Whānau as Agents: Exploring ways to improve relationships between whānau and teachers.

Sarah Aperahama

ABSTRACT

The relationship between whānau and schools in education is not new but is an area that many schools focus on and want to improve. Literature from both New Zealand and globally highlights the positive outcomes of engaging with whānau and the implications this has on student success. Relationships between whānau and teachers can be strengthened where whānau voice is used to drive teaching contexts and improve practice. The school-based project undertaken as part of this research aimed to improve the relationships between whānau and teachers by using a variety of communication methods focused on collaborative knowledge building. This study highlights the importance of kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face) meetings to build relationships followed by the use of digital and online platforms such as ‘See-Saw’ or Facebook to continue ongoing reciprocal communication. It is through this sharing that the relationship is strengthened, teaching is strengthened, and outcomes for the students are strengthened. This research used a Māori centred approach which acknowledges the value and significance of Māori perspectives. The research explored the nature of relationships within the school environment, what whānau can teach us about the forming of relationships and how whānau voice can influence and change teacher practice.

This thesis contributes to the literature on whānau engagement in New Zealand, highlighting the positive implications of working with whānau and the changes this can make to teacher practice. The major findings of this study were specific to understanding the nature of the relationships between whānau and teachers at the project school, improved relationships through student interest directed learning and the changes in teacher practice in the way we communicate with whānau.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my kura (school) for allowing me the opportunity to pursue Master’s level research. To the participants, I thank you for your very valuable and honest contributions that created this project and I aim to use what we have discovered to better our communication systems across our whole kura. Thank you to the school principal who also acted as my cultural advisor and Dr Paul Wood who showed such enthusiasm towards my research and offered his personal contributions towards the presentation.

I am also highly grateful for the expert supervisor I was allocated who has supported my field of research and helped challenge and re shape some of my thinking. Thank you Dr Jo Mane for your wise words of wisdom and Dr Lisa Maurice-Takerei for your professional input.

Last of all I must acknowledge my whānau, Ben and Ella, for their unwavering love and support in all stages of this study.
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He kaha ahau ki te whakaako
Ko te mātauranga tōku whatumanawa
Ko tāku whānau tāku aō
Whakataukī

Mā whero mā pango ka oti ai te mahi
(With red and black the work will be complete)

This whakataukī was selected as it focuses on the idea of collaboration and working together. It refers to the red and black of the kowhaiwhai patterns in the Mārae and the need for both to complete the mahi (work) (Martin-Hawke, 2015).
Key Terminology Definitions

Key terminology that will be used throughout this thesis is defined below.

**Whānau** - Whānau in this thesis refers to the students’ family and extended family. It is not inclusive of only parents but any family that has a major role in the child's life. Often this can be grandparents, aunties and uncles with whom the child lives.

**Cultural identity** - Cultural identity embraces everything about a person and the cultural background in which a person lives. It links to the person's ideas, customs and social behaviour. Culture is not defined as only ethnicity but embraces tikanga and the world in which the person has grown up in.

**Partnership** - a collaborative and mutually respectful relationship.

**Ako** - Ako in this thesis refers to the reciprocal relationship between whānau and kaiako. “Ako is grounded in the principle of reciprocity and also recognises that students and their whānau cannot be separated” (Ministry of Education, 2013. Pg 16).

**Whānau engagement** - For the purpose of this study whānau engagement will be operationally defined as the relationship between whānau and the school that are moulded on reciprocity. This means whānau feels comfortable and are actively involved in the school. This could be communicating with teachers, adding ideas, being informed of teaching taking place and attending school events. The Education Review Office (2008) defines whānau engagement as “a meaningful, respectful partnership between schools and their parents, whānau, and communities that focuses on improving the educational experiences and successes for each child” (p. 1). Having a common purpose for the engagement between whānau and schools is important in defining whānau engagement.

**Whakawhānaungatanga** - The term whakawhānaungatanga will be used to describe the shared understanding and meaning the project aims to create (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy. 2007). Whakawhānaungatanga is also one of the school's key values put in place with the
community, whānau, teachers and students as being important. It encompasses the idea of working together like a family, with a shared understanding and purpose.

**Whānau agency** - The term whānau agency refers to whānau power to act and make choices for their children in school.

**Kupu Māori / Māori Words**

Mahi - A Maori word for work.
Kaiako - Kaiako is a Maori word for teacher/s.
Pānui - notice / newsletter
Tamariki - children
Kura – school (In this thesis kura will be used in reference to our school which is a mainstream New Zealand School).
Tikanga - customs, a way of doing things
Kanohi - face
Tuākana - older
Teina - younger
Kai – food
Kawa – protocol / etiquette
Karakia – prayer
Pepeha – a way to introduce yourself in Māori
Whakapapa – geneology
Te Ao Māori – A Māori world view
Maanaki ki te tangata – care for people
Te Tiriti o Waitangi – The Treaty of Waitangi (New Zealand’s founding document)
Kia tūpato – being cautious, staying safe
Mana- the honour and power you are born with
Kitea – be seen
Tika - right
Tangata - people
Manaakitanga – caring
Kaupapa – policy
Hui – meeting
Kaumatua – respectable elder, guider
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This initial chapter is an introduction to the thesis describing the general context of the research and the significance of the background information. In addition, the rationale for the study and its significance are justified, giving rise to the research aims and questions. Finally, the thesis organisation will be explained to provide a general overview of the paper.

Educational Reform in New Zealand

Whānau engagement and partnerships are not new concepts within New Zealand education policies; however, the definition of partnership is not always evident within schools. During the last decade in New Zealand, there has been a high level of interest in interventions aimed at improving whānau engagement as a means of improving teacher practice and student outcomes (Trinick, 2015). Baker (2002) highlighted that the changes within the ‘Tomorrow's Schools’ policy reform of 1989 was intended to change parental and community involvement within schools from a largely supportive role to that of a partnership. The two intended ways in which this reform was to be achieved was firstly, through the creation of Board of Trustees that included whānau elective representatives within the school, and secondly a mutual collaboration between teachers, whānau and community that promotes learning (Barker, 2002). It can be argued that the governance part of School Boards of Trustees has largely been achieved, but the second notion of mutual collaboration has not. Trinick (2015) supports this argument by stating that many of the home school initiatives have not resulted in improved student outcomes or relationships with whānau as they were heavily school led and did not create opportunities for reciprocity. This could possibly allude to whānau actively directing aspects they considered as important to their children’s learning.

Wylie (1999) found that from a parental perspective there had been a decline in parental involvement in schools as people's lives had become busier. Bird (1998) supports Wylie’s (1999) research in arguing that the involvement of the majority of parents in schools was at the level of being informed not so much that of collaboration. Whānau engagement and
partnerships remain key drivers within many Ministry of Education publications, particularly in documentation about improving education for Māori students (Ministry of Education, 2013). Furthermore, there is great potential for schools to utilise information communication technologies (ICT) to engage with whānau. In terms of communication, ICT provides flexibility outside of the usual times and places available for whānau engagement (Kraft, 2017).

**Background**

The history of New Zealand schooling has had major implications on how Māori whānau relate to schooling initiatives, particularly where urbanisation and the pressure of English schooling repressed Māori culture and identity (Hawaikirangi-Pere, 2013). This history is vitally important to understanding the challenge of building whānau engagement within what are mainstream schools in predominantly Māori communities. The success of Kura Kaupapa Schools has been credited to the reciprocal relationship the school has with whānau, where it was initially whānau who founded the schools with the desire to change schooling experiences for their children and grandchildren (Calman, 2012). McKinley and Else (2002) interviewed many Māori whānau to find out about their experiences of schooling in New Zealand and found there was a marked difference between the involvement of whānau in Kura Kaupapa schools and mainstream schools. The difference was that whānau in Kura Kaupapa were actively involved in decision making and had a shared responsibility for the learning taking place. The whānau of mainstream schools reported that often their previous experiences with schooling had major implications on their confidence of engaging with their children's schools (McKinley & Else, 2002). This is also part of the reason why many Māori whānau have chosen Kura Kaupapa for their children.

Baker (2002) also concludes that a decline in whānau engagement within mainstream schools was largely due to the fact that whānau became busy in their lives. Technology can play an important role of ensuring that whānau can engage and contribute freely with schools but very little research of this nature shows the impact this has on the relationships between whānau and schools. The Education Review Office (2015) found that technology alone did not help build reciprocal relationships with whānau and therefore should be used as a way of communicating once a relationship has been formed.
A key finding in the Best Evidence Synthesis which breaks down the key factors that make effective schools, is that there is great potential for school leaders to change patterns of underachievement when they work with parents and whānau to build home–school connections (Ministry of Education, 2010). Whānau engagement features strongly in most Ministry of Education documentation and self-reviews that schools undertake (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2011, 2013) where “success in learning depends on teachers and schools building productive relationships with the students’ whānau and communities as well as with the students themselves” (Ministry of Education, 2009, p.29). Much of the research information discussed by the Ministry of Education refers explicitly to the success of Māori learners hinging on the relationships the teachers have with them, their whānau and their communities (Ministry of Education, 2009). Ka Hikitia is a Maori Education Strategy released by the Ministry of Education, initially in 2007 and updated again in 2013. Ka Hikitia is based on research that outlines key principles that are critical to the success of Māori students at school. One of which is the need for strong engagement and collaboration with whānau with a purpose focused on the education of the students (Ministry of Education, 2013). Houghton (2015) supports the Ministry of Education’s documentation around the importance of relationships by stating that Māori student’s positive engagement in schools relied on the relationship with the kaiako (teacher), where the kaikako saw the whānau relationships as holding immense value.

By creating learning focused, purposeful relationships with whānau, teachers are able to change their practice to better suit the needs of their students (Education Review Office, 2015). Kraft (2017) found that many schools have infrequent, unsystematic and not adequately supported ways of communicating with whānau. It was through this research that recommendations were made for schools to use a strong research base and a systematic approach to improving the frequency and quality of whānau - teacher communications (Kraft, 2017). When whānau-teacher relationships are reciprocal, teachers know their students, their aspirations and their strengths better and therefore can tailor learning to draw from this knowledge (Trinick, 2015). Consequently, students are better able to make connections in their learning and grasp new concepts quicker when they have prior knowledge of the new learning context (Sale, 2015). Teachers have much to learn from whānau, as whānau have insight and knowledge about their children that teachers do not. Teachers are able to change their practice to better suit the needs of their students by creating learning focused purposeful relationships with whānau. Learning contexts for students could be strengthened by whānau voice. The nature of the communication between both parties would also be strengthened and become more purposeful and learning focused. The Education Review Office (2015) found that successful schools communicated
with whānau beyond sharing achievement to working together to support student success. It is with this idea that this research project is based.

**Personal Statement**

As a kaiako in a low decile school with a predominantly Māori cohort of tamariki (children), it is important to me to improve my practice to better serve the tamariki and their whānau. I believe that relationships sit at the heart of successful education for Māori which is supported by the research conducted by Russell Bishop and Mere Berryman (2009) in Te Kotahitanga. “Relationships and interactions between teachers and students in the classroom are key to effective teaching of Māori students” (Bishop & Berryman, 2009 p. 27).

Furthermore, as a teacher, I feel that relationships with students can be enhanced through strengthening the relationships with children’s whānau. I believe that strong purposeful relationships create an opportunity for authentic engagement with whānau. Engagement as such relates to the concept of ‘āko’ which is “the principle of reciprocity and also recognises that students and their whānau cannot be separated” (Ministry of Education, 2013. pg 16). I have the belief that all whānau want the best for their tamariki and have a lot to offer teachers that can help better their practice. This belief is supported by Gonzalez, Williems and Holbein (2005) who found that students who perceived their parents to value the importance of education were more motivated at school. Furthermore, by linking home and school, more learning can be better tailored to suit individuals and therefore increase the likelihood that the students will understand the concepts and context being taught.

Within my own teaching practice, I aim to build strong meaningful and purposeful relationships with the students and their whānau. Whānau engagement is a term used in many Ministry of Education publications from Ka Hikitia (2013) to the Education Review Office publications (2015). The essence of what these documents outline is the importance of schools building reciprocal relationships with whānau and creating opportunities to seek whānau input in decision making. In drawing on our kura (school) self-reviews we find the area we often want to focus on or further strengthen is around whānau engagement.

This idea of whānau engagement is complex and often means different things to different groups of people. Within this research project the term whānau engagement refers to the
reciprocal relationships between teachers and student whānau. When teachers and schools make concerted efforts to engage with whānau in a respectful and meaningful way they can learn an immense amount of information that helps improve their teaching practice (Education Review Office, 2008). Trinick (2015) and McKinley & Else (2002) identified that whānau wanted to be better connected to their children's school in order to encourage them and to know what learning was taking place. Furthermore, my own teaching practice can be strengthened by finding methods for communicating more regularly with whānau and learning from their knowledge about their children's interests, and aspirations.

Through this research project it is hoped that I can strengthen my teaching practice to engage better with whānau and seek their input into the learning and wellbeing of their children at school. By focusing on building reciprocal relationships the aim is to improve my teaching through building genuine relationships with whānau.

The Study Site or Context

The kura in which I teach has undertaken a number of initiatives over the last few years to improve relationships with whānau. This includes, whānau evenings with kai (food), surveys to collect whānau voice on planning and initiatives, creating classroom blogs, sending out pānui (notices) inviting whānau to events at school and sharing information on Facebook. These efforts have helped to improve relationships and created a school that embraces whakawhanaungatanga (working together like a family). What the school found was that they had a large attendance from whānau at events such as sports days, with 50-60% of whānau attending and approximately 80% attending for mandatory reporting times, but according to school records from 2017, less than 10% when it came to teaching and learning sharing. Senior management made a goal within their strategic planning to strengthen the relationships with whānau, to refine the focus to be more purposeful around teaching and learning. In doing so, Senior Management hoped to seek input from whānau and ensure that their suggestions are implemented into teaching and learning.

The purpose of this research project was to a) find out more about the nature of relationships between whānau and the school and b) consider teacher practice as a way to strengthen relationships. The Education Review Office (2015) found in a review of 256 schools that the schools that had the strongest whānau engagement were the ones that had learning focused
relationships that supported a two way sharing of expertise; this two way sharing throughout this thesis will be described as whānau agency. It is with these ideas in mind that the school leadership sought to make a commitment to further improve the relationships with whānau in order to grow whānau agency.

Whānau struggle to engage positively with the kura (school) for many different reasons such as their own or their children’s negative experiences with schools, their own experiences of schooling, and time and resources (McKinley & Else, 2002). This project that forms part of this research aims to build more collaborative relationships with whānau, so that whānau voice is used to improve teacher practice and thus learning experiences for the children. This study is a response to feedback from whānau indicating a desire to know more about their children’s learning, than what is being provided during mandatory reporting times. The Education Review Office (2013) supports this by stating that whānau wanted more regular communication about their children’s learning than the usual twice a year reporting.

By engaging with whānau the project also provides opportunities for teachers and whānau to work collaboratively and improve the learning contexts for the students. If the learning contexts being taught link directly to the student’s culture and identity it helps to improve the engagement, motivation and prior knowledge that builds learning (Sale, 2015).

**A Maori-Centred Approach – A Prelude to the Research Project**

When embarking on research that is framed around a Māori centred approach, it is important to involve the key stakeholders in the planning and design process as well as the project itself (Bishop & Berryman, 2009). Guidance and support was sought from the teachers and whānau in the junior school before the study was implemented. At first the focus was on building friendly relationships with whānau through a Marae noho (Marae stay), followed by seeking information from them as to how they would like to communicate with the kaiako (teacher) about their children’s learning.

Many of the whānau were already known to me, as I am a kaiako (teacher) in the school, however some were new to the kura (school) so an emphasis on getting to know everyone was needed. This approach of getting to know whānau is connected to one of our school values, whakawhanaungatanga (working like a family). When working with whānau and beginning to
build relationships the emphasis was placed on making connections with whānau through pepeha (a way to introduce yourself in Māori), common interests or whakapapa (ancestry).

Once a friendly relationship was made and whānau felt comfortable talking, I sought more information about what they wanted from the school regarding their children's learning. Once a friendly relationship had been established face to face, whānau signaled the use of technology as a preferred method of communication. All whānau responded positively to the idea of this research project and were interested in knowing more about what their children were learning at school. Some whānau also shared that they wanted to contribute more to learning at school but were busy with their own work and whānau commitments. Whānau did comment that they would like to be able to communicate with teachers without having to come into school.

The teachers within the school were also open to sharing their ideas and supported the idea of this research. Through the year, as the project was being shaped, I continued to work with the whānau responding to their questions and ideas about how they wanted to support their children and be involved in the school. It was important to keep the positive and ongoing’ relationships with whānau in order to be able to begin the research later in the year. One way that this was achieved was by working with whānau in a reading programme, supported by the Ministry of Education, under the name of Reading Together (Biddulph, 2012).

At the end of the whānau reading group I discussed with whānau what they would like to know more about or be involved in within the school. This feedback showed that the whānau really wanted to know more about the learning their children were doing and to be able to contribute more to the school. They also responded by saying they did not have a lot of time to always come into school so we discussed the use of technology. The feedback from whānau at this point was that they had access to smartphones but not always computers.

Facebook and See-Saw were both discussed with whānau as tools that could be used to communicate regularly. Facebook is a commonly used social media that many schools now use to share information (Clarke, 2017). See-Saw is an application that can be downloaded onto smart phones or used on computers. It provides a place where teachers and students can share learning with their families and they receive a notification that something has been added. It has the ability to share video, document and screen recordings of talking and creating. These two tools are discussed throughout this thesis particularly in the findings and discussion chapters.
The feedback from whānau was vital throughout the design of this research project. It first helped to form friendly relationships with whānau, canvased feedback from the whānau about what they would like to know more about, and how they wanted to engage with the school. This information drove the decisions within this research project.

**Research Aims**

The purpose of this study is to inform my teaching practice in terms of how to create more learning focused and collaborative relationships with whānau, where whānau become agents in the learning process.

**Research Questions**

To achieve these aims, the following research questions were utilised in the study:

- What is the nature of whānau relationships at my school?
- What can whānau teach us (teachers) about forming relationships that improve the learning for their children?
- How can whānau voice improve my teaching practice?

**Significance of the Aim / Questions to the Research Challenge.**

The project has a goal of improving relationships with whānau and links directly to the challenge that schools face when building reciprocal partnerships with whānau. As both the whānau feedback and Education Review Office (2008) found, whānau wanted to know more about what their children are learning at school. Baker (2002) further supports this by looking at the historical intentions behind ‘Tomorrow’s Schools’ in forming partnerships with whānau and while schools have achieved the governance level, they have yet to achieve the collaborative partnership level.

As guided by the notion of practitioner research (Mutch, 2005), I acknowledge that my teacher practice can be enhanced and strengthened by working more collaboratively with whānau. For
this project, I used Facebook and See-Saw (social media and digital applications) to share the learning that had occurred at school and sought opportunities for whānau to share knowledge of their tamariki through the use of questioning to prompt conversation. Through this meaningful dialogue with whānau my teaching practice was further strengthened by creating learning opportunities that catered better towards their child’s learning, inclusive of their cultural identity. McKinley & Else (2002) found through their research that Māori whānau had more positive experiences of school when their teacher valued their culture, identity and had a strong relationship with them and their whānau.

In summary, the research project is shaped around a need for our school to further strengthen the nature of the relationships we have with whānau. The project sought to investigate how social media and apps could be utilised to increase the frequency of conversation between whānau and teachers when face to face interactions cannot be achieved. Whānau have great insight into their own children’s interests and aspirations and therefore can help share information that can strengthen teaching practice. By knowing my students and their whānau better it creates opportunities for refinement of how and what I teach.

**Organisation of the Research Chapters**

This thesis is organised into six chapters. Chapter One provides a background to the study and discusses the aims and questions related to this study. This chapter serves to orientate the reader to the nature of the study and provides an explanation of the process followed.

In Chapter Two, the body of literature around whānau engagement is reviewed. The historical context of whānau engagement in New Zealand schools is discussed and provides insight into some of the barriers that make it difficult for whānau to engage with schools. The body of literature also discusses international and national research, pertaining to whānau engagement and the advantages and disadvantages this can have on teacher practice.

Chapter Three includes a justification of the research methodology and methods employed in the study. The qualitative research design is explained, with its appropriateness discussed. A description of Māori-centred research and practitioner research is also outlined more in this
methodology chapter, with its links to the research project explained. A brief description of the participants and ethical considerations are also provided.

Chapter Four presents the findings collected from the focus groups, interviews and collated field notes. The themes and subthemes that emerged during the data collection process are identified and discussed. A first level analysis was used to make the collected data more manageable and meaningful.

Chapter Five provides a critical discussion of the findings identified in chapter four and adds meaning to them by linking them to other research and ideas. It also discusses the limitations of the research project and implications for future practice.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter the existing literature base pertaining to whānau engagement and home school partnerships is examined, predominantly from the New Zealand education sector, but also in relation to international research.

This review will also outline the literature relating to the historical background to whānau engagement in schools in New Zealand with a particular focus on educational experiences of Māori whānau. The second section will discuss some of the literature pertaining to other barriers that contribute to limited whānau engagement. Following this, literature surrounding Māori learners and whānau engagement will be discussed. The final two sections of the literature review will discuss the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in whānau engagement and the implications this has on teacher practice.

Improving Educational Outcomes through Engagement with Whānau

The Ministry of Education (2013) outlines the expectation that schools and whānau must work in partnership in order to provide accessible, practical information that supports students and their whānau to understand how the education system works and how whānau can influence the quality of education their children receive (pg. 18). This stance by the Ministry of Education is supported by research undertaken by Hattie (2009) who found that a child's home environment has an effect size of 0.52 and parental involvement has an effect size of 0.49 which is higher than a range of other inputs such as homework 0.29, class sizes 0.21. Any measure above 0.40 is deemed to have a positive influence on education and above what is described as developmental progress (Hattie, 2009). For educators this highlights a responsibility to help students to make connections between their school environment and home environment and the way to achieve this is through working collaboratively with whānau. Therefore, it is the teacher’s responsibility to ensure that whānau are valued and have formed relationships that enable both the students and whānau to be valued and supported (Ministry of Education, 2013).

Whilst there is an abundance of literature that supports the need for schools to have strong partnerships and engage whānau in their children’s education, there are many variations of what
this engagement actually looks like (Bull, Brooking, & Campbell, 2008; Clarke, 2017; Ester & Wai-Man, 2013; Gonzalez, Williams, & Holbein, 2005; Gorinski & Fraser, 2006; Hyslop, 2001; OECD, 2008; Madden, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2010; The Centre for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2005; Education Review Office, 2015). Some schools highlight that the quality of whānau engagement relates to the school’s processes in sharing information with whānau (Madden, 2015) while other schools describe workshops setup that help explain how teaching and learning takes place (Clarke, 2017). Then there are wider definitions of whānau engagement such as The Education Review Office (2008) that defines whānau engagement as a meaningful and respectful partnership that is focused on improving the educational success for the students. This definition links closely to the aim of this project in terms of building a reciprocal relationship with whānau.

Bull, Brooking, & Campbell (2008) and Gorinski & Fraser (2006) both carried out literature reviews on whānau engagement and found that most literature referred to whānau knowing what was happening at schools or being involved in extracurricular activities such as sports days. The definition of whānau engagement this paper is focused around is “a meaningful, respectful partnership between schools and their parents, whānau, and communities that focuses on improving the educational experiences and successes for each child” (Education Review Office, 2008, p. 1). It is also important to note that each school has a unique community and therefore what works well in one context does not necessarily work well in another. The purpose of this thesis is to inform my teaching practice in terms of how to create more learning focused and collaborative relationships with whānau, where whānau become agents in the learning process.

Ka Hikitia (Ministry of Education, 2013) outlines the key factors that help improve education success for Māori students and is a key strategic document for reciprocal relationships between whānau and kaiako (teachers). This is a guiding document for the project outlined in this thesis. Ka Hikitia outlines the importance of ako which, “is grounded in the principle of reciprocity” (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 16). The terms ‘whānau engagement’ and ‘partnerships’ with whānau will be used throughout this literature review. These terms are used to describe the way that whānau and teachers work together and share information from home and school in order to best plan the learning for the student. Within this literature review, partnership will be defined as a collaborative and mutually respectful relationship (Bull, Brooking, & Campbell. 2008).
The engagement and involvement of whānau in their children's education has changed over time. It is only in more recent years that ‘whānau engagement’ has become a commonly used term in education both nationally and internationally. As whānau are the key stakeholders in their child’s education there has been a growing interest within research fields to promote whānau involvement (Ministry of Education, 2013; Education Review Office, 2008; Sui-Chu Ho & Kwong, 2013). Sui-Chu Ho & Kwong (2013) describe whānau engagement as enhancing and improving children's education and school effectiveness. Furthermore, as identified in Ka Hikitia (Ministry of Education, 2013) whānau have indicated they want more involvement in what and how their children are being taught (Ministry of Education, 2013). In an article entitled 10 steps to equity in education published by ‘The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development’ (OECD, 2008) engaging families and communities was one of five levers that encourages quality education. Many sources have identified this area of study is relatively new (Ministry of Education, 2013; Education Review Office 2008; Sui-Chu Ho & Kwong, 2013; OECD, 2008).

The Historical Context of Whānau Engagement in New Zealand Schools

According to Bishop and Berryman (2006) historically negative experiences of schooling have been demoralising towards Māori or near nonexistent where schooling has historically been a negative experience for many Māori whānau where they have experienced racism towards their language and culture. Therefore, the historical background in a predominately Māori school is relevant to this study.

As outlined by Selby (1999), New Zealand education policies have only recently included the emphasis of whānau engagement even though our education systems began in 1867. In a history of New Zealand education by Calman (2012) it is stated that in 1867 the creation of the native school system began, which established a national system of primary schools. By 1879 control of the native schools was transferred to the Department of Education (Calman, 2012). In New Zealand history the first formal education act was established in 1877 which resulted in a free and compulsory primary education. At this time an education board was also set up. According to Mutch & Collins (2012) it was this board that made decisions about all matters which involved the schools and education.
New Zealand researcher Tearney (2016) stated that engaging whānau was not mentioned as an important factor and the focus of education policies and Māori representatives were not included in the makeup of decision makers as the curriculum was solely based around English. Hawaikirangi-Pere (2013) agreed with this statement and concluded, through a research project on cultural identity, that the native school system began a subtle process to eliminate Māori language and culture, and forcibly teach English language as a dominant culture. This research is further supported by Tearney (2016) who wrote a historical literature review focusing on New Zealand’s schooling and found that the dominant policy at the time was one of assimilation. “This approach involved educating Māori to abide by the habits of the European population by actively discouraging Māori language, belief systems and culture” (Tearney, 2016. p16). According to Selby (1999), it was during this era that Māori were punished for speaking Māori and forced to comply with English schooling.

From 1945 onwards, the Māori population moved into cities from their rural lifestyles in search of work, this move further withdrew Māori from their culture (Calman, 2012). Hook (2007) asserts that the loss of language, culture and language for the following generations of Māori has left them without a firm foundation which has led to a loss of confidence and a sense of individual inferiority.

According to Tearney (2016) the generation of children in most schools from 1945-1970 experienced English as the only language of instruction which had the effect of leaving Māori whānau unable to speak their language or celebrate their culture. Ritchie, Skerrett, & Rau (2013) found through literature that Māori language had dropped to only 5% of Māori adults being able to speak their language by 1970. This dismaying statistic caused a growing movement with whānau wanting to fight back for their language and their tamariki’s language (Ritchie, et al. 2013). With support from the Department of Maori Affairs ‘This Flax-Root’ development saw the introduction of kōhanga reo which began a resurgence of te reo Māori education (Calman, 2012). This movement was largely driven by whānau who wanted to see changes for their own tamariki and mokopuna.
Hawaikirangi-Pere (2013) describes the impact of colonisation as a harsh reminder that generations of Māori have suffered the psychological trauma of losing their sense of belonging. As a result of this trauma it has created generations of Māori whānau that feel disconnected from their identity and culture (Hawaikirangi-Pere, 2013). Whānau engagement in education was driven by Māori whānau wanting to change education for their own tamariki as exemplified in creating movements such as Kōhanga Reo followed by Kura Kaupapa, Whare Kura and Wānanga (Richie et al. 2013).

According to Baker (2002), ‘Tomorrow’s Schools’ introduced by the New Zealand Labour government in the 1980s recognised the need for school communities and whānau to have a voice in decision making. Some of the reasons cited for making change was the desire for schools to extend parental choice, increase home school partnerships and improve education outcomes for Māori students and students who came from low income families (Mutch & Collins, 2012). Baker (2002) argues that the need for change was largely due to a growing dissatisfaction with the system’s inflexibility and lack of responsiveness to parents and the local community.

Goriniski & Fraser (2006) comment that partnerships between educators and whānau is an ideal and has been for a long time both nationally and internationally. A literature review of international educational research from 1970 the present day article, discovered a link between parental involvement and children's educational achievement, where student’s families that were involved with the school had better achievement outcomes (Goriniski & Fraser, 2006). Research studies conducted in the United States, Britain and other European countries also show that promoting parental involvement at home or school has significant benefits such as enhancing student achievement, reducing absenteeism and school dropout rates (Sui-Chu Ho & Kwong, 2013).

By 1993, the Ministry of Education released more defined goals and purposes for Boards of Trustees made up of whānau representatives, staff and the school principal to govern schools (Mutch & Collins, 2012). The importance of clear and concise communication and consultation with whānau and communities became a mandated expectation of all schools in New Zealand from this point (Mutch & Collins, 2012). These two researchers who explored whānau
engagement over time in New Zealand identified that it has only been since the 21st century that whānau engagement has become an expectation for schools. According to Mutch and Collins (2012), generally, the first types of whānau involvement in schools were tasked with fundraising and education outside of the classroom, because these forms of engagement from whānau meant that schools could offer more depth in sporting and cultural activities. Both international and national research shows a shift in education policies that acknowledge whānau engagement as a key factor that makes a difference to students’ and schools’ performance (Brownlee, 2015).

Bird (1999) states that New Zealand education policies were hinged around English only schooling. It was not until the introduction of ‘Tomorrow’s Schools’ that there was a shift in emphasis where whānau became involved in governance and decision-making (Baker, 2002). Currently, whānau engagement is an expectation for all schools and features throughout Ministry of Education documentation such as Ka Hikitia (2013), Te Kotahitanga (2011) and Family and Community engagement (2010). How schools engage with whānau, and what that looks like differs for each unique school community. In more recent years, education has developed many policies and resources to encourage the success of Māori students that all include explicit goals around whānau engagement (Calman, 2012). Prior to this, efforts were fairly dismal with much emphasis made to exclude Māori from their own culture and identity (Brownlee, 2015; Desforges, & Abouchaar, 2003; Gorinski & Fraser, 2006).

**Barriers to Whānau Engagement**

Historical influences for schooling in New Zealand provides a background to whānau and school engagement. Through generations of negative schooling experiences, predominantly within mainstream schools, whānau are much less inclined to want to engage with schools (Hawaikirangi-Pere, 2013; Selby, 1999). This section of the literature review will discuss some identified barriers to whānau engagement. Literature from New Zealand and abroad describe some of these challenges as stress from other factors in whānau lives, previous negative experiences in education for themselves or their whānau, and a lack of the resources needed to engage from both school and whānau perspectives (McKinley & Else, 2002; Gorinski & Fraser, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2013).
One of the most commonly identified barriers to strong whānau engagement in schools is the person’s own experiences of schooling (Brownlee, 2015). The analysis by McKinley and Else (2002) is directly relevant to this study because it found that Māori parents, who had had negative experiences of schooling themselves or with their children, generally did not feel as welcome or confident in school environments. Parents interviewed in McKinley and Else’s (2002) research reported that some of the negative experiences that formed mistrust between themselves and their schools were due to them feeling isolated as Māori, singled out or treated differently. They also felt that teachers did not care about them and this contributed to a lack of confidence and low self-worth (McKinley & Else, 2002). Bishop & Glynn (1999) agree with the experiences relayed by parents in McKinley & Else’s research (2002). Poor schooling experiences like being streamed into classes also made parents feel they were not good enough (McKinley & Else, 2002). Gorinski & Fraser (2006) report that issues of parental confidence and self-esteem can be directly linked to parents’ own experiences of school. As educators there is a need to make whānau feel cared about, welcome and able to be involved in their children’s education as well as ensuring the children have a whānau like context for learning (Bishop, 2017).

According to Desforges & Abouchaar (2003) whānau involvement in schools has a positive effect for students. When children see that their whānau value education it motivates them to value higher academic competence (Gorinski and Fraser, 2006). Indeed, as stated by Gratz (2006), “It is important that children learn how to be excited about learning from an early age. Parents are the ones who need to instill this excitement in their children” (p.3). This can be a huge challenge if parents’ own experiences of schooling have been negative. Selby (1999) highlights the historical loss of culture, identity and a forced fit of English schooling on Māori still harbors negative feelings towards education today.

Ka Hikitia (Ministry of Education, 2013) states that schools that work in partnership with whānau can better support more effective teaching and learning for Māori students where they see their whānau having a say in decisions. According to researchers McKinley and Else (2002), there was a noted difference between the nature of involvement from whānau at Kura Kaupapa and mainstream schools where whānau participation and shared responsibility is an expectation within Kura Kaupapa. McKinley and Else’s (2002) research collected qualitative data from whānau and teachers which provides insight into how to begin improving whānau relationships,
and building collaboration where whānau have a sense of shared responsibility for the education of their children. The Education Review Office (2015) found in a study of 256 schools that in situations where schools were unsuccessful in forming strong home school partnerships with whanau, the communication was through a one-way portal that did not require a response. The Education Review Office (2015) found that when engagement with whānau was not a school focus and the understanding of the role whānau play in co-constructing learning steps was not embedded in the school, school staff lacked the ability to form strong home school partnerships. According to Bull, Brookings & Campbell (2008) the lack of resources can be both in terms of the school not having the appropriate policies and aims as well as physical resources such as transport and internet access.

A number of research studies have discussed the connection of socio-economic groups and whānau engagement (Kiyama, Harper et al, 2015; Gratz 2006; Hyslop, 2001; McKinley, Else, 2002). Kiyama, Harper et al. (2015) examines literature around parental involvement and concludes that it differs hugely between socio-economic groups where low socio families were perceived to not have as much voice in the education of their tamariki as high socio families. Gratz, (2006) also concludes that low socio-economic areas have lower levels of whānau engagement. The research has tended to focus on the numbers of whānau involved in the school but does not elaborate to describe the nature of that involvement. However, this research from both Kiyama & Harper (2015) and Gratz (2006) was conducted in The United States of America and therefore may not be completely relevant to New Zealand in all respects because of the cultural and historical differences. One aspect that is relevant is the difference in socio-economic research found, as both New Zealand and The United States of America have large differences between those who live in high socio-economic backgrounds and those who live in low.

McKinley and Else (2002) researchers from New Zealand, report that many principals and teachers in New Zealand believe that lower numbers of Māori whānau involved in their tamariki’s learning is not a cultural but rather a socio-economic issue. This research regarding the socio economic connection to whānau engagement in schools is relevant to this research project given the low socio area the study is carried out in. McKinley & Else (2002) interviewed a wide range of school principals and found that the perceived lack of involvement of whānau was understandable when considering that whānau had to work, had other preschoolers at home and generally having to think about the pressures of trying to get by economically each day. Socio economic pressures do add challenges for many whānau who want to be more involved
and therefore schools must address this by understanding, forming positive relationships and finding ways to communicate with whānau that are not reliant on whānau having to be physically present, in the understanding that whānau may face many pressures in their daily lives (Education Review Office, 2008).

The most commonly identified barriers to whānau engagement in schools linked directly to previous negative experiences and socio economic barriers.

**Māori Learners and Whānau Engagement**

Māori have led some movements such as the creation of Kura Kaupapa Schools which are leading the way in terms of collaborative partnerships between whānau and school staff where whānau have a key role in the direction of the education that their children receive (Mc Kinley & Else, 2002). Kura Kaupapa Schools are whānau-led and therefore are quite different to mainstream schooling where the school leads everything (Tearney, 2016). Several key factors are acknowledged when thinking about how Māori students learn best with the key one being relationships (Bishop, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2011; McKinley & Else, 2002). These relationships are between the whānau, the student, the teachers and the school community.

Te Kotahitanga (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy, 2007) a professional development initiative aimed at supporting schools to develop culturally responsive pedagogies, acknowledges teacher effectiveness stands out as a factor that makes a major difference to student achievement. According to The Ministry of Education (2009, 2011) and Bishop et al (2007), this teacher effectiveness can be strengthened by working with the students’ whānau. The Ministry of Education (2011) outlines the value of this project as an opportunity for co construction between students and teachers, “Teachers and researchers involved in Te Kotahitanga have found that the most effective learning takes place when students and teachers actively construct knowledge together. This enables students’ prior experiences to be brought to classroom conversations and then built on with new knowledge and insights” (Ministry of Education, 2011 p.2). While Te Kotahitanga (2011) was designed for secondary school teachers many of the ideas within it can be applied to a primary school context with teachers working with whānau to understand and co construct learning for the students (Ministry of Education, 2009).
In their interviews with Maori whānau, McKinley and Else (2002) found that where whānau experiences of schooling had been positive, the teachers had shown a real interest in individual strengths and created engaging activities that drew from these. The Education Review Office (2008) further supports the idea that engagement with whānau was high when whānau felt listened to and their ideas valued. The success of Kura Kaupapa is hinged on the relationships between whānau and the kura where the kura staff are considered part of the wider whānau, this reflects the true essence of whakawhanaungatanga where all members of the school whānau contribute to the education of the tamariki (Horomia, 2008). McKinley and Else (2002) report that the Kura Kaupapa teachers and whānau had a shared responsibility for the education of the child which meant that there was a cultural match between the learning at home and that at kura (school). The closer the classroom experiences and home experiences are for students, the more likely that students will be able to participate in the learning (Ministry of Education, 2011). This cultural match between home and school is vital in being able to make links and construct new knowledge (Sale, 2015). This research by the Ministry of Education (2011) and Sale (2015) is relevant to this research project as it emphasizes the importance of teacher practice through whānau voice. Students generally do better in education when what and how they learn reflects where they come from, what they value and what they already know (Bishop, 2017). If learning connects with student’s existing knowledge it is easier for them to understand (Ministry of Education, 2013). By understanding Māori students, their world, their values and their whānau values and experiences we have a much greater chance of making learning experiences that are relevant and enjoyable and reflect a whānau like context for learning (Bishop, 2017).

Houghton (2015) found that for Māori students to positively engage in learning, positive relationships with the kaiako (teachers) had to be in place, where the kaiako (teachers) saw whānau relationships of value. Engaging with whānau has been highlighted as being a priority for teachers and school leaders where it is acknowledged that relationships are paramount to the success of the school (Controller and Auditor General, 2016, Gorinski and Fraser, 2006). A key finding in the Best Evidence Synthesis (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009) which identifies key factors for effective schools is that there is great potential for school leaders to change patterns of underachievement when they work with parents and whānau to build home–school connections that are purposeful (Ministry of Education, 2010). This is further supported by Desforges & Abouchaar (2003) who identified a link between parental involvement and student achievement in the United Kingdom.
When schools are trying to form positive relationships with whānau it has been shown that newsletters, letters and phone calls did not encourage greater involvement for Māori whānau (McKinley & Else, 2002). According to Moeke-Pickering (1996) what worked better was to first begin with kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face) which provides opportunity for connections to be formed between the people meeting. Cavanagh, Macfarlane, Glynn and Macfarlane (2012) describe relationships as being the centre of maintaining one’s identity, safety and survival in education where Māori students will make connections to others and share knowledge between them. As teachers it is vital that these relationships are formed and connections are made to the students and their whānau (Bull et al. 2008). Examples of this can include finding out whānau aspirations and strengths of their tamariki and then teaching to these as described by interviews in McKinley & Else’s (2002) research.

The Ministry of Education (2009) states that the success in learning depends on relationships where people add value and build on each other’s knowledge, expertise and aspirations. The Education Review Office (2008) conducted a review of whānau engagement in schools and found that Māori parents wanted their children to have good relationships with the teachers and this was more likely to happen when teachers related well to their children and respected their cultural identity. When forming relationships with students and whānau it is essential that the purpose is respectful and honest. Whānau within the research project conducted by McKinley and Else (2002) stated that once a relationship was established it was more likely the whānau would be involved in the school. The Ministry of Education (2013) states that schools must create productive partnerships with whānau that are focused on education but this approach is not attainable without first establishing a relationship with the whānau. Both authors have identified that relationships are fundamental to the establishment of whānau engagement in schools.

The literature suggests that there are several factors outlined as being essential for schools when trying to establish partnerships with Māori whānau and students. McKinley & Else (2002) suggest that it begins with relationships and secondly that whānau have a joint role in the education of their children in being able to share their ideas and aspirations for their children (Ministry of Education, 2009). It is through this that teachers can create learning experiences that are more encompassing of Te Ao Māori and the cultural world of each individual student.
Te Ao Māori is a term used to describe the world in which Māori live, it is literally translated as the Māori world.

**ICT and Whānau Engagement**

In recent years, information communication technologies (ICT) has been seen and used as a way of engaging with whānau who cannot always come to school due to other commitments (Olender, Elias & Mastroleo, 2015). According to Trottier, (2016) whilst ICT can provide a way of being able to communicate more efficiently and frequently it is not always used in a manner that allows for collaborative partnerships with whānau to be formed, instead he argues that face to face interactions must be made initially.

The Education Review Office (2008) reports that Māori parents said they wanted to use different ways to communicate, such as text messaging to help the flow of information between home and school. Many examples of literature refer to engaging whānau as simply sharing information with them through the use of blogs, forums, websites and social media, and argues that the sharing of information helps the whānau to know what is happening and provides an avenue for whānau to respond (Clarke, 2017; The Centre for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2005; Danielson, 2017 & Innes, 2017). The response avenue provided by most of these communication technologies is by whānau writing a comment on a public forum space like Facebook or blogs. The ability to be able to respond or contribute to a conversation allows collaboration to begin. One school held information evenings where they have shown whānau how to respond to blogs and Facebook pages in efforts to increase whānau input in to how their school operates (Clarke, 2017).

However, in a study of 256 schools, the New Zealand Education Review Office (2015) found that using technology alone had not contributed to learning centred relationships between whānau and school improving nor student outcomes improving. Trottier (2015) agreed and argues the need to form friendly relationships with whānau first, and then using websites and technology to increase the frequency of dialogue. McKinley and Else (2002) agree and discovered through feedback from whānau that newsletters, phone calls and letters did not encourage greater involvement unless relationships had already been formed. These methods of engaging whānau really highlight schools sending information to whānau but does not allow
whānau to know how teaching and learning takes place nor does it give them an opportunity to be involved.

McKinley & Else (2002) discovered that most parents based their understanding of their child’s progress at school on school reports and parent teacher interviews which usually happened twice throughout the year. According to Mutch & Collins (2012) traditionally information sharing between schools and families has been a one-way flow of information about student achievement. Researchers McKinley and Else (2002) and the Education Review Office (2008) found that whānau wanted to know more about what their children were learning at school than what was often provided. Information communication technology provides an opportunity to increase the frequency of sharing between whānau and teachers where whānau can see their children’s progress and learning goals anytime (Porter, 2008). The Education Review Office (2008) found that this in turn would provide an opportunity for whānau to know what learning is taking place and to talk about learning at home with their children when the time fitted with the whānau.

Mahuika, Berryman & Bishop (2011) support the idea of a reciprocal relationship (ako) with whānau in order to create compatibility between the school and home environments that support the learning of the students. The Ministry of Education (2013) further supports this idea by stating that students do better in education when how they learn is positively reinforced by where they come from, what they value and what they already know. This can be achieved if we work closer with whānau to learn from each other and form closer tailored learning experiences based around students’ existing knowledge. This does not mean schools simply sharing what happens at school but whānau having opportunities to share learning experiences from home as well. McKinley and Else (2002) attribute the success of Kura Kaupapa and whānau engagement to the commitment that the kaiako (teacher) and the whānau give to learning being across both home and school environments. In a small randomized control trial conducted by Kraft (2017) personalized phone calls increased student engagement and whānau relationships more at school than other measures such as homework and in class participation. This small scale study gives insight into the way technology can be used in order to build whānau engagement and improve learning experiences for students.
Strengthening Teacher Practice

By improving partnerships with whānau, kaiako (teachers) create opportunities to improve general classroom teaching practice. When teachers know more about their students and have better relationships with their whānau they can create learning experiences directly linked to the world in which their students live. The consequences of such actions have shown to increase student achievement, improve student behaviour and engagement in learning as well as improve relationships between whānau and teachers (Ester & Wai-Man, 2013).

Purposeful relationships with whānau have the ability to extend learning across home and school (Education Review Office, 2015). Sale (2015) found that many difficulties faced by learners were attributed to the learning context. If students were confronted with a learning context in which they had little prior knowledge, the instruction moved at such a rate that they could not comprehend or understand the learning (Sale 2015). Furthermore, Hattie (2009) found that the learning rate for students could be accelerated by using meaningful connections between prior knowledge and new learning concepts. This approach was measured to have an effect size of 0.41 making it more than a normal rate of progress (Hattie, 2009). The Education Review Office (2015) highlight that successful examples of whānau engagement are built around powerful connections and relationships that are focused on learning and a sharing of expertise. Furthermore, research by Bishop (2017) attribute success for Māori students at school to culturally responsive learning contexts and relationships formed. Whānau have expertise in knowing their children, their interests and aspirations, if these are shared and taught from, it strengthens the relationships and learning experiences between whānau, students and teachers (Education Review Office, 2008).

It is suggested that the nature of conversations has to move beyond communicating about achievement to working together to support student success (Porter, 2008). If whānau and teachers worked closely together and shared information between the home and school, then learning contexts in which the students had prior knowledge could be better utilized. Sale (2015) states that prior knowledge is the lens through which students perceive and react to new information provided and the challenge teachers faced was utilizing and designing ways for students to connect new knowledge to the prior knowledge. These authors have discussed the potential whānau voice can have on changing teacher practice and improving learning for students.
A research project of 256 schools conducted by the Education Review Office (2015) found those that had educationally powerful relationships between whānau and school knew that the school’s involvement had to go beyond communication about achievement to working together to support student success. While this research project highlighted some examples of whānau engagement focused on the teaching and learning and improved students’ academic outcomes, it did not specify the decile rating, ethnic makeup of the school or the levels of students deemed at risk. Instead it looked at small groups of students at a school whose achievement was at risk and gave examples of how the school had worked with whānau to improve their understandings of what their children were learning and how they could support them. These small group examples were based on pull out groups of learners at school and could not make a clear connection between student’s achievement and whānau engagement (Education Review Office, 2015).

Fraser and Gorinski (2006) found that a common thread identified amongst international research showed a link between poor achievement of low socioeconomic neighborhoods and the perceived lack of parental involvement. However, the teachers had only allowed involvement at an administrative level and therefore the link cannot be accredited to whānau involvement but more school processes (Fraser & Gorinski, 2006). The Education Review Office (2008) supports this view with whānau sharing it was not easy for them to work in partnership with their child’s school when policies and procedures were not clear or made available. In turn there is a need for increased advocacy in the role of empowering, co constructing models of home school partnerships that are based on respect, honesty and are purposeful. Trinick (2015) carried out a project called Mutukaraoa, that focused on improving the relationship and understanding between whānau and schools by creating a genuine partnership where school practices were informed by whānau understandings. As teachers we need to spend time forming positive relationships with whānau and ensuring that they are reciprocal where whānau has a voice in decision making.

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) found through their literature review that the link between student achievement and parental involvement in school was weak. Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) accredited the weak link to the fact that it had not been studied closely, instead, it relied of perceptual data to draw conclusions of the changes made, therefore it was impossible to use available evidence to describe the scale of the impact on pupils’ achievement. The Ministry of Education (2013) outlines that to be successful in raising student achievement, stakeholders must form productive partnerships where there is an ongoing exchange of knowledge and
information where everybody contributes to achieving the goals. However, with this statement there are no examples provided of practices that go alongside the policy for schools. Perceptions of what productive partnerships entails can be vastly different. Bull et al. (2008) found that despite initiatives to increase parental involvement in schools it had not always improved outcomes for students as the initiatives looked simply at an information drop onto parents rather than reciprocity. These initiatives had done little to achieve either whānau engagement or better teaching practice.

Literature that looks specifically at initiatives to help bridge home school language and learning differences focused on how schools could help whānau help their children through the use of workshops. Madden (2015) found that there was no data to support the ongoing nature of how whānau have continued to help their children with learning beyond the initial workshops. These workshops are often held once or twice a year and do not allow for ongoing communication around the students’ learning. The aim is to have our Māori students achieving education success as Maori with their whānau participating and contributing to an engaging and enjoyable educational journey that enables and celebrates each student and whānau as individuals (Ministry of Education, 2013).

**Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the literature pertaining to whānau engagement in New Zealand and has made links to literature from abroad. The literature surveyed suggests that Māori experiences of education have been historically negative. Such experiences have impacted on the current context where the loss of culture, identity and self-worth have created generations of whānau who feel disconnected and not valued within schools. This has been further supported by international research that has shown parental involvement makes a significant difference to the educational outcome of the students (Bull et al., 2008; Gratz, 2006; Gonzalez et al., 2005; Ester & Wai-Man, 2013). Further challenges that make it hard for whānau to engage with schools can be accredited to a lack of resources including time. The use of ICT can support ongoing collaboration with whānau once a relationship has been formed. ICT alone does not build whanau engagement as whanau need to connect with the teacher first (Education Review Office, 2015). Effective teacher practice for Māori students is based around relationships. When teachers are positive and draw from student strengths and whānau aspirations learning connections are made more readily (McKinley & Else, 2002). Teachers’ practice can be
enhanced by focusing on building reciprocal relationships with whānau and using vital information they share to create better learning contexts for the students they teach (Sale, 2015).
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Overview

In this chapter the research paradigm which informed and shaped this research approach and process will be discussed. The methodological direction will be examined and discussed as well as the methods and techniques employed to gather and analyse the data. Methodology refers to the choices that the researcher makes when planning and carrying out a study (Silverman, 2005). For all research projects it is important that the research methodology and the research methods are appropriate to the aim and outcomes. Bryman (2012) further elaborates on this by stating that researchers draw on a set of beliefs that shape their worldviews and direct them towards study and the interpretation of results. In short methodology in this chapter refers to the research approach and methods that have shaped this research project.

The chapter opens by presenting the aims of the research followed by the rationale for the use of a qualitative practitioner research approach strongly bonded with a Māori centred research approach (Mutch, 2005).

In summary, the components of this research design include

- Research methodology
- Research methods
- Data Collection
- Data Analysis
- Ethical Issues

The research methodology seeks to answer the research questions. In turn, the type of research methodology must be appropriate for the type of questions and nature of the research project. The selection of a research methodology brings both research methods and the methods used to analyse data into the spotlight (Mason, 2002).
Research Aim

The aims of this research project was to a) find out more about the nature of relationships between whānau and the school and b) consider teacher practice as a way to strengthen relationships.

It is hoped that the insights from this study may provide some understanding and practical approaches other schools with a similar cohort may be able to use in order to strengthen teaching practice through whānau agency. The next sections of this chapter will discuss the research methods in light of the research questions:

Research Questions

- What is the nature of whānau relationships at our school?
- What can whānau teach us (teachers) about forming relationships that improve the learning for their children?
- How can whānau voice change teaching practice?

A Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research traces its origins in disciplines of humanity and social sciences, where it has evolved significantly over the last two centuries (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Flick (2007) points out the term qualitative research was used to describe an alternative to quantitative research where the importance of a research approach that is better aligned with understanding social science and humanity is utilised. Lapan, Quartaroli and Riemer (2011) affirm this difference between the two research approaches by explaining that qualitative research places more emphasis on the study of phenomena from the perspective of ‘insider research’ rather than physical phenomena in quantitative approaches. Mutch (2005) states that when we think of educational research it is distinguished by its focus on people, places and processes broadly related to teaching and learning.

Therefore, the main approach for gathering research data for this study considers that research undertaken through the lenses of the descriptive accounts of participants, helps the reader to
gain a better understanding (Mutch, 2005). This research draws on the work of Berryman, SooHoo and Nevin (2013) as the study focuses on the diverse ways in which the participants view their relationships with whānau and whānau with school staff. This implies a focus on qualitative research with a Māori centered research approach that is culturally responsive.

Qualitative research uses text as empirical material instead of numbers and starts from the notion that draws from the perspectives of the participants in everyday practices (Flick, 2007). Mutch (2005) supports this definition by describing qualitative research as an approach that looks at fewer participants but in more depth, to understand their feelings, thoughts and stories. Another key difference between the two research paradigms is that qualitative researchers do not stay anonymous within the field of study but take part (Flick, 2007). This approach is more in alignment of Māori centered research methodology as well as that of practitioner research. Therefore, given the shape of this research project being based around the practitioner’s research where the researcher is trying to better understand the participants and their particular views in order to improve her practice, qualitative research is the chosen approach. This approach also better aligns with Māori centered research.

**Practitioner Research**

Every researcher must decide on the paradigm that is the best in which to convey the research project. As this research project is shaped around understanding people, their stories and experiences it was essential to select a qualitative paradigm which would reflect this. Mutch (2005) defines a paradigm as a particular view of the world which links to a theory and a research approach.

This project follows an inquiry approach adopted from the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2008) in that it aims to improve teacher practice and student outcomes. The research draws on Māori centred philosophies and follows an informal practitioner research process. Lapan et al. (2011) refer to practitioner research as practical reasoning which is characteristic by professional self-regulation and a work related focus that is intended to improve practice. Elliott (2009) emphasises that educational practitioner research has an aim of changing a situation to make it more educationally worthwhile (cited in Noffke & Somekh, 2012).
Practitioner research is commonly used by researchers in their own field of expertise that involves people and the understanding of people (Lapan et al. 2011). Mutch (2005) supports both researchers’ definitions of practitioner research and concludes that the focus is on one’s own practices for the improvement of teaching and learning. This definition aligns perfectly with the aim of this research project in improving one's own teaching practice by collaborating with whānau.

The role of the researcher in practitioner research is likened to teachers’ inquiries in the classroom where the practitioner takes on the role of the researcher themselves (Cochran, & Lytle, 2009. cited in Noffke & Somekh. 2012). The New Zealand Curriculum document (Ministry of Education, 2008) also supports this by describing the teaching as inquiry cycle as a tool for teachers to learn from their practice. It is argued that the practitioner who works inside a particular educational context is among those who have significant knowledge and perspectives about the situation and context the research is hinged on (Cochran & Lytle, 2009. cited in Noffke & Somekh, 2012). Mutch (2005) supports this view of practitioner research and reiterates that the researcher must be working in the same field in which they carry out the research. Zeni (2009) affirms this approach to research and refers to it as the ‘insider stance’ where the researcher plays an important role in the research setting where the relationships and responsibilities continue post project (Cited in Noffke & Somekh, 2012).

The purpose of this research project was to investigate whānau relationships and engagement in school, with an aim to improve the relationships by building collaboration between whānau and teachers that have a positive impact on the teaching their children receive. This required me to collect the perceptions of teachers and whānau, adopting a subjectivist epistemological position. This epistemological position allowed me to collect and analyse whānau perceptions of their engagement with kura. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) explain that the subjectivist position is characterised by a concern for the individual as part of understanding the world. It was through this collection of information that I could begin my practitioner research. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) regard the interpretive approach as being suited for research that considers participant’s worlds of reality, attempts to interpret why people have different attitudes, beliefs and perspectives of their reality.

Mutch (2005) defines practitioner research as research where the focus is on the practitioner researcher investigating her own practice in order to make improvements. In this case the researcher investigated her own practice by seeking understandings and information from key
stakeholders within the research project. This information was used to then change and improve practice.

**Māori Centered Research**

A Māori centered research approach has been used as a key methodology for this thesis. A Māori centered research approach captures the vision of the project and adheres to the principles of the Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi). The key stakeholders are working in partnership where their rights, roles and responsibilities are shared and co constructed before, throughout and after the project (Hudson, Milne, Reynolds, Russell & Smith, 2010). Hudson, et al. (2010) provide a continuum of approaches that researchers can use and within this, Māori centered research is described as research designs that give Māori a greater level of participation within the research process. “Māori centered research involves Māori as significant participants in various roles, including the research team and participants, and possibly analysis and outcomes” (Hudson et al. p 10). The biggest difference between Māori centered research and Kaupapa Māori research is the role of the researcher itself. Smith (2013) highlights this by stating that a non-indigenous, non-Māori person can be involved in Kaupapa Māori research, but not on their own. As this research project is small scale and within the school community the research group consists of the researcher and a Māori advisor who is also the school principal. Delgado-Bernal (1998) explicates that striving to become competent in the main culture of the participants is an important element of research. This has been an explicit focus of the framing of my research project as it has involved investigating what elements help to form positive relationships between whānau and teachers to improve learning opportunities for a large majority of Māori students. It is necessary to understand Kaupapa Māori research and Māori values and culture that contributed to this methodology. Smith (2013) argues that non-indigenous researchers should support Māori research if their desire is to make a positive difference to Māori.

There are many reasons why Māori centered research, which is closely linked to the Kaupapa Māori Framework, is relevant and culturally appropriate when undertaking research. Henry and Pene (2001) describe Kaupapa Māori research as the Māori way or agenda which is a term used to highlight traditional Māori ways of doing, thinking and encapsulating a Māori world view. Smith (2013) supports this statement by stating that traditionally Māori have not seen the positive benefits of research, therefore cultural ground rules of respect and sharing processes
that are grounded around Māori world views are essential. Hudson et al. (2010) outline these essential values as Māori tikanga which reflects the way Māori view the world. These key tikanga based principles that link to Māori centered research are whakapapa, tika, maanaakitanga and mana. In this research, these principles were adhered to as part of following Māori tikanga within the school.

Whakapapa is defined by Hudson et al. (2010) as, the reason why a relationship has been formed and how the relationship progresses over time. As the researcher, the relationship with the whānau participants had begun to be established long before the research project was carried out. Cram (2001) describes this as He kanohi kitea (meeting people face to face) which is affirmed as a necessary component to Māori centered research. As a teacher practitioner I have been involved in many initiatives within the school to promote whānau engagement and sought feedback from the whānau as to the direction of this research. It was from this feedback that the research project was shaped. At the beginning of the research project, potential participants joined in information sharing sessions where an open forum was established and all were welcome to ask questions and refine the processes further. The information sheet provided whānau with all of the essential information which enabled them to make an informed decision about becoming a participant.

Tika is the term used to describe the validity of the research proposal as being right and good for Māori (Hudson et al, 2010). This value helps define the methodology for the research project as one that is cemented in a Māori centered research methodology which has similar elements to that of Kaupapa Māori research. Powick (2003) affirms that a Kaupapa Māori Framework is culturally safe and involves mentorship from elders that is culturally relevant when conducting research with Māori participants. In this research design a mentor was sought who is also the school principal and understands the community which the school serves. Cram (2001) refers to tika as kia tūpato (being cautious, staying safe by collaborating with kaumātua), this collaboration perhaps may help to address political concerns and culturally safe practice.

Maanaakitanga encompasses upholding the mana of all parties with the idea of cultural and social responsibility (Hudson et al, 2010). Privacy and confidentiality had to be upheld in all cases and a general care of the relationship between the researcher and the participants maintained. Powick (2003) states that research within a Māori context needs to consider the ethical safety of all participants including Māori. In this case, the community in which the school is located is largely Māori. Cram (2001) also affirms this by describing one of the key
components of Māori centered research as Manaaki ki te tangata (care for people) which is essentially about having a collaborative approach to the research where no elements are a surprise or not clearly established beforehand. Involving the participants in the design of the project was fundamental in establishing this key component.

Mana in a Māori context refers to the power and authority of the project and the equity of the research (Hudson et al. 2010). Cram (2001) affirms with the notion of aroha ki te tangata (a respect for people) allows people to define their own space and meet on their own terms. When setting up hui with whānau, this was always determined by whānau in terms of what worked best for them. Within this research project it was important that all information was transparent and could be questioned or changed at any point by the participants. This began before the project was put together through the use of participant feedback and throughout the project.

In summary a Māori centered research methodology was essential in developing this research project as the community in which the research was conducted is largely Māori. In framing up a research project it required direction from participants and a kaumātua from the community in the form of the school principal. As a Māori centred research approach there is some alignment with Kaupapa Māori methodology in that this research has focused on ensuring positive outcomes for the benefit of a large part of the school population, who are Māori.

Research Methods

The research methods used in this study drew on practitioner research and Māori centred research approaches that incorporated a combination of three data collecting methods: semi structured interviews with teachers (Appendix 3), a field notebook to capture researcher reflections and focus group interviews with whānau participants (Appendix 4). Mutch (2005) describes methods as a coherent set of strategies that a researcher uses to gather one kind of data.

Sampling Selection

All teachers of students in their first years or two of school were initially invited to join the research project. This consisted of three teachers in total. All three teacher participants consented to participate in the research.
All whānau from the three classes were then invited to first hear about (Appendix 5) and then join the research project if they wanted to. All whānau who were or were not participants in the research project still received the same information from the teachers but would not be part of the focus group for discussion. The rationale behind this was to ensure whānau and students were informed about the research and to avoid the scenario where whānau could feel excluded or not privy to what was happening. For many whānau the concept of research is daunting and previous experiences of research have limited Māori voice (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). This research project and the methods used needed to be flexible to allow whānau to decide the direction and value of the project. Bishop & Glynn (1999) state that one of the challenges for researchers has been to convince Māori people of the value of research and instill collaborative power sharing of the research.

The students within the classes were not participants in the research.

**Semi Structured Interviews**

The next section will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of semi structured interviews as a research method and why it was chosen as a method opposed to other methods.

Bryman (2001) highlights that semi structured interviews are helpful methods to use when conducting research that is open to hearing others views and stories. Semi structured interviews was chosen as a method for this research project as it allows the teacher participants to share their stories and ideas flexibly with myself and for them to seek clarification if they were unsure about any questions asked (Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

As there were only three teacher participants there was no concern of the interviews being too time consuming.

Semi structured interviews allow for flexibility in the questions used where the interviewer can change the order or re word the questions to seek the information they require (Bryman, 2001). Bishop and Glynn (1999) describe interviews as an appropriate research method when they are semi structured and promote free interaction and opportunity for clarification and discussion between the researcher and research participant. Mutch (2005) supports this description by describing the semi structured interviews as being more open ended and flexible. Furthermore,
Mutch (2005) argues that qualitative research tends to favour semi structured interviews as the researcher wants to get a more in depth understanding of the topic from the participant’s perspective. Berryman, SooHoo and Nevin (2013) and Silverman (2005) support this approach as it enables an authentic connection between the participants and the researcher. As the researcher and teacher participants have well established professional relationships with one another this research method was deemed appropriate. It also allowed the researcher to understand each teacher's different approach to updating whānau. Secondly, the researcher could gain insights in the teaching and learning in the teacher’s classroom and how whānau voice impacts on what they teach.

The key difference between an interview and a semi structured interview, as described by Bryman (2001), is that the specific topic areas are covered during the interview but the order and wording of the questions are left to the discretion of the interviewer. This allows the researcher flexibility in having a conversation and hearing the ideas and stories of the participants.

There are several disadvantages of using semi structured interviews. The first disadvantage is that semi structured interviews create opportunities for the interviewees to talk off topic and to lengthen the conversation beyond what the questions are designed (Eric, 1995). This can potentially pose issues for the researcher when transcribing the interview. Whereas, Opdenakkar (2006) describes the researcher’s added ability to read the interviewees’ body language and to direct the conversation when needed. The second disadvantage of semi structured interviews is that it is only useful in small scale research projects given the time it takes to conduct and transcribe the interviews (Eric, 1995). Mutch (2005) supports this view and lists semi structured interviews as an effective tool to use in small scale case studies or practitioner research type studies.

Two interviews with the teachers’ pre and post the research project were collected. The rationale behind two interviews was firstly to build an understanding of the ways the teachers had already built strong whānau relationships and use these as a platform to then increase the collaborative nature of those relationships. Secondly, it was to find out from the teacher’s perspectives what effect a collaborative relationship with whānau has on the students’ learning at school and the relationships with whānau.
The interviews with the teachers were conducted in a semi-formal setting at school in the teacher’s classrooms. The location of the interviews and the times teachers chose during the recruiting participants’ stage. The second interviews followed the same structure where teachers made the time and location to hold the interview.

The research questions used were developed from issues highlighted within the literature review as well as an understanding of the context of our school. The interview schedule can be found in the Appendixes (See Appendix 2).

The information collected in the first interviews helped to shape the direction of the project and its delivery. (See Appendix 2).

**Focus Group Interviews**

Focus groups are a popular means of data collection within educational contexts as it focuses on the conversation and qualitative research methods (McLachlan, 2005). As this project is based on finding out participant’s views about how they engage with the teachers at school, having the ability to obtain rich contextual information was of the highest importance (Sharma, 2005). Another term used to describe focus groups are group interviews. Mutch (2005) highlights that one of the key benefits of using a group interview is that it saves time. Sharma (2005) supports this statement by referring to a key benefit of a focus group being that it is a quick and inexpensive means of collecting data. This however was not the deciding factor when selecting this research method.

Secondly the environment for focus groups are considered non-threatening as responses to questions are given as a group. McLachlan (2005) comments that focus groups provide a way that researchers can identify a group's beliefs about a particular issue in a non-threatening environment. Hinds (2000) cited in Mutch (2005) further supports this by saying that a comfortable environment is a factor that leads to successful focus group interviews. This supportive collaborative and non-threatening environment is further supported in alignment with Māori centered research as described by Bishop and Glynn (1999). Due to the nature of this project, focus groups were selected in order to collect information from the whānau participants in an environment where the whānau participants could listen to other views. In turn comments made by whānau could spark further conversation.
One of the identified challenges of using focus group interviews is that they can be hard to record (Mutch, 2005). To mitigate this challenge audio recording can be used and then listened to later to take more comprehensive notes.

Each focus group for this study was run in alignment with tikanga (protocols) Māori and Kawa (rules) of our school. Each focus group interview (hui) began with a karakia (prayer) followed by a process of whanaungatanga where each person introduced themselves. Each interview also ended with karakia. Kai (food) was also provided and once we had finished our focus group we had a shared kai together. Berryman, SooHoo and Nevin (1998) highlight the importance of understanding the culture of the participants and ensuring that all practices reflect cultural responsiveness. Bishop and Glynn (1999) further support this approach by likening it to hui (meetings) that are conducted kano ki te kano (face to face) as a preferred research method with Māori participants.

**Field Journal Notes**

It is regarded normal teacher practice to make reflections based on your own teaching and inquire into how you can do things in a different way that better meets the needs of the learners (Ministry of Education, 2008). This process is called teaching as inquiry and requires the teacher to make reflections and notes of what happened as a result of their teaching and then focus the inquiry on what will best benefit students. For this research project using a field journal to take notes in regard to my teaching worked well in developing appropriate research questions and also in taking notes specific to meeting with whānau. I took notes on what I did as a teacher and what implications this then had on my learners.

Hinds (as cited in Wilkinson 2000) concludes that the use of diaries or field journals are best used as a form of a self-completed questionnaire used along with other forms of data such as interviews. Whereas Taylor, Bogan and DeVault (2015) describes field notes as a way for the researcher observe and record additional information during their project time.

For this project the field notes were used in addition to other forms of data as a way to reflect on my own practice. This began with reflecting on changes made to teacher-participant practice when conducting the interviews and focus group interviews followed by reflections on their
teaching during the project. Again at the end, notes were taken reflecting on the second focus group interviews and teacher interviews. Taylor et al. (2015) states that recorded field notes can become valuable at a later date when trying to remember how things took place or what was observed from the researcher's perspective.

One of the disadvantages of using field notes as a research method is that they can be time consuming for the researcher. To mitigate this, I have structured my field notes around the teaching as inquiry model which is in alignment with teachers’ normal practice (Ministry of Education, 2008). The second disadvantage of using field notes as the only method of data is it relies on the researcher's perspective and therefore could be seen as bias. To mitigate this risk, the field notes focused on the researcher's teaching and leading interview conversations with participants, rather than observing participants.

**Data Generation and Analysis**

As a researcher interested in preserving the words and experiences of participants, I undertook the transcriptions of all interviews. Following this each transcription was given to the participants who had the interviews. Cohen et al. (2007) highlight the need for researchers to send transcriptions to each participant for them to verify and continue to collaborate as it minimises bias statements being formed. Of the three teacher participants one made a minor change to the wording of a sentence. This allows direct quotes to then be used from the interview information.

The analysis of the interview data began by reading and rereading the interview transcripts, focus group interview notes and my field notes, in order to familiarise myself with the data. This is where the patterns and themes are identified from the data transcripts, unlike quantitative data analysis which is usually numeric (Mutch, 2005). Lofland, Snow, Anderson and Lofland (2006) agree with Mutch and describe the process as sorting data collected into broad categories in order to draw out recurring and essential themes. According to Mason (1996) the validity in qualitative research methods is met when you observe, identify or measure what you aim to measure (as cited in Bryman, 2012). This approach is referred to as thematic analysis as it takes its categories from the data using content analysis (Mutch, 2005). Through the design process it was highly important to keep the aim of the research close to the identified themes that emerged within the data.
Once the data had been read and reread a colour code was used to group common themes and categories. Lofland et al. (2006) state that this process of coding consists of two steps, initial coding and then focused coding. The initial coding of the data was organised and assigned to categories. During this time, I looked to match the themes to the research questions as seen in tables 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 (Appendix 1). These categories were decided upon based on recurring themes and ideas. This process left a large amount of categories and themes and therefore focused coding was applied. This process refined the categories and themes further and left out unnecessary information from the focused coding data. When analysing the focus group interview data and my field journal notes a similar approach to interpreting the data was applied. First the findings were transcribed in note form and then a thematic approach applied where common themes were identified to form categories. Once the data had been sorted into the categories then a focused form of coding was applied to refine the data and themes identified. The constant comparative analysis steps and key questions formed by LeCompte and Preissle (1993) cited in Mutch (2005) were also applied to help determine the categories and coding. These steps are:

- **Perceiving** - What am I looking for? What are my first impressions? What is capturing my attention?
- **Comparing** - What can I see that is similar to something else? What things go together? What do different parts have in common?
- **Contrasting** - What can I see that is different to other things? What things don’t go together? What things don't fit my emerging categories?
- **Aggregating** - What groupings are evident? Why do these things go together? What are suitable labels for my groups?
- **Ordering** - Does any pattern or order appear with these groups? Are some themes stronger or more important than others? Are there categories and subcategories?
- **Establishing linkages and relationships** - What does this remind me of? How do my categories relate to one another? How do these relate to the literature? How do they relate to everyday practices?
- **Speculating** - What is my tentative explanation or theory? What is the significance of this? What other research does the study indicate needs to be done?

Although a thematic analysis approach to understanding qualitative data requires a degree of interpretation having an open process during this ensures minimal misinterpretation. Hudson et. al (2010) affirm that good practice is where research designs give Māori a greater level of
participation within the research process, where possible involvement in the analysis and outcomes of the data itself. Once the second phase of coding had taken place, all data categories that emerged were shared with the participants for further refinement or comment. These were sent via email where no names were used and it only looked at the direct quotes found within the data. At this stage no further refinement was requested by the participants, both teachers and whānau participants had an opportunity to change or reword any quotes collected before key findings were made.

Validity

Validity refers to the study actually measuring what it set out to measure (Mutch, 2005). The data collected had to be precise and clarity was sought from all participants after each focus group and interview was held. This ensured that participants could check the accuracy of data collected and make any adjustments needed.

Mutch (2005) connects trustworthiness, validity and reliability as three key factors that must be in place when carrying out qualitative research. Trustworthiness refers to the researcher demonstrating an ethical approach to seeking information from participants (Mutch, 2005). Henwood (2014) states that trustworthiness refers to not only the ethical trustworthiness with participant’s but also in the research findings.

Reliability refers to the ability for others to replicate the research in similar situations and collect similar results. This reliability gives credibility and believability to the project (Mutch, 2005). According to Henwood (2014) good rigorous studies are open and honest about the results and similar studies could be replicated in similar contexts.

Ethical Issues

As a researcher it is important to consider all aspects of ethics that could potentially cause harm to participants. Mitigating these potential aspects is the purpose of ethics within research. Mutch (2005) likens this to researchers in a position of power where there are very few laws that protect the participants of research. Therefore, it is critical to examine aspects of potential harm and then to mitigate these to protect the participants and validity of the research (Wellington,
Zeni (2009) highlights the link between practitioner research where the researcher has strong links to the participants and research context pre and post the research project itself (Cited in Noffke. & Somekh. 2012). This can be seen as a strength as well as an area that has potential risks.

The main ethical issues in this research project were linked to the participant’s feelings being hurt. It was important as the researcher and teacher within the school to ensure all participants were aware of the school processes they could follow if needed. The school Principal offered to be available for any participant that wanted to seek other opinions or ask further questions regarding the research project. This process was in alignment with the schools’ health and safety policy. Wilkinson (2000) states that a key topic in research ethics is how we treat others. Zeni (2009) states the bonds of caring, responsibility and social commitment that engage practitioner researchers with the participants is the most appropriate basis of ethical decision making.

Gaining access to participants requires an appropriate approach. As most of the participants within this research project identify as New Zealand Māori recognising the rights in Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) and being respectful of these rights was paramount. The guidance of my supervisor who is an experienced Kaupapa Maori researcher and the guidance of the school principal as a Kaumātua was undertaken to ensure Māori participants were approached respectfully and care was maintained throughout the research project process.

Confidentiality and Preservation of Anonymity

Mutch (2005) states that researchers should ensure that participants cannot be identified and that this may require the changing of names or identifying features. Unitec’s guidelines around ethics (2014) state that correct protocols are participants must have their rights to confidentiality and anonymity protected. In order to uphold these commitments all participant and student names have been replaced with pseudonyms. Some identifying information such as the location of the school was left out but some demographic information was required in order to understand the context of the research. In the teacher’s information sheets, it did highlight that some factors could potentially make them recognisable but only from within our school itself such as the whānau knowing who the teachers are. This was discussed with the teachers and stated that in a small community the school could potentially be identifiable. The teachers all signed the consent forms agreeing that this was fine (Appendix 6).
Bryman (2012) states that data collection, storage, security and dissemination of findings are all important aspects of being ethical. An electronic copy of the thesis, information sheets, interview and focus group transcriptions are stored in a secure file within my home where no one other than myself has access.

UREC approval was granted to carry out this research project on July 17 2017.

**Identifying and Recruiting Participants**

As relationships are fundamental to engaging and working with Māori, stakeholder engagement began at the beginning of the year and has occurred consistently throughout this research project (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, (2007). Bishop et al. (2007) found that one of the key elements of creating a culturally responsive pedagogy was to form positive relationships between students and teachers, and teachers and whānau. This stakeholder engagement was critical to the recruiting of participants for this study. Zeni (2009) highlights that through a practitioner research methodology the relationships begin before and continue after a specific project begins and ends (Cited in Noffke. & Somekh. 2012).

A concerted effort to build relationships with the whānau of the junior classes began at the beginning of the year. This included attending a Marae noho which invited all whānau of the junior school to stay at one of the local marae that whānau and students were connected to. Following the noho, I sought whānau voice around shaping the research project. The whānau I met with, shared vital information about the location, times, resources and aim of the project they would like to see. This information was vital in the design and implementation of the research project. Bishop and Glynn (1999) support this approach where Māori participants should be involved in all aspects of a research project, not just the collection of data.

Following the concerted efforts to get to know more whānau and build relationships, I continued to lead other projects within the school's normal practice, such as a whānau reading programme that allowed me to work face to face with whānau. These workshops further enabled me to strengthen the already positive relationships I had with whānau.

To recruit the whānau and the teachers for the project, I sent out a pānui (notice) to whānau and teachers in the three junior classrooms inviting them to an information evening / afternoon
presentation hui (Appendix 5). My normal practice would be to invite whānau face to face or over the phone but this can be seen as persuading participants. Mutch (2005) states that “participants should not be coerced to participate in the research. This is especially important if the researcher is in a position of power over a participant” (p. 78). It was important to me that whānau did not feel they were coerced into attending the information sharing hui.

I held two information sharing hui with a total of 16 whānau and 3 potential teacher participants who came to find out more. These hui began with a karakia, whakawhanaunga introductions, presentation from myself around the research design, aim and process. The session ended with karakia and was followed where food was provided for those in attendance. Information sheets, and a timeline of the project were shared during the presentation and consent forms were given to whānau and teachers at the end of the hui. Whānau and teachers were encouraged to take the information and consent forms home and share with other whānau to decide if they wanted to be involved.

Organisational consent was also sought from the school Board of Trustees and Principal before embarking on any recruitment of participants. Mutch (2005) lists permission from the school Board of trustees to conduct research in a school as a general notion for educational research.

**Informed Consent**

Mutch (2005) states that “participants in your research should be fully informed about the purposes, conduct, and possible dissemination of your research and should give their consent to be involved” (p. 78). Informed consent is described by Bryman (2012) as the process where researchers fully inform participants about the intended research and gain consent in writing. To ensure participation was voluntary and well informed, all participants, teachers and whānau, were provided with information sheets and a hui convened where questions could be asked in a comfortable environment. Wilkinson (2000) explains that to do research on people you should ask their permission first and that the consent should be voluntary where the participants understand all relevant information.

Consent forms were given to potential participants to take away and discuss with other whānau and no expectation was placed upon participants to sign on the day (Appendix 6, Appendix 7).
Hudson et al. (2010) outline the clarity of the research agenda and information sheets as essential to positively engaging Māori in research.

To align with Unitec’s (2014) ethics guidelines, written consent was gained from every participant. The consent forms relayed key information discussed in the hui. This was to highlight the main points discussed in the information sharing and information sheets. This included the participant's rights to withdraw from the research project at any time. Mutch (2005) lists participants right to withdraw from the research overall or aspects of it as a key ethical consideration.

The students in the classroom were not listed as participants in the research as they were not singled out for extra teaching but rather the teaching targeting the whole class as part of normal practice.

On all information sheets (Appendix 8, Appendix 9) and consent forms (Appendix 6, Appendix 7) contact details for my supervisor at Unitec was also made available if any further clarity was needed from participants.

The Process

As the project was shaped around relationships with whānau, these relationships had to be developed throughout the year. Therefore, it is important to understand the process taken in order to understand the findings.

Firstly, I attended a Marae noho (Marae stay) with the whānau and the kura (school) as outlined above. Secondly, whānau voice was sought to shape the aim and research questions. Whānau gave their ideas of what sort of communications they would like from teachers and that there was a need to strengthen this. From this information whānau shared that they would like to see how reading was taught in schools. The school then applied for and was successful in receiving funding to take the ‘Reading Together’ programme designed by Jeanne Biddulph (2012). This gave me a chance to get to know 14 whānau well and build working relationships with them. For a school term the whānau and their tamariki came into school each fortnight where we played games and provided resources to help the tamariki and whānau at home. One whānau member commented during the first Focus Group discussion “When we did the whānau reading programme it really helped, even after one session he came home and actually wanted to do
the games and stuff. He had never done that before”. This additional working with whānau set the project up to build on already established relationships and also to respond to information shared by whānau of what was important to them.

At the start of the project two information sharing workshops were held where all whānau were invited. 17 whānau attended these and of the 17, nine signed to be a part of the research group. Of those nine, six were whānau I had worked with during the Whānau reading programme. Each hui held with whānau always began and followed the tikanga of our kura with a karakia, whanaunga circle (a way of introducing ourselves and making connections to others), then kai and karakia to close.

Information from whānau collected in Focus Group One then shaped how the teachers would communicate with the whānau and the sorts of information they wanted to be shared. This was done by sharing different ways of communicating with whānau, followed by them deciding what would work best for their whānau. All whānau shared that they wanted to see “videos of them learning because you can see and hear it” (Focus Group 1). By responding to whānau voice and using their ideas to shape what and how communication could happen it contributed towards the projects positive findings. Lastly throughout the project whānau voice was used to change teaching contexts and draw from what whānau shared therefore valuing whānau input over a ten-week term. I communicated with, and shared learning between home and school daily during this time using See-Saw and Facebook as well as meeting with whānau face to face.

At the end of the project whānau shared what they would like to see in the future from the results achieved in the project. One whanau member added during Focus Group 2 “I would like to see all technologies used in all of the class to communicate with whānau”. This feedback from whānau has then shaped the school’s direction for whānau engagement and has been woven into the strategic planning for 2018.

**Summary**

In this chapter I have discussed the reasons around adopting a qualitative approach to Māori centered research that sits within the field of educational practitioner research using the New Zealand Curriculum inquiry cycle (Ministry of Education, 2008). Discussion has been provided
about the purpose of using semi structured interviews and focus group interviews which also explains why this research method aligns with a Māori centered action research approach. Information has been shared around the benefits and possible risks of including the use of a field notebook. Finally, I have described the data analysis approach to interpreting the data collected and examined ethical issues relating to the study and what steps I took to ensure validity of the data. The next chapter outlines the findings from the data gained from the interviews, focus groups and field notebook.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Structure of the Data Presentation

The purpose of the findings chapter is to outline the findings from the data in relation to the research questions. This chapter relies on the use of quotes to reflect the teachers’ and whānau voice as accurately as possible; using their words to provide evidence.

Analysis of the interview data drawn from focus groups with whānau and interviews with teachers revealed five main areas of interest relating to the aims and research questions. These were further supported by data collected in field notes. These main areas included, a) the importance of deepening relationships to be more purposeful, b) the importance of face to face interactions, c) value of whānau contributions, d) academic benefits versus social benefits and e) overall benefits. The sub-categories stemming from the main areas are shown below.

The importance of deepening relationships to be more purposeful
- Opportunist nature of teacher interactions
- Whānau initiated interactions
- ICT to increase frequency of interactions

The importance of face to face interactions
- Making connections
- Building trust
- Respectful relationships

Value of whānau contributions
- A new perspective
- Student interest directed learning

Academic Versus Social benefits

The benefits
- Bridging home school life
- Motivation and engagement
- Confidence
The following abbreviations are used in this chapter to indicate the data set from which information has been gleaned.

FG1 – refers to focus group one. This data was from the whānau at the beginning of the project. Interview 1 – refers to interview one. This data was from the teacher interviews at the beginning of the project. Interview 2 – refers to interview two. This data was taken from the teacher interviews at the end of the project. FG2 – refers to focus group two. This data was taken from the same whānau at the end of the project. FD – will refer to field notes taken throughout the project. FD will be followed by the week the data was collected.

The Research Participants

For the purpose of this thesis, pseudonyms are used for all participants in order to protect their identity and the school in which the research project was carried out. Teacher participants are referred to as, Charlotte, Jane and Mereana and whānau participants will all remain anonymous without pseudonyms or names used. The name of the school has been changed to Jasper and the region city referred to is re-named Hanna so as to protect the identity of all participants.

Some of the whānau participants had multiple children so the total number of children in the three classes referred to in the study is 12. All students will be referred to as student / him or her to remain anonymous.

Presentation of Data

The following presentation of data will use the main themes and sub themes found and direct quotes from whānau and teachers using pseudonyms. Following this is the second layer of data analysis, which looks at the links to the research questions, will be outlined. This analysis also includes notes from my field notebook which details reflections and thoughts in relation to my own practice.
In the next chapter the findings are discussed in more detail linking theory and other research.

**Importance of Deepening Relationships to be more Purposeful**

Teachers and whānau overall believed that relationships were good, one whānau member commented during FG2, “Teachers are much friendlier and easy to talk to these days”. The relationships between whānau and teachers at the beginning of the project were described as ‘friendly’ by one whānau member during FG1. This was further supported by Mereana during Interview 1 who added, “some whānau I have a pretty good relationship with, but there is always room for improvement”. These friendly relationships enabled the project to deepen the relationships to be more purposeful.

**Opportunistlic Nature of Teacher Interactions**

Information shared during Interview 1 suggests that communication with whānau tended to be initiated by teachers when whānau came into the school. Mereana commented for example, “If I catch them at the door I talk to them” and Jane said “Generally I do not have a structure in the class about how I share learning I will not ring and contact whānau but talk to them when they come in”. These teachers expressed that when opportunities to communicate with whānau arose, they took them. Interestingly, eight whānau expressed during FG1 that they would go and see the teacher whenever they needed to. One whānau member shared during FG1, “I go and see the teachers if I have any questions”. This indicates whānau were deliberate in seeking the teachers input, whereas the teachers were opportunistic in their approach to communicating with whānau.

**Whānau Initiated Interactions**

Whānau initiated conversations with teachers tended to be focused around behaviour or notices, where one whānau member commented during FG1, “He will say he has been good and he has actually been in trouble so I have to go and see the teacher to find out”. Mereana also supported this approach to seeking input from whānau, “If it is something that needs to be said I will make contact by making a phone call” during Interview 1. Another whānau member commented “I go and see koka when I need to talk about something like a panui (notice)”. The nature of the
conversations that were initiated by teachers or whānau were usually seeking input around behaviour or panui rather than learning. This is in contrast with comments made in Interview 2 with both whānau in FG2 sharing “I love seeing my child’s learning everyday through See-Saw” and another whānau member added, “I like See-Saw as I can jump in and look at his learning anytime”. A third whānau member added that, “See-Saw helps me know what he has been learning and I can talk to him about it when he gets home”. The findings indicate that more regular communication with whānau change the nature of the relationship to one that is purposeful and learning focused.

The nature of the conversations between whānau and teachers that were initiated by opportunity tended to be socially based for example, Mereana commented, “the majority of conversations are about building a relationship” (Interview 1). These conversations were aimed at keeping whānau comfortable. Whānau also expressed a need to build a relationship, “I like to get to know the teachers at the beginning”. The opportunistic approach from the teachers focused the conversations around low key low stakes socialising. This was in contrast to the comments made in Interview 2 where Charlotte stated, “One of the benefits of See-Saw is that the whānau can see the learning happening each day and be a part of it, they can share and add in ideas too”. Whānau also shared during FG2 where one whānau commented, “there is a huge change in the way whānau share learning” and another added “technology means that working parents do not miss out on what their children are learning at school and can communicate easily with the teacher”. The information shared in both interview 2 and FG2 were focused around learning through the use of technology whereas information from Interview 1 and FG1 focused around low stakes friendly exchanges of information.

Whānau that visited the kura had more opportunity to engage with the teachers about their child’s learning as indicated by teachers and whānau during FG1 and Interview 1. Jane commented during Interview 1 “I will pull the whānau in and talk to them about what their tamariki can do and celebrate their awesome learning” when she sees them. Whereas, following the project feedback from Interview 2 and FG 2 identified that regular learning focused communication was apparent. Whānau shared in FG 2, “I really like See-Saw because I can see the learning taking place each day and we can talk about it at home”. Another whānau member celebrated the possibilities of See-Saw by saying, “all available technologies should be used by schools to share learning with whānau”. The teacher participants shared similar views in Interview 2, where Jane stated, “I would like to see See-Saw used across the school”.
Information collected from the FG and the Interviews suggest that following the project conversations between whānau and teachers were deepened and focused on learning.

**ICT to Increase Frequency of Interactions**

Technology is a powerful tool to connect people and let communication and relationships develop at times and places that suit each person. During FG2 one whānau member noted the difference between her older and younger children in terms of the way teachers communicate, “There is such a huge change with the way that teachers share learning between my oldest and my youngest. Teachers seem easier to contact with technology”. Furthermore, the use of ICT does not restrict those that cannot come into schools from communicating with teachers. The whānau expressed during FG2 that “Time makes it hard for some whānau to connect with school, people are busy”. Another whānau member commented that they enjoyed being able to see their children’s learning when they were working because they knew they did not miss out. “Parents who are working full time have limited time to be involved in the school” (FG2). Another whānau member commented during FG2 that technology does allow whānau to be connected and to contribute to their children’s education but it must be used only after a face to face relationship has begun. “I like meeting the teacher first then using See-Saw or Facebook because it doesn’t matter where I am I can still be involved”. Using tools such as See-Saw creates ways for whānau to be involved and contribute towards learning even when they are away from the school itself.

Charlotte had set up ICT systems to enable her to share more regularly with whānau, she responded to the question, ‘How do you share learning with whānau?’ in Interview 1 with; “The children probably share it most days with their whānau on See-Saw. I also add something to the Facebook page each day. Some whānau respond by liking or loving the post so I know they have seen it”. The teacher had systems for sharing information regularly with whānau and she knew when the information had been received as she stated during Interview 1 “sometimes they will like or love the post”. It was noted in FD week 1 that previous to the research project there had been eight likes and no comments on posts shared. There was a noted difference in responses during Interview 2 where Charlotte commented that “whānau comment more and share things with the teachers since the project began”. This was further supported by whānau responses in FG2 stating, “when you get a notification it comes up and makes you want to have a look”. Another whānau member added “I like being able to write messages to my child and
the teacher”. Although systems had been put in place by Charlotte before the project the frequency of communication between the teachers and whānau increased during the project. FD week 1 and 2 showed that whānau responded to the students learning through See-Saw with 13 written comments and an additional four likes whereas, FD for week 1 before the project began only eight likes had been noted in See-Saw for Charlotte’s class.

The importance of deepening relationships beyond low stakes friendly relationships to purposeful relationships can be achieved through the use of ICT such as See-Saw that allows communication to be more frequent than face to face opportunities.

The Importance of Face to Face Interactions

The importance of face to face interactions to begin the relationship between teachers and whānau was a key idea that emerged in the initial interviews and focus groups. All of the whānau and teachers mentioned face to face as a key communication method. For example, Jane outlined during Interview 1, “Kanohi ki te kanohi to begin with. It has to be face to face, we have to meet at the start with whānau”. Whānau also supported this during FG1 by stating “at the beginning I like to meet the teachers and get to know them”. However, once the relationship has been established online relationships can improve the relationship and make it more purposeful to learning, as Jane stated in Interview 1 “and then we will share through our class Facebook”. This was an important step that was confirmed by whānau with one commenting “it’s great to talk face to face and then to start using See-Saw as it’s a lot easier because it doesn’t matter where you are you can see it (learning)”. Interestingly all whānau and teachers still rated face to face communication as one of the best forms of communicating during FG2 and Interview 2. One whānau commented that the best ways to communicate were “talking to the teacher face to face” and Charlotte added “we need to be able to connect to whānau through all means as not all have internet or a device”. Findings from both FG and Interviews indicate that ICT sharing methods work once a face to face relationship has been established.

The idea of having multiple ways of communicating with teachers was encouraged by whānau and teachers where one whānau added “I would like to see all technologies and ways of sharing with whānau explored”. Jane made a similar statement and added she would like the school to have an “approach that is multi-levelled and school wide, this will ensure that whānau are
aware of and confident that the points of contact and engagement within Jasper school are consistent”. Both whānau and teachers during FG2 and Interview 2 suggested that technologies be utilised across the whole school.

Making Connections

By meeting face to face it creates opportunities for whānau and teachers to make connections and build trust in one another. Jane commented during Interview 1, “I use my pepeha (a way to introduce yourself in Māori) and whakapapa (ancestry) with the whānau because Māori like to make connections to you”. Whānau confirmed this approach and added during FG1 “I like to make a connection to the teachers first”. By making connections first it builds a relationship that is friendly and trusting. Jane shared in Interview 1 “I want them to feel comfortable with me once they are comfortable then we can talk about other learning, this is how we build the relationship”. Charlotte also agreed during Interview 2 and shared; “at first face to face is important in order to build relationships”. Information collected indicates that connections must be made between whānau and teachers.

Interestingly Charlotte also shared during Interview 1 “when it came to parent teacher interviews I went out into the community and visited them and they were all so thankful”. This response was an abnormality in terms of other responses from whānau and teachers but does highlight the extra effort this teacher went to in order to meet whānau face to face.

Building Trust

The purpose for meeting face to face with whānau was to build relationships and trust as Jane shared in Interview 1, “We build the relationship first then we look at the learning, the whānau must trust you first”. Whānau also supported this approach and added during FG2 that the best ways to communicate were, “face to face at the beginning and then online is good”. Another whānau member added “The best forms of communication with teachers is face to face to start off with then something like See-Saw or Facebook so I can communicate with the teachers and see learning even when I can’t come into the kura”. Responses suggest that whānau value meeting face to face with teachers and this interaction lets them make personal connections and get to know one another. These comments from whānau at the end of the project highlight the importance of teachers and whānau establishing a relationship before using other methods of communicating.
Respectful Relationships

The teachers saw it as important to make sure that the first interactions with whānau were positive where Jane added during Interview 1, “We build the relationship first then we look at the learning, socialising something I have noticed about their child. I will pull the whānau in and talk to them about what their tamariki can do”. This strategy to build relationships with whānau used the student’s strengths or positive things about them to begin conversations. Charlotte stated during Interview 2 that is was important to “try to connect positively with the whānau”. Whānau added during FG2 that “See-Saw is amazing because you feel like you are there (at school) but not there and are still such a big part of the learning”. No whānau referred to comments about their children being in trouble or seeking information about panui as mentioned in the section above during FG2. Instead, all comments referred to learning and positive aspects of school life.

The nature of these beginning interactions needed to be around getting to know one another as Jane stated during Interview 1, “most of our conversations are about building relationships”. Charlotte also added that “it was important to build the relationship first and not talk about teaching and learning”. Notes taken in my field notebook during week one, when information evenings were held to share the project with whānau, noted that of the seventeen whānau that came to hear about the project, thirteen whānau were ones that I had already worked in previous projects around the kura. Of the four new whānau, three of them signed up to be a part of the research group. The other six were whānau I already had an established relationship with. It was also noted that some whānau did not want to be included in a research project but liked the idea of seeing their children’s learning so it was offered for the remaining whānau to still be involved in the use of See-Saw but not the focus groups. This approach respected whānau choice to be involved in understanding how to use the See-Saw app without being part of the research project. All of the information sharing evenings were held face to face and began with a whanaunga circle where each person introduced themselves. It was through this that whānau and teachers made further connections.
Value of Whānau Contributions

Another key finding from the research project was that when teachers responded to whānau voice it increased the chance whānau would feel respected and contribute. During Interview 1 Charlotte shared that she had been using See-Saw and Facebook in her classroom. However, in Interview 2 she commented that she had seen a change in the way whānau “share comfortably and willingly”. This change could be linked to the time spent with each whānau establishing how they wanted to communicate with the teachers and what they wanted shared. During FG1 three whānau members commented, “On the See-Saw app I will like or love the posts”. One of the teachers also commented during Interview 1 that; “When whānau like or love the post I know they have seen it”. This response cements the expectation that the teachers and whānau had for their communicating through social media was to be informed not necessarily to collaborate and share. For these whānau and teachers that were already using ICT tools to communicate the project focused on using the tools to collaborate with whānau.

At the end of the project whānau responses changed and whānau commented on how they shared information with the teachers through Facebook and See-saw. One whānau commented, “with See-saw a notification comes up and it makes you want to look at it. You can write back to your children and the teachers and share information about what your child is interested in too” (FG2). Charlotte also noted the change in the way whānau responded to learning shared through ICT tools during Interview 2 adding, “I have noticed an improvement in the whānau writing back to their children and responding to learning videos and posts through the project. They are also writing in more detail and answering questions”. This shows a shift in whānau agency where communications are more interactive and collaborative rather than sharing out without seeking information back.

In FG1 all whānau shared that they would like to “see videos of their children” and wanted to use “See-Saw” after they had seen the presentation of the tools available to communicate with. Charlotte also believed “meeting with the whānau many times face to face to show them the ICT tools and how they work is important”. Data collected in week 1 from FD indicated that whānau liked to see the ICT tools and all opted to select See-Saw as their preferred method of communicating and were happy to download the app and see a message from their child that they could respond to. During FG2 one whānau shared that, “I showed whānau from around
New Zealand, they were all amazed at how they could see the learning”. Another added “My niece who is on a school board was taking the idea back to her school”. Information collected from whānau and field notes indicates it is important to take time to work with whānau on what ICT tools work for them.

A New Perspective

It is through respect for one another that whānau feel comfortable and see that their voice is valued. This was evident in the changes in whānau responses in how they share information with the teachers and the impact this had on their children. One whānau member shared during FG2 that, “my child loves sharing learning he has done at home with koka as soon as he has done something he asks me to share it”. The value of this open sharing of learning between home and school was a key finding in this research project as whānau reported they felt respected and that their voice was valued in their children’s education. One whānau member commented during FG2 that she was excited for the future given the changes made to education today. “Generations change and all the changes we are doing now is setting up the next generation to love education”. This healing perspective paves the way forward for whānau to have their voice heard as one whānau member commented during FG2 “everyone is on the same page”. Another whānau member added that they would like to see “more whānau coming into the school and having a voice”. Information collected from whānau indicates the growth in whānau having a voice.

New Zealand has a long history of negative experiences of education particularly for Māori whānau. One whānau member shared during FG2 a reason she felt was a barrier to whānau coming into school was, “Many of our people have been oppressed for so long”. These negative experiences have influenced how whānau can see schooling now and their willingness to engage with schools. This expresses the lasting effects of an education system that oppressed Māori culture, identity and language. Another whānau member commented during FG2 that some whānau find it hard to engage with schools as they “have feelings of inferiority and lack confidence in themselves”. Whānau may lack confidence and as a result feel inadequate in being involved in discussions about education. One whānau member commented during FG2 that; “when I was growing up it wasn't cool to be Māori but now it is cool to be Māori and I know I have a voice”. The impact of Māori being seen as uncool is significant in terms of how being Māori or identifying as Māori has been historically positioned as a disadvantage. These
historical experiences can haunt the experiences of students at school today with their whānau feeling uncomfortable or disadvantaged at school today. The teachers at the school were also aware of these feelings with Mereana stating a reason whānau may be reluctant to engage with schools being, “their own schooling experiences (Interview 2)”. Chalrotte also added during Interview 2 that she felt “people’s experiences of school changed” and impacted on “their confidence to be involved”. Information shared from teachers and whānau highlight the understanding of the history of New Zealand schooling and how it still impacts many whānau today.

Two whānau members also shared how they knew more about the school and were able to use the language of school a lot more freely when speaking to their children. This approach has strengthened the transition of learning for the children between their home environment and their school environment. One whānau member commented that, “everyone is on the same page and speaking the same language. I know the language of the school now” (FG2). Another whānau member also agreed and added “The app is great because it prompts him to articulate his learning and his journey, we talk about learning more at home and we can use the same words”. Sometimes not being aware of the ‘words’ the school uses can be a barrier for some whānau engaging with the kura. Regular communication and sharing between home and school can help break down some of these barriers as whānau can see, and hear what and how learning takes place for their child therefore creating a new perspective about schooling today.

**Student Interest Directed Learning**

By working collaboratively together and sharing students’ interests it helps to improve teaching contexts and create stronger relationships with whānau. One whānau member commented during FG2 that; “It was awesome to see the support my child got from the teacher using what we shared about his interests to help his learning”. This whānau member appreciated the time the teacher took to adapt teaching for her child that used what they had shared from home. It helps to cement a respectful and collaborative relationship with whānau and better learning experiences for the child. In my field notebook in week six it was noted the reaction that one child had when what his whānau had shared he loved doing at home was used in his learning in class. This child enjoyed playing with trains so the teacher brought in a book about trains and then used some blocks and trains to create sight words he was learning on the back on the trains. The child was well engaged in the activities and was excited to share himself reading the
book with his wider whānau. The whānau then responded during the lesson by thanking the teacher for fostering his love of trains into his learning. Mereana who was the teacher of this child commented during Interview 2 that, “it hooks them in and keeps them interested in learning, the student learning with trains and blocks interest was acknowledged and it made his learning more meaningful”. Not only was the learning more meaningful but it was driven from whānau voice around what he loved to do at home.

At the end of the project both whānau and teachers could talk about how learning from whānau and student voice was used to help them in their learning. Charlotte shared during Interview 2, “When whānau share that they love reading that book or context I try to get more of that sort of book, whānau are comfortable and share willingly”. The response that whānau are comfortable sharing and share willingly is a difference to the responses first given from teachers around seeking information from whānau. Most responses from teachers in Interview 1 were that “they do not really share” whereas at the end of the project whānau were comfortable sharing.

One strategy that Charlotte shared during Interview 1 was “when they (the new students) start I share about myself and my children and I ask that they share about what they want for their child and what their interests are”. This approach was more formalised with whānau writing their aspirations for their children whereas in the other two classes the teachers chose their teaching contexts based on teachable moments that presented themselves as Jane shared during Interview 1 “it's about being flexible and changing when a teachable moment comes up.”

During FG1 whānau shared that they would sometimes share with the teachers but not often; “Sometimes we will share what we did in the weekend when we go into school”. The teachers in Interview 1 also shared that they didn’t really seek input from whānau that contributed to the learning contexts for the children. During Interview 1 Mereana shared, “some whānau will come in and share what the kids have done in the weekends. I try to incorporate what students share into our learning”. This response shows that the teachers would use information that whānau passed on to them if the whānau came into the school and shared. The project aimed to seek input from whānau that would shape the contexts for teaching for their children. At the end of the project one whānau member commented that “when we are doing fun things together the first thing he says to me is ‘Mum can we send it to Koka’, I think it's awesome that he wants to share his learning at home with his teacher and friends at school” (FG2). The use of an ICT
system for sharing learning from home enabled the child’s passion for learning to be fostered and encouraged.

**Academic Verses Social Benefits**

At the beginning of the project I asked whānau what type of learning from school they wanted to be shared with them. Six out of the nine whānau referred to wanting to know the progress their children made academically. “The progress they are making” (FG1). Whereas all of the teachers shared that they wanted to see the “students make progress in their reading” as an ideal outcome of the project. Another whānau member added during FG1 that, “I want to see what they are learning so I can talk to them at home about it, and to see the progress they are making” (FG1). Academic progress was important for the teachers when they relayed what they would like to see as a result of the project during Interview 1; “Improvement in the reading progression for the children. Accelerating the learning to the next levels. I would like to see those sorts of things and a growing confidence in the tamariki.”. Information collected indicated that teachers and whānau valued academic progress.

Whānau also expressed their desire to see their children interacting with others. One whānau member also mirrored what the teacher said and stated, “I want to know about the progress they make as well as how they are working with others in the class” during FG1. Another whānau member added “I want to see a mix of learning, some whole class with them included so we can see how they get along with others”. Social skills and academic skills are both the key areas that whānau wanted for their children. Another whānau member shared during FG1 “I want to see them working in groups and working with others so I can see they are happy and socialising”. For this whānau member it was really important that their child was happy at school and had friends. Charlotte commented during Interview 1, “Probably the thing that the whānau are really wanting is that they (their children) are happy and safe at school”. While most whānau referred to social learning as being really important only one of the teachers did.

At the end of the research project when I interviewed the teachers they all made comment linked to student achievement. Charlotte commented during Interview 2, “They have made progress and moved levels”. Whereas whānau responses during FG2 looked at a mix of social and academic results. One whānau member commented that her child had made big changes in his behaviour which was making it easier for him to learn. “His behaviour has really improved as
well and we are very proud. It is no longer a struggle to read with him or talk about learning” (FG2).

Whānau also expressed that they liked to see what their children were learning and doing at school. The preferred method for sharing information was in videos as they could see and hear their children. Whānau responded during FG1 to what they would like shared with them; “I would love to see videos about her, videos are the best because you can see and hear it”. Whānau reported that seeing videos of their children learning is exciting as they get to see and hear their children interacting and learning with others.

One whānau member also commented that her child knew his own goals and was reaching them. “He knows his own goals and he is reaching them. He has made such a big shift” (FG2). Students being aware of their own goals and creating them independently meant that the students were developing more student agency and saw themselves as learners. Other whānau noted the changes in the students working towards their goals. One whānau member commented during FG2; “I feel like my child has progressed so much and he has come to use more vocabulary that he usually wouldn’t”. Another whānau member also commented in a similar way that shows she was aware of what her child’s self-set goals were, “There has been heaps of changes in his reading and the questions he comes up with”. These responses from whānau indicate they are more aware of the student’s goals and the students are able to articulate them easier.

The Benefits

Bridging Home and School Life

One major benefit of the project is that regular sharing between home and school helps to bridge home and school life. During FG2 one whānau member stated that, “He is happier to talk about what he has been learning. We have never discussed his learning before but now he can explain things using See-Saw”. Another whānau member also added that, “We talk about his learning a lot more at home because it’s easier to engage conversation using what we see on See-Saw”. A third whānau member stated that, “everyone is on the same page speaking the same language”. Using a common language between home and school was a major finding and benefit of the project for whānau with a fourth whānau member stating, “the app was great because it prompts her child to articulate his learning and they can use the same words at
Creating a shared language between whānau and teachers was one benefit the project highlighted by whānau during FG2.

One whānau member commented that she wanted to have ideas on what she could do to help her child at home shared. “Stuff that I can do at home to help him further with his learning, games and stuff like that are really good. When we did the whānau reading programme it really helped, even after one session he came home and actually wanted to do the games and stuff. He had never wanted to do learning at home before”. By providing basic skills for whānau to help their children read adds value as it motivates learning for the parent and child.

Information Communication Technologies (ICT) gives teachers the opportunity to share learning with whānau that live away from the child. For the whānau four of the nine expressed how they were able to share and celebrate their child's learning with whānau who live away from them. One whānau member commented that the child’s mother was able to comment on and see her son’s learning even though she lived away in another city “See-Saw is awesome because we can see what is happening in real life, his mum can see it from Hanna too and comment on his learning”. Many whānau live in different houses and in different cities. It not only motivates the child but also the whānau when they are able to communicate and encourage the children in their learning. Another whānau member shared she had shown her child’s learning to other extended whānau and commented during FG2 “Some whānau I shared See-Saw with were amazed that they can see the learning as it’s happening right now. My sister said it was amazing that you were there but not there and still such a big part of the learning”. Notes taken in my field journal in week four and six highlight “the positive reactions from the child when his mother gives him positive praise from Hanna”. A major benefit of the project is that communication between whānau can be extended to the wider whānau and others that do not live in the same city.

Furthermore, all nine whānau commented on the increased engagement and motivation their children had developed due to the project. One whānau member commented during FG2 that, “She has become really outgoing and just loves learning”. Another whānau member added “we have seen such big changes, he has so much more confidence in himself. Even at home you can see if coming through”. Teachers also made links between the project and the increase in student engagement and motivation for learning. Mereana commented that regular sharing with whānau “hooks them in and keeps them interested in learning” during Interview 2.
Motivation and Engagement

Both whānau and teachers commented on the link between the personalised learning approach and the changes in the student’s engagement and motivation because of this. Mereana commented during Interview 2, “The students were learning with blocks, cars and fairy tales which was what they are interested in is acknowledged and the learning is meaningful. Other people are interested in what they like as well so it helps them socially”. A whānau member also commented that “he has really liked learning with the blocks and cars”. Regular communication with whānau can help teachers create personalised learning as indicated through the information shared from both whānau and teachers.

Mereana also found that one student’s behaviour had improved during the project, “One student has really come along in leaps and bounds and is engaged in learning”. Several whānau members also made links between the project and improved behaviour from their child. One whānau commented that, “He is a lot more out there now and speaking a lot more. He was not engaging with the other kids before and now he is” (FG2). Another whānau member added that “his behaviour has really improved, we are really proud”. The information shared highlights the positive impact the project had on student behaviour.

Confidence

Whānau shared that one benefit they saw from the project was the increase in their children’s self-esteem. During FG2 one whānau shared; “we have seen such big changes, he has so much more confidence in himself. Even at home you can see if coming through”. The whānau expressed how this further showed the positive impact the project had on the child’s interest in learning. In FG2 the whānau shared, “before he compared himself so much to his sister but seems to have built more confidence and self-esteem for himself. He is real keen and wanting to do learning. This is such a big shift for him”. This was further reflected by another participant who shares how her daughter has become really outgoing where she has developed a real love of learning and looks forward to sharing what she has learnt at home (FG2). “She has become really outgoing and just loves learning”. An increase in student confidence was noted by the whānau members but not reflected by the teacher’s comments which tended to focus more on student academic progress “they all moved levels” (Charlotte, Interview 2).
Another whānau member commented on the change she had seen for her son in his knowledge of his own learning and goals (FG2) “he knows what he wants and he knows his goals. He has so much more confidence”. Another whānau member supported this statement and added that in the words of her child he had also “expanded his horizons and has more confidence in himself”. One whānau member added during FG2 “because of this confidence it makes me feel proud and happy to know he loves to learn”. Whānau love to see their children do well at school and to enjoy school. Another whānau member added that his child was much happier to talk about learning because he could use See-Saw and the visual aids to explain to his whānau what he was learning. Because of this he is a lot more confident and excited and he is really proud of what he is doing”. (FG2).

The main benefits of the project as highlighted above by whānau and teachers were the bridging of home and school, increased student motivation and engagement, an improvement in student behaviour and increased student confidence and self-esteem.

**Summary**

This chapter has disseminated the data to identify some themes. The themes and subthemes of;

The importance of deepening relationships to be more purposeful
- Opportunist nature of teacher interactions
- Whānau initiated interactions
- ICT to increase frequency of interactions

The importance of face to face interactions
- Making connections
- Building trust
- Respectful relationships

The value of whānau contributions
- A new perspective
- Student interest directed learning

Academic Verses Social benefits

The benefits
- Bridging home school life
- Motivation and engagement
- Confidence

The last section of the data uses information from whānau voice to direct the findings of the project to ongoing changes and implications for the school. These themes and subthemes were discussed in more depth using evidence from both the teacher interviews and whānau focus group data. This took the shape of direct quotes in order to preserve the essence of what the participants had to share. Following this the inclusion of field notes was used to link to the research questions and key findings from the whānau and teachers. The next chapter will discuss these findings in more detail linking to theory and research.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the main findings of this research project. The discussion is presented under themes which emerged from the focus group interviews with whānau, interviews with teachers and field notes taken during the project. These findings will be examined in relation to the issues which were covered in the literature review. The chapter subheadings follow the findings.

The Importance of Deepening Relationships to be more Purposeful

This study identified that the nature of relationships at our kura before the project tended to be ad hoc where the teachers were opportunists when engaging with whānau. Teachers made comments reflecting using opportunities to engage with whānau when they visited the school. Trottier (2016) refers to these exchanges between whānau and teachers as important relationship builders. However, Trinick (2015) raises the point that simply building friendly relationships with whānau does not mean that changes will occur for the students; there is a need for relationships to be more purposeful and collaborative.

When whānau initiated conversations with the teachers it tended to be focused on seeking clarification about panui (notices) or seeking input around student behaviour during FG1. Gorinski & Fraser (2006) found through a literature review that whānau received most of their information about school from their children or from a one-way flow of information sent out from the school. Researchers, Bull, Brooking & Campbell (2008) also commented that there is a huge range in initiatives that schools have that are designed to engage whānau, one of these initiatives is the idea of an open door policy in which whānau can approach the teachers to discuss concerns or seek input to questions. This initiative creates opportunity for whānau to come into the school, but the nature of the conversation had within the research data suggested these conversations were behaviour or panui (notice) based rather than learning based.
McDermott (2008) describes successful home school partnerships as connecting home and school through regular purposeful communication. If small talk communication is the only type of communication formed there is a risk of the relationship not being focused on the student but instead a friendship between the teacher and whānau (McDermott, 2008). Trottier (2016) describes the need to begin by nurturing friendships with parents that later lead into a collaborative relationship between the student, parents and teachers. This was evident in the findings of the research project where the friendly relationships already formed were used to create more purposeful relationships between whānau and teachers.

Adkins-Sharif (2017) discovered through research that every parent or caregiver had important insights about their child and their learning, but for a long time those insights have been ignored by schools. Mutch & Collins (2012) found that traditionally information sharing between schools and whānau has been a one-way flow of information from schools that relies on reporting student achievement. The whānau participants in the research shared how they made contact with the teachers when they had concerns to raise, were collecting their children, or when the teachers shared reports with them. McKinley & Else (2002) found that almost all Māori whānau they interviewed attended the parent teacher interviews at school but felt it did not tell them everything they wanted to know about their children's schooling. However, Trinick (2015) found that 75% of whānau in decile five – ten schools were likely to engage whānau in discussions with teachers about student reports whereas only 38% of whānau in lower decile one-two schools engaged in these discussions. Given this information it can be argued that all whānau want to be engaged in these conversations but other factors and stressors in life can make it difficult for whānau to engage, or as shown in my own data, were confident in using the language of the school/related to learning. McKinley & Else (2002) support this view and found that teachers believed that the difference between engagement at school was a socioeconomic issue not an ethnicity issue.

The findings of the research project highlighted that teacher whānau relationships had deepened due to them being more purposeful and deliberate rather than opportunist.
ICT to Increase Frequency of Interactions

One key factor that was found during the research findings was the use of ICT to increase the frequency of interactions whānau and teachers had. Clarke (2017) highlighted that ICT should be used as a supplement to other forms of communication as it has the means to increase the frequency of dialogue between home and school. Data from whānau and teacher feedback was clear that the project made a positive impact on teacher, whānau and student’s relationships because the frequency of communication increased.

Olender, Elias & Mastroleo (2015) found that there was a positive snowball effect on the school community by increasing positive whānau relationships. Feedback from the whānau in relation to recommendations moving forward were all based around developing consistency and involving more whānau to work collaboratively with the teachers. The benefits for the students were clear in promoting a sense of security in knowing that the teachers and parents were working together to help them do well (Olender et al. 2015). Although student voice was not collected during this research project, it was evident through field notes that the student’s positive reactions and willingness to want to share their learning with their whānau.

Teacher practice in regards to how teachers and whānau share information with one another has changed with the increases in technology. Mutch & Collins (2012) found that technology advances have enabled a swifter flow of communication between home and schools. This is vitally important given the fact that parents are now much busier than they used to be (McKinley & Else, 2002). Whānau within the research project also described the busy nature of their lives as a factor that made it difficult to engage with school all of the time. Several whānau members commented that they liked to use See-Saw and the class Facebook page as they knew what was happening and could engage with the school without having to be there.

Teachers and whānau can deepen their relationships through the use of ICT as it creates opportunities to increase the frequency of communication.

The Importance of Face to Face Interactions

Forming relationships has to start with kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face) interactions. These interactions are vitally important for all whānau and teachers as they expressed they had to get
to know one another before settling on a purpose for future interactions. All of the whānau and teachers listed face to face interactions as one of the best ways of communicating.

**Making Connections**

One teacher within the study shared how she used her whakapapa (ancestry), pepeha (Māori way of introducing yourself) and interests to make connections to whānau in her class. Moeke-Pickering (1996) describes how Māori identity was intimately associated with the location of tribal boundaries and it is from these practices that Maori identify themselves today. When beginning the project and focus group discussions we always began by sharing about ourselves through our pepeha or korero (talking). It was noted that this enabled the whānau to make connections to each other. A sense of belonging through whakapapa or geological ties connects people together and helps embed whakawhānaungatanga where everyone is working as a family unit (Moeke-Pickering, 1996). Adkins-Sharif (2017) suggests using low-stakes events such as school barbeques as a way to begin relationships with whānau where connections are made. This is an area where the school has always had a strength and has made deliberate efforts to get to know the whānau at the school.

After an initial connection is made between teachers and whānau this has to be grown. Olender et al, (2015) describe this stage of forming relationships as ‘small talk’ and is highly important in beginning a relationship. Clarke (2017) also commented that ICT systems to communicate should only be used once a face to face meeting has taken place.

**Building Trust**

Powers (2016) describes stages of relationships with whanau. The first stage being friendly relationship building and the second stage involves encouraging whānau to assist, share and make decisions. Porter (2008) supports this and states that communication should aim to empower both whānau and teachers to better meet the needs of the students by exchanging information that enables equal and joint participants in decision making. The initial data collected from whānau and teachers highlighted that positive beginning of relationships had been formed and whānau felt comfortable in school and trusted the teachers, but the next level of partnership had not yet been established.
The Ministry of Education (2008) highlights that whānau appreciate both informal and formal communication with teachers. Partnerships are strengthened when whānau have opportunities to share their child’s interests, successes and experiences (Ministry of Education, 2008). McKinley and Else (2002) found that in order to grow greater involvement of whānau within schools it was important to first establish a relationship by meeting, after this relationship had been formed it was more likely parents would be involved in the school.

Smaill (2015) describes the conditions needed for partnerships to be formed and states that a level of trust between the teacher and whānau must be established. This trust is based on both parties valuing the input each other can give (Smaill, 2015). Data from the research project showed that whānau did trust teachers to teach but this could be further strengthened by working collaboratively together.

It is clear from research both nationally, internationally and through this project, that collaborative positive relationships between whānau and teachers result in positive outcomes. The basis of these relationships led back to collaboration and reciprocity where both parties are acknowledged for the expertise they bring to shaping the education of the children.

**Respectful Relationships**

The findings of the research project highlighted that relationships with whānau needed to be respectful and begin with positive interactions. Smaill (2015) describes that interactions between teachers and whānau should begin positive and purposeful. This view is further supported by the Ministry of Education (2010) where a case study example describes a positive whānau school partnership as one that is individualised and begins positively.

Teacher and whānau within the research findings both described building respectful relationships as making connections first, followed by talking about positives of their children at school and then setting a purpose for further dialogue. These steps for building respectful relationships is supported by Olender et al. (2015) who describes the need for teachers to be committed to building purposeful relationships with whānau that move beyond low stakes interactions to whānau becoming decision makers within the school.
Smaill (2015), states that teachers need to respect the place of parents as being valuable teachers of all learning as learning takes place both in the home and at school. Findings from the number of written conversations sharing learning between home and school increased significantly during the project. This huge increase could be connected to the respectful relationship built that had a purpose of acknowledging learning in both home and school contexts.

**Value of Whānau Contributions**

When teachers are changing their practice in order to develop ways in which they can collaborate and communicate with whānau it is important to find out what whānau want. Porter (2008) supports this, and states that for teachers to be responsive to whānau they need to be accessible outside of the traditional rigid timetable of before or after school. Kraft (2017) found through research that the biggest issue he saw in schools was the inconsistent and unsystematic approach to trying to engage whānau. This research highlighted that although the small scale project was a success, much work was still needed to make it more consistent across the school. When the whānau shared what they wanted in the future many commented that they wanted to be able to communicate with the teachers using technology in a more consistent manner. The Ministry of Education (2008) identified ways in which school could improve whānau engagement and one was the need for better forms of communication. By using whānau voice to make changes after the research project ensures trust between the kaiako (teachers) of the school, myself and the whānau.

Valuing the input and knowledge that whānau have is important for creating purposeful relationships (McKinley & Else, 2002). At the beginning of the research project, whānau determined how they wanted to communicate with the teachers and what information they wanted to know. This information highlighted that the whānau wanted to know about the students’ academic progress, what they were learning, and how they were socialising with others in the class. Interestingly McKinley and Else (2002) noted the same responses from whānau, but teachers expressed they wanted whānau to be more involved in fundraising, organising sports and extracurricular activities. Bull, Brooking and Campbell (2008) found that there was a huge range in what school leaders described as whānau engagement from fundraising to aligning home school practices. This research project in alignment with McKinley and Else (2002) research showed whānau wanted to know more about teaching and learning not just helping out at the school. It is important for schools to seek input from whānau
around how they want to be involved in the school. McDermott (2008) raises that without knowing who whānau are and what they bring we cannot expect them to respond to school requests in a homogenous manner. Adkins-Sharif (2017) supports this and states that as teachers we need to change the dynamic of working with whānau to communicate continually as it increases the sense of connection between home and school.

A New Perspective

Given historical research of schooling experiences for Māori, traditional schools have not been positive places for many whānau (Bishop, 2006). Selby (1999) sheds light on the extent in which Māori were punished at school for their culture, identity and language. Whānau voice also highlighted this change where they identified they were excited about the future of education because of the changes for Māori at school. McDermott (2008) supports this change by stating that a consequence of spending time building educational relationships is that the next generation of parents are even better prepared to work collaboratively with teachers. One whānau member commented that it was not cool to be Māori but now it is.

Hawaikirangi-Pere (2013) exerts the loss of culture and language has left many Māori without firm foundations of who they are and that this has led to a loss of confidence in educational settings. The changes teachers make now to how they teach in culturally responsive ways can contribute towards a more positive experience of schooling for Māori students. This view is supported by Macfarlane (2010) and the Ministry of Education (2010). One whānau member commented that she felt the school had made changes that would enable future generations to love education. McDermott (2008) supports this view by stating that by spending time on relationships it creates the next generation of parents who are involved in schools.

Changing teacher practice in terms of understanding the history of New Zealand education and building culturally responsive practices has been a goal for educational researcher Macfarlane (2010) who has run courses at Waikato University. This understanding was important for the whānau within the research project where their collaborative input into their children's learning excited them, not only for the present but also for future generations.

All of the whānau within the research project wanted the best for their children and for them to get a good education despite their own schooling history. Sheriff (2010) investigated factors
that led to Māori students leaving school early and found that students whose parents had poor experiences still hoped their children would get a good education and later a good job. The difficulty in engaging these whānau was often linked to the whānau not wanting to be in the school as it made them uncomfortable or they felt they did not have the skills required to help. Whānau and teachers within the research project also highlighted that some whānau struggle to engage with the school as they do not know how they can help their children and are worried they might do something wrong. Gorinski and Fraser (2006) found that when whānau see the teacher as an expert they tend to disengage from the educational experiences of their children. An important note raised by Dauber and Epstein (1989) is that parents want teachers and schools to advise and help them know what their children are learning at school and how they can support them. This idea is not new to the education sector but remains an area that schools need to strengthen (Ministry of Education, 2008).

All the whānau within the research project were interested in their children's education and were wanting to help them in any way possible. Some of these same whānau shared how school had not been a positive place for them but they wanted the best for their children. Past experiences of education for whānau can act as a barrier to making them feel comfortable within a school environment but the school has the ability to change the perspective of whānau and excite them for the future generations to come.

**Student Interest Directed Learning**

The Ministry of Education document Ka Hikitia (2013) states that students do better in education when what they learn positively reflects who they are, where they come from, their values and their previous experiences. Sale (2015) accredits student’s ability to learn new information to them being able to draw from previous experiences. In order for teachers to better understand their students, knowledge can be drawn from the whānau. The results in the research project highlighted the unique knowledge the whānau could give and how that had the power to lead to improved student engagement, motivation and academic success. The information collected from the whānau helped the teacher-researcher to change the context of what she was teaching to link to the student’s interests, values, aspirations and experiences. This knowledge would not have been possible without input from the whānau. Teachers’ willingness is key to changing whānau teacher relationships (Dauber & Epstein, 1989).
Porter (2008) recognises teacher expertise in collaborating with whānau to better harness information that helps improve teaching. Whānau have intimate knowledge about their children across time in a variety of settings that help them to know the children's needs, aspirations and interests (Porter, 2008). This information can be vitally important for teachers to teach. When teachers use knowledge of the student’s interests to direct learning they create productive partnerships that are focused on educational success (Ministry of Education, 2013). Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh and Teddy (2007) describe that the closer the classroom experiences and home experiences are for students the more likely it will be that students will be able to participate in education at school.

An important part of this project was to use whānau voice to begin to shape how the conversations between whānau and teachers would take place. Whānau all agreed that using information communication technologies was the most appropriate way to have ongoing dialogue with the teachers. Smith (2013) emphasise the importance of involving Māori in all aspects of decision making when undertaking research. This idea is also important to cross over to education and involve whānau in the decisions around what they want to know from the school, decisions around their children's learning and decisions around how communication will happen. McKinley and Else (2002) support this view and credit some of the success of Kura Kaupapa to whānaungatanga where all whānau have a say in decisions made at the kura.

Porter (2008) acknowledges that teachers have expertise but challenges this belief and describes whānau as having the most important relationship with their children and therefore possess detailed knowledge about them across time. By harnessing this intimate knowledge, teachers gain information that strengthen their expertise and practice (Porter, 2008). Dermott (2008) supports this view and states that it is easier for whānau to be involved in the school curriculum when their children's learning is tied to family experiences, iwi, history and knowledge. Within the research project both teachers and whānau commented on the changes they saw in how they communicated and worked collaboratively with each other to design learning experiences for the students.

Findings within the research highlighted that whānau trust the teachers to do their job. Smaill (2015) describes this as a strength for a school to have as a foundation for forming collaborative partnerships between whānau and teachers. Both parties need to respect each other's contributions to the education of the children. Hughes and Kwok (2007) agree and found through their research that, where there was a mismatch between the culture of the school and
home, the lack of alliance between both parties impacts negatively on the students. The Ministry of Education (2010) highlights that teacher practice must change to better align what is being taught to the culture of the students that they teach. For many, culture goes beyond what ethnicity you belong to but encompasses everything about you from your interests, experiences and nationality (Zimmermann, 2017). Cavanagh, Macfarlane, Glynn and Mcfarlane (2012) support this and describe it as a culturally responsive pedagogy that is based on enduring respectful relationships that foster care.

Trinick (2015) describe effective home school partnerships as one that involves the school and teachers embracing the home culture as it is not just a matter of acculturation of whānau into school practices. One of the noted positive effects of the project was that whānau led what and how communication was going to happen rather than the teachers telling whānau. Porter (2008) found that when teachers enter interactions with whānau only to give information with no acknowledgement of what whānau can contribute, it inhibits not only the potential of what teachers may receive but also the potential of what teachers seek to give. Building whānau relationships that are collaborative are fundamental to restructure the power relations between school and home (Bishop et al. 2007).

Within the research project information shared from the whānau was used to shape the learning contexts and experiences for the students at school. Whānau responded that they loved seeing what they had shared had been used to make learning experiences for their children. One whānau member commented how she was excited that her child's interest in science had been fostered and encouraged by the teachers in all learning areas. Another whānau member commented how her child was reluctant to join in learning but this had dramatically changed when his personal interest was used to drive the learning experiences. Sale (2015) describes this as creative teaching that uses experiences the children are familiar with to build new knowledge. He argues that new learning must connect to something already known and engagement in learning hinges on student’s interests. Olender et al., (2015) supports this research by stating that the benefits of whānau voice in schooling is that whānau sense partnership when their opinion and ideas do matter and are drawn from to improve learning opportunities for their child. This then leads to greater security in knowing that their child’s educational needs are recognised and addressed (Olender et al. 2015).

Trottier (2016) describe parents as loving the opportunity to be active participants in their children's learning but the teachers are the ones that need to create opportunities for this to
happen. By the end of the research project both whānau and teachers could discuss how learning from whānau and student voice was used to help teach. There was a definite link between a personalised learning approach and the changes to student motivation and engagement. The teachers also noted that the whānau commented more about the students’ learning and shared more from home as well. Bishop et al (2007) describe this as respecting each whānau and acknowledging their mana. Student directed learning that fosters whānau voice creates more culturally responsive and meaningful opportunities for student learning to occur (Olender et al, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2013). Student directed learning contexts based on whānau voice was a key finding within the research project.

**Academic Versus Social Benefits**

The whānau within this research project shared that they wanted to know about the progress their children made, how they worked socially with others in the class and what learning contexts they were focusing on.

Researchers Porter (2008), McKinley and Else (2002), and Rouse and O’Brien (2017), all found that parents wanted more insight into what was happening at school for their children and what their children were learning than what was currently provided by the schools. Porter (2008) also highlights that when schools engage with whānau often it is built on a flawed model that entrenches a power imbalance between parents and teachers. Several teachers and whānau within the project shared how some whānau felt that it was not their place to contribute in schools as it could be seen as undermining or questioning professionals (teachers).

While the findings of the research project highlighted that whānau were wanting to know about social and academic learning, the teachers focused more on the academic learning. Six of the nine whānau shared that they wanted to know about academic progress where all of the teachers talked about academic progress as a goal. Interestingly, all of the whānau shared they wanted to know about social learning whereas the teachers did not highlight it as a goal for the study. Bishop (2017) describes that Māori students need class environments that promote cooperative learning. Results from Te Kotahitanga (Ministry of Education, 2011) also highlight that Māori students achieve success at school when they have strong relationships with their teachers and their peers. Therefore, the idea of social learning being as relevant as academic learning is highly important for teachers. Interestingly international researchers Zins, Weissberg, Wang &
Walberg (2004) argue that social learning is more important than academic learning and by delving into teaching social learning it automatically increases academic outcomes.

The project’s findings, highlighted that by communicating frequently with whānau where they could see their children’s learning they felt their children had made more progress. This idea of academic progress was also highlighted by the teachers who all noted the shifts in reading levels of the children in the project. Trinick (2015) accredits this academic focus to the last decade of educational focuses in New Zealand that has focused on interventions aimed at involving parents in the education of their children as a means of raising educational achievement. Both international and national research makes links to increasing student achievement through whānau engagement as Ester & Wai-Man (2013) state. Sale (2015) also made links between whānau engagement and student achievement by describing the list of positive outcomes that schools have achieved as a result of working with whānau. The Education Review Office (2015) describes educationally powerful relationships going beyond communicating about achievement to working together with whānau to support student success. It can be argued that the findings highlighted that the whānau felt their children had made significant progress because they were aware of the learning taking place each day and could witness and contribute towards the progress themselves. Desforges and Aboucharr (2003) support this and found through their research that it was hard to determine a link of academic achievement increases to whānau engagement simply because it had not been studied in isolation.

Whānau shared the want for videos to be used to share social and academic learning. Clarke (2017) and The Education Review Office (2008) highlight the use of video sharing between teachers and whānau as opportunities to build connections and collaboration. Digital sharing helps whānau to be able to see the learning take place both academic progress and social learning.

For whānau social learning was just as important as academic learning whereas for teachers academic learning and progress was what they tended to speak about more.
The Benefits

Data from whānau and teachers around the project highlighted the increase in student engagement, motivation and achievement at school. Several factors were highlighted as the reasons for this change. One was that whānau, teachers and students were talking the same language about learning and the other being that whānau voice was used to change teaching contexts for the students.

Bridging Home and School Life

One of the benefits of collaboratively working with whānau is the change in teacher practice of what teachers teach. Olender et al. (2015) highlight the change in the teaching curriculum that occurs when teachers and whānau work together, where the contexts and improved ideas from the teachers link to information shared from whānau. Bishop et al., (2007) acknowledge the knowledge whānau can bring that can change the way in which teachers teach.

Whānau voice also showed that they loved seeing the updates and responding to their children's learning at school. Several whānau shared that they used what was shared from school to engage in conversations about learning with their children at home. Olender et al, (2015) describes the benefits of collaborative whānau and teacher relationships as leading to improved ideas, resources and relevance of what students were learning. Rouse and O’Brien (2017) support this and also found that positive relationships that were founded around reciprocity, led to a more collaborative relationship that was built around trust and mutually agreed goals.

Whānau expressed through the findings of FG2 that they knew the language of the school and could talk more freely with their children about their learning. Gorinski and Fraser (2006) found that whānau being unaware of the practices and language of the school is a barrier to their engagement. The Education Review Office (2008) found that when schools have collaborative relationships with whānau there is a shared understanding and language between home and school. The finding of a shared language between home and school was evident within the results of the research project.

Sharing through technology also created opportunities for whānau living at a distance to be engaged in the education of their children. Trottier (2016) found that using technology helped
students to take more ownership of their learning and share more whānau including whānau living away. Technology has no limits of distance and can be a helpful tool to use in education as it has the ability to connect people (Clarke, 2017). This sharing of learning across the wider whānau creates opportunities to celebrate learning and education as well as seek input from whānau (Education Review Office, 2008). Communicating learning to the wider whānau was a key finding within the research project.

Motivation and Engagement

Several whānau members shared how motivated their child was to share their learning at home. Two whānau members stated that they knew more about the language of the school that that enabled them to have rich conversations with their children about learning. Kraft (2017) found that frequent, personalised communication with whānau increased student’s engagement in school, behaviour in class and in class participation. This was noted by two whānau members who commented that the behaviour of their child at school had improved significantly through the project. One child was disengaged in school and in class participation but through the project began to engage more frequently which lead to a change in behaviour, engagement and academic success. Smaill (2015) found strong support within his literature review that all suggested the power effective partnerships with whānau can have on student success in school.

Student motivation and engagement was highlighted by Gorinski and Fraser (2006) as a key benefit of whānau engagement. Hughes and Kwok (2017) support this through their research and also found that parent - teacher - student relationships influence the child's academic motivation and engagement. Whānau commented that the reason why they believed that their child had made such big changes in terms of motivation and engagement could be accredited to the contexts the teacher was teaching from being in alignment with student’s interests, experiences and aspirations. The link could also be made back to the whānau and student talking about their learning at home. Gonzalez et al, (2005) state that student motivation is enhanced when whānau talk about their learning with them and encourage them. Bull, Brooking and Campbell (2008) support this and report that parental involvement makes a significant difference to the educational outcomes for students. This is due to the excitement that whānau instil in their children about learning (Gratz, 2006).
This research project also clearly linked students increased motivation, engagement and academic attainment to the collaborative relationships formed with whānau.

Confidence

Trinick (2015) found through his research that children felt positive about their parent’s involvement which lead to positive educational outcomes such as reduced absenteeism and positive academic gains. Through my field notes I also noted that students were positive about their whānau interactions when sharing learning and loved getting feedback and input from their whānau during the lesson. Gratz (2006) found that students were more motivated and engaged in learning when they knew their whānau supported and encouraged their efforts. Brownlee (2015) supports this and states that children whose parents are actively involved in school are likely to get higher grades and have increased levels of engagement and motivation at school.

Mutch and Collins (2012) describe the better the engagement between whānau and schools, the greater the positive impact in student learning. The challenge for schools is to create positive relationships that use whānau voice to decide how communication lines are opened up and what whānau want school to share and seek input about. Hughes and Kwok (2007) suggest that positive relations between whānau and teachers is harder to achieve in low socioeconomic and ethnic minority areas. However, McKinley and Else (2002) challenge this by stating that a lack of culturally responsive approach to engaging whānau is often the reason why Māori struggle to engage. Input from Māori is important in developing collaborative relationships where their ideas, values and inputs are utilised and a sense of reciprocity is developed (Smith, 2013). Olender et al, (2015) supports this and states that regardless of family income or background, students whose parents are involved in their schooling are more likely to have higher levels of success in school.
Summary

The findings from the research project show that whānau and teachers can work collaboratively together to create better learning opportunities for the students. When it comes to building relationships with whānau, in particular Māori whānau face to face interactions are important to begin with. Once connections have been made and a clear understanding of what and how teachers-whānau can communicate with one another then ICT can be utilised. ICT has the ability to increase the frequency of communication with whānau and thus allows the relationship to move beyond a friendly relationship to one that is more purposeful.

Another key finding was in order to build relationships both whānau and teachers found that it had to begin with face to face interactions. The purpose for these face to face interactions were to make connections with one another, build trust and create respectful relationships.

To build on respectful relationships and create whānau agency it was found that it was important that teachers acknowledge and act on whānau voice. This whānau voice gives insight to a new perspective around education being formed. By using whānau voice to shape learning contexts for the students it further increased the likelihood that whānau voice would be given.

For many whānau academic learning and social learning were just as important as each other. When whānau shared what learning they wanted to know about social learning was described by most participants. Interestingly teachers focused more on the academic learning.

The benefits of the research project included bridging home and school by creating a shared language, increased student motivation and engagement in learning and an increase in student confidence.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study is that, due to the sample size, the results of this study cannot be representative of all low decile schools engaging with whānau. Readers of this study will need to consider the extent to which the findings and conclusions from this study can be applied to
their own context (Cohen et al. 2007). However, other communities that are rural and predominantly Māori may find these results helpful when seeking to improve whānau-teacher relationships.

Another limitation of this study is the fact that the school had already put in place many measures to build positive friendly relationships with whānau and this project was premised on that. Not included in the data and findings is that some whānau that had yet to establish positive relationships with the school did not volunteer to be part of the project. The challenge for all schools is to create opportunities for whānau to engage and to understand the value collaborative relationships with whānau can have on teacher practice and school outcomes.

**Recommendations**

The findings of this study have led to the development of a school wide plan for building consistency in creating opportunities to engage with whānau. Even though this is a small-scale study, readers may choose to take these recommendations, and make generalisations that can be applied to their own school contexts.

Consistency is important when it comes to school leaders deciding what measures and methods they want to use to collaborate with whānau. Kraft (2017) discovered through research that the problem in many schools was that teacher-parent communication was infrequent, unsystematic and not adequately supported. Whānau also expressed the desire to have communication with teachers more consistent in each class where technology was utilised to allow this to happen. In terms of our school, a plan will be developed that uses whānau voice to decide how and what they would like communicated with them.

ICT is a powerful tool that can enable schools, teachers and whānau to communicate and collaborate frequently. Olender et al (2015), highlights that by communicating more frequently with whānau it allows the relationship to grow to being more reciprocal. Another recommendation from whānau was to make all hui that involved whānau ‘live’ so input could be made from those who were busy and could not make the meeting in person. This is a recommendation that our school will take forward as well as holding onto the importance of meeting with whānau face to face to begin with and keeping it as an option in all instances.
Teachers utilising whānau voice is important in terms of moving forward. As a school we will be ensuring that once we have established friendly relationships with whānau we then put in place systematic and responsive measures to communicate more frequently where we seek their input into what their children learn about. Bishop et al. (2007) and the Ministry of Education (2013) both highlight that students do better in education when what they learn reflects who they are, their interests, values and whānau aspirations.

**Suggestions for Further Study**

This research has highlighted the possibilities for future research, these possibilities include:

- A more in-depth study exploring the effect personalised learning driven from whānau voice has on student’s motivation, engagement and academic success.
- Research into the way schools engage with whānau to build collaborative relationships.
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http://hdl.handle.net/10092/11456


APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Analysis tables used to sort findings

Table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the nature of whānau relationships at my school?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre data (interviews and focus group)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● ¾ teachers based on when whānau come into school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● ¾ teachers use Facebook for whole class sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● 1 teacher uses see-saw for individual student and whole class sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● All teachers said they had generally good relationships with whānau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● All teachers referred to face to face contact with whānau.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● 1 teacher made comment that their relationships could always improve. This could indicate the need for consistency across the kura.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whānau</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● 7/9 whānau reported they went to see the teachers when they needed to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● 2/9 whānau reported they checked on Facebook to see what the class was doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● 2/9 whānau reported seeing their children’s learning on see-saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● 3/9 whānau commented that they liked or loved a post when they saw it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● All whānau shared they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
talked about things happening at school, any concerns they had and how their children were doing at school with teachers.

as being possible reasons why some whānau do not engage with school.

- 2 whānau shared a possible lack of resources such as phone credit as a possible barrier. This could indicate whānau feeling whakama (embarrassed).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field Notebook findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When initially setting up to have the focus group discussions I realised I would need to adapt the original idea of having one larger focus group to having two smaller ones to suit the whānau and their busy lives. It was essential that the whānau participants had a say in the design process for collecting the data. When respecting relationships, it is important that the process of collecting data was also collaborative and had opportunities for the whānau to decide what would work best for them. It was also noted that during the hui which explained the project design there were a number of whānau that wanted to be involved but outside of the research aspect. these whānau they could still see the learning from the class through the app See-Saw but were not required to give any data or be participants of the study. This approach respected whānau choice to be involved in understanding how to use the see-saw app without being part of the research project. No information regarding the rest of the class was collected as it was normal practice to share learning with whānau and to teach the students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 1.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What can whānau teach us (teachers) about forming relationships that improve the learning for their children?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre data (interviews and focus group)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● All three teachers referred to using student’s interests to teach from if they knew.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● 1 teacher shared how she asked whānau to share their aspirations for their child when they began school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● 2 teachers commented on the use of whānau feedback and sharing to change the teaching context for children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● 2 teachers commented on the academic progress the students had made through the project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All whānau reported the changes to their children's confidence and happiness.

Field Notes

My own observations and notes collected when hosting the information sharing hui were that the majority of the whānau that attended were the whānau know already knew me as a kaiako in the school. There was the addition of 4 extra whānau who I did not have an established relationship with that came to hear about the project. My learning from this observation was the importance of building a face to face relationship at the beginning. This was then reiterated with the data collected from teachers and whānau.

Further learning showed me that when you took the time to sit down with whānau and show them how they can see, and respond to their children's learning at school or home they were more inclined to share. By spending time with whānau and showing them how the tools worked was well worth the effort.

During the project I made several notes about how regularly whānau were sharing information and awhi back to their children at school. For 5 of the whānau the response was within the lesson time itself where the child and their whānau could communicate. The smiles and confidence the students gained from the awhi from their whānau was irreplaceable and more powerful than any awhi myself as a teacher may give. This really illustrates a new approach to how whānau are able to be involved in their children’s learning, a way that hasn’t been possible before the occurrence of this kind of tool.

Table 1.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre data (interviews and focus group)</th>
<th>Post data (interviews and focus group)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Teachers             | ● All teachers referred to getting to know whānau face to face  
 ● All teachers commented on how they aimed to build stronger learning focused relationships  
 ● All teachers were interested in using technology to continue contact with whānau with 2 of the three teachers having something in place. | ● All teachers commented on the way whānau shared back and responded to learning  
 ● All teachers wanted to explore other methods for building relationships with whānau through the use of technology in the future  
 ● All teachers commented on the connection of the students’ progress and or confidence through the relationship sharing with whānau. |
| Whānau               | ● 1 whānau member shared                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | ● All whānau wanted to have                                                                                                                                                               |
that they sometimes share their home learning with the teacher.

- All whānau shared that they had access to digital technologies such as smartphones and would prefer contact through those measures.

- technology sharing available to them in the future

- All whānau commented on the confidence, happiness or progress their children had made

**Field Notes and reflections**

Each week information about student’s interests, what they had been learning or involved in at home were shared from whānau. These created contexts for my teaching. One student loved science and began sharing science experiments he had been doing at home so all the reading we did at school with his group were based around science concepts.

Another student was new to the school and had previously not had a very successful time at his last school where he was withdrawn and would not enter the classroom. His whānau shared his love for blocks and cars. Using both those concepts all his reading was built around blocks and cars. Within a week there was a noted difference in his engagement where he was in the classroom and completing learning suited to his level. This was further enhanced over the term working with him where he made significant progress in his engagement and learning levels where he was strongly supported by his classroom teacher as well.

Another student who struggled to work with others had learning built around his love for lions and tigers. He eventually branched off to bringing in and sharing soft toys that were used within the lessons to engage and motivate him to practice being a tuakana (older role model).

One young student made significant progress in her reading by reading and finding out more about cats. It was something she was very interested in that whānau shared she loved. It helped to engage her and motivate her to read. She also brought with her a large bank of prior knowledge which aided the learning.

All of the wānau involved in the project comments and responded to learning shared from the teacher. Additional whānau who lived away from the child were also able to communicate with their child and encourage their learning. 5 of the whānau shared information from home learning contexts or interests the student had at the time which enabled me to cater their learning around whānau voice. The additional 4 children told me their interests and the learning context was built around that as well showing students are able to focus on their own interests to motivate their learning.
Appendix 2- Schedule of data collection and project timeline

Whanau as Agents: Exploring ways to improve relationships between whanau and teachers.

Timeline of The Research Project for Whanau.

Week One
- A panui will be sent out inviting whanau and teachers to an information sharing afternoon or evening hui.
- Information will be shared (handout)
- A consent form will be shared and those who want to join the project will sign
- Informally we will have a discussion around what we currently do and what whanau would like from the project. This is called a focus group interview.

Week Two - Twelve
In week two Mrs Aperahama will meet with each whanau to show them how to share learning from home through see-saw, email or facebook.
- Mrs Aperahama will be working in the classrooms during reading time
- Mrs Aperahama will share with you your child’s learning from school
- Mrs Aperahama will contact you to see what learning is happening at home
- Mrs Aperahama will change her teaching to use the contexts of learning at home to help the children make connections between home and school.
- Mrs Aperahama and the children will share their progress and celebrations of their learning.

Week Thirteen
- Mrs Aperahama will ask you to join an informal discussion as part of a focus group interview

Week Fifteen - Fourteen
- Mrs Aperahama will share with you all the results from the project

After the Project
- Mrs Aperahama will write up the research project to hand into Unitec.
- She will present the findings and key information to the teachers and BOT of the school as well as the whanau involved in the project
Appendix 3 - Semi Structured Interview Questions

**Teachers - Whānau Engagement Interview**

What is the nature of the communication you have with whānau currently?
How do you currently contact and share learning with whānau?
How often do you share learning with whānau?
How often does whānau share learning from home with you?
Do you use learning from home to help guide your teaching of that individual child? (e.g the child went to the marae in the weekend, using this to do reading about a marae in class). Can you give me some examples?
Roughly what percentage of your class currently do their home learning ‘reading’ at home?
How well are your children achieving in reading?
How much do the children enjoy reading in the classroom?
What would you like to see as an outcome from the project?

**End of the project Interview questions to be included**

Have you found any changes in the relationship/s with whānau?
Have you found any changes in the students learning?
Which methods of communication have you seen as having the most benefit for our whānau?
What do you think are some of the key reasons some whānau find it hard to engage with the school?
Have you seen any benefit of using the students learning at home to drive the learning contexts at school?
What would you like to see as a result of this project for our school moving forward?
Appendix 4 - Whānau focus group questions

**Whānau as Agents Focus Group Questions**

What is your preferred method of communication?
Facebook  text  email  see-saw  phone call

How do you currently communicate with the kaiako/s of your tamariki?

What would you like to know about what learning your child does at school? (whole class learning, just what my child is learning etc)

Do you / your child share learning they do at home with the kaiako?

Does your child come home and share with you what they have been learning?

**End of the project Focus questions to be included**

Have you noticed any changes in what / how your child shares their learning from school?

Have there been any changes in how your child feels about school and their learning?

Have there been any changes for yourself in how you feel about the learning that is happening at school for your child?

What do you think are some of the barriers / reasons why some whānau find it hard to connect /engage with the school?

What means of communication have you found the most helpful?

What would you like to see in the future around the connection between home and school and sharing of learning?
Nau mai Haere mai

Kia Ora Whanau,

Ko iangaunui te maunga
Ko Iwi te aua
Ko Ben Aperahama toku tane
Ko Ella Aperahama tuku tamahine
Ko Sarah Aperahama ahau

I would like to invite you to a special hui about a project I will be doing at school this term.

The project is about working together with whanau to improve teachers practice and improve learning for the tamariki.

We will have two presentations where I welcome you to input into the project.
Appendix 6 – Teacher participant consent form

**Research Project Title:** Whānau as Agents: Exploring ways to improve relationships between whānau and teachers.

*I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understand the information sheet given to me.*

- I understand that I don’t have to be part of this research project should I choose not to participate and may withdraw anytime in the first 2 weeks of the project.

- I understand that everything I share in the interview at the beginning and end of the project will be transcribed and shared with me for consent before being published.

- I understand that I will be able to select the time in the first week to have an interview about whānau engagement.

- The researcher, the whanau and the school Principal will be aware I am one of the target teachers.

- I understand that this project will require me to use social media or the see-saw app to share learning from school with the whanau in the project and seek information about the tamariki’s learning at home. This information I will then use to adapt the teaching contexts for that student. This will take approximately 30 minutes per week.

- I understand and give permission for the researcher to be working in the classroom with me using the see-saw app or social media to share learning with whanau, adapt teaching based on whānau home learning with the students in the project.

- I understand that our school will not be named in the research project but given the nature of how small Gisborne is and the makeup of our school it could be able to be identified by some.

- I understand that I can see the finished research document and findings from the data and make suggestions for amendments.

- I have had time to consider everything and I give my consent to be a part of this project.
Participant Name: ..............................................................................................................

Participant Signature: .................................. Date: ............................................

Project Researcher: ...................................... Date: ............................................

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2017-1038
This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 17.07.2017 to 17.07.2018.
If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 7 – Whānau consent form

Research Project Title: Whānau as Agents: Exploring ways to improve relationships between whānau and teachers

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understand the information sheet given to me.

I understand that I don't have to be part of this research project should I chose not to participate and may withdraw at any time prior to the completion of the research project.

I understand that I will be a part of a recorded focus group discussion at the beginning of the project and again at the end of the project. This recording will not be published, but will be used to collect data and information about the findings from the project. I will be able to view all findings before they are published.

I understand that everything I share in the focus group discussion is confidential and my identity will remain anonymous. The only person who will have access to what I share is the researcher and myself.

I understand that this project will require me to share learning that my child does at home and this will take approximately 15 minutes – 30 minutes per week for 12 weeks through the use of an app or social media.

I understand and give permission for the researcher to work with my child in class, adapt her teaching to suit my child’s home learning contexts and share the learning with me.

I understand that our school will not be named in the research project but given the nature of how small Gisborne is and the makeup of our school it could be able to be identified by some.

I understand that the researcher will share her findings from the research project in Term 4 before the end of the school year. I will have the opportunity to amend information if I feel it is incorrectly stated.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time and only the information I have shared to that date can be used in the research findings.

○ I understand that I can see the finished research document.
I have had time to consider everything and I give my consent to be a part of this project.

Participant Name: .............................................................................................................

Participant Signature: ......................... Date: ................................................

Project Researcher: ............................................. Date: .............................................

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2017-1038
This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 17.07.2017 to 17.07.2018. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Information for participants - Teachers

**Research Project Title**
Whānau as Agents: Exploring ways to improve relationships between whānau and teachers.

**Synopsis of project**
The research project will be exploring using social media to collaborative and share learning between home and school. It aims to form strong learning focused collaborative relationships between teachers and whānau.

**What we are doing**
The researcher will be coming into the classrooms and teaching groups of students. The researcher will then share the children’s learning directly with whānau. The researcher will then try and use learning contexts shared from home to adapt her teaching.

**What it will mean for you**
At the beginning and end the researcher will ask you to have an interview to talk about whānau relationships. It is expected that this will take no longer than 30 minutes. The interview will be transcribed and this will be shared directly with you.

The researcher will then be in your class during reading time taking groups of learners. She will share learning with the whānau for the term. The discussions between the researcher and yourself should not exceed 30 minutes per week.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This gives the researcher permission to use the information you share in interview at the beginning and end and any information you share about whānau relationships and sharing of learning over the term. All information being used in the project that pertains to you will be shared.

At any time, you can request copies of any information pertaining to yourself. After signing the consent form you can still change your mind and withdraw from the project in the first week.

Your name and information that may identify you will be kept completely confidential from the published study; however, the whānau will know who you are as the classroom teachers of their
children. All information collected from you will be stored on a password protected file and only you, the researchers and our supervisors will have access to this information.

Please contact us if you need more information about the project. At any time if you have any concerns about the research project you can contact our supervisor:

My supervisor is Jo Mane, phone 815-4321 ext. 7146 or email jmane@unitec.ac.nz

**UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2017-1038**

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from *17.07.2017* to *17.07.2018*. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 9 – Information sheet for whānau participants

Information for participants - Whānau

**Research Project Title**
Whānau as Agents: Exploring ways to improve relationships between whānau and teachers.

**Synopsis of project**
The research project will be exploring using social media to collaborative and share learning between home and school. It aims to form strong learning focused collaborative relationships between teachers and whānau.

**What we are doing**
The researcher will be coming into the classrooms and teaching groups of students. The researcher will then share the children’s learning directly with you. You will be asked to share any learning at home with the researcher and she will use this to change her teaching.

**What it will mean for you**
At the beginning and end the researcher will ask you to have a group discussion (focus group) where she will ask some questions about sharing learning between home and school. It is expected this will take a maximum of thirty minutes.
The researcher and teachers will share learning with you using social media or an app. You will be able to share learning from home with them as well. It is expected that this will take between 15-30 minutes per week for the term.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This gives the researcher permission to use the information you share in the focus group discussion at the beginning and end and the number of times you share what learning happens at home and information from the teachers anonymously in her research project. This means your name and your child's name will never be shared or published to ensure confidentiality.

At any time, you can request copies of any information pertaining to yourself. After signing the consent form you can still change your mind and withdraw from the project at any time.

Your name and information that may identify you will be kept completely confidential. All information collected from you will be stored on a password protected file and only you, the researchers and our supervisors will have access to this information.
Please contact us if you need more information about the project. At any time if you have any concerns about the research project you can contact our supervisor:

My supervisor is Jo Mane, phone 815-4321 ext. 7146 or email jmane@unitec.ac.nz

**UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2017-1038**

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 17.07.2017 to 17.07.2018. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 10 – Organisational Consent

Organisational Consent Form

**Research Project Title:**
Whānau as Agents: Exploring ways to improve relationships between whānau and teachers.

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understand the information sheet given to me.

We give permission for Sarah Aperahama to work with whānau on our school site between the hours of 8am and 6pm to cater for times that work best for our community.

We give permission for Sarah Aperahama to work in the classrooms with students in order to collect learning examples to share with whānau.

We see this project as valuable to our school and its strategic goals set in place and therefore support the project.

I understand that I can see the finished research document.

I have had time to consider everything and I give my consent to be a part of this project.

*Participant Name:* ..............................................................

*Participant Signature:* ...................................... *Date:* ........................................

*Project Researcher:* ................................................... *Date:* ........................

**UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2017-1038**

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 17.07.2017 to 17.07.2018. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Full name of author: Sarah Jane Aperahama

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Whanau as Agents: Exploring ways to improve relationships between whanau and teachers.

Practice Pathway: Te Miro Postgraduate Pathway
Degree: Masters of Applied Practice
Year of presentation: 2018

Principal Supervisor: Dr Lisa Maurice-Takerei
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