitively’ compared to
another, only four girls and one boy wished to know what their resulting MALS score was.
Although I did not outline Burdens (2009) identified average score or indicate subsequent
highs and lows at this point, as I did not wish to place students in a position where they were
encouraged to manipulate their responses in any way in order to achieve a perceived high
score, students were informed they were welcome to discuss any results with me privately at
research conclusion.

The MALS score for each student is displayed in the following pages along with ethnicity (to
highlight the diversity of the classroom), gender and corresponding quotes aligned with
before and after Lighthouse Programme photo depiction. To provide further insight into
student personalities I have also included in the top right hand corner the student’s top three
Clifton Strengths Explorer talent assessment themes as identified in week two of their
Lighthouse programme journey. The appearance of the occasional bracketed theme indicates
to the reader that the student did not identify with the provided narration around this talent
and did not agree it was relevant to them.

Although initial classroom sample size was 25 students I have only included 20 in this
research data as three students transitioned, one transferred and one student experienced an
extended hospital visit which resulted in their extended absence.
Room 11 introductions

701

“I am okay as a learner I feel better knowing we are all in it together.”
MALS score: 72  Girl, Samoan

702

“I don’t know why I chose this photo, but I know I want it, he looks lonely and like he wants to fly but can’t.”
MALS score: 72  Boy, Cook Island Maori

702

“My teacher helps me to reach my goals at school.”
MALS score: 68

“I don’t know why I chose this photo, but I know I want it, he looks lonely and like he wants to fly but can’t.”
MALS score: 68  Boy, Cook Island Maori

“Learning is okay when it’s fun, usually it makes me feel angry.”
MALS score: 68
"I try to be relaxed about my learning and laugh about it."

MALS score: 69  Boy, Maori

"Learning is like lots of different obstacles to get over, I don’t always feel confident."

MALS score: 68  Boy, Maori

"I like to be outside as much as I can, my favourite thing at school is playing sports with my friends."

MALS score: 70

"I feel brave because now I try stuff, I'll give it a go."

MALS score: 81
“I have fun at school with my friends, learning is big.”
MAL score: 58  Boy, Maori

“I like learning and find some things easier to learn than others.”
MAL score: 73  Girl, European

“I am strong at trying to learn.”
MAL score: 69

“My heart feels bigger cause I know I can do it.”
MAL score: 85
“I like to blend in so no one notices if I don’t say much.”

MALS score: 57  Girl, Maori

“I am like a Harakeke (Flax) I am stronger when I am with my family.”

MALS score: 71

“Being able to compete is important if you are going to keep up.”

MALS score: 73  Boy, Tongan

“I have faith that I can do whatever it is I need to do.”

MALS score: 80
“I’m a slow learner, it makes me sad.”

*MALS score: 51 Girl, Samoan*

“I love Lighthouse cause I love art. I helped decorate our class Lighthouse wall.”

*Mals score: 71*

“I don’t know how I see myself, I just know I wish I could sparkle like this beautiful unicorn.”

*MALS score: 62 Girl, Maori*

“Now that I see my talents I feel like maybe I could fly.”

*MALS score: 60*
“Learning is difficult but I try to be confident.”
MALS score: 55  Boy, Indian

“Lighthouse groups are fun, I like competing in teams with my friends.”
MALS score: 63

“My writing makes my learning hard, it’s like trying to get over fences.”
MALS score: 74  Girl, European

“I’ve realised I’m good at some things more than others, I’m going to use my talents in the future to help me to fly like a butterfly.”
MALS score: 71
“I’m like Bart I’m sometimes naughty because learning is boring.”

MALS score: 76 Boy, European/Maori

“I like sports at school because I’m good at competing, my friends want me on their team.”

MALS score: 70

“I really like learning and school and hanging out with my friends, our teacher is cool.”

MALS score: 74 Girl, Cook Island Maori

“I feel like I shine when I’m helping the teacher with stuff and helping others in class who are stuck.”

MALS score: 70
“I want to zoom out of the classroom and do something else.”
MALS score: 57 Girl, Samoan

“I’m pretty good at learning, I stand strong but I’d rather be with my boys playing sport.”
MALS score: 86 Boy, Maori

“The sky reminds me I’d rather be somewhere else, I still don’t like learning.”
MALS score: 57

“I am proud to be Maori.”
MALS score: 90
“I always feel angry and frustrated with learning.”
MALS score: 63  Boy, Maori

“I have learnt I am a good leader, I like making decisions and getting the team moving.”
MALS score: 71

“I think I am like Lisa Simpson, she knows what to do. She tries to find a solution because she’s smart.”
MALS Score: 81  Girl, Indian

“When I am learning, I feel like a big tall tree reaching for the sun. I feel bad though when I see my friends struggling.”
MALS score: 90
“I try to feel bright in class, confident like a queen.”

*MALS score: 82 Girl, Maori*

“I feel like Marg Simpson no one realises just how smart she is.”

*MALS score: 65 Girl, Samoan*

“I think we all have different talents so we can help one another learn.”

*MALS score: 78*

“I like this photo because it is like a tunnel. I am looking forward to being in the Lighthouse Leadership group next year.”

*MALS score: 84*
PHOTOVOICE REFLECTION

Although many of the students had taken photos before either on phones or cameras, there was a level of excitement apparent as soon as I introduced what we were going to do and why. Some students were initially concerned with the level of confidentiality, worried that their teacher, parents or principal would know and maybe not appreciate their selected photo or description. At this point I re-addressed confidentiality and affirmed that once each student received their allotted number this would act as a way to correlate results and their names would not be included or referred to at any point in relation to data gathered. Subsequently the students became eager to get started with a few already voicing which area of the school they would like to go.

Group discussion is a very important element of Photovoice and critical to the effectiveness of the process. It encourages any concerns to be addressed and lays the platform for encouraging honest representations and inspiring more informative pictures to be gathered. I would never request from students something I would not be prepared to use myself, so I introduced the tool by giving the students an example of how it worked. I provided two examples within the school that were my photographic depictions answering the question “What is something you don’t know about me?” I was able to encourage some laughter and I saw a few students visibly relax. On reflection, I felt the robustness of this group discussion and the use of an example to a question unrelated to the research aided relationship building, improved student understanding and encouraged the ideal “we are all in this together”.

Following is some student verbal feedback around the Photovoice process:

“It was hard at first thinking of something but then I saw a figurine that made me think of something.”

“It’s funny, when I looked at my photos I realised how much I love being outside.”

“I didn’t like it first, it took me ages to find a picture that said what I wanted to say and I still didn’t like the first one I chose, I liked the second one better.”

“I was honest because it was Whaea but with some teachers I don’t want to be honest because then they will give me more harder work.”
“It was cool, I love taking photos and putting them on face book, I like doing stuff outside and we didn’t have to write heaps.”

“It was so much fun; it was kinda like talking about yourself without talking.”

There appeared to be a more considered tone to the gathering of the photos taken after the Lighthouse Programme as the students took more time and care to select their chosen shot. I found student voice and tone was often more reflective when sharing the insights of their second photo with me. Following are several student comments when given opportunity to view both photos again to verify their choice.

Student #703 commented,

“It’s my laughing and joking around with my friends that always gets me into trouble. It’s just that I can’t concentrate and so I tell myself it doesn’t matter, not to worry about it.”

Student #707 noticed,

“I realised doing the Lighthouse Programme that I am stronger than I think, my whanau believes in me and cares about me and they believe I can do it so I should try to do that too.”

Student #708 reflected,

“I didn’t realise how much my belief in myself comes from God until I saw the painting of the little church, I knew straight away it was the right photo.”

This spiritual element was also apparent in much of this student’s artwork during the Lighthouse Programme as reflected by figure 10 opposite.

**Figure 10.** Ceramic art created by student #708 in final Lighthouse Programme session, depicting strengths.

Student #715 said,

“My photos seem like I’m angry but I like being with my friends at school.”
The Photovoice process gives students an opportunity to step outside themselves for a moment and view their inner perceptions from a greater distance. It also provides students with the opportunity to experiment and view their own experience or negative emotion in a way that provides a measure of emotional safety (Geldard & Geldard, 2002). I noticed that in several cases, such as student #715, the process of taking a photo and reflecting on it, appeared to show the student something about their inner self-talk that had not considered before. For this student, this increased awareness around anger, aided their Lighthouse journey, as they began to realise and further question, understandings around their learning and talent.

**MYSELF AS A LEARNER QUESTIONNAIRE**

Once the MALS questionnaires were completed, I took them away for scoring against Burden’s (2009) scoring sheet. This resulted in each student receiving a score out of a possible 100. Below are graphed results for girls and boys separately, indicating the shift in their MALS score from before to after their participation in the Lighthouse Programme. Burden’s calculated mean score of 71 is indicated by the green line. This line acts as an indicator, showing which students moved above or below the standardised mean, it also portrays the increased number of classroom participants that now score either above or closer to mean average.

*Figure 11: Graph indicating the shift in ‘Myself as a learner questionnaire’ scores for Room 11 Girls*
The above graph shows that 55% of the Girls in Room 11 experienced an increase in their MALS score. Mean score for the “before” programme data was 68, subsequently the “after” mean score was 73 depicting quite a noticeable (5%) increase in 9 weeks.

![Graph showing MALS scores before and after programme completion for girls in Room 11.](image)

**Figure 12:** Graph indicating the shift in ‘Myself as a learner questionnaire’ scores for Room 11 Boys

The results for boys indicated 78% of them experienced an increase in their MALS academic self-perception score with mean MALS score shifting from 69 to 75 after programme completion. This is a 6% rise over nine weeks and indicates a clear shift in academic self concept as most boys are now just under or well over the 71 average mean.

The week after programme completion, students were asked to complete an evaluation form, outlining their experience of the Lighthouse Programme. I delayed this evaluation a week after the programme finished as we had all participated in an ‘upbeat’ programme windup celebration and I felt this may impact student response in some way. As discussed in the previous chapter, this evaluation form contained five Likert style questions all based around specific themes. The selected responses included strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree and strongly agree however interestingly, no student indicated disagree or strongly disagree on any of their question responses. Below, each theme is considered through several lenses, taking a look first at student written response to the question through a bar graph.
representation, then in greater detail through the use of qualitative data in the form of quotes from students, facilitators and teacher observations.

**STUDENT CONFIDENCE**

![Bar Chart](image)

**Figure 13:** Results for Randwick Park School Room 11 students asked to rate the statement, ‘Participating in the Lighthouse Programme has increased my confidence’

Opportunities for the students to gain self confidence and confidence in their peers were interwoven throughout the Lighthouse Programme. With only one student feeling unsure as to whether their confidence had increased or not, this graph depiction was mirrored through the increase in questions and verbal dialogue within the class discussion section of the Lighthouse programme. With many boys initially displaying more confidence in the team building and outdoor activities and girls generally more with classroom activities, I observed this evened out to more equal gender participation in both environments as the programme progressed over time. Through the use of activities designed to encourage student ownership of their individual talents and strengths, experiences included work with various creative mediums, handouts, team building, group discussion and homework exercises designed to engage friends and family (Appendix L).
Confidence is one of the ten talent themes identified within the Clifton Youth Strengths Explorer Talent assessment. However, as the graph below depicts, after students completed the assessment at the beginning of the programme, confidence only appeared as strength for two students, one of which, did not agree with it.

![Pie Graph](image)

**Figure 14:** Pie Graph depicting percentage breakdown of talent themes identified through the Clifton Youth Strengths Explorer Assessment for Room 11

As the programme progressed observation of student interactions noted, increased willingness to blend groups, an improved level of collaboration and a shift in the tone of conversation between students. As an increased level of trust within the group began to emerge, several more confident students began to encourage some that weren’t so confident, through more inclusive body language and expressions of verbal encouragement. The result of this apparent shift follows:

“We got to try new things every single week and it built our confidence higher.”

Student #701
“Team building was my favourite Lighthouse activity; we got to know the girls better and had great teamwork.”  Student #705

“I didn’t really want to do the outside activities because some of the girls are mean and laugh, but at Lighthouse everybody was laughing so it was fun.”  Student #711

The facilitators said:

“There was clarity around their strengths, their talents. There was a confidence that came because they gained an understanding of what they were designed for.”

“I would recommend the programme because it built confidence in the kids knowing that they have talents. They are not always readily identified in the classroom.”

Confidence definitely improved as the programme progressed. Students who were tentative in the beginning gained confidence, especially with the small group work which was an advantage.”

Class teacher observations:

“Confidence was displayed through most children still using the language of Lighthouse even after the programme completion. When contacting buddies from another school some asked after their talents. It’s real to them!”

“I was met with some surprises as students who normally kept to themselves were keen to show me their ‘newfound’ talents and strengths and there was a new level of ownership there.”
UTILISING TALENT

Figure 16: Results for Randwick Park School Room 11 students asked to rate the statement, ‘Learning how to use my talents helps me to achieve my goals and dreams’

The connection between identifying talents and learning how to use them in everyday life is an important aim of Lighthouse. This topic was one that came up for discussion each week as the facilitators and I attempted to make the transition from thinking about talents to learning to act on them as relevant as possible for each learner. Dialogue amongst the boys during the small group work indicated an appreciation of working collaboratively to discover something and a more practical level of understanding that appeared to connect to Lighthouse’s visual cues quickly. This collaborative connection of talents to achieve goals stood out as many boys stepped up to lead within the team-building activities.
The students said,

“I use my talent of competing to help me work hard in the challenges I enter.” Student #708

“I use my talent for caring for others to help when they are feeling sad.” Student # 721

“I use my talent for art in class when I am bored.” Student # 718

“I now know I can use my talents to help me make new friends.” Student # 707

Facilitator comments:

“The language used was quite universal. When designing their own things, there was plenty of opportunity to express their own culture and talent within their own designs.”

“The different mediums of learning used within the programme, creative, arty stuff alongside the use of visual aids provided many avenues to connect talent to daily activities.”

“At first I think some of them struggled, the girls in particular...they needed someone to sit down with them and explain the connection. This is where group discussions were most effective.”

Teacher observations:

“It gives a point of reference that is very useful for goal setting conversations.’

“The analogy of the Lighthouse worked through each week is very strong and easy for the students to connect with it also gives them time to grasp the concept of using talents and something visual to refer back to.”

Figure 17: The boys celebrate after their idea to form the group sculpture won their team the first team challenge.
Reflective conversations with the teacher and students at the end of the programme aided their identification of a way to connect the idea of talent to classroom learning goals earlier in the programme. This openness of dialogue by the students and teacher and the sharing of their suggestions to strengthen the programme highlighted classroom increased understanding around the value of identifying your talents to be used as strengths that aid learning.

**ENCOURAGING COLLABORATION**

![Figure 18: Results for Randwick Park School Room 11 students asked to rate the statement: ‘The Lighthouse Programme helped me to get to know my classmates better’.

During the course of the Lighthouse Programme attendance ranged between 95-100% with no students choosing to opt out. Randwick Park School is in an area of high student transience and it is not uncommon for students to come and go within a classroom over a term. As mentioned previously, this was the case with three students who expressed reluctance at having to leave friends and be unable to complete their Lighthouse journey.

The above graph shows that 90% of the room 11 students felt the Lighthouse Programme had improved relationships within the classroom both with the teacher and with peers. This result was backed up by the following student evaluative responses.

“We all had fun and there were no mean comments.”       Student # 711
“The team building part of the programme made us learn to work together better as a team.”
Student # 704

“The class became a team and we learned how we all shine.” Student # 702

Facilitators noted that:

“The programme had a nice mix of individual, small group and class work that gave the students time to do their own ‘creative’ thing and then look back and chat and appreciate the work of other students. Both students and teacher appeared to learn new things about one another.”

“The use of a treaty to create a safety contract at the beginning of the programme to set some parameters for the student’s behaviour towards each other and also towards the facilitators, highlighted important values such as respect, patience, trust and honesty.”

“The teacher becoming actively involved in extending the Lighthouse Programme philosophy into daily classroom language was paramount in promoting respect and reinforcing the collaborative nature of Lighthouse.”

Teacher observations:

“Curriculum key competencies link directly to Lighthouse – directly managing self, relating to others, participating and contributing.”

**Figure 19:** Students collaborating to complete a class team building challenge
Week one of the Lighthouse Programme involved setting the scene for a safe learning environment within the classroom. This is to enable students to obtain the most they can from their participation in the programme in a way that nurtures their physical and emotional well being. Within this session we discussed the idea of talents and we took a couple of student polls to indicate current student understanding of talent. When asked what constitutes as ‘talent’ the most common three answers were the following:

1) Someone who is good at everything
2) Someone who is smart/brainy and can read and write really well
3) Someone who is good at sports.

Expanding further on this idea of being brainy or smart I asked the students to indicate on an anonymous paper ballot (only noting gender) whether they thought they were brainy or smart, 10 out of 20 indicated ‘no’, 8 of those were boys (there are only nine boys in this research sample). When I asked students about their dreams for the future, responses were minimal with several students indicating they had not really thought about it much at all. One student commented, “I think I’ll just stay home and play Play Station that’s the only thing I’m really good at” (Student #702). The teacher confirmed later that this type of narrative was common from many students and this particular student was difficult to engage in any learning
activity. The tapestry given to me at the end of the programme (discussed further on) had a quote attached to it this student had written it read, “My talent is being a good friend”.

Following are further student comments connected to hope.

“The most I liked about Lighthouse is that through the programme I was struggling and trying to find my identity and now I feel bright about the future.”  ..Student # 709

“I use my talent of being a future thinker to dream of what I want to be when I’m older, I’m going to be an artist.”  Student # 715

“My talent is organising, I can work together as a team and organise stuff.”  Student #720

“I use my talents of relating to others by helping others learn maths.”  Student #703

The facilitators said,

“There were two female students in my group that were very hard on themselves and struggled with believing they had any talent. It was amazing to see them at the end beginning to ‘own’ the idea they had some talent.”

“I noticed my group of boys were fairly confident about their ability on the sports field but when it came to the written handouts they had more of a struggle. Over the course of Lighthouse they began to brainstorm more as a group and helped one another to complete the worksheets. This meant they opened up more during classroom activities and sharing time and at the end voiced their enjoyment of trying new things.”

Teacher observation,

“As a class we decided after Lighthouse, to make Whaea Teri a tapestry of all our talents woven together. From the front the tapestry shows the students crayon rub drawings each showing something the students liked and the talent the student felt most connected to. On the back of the tapestry each student made a star that described our experience of Lighthouse and how we will use our talents in the future.”
Figure 21: These photos display the beautiful tapestry created by the Room 11 students. The first photo shows the front view with each rub depicting each student’s ‘talents. From the back the tapestry shows a star containing a personal message from each student around how the Lighthouse Programme impacted them.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE LIGHTHOUSE PROGRAMME

Student Feedback

While comments made on the classroom tapestry of talents, student expressed disappointment in programme completion and their request to continue meeting on a Thursday afternoon was an indicator that students enjoyed participating in the Lighthouse Programme, the Room 11 evaluation form gave students the opportunity to comment on what they liked the most, liked the least and what improvements they felt were needed. Student responses are as follows:

What I liked the most.

“I got to use my talent while doing lighthouse.”

“I liked that everyone got along and there were no mean comments.”

“Making my own bowl to keep.”

“Doing all the artwork.”

“Everything we did in Lighthouse.”
“The team building activities were cool, it made us all work together.”

“We became like a class team.”

“I liked the sports with Matua.”

“Getting to know the girls in my class better.”

“How to use my talents to do my best.”

“Everything we done was great fun.”

“Using our talents made learning more fun.”

“It was great because everyone enjoyed the activities and we all had fun.”

“I got to be confident and show my talents and got to be a leader.”

“Getting to know more about my talents and everyone in my class and the activities.”

“Getting to do team building outside and being supportive of one another.”

“Making the ceramic cup with my talent on it was cool.”

“We all had fun doing the different activities and everyone got along.”

“That the boys and girls got to know one another better, usually we don’t really talk much.”

“Coming up with new ideas and leading the team.”

What I liked the least:

“We sometimes didn’t have enough time to finish.”  (Four students indicated this)

“Having to talk too much.”  (Two students indicated this)

“I didn’t like the outside games.”

“Doing the handouts.”(Two student’s indicated this)

“There was nothing I didn’t like.”  (11 students indicated this)

Following are some student suggestions as to how the Lighthouse Programme could be improved.

“Having time to have a team building activity every week.”

“Go outside more.”

“Go on a Lighthouse field trip.” (Some students felt it would be “cool” to go to an actual Lighthouse).
“Be able to show off your talents to others more.” (Three students indicated this).

“More leadership skill activities.”

“Music in the background while doing art activities.”

The Lighthouse programme was originally designed to run over 1 ½ hours however due to bell times this was cut down to 1 ¼ hours which meant students at times felt rushed. More time was a common feedback suggestion from students, facilitators and teacher. As I had received several requests from students to continue being involved in Lighthouse, I added a question to the evaluation form to ascertain how many students felt they would like to be involved in a Year 7 and 8 Lighthouse Leadership Programme next year as a flow-on for those who had completed the Lighthouse Programme. The response was almost unanimous with 19 out of 20 students indicating they would like to continue building on their talents and self leadership skills next year.

*Figure 22:* Results for Randwick Park School Room 11 students asked to rate the statement: ‘Through Lighthouse I had a chance to show my talents’.

Three students indicated ‘undecided’ on the Likert questionnaire as to whether they had a chance to display their talent. While the greatest percentage of boys agreed, observations during the programme indicated clearly the boys preference for outside activities or activities involving an element of competition. Keeping this in mind, the strongest talent theme for the boys was ‘competing’ with 7 out of 9 boys indicating this theme in their top three strengths.
Working to a tighter time schedule, we moved through the stages of each session relatively swiftly. This required a degree of organisation in getting each task finished, alternatively to the boys ‘organiser’ was the top talent theme for the girls with 7 out of 11 students indicating this theme in their top three talents.

**Feedback from the facilitators**

Youth Worker reflected:

“I see Lighthouse as a tool to improve teacher understanding of their students, especially learning style preferences.”

“The programme is somewhat effective for relationship building as some of the content is completed independently.”

“As a facilitator there were opportunities for me at times when I could use my own talents and personal skills such as leading the physical activities.”

“I think the programme is very effective in prompting student choice as there were elements of the programme where students were encouraged to write their own responses to personal questions.”

“Programme strengths included, the safety contract at the beginning, the use of visual aids such as the Lighthouse itself, the use of creative arty stuff (such as creating sculptures) to identify talents. It offered different mediums of learning which catered to lots of different styles of learning.”

“A weakness of the programme was the time factor sometimes we were a bit rushed.”

“I felt it was a good balance between content and practical.”

Parent Hub Co-ordinator reflected:

“The teacher choosing to become actively involved makes a huge difference.”

“I think it helps student and teacher understanding each other and promotes mutual respect.”

“I talked to some of the girls in my group and asked if the programme had made a difference in their class. They felt that now outside the classroom they got on better, that was noticeable
as they were not as divided as they were from the start. Lots of encouraging words were beginning to be shared between the students.”

“With this being my first experience of the programme I spent a lot of time observing and taking in programme dynamics. I can see lots of space for teachers and facilitators to shine too.”

“I believe that talents and strengths are not culturally dependent, if you come from a challenging background or a loving environment it encourages you to discover who you are. I see the programme being one that everyone can participate in and grow from.”

“It is very clear throughout the programme that you can choose to use your talents or not and that you can use them positively or negatively. It gives everyone some hope for future endeavours and how they can get there by using their strengths.”

“I thought the homework aids were a great way to include family and to share.”

“There was plenty of room for the teacher to expand and bring activities into daily classroom learning.”

“Programme needs a punchy, short opening activity or video that sets the daily aim quickly. We could definitely have done with a little more time some weeks.”

“I felt the programme was a great method of improving kids perception of themselves.”

Teacher Observations

“Seeing a talent in a child for the first time was exciting, it re-affirmed what I already knew about a few students but there were a few surprises.”

“Making the Korowai (Cloak) was a cool way of setting the treaty and safe environment for the classroom we kept it hanging in our room in the centre of the class until the end of the year and many students referred to it.”

“I felt the programme was easily adaptable and could be extended/adapted to incorporate an even stronger cultural twist should you choose.”

“Ability to engage the students in team building was fantastic, all the adult facilitators formed great connections with the students.”
“The time factor didn’t allow for an indepth reflection of the previous session and a solid summation at the end.”

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Throughout this chapter, indicators of student engagement have been shown through the various data gathering methods applied to this research. Following, a window in classroom activity is provided once again through the use of photography and the expression of additional facilitator and teacher insights.

I observed that as the programme progressed, so did student engagement. Class brainstorming sessions initially displayed the same three or four sets of hands, however I noticed not only did more hands arise as programme progressed, but students who had displayed more confidence initially answering questions, began encouraging their peers to participate. As students began to recognise talents in others and to be surprised in the common strengths they shared, increased engagement resulted as students began to encourage one another to follow the Lighthouse motto and ‘Dare to dream, choose to shine.’
Further comments on student engagement follow.

The facilitators said:

“Initial engagement can always depend on the class mood however I noticed at the end of each session they were always keen to carry on.”

“Students were keen to talk about all they were doing and had achieved in Lighthouse.”

“The students were engaged most of the time with positive conversations that were centred around the programme content.”

The teacher said,

“The variety of activities – physical or creative, engaged the students throughout.”

On week five of the Lighthouse Programme the school associate principal and senior team leader visited the classroom, observing the Lighthouse activities and talking to the students around what they were doing. STL commended the class for the effort she could see they were making in their ‘active’ engagement in small group discussion. Commenting directly to students on the lovely atmosphere in their classroom, she also praised the positive classroom conversations that were occurring and the way students were encouraging one another. These

**Figure 25:** This photo depicts the artwork of student #723.

When asked about her design she responded, “I have always been shy and scared of doing team things, cause I worry I’m not good enough. Lighthouse made me realise I have got talents and my plate is to remind me, that like a flower in the sun, from now on, I’m going to choose to try and open up more and try things I have found hard.” (Future Thinker was this students identified top talent theme).
Observations were re-enforced again when the school principal and deputy principal attended the Room 11 celebration and certificate presentation at the Lighthouse Programme conclusion.

**CONCLUSION**

This chapter provided an analysis of the data gathered during the Lighthouse Programme research. Shifts in student academic self-perception from programme beginning to end are evidenced and data has provided opportunity for themes to be identified through student response and facilitator and teacher observation. As the Lighthouse Programme’s connection to talent identification and exploration progressed, the importance of Lighthouse’s method of ensuring classroom safety for learners was identified as student confidence, collaboration and engagement increased. Issues identified within this chapter will now be discussed further in chapter six, which draws data themes together alongside argument introduced in Chapter Three’s literature review.
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses findings that have been drawn from the data gathered throughout this research. As various methods were used and data was analysed, the strong student narratives converged together to signal various significant themes. These themes from the data, create a window into the lives of Randwick Park School students and provide insight into what has until now, remained unsaid within the classroom around student perceptions of talent and ability identification.

Within this chapter, the provision of this new window, allows research aims to be met and insight to be provided into the impact of messages within the classroom. Subsequently, the power of what students say to themselves and the question driving this research, “Does the Lighthouse Programme, through talent identification and exploration, assist in improving a student’s academic self-concept” is answered.

HOW IMPORTANT IS A “TEAM” ENVIRONMENT IN THE CLASSROOM?

In the beginning: Room 11 reflections

The selection of Room 11 to participate in the Lighthouse Programme was predominantly driven by various leadership perceptions that this classroom had issues around cohesiveness and working together. Early facilitator observations noted conversations (especially in small groups) included constant “put downs” and body language indicative of disharmony within several class groupings. Although students were quick to praise their teacher, for whom many had a definite fondness, student dialogue indicated in the early stages of the programme that friendships and student interaction was in the form of very distinct groups and that there was a solid dividing line within the classroom between the girls and the boys.

Here are the responses when students were asked by facilitators to describe the learning environment within room 11.

“We don’t talk to the boys at all they just muck around and make fun of us. It would be better if we all got on better.” Student # 701

“Miss V is cool, I like this class and being with my friends. I just hang out with them, the girls do different stuff.” Student #703
“Sometimes the class is quite loud but I get on with the boys because I’m sporty.”  

“IT’s loud and hard to concentrate sometimes. We stay at our own tables with our own friends.”  

“I think the girls are sometimes mean, they say mean things to people and that’s why the boys and girls fight sometimes.”  

“Our teacher is cool, the boys are stupid though, lots of them muck around, us girls don’t really get along with them.”  

“I just hang out with my friends the boys don’t like us so we don’t play with them.”

These are only a few of the comments made during the initial Lighthouse week small group sessions around classroom safety. At facilitator debriefing after this session a common theme was identified that many students were not participating in discussion as they did not wish to look stupid or be made fun of especially by members of the opposite gender (this was the case from the point of view of both boys and girls). Student reflections appeared to indicate that many had reached an undisclosed general consensus that it was better to remain silent. This was distinctly apparent in the initial three Lighthouse sessions where the same few hands were raised during class discussion time.

Goethals, Messick and Allsion (as cited in Hattie & Timperley, 2007) state that, “students do a lot of “in the head” comparisons” (p.97) from feedback provided from teachers or peers. Hattie & Timperley (2007) notes that this feedback is often selected, interpreted and/or biased but it can influence a student’s involvement or time investment in certain situations or individuals.

A LIGHTHOUSE AS A PATHWAY TO CHANGE

The lighthouse metaphor

The Lighthouse Programme invitation to explore talent begins with the introduction of a Lighthouse metaphor, used to represent the students themselves. The purpose of this metaphor is to give students an object that is representative of themselves on which to focus on. This enables students to step outside themselves and reflect on their weekly learning journey from the fresh perspective of each various stage of building a Lighthouse. The intent of this is to encourage students to become the reflective critical eye to their own learning processes. The use of a Lighthouse to represent each student also enables students to make
the inner comparisons they are inclined to do (Hattie and Timperley, 2007) in a way that externalises the ‘characteristics’ of an individual, rather than the person directly.

For most students the use of the Lighthouse analogy was easy to follow, however there were three individuals who required more one-to-one dialogue in order to help them grasp the concept. A predominant issue of implementation of these strengths-based education processes into an existing school structure is the strict time constraints. An obstacle on more than one occasion, this is something that the class teacher suggested could be addressed through the creation of a Lighthouse teacher’s guide around how to effectively implement daily reflection of Lighthouse processes into classroom routines.

The class teacher commented:

“The analogy of the Lighthouse worked through each week is very strong and easy for the students to connect with. It also gives them time to grasp the concept of using talents and something visual to refer back to.” (Teacher Evaluation Response).

The use of metaphor is frequently encouraged as a tool in teaching, learning and counselling (Durie, 1998; Geldard, Yin Foo, Coller & Shakespeare-Finch, 2009; Pitcher & Akerlind, 2009). Utilising existing knowledge as a scaffold to introduce or illustrate a new concept (Pitcher & Akerlind, 2009), the above quote indicates how the use of metaphor encourages reciprocity within the classroom, helping teachers/facilitators to teach and learners to learn. This is not a new concept for Maori. Durie (1998) and Hemara (2000) suggest that metaphor use is traditionally relevant and has been an effective way Maori has introduced and expanded learning within their curricula for years. Hemara’s (2000) findings show, that for Maori learners, the use of a visual metaphor, aids in building an informal environment and creates a feeling of familiarity with what is being taught.

Throughout the programme, continual connections were made to the use of the Lighthouse as a descriptor to student journey. These reflections varied in nature, involving small group discussion, class discussion, activities and worksheets that all linked talent to the Lighthouse metaphor. Following, photo (figure 26 & 27, p. 112) examples highlight this process.
The Lighthouse Programme promotion of talent

The Lighthouse Programme processes are informed by the belief that “simply focusing on individual strengths is not enough to liberate people from oppressive realities” (McCashen, 2005, p. 2), and thus it is not about filling students with false confidence and suggestions that areas of weakness should be ignored (Fox, 2008). Lighthouse connects to Erikson’s (1959) and Dweck’s (1999) understanding that how children perceive their intelligence and ability is what matters when strengthening academic self-concept and encouraging student development and motivation. The programme places emphasis on building student confidence in their ability, through the recognition of talent as an essential support or “building block” to overcoming obstacles or reaching future goals. This approach to talent as a “tool” that can be chosen to aid development is the essence of the Lighthouse Programme and is achieved through various class activities and weekly worksheets.
THE POTENTIAL OF PHOTOVOICE AND MALS AS IDENTIFIERS OF STUDENT INTERNAL MESSAGES

Wang and Burris (1997) propose that Photovoice provides researchers working with children a deeper level of insight into individual cognitive process, as long as those walking alongside students provide informed guidance, ensure that the research environment is safe and display a high level of belief in student competence. My findings show as Strack et al. (2004) suggest, that the Photovoice process provided an excellent means of building rapport and acted like an “ice breaker,” sending the message immediately to students that I cared and wanted to know what they had to say and was keen to encourage a connection in a way that was creative and interesting.

An issue remarked by the class teacher, is the difficulty in understanding what is ‘driving’ student behaviour or disengagement. The data gathered through the use of Photovoice and MALS, aids in identifying where possible negative internal narratives may be coming from by going directly to the student in an inconspicuous and non-threatening way. This method also gives students the opportunity to safely view for themselves an externalised image of their inner thoughts and feelings. Observing this process unfold, I noted that for several students such as #702, #703, #706, #710, #713, #718 and #720 (identified in chapter five), new awareness emerged even as they were discussing their choices with me. This encourages me to include a photographic exercise in future programmes during week four of Lighthouse, as a tool to aid student identification of beliefs shaping their behaviour that they may be unaware of.

THE VALUE OF STUDENT SELF-TALK

The first aim of this research is to empower the student voice around talent and ability in such a way that increased understanding results around messages students are receiving in the classroom and any issues in student academic self-concept are identified. As this chapter examines the internal dialogue of the students, a connection begins to emerge. Results show how student cognitive processes react to classroom messages around ability and talent and how negative self perceptions of ability have the potential to threaten motivation (Dweck, 2003) and the development of a student’s healthy academic self-concept (Burden, 2005).
Identifying messages around talent and ability

As students began their journey through Lighthouse, the existence of student self-talk was evident in their photo and quotation introduction. Without having to enter into any long-winded discussion detrimental to the process (Geldard & Geldard, 2002), the students immediately embraced the idea of expressing themselves through photography. Walking alongside various groups, I noticed most students barely interacted with me, appearing caught up in their own thoughts and conversations. Five minutes into the task however, one student came to me and said, “Can you please help me find a snail?” This student had immediately connected in her mind to a visual representation of how she saw herself. Although we did not find the snail she was hoping for, we did locate a turtle figurine in my office which the student deemed appropriate in getting this message across, “I am a slow learner, it makes me sad” (Student #709).

Strack et al. (2004) found that a challenge of Photovoice is the varying time it takes students to identify their image. Cautionary to this, I allowed half an hour, expecting one or two students to struggle with the concept. Observing as several students walked directly to an area, appearing to know exactly what they were going to photograph, the majority took their time and 3-4 shots before deciding which photo best depicted what they wanted to say. After 20 minutes, all students had returned their photo in hand. I had indicated students could discuss their images with others on returning back to base if they wished, however the majority of students wished to show their photo to me alone.

In one instance, a student indicated he was unsure as to why he had been drawn to the particular photo he wanted me to use. When I spoke with him further around what he saw when he looked at it, his response, “he looks lonely and like he wants to fly but can’t,” resulted in further quiet reflections. It was during this time Student #702 realised the photo depicted a feeling he could very much relate to as he found himself often looking around the class and wondering why everyone else appeared to be able to do easily what he found often difficult. Realising that the quality of this internal dialogue can originate from debilitating early home, school or cultural experiences, the nature of this students reflections and quote align with Purkey’s (2000) suggestion that a child’s school environment is “the single most important force in determining what students say to themselves, about themselves and their abilities” (p.19) and thus, influences their moving forward.
This chapter now looks closely at the before and after results of the student Photovoice exercise, linking themes identified through data gathered with relevant literature review discussions as outlined in Chapter Three.

**Student focus on weakness**

As I viewed the photos, I noticed several students were focused predominantly on negative feelings and the obstacles they saw in relation to their learning. Bandura (as cited in Purkey, 2000) suggests this focus on obstacles can make learning difficult as students who tell themselves they are not up to the challenge of coping with the current demands and expectations placed on them, “tend to dwell on their perceived deficiencies and view potential challenges and difficulties as far more difficult than they really are” (p.19). This choice to focus on barriers becomes apparent in the following students:

“*Learning is like lots of different obstacles to get over, I don’t always feel confident.*” Student #704

“*Learning is difficult but I try to be confident.*” Student #711

“*My writing makes my learning hard it’s like trying to get over fences.*” Student #712

“*I always feel angry and frustrated with learning.*” Student #720

Synder et al. (1997) and Burden (2005) found that when students focus on the barriers they encounter around their learning they no longer consider ways of coping or establishing strategies that may help them to move forward. Freire (1989) believed that it is through learning to question the answers and not just answer the questions that a student learns liberation and autonomy. The Lighthouse Programme method of encouraging teacher and student reciprocity aligns with Freire’s (1989) findings and Hattie and Timperley’s (2007) suggestion, that teachers can aid this process of learning to learn through opportunities that encourage the provision of feedback and clarification of goals moving forward. Both Rogers (1951) and Vygotsky’s (1978) theories validate the importance of this process, adding it is through the working through of problems and obstacles collaboratively that individuals create new pathways for improved understanding, improve their cognition and subsequently achieve developmental growth.
FOCUS ON TALENT AS AN INDICATOR OF STUDENT CONFIDENCE

As an environment of safety was established and students began their journey through the Lighthouse Programme, week two began to delve more deeply into the concept of talents. Class and group discussion unpacked the idea around what defines talent and students were excited to try Clifton’s Youth Strength Explorer talent assessment to see what it had to say about them. Gallup had indicated this tool takes approximately 15-20 minutes to complete and this had been proved true when I had introduced the assessment to the Year Eight advisory. However this process in a Year Six and Seven class environment took much longer as student ability to read and understand the questions varied extensively. The various stages of student cognitive understanding resulted in the active participation of the facilitators as guides to the process and meant this assessment for most students, took 45 minutes to complete.

Reflection on Clifton Youth Strengths Explorer results indicated that confidence was a talent theme that only two students identified with and one of those students, student #714, expressed she did not feel this talent or strength applied to her. The low appearance of this talent theme was also indicative of the earlier informal Year Eight student advisory experience, as not one student had identified with confidence as a talent theme. So is this finding indicative of a possible school issue around student self belief?

Although Gallup (2006) acknowledged that the top three themes can vary depending on various environments, their Clifton Youth Strengths Explorer Technical Report identifies initially eighteen themes had been piloted for the tool creation. After further testing with American students, the eighteen were reduced to the most consistent student indicators, thus confidence is one of those resulting top 10 themes. While it could be said the conspicuous absence of this talent theme signifies a difference in student dynamic centered around country of origin, lack of confidence may also indicate that these Randwick Park students may not believe in themselves or their ability to be successful in future endeavours, signifying an underlying reason for subsequent Year Seven levels of increased student disengagement at this school.

Bandura’s (as cited in Purkey, 2000) findings support this possibility. He suggests that negative self-talk results in levels of confidence so low that students begin to discourage themselves from facing day-to-day school life, disengaging through various means, including
acts of avoidance and choosing to shift their focus to more pleasant or enjoyable things. While it may be argued that various environmental influences could produce such a result, the internal voices of students brought out into the open with Photovoice shows a distinct lack of confidence related to their academic self concept and directly indicated in their photo, quote and correlating low MALS score. Dialogues displaying these low levels of academic confidence are indicated below.

“I don’t always feel confident.” (#704) MALS 68
“I like to blend in.” (#707) MALS 57
“I am a slow learner.” (#709) MALS 51
“I don’t know….I wish I could sparkle.” (#710) MALS 62
“I try to be confident.” (#711) MALS 55
“I want to zoom out of the classroom.” (#715) MALS 57

Is academic confidence important to future student success or motivation? Both Purkey (2000) and Burden (2005) suggest a student’s “inner whispers” must display a level of self-belief and confidence that they have what it takes to move forward in order for them to develop and achieve any level of future success. Purkey (2000) points out that classroom success is almost impossible when a student’s head is filled with thoughts of self-doubt and pessimism. When taking a look at the community of Photovoice responses prior to the Lighthouse Programme, a noticeable pattern is identified as many students (such as the ones below) indicate their focus is centred on what they feel they lack. For several students dialogue speaks of perceptions around ability, levels of confidence and identification of roadblocks to learning as indicated by several examples below.

“I’m okay as a learner.” (#701)
“... I don’t always feel confident.” (#704)
“I’m a slow learner, it makes me sad.” (#709)
“My writing makes my learning hard.” (#712)

When looking closer at quotes for student #707 and #715 self-talk and corresponding low self-confidence may not have emerged tangibly within the classroom environment, however
student inner dialogue indicates messages around their learning capabilities are already beginning to manifest in thoughts of avoidance.

“I like to blend in so no one notices if I don’t say much.” (#707)

“I want to zoom out of the classroom and do something else.” (#715)

Offering an alternative perspective on confidence, Dunning (2005) and Clabaugh (2005) suggest there are risks in building student confidence through repetitious praise and focus on strengths. Believing that individuals tend to overestimate their own ability, Dunning (2005) proposes that overconfidence can occur when excessive focus is placed on the attainment of confidence to the detriment of recognising limitations. The implication here for the Lighthouse Programme and education professionals is the necessary recognition that building student confidence is not through false praise or continual repetition of talent identifiers, but is in teachers/facilitators taking the guiding motivational role that Hattie and Timperley (2007) would suggest. It is through teacher commitment and encouragement to “harness student energy” (Anderson, 2005, p. 188) through strengths-based teaching that Anderson believes students will become “more confident, optimistic, and focused as they achieve through their strengths and attain higher goals” (p.189).

Recognising talent and empowering choice

Results from the Clifton Youth Strengths Explorer talent assessment provided the Lighthouse programme week two with a solid platform to introduce the idea of talent. As each student read their talent theme report (Appendix M), they were instructed to highlight areas they felt applied to them. While there were occasions when students felt certain themes did not apply, fifteen students out of twenty felt the report descriptors fitted them perfectly. Subsequently, these reports opened up discussion around similarities and differences within the class around talent and several students were surprised to find they had themes in common. From an observational standpoint these talent conversations began the process of breaking down of barriers existing within the classroom, especially those apparent between the boys and the girls.

The student with the lowest academic self-concept score, student #709 (MALS score 51), indicated clearly through data the feelings she associated with learning. Correspondingly, the teacher had already identified this female student as someone with low levels of confidence, noting that this student chose to sit quietly removed from many class activities, found making
friendships difficult and struggled in many areas of learning. Choosing to consider this child from a strengths perspective the teacher also noted, although shy, this student is often one of the first people to offer help if something needs to be organised in the classroom. This observation was supported when student #709’s top three strengths were identified as Organiser, Competing and Caring. In week four of the Lighthouse Programme when beliefs around talent were considered in more depth, this student identified through Lighthouse worksheet and conversations with her teacher who was observing, the difficulties in being a student who feels she cannot keep up with others in the classroom environment. Consequently, once the teacher had verbalised to student #709 what she had noticed around the student’s talents, a conversation developed that appeared to empower a subsequent shift. During week six when group discussion was on support systems, this student quietly confided, “I always get it (learning) wrong” as the reason she had been reluctant to share in any discussions adding after discussions with her teacher, “I feel better, knowing my talents mean there are some things I can do.” When final measures were done, this student showed the largest shift in academic self-concept score (MALS 71) choosing to focus on her talent and stating alongside her photo, “I love Lighthouse ‘cause I love art. I helped decorate our class Lighthouse wall” (Student #709). This student’s distinctly different tone indicates her choice to focus on talent and results in a noticeable shift, as self-talk moves to accentuate what she can do in place of what she cannot. As this discussion now moves on to consider collaboration and the move from focusing on weakness to strengths, it seems results such as this indicate the more significant changes were present in the students who needed it the most.

Talent as a foundation for collaboration

Working towards a more unified classroom is a process that takes time (Gordon & Crabtree, 2006). The Lighthouse Programme activities were designed in such a way that students had opportunities to work individually and as a team. The facilitators and I nurtured this idea of class team throughout the programme, reinforcing that individual talents work best when they are combined with the diverse talents of others. One facilitator observed that students who were initially displaying low levels of confidence began to participate more as they were encouraged through feedback around how they could use their talents to participate in challenges. As Week Eight of the programme tackled obstacles, students were encouraged to consider how their talents could help them move forward to overcome an obstacle they were
facing. It was apparent in this exercise that students were clearly ‘getting it.’ As students began to take their focus off striving to compete academically and instead onto their strengths, Week Eight lesson identified they were more positive around their capability to move forward with their learning. Two students commented:

“*My talent of caring has shown me that I can help others in class who are struggling. I realise now I can also get help from others who know something better than I do.*” (Student #723)

“I always thought competing was something I always had to do against others, now I see that I can compete against myself to get to my next learning goal.” (Student #708)

We ensured that small group discussion remained as single sex groups to encourage safety around levels of sharing (Gray, 2002), however, session team-building activities involved mixed groups made up of various ethnicities and gender to work towards building relationships and to equally spread the boy’s strength for outdoor pursuits.

The outdoor team-building was always approached with extensive enthusiasm as students were provided with opportunities to identify individual talents that could help them and their team complete a challenge. In week two, completion of the Clifton Youth Strengths Explorer assessment had identified that 17% of the students in room 11 connected with competition as a talent in their top three talent themes. This result correlates with Gallup (2010) findings that competition regularly appeared within the top three themes of Clifton Youth Strengths Explorer various test pilots.

It is important to recognise that competition and collaboration do not need to be diametrically opposed. Dweck (2003) asserts that as a child grows “they may develop many conceptions that are potentially relevant to their motivation” (p.14). The topic of competition came up frequently in facilitator and teacher de-briefings after Lighthouse sessions as it became apparent both boys and girls often requested (and enjoyed) an element of competition to be added to the weekly team-building activities.

This suggestion from students proved to be a great motivator towards encouraging students to work more cohesively. As the facilitators and I built on this competitive element threaded into the team events, week six involved a series of challenges designed to aid students to look within their group for different leaders that would take charge of each challenge. These challenges ranged from activities that required strength to activities that required artistic flair,
code breaking and a good memory. The Lighthouse Programme evaluation indicated clearly this opportunity for fun, competition and collaboration was one both boys and girls enjoyed immensely as exampled below.

“The team building activities were cool, it made us work together.”

“We became like a class team.”

“My favourite thing was getting to do the team building outside and being supportive of one another.”

During the course of the programme students gained the understanding they could always choose how or whether or not they would use their talents. As the programme progressed, many students added other talents to their Clifton assessment as they gave recognition to other skills and strengths they felt were equally valuable. This language of talents gave the students common ground to speak and a different way to consider each other, correspondingly, this dialogue shift to a strengths-based tone resulted in improved class cohesiveness. The below comment from student #711 showed a distinct shift. Entering the class as a refugee whose family had experienced much hardship, he had found fitting in and learning English was proving to be very difficult. After completing the Lighthouse Programme the predominant theme identified in this student was a move from feeling unsafe and isolated to feeling safe enough to be included. As well as his Photovoice shots and quotes indicating a move from isolation to connection, the narration from his final Lighthouse evaluation also shows an increased level of safety is present.

“I liked that everyone got along and there were no mean comments.”

Quotes like the one above may indicate the subtle difference that McCashen (2005) has suggested can occur when the strength of competition is not used to gain “power over” someone but used to attain “power with” another.

**Talent collaboration as a promoter of positive feedback**

“For youths to succeed and fulfil their maximum potential it is essential that their assets, capabilities, talents and strengths are recognised and opportunities are given for them to work together.” (Gallup, 2006, p. 183)
One of the most noticeable changes within Room 11 was the distinct change in the atmosphere when students were given a safe platform through Lighthouse to identify their talents, and use them as a way of getting to know one another.

As the Lighthouse Programme aims were met, the class treaty and group activities provided students with opportunities to safely interact and to give and receive feedback and encouragement to their peers in a way that was collaborative and unthreatening. Miss V (teacher) noticed that student language had made a clear shift as the word “talent” and understanding of it became more of a habit. Dunning (2005) expresses concern that ‘habitual or repetitive’ language can sway individuals from making clear decisions in their everyday life. However, the Lighthouse Programme’s approach clearly acknowledges that talents are not the answer to everything, and guides students to see talent as an added tool in their “kete” that can be used to support their weaknesses, overcome obstacles and reach future goals.

As language around talents became fluid in their daily classroom life Miss V observed it expanded out of the classroom into student increased acceptance of one another. She noticed the division between boys and girls was less apparent as they worked together in class brainstorming activities and subjects like physical education. This was confirmed through the following student evaluation comments around what they liked about Lighthouse.

“That the boys and girls got to know one another better, usually we don’t really talk much”.
“getting to know the girls in my class better”.

The presentation of a “more collaborative and supportive” atmosphere Miss V felt, was most apparent in the group discussion and decision to make me a tapestry at the end of the programme. The students themselves brainstormed this idea as a way of each student having a voice in something that described what Lighthouse meant for them. They also chose to weave it together (in a way similar to the class treaty) in a beautifully unified way.

This increase in unity, displayed a new level of empathy and willingness to share amongst students. As the programme progressed, facilitators noticed students began to interact out of their group encouraging others to achieve the aims and verbally supporting at times when task was difficult for some. Two such occasions were recorded by a facilitator.

Student 706 - “Miss, can I please go and help .....(student #711), he finds reading hard and he looks like he is having trouble with the worksheet.”
It is through the nurture of a collaborative environment that Lighthouse Programmes aims are achieved. Following are two photos depicting two occasions where programme activities are designed to aid relationship building, reciprocity and learning.

**Figure 28:** Photo shows a team building exercise called “The road to success”. Students are given tasks that require they support, encourage and problem solve. Here the class teacher cheers on with words of support and a helping hand.

**Figure 29:** In this task, one student takes the role of critical observer to provide constructive and encouraging feedback that benefits the process and aids group task accomplishment.

**LIGHTHOUSE EVALUATION**

Co-designed by the Year Eight Student Advisory, the Lighthouse evaluation form provided a way for students to share their perceptions of the programme (meeting the third aim of this research). For many students time was an issue. Some students felt the programme at times had been rushed and as mentioned earlier in this chapter, this was at times indeed an issue. A resounding 90% of students in Room 11 felt the Lighthouse Programme had helped them to get to know their peers better. Shifting from a place of initial class division, the most
Prominent student suggestion for programme improvement was that team building sessions be included every week in future programmes. This request supports teacher and facilitator feedback that noted a distinct shift towards seeking opportunities for collaboration about halfway through the programme. Following are quotes around teacher observations after programme completion.

“I noticed that not only had the classroom atmosphere improved after Lighthouse, but many students displayed a level of caring for one another that had not been there before. This continued on until the end of the year with several students indicating they did not want to change classes next year.”

“After our class camp was cancelled due to lack of funds, we decided at the end of the Lighthouse Programme to organise a trip away for two nights camping. If someone had asked me prior to the programme I would have said only ten or so students would go, however as a class, we organised and fundraised together and as a result 21 students (and several parents) attended the camp. One of the Lighthouse facilitators, Matua Sunia came with us, the kids had a blast.”

(Miss V, Teacher)

Describing the classroom language now as “universal,” Miss V suggested that the language of talents provided a common ground for students to meet and discuss ability in an non-threatening way. She believes that “talent” provides a great point of reference for goal-setting conversations and immediately sets the tone for teacher and student collaboration to be strength-based and encouraging. Goals for Term Three for this classroom were set at the beginning and twice a week reflection time was offered in class to see how students were going in using their talents to move forward. Areas for improvement were identified by students who began to look at all the talents, skills and supports they had at their disposal to reach learning goals.

Student final evaluation of the Lighthouse Programme showed 85% of the students agreed, or strongly agreed, that recognising and identifying talents could help them reach goals and dreams, showing that the majority of the students understood the reasoning and relevancy of the Lighthouse metaphor. Looking to the future, students were asked to express their interest in a possible Lighthouse Leadership programme next year. A resounding 95% indicated they wished to participate in an opportunity such as this.
From a researcher standpoint, the data gathered throughout this research has provided indicators of programme success through measures chosen by me. However, I believe the greatest evaluation indicator of programme success was actually chosen by the participants. The ‘tapestry of talents’ provides a colourful, striking description of the effectiveness of the Lighthouse Programme. Student comments woven into the back indicate the programme meant different things to different students. Several examples of this personal, diverse collection of student view now follow (student numbers connect to chapter five).

“I now use my talent by choosing the right pathway, thank you.” #723

“To Whaea, thank you for teaching me how to hold my head up high and show my talent” #714

“I use my talent of competing to help me work hard in the challenges I enter.” Student #708

“I use my talent of being a future thinker and dream of what I want to be when I am older. I am going to be an artist.” #715

“I liked learning to be a leader in Lighthouse.” #705

“I use my competing talent in sports to encourage others.” #713

“Thank you Whaea for helping me use my talents to make new friends.” #707

“I use my talent for caring for others to help when they are feeling sad.” Student #721

“I feel my talent inside me when I am helping others it makes me feel warm.” Student #722

“I use my talent of relating to help others learn maths.” #703

**ACADEMIC SELF-CONCEPT**

**The move from deficits to strengths**

A predominant aim of this research was to identify possible issues around academic self concept, therefore, this thesis now explores data gathered from Photovoice, MALS and programme evaluations, connecting themes with the theories underpinning Lighthouse Programme. The degree of insight provided by the student findings is what informs this body of research and thus, the following table gathers student voice again, re-assembling student MALS data to form a class collective voice to aid in identifying correlations.
While not all students had a rise in their MALS score, the shift in the tone of student photos and quotes from a deficit focus to thinking based on competence or strength is indicated by the Yellow highlight and pertains to 19 out of 20 students. The students who did experience a decrease in MALS score, remained within 3 points of the MALS average of 71, interestingly the photographic depictions from these students appear to speak with a new level of insight and honesty as the below examples reflect.

“My teacher helps me reach my goals at school.”  
Student #701

“Learning is okay when it’s fun, usually it makes me feel angry.”  
Student #702

“I’ve realised I’m good at some things more than others...”  
Student #712

Solberg (1996) and Matthews (2001) suggest that adults working with children need to be aware there is danger in children conforming their responses to meet adult expectations. In a research such as this Gray (2002) proposes that the level of involvement by children will only

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### Table 4

Randwick Park School, Room 11 Student MALS results before and after the Lighthouse Programme, 2012.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Number</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>MALS Before</th>
<th>MALS After</th>
<th>Change MALS score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>701</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>68</td>
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<tr>
<td>702</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>72</td>
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<td>73</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>709</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>60</td>
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<td>+20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>710</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>B</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>+8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>724</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**KEY:**  
**YELLOW:** Indicates students whose Photovoice reflections moved from deficit to strength.  
**GREEN:** Indicates students whose MALS score was very low - 65 or below.  
**TURQUOISE:** Indicates students whose MALS score was well above average – 80
be to the level that each child feels is safe for them. Irwin (1994) suggests that often children are more likely to provide reliable information when they feel the environment is safe enough for them to share honestly and/or when they realise the information they are talking about is relevant to their own interests or experiences. While building rapport (Geldard & Geldard, 2001) was imperative to the encouragement of student open response in a situation such as this, observations made throughout each child’s journey by facilitators and teacher provided visual and verbal re-enforcement to the changes identified in Photovoice and MALS.

The tabled data above shows that the Lighthouse Programme introduction of dialogue around talents has had a positive effect on both student self-talk and motivation as several students such as #701, #704, #708, #710, #712 (reflected in chapter five) speak directly of increased motivation to move forward positively into their future. Dweck (2003) suggests introducing change within a classroom in the form of expanded thinking around what constitutes as talent, intelligence or ability can result in a corresponding change in student motivation and this would appear to be the case. Concurring with Erikson’s (1959) belief that messages around intelligence, ability and talent begin to have motivational value during 10-13 years of age Dweck (2003) noted there is a point where student self talk begins to alter behaviour patterns as positive alternative cognitive pathways are built and student engagement at an increased level is ignited. This move towards increased motivation around learning may also be an indicator as to the deeper insight and level of honesty provided by students who initially were unsure around how much of themselves to share.

**Myself as a learner (MALS)**

Graphed results from the MALS questionnaires clearly indicate an increase in academic self-concept scores for 70% of students participating in the research pilot. With both girls mean scores (68) and boys mean score (69) initially coming in under Burden’s (2009) standardised mean score of 71 there was a resulting improvement in average mean scores for both groupings, 5% and 6% consecutively over the nine week Lighthouse Programme pilot. Although results noted for six students, a drop of +/- 6 this outcome is well within Burdens (2009) sample standard deviation of +/- 10.5 and as a result one can have a degree of confidence that this scale is a reliable measure of academic self-concept.

A clear finding that has emerged from comparing student photo and narrative results with that of the MALS questionnaire is that how students think and feel about themselves matters. As
it is these cognitive processes and feelings that drive student self-talk the MALS questionnaire adds credence to Photovoice as an effective measure of ascertaining student internal narratives. While MALS does not profess to be 100% infallible, it acts as a reliable guide to exposing any possible issues around student confidence and capability within the classroom.

**The significance of feedback on student internal dialogue**

Recognition of the power of external and internal dialogue is supported by Bandura et al. (1996), Rogoff (1990), Erikson (1959), Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Vygotsky’s (1978) suggestion that language is one of the most essential tools to a child’s healthy development. Vygotsky (1978) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) found that as children learn to speak and interact with those around them, a reciprocal process of learning occurs resulting in a subsequent impact to the establishment of their cognitive pathways. As children consider both positive and negative messages received from their experiences alongside others, their understandings become internalised as a distinct shift in their language processes begins to move from focus outwardly, to a more internally driven narration of inner speech (Dweck, 1999, 2003; Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). It is in this shift to inward self-talk that much of what students think and feel begins to remain hidden.

The difficulty for education professionals is in figuring out how to gain insight into student internal understandings in order to aid their development. However it is here that the research of Hattie and Timperly (2007) on the power of feedback may provide a pathway for change.

Hattie and Timperly (2007) suggest that as teachers guide student learning through aiding appropriate goal setting and asking relevant open ended questions (as outlined in the literature review), they can then “generate a learning environment in which students develop self-regulation and error detection skills” (p.87). Hattie (2003) proposes that “quality” teacher feedback aids each student to build effective learning strategies and thus cognitively develop further. The process this feedback generates is reciprocal as Freire (1989) and Alexander (2004) would suggest, with student responses equally contributing to the learning process as they share their perspectives with the teacher. Collaborative and essential, the “dialogue empowers young people to take charge of their own learning, through respectful relationships and development of critical thinking skills” (Alexander, 2004, p.5).
Inherent to the nature of the Lighthouse Programme, is its intent to provide more equal opportunity for effective dialogue and reciprocal feedback to be established between teacher and student and between peers. Each week opportunities are given through worksheets and discussion for students to externalise in various creative and safe ways their understanding of messages heard from others and to “actively listen” and respond with respect to shared peer/teacher experiences.

As Lighthouse weekly sessions progressed, teacher and facilitators gained insight into levels of student disengagement, self-handicapping and/or levels of hopelessness around individual learning situations. These were largely symptomatic of student beliefs around their own ability, inherited parental or cultural beliefs around learning or consequential of beliefs around learning difficulties or other environmental factors (Snyder et al, 1997; Thomas & Gadbois, 2007).

Having already decided to choose an alternate behaviour option as an excuse to get out of learning, student #713 photographed an upside down Bart Simpson stuck in a tree and quoted, “I’m like Bart, I’m sometimes naughty because learning is boring.” Completing the Lighthouse Programme’s Week Three worksheet around values and beliefs, I used specific open-ended questions as Hattie (2003) would suggest to encourage this student following further reflection, “I hate learning it’s too hard, I can’t be bothered asking cause usually I don’t get it so it’s easier not to care. I’d rather be outside anyway doing sports stuff”. While this opened up further opportunity for me as a facilitator to communicate with this student, it is interesting his MALS score initially indicated 76, a relatively strong academic self-perception that just didn’t seem to correlate with his response. I was not surprised to find at the end of the programme his MALS returned much lower as his interaction in team-building and group activities had begun to indicate an increased level of self-acceptance and safety in the classroom space. This possibly influenced his more honest response to the MALS questionnaire.

Student #713’s statement indicates a distinct choice by this student to disengage from learning due to levels of frustration or hopelessness around his capabilities. Also reflecting diminishing hope is student #710.

“I don’t know how I see myself I just wish I could sparkle like this beautiful unicorn.”
(Student #710)
In this instance the student indicated a clear understanding of the Photovoice task given, revealing they did not know why they chose this photo but then, on reflection actually defines the photo very succinctly. Remembering that the question was, “How do you see yourself as a learner”, shows that this young person’s wishful thinking alludes to something they feel may be beyond their grasp, choosing a mythical horse to show considerable weight has been given to the illusive task that is learning. The corresponding MALS score for this student of 62 reinforces the view that there are issues around academic self-concept present. It is interesting to note that although the final reflection through MALS resulted in this student’s academic self-concept score almost remaining the same at 60, during the Photovoice task she asked specifically if she could be in her chosen photo alongside the quote, “Now that I see my talents I feel like maybe I could fly” (Student #710). The teacher observed that since the programme has ended this student’s stories and dialogue has utilised the word talent on several occasions. This supports the idea that this is very much a concept that students can grasp and understand.

Reflecting back to awareness gained through the Year Eight student advisory, the importance of identifying the negative narratives of students as soon as possible is highlighted through the voices of the male students within the Advisory as they strongly resonate with many students at the Year Six and Seven level. What stood out to me about the Year Eight Advisory was that the negativity was much harder to shift as messages students are saying to themselves appear to be a lot more embedded at this year level. The good news is, that after participating in the Lighthouse Programme 19 out of 20 students indicated agree or strongly agree on their Lighthouse evaluation questionnaire that they felt more hopeful about their future after the programme. This has since been reinforced as students from this class have now moved on and have continued to maintain their involvement in the development of the newly-formed Year Seven and Eight Lighthouse leadership team.
CONCLUSION

What students say to themselves matters.

As this chapter has progressed, discussing themes identified through the Lighthouse Programme, a picture has emerged through student, facilitator and teacher responses and evaluations that highlight the effectiveness of this programme as one that encourages reciprocal feedback, reflection and change. The Lighthouse Programme’s strengths-based approach embraces the New Zealand Curriculum Inclusion Principle, valuing individuality and removing barriers to presence, participation and achievement.

This chapter has outlined that the Lighthouse Programme provides an effective platform to externalise student ‘inner speak’ in order for teacher/facilitators to understand their students better. However, it also revealed how this newly acquired knowledge brings with it further responsibility for education professionals to understand the power of student negative self-talk on academic self-concept and the importance of their role in identifying negative pathways and aiding students to move towards a more hopeful future.

Photovoice and MALS have identified that students are internalising negative messages that reflect directly in their level of academic self-concept. These messages have a distinct focus and tone which indicates their belief that the heart of their learning beliefs should lay in their difficulties, weaknesses or inabilities. If this in turn determines how successful they are to be within a classroom environment then programmes such as this one are imperative to aid improved understanding and personal development for both student and teacher. This begins with altering the overall school culture to support teacher’s ability to truly understand and be able to teach and reach all their students.
CHAPTER SEVEN: RESEARCH CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

This final chapter provides a summary of findings as discussed in Chapter Six and then considers the summary in relation to the research question underpinning this thesis.

Implications of the research are discussed and the resulting recommendation is made that students be provided with collaborative opportunities such as the Lighthouse Programme, to enable discovery and utilisation of their talents in a way that supports individual development, empowers autonomy and strengthens relationships moving forward. This conclusion indicates that for students to successfully embark on this journey a shift in perception around what defines student talent and ability needs to occur at local school and subsequently, Ministry of Education level.

As this research conclusion highlights the connection between strength-based talent identification and improvement of student academic self concept, recommendations support the move towards increased student ownership of learning that would require education decision-makers to do two things.

- **Choose** to “Expand their vision” around the true meaning of talent as alluded to through New Zealand’s founding constitutional documents and the subsequent philosophy underpinning the New Zealand Curriculum.

- **Choose** to move from a weakness-driven approach to student ability and talent to a more ‘equalising’ strengths driven approach that values diversity, believes in student ability to overcome weakness with strengths and views ALL New Zealand children as having something valuable to contribute to this country’s future.

SUMMARY OF SPECIFIC FINDINGS

Photovoice

The use of Photovoice created by Wang and Burris (1997) spawned the awareness that concerning issues around student academic self-concept are present within this decile one
classroom environment. Prior to the Lighthouse programme, symptoms such as student behavioural concerns, limited peer rapport and/or levels of disengagement highlighted rumblings of possible future negative repercussions. However, it was difficult for the class teacher and school leadership to pinpoint what the underlying cause or issues were and thus, where to begin in best supporting the positive cohesiveness of this classroom. Photovoice brought thoughts and messages that were buried beneath surface symptoms, out into the light and enabled an avenue for student internal narratives to be identified. This measure used before and after the Lighthouse Programme made it possible for this research to aid in dispelling the myth that levels of performance and academic ability alone is what drives classroom cohesiveness and the formation of a strong student academic self-concept (Purkey, 2000).

Myself as a learner scale

Taking a look at the MALS results before the Lighthouse Programme, we see that the mean score for girls and boys is 68 and 69 respectively, just below the 71 indicated by Burdens (2005) pilot sample. This is not unusual as Burden (2005) indicated there may be a variance in this score depending on the nature of the school researched (for example the mean score for a decile 10 school and a decile 1 school may vary significantly due to outside influencing factors such as poverty, crime and absence of family members). However, in both the female and male student sample, the completion of the Lighthouse Programme resulted in a increase of 5% and 6% in MALS scores overall, with over half the female students improving on their academic self-concept scores and a commanding 78% of the boys improving in their academic self-perception score after participating in the programme.

At this point even without the positive qualitative feedback that the evaluations provided, the results from use of these tools reveal that student perceptions and beliefs around how they see themselves as a learner, and consequently what they think about both in relation to self and to others, matters (Burden, 1998). These results also confirm improvement after participation in the Lighthouse Programme.
While recognising that factors external to the classroom have impact also, this research has shown that classroom messages around safety, talent and acceptance play a major role in the development of a student’s healthy academic self-concept. As a student looks to their teacher/facilitator for cues around what is valued and ‘believed’ within a classroom, these cues are then internalised to inform messages that ‘set the tone’ for student thinking and consequently, influence the classroom environment (Hattie, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). The ‘tone’ or atmosphere created by these overt or implied messages, in turn indicate to students what is valued most in their classroom and thus, can impact student self-talk negatively or positively depending on whether each student feels they can connect in some way to classroom indicators of potential.

As Dunning (2005) suggests, the positivity around this process of internal self-talk and perceptions of ability and talent is not reliant on actual academic levels but more so on a student’s internal belief that they have something valuable to offer their classroom environment. It is possible for a student to have a very positive, healthy academic self-concept and be an average or below-average academic achiever (Dweck, 2003; Burden, 2005; Purkey, 2000). Alternatively, as distinctly pointed out in both the Student Advisory and classroom pilot, it is possible for a student to have a high level of academic achievement and for their inner self-talk to be negative and indicative of a low academic self-concept. Smith (2000) believes this is possible due to the high importance that a student places on belonging and being an accepted part of a wider group. Agreeing with Burden (2005; 2008), Smith (2000) has found that as student inner-talk is driven by messages gauged from teacher and classroom interactions, student conclusions around how they “measure up” can result in a disabling impact on the development of their healthy academic self-concept.
THE LIGHTHOUSE PROGRAMME

Summation of findings

The power of a teacher

My role as facilitating lead throughout the Lighthouse programme placed me in a classroom position normally taken by the class teacher. This provided me with direct insight into classroom dynamics and the power of what education professionals communicate to students and each other. While I was in a position to observe the impact of student conversations and watch the process evolve, I also became distinctly aware of the power behind my position and the importance of understanding the impact of my own views.

Purkey’s (2000) finding that students look for cues around what’s important and what to focus on from their teacher is confirmed in this research. As the Lighthouse Programme progressed, many students spoke to me directly of their relief at being recognised in a new way. Students placed value on the reciprocal process of feedback, appreciating the opportunity to be listened to and to respond to what programme facilitators and teacher had to say. I observed engagement levels increase as students were eager to share their new found talents and positive status with Miss V, the school leadership during their visit and each other. For many students whose family did not wish to participate in the homework exercises, the teacher was their chosen person with whom to share. Subsequently, Miss V voiced her observations around how even the toughest students to engage were soon caught up in the journey of talent discovery. While there was no doubt students appreciated the language of strength and praise around talents, this did not display within the classroom as over-confidence but rather as relief and increased levels of acceptance as students began to change their inner dialogue, use their talents to support their weaknesses and move collaboratively towards achievement of class and individual goals.

Teacher involvement and the Lighthouse Programme effectiveness

Purkey (2000) found that in order for students to define themselves in a positive way, education professionals need to focus on introducing positive strength-based experiences that reduce counterproductive or negative self-talk. He believes it is in recognising the power of this self-talk, that teachers must realise the resounding impact of their own perceptions on student academic self-concept. As a facilitator noted,
“The teacher choosing to embrace the philosophy of strengths and become actively involved in the Lighthouse Programme makes a huge difference.”

This significant finding supports Hattie’s (2003) research that teachers have a major influence on student perceptions of learning. As facilitators, the teacher and I spoke a language that accentuated our belief in all students and the result was a distinct shift in classroom atmosphere, collaboration and ultimately student academic self concept. While Miss V entered this pilot as an observer, she soon found herself caught up in the journey of talent discovery and enjoyed watching children who had previously been difficult to engage, take the lead and respond to their talents. Her connection of talents into daily classroom routines and achievement of everyday learning goals assisted in setting high expectations around learning ownership and behaviour for all. The display of Miss V’s belief in each student was rewarded with their improved behaviour, cohesiveness and an increased enthusiastic response to her teaching in room 11. This aids the building of an environment that is safe, equal and fun for all.

The Lighthouse Programme connection to the New Zealand Curriculum

The Lighthouse Programme strength-based approach encourages student active participation in a way that lays foundations for an inclusive classroom. This inclusivity begins as teacher and facilitator establish the message that a safe environment is one that respects all, believes in all and encourages all. Results show this environment is essential to programme effectiveness and as Cullingford (2006) would suggest, requires that teacher and facilitator lead in a way that reassures and ensures that each student is encouraged to believe they are an integral part of the classroom itself. This is also supported by Hattie’s (2003) finding that “what teachers know, do and care about” (p. 2) powerfully impacts student belief in their ability to move forward and learn. The Lighthouse Programme’s nine-week journey has shown that programme methodology results in several significant changes. While this study focused on the Lighthouse Programme’s impact on students, further influences on teacher and school were also indicated. Identified through the following table, benefit relevancy within a school is highlighted through connection to principles outlined within the New Zealand Curriculum.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESULTING BENEFIT</th>
<th>Impact on Students</th>
<th>Impact on Teacher</th>
<th>Impact on School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talents identified</td>
<td>-Consideration of oneself from a strengths perspective.</td>
<td>-Opportunity for greater understanding of students strengths.</td>
<td>CULTURAL DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, LEARNING TO LEARN, HIGH EXPECTATIONS – Individuality honoured and diversity of talent acknowledged, \  \ -Easier identification of student interests and possibly areas of expansion for student support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Identification of tools to aid learning and development</td>
<td>-Positive point of reference for goal setting and report conversations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Common language to relationship building.</td>
<td>-Building Block for classroom team building</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Increased learning</td>
<td>-Opportunity for teacher Personal development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Improvement in reflection, critique and analysis skills</td>
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<td>Confidence increased</td>
<td>-Increased participation in activities</td>
<td>-Increased student ownership of learning</td>
<td>HIGH EXPECTATIONS, TREATY OF WAITANGI, COHERENCE – Students who feel safely accepted for who they are and confident enough to question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Not afraid to ask questions when needed</td>
<td>-Students embracing language of talents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Improved sense of belonging</td>
<td>-Increased student engagement levels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Increased learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration – Relationships developed</td>
<td>-Stronger external support system</td>
<td>-Greater acceptance of students for each other</td>
<td>INCLUSION, TREATY OF WAITANGI, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, LEARNING TO LEARN – Students encouraged to embrace diversity and connect with others to aid learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-New awareness gained from new connections</td>
<td>-More collaborative, settled classroom</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Improved ability to problem solve alongside others enhanced.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Increased learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased levels of HOPE</td>
<td>-Increased security in own identity</td>
<td>-Students that are thinking and planning towards future goals</td>
<td>FUTURE FOCUS, HIGH EXPECTATIONS, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT-Less student disengagement, Improved school cohesiveness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Increased ownership of strengths and weaknesses</td>
<td>-Students that are expectant about their potential</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Increased student perception</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved Self Talk</td>
<td>-View of self expresses strength and a belief in own ability to overcome.</td>
<td>-Less behavioural issues</td>
<td>LEARNING TO LEARN, INCLUSION, HIGH EXPECTATIONS - More confident, collaborative, achieving classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Improved student motivation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACADEMIC SELF-CONCEPT</td>
<td>-Improved perception of self as one who can move forward and achieve in the future.</td>
<td></td>
<td>TREATY OF WAITANGI, CULTURAL DIVERSITY - School directions for learning are upheld, Key competencies are met, Equality encouraged and learning outcomes are achieved in an inclusive and culturally safe way.</td>
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</table>

Table 5. Identified benefits of participation in the Lighthouse Programme, 2012
The above results show that as the Lighthouse Programme shifts student focus away from what they struggle with or cannot do, and towards the talents and abilities they already have at their disposal, an inner dialogue reflective of increased inner strength occurs and renewed hope emerges within the student. This hope, observed in students are various progressions through the Lighthouse Programme, presents in the final Photovoice results as increased self-belief that one can initiate and sustain cognitive pathways towards goals and dreams for the future (Snyder et al, 1997; McCashen, 2005).

From an academic self-concept perspective, a ‘symptom’ of this new student rise in self-belief, displayed in the classroom environment as increased student collaboration, increased confidence and finally as a wish or ‘hope’ by students to have their talents and skills continue to be recognised, valued and built upon in the newly created, student-led 2013 Lighthouse Leadership Team. Does this historically fluid, seemingly unpredictable, un-definable, evolving concept of talent need to be defined to find its place empowering individuals within New Zealand’s education system?

**REDEFINING TALENT THROUGH LIGHTHOUSE**

Jarvis (2009) points out that it has been proven students who have not been provided with a culturally relevant, engaging learning environment or learning opportunities that are individually appropriate are less likely to achieve test scores or display characteristics that will distinguish them as talented or gifted learners. Some may say that revising educational ideas of what constitutes talent may make it more difficult to identify students for specialised programmes and extended opportunities. However I believe the Lighthouse Programme offers a way to make that selection process more equal among students and aid in ensuring students selection is more holistic, inclusive and relevant.

This research points out there is an argument for more focus to be placed on developing teacher understanding around the powerful role they hold within a classroom and the subsequent messages that children can receive and internalise around their ability. This Lighthouse Programme research clearly indicates that if our journey to improve literacy begins with identifying talent purely as an ability to perform and “prove yourself,” we will end up with a classroom environment that breeds comparison, provides stumbling blocks to learning and increases possible future disengagement (Dedmon, 2012). Alternatively if we embrace New Zealand’s diverse classrooms by way of an inclusive student-driven talent
identification and exploration process, we will end up with increased student confidence, improved classroom relationships and endless possibilities of hope for the future.

CONCLUSION

Within this chapter research conclusions have shown as Hemara’s (2000) findings would suggest, that rather than focusing on what society currently deems the most important, focusing on talents, aspirations and existing achievements may be a more appropriate and effective way to bridge the gap towards improving learning levels in our New Zealand classrooms. Acknowledging substantial positive shifts in overall student academic self-concept, the programme has proved itself as an effective way of facilitating an environment that embodies Treaty of Waitangi principles as well as the New Zealand curriculum principle of inclusiveness. Aiding teachers ability to teach and students learning how to learn, this methodology encourages the process of capacity-building and a community defining its own needs.

This research shows that what is needed is the raising of children’s subordinate status in New Zealand through a government and local school shift in perception around talent that puts ownership with the child and puts human rights equity before academic adequacy. This process of embracing student individuality through talent offers a door into community in a way that is positive and encouraging to both students and their whanau. While time constraints need to be addressed, the Lighthouse Programme is constructed to cohesively fit within the curriculum, providing a method of encouraging student and teacher communication in a way that is not intrusive or presuming and is achievable through our schools.

In these swiftly changing technological times, the necessity to receive and deal with vast amounts of information means that the ability to problem solve and identify choices are essential skills needed to overcome obstacles. Twenty-first Century learning is not purely about continually acquiring and storing immense amounts of knowledge (Wrigley, 2005) however knowledge accumulation has become a societal set measure of ability. Carefully disguised as the road to accolades and accomplishment, this measure of intelligence has in fact become the very undoing to students looking to embrace their individuality and discover all that they can be (Wrigley, 2005).
In fact, any inferred belief that talent and ability is equated to a fixed standard of performance, seriously undermines New Zealand current curriculum values and principles, chopping teacher creativity ‘off at the knees’ in a way that can only have a flow-on effect to students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

“We must really start believing in the inherent worth of each child if we are to have any hope for their healthy future. If we could do this, school would become a journey, an exploration, rather than an evaluation that lasts for years.” (Fox, 2008, p.27)

If a school’s primary focus remains largely on standards assessment, evaluation and student weakness then all processes and practices within the school environment will be focused on these things. Alternatively if the focus is on individual strengths and the building of a collaborative relationship with students the focus shifts to a more positive environment and, as Rogers (1951), Fox (2008), McCashen (2005), Clifton and Harter (2003) and Gordon and Crabtree (2006) would suggest, student empowerment results. It has been demonstrated in this research that as students learn to embrace their individuality in a strengths-based environment, the focus on their vast inner resources results in an increase in academic self-concept and an increase in student confidence to reach goals and overcome obstacles. The bottom line is that students need to know what their strengths and talents are in order to help them problem solve, not only in the classroom but in life itself. Failure to prepare students in this way results in setting them up to compare themselves to others and to possibly give up if they believe they are unable to compete.

The Ministry of Education’s role as governing body around decision making within New Zealand education comes with an immense level of responsibility. To enable accurate effective decision making around New Zealand education service provision information is required that identifies learners progress and achievements, effectiveness of curriculum provisions and learner dynamic. Without this information those in power within government cannot make evidence based decisions around resources, curriculum capabilities and limitations and future education direction (Absolum, 2011). However, change is required. Bandura et al. (1996) would suggest schools need to focus on aiding their teachers to:
- Identify and reduce any possible sources of negative self talk
- Learn to recognise negative self-talk when it occurs
- Aid the student to learn to “replace negative self talk with positive realistic inner narratives, and then practice this new inner voice until it becomes a habit” (p.19).

Recognising that changing a student’s self talk does not happen instantaneously Bandura et al. (1996) maintains it is the consistency of positive teacher dialogue that begins to improve the quality of inner whispers for students over time.

This chapter has clearly indicated the findings of experts such as Bandura et al. (1996), Dunning (2005) and Purkey (2000) are immensely significant in understanding the true nature and value of student self-talk and its impact on academic self-concept. The self-talk is in fact the key driver. As students within the classroom pilot participated in the Lighthouse Programme strengths-based activities the result was a distinct shift in the nature and tone of their inner narrations. Subsequently as those narrations moved from focus on weakness to strength a classroom philosophy and environment for learning emerged that honoured both individuality and connectedness within the classroom.

As Vygotsky (1978) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) would suggest, student self-talk is in fact a two-way process stemming from understandings gained through relationships inside and outside the classroom. However teachers are in a valuable position to lead by example and thus this chapter concludes in agreement with Hattie (2003) that the tone that teachers (and facilitators) set within a classroom, filters down as an act of consequence. What educators think about, focus on and act on influences what students say to themselves (Purkey,2000; Erikson,1959; Vygotsky, 1978; Burden, 2005). As Dunning (2005) proposes, any attempt to move a student forward requires that they have an accurate understanding of self, recognise their strengths and know how best to support their weaknesses. He believes that the cognitive level of this understanding will be displayed through the tone and content of student self-talk and communication with one another.

After embarking on this journey, I believe students see their classroom as a window into what society values and what is to come in their future (Cullingford, 2006). As Absolum (2011) would suggest, to become future active participants in society, students need to be affirmed and respected for the individual attributes that they bring to the classroom and “to feel their
right to be in the class as equals with all others is fully recognised and respected” (p.70). Therefore implementing a process like National Standards must come with balance (Absolum, 2011). This is something the Lighthouse Programme provides and promotes as it sends students and teachers the message that in this school you are accepted, valued and significant. Your talents are important and created for a purpose to help you reach your future potential, goals and dreams.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

Time constraints were the predominant issue within this research. As the Lighthouse Programme had not been implemented in a classroom environment before, requests to reduce the programmes initial 1 ½ hour format to fit school bell times resulted in students and facilitators at times feeling rushed. This is a serious consideration in continuing to develop the programme moving forward. I am interested to see if empowering the Lighthouse Programmes implementation as a teacher led process (as outlined next), alleviates this time factor.

Although the programme was designed predominantly for classroom use, limited parental response and interaction to homework activities was also a constraint which at times left students disappointed. However placing increased focus on encouraging student identification and connection to significant others may result in lessening this somewhat.

FUTURE AREAS FOR RESEARCH

This research has shown there is indeed an issue around academic self-concept and negative self-talk within this lower decile school. Subsequently it is the intent of this researcher (at the request of the students and school management), to continue developing this philosophy of strengths-based nurture of talent within our school. School management requested that the 2013 Lighthouse Programme be run in several classrooms, agreeing also to the establishment of a student-led Lighthouse Leadership team initially representative of students from the 2012 Room 11 class. I have since met with students who are now continuing their Lighthouse journey into self-leadership through currently brainstorming ideas for raising the funds necessary to run such a programme in our school.

Alton-Lee (2003) discovered the quality of teaching can vary for the same teacher within different areas of the curriculum and the factors that influence this can be curriculum-
specific. I considered this statement from a talent perspective. Reflecting on the possibility that teaching quality may vary in different curriculum areas due to teacher effectiveness being stronger in areas that connect to where the teacher’s individual “talents” are best displayed, I wondered if teacher quality is better in areas where they have a natural leaning, ability or talent. Is a teacher of low quality or “untalented” if their teaching appears effective in one area and ineffective in another? Would teachers talented in a particular area teach students talented in that area most effectively? While investigating the connection between talent and teacher quality is not this thesis objective, it signifies an area for future research.

Connecting into this idea of nurturing teacher talent and personal development, I am also currently discussing with teaching leadership the prospect of training Randwick Year Six, Seven and Eight teachers how to use the Lighthouse Programme and then seeking their advice around the development of a Lighthouse Programme teachers guide. As the programme is designed to empower creativity, my role would entail providing guidance and support while teachers work through the programme weekly format and to encourage their feedback around effective collaborative methods that could be used to meet Lighthouse Programme aims.

The programme format is designed to evolve in the context of diverse classrooms and thus, I am interested to research the Lighthouse Programme’s effectiveness as a tool used by teachers with the ultimate goal of developing a resource that education professionals can use to build relationships with students and strengthen academic-self-concept within various education contexts.

Another possible area of future research is investigating the student journey from Year Six to Year Eight through the initial Lighthouse Programme and subsequent Lighthouse Leadership team. I would like to measure the impact on academic results when the Lighthouse approach to lifting student academic self concept is taken. I wonder as to the impact on academic results and school external community if school philosophy shifted to a belief in the inherent worth of every individual within a school.
CONCLUSION

This final chapter has provided a summation of findings in response to the research question. Benefits to student academic self concept have been highlighted and validity of the Lighthouse Programme’s methods and fit within the New Zealand Curriculum has been identified. Limitations around this research have been identified and this chapter ends with recommendations for future research around the Lighthouse Programme.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A: The Lighthouse Programme Brief Outline

THE LIGHTHOUSE PROGRAMME: OUTLINE

WEEK ONE: (LAND) “Building on Rock”

For us to reach our greatest potential, it is important we help to make our learning environment SAFE for ourselves and for others

Introduction to the Lighthouse Program – This week looks at class environment. Message: It is important our learning environment is safe in order for everyone to be respected and to be able to learn.

- Workbooks are handed out and name badges
- Lighthouse metaphor, weekly themes and program format discussed
- Creation of Group Treaty” - “What do I need to do to get the most from this process and participate safely in this program?”
- Team building exercise - outdoors

WEEK TWO (TREASURE) “Created for a purpose”

Our TALENTS are more precious than gold. They have been hidden inside us since the day we were born. Talents indicate what we can do, the qualities of who we are as a person and all our wonderful potential for future endeavours.

Group Brainstorm around what talents are? How did we get them? This week introduces talent discovery through the use of Clifton Youth Strength Explorer computer online Talent Assessment.

- Clifton Assessment completed
- Student assessment of results
- Workbook and Art exercise around top three talents
- Team Building exercise
- Homework exercise around whanau talent

WEEK THREE: (KEY) “Investing your talents”

We need to CHOOSE to un-lock our talents and use them to discover our potential and to truly shine.

The theme this week we consider how much we have chosen to invest our talents in the past. Worksheets and homework exercise are used to provoke thinking around what we have noticed about talents in our family. We consider our family tree of talents. What have we ‘dug up’ this week after chatting with our whanau about talents?

- Talent Reports reviewed, opportunity to discuss within pairs
WEEK FOUR (FOUNDATION)  “Your heart is where your riches are”

When we BELIEVE in ourselves and our talents, we do not give up easily, but know in our heart we have what it takes to do great things in life.

Knowing what we believe in our heart about our talents is very important as it is from our heart and our beliefs that we make our decisions. Foundation represents that on which I stand or am 'based' - My values and beliefs. This session sets the tone for students understanding around the importance of discovering and understanding what we believe, why we believe it and how our foundations can affect us. How do we see ourselves? Now that we have aided our class to be a good place to build we must make sure our foundation is solid. Is our foundation a little shaky?

- Brief reflection on last week followed by class scientific experiment
- Small group discussion and worksheet
- Class exercise working with clay around “foundation” theme

WEEK FIVE (BUILDING BLOCKS) Part One  “I am wonderfully made”

Our talents provide the valuable BUILDING MATERIAL that we can use to begin to BUILD our Lighthouse. When we choose to use our talents wisely we become stronger and are more willing to try new things.

This week we look at when we have used our talents in the past. When did we become aware of them? How did they/could they help us? We explore the idea that our talents provide solid material that we can use to build strengths for our future.

- Short DVD and class discussion around talent “Happy Feet”
- Worksheet: Building on our talents
- Individual art exercise - “Footsteps”

WEEK SIX (BUILDING BLOCKS) Part Two  “Encourage one another”

Understanding and valuing our own talent helps us to learn to see and appreciate talent in others. When we believe our talents are valuable, we begin to find ways to use them and to work COLLABORATIVELY with others to achieve great things.

Students are encouraged this week to consider themselves as talented individuals that are an important part of a wider community. We look at the power of talents when they are used to connect with others and to work collaboratively. Our talents have the ability to strengthen us and to encourage others towards achieving great things.

** Team Challenge Week
This week students form mixed groups and complete a series of challenges designed to empower students to identify their talents and to work together to complete each task. Each challenge requires a different student to step up and lead.

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**WEEK SEVEN (DOOR)  “A light to your path”**

*Our heart holds the key to the door of our choices.*

**CHOOSING** to have courage, take risks and use our talents to move forward is the first step towards reaching our potential and making a difference in our future and in the lives of others.

The door to the Lighthouse represents ‘choice’.

This week we focus on how the quality of student choices determine whether they decide to use their talents to enter and continue building their Lighthouse or not. Before we can turn our light on and shine we must open the door to our talents and use them to move forward into our future.

- Small group quiz to help initiate discussion around choice
- Worksheet
- Individual collage art activity
- Team building exercise. (The words we say to ourselves and to others. Do we choose to place value on their talents or ours? What are our words saying about our choices?)

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**WEEK EIGHT (STAIRCASE) “Renew your mind”**

*Our talents give us strength and provide a way for us to OVERCOME the obstacles we often face in our daily lives. The challenges we face are often hidden from view and surprise us. They can be the Road Blocks that detour us from continuing on our journey to shine.*

This week’s program takes a look at the tough stuff. Students are encouraged to look at the obstacles in their lives that are currently preventing them from believing in their own ability to move forward and overcome. We consider the question, How can I use my talents to work though this issue? Have I used my talents to overcome an obstacle in the past? How?

- Short DVD Clip “Overcoming Adversity”
- Class Discussion
- Small Group Brainstorm around worksheet
- Team Building Activity “SOS” (Activity designed to expand thinking around talent through collaboration and means of supporting each other during tough times)
WEEK NINE (LANTERN) “Let your Light Shine”

Our talents help us to SHINE, discover our goals and connect to our dreams and HOPE for the future.

The top room of the Lighthouse, this week’s theme represents the power of hopes, dreams and aspirations for the future.

Students are encouraged to connect and reflect on all that they have learned about their talents and to set a goal for the following term, thinking about how they can use their talents to achieve that goal.

- Today the students hear from two who have used and believed in their talents (when maybe others did not) and have overcome and achieved great things
- The creation of a piece of art that reminds students to connect to their talents in the future and to be strong in courageous, knowing their talents will aid them to move into their future from a place of strength.

** CELEBRATION ** A time to dance

After the final week of the programme

This is a time for sharing of food and for students to receive their certificate for participation in the programme and their Lighthouse keepsake. Students will also be given the opportunity to share with the group any creation they have made, music they enjoy or bring something they love (to show) that expresses one of their talents.
APPENDIX B: Harts Ladder of Participation

Eight levels of young people's participation in projects:
(The ladder metaphor is borrowed from the well-known essay on adult participation by Sherry Arnstein (1969); the categories are new.)
THE LIGHTHOUSE STUDENT ADVISORY GROUP

What is the Student Advisory Group?

The Student Advisory Group is two teams of six/seven students who have been selected to take part in the implementation and evaluation of the Lighthouse Programme. This is a programme that discovers and explores the talents that students have within them to build strengths that can aid classroom learning and everyday decision-making.

Why have I been selected?

You have been selected because your teachers believe you have great potential for leadership, creativity and would enjoy being part of this exciting team. We believe you would benefit from learning more about the skills and talents you have and being part of building and creating the Lighthouse Programme.

What am I expected to do? (What is my role?)

As a team member you will be required to attend Lighthouse sessions once a week for 1 ½ hours during Term Two.

Your role will include:

- Participation in weekly Lighthouse Sessions
- Be part of discussion around the Lighthouse Programme design and ways of doing things
- Learning to reflect and provide feedback to Whaea Teri around your experiences of the programme
- Tapping into your creativity to come up with new ideas that would improve the programme prior to the classroom launch

** This role is completely VOLUNTARY (This means you do not have to do it 😊)

If you do not think this is your thing, that is perfectly fine...Also, if you are nervous about sharing please do not worry, we will all learn as we go and get used to each other’s company. You may share to the level that you feel comfortable with. We will decide as a group what day we will meet, where and group rules. This is so everyone has an enjoyable time being part of this group.
What is in it for me?

You get to be the first students to go through this new programme and to experience all the fun, creative activities that the programme entails. We hope you will also learn lots of new and exciting things about yourself. At the end of the programme you will receive a certificate and be part of a celebration lunch and team building activity to finish our time together.

What do I need to do to take part?

As this role is voluntary and part of a research project, we need you and your parent/caregivers consent for you to take part. A permission slip will be handed out and needs to be back at school with both yours and your parent/caregivers signature to enable you to take part. Please tell your parent/caregiver they can call me if they have any further questions after reading the consent form. (on 267 0112)

What is Whaea Teri’s research about?

Whaea Teri has created the Lighthouse Programme as she believes there are lots of students at our school who have great talent hidden inside them that they may not have realised yet. Students may not have thought their talent is valuable at school or may not have had the chance to show their talent and to ‘shine’. It is Whaea Teri’s hope that through the Lighthouse Programme students will be encouraged to consider themselves differently as they see their talents in a new way and begin to use them in the classroom to help them to achieve great things.

**This programme research is part of a UNITEC Masters degree that Whaea Teri is working towards. If you have any questions about today please call into my office and we can chat further …. I am happy to answer any concerns you may have. Remember – this is meant to be fun! 😊**
APPENDIX D: Group One: Lighthouse Student Advisory Talents and MALS Score

GROUP ONE: TOP 3 TALENTS and MALS SCORE

<table>
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<tr>
<th>STUDENT INITIALS AND MAL SCORE</th>
<th>Achieving</th>
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<th>DISCOVERER</th>
<th>FUTURE THINKER</th>
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Students who scored under 71 MALS Average are highlighted in turquoise.

Yellow highlighting shows no students connected with Confidence or Dependability in their top three talent themes.
## APPENDIX E: Group Two: Lighthouse Student Advisory Talents and MALS Score

### GROUP TWO: TOP 3 TALENTS and MALS SCORE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENT INITIALS AND MAL SCORE</th>
<th>Achieving</th>
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Students who scored under 71 MALS Average are highlighted in Turquoise

**Yellow Highlighting** shows no students connected with Confidence or Future Thinker in their top three talent themes.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I'm good at doing tests.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I like having problems to solve.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>When I'm given new work to do, I usually feel confident I can do it.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Thinking carefully about your work helps you do it better.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I'm good at discussing things.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>I need lots of help with my work.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I like having difficult work to do.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>I get anxious when I have to do new work.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I think that problem solving is fun.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>When I get stuck with my work, I can usually work out what to do next.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Learning is easy.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I'm not very good at solving problems.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I know the meaning of lots of words.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I usually think carefully about what I've got to do.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I know how to solve the problems that I meet.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I find a lot of schoolwork difficult.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I'm clever.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>I know how to be a good learner.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>I like using my brain.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Learning is difficult.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL SCORE**
The **Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer** measures talent in the following 10 emerging themes:

**Achieving** Youths especially talented in the Achieving theme like to accomplish things and have a great deal of energy.

**Caring** Youths especially talented in the Caring theme enjoy helping others.

**Competing** Youths especially talented in the Competing theme enjoy measuring their performance against that of others and have a great desire to win.

**Confidence** Youths especially talented in the Confidence theme believe in themselves and their ability to be successful in their endeavors.

**Dependability** Youths especially talented in the Dependability theme keep their promises and show a high level of responsibility.

**Discoverer** Youths especially talented in the Discoverer theme tend to be very curious and like to ask “Why?” and “How?”

**Future Thinker** Youths especially talented in the Future Thinker theme tend to think about what’s possible beyond the present time, even beyond their lifetime.

**Organizer** Youths especially talented in the Organizer theme are good at scheduling, planning, and organizing.

**Presence** Youths especially talented in the Presence theme like to tell stories and be at the center of attention.

**Relating** Youths especially talented in the Relating theme are good at establishing meaningful friendships and maintaining them.

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APPENDIX H: The Lighthouse Programme Information Worksheet

PARENT INFORMATION SHEET

LIGHTHOUSE PROGRAMME

Thank you for taking the time to find out about this new and exciting opportunity available for your child at Randwick Park School. We hope you find the following information helpful.

What is the Lighthouse Programme?

Developed over the last few years, the Lighthouse Programme is a strengths-based talent discovery programme designed to assist students to identify their natural talents and then build those talents into strengths that aid their future learning. Beginning with Gallup's online assessment questionnaire, students spend 9 weeks using various activities such as: group discussion, individual activities, photography, creative art activities and team building to discover times past and present when they have used their talents often without realising it. The goal of this programme is to build the students ability to recognise and draw on their strengths to make future choices and achieve goals they have set for themselves in class and daily life.

What is the research project?

Teri Harnell, our school Counsellor is currently carrying out this research as part of her Masters Degree in Social Practice at UNITEC Auckland.

The Lighthouse Programme is free and will be run within the classroom as part of your child’s weekly learning routine. Before beginning the Lighthouse Programme each student will be asked to complete a questionnaire of 20 questions asking how they see themselves as a learner in school, this will also be completed after 9 weeks to measure the programme’s effectiveness as a way of improving/lifting a student’s perception of themselves as a learner. Students will also be given an opportunity to visually express how they see themselves through the use of photography. By doing these measures Teri can compare the results and see if taking part in the Lighthouse Programme has improved the way students consider themselves as learners with something valuable to contribute within the classroom.

Why is Teri choosing to do this research?

Because I believe that there are lots of talented students at our school who have not yet realised their potential or had the opportunity to ‘shine’ at school. Some of those students may find areas of learning hard but may be stronger in other areas they feel are not as important at school. It is my hope that this programme will help students to appreciate their own talents and the talents of others more and help them to learn to use their talents more in the classroom.

What will happen with the information gathered?

All information gathered from students will be confidential and anonymous and owned by the researcher. Paper based questionnaires will be stored and locked away from school grounds and destroyed after seven years. Any results found from the research will be analysed by Teri and her Supervisors and presented to UNITEC in a final thesis report. A brief summation of findings is available for those parents who are interested. The final report findings may be submitted in various forms however, student’s names and details will be kept confidential. Should students request to have their photo included in the report please indicate on the return consent your willingness for this to occur (Names will not be applied to photos in this instance).
**APPENDIX I: The Lighthouse Programme Room 11 Student Evaluation Form**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>ROOM 11</strong></th>
<th><strong>LIGHTHOUSE PROGRAM EVALUATION</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participating in the Lighthouse program has increased my confidence</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning how to use my talents helps me to achieve my goals and dreams</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>After being in Lighthouse I feel more hopeful about my future</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Through Lighthouse I had a chance to show my talents</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Lighthouse Program helped me to get to know my classmates better</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>My rating for the Lighthouse program is:</strong> (Please rate out of 10, 1 being lowest, 10 highest)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What I liked about the most about the Lighthouse Program</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>.................................................................................................................................</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>.................................................................................................................................</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What I liked the least about the Lighthouse Program</strong></td>
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<td>.................................................................................................................................</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>.................................................................................................................................</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do you think we can improve the Lighthouse Program?</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td>.................................................................................................................................</td>
<td></td>
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<td>.................................................................................................................................</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Would you be interested in being part of a Lighthouse Leadership Program next year?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Thank you for your help with this evaluation.* ☺
THE LIGHTHOUSE PROGRAMME

TEACHER/FACILITATOR OBSERVATIONS AND FEEDBACK

Name................................................................. Date.................................................

How well does the Lighthouse programme expand teacher understanding of student
talents/strengths?

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What did you notice about student understanding of their talents/strengths during the course
of the programme?

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How well do you think the Lighthouse Programme provides a platform for student and
teacher safety within the classroom environment?

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What did you notice about student engagement throughout the programme?

Please share your thoughts on the Lighthouse Programmes effectiveness as a method of relationship building within the classroom environment.

How well do you think the Lighthouse Programme fits within the school curriculum?

As a facilitator how well does the programme enable you to use your own talents and creative influence?
How well do you believe the programme adapts to various student/teacher/facilitator cultural backgrounds?

How effective do you believe the programme is in prompting student identification of choice?

What programme strengths did you notice?

What programme weaknesses, areas for improvement did you notice?
Would you recommend the Lighthouse Programme to other organisations as a method of improving student self-perception? Why? Why not?

Please comment on any other observations that you have made. 😊

** Thank you for being a talented and valuable part of this programme and for helping with these responses to make it even better. ** 😊😊😊
The Lighthouse Programme is an exciting new programme for our Year 6, 7 and 8 students that began in our school this year. Through the use of team building and creative art activities, students are encouraged to think about what talent means for them and then learn how to use their talents to help them learn and make good choices at school. We know everyone here at Randwick Park School has talent, and we believe Lighthouse will help students and teachers join together to build those talents into strengths.
Lighthouse Family and Friends Connect Card

Home Learning: Week Two

Theme: Treasure

We are all different and unique. We think differently, feel differently, act differently and learn differently. It's just who we are and how we're created to be. The natural ways we have of thinking, feeling, learning and acting are called our talents. For this week's home learning you will need your copy of your child’s Strength Explorer Talent Report.

** Please read and highlight any words or sentences you believe describes your child.

** As you look at your child's talent report chat with them about what you notice about their talents and about any other family members that may also share talents similar to your child. (For example: If your child's talent is competing, who else in the family likes the challenge of competing against others, or themselves.)

** What other talents do you see in your child?

** In supporting your child's Lighthouse Learning this week you may like to complete the online Adult Strength Assessment to discover your top five themes of talent. Please contact the class teacher if you wish to know more. ☺️
APPENDIX M: Clifton Strength Explorer Talent Theme Report

CLIFTON YOUTH STRENGTHSEXPLORE REPORT FOR

CARING
In your heart, helping other people is very important. You want to make the world better by helping people in small ways or big ways. You have a big heart. You feel good when you reach out and help people. You are the friend who includes others. When someone feels left out, you help him or her be part of your group. It is easy for you to encourage people, share with them, and help them learn. You know you have something to offer other people. Even the smallest kind deed is important in people’s everyday lives. Whether you help in big or small ways, you can make a difference in your world. People count on you to be kind, thoughtful, and caring.

FUTURE THINKER
Your mind loves to think and dream about the future. You are a person who thinks about what is possible, not what is impossible. You like to imagine the life you will have, what new things will be invented, and what you will be able to do that you cannot do now. What kind of person will you be? How will the world be different in 10 years or 100 years? What are your dreams? Your visions of the future might be bigger than most people’s because thinking big is one of your talents. You like to think about the important things in life, what they mean, and how they are connected to each other. Finding meaning is important to you. It is not enough for you to simply concentrate on what you need to do today because your mind needs more adventure than that. You spend time thinking about ideas, not just facts. Thinking big paints pictures of what the future can be.

CONFIDENCE
You believe in yourself and what you can do. This helps you take on challenges because you feel sure you can succeed. Because you are confident, you are able to do things that others may not want to try. Knowing that you are a unique and special person in the world gives you the power to be who you are. You don’t have to be like everybody else, and you don’t have to follow the crowd. Even when you don’t feel it, other people may see you as brave because you will speak up even if no one else will. You are sure enough of your opinions that you will take a stand for them. It is great to believe in what you can do because this belief helps you do more in your life.