The Lived Experiences of Student Representatives in a New Zealand Institute of Technology and Polytechnic: A Critical Examination

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning."

Name: **Daryl Parkin**

Signature:

Date: 21st July 2019

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ABSTRACT

A common form of student voice within higher education is democratically elected student representation. These students represent the voices of their peers and participate in institutional decision making. There has been much written about student representation and student participation in university governance, however, there are limited accounts of how student representatives experience this role, and little relevant literature relating specifically to the Institute of Technology and Polytechnic (ITP) sector, which provides applied and specific, vocational training up to degree level, in New Zealand. This study sets out to understand the experiences of student representatives within an ITP and to identify barriers and enablers that influence their engagement with their role.

An interpretive phenomenological methodology was used. Data was collected through semi-structured interviewing, which involved six student representatives from an ITP in New Zealand.

This study found that the experience of student representation is multifaceted, occurring within a complex, conflicting and changing environment, and revealed not only why students choose to be representatives, but why they choose to remain in this role. Although most participants saw the role as being a voice for other students, the findings indicated that participants also viewed the role as more than student advocacy, which may have further implications. The findings also suggested that the student representative experience is influenced by

‘people’ and ‘structural’ barriers and enablers, which may impact their engagement with this role.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Student representation in the international and New Zealand context

The origins of student involvement in university decision making appeared in the British Commonwealth in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Altbach, 2006), in response to students' demands for a democratisation of universities. The advent of neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s led to educational institutes being viewed as service providers in a contractual relationship with students, who come to be viewed as customers (Bergan, 2004). These changes included a demand for increased efficiency, flexibility and diversity. The student-as-consumer model led higher education providers to provide services that took into consideration student views or else risking the loss of ‘customers' and revenue (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005). This has meant education providers must at the least, be seen as attempting to promote student participation. In the United States of America and the United Kingdom, formal student involvement in university governance has become an established feature, influencing both teaching and learning, as well as overall institutional strategic planning (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013). Recent research has also indicated that student involvement in representation of peers and participation in institutional governance is widespread, although there is much variability between and within institutions (Alkema, McDonald & Ryan, 2013; Little,

Locke, Scesa, & Williams, 2009; Luescher-Mamashela et al., 2011; Persson, 2004).

Previously, student representation has shown benefits to universities, students and society (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009) however, there are also reported personal costs associated with the role. Little et al. (2009) for example, identified deficiencies such as time availability, lack of training, and fear of speaking out against courses, as barriers to engagement.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

In 2012, the New Zealand Union of Students' Association (NZUSA) and Ako Aotearoa: The National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence commissioned work into student representative systems in New Zealand entitled, 'Student Voice in Tertiary Education Settings: Quality Systems in Practice' (Alkema, McDonald & Ryan, 2013). This was a year-long investigative research case study on nine New Zealand Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs) (mix of universities, Institute of Technology and Polytechnic (ITPs) and Private Training Establishments), and designed to consider how student representatives systems contribute to the quality improvement of academic programmes in higher education in New Zealand. Significant findings of this study included: Students have a number of challenges preventing them from engaging meaningfully in student representation; although there is an increase in representation numbers, students have little interest in being actively involved in representation and;

students are less likely to engage in a system of representation if they feel like they are not being listened to.

Although Alkema et al. (2013) highlighted a problem with regard to student representation in New Zealand, the research focus of this study was on ‘systems’ of student representation and not specifically on capturing the lived experiences of these students, which may have provided richer data to support understanding of how these students transition into, and exercise their role. Other discovered research studies capturing student representative experiences were based on course representatives in a university in England (Carey, 2013b) as well as university governance in Australia and Canada (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009; Zuo & Ratsoy, 1999). Notably, there may be significant differences in how university students experience student representation when compared to students from ITPs. In their research, Alkema et al. (2013) found significant challenges faced by student representatives of ITPs that did not feature for university students. For example, students from universities were able to cope with the transition into governance committees better than students from ITPs, who found the experience ‘daunting', as they described themselves as a "single voice in a room full of academics" (Alkema et al., 2013, p. 27). This present dissertation study aimed to analyse the experiences of student representatives within an ITP in New Zealand, where the dynamics that govern the student representative experiences may be unique to the ITP sector.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH STUDENT REPRESENTATION

As an educational leader for adult learners in an ITP, I have had a long interest in student leadership. My interest in student representation started when reading an article by Tamati (2011) entitled, *Te mana tangata - Leadership stories*, that referred to stories of leadership within an Early Childhood Education centre. Tamati suggested a different view on leadership, where everyone in the learning community is considered a leader. Although this article addressed leadership development within a preschool kura kaupapa, my reflections took me to my workplace in tertiary education to consider what is offered by my institution that provides students the opportunity to be leaders, and to develop the skills of leadership outside of the curriculum. This led me to consider student representatives on campus.

Each year, my institution seeks to recruit course representatives and engages in an informal process of student elections where students are nominated and voted for by their peers to become representatives of student voice. The successful candidates initially accept the position with some sense of enthusiasm, as well as confusion, not understanding what the role involves. Although there is no ‘job description’, course representatives are usually happy to wait for students to approach them, if and when required. Usually, little is heard from representatives unless there is a *real* concern amongst the cohort that requires immediate resolution and sometimes, class representatives go so far as to organise study groups or meetings for their peers. Over the course of a semester, the initial feeling of enthusiasm is replaced by representatives who are less active and less engaged in their role,

especially as student and personal pressures mount. The engagement of most student representatives declines after one semester.

Being a formal leadership position, the student representative role may provide an ideal opportunity for students to exercise and develop leadership in higher education, but this area seems to be an area of research that is given little attention. It is questionable whether student representatives have adequate opportunity and resources to develop personally, which is an area that I wanted to explore. My interest in this research was to examine the lived experiences of student representatives, to understand their world of student representation, including the barriers to, and enablers of, student advocacy on campus.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK USED

Through an interpretive phenomenological paradigm, this study critically examined the lived experiences of selected undergraduate student representatives from a New Zealand ITP. It engaged student representatives in discussion to identify their experience of their representative role, identifying barriers and enablers associated with their engagement with student representation. Addressing this student perspective uncovered dynamics that influence the representative role, potentially providing opportunities for institutions to refine their support and enhancement student representation in decision-making.

On this note, three research questions were formulated:

1. How is the student class representative's role defined by student representatives?
2. How do student class representatives experience this role?
3. What are the barriers and enablers that influence the engagement of this role?

For me to answer these research questions, I needed to decide on a principal organisation where I could carry out this work. From then, I recruited, interviewed, recorded, and transcribed the discussions that were later analysed. This process is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

For me to adequately analyse my research questions, I needed to broaden my analytical focus. Although there are many references to acknowledge which have contributed to this piece of research, there are some essential contributors to this study. To discover the origins of student representation and student voice, I drew on a conceptual model and framework of Dana Mitra's (2006) Pyramid of Student Voice. Although this theory was developed with a perspective on student voice in schools, it is consistent with objectives to help understand student voice within higher education, which is explained in chapter two. Additionally, I refer to other student voice advocates and researchers (Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2001; Flint & O'Hara, 2013; Mitra & Gross, 2009) to add to the knowledge of understanding student voice research, and to contextualise the conversation within higher education (McLeod, 2011; Seale, 2009). Understanding previous student representative experience was essential, and I drew on research regarding experiences in

course representation and governance (Bergan, 2003; Carey, 2013a, 2013b; Lizzio & Wilson, 2009; Zuo & Ratsoy, 1999). These readings then led me to Little et al. (2009), to help me understand student engagement with systems such as student representation in higher education in England, and then in a New Zealand context (Alkema et al., 2013). Finally, to strengthen the link to student representative engagement, I referred to Lizzio and Wilson's (2009) framework on Motivations for Student Representative Engagement.

OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter introduces the research topic: *The lived experiences of student representatives in a New Zealand Industry Training and Polytechnic: A critical examination*. A background/rationale for this study is also provided, highlighting some influencing authors to this study. Finally, this chapter provides a conceptual framework of this study and research questions that guide this research.

Chapter Two: Literature review

This chapter is a review of academic literature on the topics of student voice and representation. This chapter is presented in the main themes, which have emerged from the literature. These themes are democratisation in higher education, the emergence of student voice, and student representation and governance in higher education. These themes also reflect the aims and research questions of this study.

Chapter Three: Research methodology and method

This chapter starts by defining my ontological and epistemological assumptions related to an interpretivist paradigm. I describe the methodology that I used to answer my research question and the use of semi-structured interviews is explained. I also explain my participant selection and method of collecting and analysing my data. This chapter includes an acknowledgement of relevant ethical considerations.

Chapter Four: Findings

The research analysis and a discussion of the research findings are the subject of chapter four. This chapter has been structured based on the main themes derived from the interviews and academic literature. The themes which emerged are: Reasons reported for being student representatives; Understanding the student representative role; and Influences affecting the student representative role, which are further subdivided into four themes: *Personal factors, People factors, Student Advocacy, and Organisational Factors.*

Chapter Five: Discussion

In this chapter, I discuss the findings. Where the findings chapter was built with the main themes from the interview transcripts, the discussion chapter discusses the implications of these. It is here that I draw on academic research which guided this study, linking this research to the findings. It is here new themes emerge to answer my research questions.

Chapter Six: Conclusion, recommendations, implications for practice

In the sixth and final chapter, the research is concluded where I present a conceptual model, which is presented as a four quadrants model identifying barriers and enablers which affect student representative engagement. From this conceptual model, I present recommendations for practice in ITPs looking at enhancing student representative engagement.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Within the education sector, there has been an abundance of research advocating student participation and voice in schools (Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2001; Flint & O'Hara, 2013; Mitra, 2006; Mitra & Gross, 2009) and higher education (McLeod, 2011; Seale, 2009). Student voice may be achieved at many levels in higher education, the mechanisms for activating this including the use of democratically elected student representatives, whose role is to represent the views of their peers, particularly concerning specific programmes or student experiences (Little et al., 2009). Representatives may also sit on departmental and institutional committees (Bergan, 2003).

This chapter is a critical review of a selection of academic literature on the topic of student representation. It is presented in the main themes, which have emerged from the literature. These are: the shift of neoliberalism and student voice, the emergence of student voice, student representation in higher education and student participation in governance. The themes that emerged related to the research aims and support the provision of answers to the research questions.

THE SHIFT OF NEOLIBERALISM AND STUDENT VOICE

Democratisation and the enhancement of student voice in higher education governance were strong topics in the late nineteen sixties and early

seventies. Apart from student affairs governance, student input started to gain strength concerning teaching and learning strategies, as well as institutional strategic planning (Lesnik-Oberstein, 2015). In higher education systems of the United Kingdom and the United States of America, formalising student voice within university decision making became an established feature of university governance (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013). Those who were leading universities were considered academic leaders, instead of chief executives or managers (Deem, 1998). By the early 1990s, fiscal pressures, internationalism, globalisation, and the dominance of neo-liberal ideologies, increased interest in the role of students, as consumers, and how universities were being managed (Newman, Glendinning, & Hughes, 2008). This gradually led to a change in the democratic nature of higher education institutions (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013), giving way to managerialism, typically defined by leadership styles and management approaches developed for business.

This paradigm shift towards neoliberalism, and the ‘student-as-consumer' model in higher education, coupled with rising tuition fees, has compelled higher education providers to provide a quality product or risk losing ‘customers' and thus revenue (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005). This consumerist perspective recognises that decisions made on campus affect students, and therefore, students feel they have a right to participate in the making of these decisions (Carey, 2013b; Menon, 2005; Zuo & Ratsoy, 1999). Contemporary cultural and political pressures to improve student satisfaction has also meant that institutions need at the least, to be seen trying to improve student

equity, by giving voice to marginalised and under-represented groups. Positioning students as consumers, Lizzio and Wilson (2009) suggest, defines their position in governance, maximises satisfaction and ensures an appropriate return on investment. Students demanding more from their education providers than ever before (Bunce, Baird, & Jones, 2017) has also reinvigorated the conversation on how higher education organisations should connect with their students, triggering a reassessment of the student-institute relationship. Fuelled by a demand for competitiveness, efficiency and consumer satisfaction between higher education institutions, educational providers aware of their 'market position' to attract students, are now adhering to a student-centric position (Lesnik-Oberstein, 2015), and embracing the voice of students.

STUDENT VOICE

Although student voice work in schools has been well researched, in higher education it is underdeveloped and there has been much debate questioning how student voice is understood, interpreted and initiated (Seale, 2009). The term 'student voice' is concerned with providing learners with the opportunity to express concerns regarding factors that influence their learning and make decisions that affect their education and the education of their peers (Fielding, 2001). McLeod (2011) explains the term 'voice' to represent 'difference', or imply "democratic politics of participation and inclusion, or be the expression of an essentialized group identity" (p. 181). For students, having a voice in education can lead to self-worth, a sense of belonging, as well as allowing issues to be addressed which can lead to enhancements in

teaching and learning (Mitra & Gross, 2009). Smyth (2006) further suggests that the enhancement of student voice can help educational leaders to understand students' experiences in education creating space for a conversation around inequality and representation in education. McLeod (2011) agrees with this view and suggests, "a view of student experience both before and during [higher education] – is required to understand the dynamics that fuel students' decisions to go, remain or leave" (p. 180). Additionally, Mitra (2006) suggests, student insights concerning their education can raise awareness of flaws in current performance, challenge assumptions around teaching and learning, and has been seen to be more influential than tutor-initiated changes (Cook-Sather, 2002).

Pyramid of Student Voice

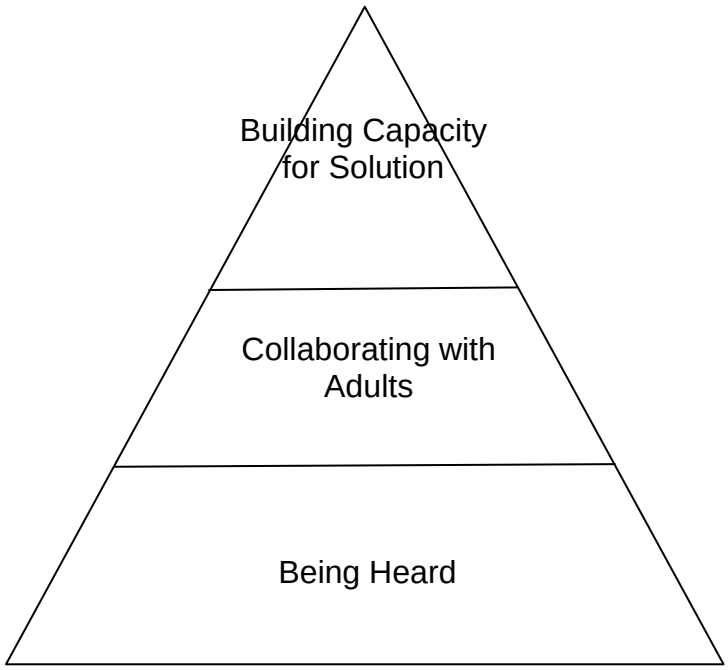


Fig 1 Adapted from Mitra (2006)

Mitra's (2006) ‘Pyramid of Student Voice' (Fig 1) illustrates "youth development opportunities possible as student voice is increased in schools" (p. 7). Starting at the bottom tier ‘Being Heard', teachers and administrators listen to students about their experiences within education. Through various forms of gathering data from students, schools can understand student experience that may be used to enhance the student experience and learning. The middle tier ‘Collaborating with Adults' suggests students having a deeper ‘connection' than just "being heard". Here they can participate and influence issues of importance to them, by working alongside teachers and administrators to identify problems, make change, and implement solutions in schools. The top and smallest tier ‘Building Capacity for Solution', enables students to adopt leadership roles, be involved in the movement to find solutions and be a part of the solution. This is an important step, as leadership practice allows students to develop leadership skills in preparation for adult life (Eich, 2008) and additionally, strengthen student-teacher relationships (Mitra, 2006).

Although Mitra’s perspective on student voice is based in schools, it is consistent with objectives to help understand student voice within higher education. Seale (2009) for example, suggested student voice in higher education is about actively listening to what students have to say regarding their education; effectively communicating these views and actions to make improvements; placing students in partnership with tutors to reflect and evaluate learning experiences; and empowering students to be actively involved in the development of their education.

Questions have been raised regarding how student voice is being captured and reported (Connolly, 2002; Rudduck, Chaplain, & Wallace, 1996). This question is even more relevant today when considering increased participation in higher education internationally, which also raises questions of how this diversity is being represented (Barrington, 2004). Williams and Cappuccini-Ansfield (2007) stated, students as learners, are the “chief recipients of the higher education system” (p. 166), and therefore are fundamentally entitled to voice their opinions. Fielding (2001) also suggests that failure to consider questions of who is talking and listening, and to what effect, raises issues of validity and the extent to which some students can legitimately speak on behalf of others. Increased participation in higher education from diverse populations has ‘widened the playing field’ of student voice to make educational leaders mindful that “diversity should include hearing the voices of students from different cultures or languages, students with different abilities, students disengaged from school and students who live in different family situations” (Laitala & Kenopic, 2016, p. 3). Gale (2009) addresses the concern around diversity and the growing number of ‘different’ students, and asks, how do we provide greater equity to ensure all students are heard?

Student voice in higher education

While the common discourse of student voice research in schools features student rights, equity and enhancement in pedagogy (Fielding, 2004; Mitra, 2006), student voice research in higher education tends to focus on quality enhancement (Shah & Nair, 2006; Williams & Cappuccini-Ansfield, 2007), governance (Bergan, 2003; Zuo & Ratsoy, 2009) and professional

development (Campbell, Beasley, Eland, & Rumpus, 2007; Duffy & O'Neil, 2003). Student views have also been sought more recently in higher education, through demanding regulations of accountability, performative systems, and evaluating academic performance (McLeod, 2011). From a marketing perspective, student participation in democracy also has important benefits for the quality of the educational product (Menon, 2005), where institutions must show they accommodate diversity by demonstrating inclusiveness to attract and retain students (Zepke & Leach, 2010). There is a need for caution, however, as there has been an "interrogation of authenticity of student voice" (McLeod, 2011, p. 183) in higher education, where institutes may be giving a ‘tokenistic nod' to student voice as a function of consumerism. Student voice processes that are poorly implemented, or influenced only by performativity, can distort efforts to encourage student engagement. For example, Fielding (2004) noted that inauthentic student voice structures have increased alienation and distrust in students. This same distrust in the institution Smyth (2006) asserts, can further lead to hostility towards the institution, and student resistance to learning (Kohl, 1994). One of the common forms of student voice initiatives within higher education is the student representative model, where students are elected through a democratic process, to represent the voices of peers and participate in institutional decision-making. Student representation also offers opportunities for students to practice leadership and engage in the culture of the institute (Dempster, Stevens, & Keeffe, 2011).

STUDENT REPRESENTATION: AN INSTRUMENT OF STUDENT VOICE

Although the definition of the student representative role may differ slightly between institutions, the premise of the student representative is to reflect and report on a range of views and the views of their peers, to do with a specific programme or student experience (Little et al., 2009). Carey (2013b) identified that participants saw their student representative role as multi-dimensional, as being the voice *for* students, where they would represent the voices of students and themselves. They also saw the role as being the voice *of* students, where the institution would consult with them on matters relating to matters of student affairs. There are potentially significant gains to be made by providing students with the opportunity to be actively involved in leadership roles in higher education. Opportunity for students to be involved in leadership roles, can potentially build healthier organisational climates, which encompass trust, communication and unity (Astin & Astin, 2000; Wood, 1993), as well as promote bottom-up democracy in tertiary organisations. Students have also benefited through the development of critical thinking, teamwork, and academic gains from studies which have investigated tertiary students in leadership roles, such as student representation (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Eich, 2008; Kuh & Lund, 1994). Given that "students learn leadership by doing it" (Eich, 2008, p. 182), suggests the student representative role may be the ideal instrument to develop and exercise leadership, personal growth and development in higher education.

As students transition into a representative role, their engagement and relationship with their institution shifts (Carey, 2013a). They become

enculturated into a semi-governance role and their position on campus becomes increasingly allied to information sharing and leadership. While maintaining their student status, they must also try to understand the programme and teaching through the eyes of both their tutors and peers. Students transition from ‘consumer’ to co-producer of their education and enter into a power-shared relationship as previously mentioned by Fielding (2004). Students effectively step into a new identity and become enculturated into a different Community of Practice, one that is perhaps closer to that of a tutor (Wenger, 1999). It is possible that through the changing context of their new position within the institute over time, their identity on campus is reshaped as they start to see themselves as ‘more than a student’ on campus (Ylijoki & Ursin, 2013). The implications of student representative sense of identity and perceptions from peers and tutors, Carey (2013b) suggests, is an area worth exploring further.

Student participation in institutional governance

In recent years, there have been many studies highlighting the importance of student participation in university governance and understanding of their experiences in governance committees (Bergan, 2003; Lizzio & Wilson, 2009; Luescher-Mamashela, 2013; Menon, 2003; Planas et al., 2011; Zuo & Ratsoy, 1999). Much of this research observed is centered on the notion that students are directly affected by the decisions made by committees (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009; Menon, 2003; Zuo & Ratsoy, 1999). The literature explored, identified arguments for and against student participation in higher education governance. Luescher-Mamashela (2013) suggested that arguments for

student representation participation can be viewed from the perspective of political activism, students as consumers, or as members of an academic community.

The "political-realist case", suggests that students are internal stakeholders or a "politically significant constituency of the university" (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013, p. 1446), and therefore, should be involved in university decision making. Historically, student protests occur more frequently when students are affected by the decisions made and are not involved in this decision-making process (Hirsch, 1990). Bergan (2003) suggested that formal channels of communication with student leaders are recommended as ideal actions for higher education institutes to reduce political activism on campus. Other studies, however, have suggested that students lack the knowledge, experience and maturity to be effective contributors to university decision making, they have no interest in matters of academia, and their participation on committees would have a negative impact on their education (McCulloch, 2009; Menon, 2005; Zuo & Ratsoy, 1999).

The ‘consumerist-case' suggests that higher education providers, offer a contractual service with students who are viewed as, ‘customers' or "consumers of the products or services provided by the university" (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013, p. 1446) and therefore, have the right to be involved in the making of decisions that affect them (Zuo & Ratsoy, 1999). This consumerist view, however, may affect representation when student politics become too narrowly focused on demanding ‘value-for-money' (Luescher-Mamashela

2010). As cited in Ramsden (2008), the President of the National Union of Students in the United Kingdom also warned from another perspective that treating students as customers could send the student and academic relationship down the wrong path. The partnership between student and education provider could be altered by the ‘customer is always right' mentality.

The ‘communitarian perspective' justifies student participation in university governance through virtue of "students being members of the community" (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013, p. 1449). This view is further supported by McCulloch (2009) who asserts, students, tutors and others involved in the learning process, are involved in a co-production of education and "the development of the learners" (p. 181). Research has suggested, however, that students are only transient members of the learning community and therefore, they may have already left the institution by the time decisions that they make on committees, comes into effect (Zuo & Ratsoy, 1999).

Effects of organisational culture and student representation

Even though there is indication that great efforts are made to emphasise student-centeredness throughout many case studies, the level of student participation within committees is consistently shown to be heavily influenced by the cultural assumptions of the academic community (Bergan, 2003; Lizzio & Wilson, 2009; Luescher-Mamashela, 2013), and bureaucratic processes that slow or hinder student representation (Carey, 2013b). Johnson and Deem (2003) acknowledge that academic managers are often caught up focusing on the student body rather than responding to the

experiences of students and should be warned against turning student voice initiatives into a ‘tick box’ exercise. Organisations run the risk of seeming to be engaged, while actually being more concerned with gathering data, not encouraging dialogue (Carey, 2013a). Research has also identified that student satisfaction and effectiveness of student representation is influenced by the perceptions of academic staff (Carey, 2013a; Lizzio & Wilson, 2009; Zuo & Ratsoy, 1999). Therefore, a collegial partnership between student and tutor may be limited by staff willingness (or lack of) to collaborate in this type of environment with students (Salzer, 1997) and possibly discourage departments from committing to work with them (Seale, 2009). This inability for departments to commit has previously contributed to a lack of training, low student motivation and fear of penalty for speaking out against course practice (Carey, 2013a).

While student representation is well reported on at institutional level, there seems less confidence at faculty/departmental level (Little et al., 2009), and finding candidates to occupy position at faculty/departmental level, seems problematic (Persson, 2003). The pressures of balancing student and ‘institutional life', has been linked to this, a term Bergen (2003) referred to as "democratic fatigue" however, there is also a possible link suggesting education institutions also influence this. In two studies, the point was made that students who are ill-informed or unprepared for their role in governance committees are unlikely to engage (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009; Planas et al., 2011), which puts the onus back onto the committees and how they are preparing students to be active participants. Considering the changing

setting of higher education, the diversity of academic staff and students, the internationalisation of students, changing technologies, and competition between education providers (Johnson & Deem, 2003), education providers may need to think differently about how to engage student participation at this level of decision-making. This may require a change in perception and attitude towards the role of students in higher education decision making (Planas et al., 2011).

Smyth (2006) suggested courageous organisational leadership that encourages relationships between academic departments and student representatives is required to demonstrate the importance of student ownership and student voice throughout educational organisations. Such leadership would reflect an organisational culture, where teachers and administrators take student voice seriously and address the power dynamics between staff and students, which affect the creation of communities of practice (Mitra, 2008; Wenger, 1999). Notably, Bergan (2003) found a possible link suggesting universities which have more positive attitudes towards formal student participation and influence, also have a strong organisational culture which encourages leadership. Such cultures create an essential base for developing effective systems, which encourages and supports student representation. Lizzio and Wilson (2009) also asserted that, if higher educational institutes expect students to develop skills of effective citizenship such as leadership, then they must create the opportunity to be leaders and support these through policies and practice.

Student motivations for engagement in representation

Lizzio and Wilson (2009) investigated student conceptions and sense of efficacy in university governance. Within their findings, role motivations were identified as to why student representatives chose to engage in representation. Their findings were scaled by two independent raters and represented as: 'stance': (*individualism-collectivism: whether student representative engagement is motivated through personal gain or advancement of the institute*) and 'locus of motivation' (*Intrinsic-extrinsic motivation: whether student representatives are motivated by considerations internally or externally*). Their findings were categorised into four clusters which identified motivations for student representative engagement: Systems positioning (*get to meet people, understand how the institute operates*); compliance with authority (*was asked to participate, no-one else*

Motivations for student representative engagement

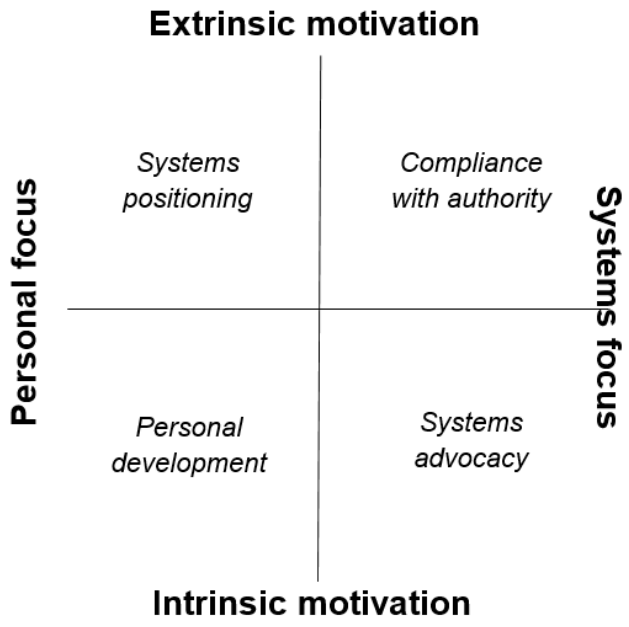


Fig 2 Adapted from Lizzio and Wilson (2009)

would do it); personal development (*develop skills, personal challenge, personal interest*); and systems advocacy (*advocate for students, pro-student rights - see figure 2*).

There are reported inherent problems within the student representation system that causes students to lack motivation in participating in student representation (Little et. al., 2009) and through the understanding of student experiences, and motivations of engagement, may help educators understand why some students choose to stay or leave (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009; McLeod, 2011; Smyth, 2006).

STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE IN NEW ZEALAND

The New Zealand higher education system is comprised of universities, Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs), wananga, and Private Training Establishments (PTEs). Universities generally offer academic research-led, higher degree-level education. ITPs, wananga and larger PTEs generally offer vocational education, up to degree level training, with careers that tend to be applied and work specific. Most PTEs are specifically vocational and are targeted at certificate and diploma level (NZQA, nd).

While substantial research regarding higher education student representation and student voice exists in studies in the United Kingdom, United States of America, and Australia, student voice and student representation research New Zealand is somewhat limited. In 2012, the New Zealand Union of Students' Association (NZUSA) and Ako Aotearoa: The National Centre for

Tertiary Teaching Excellence, commissioned work into student representative systems in New Zealand entitled, ‘Student Voice in Tertiary Education Settings: Quality Systems in Practice’ (Alkema, McDonald & Ryan, 2013). This was a year-long investigative research case study on nine New Zealand Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs) (mix of universities, ITPs and PTEs), and was designed to consider how student representation systems contribute to the quality improvement of academic programmes in higher education. There were many consistent findings within this study that were identified elsewhere, such as the challenging nature of student involvement in the representative and quality enhancement processes (Little et al., 2009; Persson, 2003). This New Zealand research also emphasised the risk of role strain that was evident when role ambiguity and conflict was present and underlined the importance of having clear guidelines for student representation.

In their findings, Alkema et al. (2013) identified differences in university student experiences in student representation roles compared to polytechnic students and highlighted dynamics that govern the student representative experiences arguably unique to ITPs. For example, students from ITPs felt less supported in their roles than university students, found it harder to cope with the transition into governance, and required more training than university students. Although Alkema et al. (2013) highlighted a problem with regard to student representation in New Zealand and the barriers to student representative engagement in the ITP sector, the research focus was on ‘systems' of student representation and not specifically capturing the lived experiences of these

students, which may have provided richer data to understanding how these students transition into, and exercise their role.

In a neoliberal consumerist ideology, there is an expectation that students will be involved in decisions that affect their education. In this respect, educational institutes are not only encouraging but seek opportunities for student participation. As Bergan asserts, "students must be encouraged to participate, and they must feel that their participation has an impact" (p. 12). It is clear that the people within the institute (students and staff) play an important role in student representative engagement, as well as the processes that guide the organisation. It has also been recorded in many studies that not all students want to participate in student politics and there are legitimate arguments around the limitations of student participation in governance. One learns through participation and practice and therefore, educators should not give up trying to encourage participation or trying to comprehend student representation and the challenges that student's experience in participation in educational democracy. We also shouldn't stop thinking differently about participative structures and policies, which affect student participation in student representation and governance and allow students to take advantage of the learning and training benefits that comes with this opportunity (Planas et al., 2011).

CONCLUSION

This literature review has examined literature pertinent to student voice research, particularly in the context of higher education, where the voice of

students is both encouraged and ‘championed’. Reporting student voice and experiences may be achieved in many levels of higher education and one of the mechanisms for activating this is through the use of student representatives, where students are democratically elected to represent the voices of their peers. Effectively, students transition from student to representative and become encultured into the institution where they are studying and start to view their education from the position of the tutors as well as students. In this, there is the opportunity to develop students beyond the curriculum by providing them with the opportunity to take on a leadership role within the institution, however, there are potential barriers which prevent these student leaders from fully engaging in this position, as well as enablers which should also be understood. Although there is much advocacy of student representation, evidence in the research literature, suggests, the representative role is confusing and not particularly understood or supported within departments. If institutions are to capitalise on the voice of students, as Carey (2013) suggests, there needs to be more understanding not only about what these representatives do but how they experience the system. Understanding these experiences, and what motivates and prevents engagement to representative roles, may better assist academic managers when seeking, recruiting and supporting student representatives in these roles.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this research is a critical examination of the lived experiences of undergraduate student representatives from a New Zealand Institute of Technology and Polytechnic (ITP). This study aimed to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of student representatives of an ITP. I was particularly interested in identifying barriers to and enablers of their engagement with the student representative role, and how these influenced their actions. The overarching research question guiding this research is; what are the influences that affect student representation engagement within a New Zealand ITP?

The research sub-questions were:

- How is the student class representative's role defined by student representatives?
- How do student class representatives experience this role? and,
- What are the barriers and enablers that influence engagement with student representation?

This interpretive study followed an interview design, and this chapter details the methodology of this study. This includes a consideration of my positioning and will detail my data collection strategy and analysis. Relevant considerations for this research are also presented.

DISCOURSE, CONTEXT AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

This qualitative research design aims to capture and interpret the voices of selected student representatives. For Merriam (2014), qualitative researchers are interested in "how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in it" (p.13). Through a qualitative lens, I interviewed participants to capture their voices, as a sample of the interpretive experience of student representatives within an ITP in New Zealand.

The design of this research has been constructed through my engagement with an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivist researchers attempt to understand the social world of human experience (Cohen & Manion, 1994), and it is this intention which has shaped this research design. According to Scotland (2012), a paradigm encompasses ontology (*concerned with what constitutes reality*), epistemology (*concerned with how knowledge is created*), methodology (*strategy or plan of action behind the choice of methods to answer the research question*) and methods (*specific techniques used to collect and analyse data*).

Ontology, epistemology and methodology

Sparkes (1992) defines ontology as those assumptions that “revolve around questions regarding the nature of existence” (p.13). Whereas positivist researchers have an external-realist ontology, which regards reality to be objective and external to the researcher, interpretivist researchers have an internal-idealist ontology where they assume reality is the creation of individual thought and sense of reality (Sparkes, 1992). Scotland (2012) refers to this ontological position as ‘relativism’, where reality is viewed as

subjective and differing between persons (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Scotland (2012) also suggests that interpretivists believe reality is an individual construction and assumes that making meaning of reality is an act of interpretation (Crist & Tanner, 2003). McQueen and Knussen (2002) confirms that interpretivist researchers view the world through individual eyes and choose participants who have their own interpretations which encompass their worldview.

Epistemology refers to “knowledge and the nature of knowing” (Sparkes, 1992, p.13). An objective epistemology regards the nature of knowledge as hard, tangible, and ‘real’. Interpretivists on the other hand, have a subjective epistemology, where knowledge is believed to being ‘softer’ or ‘greyer’ and intangible. Interpretivists see social research as being important to uncover meanings associated with social activity (Hammond & Wellington, 2013). Whereas positivism may be appropriate to the physical world, interpretivism has very different characteristics (Sparkes, 1992). Interpretivists address the social world and position themselves to co-create and share knowledge, as well as creating relationships which advance their understanding of individuality. Therefore, interpretive research is subjective and identifies knowledge as created in interaction between investigator and respondents (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), as opposed to positivists who approach research impartially, discovering absolute knowledge about an objective reality (Scotland, 2012). Different world views or paradigms essentially consist of different ontological and epistemological positions and therefore, have different assumptions concerning reality and the nature of knowing. These

different approaches to answering questions of research are reflected in their research methodology and methods.

The design of this study has stemmed from my research questions, a process suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2014). The qualitative research methodology and design of this study was developed to capture the voices and experiences of student representatives. The interpretive paradigm and qualitative methodology are tightly connected as "one is a methodological approach and one is a means of collecting data" (Thanh & Thanh, 2015, p. 26). Scotland (2012) suggests that "interpretive methodology is directed at understanding a phenomenon from an individual's perspective" (p. 12). Examples of interpretive methodology include case-study (in-depth study of an individual or small group of individuals), phenomenology (a study of exploring and understanding human experience), hermeneutics (interpreting the meaning of texts/language), and ethnography (long-term study of cultural groups). It is through my research question, which is concerned in the understanding of human experiences, that I have chosen phenomenological inquiry to provide the authenticity I need to answer these research questions.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is concerned with how people experience the world, rather than the concepts about how the world is. It seeks to understand the human experience of phenomena by investigating experiential accounts of individual and collective experiences grounded in everyday life (Lester, 1999) or the ‘lifeworld' (Newby, 2014). Phenomenological research "is an attempt to deal

with inner experiences unprobed in everyday life" (Merriam, 2002, p. 7). Because the meanings that are put to experiences are unique to individuals, phenomenological research often produces surprising and interesting results (Van der Mescht, 2004).

Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938) the originator of phenomenology, believed that the positivistic paradigm was inappropriate for uncovering phenomena because it could not capture experiences that are unique to humans (McPhail, 1995), and rejected the idea that “objects in the external world exist independently and that the information about objects is reliable” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 43). Husserl (2012) asserted that phenomenological researchers need to suspend judgement and bias. Anything outside immediate experience, he believed, should be discounted. This ‘bracketing’ frees up researchers and helps them to comprehend what the interviewee is saying, rather than anticipating what the researcher expects that person to say (Hycner, 1999). Bracketing in this study meant asking participants to “describe the lived experience in a language free from the constructs of the intellect and society as possible” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 47). This process allowed me to help capture my participant’s experiences, as they were experienced (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). Heidegger (1962), a student of Husserl, believed phenomenology had to be interpretive, and that ‘bracketing’ in its purest form, may not be attainable. He believed researchers unavoidably approach their study with preconceived notions that are automatically a part of their being and that phenomenology cannot be limited to ‘pure consciousness' alone but must involve human existence holistically.

Ultimately, one's consciousness and subjectivity cannot be ‘bracketed' because everything else depends on these for existence. To ensure I maintained a level of neutrality throughout this research, I adopted a technique suggested by Ahern (1999), which included identifying feelings of positivity and negativity that I felt towards participant experiences, then revisited my notes, to try to determine the origins of these feelings, which helped to "separate my reactions of past experiences to present research" (p.409).

Phenomenological methods are particularly effective at uncovering perceptions of the world from an individual's own experiences (Lester, 1999). In phenomenology, the acts of living are accessed through narratives (interviews and observation) to divulge true meaning (Crist & Tanner, 2003). Getting to the ‘essence' of these meanings requires collaboration between researchers and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The premise of phenomenology is based on staying with the narrative until the holistic picture of the issue surfaces (Groenewald, 2004). This also includes inaudible elements such as vocal intonations, physical expressions and gestures, which should also be included in field notes, and transcribed into narrative texts. These observations should later be analysed with the interview (Crist & Tanner, 2003).

Participant selection

According to Hycner (1999), the phenomenon should dictate the method and not vice-versa, including the type of participants selected. Purposive or

purposeful sampling was used for this study. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) suggest that "purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 91). My selection of participants was based on the purpose of this research and the participants were current student representatives at the time of this research, within a selected educational institute, in an Industry Training and Polytechnic in New Zealand, which has a diverse demographic mix, reflective of its community.

To maintain the integrity of this study, I removed myself from the recruitment process and liaised with the ‘student experience' team, responsible for the recruitment and management of student representatives for this institute. This student support network played a pivotal role in linking me with my participants, as they liaise and maintain contact with student representatives regularly within the institute. In turn, these student liaison officers were effectively ‘gatekeepers' (Greig, Taylor, & MacKay, 2012) to my research participants. A gatekeeper Neuman (2000) suggested, is someone with "formal or informal authority to control access to a site" (p. 352) and maintains a high degree of respect within their group (Jupp, 2005). These student liaison officers were also responsible for student voice initiatives throughout the campus, and work closely with the student representatives, thus increasing the significance of their role.

After approval was granted from the Auckland University of Technology's Ethics Committee (AUTEC) (Appendix A), I attended an informal meeting with the student experience team to establish contact and outline the research aims and methodology. Following this meeting, I sent an email to the student experience team, containing a cover email explaining the research (Appendix B), and asking the student liaison officer to forward the attachment documents onto the institute student representatives. Attached to that email was a participant cover letter, which invited them to participate in this research (Appendix C), and participant information sheet (Appendix D), which explained the research and detailed the methodology and method that would be used.

Not only was this process appropriate ethical practice, but Carey (2013a) suggests it has the added advantage of helping participants reflect on their experience before the interview. The information sheet also detailed processes to minimise the risk, including the anonymity protocol that would be adhered to. Included in the information given was my contact details so participants could make contact with me directly. Additionally, the participant consent form (Appendix E) was attached and participants were asked to send to me by email or, bring it to their interview. Applicants confirmed their participation by returning their consent forms to me directly. In some cases, they brought the consent forms to the interview.

Table 1: List of participants

Participant	Description
Robert	● First-year as a student representative ● Co-opted member of the student executive committee ● South campus
Jane	● Second-year student representative ● Student council member ● City campus
Annabel	● First-year student representative ● Student council member ● City campus
Tom	● First-year student representative ● Student council member ● City campus
Mavis	● First-year student representative ● Student council member ● South campus
James	● First-year student representative ● Student council member ● City campus

Once participants had responded to the initial invitation, an email address and phone number were confirmed for ongoing contact. The target number of participants for this study was six, intending to obtain participants from a diverse mix of departments. If more than six participants applied to participate, the selection would be randomised and the successful and unsuccessful participants informed of the outcome by email.

Ultimately, six participants applied to participate in this research (Table 1), which meant there was no need for me to invoke the screening protocol. Responses received were mostly from students within the student council whose role it is to have a strategic overview and work alongside the institute's leadership team (ILT) and work with other representatives who liaise with students. One participant to this study was from a student executive team,

who is less involved with governance and is more of a departmental representative position. Most of the participants were previous class representatives before beginning this role and all except one participant to this study was in their first year of student council or student executive. The majority of participants in this study were from the schools of business or information technology, which are located on the same campus

Data collection

The primary data collection method was face to face interviews with each participant. Interviews can simply be defined as a “face-to-face ‘conversation with a purpose’ between two unacquainted individuals, one the interviewer and the other the interviewee or respondent” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, p. 55). Research interviews are governed by ethical rules, such as gathering consent for recordings and protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents (Hammond & Wellington, 2013). At one end of the interview, continuum are structured interviews, where the interviewer asks a set of pre-established questions in a structured order. Within this interview method, there is an allowance for limited responses. At the other end of questioning is unstructured interviews, where the interviewer provides greater flexibility and allowance for related side conversation throughout the interviewing process (Luo & Wildemuth, 2016). The particular interview method that I used was semi-structured interviews, which have more flexibility and leeway than structured interviews, yet are more structured and processed than the unstructured interview.

According to Luo and Wildemuth (2016), semi-structured interviews are possibly the most useful data collection method in qualitative research as participants are not expected to move far beyond the scope of the topic, allows conversation to develop and covers the general focus of the topic. There is flexibility to change the order of the questions depending on how the interview unfolds (Luo & Wildemuth, 2016). Additionally, “particular questions which seem inappropriate with a particular interviewee, can be omitted or additional ones included” (Robson, 2002, p. 270). This particular interview method is also effective where the aim is to reveal the participants’ perspectives on their experiences, which was the purpose of this particular research study. As my focus was to examine the lived experiences of these student representatives, semi-structured interviews enabled me to facilitate an interpretation of their world (Scotland, 2012), and “facilitate dialogue between researcher and respondent to develop a narrative that relates to the social world without actually replicating it” (Carey, 2013b, p 75-76).

Developing interview questions

Berg (2000) proposed four types of questions to be asked when developing interview questions. *Essential questions*, *extra questions*, *throw-away questions*, and *probing questions*. This framework was applied when developing my interview questions (Appendix G).

Essential questions provided the central focus of the research which ensured the conversation achieved consistency and purpose. *Extra questions* were similar to the essential questions but reworded slightly differently so that they

clarified previous questions. Luo and Wildemuth (2016) suggested that these *extra questions* may be used to check on the reliability of responses and gauge the impact caused by the alteration of wording. *Throw-away questions* occurred at the beginning of the interview. Although these questions may not have any impact on the outcome of the research, they may establish a connection with the participant, and ultimately influence the overall flow of the interview. Lester (1999) suggests that good rapport and empathy between interviewer and interviewee are important to acquire a good depth of information, especially when the participant has a strong personal stake. The *probing questions* are questions that may be asked for the participant to elaborate on a certain response. For example, “Why do you think you responded that way”? Or “What do you mean by that”? The interview questions I designed had a mixture of all four question types. Berg (2001) further cautions researchers against using affectively worded questions, *double-barreled questions* and *complex questions,* which can make the participant uncomfortable and hinder the outcome of the interview.

DATA ANALYSIS

My data analysis plan was influenced by my interpretive perspective and I adopted a particular phenomenological approach. Phenomenological analysis transforms data through interpretation, whilst keeping the context intact (Hycner, 1999). I used a qualitative analysis to create consistent themes and discern patterns to answer my research question. Hycner (1999) proposed a five-step process, which is the framework used in my analysis of data. Initially, through the screening of data, it was important that I did not

take a position either for or against the data, and I needed to ensure that my meanings and interpretations did not enter the world of the participants (Creswell, 1998). Hycner (1999) refers to this stage of analysis as *bracketing*. I then identified and defined the *units of meaning,* which were the particular statements in conversations, which illuminated the research phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). In this stage, I made substantial judgements about what was important to the research, while bracketing my assumptions to avoid inappropriate subjective judgements (Groenewald, 2004). Whilst bracketing, I *clustered units of meanings to form themes.* This involved identifying significant topics arising from the research data and grouping these in my findings, to identify recurring patterns. I then *summarised each interview,* which helped validate my themes by returning to the informant to determine if the essence of the interview was accurately captured (Hycner, 1999). Once the previous four stages were addressed, I established *general and unique themes from all interviews*. This required looking “for the themes common to most or all of the interviews as well as the individual variations” (Hycner, 1999, p. 154). According to Sadala and Adorno (2001), at this point, the researcher, "transforms participants' everyday expressions into expressions appropriate to the scientific discourse supporting the research" (p. 289).

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The conduct of this research project adhered to the ethical principles of the Auckland University of Technology (AUT). The participants were informed with my details, the purpose of this study and the methodology that I was using to collect my data. Also included was a voluntary consent form, which

included the right to opt-out of this study. Once signed, the consent forms were collected and stored confidentially within a lockable file cabinet within my workplace to protect the participant's anonymity.

All participants were informed that their privacy, including details such as names, titles and programmes they study on, would be protected and pseudonyms used throughout the research where necessary. I ensured that I used a private space to conduct the interviews. Interviews were digitally recorded and uploaded to a private Google drive file which was eventually shared with my transcriber, who had completed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix F). Transcriptions were eventually emailed back to me and uploaded onto a Google drive file, and recordings were saved to an electronic hard drive, separate from the confidentiality agreements and transcriptions.

I ensured minimisation of risk throughout this project by ensuring the participants were not exposed to social, intellectual or psychological risks. I made sure my questions were appropriate and purposeful for the research. I conducted this research outside of my immediate workplace to avoid any conflict of interest. Had any participant been known to me, I would have excused them from participating in the research project. None of the participants chose to opt-out of this research.

I ensured that I remained culturally sensitive by ensuring my research questions were screened by my supervisor before the interviews took place. I considered the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi although this research had

no connection to a Māori community. All participants were sent copies or research transcripts for checking before analysis, to ensure I had captured their exact sentiments and meanings. This process was important to avoid miscommunication and ensured the validity of what was used for the research. All participants are to be informed about the research findings and a summary of the final research will be made available to them.

CONCLUSION

As a tertiary educator, I have an interest in supporting all adult students to have a voice in their education. The student representative system proposes to represent that student voice within their cohorts and my interest in this lies simply with understanding how these student representatives experience that system. To determine this, I developed an interpretive study which was guided by my ontological and epistemological perspectives. The methodology that I used, which was best suited to answer my research question, was a phenomenological approach, whereby I interviewed six tertiary student participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this study was to critically examine the lived experiences of selected undergraduate student representatives from a New Zealand ITP, to identify how they experience that role, with particular reference to barriers and enablers associated with meaningful engagement. Participants were asked to identify, 1) the reasons and motivations for becoming a student representative, 2) their comprehension of the role, and 3) barriers and enablers that influence their effective performance of that role. In the process, their meaningful engagement with these factors was considered.

The question above gave rise to the themes elaborated in this chapter. The third question was however, the most significant, giving rise to several sub-themes. The major themes emerging from this phenomenological study included: 1) Reasons why these participants chose to be student representatives; 2) Understanding student representation; and 3) Barriers and enablers influencing the student representative role, which was further divided into four sub-themes, *personal factors*, *people factors*, *student advocacy*, and *organisational factors*.

REASONS IDENTIFIED FOR BEING STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

Prior to this research, half the participants had reported some kind of previous class representation experience, and each reported a mixture of motivating

reasons for participating in student representation in the year of this study. These motivating factors were seen as both *intrinsic,* i.e. performing an activity for its inherent satisfaction, and *extrinsic,* i.e. performing an activity to attain some kind of separable outcome.

Intrinsic motivations

Overall, there were few intrinsic motivations to participate in student representation for these participants. There was what seemed like a 'genuine' care for people within this group of participants, and it was reported a number of times, through dialogue and expression, how much these participants just wanted to support other students through their studies. Participants mentioned that *all* students had a 'right' to representation, and most of the participants strongly acknowledged their motivation to advocate for other students who may not be able to speak for themselves. This type of student was generally identified by participants as lacking confidence and being reserved students. International students struggling with language, and students who do not understand the 'system' were also identified as unlikely to report their concerns. James mentioned the personal satisfaction of helping other students and that he would get a "spring in his step" through his enjoyment of "giving [students] a service that they need, and providing them with the answers that they need". Some participants had a particular focus group that they were motivated to advocate for. Annabel and Mavis for example, emphasised their enthusiasm to advocate for students of their culture. As an older student, Tom emphasised his interest in particularly supporting younger students, who might "need that nurturing, and learning to speak up".

Extrinsic motivations

There were also few extrinsic motivations to participate in student representation observed by these participants. Some participants saw the value of student representation as a way to socialise on campus, meet people and make new friends. Opportunities to meet people came through meetings, proactively engaging student groups, and organising and attending campus events which participants often spoke of their personal enjoyment. It was also acknowledged by most that they wanted to develop personal skills, for example, leadership, public speaking and listening. Tom mentioned that he was interested to “grow as a person”, and “push those boundaries”. Student representation was also viewed as a ‘leadership role’ and thus that would support their prospects of future employment. Examples mentioned included references for their C.V., transferable employment skills (leadership, presentation delivery, governance experience), and improved confidence in applying for jobs. Jane acknowledged her initial motivation was to strengthen her C.V. however, after her first year of being on student council, she developed a passion for being in student council, therefore, chose to ‘run’ for a second year.

At times, participants were introduced to student representation through other people or circumstances. Mavis, for example, was asked to be a representative by a staff member who saw the ‘strength’ of her voice as she led a campaign in advocating for students to reinstate a certificate ceremony which had been removed. James was persuaded by a class friend who was a representative at the time, and spoke of the mentorship and guidance this

friend gave him to help him prepare for the role. Robert had not decided to become a student representative until feeling compelled to accept the role after addressing a concern, and recognising a perceived lack of representation at the time. He stated, “I don't really have any specific reasons why I joined for myself. It was more for other people”. Interestingly, there was a perception that was held by Robert and other participants that student representatives hold ‘status’ within the institute, and that being a student representative would place them in a better position to address concerns and be listened to, in a way where being a ‘normal student’ would not. Robert explained:

> I wanted to be a student representative because there [were] a lot of problems [that] people were coming to me about, but I would say ‘I can’t do anything about them, because you guys need to see these people’, and I just went, ‘If I become one of these people, then you can come to me for help’.

There was also an indication that other campus students held similar perceptions of student representatives. Mavis explained how she had perceived her peers’ reactions to her since being a student representative. “Yea, in this role, people actually see me as a guru or something. My peers know more than me, but they look up to me, rather than me looking up to them”. While some participants were motivated to provide a ‘voice’ to students, few participants were motivated to empower students to find their own voices.

All participants acknowledged the potential strength of student voice within the institute, valued their positions as representatives and felt they were in a position to influence change. To emphasise the institute’s reception towards student voice, most of the participants had commented that they had seen change happen as a result of their individual or collective feedback.

UNDERSTANDING STUDENT REPRESENTATION

This analysis saw the participants' comprehension of the role as multifaceted. Participants held the general view that the representative role involved providing a voice for students, and a sense of empathy towards other students, and an understanding of student 'issues' while studying, featured strongly in participants' comments. James and Tom had similar views that it was their responsibility to "build rapport, and shorten that gap between the institute and students; listen to what students have to say about their learning, and their experience, and it's about resolving these issues". Mavis jokingly described the student representative role as resembling that of a social worker, as it is essential to understand the student in a holistic sense and to "get a feel of who they are; what they do; and everything about their life".

Participants mentioned that the role was testing at times, requiring them to develop diplomatic skills. Tom explained, "you are swapping your cap all the time; and they are all different coloured caps, with different words on them. That's the way I would put it. I think I am the counsellor today, [Laughter] and now I am the friend". Because of lack of representation on one particular campus, Mavis explained, "I am everything now, I took on all duties". Participants felt strongly that student advocacy and student rights being represented were important, and it was important that students knew and understood their right to representation. "We want them to feel like they are empowered, and, like, they have a voice in this campus," James explained. While some felt it was important to empower and educate students to find their own voice, others thought it more important to *be* that voice.

Fundamental to this role was the term, ‘student voice’, which all participants at some stage referred to, and is seemingly an entrenched term used amongst these participants. Tom described himself as being a voice *for* students and noted, “students need a voice, and if they need that voice, I am here to speak for them." Collectively, gathering student feedback and concerns was mainly exercised through group facilitation, meetings, and social media. James also acknowledged the importance of acting as a voice for those who may not be able to find their own voices:

> the students should be able to do it themselves, [but] some may not be able to do it, either because of power differences, or just because they are not confident enough to do some things, or approach the problems that they have.

At times, participants had acted as voices *of* students when consulted by course tutors or committees to make decisions on behalf of students. The opportunities to represent student voice at a higher level was also evident as participants spoke of their experiences of serving on institutional committees. These roles gave them the chance to contribute to institutional policies that affect *all* students. Most participants were involved in institutional committees and mentioned the positive learning they acquired from this experience. This also gave them the chance to see decisions that are made ‘in the background’ that students do not usually get to see, or have input into, however, the initial transition into committees was ‘daunting’ enough for some to question their capability of being able to handle this role, as Tom explained:

> I sat down, and I thought, oh my God, what have [I] got myself into, except that I was like, shrinking in my seat. I was thinking, I don't know if I want it or not, am I capable of this? So I started self-doubting myself.

Jane also acknowledged that although participating on a governance board was a positive experience, transitioning into this role was intimidating and at times, she needed to find an 'ally':

> It's hard to get in front of people like the CEO and other academic leaders, and I'm sitting on the academic board and I'm like, (holds hands shaking). Every time I go there, I shake. I find somebody there that I like that makes me feel comfortable because it's very intimidating. So yea, BUT, at the same time, like I say, it might be a bit of a bad experience, to be more anxious like that but it's learning.

INFLUENCES AFFECTING STUDENT REPRESENTATION

As one of the focuses of this research was to better understand the factors which influence student representative engagement, participants were also asked to identify barriers and enablers that influenced their student representative role. Responses were clustered into units of meanings to form consistent and overlapping themes, which were grouped together. The consistent themes identified, suggested the student representative experience was influenced by *personal factors*, *people factors*, *student advocacy*, and *organisational factors*.

PERSONAL FACTORS

Personal factors observed which influenced engagement came through areas of *time constraints, personal development* and *preparation and training*.

Time constraints

A common theme which emerged was the notion of 'time', which was mentioned in a number of contexts. Mainly referred to, was the amount of time

necessary for this role and the limited amount of time participants had available. This usually meant time to attend meetings, events, training, talking to students about issues and following these up. Annabel emphasised her enthusiasm for the role and referred to her children sometimes being a barrier when unable to find a babysitter at the time of important committee meetings. Other time restraints were when student timetables collided with activities or training that had been organised for the representative to attend. James emphasised his main priority at the institute was to complete his studies and although time-sharing between being a student and representative was not often a burden, he mentioned his frustration of having to switch roles, which limited the time that was available to spend on other students:

> Personally, I see that, like, being a student myself, is a barrier. Because I have to do all the classes that I need to do in order to pass my own course. That means that I have to focus on that one hundred percent, and I sometimes forget that I am in a role where I am trying to cater to students themselves as well. So just trying to put that balance between school-life and Council-life, is sometimes a hassle.

Participants had reported the personal cost of demands placed on their time, while juggling student concerns and being students themselves. Tom reported: “There's so much of your time to just giving it all the time. And the students are receiving it all of the time, so they keep taking more. Yeah...taking more of your energy”. On occasions, participants reported the need to take time away from their studies due to stresses directly relating to this role. In these situations, dealing with student related concerns were seen as contributing factors. Tom reported feelings of ‘hopelessness’ after dealing with a student issue, “I just felt useless - useless in all what that was going on here, because I didn't have any time for me, and I just had to, you know, break away,

and just, make time for me, and recharge my batteries, because there was so much going on". Mavis shared her experience:

> Sometimes it can be too much; I had a burn-out session, three months' ago. But I went away for a couple of weeks; [I came] back and I was refreshed. I learnt from that, not to get too involved with the student voice, and politics, and just go with the flow.

Personal development

An interesting observation was the level of self-learning and reflection that most participants referred to. This reflection seemed multi-layered and encompassed personal development, leadership, and altering identities. All participants at some stage referred to their leadership skills being enhanced in by their representative position, as it gave them the opportunity to exercise leadership. "I think it is mostly the exposure" Jane suggested, "You have a lot of top notch people who have a lot of knowledge, and so, just being in their presence, sometimes just helps me to develop". Annabel spoke of her own self-reflection arising from dealing with personalities in conflict situations, "Since doing this role, I have had to re-evaluate myself. I have developed to stop and think before I say - I'm still working on it, but I am using it a lot more". Learning to communicate and listen to others was a shared experience, such as James: "So what have I learned from the last twelve months, is that it's important to listen to the people". Mavis also stated the role has helped her to achieve academically, and added, "I think the energy from this role, kind of makes me work harder in being a student. It's made me open to ideas, made me see things a bit clearer". Robert however, who has limited exposure to other students due to the online nature of his course suggested: it [my leadership development] has improved - just not that much in my eyes.

Although all participants still suggested that their primary responsibility was to be a student, on a number of occasions, it was also acknowledged that some participants had formed a closer connection with the institution because of this position. This connection seemed enhanced by participation on committees and their enhanced levels of understanding of policy and practice. Tom for example, explained, “I definitely feel an affinity to [the institute] because of the [representative] role”. James added, “you are learning - not only from people from the outside who have leadership skills, you are learning from within the structure itself”.

Mavis acknowledged that the opportunity to use her voice to advocate for other students led her to connect more with her culture. She recounted a conversation with peers where she was questioned about her own position, "You are our Kaitiaki (Guardian)”, one peer member told her. “I think that's what I am”, Mavis added to this conversation. “That's how I feel”. In addition, she explained how this thinking helped her transition into her identity as Māori:

> Before [this role], I’d kinda blocked my culture. I know tikanga Māori, Mum and Dad brought us up the Māori way but never pushed us that way because they would be whipped at school for speaking Māori. So, I thanked them for teaching us the Pākeha and the Māori way. As soon as I came here to this institute, I realised that my Māori culture is more dominant now. That I want to learn Te Reo Māori, I want to get whāea to help me prepare myself to call the people on to the marae. I want to do all that stuff now. Before [at *pōwhiri*] I used to sing, I used to be …. (whispering), now I let my voice out and I think this role has helped me a lot.

Preparation and training

Despite training received, participants admitted the initial transition into the role was not easy, and some felt lost as they found their place. Tom explained:

> God, we were just left out in the dark. We were just put on this side of the fence; and they say, hey swim… And it's not a nice experience for new students who want to take on these roles, because that's bloody daunting.

Mavis' account demonstrated initial confusion around the role, however, she seemingly had not been troubled and formed her own conception of the role: "I was quite lost in the first couple of months, but my main focus was talking to students anyway….". Most participants acknowledged that the majority of their learning came over time and from the experience of doing the role. All participants apart from one late starting co-opted member, had been taken through an induction. Student and personal commitments meant most could not attend training workshops, however, all participants had received a policy manual to clarify the position. For some, the manual was a good supporting document, for others it seemed a challenge to navigate. "It's taken me, maybe six months to clearly see what's the role", Mavis explains after mentioning being unavailable to attend workshops. "They give you diagrams, and stuff like that, but it doesn't sink in. The manual didn't work for me". Some participants had acknowledged mentors who were returning representatives and supported them in their initial transition into the role. Five representatives were fortunate enough to attend the student representative summit and reported an increase in knowledge and strategies to implement. It was reflected on however, that the conference may have been presented at a level not suitable for its ITP audience, as Jane explained:

> It's valuable stuff but these people from NZQA, they're so smart. They talk their spiel and they all think that we are as intelligent as they are. Most people just sit in there and (nodding head), while they post all these figures and graphics. They are trying to target these people using universities and its university ways of doing things. We've got way different demographics.

PEOPLE FACTORS

The people factors influencing student representative engagement were evident in the *development and maintenance of relationships.*

Developing and maintaining relationships

The development and maintenance of relationships emerged as strong influences over this position and encompassed both tutors and members of the student body. Most participants prioritised the significance of staff encouragement of student voice. Most of the participants referred to the support they received from their departmental staff as enabling them to do their role. Jane suggested: "We do really have a lot of people that are supportive of us. We want the students to be at the heart of all our decisions, so [the institute] are honouring that now". James stated that being able to rely on staff enables him to perform his role. Mavis supported this by retelling her perspective on staff response which enables her to perform her student voice role. "Staff are amazing, you just have to tell them who you are and what role you are doing. Everybody knows student voice. When they get surprised when a student voice member is inside their school of learning, they open up really quickly. It's amazing!!"

Tom gains motivation and happiness in this role from “resolving something for someone”, which appeared to be a consistent view held by other participants. There was also a sense of needing to show authentic commitment, such as being seen at events and other campus activities. This authentic intention to listen James attests, “will [make students] feel validated. And that's what you want at the end of the day, is validation from them”. Participants also commented that student concerns were mostly addressed and collated through representatives being proactive in their roles. Being proactive in the role meant at times intervening in student group conversations. Mavis explained:

> When I am walking past a group of students talking, I can hear them talking about problems they are having with the lecturers; trying to get their head around an assignment, and stuff like that. And I would stop. And listen, and then come back and say, "Sorry. Excuse me, I am blah-blah-blah," and you know, I would give them advice. At first, they are like, 'Who are you? and then I tell them that I am a student rep. Then I tell them where they need to go [for support], and what stuff to do. And then a couple of weeks' later, they are coming, and hugging me, and I was thinking, 'Wow!'.

When the participants transitioned from student to representative, taking on a position that is more connected to the structure of the institution, some noticed a changing perception of their status on campus, and the attitudes of those around them, including both tutors and students. Tom shared a change his connection with a course tutor: “one difference I actually saw with the lecturers” he said, “because you know they don't want to talk to you. But as soon as I became a Student Council member, their attitude changed. They were more talkative and forthcoming”. Participants also reported that there was an alteration in the perception in how other students saw them as student

representatives on campus. Although the student representative status had been reported by participants as being well received by those students close to them, the student representative title was seen as a possible barrier for these participants to engage with other students. These barriers were seemingly difficult to grasp by participants who still saw themselves as 'normal students'. James shared his experiences of trying to connect with students as a student council member:

> First off, you have got this title, but then when that title fades away, overall you are a student like them. So they should be able to see you as a student first, in other words, and not that title that you hold. Sadly, they [other students] see the title first, [but] I am always going to be the student first, because that's what I came here for.

STUDENT ADVOCACY

Factors of student advocacy which influenced student representation observed in this study were in the areas of *student recruitment, student voice* and *managing student concerns*.

Student recruitment

To become student representatives, participants had to engage in a democratic election process, which involved creating banners, and campaigning for votes. Some participants enjoyed the experience that this brought such as James who stated, "I loved it. You are just going out to people, going, hey, I am repping this, you know, and me - vote, make sure you vote for me. It's almost like a sport to be honest". Annabel had a similar experience but volunteered her time so her name would be familiar to the voters, "before putting myself forward for this role, I had been putting my name out to come

every quarter to help the staff out with the orientation days. And just asking them if they needed help, just let me know and I will be there". James' and Annabel's experiences were not the same for all campaigners though, as having candidate's campaign for votes was perceived as an issue for some and possibly a barrier to recruitment, as Jane explained:

> People are very humble. They're not the type of people that are like, advertise, [and] campaign. They can't just really put [themselves] on this pedestal and "vote for me"…. Even I found that hard, we're just not raised like that you know, we don't understand politics as well as others.

Attracting students and campaigning for positions on student council or student executive was seen as a possible recruitment issue. Jane explained, "we aren't like universities where we have [the] majority [of students] on certificates that haven't had previous education", and suggested that this lack of knowledge in understanding politics may raise questions about "students [capability] to make changes at academic programme level".

Student voice

Participants in this study who reported having conversations around student voice and were encouraged to be representatives, were students from the areas of business and information technology departments. Participants in this study were mostly acquired from these two departments and were reflective of student council members at the time of this research. Tom recalled one of his tutors from the city campus discussing the strength of student voice, and how this was viewed stronger than staff voice: "Remember, your voice is bigger than us lecturers. You know, our opinion doesn't matter, but yours does - your voice does." From participants interviewed, it appeared that there were

fewer student voice conversations outside of those areas, as Robert (south campus) recalled the moment the opportunity to be a student representative was mentioned in his class, “my class actually didn't decide on a class rep until I mentioned it. Basically, I said, "Oh, we need a class rep for the class," because yeah. Otherwise how was our voice going to go out?”

Beyond the student representative role, the majority of participants were based in schools from one faculty of the institute (business and information technology), which are both located at the city campus. In contrast, the South campus which hosts the majority of students, had minimal representation at the time of this research. This lack of representation at one campus appears to have created some ‘tension’ within the culture of this group as it was reported that the imbalance of having the majority of student council members from one campus, created the perception of a representative “wall” between campuses, and that students from the city campus were more likely be favoured over South campus students. It was reported at times, that the strength of representation seemed to be in the number of representatives and in meetings, south campus representative suggestions were falling on “deaf ears” or were “brushed off” by the majority group. This gave an impression that there was more support for one campus, than the other, and an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ dialogue that was present in both sets of representatives, but more prominent in the minority representative group. Although most of those interviewed believe they represent *all* students, it was obvious that representatives from one campus have little connection to students from the other campus. In support of this view, Tom’s response to his view on

representation was that those immediate to him were more of a concern, “My class. Yea, my class, and other students that I have built a friendship with”. Annabel however, had a different perspective and claimed: “I think I represent the institute. I definitely don't represent my cohort”. She later acknowledged that she had a stronger connection to staff, from the other campus, than the students.

Managing student concerns

Respondents referred to dealings with student situations in a student-as-consumer context, knowing that “they are the ones that are paying for all the bills” (James), appeared to bring additional pressures to the role. These pressures seemed to come from the expectation that these participants put onto themselves, as well as expectation that students had of them. Participants had reported the pressures of student expectations and frustrations when issues were not resolved in a timely manner and that had reflected back on the representatives who were at the face of the complaints. At times, participants needed to shield themselves from these complaints by removing themselves from situations and adopting a student representative persona. “I am a bit cautious… there are students that come to me and whatever they say to me, I have to remember it is just a role that they are arguing with and it's not you” (Annabel). Tom recalls a student representative having to deal with what seems like bullying from other students, in a public space: “Another student rep got really upset by some of the back-biting that was going on; we could hear it; and then everyone else in the room could hear it, and I said, "Just ignore it". For Tom, the decision to confront this issue or

walk away needed further consideration of the implications, to protect the integrity of the student representative position.

> I really wanted to deal with it, but then, they will see that there's a Student Council, or a student rep picking on them. Because you know, you have got to bear in mind what the position you hold for students. And you have got to be seen to be a reasonable person, and you are not a bully.

ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS

The organisational factors influencing student representative engagement observed were, *organisational culture* and *Institutional policies and practices.*

Organisational culture

Participants mostly seemed encouraged by the opportunities that students had to voice their concerns and the responses of student-facing staff to this, however, there were mixed views regarding the authenticity of action at an institutional level. These concerns were not particularly directed at the student-facing staff, but more so, at the infrastructure which supports the institute. Through one incident, James frustratingly reported of the “numerous” requests made for the computers to be upgraded, with perceived “plausible” solutions from students and lecturers, as he emphasised his annoyance when receiving a “no” and “we’ll wait and see". Even though James’ request was supported by his tutor, he raised questions about the authenticity of the institute’s commitment to be student centric. Robert and Tom reported similarly regarding a lack of action on student concerns. Mavis’ scepticism regarding the institutes commitment to student voice was evident, and she referred to student council as the executive ‘guinea pigs’ stating, “sometimes they won’t give us all the information, sometimes they only give

us what they want us to do." When participants were asked about whether they felt the institute supported student voice, Tom suggested, “the intentions are there, but the connections are not”, and referred to the latest restructuring as a possible cause of this ‘breakdown’. Jane, who was in her second tenure as student council member, suggested to have witnessed much change occur and was optimistic about the institutional direction, “they are [the institute] working hard to change that culture of ‘tick box’ approach”.

Earlier in 2018, after this particular institute was involved in a restructure, participants to this study reported it’s ‘ripple effect’, and impact on the momentum of student voice. Jane reported, “It’s hard for us to get stability when the institute doesn’t have stability itself. So, going through the change process is hard”. The perception was felt that the restructure and change had affected staff buy-in with regards to proactively engaging student voice projects, and staff buy-in occurred infrequently and only in ‘pockets’ of the institute. When correspondence was sent to staff for the purpose of nominating class representatives, only two nominations were received, Jane added, “It just goes to show that there is not really a willingness to drive things around here and that’s probably because every body’s discontent with all the change”. The general view held was that class representative system that should support student voice was seldom used by various schools because either departmental leaders were not having these conversations with students, students didn’t see value in it, or were unaware of the opportunities. This made the recruitment of students from departments “challenging”. Jane

emphasised her frustrations, “We’re not one team working towards the same dream. Yea, so it’s very disconnected and sometimes it’s disheartening”.

Institutional policies and practices

On occasion, participants had commented on their frustrations at the lack of flexibility in systems and bureaucracy, which prevented resolutions to what seemed like ‘simple problems to solve’. Participants commented that the bureaucracy at times slowed student voice progression down as policies and processes set within the institute acted as constraints on promoting initiatives. The ‘red tape’ and the bureaucracy required to run a seemingly simple task such as posting a message on their website or having student shirts available for students to purchase, appeared to add frustration to the role.

> For me to get something onto a website, I have to talk to ….. who has to talk to …., she’ll tell me to go to somebody in marketing, and somebody in marketing says that to send it through, eventually, I have to go to ... who's the head of marketing, then I send through lists for them to update things. So many hoops and jumps... but yea, so it’s not easy for us to ahh… really get ourselves ... our message out there.

At times, to progress with these tasks, this had meant that these representatives needed to find a way around the system or, to “think outside the square” as Tom suggested. “That's how we get things done around here." Following a similar example, Mavis added, “I think that’s why we use Facebook cause don’t have to ask questions to anybody."

CONCLUSION

To conclude in these findings, it was clear that these participants had become student representatives for a number of personal reasons, but ultimately to

advocate for others, and act as voices *for* and *of* student concerns. Although most participants seemed confident in their understanding of this role, during the time of this interview it was acknowledged that this understanding came over time throughout their tenure as representatives. Following this, their experiences of student representation was influenced by multiple factors, which may have also influenced how they perform their role. These were identified and put into four themes. These themes were headed under, *personal factors*, which were individual factors that had influenced their engagement with student representation; *people factors*, which was concerned with factors around relationships on campus; *student advocacy*, involved influences around speaking *for* and *of* students; and *organisational factors*, regarding internal systems of the organisation which influenced their engagement with student representation. Each of these themes had a number of sub-themes which had influence on how these students experience their role as representatives to student voice.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the major findings of an investigation into the experiences of student representatives in an Institute of Technology and Polytechnic (ITP). This research is a critical examination of student representation to determine how student representatives experience this role. The research questions guiding the study were: How is the student representative role defined by student representatives? How do student representatives experience this role? And what are the barriers and enablers that influence their engagement with this role?

The literature review investigated the origins of democratisation in higher education and defined student voice, in a traditional sense, using Dana Mitra's "Pyramid of Student Voice", which I applied to higher education. Student voice within higher education was considered, focusing on student representatives and the role they play. This also uncovered the factors that influence students' participation in leadership programmes such as student representation. Finally, the literature review investigated research regarding students in governance positions and contextualised the research from a New Zealand perspective. Interview data analysis indicated the main themes of the findings, and these were linked to my research questions. These started with identifying reasons the participants articulated for their involvement in student representation, which provided an understanding of their interpretation of that

role. The factors influencing student representation engagement were identified, and these were analysed into four cluster headings, personal factors, people factors, student advocacy, and organisational factors. In this chapter, I will be discussing particularly these influences, identifying the barriers to, and enablers of, this engagement.

Findings from this study have confirmed theories of student representation and student voice in the reviewed literature. Most participants believed that student representation enhanced them personally and that they had acquired transferable skills. Their participation in representation brought them to understand institute policy and practice as they transitioned into a new community of practice, on institutional committees. Most participants also felt they added to the strength of student voice through their participation. Additional to personal development, the personal satisfaction they gained from student advocacy was evident as the participants emphasised their passion to be a voice *for* and *of* students. They also believed they were able to influence change within the institute, however, at times, found the systems within the institute to have been counterproductive to this.

MOTIVATIONS FOR STUDENT REPRESENTATION

There was a level of enjoyment emphasised in being a student representative that was obvious, which gave a sense of not only why students chose to be representatives, but why they chose to stay. This is an important consideration when taking into account the challenging nature of student involvement in the representation and quality enhancement processes (Little et al., 2009; Persson, 2003), all while maintaining their studies. This enjoyment was

enhanced through developing relationships (with both students and tutors) and validation of them as representatives, through ‘making a difference’. There were multiple motivations to participate in student representation observed in this study, which was consistent with Lizzio and Wilson’s (2009) model for student representative engagement. The main motivations reported by participants were seen as extrinsic, with opportunities to represent other students and develop themselves personally, whereas, participants also saw opportunities to enhance external opportunities in acquiring employment tools necessary for after their studies.

Amongst the personal and professional reasons to why these particular participants chose to be student representatives, came their unquestionable enthusiasm to represent other students. Compassion and empathy are traits which seemed to be replicated by these participants, who spoke of student rights, advocacy, and the power imbalances experienced by students, who need to ‘be heard', as depicted in Mitra's (2006) Pyramid of Student Voice. This advocacy was evident through examples of proactive interventions, facilitation of group discussion, and reporting on institutional committees. Amongst consideration for student concerns, there was also consideration by the participants not only of students' rights to be represented, as seen in other studies (Carey, 2013b; Menon, 2005; Zuo & Ratsoy, 1999) but also the importance of students knowing and understanding their rights to representation. This awareness, coupled with the encouragement for students to find their voices, possibly shifts the role of the participants from one of student representation, to an empowering advocacy role, which is more prolific with student voice in higher education (McLeod, 2011).

Interestingly, there was a report of a student feeling compelled to be a representative to be heard and saw student representation as being seen to hold a ‘status' amongst the student community. Within this status, it was viewed that being a student representative would enable students to take action for student concerns where a ‘normal student' could not. The premise of student voice is to express concerns regarding factors that influence student learning, and make decisions that affect student education (Fielding, 2001), however, if students view their access to addressing concerns as limited to those who are student representatives, then students may feel that they do not have a voice without that ‘title' or access to representation. This could indicate that students do not see student voice as accessible to *all* students, bringing into question student perception around staff responsiveness to student voice for ‘normal students’. This is possibly an area for future research worth exploring.

UNDERSTANDING STUDENT REPRESENTATION

The general definition of student representation seemed to be to represent the views of fellow students and to report on educational issues concerning a specific programme or student experience (Carey, 2013b; Little et al., 2009), however, it was clear in this study that these participants held many personal definitions of what representing students meant. For some, this role provided the link between student and institute by being a voice *for* and *of* students, an observation made by Carey (2013a), and also consistent with the view held in the previous definition. Other ways they understood this position was to build rapport, listen to what students have to say about their learning and

experiences, link them to solutions, and resolve issues. These general definitions of this position are consistent with Mitra's (2006) pyramid of student voice, which suggests student voice opportunities in education as, listening to student experiences (*being heard*), working with tutors to make change (*collaborating with adults*), and working in a leadership capacity to create solutions (*building capacity for leadership*) (Fig 1).

Outside of the traditional student voice definition however, participant's descriptions of their role included social work and counselling, which is far removed from the previous definition of representing and reporting views of students. This suggests that either these participants may have created their conceptions of the role, they were not aware of their role description and its limitations, or when presented with student issues, they adopted these social work/counselling roles. Either way, possible implications are arising from placing additional pressures in representatives by moving their role into a domain which is beyond their competence or training. Stecker (2004) for example, concluded that there is an increase in levels of student depression associated with higher levels of stress. In this study, 'hopelessness' was the word Tom chose to use when describing the outcome of a situation he had encountered. There were also examples where representatives had needed to remove themselves from their studies due to situations directly linked to their representative roles. Mavis responded to this by stepping back from the role, and not becoming "too involved with the student voice, politics, and just go with the flow"'. This alienation could indicate a lack of coping strategies when dealing with stress, and potentially a distrust in the student voice system

(Fielding, 2004). Not clearly understanding terms of reference may also heighten levels of stress and motivation to perform the role, as indicated by Alkema et al., (2013).

INFLUENCES AFFECTING STUDENT REPRESENTATION

Regarding influences on student representation, the findings of this study demonstrated the lived experiences of these participants as they participate in student representation. These experiences emphasised factors which *enabled* these participants to perform their role and *barriers* which may have been counterproductive to their mandate. In this discussion, these barriers and enablers had either *people* or *operational factors* and will be discussed concerning their effect on engagement in representation.

People focus

The people factors influencing student representative engagement were *personal development* opportunities, *developing and maintaining relationships,* and *student advocacy*.

Personal development

Participants reporting emphasised the enjoyment and satisfaction they gained from personal development, and this was a strong motivator for their student representative engagement. Enhancement of leadership skills, in particular, was often mentioned synonymously with personal development. Much of this development identified came through experiential learning such as, participation in meetings and interacting with students and tutors in mediation and negotiation, which supports the notion that "students learn

leadership by doing it" (Eich, 2008, p. 182). All, except one late starting co-opted representative, acknowledged that induction and training workshops were available to them. Due to conflicts with student timetables and personal reasons, however, most student representatives had chosen not to attend most of the training offered and therefore, it is not surprising that role confusion was typical of their student representative experiences, as observed with Lizzio and Wilson (2009). This lack of training and preparedness may have influenced these representatives' capability, competence and understanding to execute their role, and therefore, negatively influencing the quality of their engagement (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009; Planas et al., 2011).

If higher educational institutes expect students to develop skills of effective citizenship such as leadership, then they must create the opportunity to be leaders, and support these through policies and practice, including formalised student representative training (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009). Training such as workshops should be the responsibility of education providers to provide. This will legitimise student voice by potentially enhancing communication, their overall effectiveness and satisfaction and ultimately, support the retention of student representatives (Alkema et al., 2013). Although leadership development is learnt through practice, it can be further enhanced through formalised leadership training programmes. Dugan and Komives (2007) investigated leadership development in higher education and concluded that students who attended at least one short-term leadership programme reported significantly higher leadership outcomes compared to

students who did not. This emphasises the importance for training to not only be available, but if this institution takes student voice seriously, it they should make training accessible to everyone, and *all* student representatives should be encouraged to attend. Additionally, strengthening student capability for representative engagement would help strengthen all levels of the pyramid of student voice, displayed by Mitra (2006).

One of the training mechanisms that most representatives referred to and received, was the training manual. Although the manual is a very important resource, participants found it difficult to navigate and comprehend. This is consistent with findings from Alkema et al., (2013), who also identified this issue with students from the ITP sector. This indicates that training manuals may require reassessment and potentially redevelopment to ensure a positive impact by being responsive to student diversity encompassing both low-level and high-level academic achievers at the same time (Alton-Lee, 2003). Findings also suggest that the ITP summit, which was held by the New Zealand Student Union Association (NZUSA), was a training resource that may require reassessment to ensure it encompasses student diversity for the ITP sector.

Developing and maintaining relationships

Participants acknowledged the strength of relationships with staff as a strong enabler of student representation, and most reported on the effort staff made to encourage student voice. Although these participants viewed their relationships with students and staff as important, their connections with both stakeholders seem very different. Through interviews, participants spoke of

students in a consumer context, ‘needing support’ or ‘being in support of’ (*need help resolving issues, unable to do it themselves, unconfident, student problems, paying for the service*). This gives the impression that as student representatives, their relationships and connections with other students is strengthened by ‘servicing' or ‘satisfying' consumer's needs. Words used to describe situations with student-facing staff, on the other hand, were contrasting (*supportive, honouring student voice, reliable, amazing, open and encouraging*). These descriptions of staff efforts suggest a collegial relationship between students and teaching staff, which challenges the notion of ‘us against them’ (Rowland, 2003) and supports the notion of ‘collaboration’, as depicted in the middle tier of Mitra’s student voice (2006) model. This collaboration between staff and student, Lizzio and Wilson (2009) suggests, requires staff to hold “conceptions of power that are not overly limited by beliefs about the entitlements of status and positional authority” (p. 77). Although both relationships were acknowledged as important to participants, the relationship and connections to students appear to be based on servicing student needs, whereas the relationship with staff has a more reciprocal relationship based on collegiality. Similar relationship links between student and tutor were also reported by Carey (2013b). Each one is as an important enabler as the other for student representative engagement, because while staff encourage and support student representatives, being able to provide a ‘service’ to students, may make representatives feel validated in their role.

An interesting finding showed that although these participants still identified themselves as students, their position as representatives involved a closer

relationship with the institute. Findings suggested that participants had developed new understandings of, and some empathy for, institutional decision making. This could be attributed to their involvement on institutional committees, where they could see ‘behind the scenes', providing impetus for the newly formed collegial relationships with staff. Participants felt they had developed a closer connection to the institute because of their position. For some, their self-perception on campus had changed, reflected in a similar study by Carey (2013a) as they were more connected to their new Community of Practice (Wenger, 1999). It was perceived that tutors and other students acted ‘differently' around them, altering how they saw themselves, thus how others saw them, which potentially reinforced their new identity on campus. This changing self-perception also had a cultural twist, as one student felt ‘more Māori, after being seen as kaitiaki (Guardian), by her peers, a result of her advocating for Māori and other students. This indicates that student identity can take many forms in campus contexts (Ylijoki & Ursin, 2013). Understanding shifting student identities for representatives is, however, beyond the scope of this study, and understanding the extent of student representative identity may be a focus of future research.

Student advocacy

Being a voice ‘for’ students and upholding student rights were important to these participants. Not only were they motivated to represent student voice, but it seemed important to them that students, as members of the academic community, should have representation. Emotions of frustration and anger were evident when student rights were not adhered to, and for one particular participant, reinforced suspicions that student voice within this institute was

‘tokenistic’. The incident regarding computer upgrades suggested a perceived lack of reasoning behind responses to solve issues, potentially heightened student tensions. Johnson and Deem (2003) warned that student voice may be seen by students as a ‘tick box’ exercise if there is a lack of response to the experiences of students, and students can become sceptical and unwilling to participate when they do not see any actions arising from their feedback (Leckey & Neill, 2001). This may negatively affect the overall organisational culture if left unattended (Robinson, 2009). The incident may have created disillusionment with the concept of student voice, raising questions around the authenticity of promises to action student concerns, or to be ‘seen to be concerned' (Fielding, 2004). The caution here is that educators seen to be inauthentic in their approach to student voice, offering a ‘tokenistic nod' without actioning student concerns, may increase distrust and alienation in students (Fielding, 2004). This may also lead to hostility towards the institution (Kohl, 1994), which could lose ‘customers' and revenue (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005).

While these insights reveal consumerist, neoliberal attitudes, they also reveal a sense of entitlement on the part of students. There were several examples of these attitudes throughout this research, which reflected the consumerist-case (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013). Students now have more and more understanding of their consumer rights and greater demands and expectations that their views will be considered (Bunce, Baird, & Jones, 2017). When collecting student feedback, Watson (2003) suggests, there should be emphasis on responding to student’s expectations, even when their expectations cannot be satisfied. Following a consideration of their views,

there is a need to feedback to students. Notably, the student mentioned previously, experienced heightened frustrations when he was unable to understand the reason for no decisions to be made Instead of receiving a “no” or “we’ll wait and see," this ‘feedback loop’ an important part of quality management (Watson, 2003), should have been closed.

Although reasons as to why class representation only existed within ‘pockets' of this institute is beyond the scope of this study, finding candidates to occupy course representative positions at faculty/departmental level, was mentioned as problematic, as seen in other studies (Alkema et al., 2013; Little et. al., 2009; Persson, 2003). The impact of the lack of course representatives was identified as potentially limiting the strength of student voice projects, which impacted these participants. Lizzio and Wilson (2009) determined that class representatives have an important role to play in heightening student voice within higher education because of the link between students and tutors, which helps to create a sense of community and strengthen student engagement (Carey, 2013b). Because class representatives encourage students to address concerns, they are also instrumental in resolving departmental issues. As acknowledged in this research, there is a greater reluctance for students to approach representatives unfamiliar to them and therefore, there is limited opportunity for conversations to happen that address student concerns, when course representatives are not present. Students who have concerns with programmes or lecturers may be restricted to airing their concerns through electronic course and lecturer evaluations, which is a less effective form of feedback, as these rely on computers being readily available and students

being computer literate (Avery, Bryant, Mathios, Kang, & Bell, 2006). This in itself may marginalise the voices of a minority, contradicting the premise of student voice. The class representative system is also an important entry point for students who want to progress further into student representation and governance (Alkema et al., 2013). This was evident from this research, where half of the participants to this study had typically started as class representatives and later progressed to student executive or council positions.

Operational focus

The operational focus which appeared to influence student representative engagement was seen as *organisational influences*, and *diversity in representation.*

Organisational influences

The opportunity to function as a member in institutional governance was seen as a motivating factor and offered participants the chance to gain experience, and opportunity to serve other students. Tamrat (2016) suggested that student participation on governance committees may be regarded by institutions as an exercise in compliance, however, most participants in this study generally enjoyed their experiences, commented on the value of being on these committees, and felt they were active in their contributions. Although this study did not venture into the active roles that these participants played within committees or staff responses to student participation, participants provided glimpses into their experiences on committees. These vivid recollections described their initial experiences as "daunting", "self-doubt[ing]", "intimidating", and "anxious". If this is typical of most representative experiences on committees, this may have implications for student confidence

to contribute. Education providers may need to think differently about how to engage student participation at this level of decision-making (Planas et. al., 2011), if they are to encourage participation and develop democratic citizenship in students (Tamrat, 2016). This may include reassessment of modes of training, which prepares students to be active contributors on institutional committees.

There was, however, also an indication that these participants viewed their student representative involvement as ‘superficial', and was described as, executive "guinea pigs", which came through a perceived lack of information from executives and action around student concerns. These frustrations also turned towards an unhelpful bureaucracy, with ‘red tape’, and ‘gatekeepers' protecting the administrative system, which was seen to slow progress down as student representatives attempted to engage with other students. Similar frustrations were also identified by Carey (2013b), who suggested these frustrations at the structure and bureaucracy were typical at institutional level representation, more than course level, and ultimately created "barriers to partnership between [student representatives] and the institution as a whole" (p. 84). The problem here could be that organisations which are seen as barriers to student representation and inauthentic to student voice, may be viewed as ‘tokenistic’, only getting involved when it serves their purpose, and therefore, creating alienation and distrust (Feilding, 2004) in students. With regards to the frustrations around the bureaucracy and ‘red tape’ however, this study did reveal that participants viewed the ‘system’ open to manipulation, and they accordingly sought solutions around what they viewed as constraints.

Diversity in representation

Participants from this study were mostly from one particular area of the institute, which also reflects the areas strongest in institutional representation. It was clear that students from business and information technology were encouraged to be student representatives through conversations within their departments from tutors, peers or previous student representatives. This possibly indicates the culture within these departments promotes student representation and that authentic student voice conversations occur inside these departments, which may help influence students to participate, possibly more so than in other areas. Participants who were from outside this area, by contrast, were either ‘shoulder tapped' for the position from staff outside of their area, or circumstances had steered them towards representation. This may have also been reflective of the class representative system that only operated in few schools around the institute. One participant perceived that the recent staff restructuring had led to a ‘disconnection in the family culture'. In the face of change within organisations and the perception of job losses, job behaviour (Allen, 2003), and workplace motivation (Burchell, 1999) are mostly affected and this may have also contributed to the reported disconnection of staff participation regarding student voice, and student representative experiences at the time of this study. Such impacts on organisational climate may go unnoticed by those close to the top of the organisational hierarchy (Worrall & Cooper, 1998).

The implications of having an imbalance of representation across the institute appears to have created an ‘us vs them' dialogue between representative

parties, and isolation of the ‘minority' members from the group. One participant who felt responsible for representing her ‘entire' campus because of the lack of wider representation stated, "I am everything now, I took on all duties". Once again, this may have implications to health and wellness, and impact student representation engagement if representatives don't feel supported or adequately resourced to be able to perform their role (Trowler, 2010). Additionally, the lack of diversity in representation may also bring student voice concerns around validity and distrust (Fielding, 2001, 2004), and questions around how diversity is represented if there is a lack of diversity in student representation (Barrington, 2004).

CONCLUSION

The discussion of findings from this chapter helps to understand how students from an Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITP) experience student representation. In this discussion, I have identified reasons why these participants chose to be representatives, where multiple motivations for engagement were identified. These were seen as both intrinsic and extrinsic. Interestingly, this study revealed a student perception that regards the representative role as integral to student voice, yet at the same time, representatives may be perceived to be the only students able to exercise that voice. This chapter also collected these participant's comprehensions of student representation, where most participants saw the position as an advocacy role. There was a suggestion, however, that participants viewed representation as ‘more' than that, and maybe exposing themselves to situations beyond their competence and training which may have implications

for health and wellness of these participants. Finally, I have discussed the experiences of these participants and highlighted barriers and enablers that have influenced their engagement with this role. This discussion revealed that these participants were influenced through several personal and environmental factors, which they viewed as barriers or enablers influencing their engagement with student representation.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

OVERVIEW OF THIS STUDY

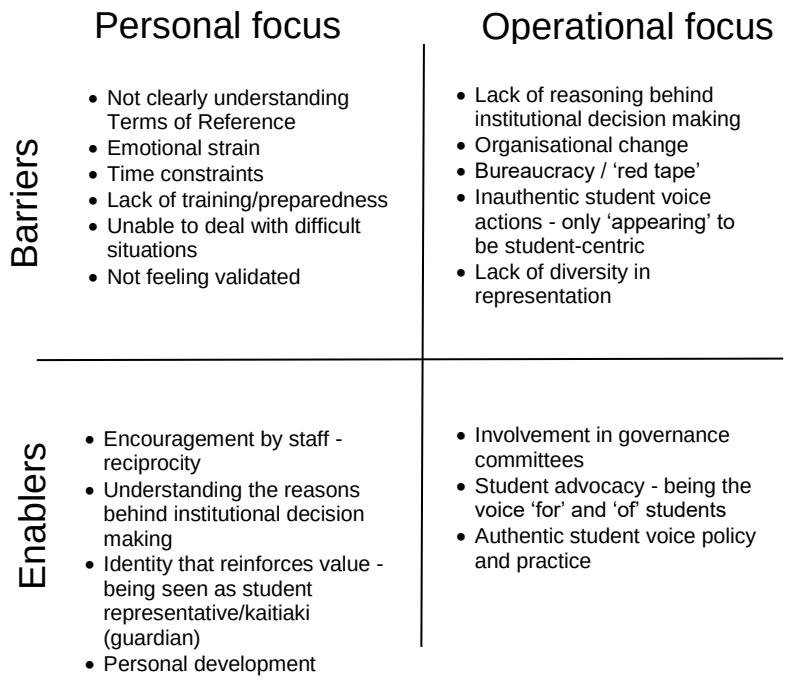
The purpose of this research was to critically examine the lived experiences of undergraduate student representatives from an Institute of Technology and Polytechnic (ITP) in New Zealand. Through my interpretive paradigm, a phenomenological methodology was used to interview and discuss experiences with six student representatives to identify how they experience their role of student representation. The research questions which underpinned this study were: 1) How is the student representative's role defined by student representatives?; 2) How do student representatives experience this role?; and 3) What are the barriers and enablers that influence their engagement with this role? This study sought to understand why these participants chose to be representatives and how they perceived the position. This study also identified the barriers and enablers which influenced their engagement with student representation. The significance of the findings may be used to inform student representative training programmes, in particular by raising awareness of how student representatives within an ITP experience and engage with this role and the implications of these experiences.

The findings identified several reasons why these particular participants engaged in student representation. These motivations were identified as both intrinsic and extrinsic. Although student advocacy featured strongly in their reasoning, the potential for personal development, that would, in turn, enhance their employability, was also important. This study also found that although the

participants' basic understanding that their student representative role was to be the voices *for* and *of* students, there were other definitions which fell outside of student advocacy. One of the main themes that emerged from my findings of the representative's perspectives were the barriers and enablers that influence the way they engaged with their roles of advocacy. These barriers and enablers were identified using themed analysis and were identified as *personal factors, people factors, student advocacy,* and *organisational factors.* These gave way to a number of sub-themes.

Through the discussion of these findings, this study also revealed the perceptions of the participants regarding their status on campus. They were able to action student concerns, in ways a ‘normal student’ could not, although this may indicate to other students that they do not have a voice without representation. Although the general understanding of the participants regarding student representation was consistent, there were other definitions which fell outside of student advocacy and these could have health and wellness implications, considering the nature of the role and how this is implemented. The barriers and enablers that were identified (Fig 3) in the findings were discussed and linked to academic literature.

Figure 3: Barriers and enablers influencing student



What was revealed through the discussion was that although student representation may be clearly defined by its terms and conditions, it is a part of a multifaceted system with complex, conflicting and changing environments. Student representatives develop newer identities on campus as they become student advocates and establish new relationships with students and staff, as well as establishing a closer connection with the institute. As they shift into a community of practice that enables them to see educational experiences through the eyes of other students, they also acquire a deeper understanding of how decisions made affected student experiences. In line with this, there was also a developing sense of being able to see things from an institutional perspective too.

Relationships with staff, in particular, appear to have been influential in encouraging and enabling representation and suggested a collaborative relationship existed which supported these participants in their mandate. Relationships with students, which was defined by advocacy, appeared to validate the representatives in this role, through their developing understanding of their student experiences and servicing their needs. This study revealed not only why students choose to be representatives, but equally as important, has highlighted why they choose to remain in this role. The opportunity to represent peers on campus was an influential motivator, along with the attraction of personal development, which provided them with employable skills. In addition to balancing student life, it is without a doubt that there are many challenges to this position such as conflict resolution, navigating through change, uncertainty in the role, being adequately prepared and trained, dealing with personalities, and organisational bureaucracy. This research has identified how these challenges have influenced student representative engagement.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

All matters of research ethics include limitations and within phenomenological research, these limitations mostly arise from what is said by the participants, the interpretation of the researcher and credibility of the research output (Centre for Innovation in Research and Teaching, nd). Because this research was qualitative, the data gathered is not statistical or generalisable to other groups.

Due to the limitations imposed by part-time Masters study and full-time employment, my time to invest in data collection and analysis was limited. This restricted the potential to gather a greater diversity of participants or time to consider other potential themes which may have emerged. Also, data gathering was limited to semi-structured interviewing, whereas this research could have been strengthened through an initial focus group to help design and strengthen my research questions. This research was also limited by my lack of experience and ability to 'flesh out' conversation during the interviews, and better reveal the underlying assumptions of the participants' experiences.

Data gathering was also limited by the participants' ability to connect with the level of questioning or nature of the research as a result of language, and cultural barriers or their comprehension of the questions. Additionally, the participants' investment in the student representative position, may have influenced their responses.

For this research to be possible, I needed to rely on a third party to assist me in the recruitment of my participants. Effectively, student services were the 'gatekeepers' to my participants and therefore, may have influenced the recruitment of my participants, who were mostly from a single area within the institute and may have had different student representative experiences, to student representatives from other areas of the institute.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is concerned with a specific set of students who are representatives from an Institute of Technology and Polytechnic (ITP) in New Zealand, the roles, motivations, and challenges are largely consistent with those observed in the literature (Alkema et al., 2013; Little et al., 2009). Although this research is specific to a particular research group, there is no reason to suggest that these findings and implications would not be pertinent to other ITPs within New Zealand, therefore the following recommendations may be relevant to those contexts too.

Role clarity

For student representatives to perform their role effectively, they need to clearly understand what that role involves. Gaps in the understanding the participants had of the student representative role was highlighted, by the range of definitions each had for the role. Furthermore, participants seemingly spent considerable time comprehending their position, whilst performing the role. If representatives are to be effective in their role, they need to attend the training provided that prepares them to perform their role effectively. This training should include an initial induction and regular workshops throughout the year. Considering implications can be linked to the health and well-being of the student, this training should be made compulsory for all students, including late co-opted members. Although role clarification of student representation should be an embedded part of the induction and ongoing training, it is important to have clear job descriptions that detail the position.

To ensure students are effective on institutional committees, job descriptions should also be given to students in these positions.

Reassessment of training resources

A reassessment of training resources, such as the training manual, should be investigated to ensure they are ideal for their intended recipients. Consideration should be made regarding student diversity and low and high academic achievers. Training resources should also be made available online to support representatives, should they require access to this at a later time.

Class representation

Building up a class representative base is instrumental to the strength and sustainability of student voice within the institute, though this study has highlighted the underutilisation of this mechanism by many departments within the institute. One of the barriers that were highlighted in this research was the recruitment of class representatives around the institute. Class representatives are heavily influenced by departments to actively engage in student voice dialogue and recruitment, however, in certain departments, these conversations may not be happening. In this, it is recommended that management encourage departments to drive course representative recruitment. Such leadership could emphasise an organisational culture that values student voice and demonstrates a commitment to a reciprocal relationship between the institute and students. To ensure a fair representation of all students, a diversity of participants should also be encouraged on student council and student executive committees.

Student involvement in the decision-making process

Institutes must be seen as authentic in their approach to accommodate student voice, or risk alienation and student distrust in the student voice system. This distrust is heightened when students do not understand the reasoning behind decisions made that affect them. In this, it is vital to emphasise the importance of ‘closing the feedback loop’, so students are made aware of the reasoning behind the decisions and where possible, are involved in the decision-making process. In this, it is recommended that actions of student concerns are fed back to students, so they feel they are being listened to, and that they are aware of the outcomes.

FURTHER RESEARCH

There is much scope for future research around student representatives, and student voice in higher education. This research was only concerned with the lived experiences of student representatives in an Institute of Technology and Polytechnic (ITP) in New Zealand and has not taken into account the considerations of staff and other students of the student's representative role. This may provide valuable insights and uncover further barriers and enablers which influence staff engagement with students in these positions. Furthermore, this may uncover staff expectations of student representatives.

Further research could also include comparisons with other ITPs in New Zealand to identify consistencies in findings. This could add to the validity of understanding the experiences of student representatives in the New Zealand

ITP sector and possibly strengthen recommendations at a policy level to advance student voice processes throughout the tertiary sector. This study would also benefit from the inclusion of teaching staff and their experiences with student representatives and student voice. This may also identify areas of strength and weakness in student representative recruitment and support that may not be identifiable by the representatives alone.

This study also highlighted student perceptions of student representatives and questioned student accessibility to student voice without representatives. It would be interesting to investigate how students view student representation and get their perceptions of their accessibility to voice concerns with and without student representation.

CLOSING COMMENTS

In summary, my interest in this research was to understand how student representatives from an ITP in New Zealand experience this role. It was not my intent to criticise an education institute for its practice in working with student representatives but to understand how student representatives operate their mandate within the confines of people and systems. This research was intended to explore the student representative experiences through the perspectives of six participants, who sacrifice their time to represent other students. It was my intention in this study to provide them with a voice to share their student representative experiences, including high and low moments, moments of satisfaction, as well as frustration, and navigating through bureaucracy and other barriers which had influenced engagement.

In this, several key points to this study were made. This research identified that students participate in student representation for several reasons, however, at the heart of representation, comes the opportunity to serve student needs, and provide a voice *for* and *of* students who may struggle to find theirs. Another key point discovered was that participants had various conceptions of what student representation entailed, which suggested either a lack of understanding or they are confronted with situations which forces them to adopt these secondary roles. Ultimately, student representatives can position themselves into situations beyond student representation and ones that they are not equipped to handle or trained for. The final key point raised was that student representatives are confronted by barriers and enablers, which influence their representative roles. These influences were seen as having either a people or operational focus. Each one of these influences were seen to impact student representative's engagement to some degree.

Coming from a leadership background, my interest was to locate opportunities where students can be developed as leaders beyond the curriculum. According to research presented in this study, student representatives may be presented with an ideal opportunity to develop leadership skills outside the curriculum, so this exploration of their experiences, potentially strengthen the connections that educational institutes have with student representatives.

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APPENDIX A: Ethics approval

26 September 2018
Leon Benade
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Leon

Re Ethics Application: **18/361 The lived experiences of student representatives in a New Zealand polytechnic: A critical examination**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 25 September 2021.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using form EA2, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics.
2. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using form EA3, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form: http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics.
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval for access for your research from another institution or organisation then you are responsible for obtaining it. You are reminded that it is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

For any enquiries, please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz

Yours sincerely,

Kate O'Connor
Executive Manager
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee
Cc: dparkin@manukau.ac.nz

APPENDIX B: Cover letter that was emailed to Student Services

Participation of volunteer Student Representatives in an interview

Student representative experience within Manukau Institute of Technology

Dear

My name is Daryl Parkin, I am a senior lecturer at Manukau Institute of Technology, School of Sport and a student at Auckland University of Technology, working my way to completing my Master of Educational Leadership. My dissertation is entitled 'The lived experiences of student representatives in an Industry Training and Polytechnic in New Zealand. A critical examination.' and I am inviting possible participants to spend an hour discussing with me:

- Their understanding of the student representative role.
- Their experiences as a student representative and representative of student voice.
- I am particularly interested to hear their perspective on what they see as barriers and enablers that may affect their role as student representatives.

I am asking that you would be able to forward the attached covering letter, information sheet and consent form to your student representatives who might be interested to participate in this research. My contact details are in the covering letter for the potential participants to contact me directly.

Your time spent sending these out is greatly appreciated.

For further information, please email me at dparkin@manukau.ac.nz, or text me at 0212527513.

Yours faithfully

Daryl Parkin

APPENDIX C: Cover letter to participants

Student representative participation in an interview

2nd October 2018

Your experience as a student representative within your institute of study

I am Daryl Parkin, student at Auckland University of Technology, working my way to completing my Master of Educational Leadership. I am inviting possible participants to spend an hour discussing with me:

- Your understanding of the student representative role.
- Your experiences as a student representative and representative of student voice.
- I am particularly interested to have your perspective on what you see as barriers and enablers that may affect your role as student representative.

If you are able to spare an hour to take part in an interview discussion, please read the attached Information Sheet. All participants are kindly requested to sign the attached Consent Form, which can either be returned by email within a week, or given to me when we meet. If you are willing to participate, please email me at dparkin@manukau.ac.nz, or text me at 0212527513 by **Friday 19th October**

Yours faithfully

Daryl Parkin

APPENDIX D: Participant information sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced:

02 October, 2018

Project Title

The lived experiences of student representatives in an Industry Training and Polytechnic in New Zealand: A critical examination

Kia ora,

My name is Daryl Parkin. I am a currently a Senior Lecturer at Manukau Institute of Technology, School of Sport and a student of Auckland University of Technology (AUT) working towards completing my Masters in Educational Leadership. I am currently working on finishing this qualification through this research project, listed above, which will be the title of my dissertation.

In this, I am recruiting participants who are currently student representatives within their cohorts to be a part of this research project that will involve an interview up to 1-hour in duration. In this time, we will be discussing your experience as a student representative within MIT.

If you feel that you do not want to be a part of this study for whatever reason, you will not be advantaged nor disadvantaged.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this study is to gain a greater understanding of the student representative role by through the voice of the student leaders in a critical examination of their experience of the system. I am particularly interested in enablers and barriers that influence your ability to do this role.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

The reason you have been identified as a potential participant to this study is because you are a student representative within your cohort of study. Although this recruitment notice been sent by student services, they will not be aware of the final selection of participants for this study.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be required to complete a Consent Form, which is attached to this letter. You can scan, and email this to me or bring this with you at the time of the interview. Students from the School of Sport will be excluded from participating in this research.

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

What will happen in this research?

This research project will require you to meet for a face-to-face interview that is expected to take up to one hour in duration. I will be asking a series of questions aimed towards finding out your account and experience as a student representative. The interview will be recorded through a digital device and will be transcribed into a word document at some stage after the interview. Transcripts of the interview will be available for checking

What are the discomforts and risks?

I acknowledge that there may be some emotional discomfort with the retelling of some of your experiences that may include certain peers, lecturers, or management during this meeting. You are, however, welcome to omit from answering any question that make you feel uncomfortable at any stage.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

Once interview recordings are transcribed, I send a copy to you to check that your words are correctly captured, and can ask for changes or deletions to be made. If you do require support dealing with emotions, then you are able to contact MIT health and counselling centre, which offer three free sessions of confidential counselling support for all students. To access these services, you can:

- drop into their centre at S block, Gate 9, MIT Otara – South Campus or phone (09) 968 8072 to make an appointment.

You can find out more information about MIT counselling service on https://www.manukau.ac.nz/campus-facilities/facilities/mit-health-centre/counselling-services/making-an-appointment-with-a-counsellor.

What are the benefits?

This research project enables me to gather data required so I can write a dissertation, which is part-fulfilment of the requirements of the Masters in Educational Leadership (M.EdL). This research also aims to achieve more understanding of the student representative role by hearing the voices of the student leaders themselves. Addressing your perspective may uncover dynamics that influence the performance of your representative role, and may provide an opportunity for your institution to support and enhance future course representatives in decision-making.

How will my privacy be protected?

Your name, and programme you study on will be protected and an alias name will be used throughout the research. The interview will be confidential. All collected interview data will be retained on a password-protected device and stored for six years before being deleted.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There is no cost to you to be a part of this research apart from your time, which is likely to be up to 1 hour, and a further half an hour to read the interview transcript.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

If you are able to participate in this research, I would need you to respond within a week so that I can confirm numbers.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

If you would like to know the outcome of the research, please let me know and I would be happy to email a copy to you once my dissertation is compete.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Leon Benade, leon.w.benade@aut.ac.nz, +64 9 921 9999 ext. 7931.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, Kate O'Connor, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , 921 9999 ext 6038. + 64 9 921 9999 ext: 7931

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Daryl Parkin, dparkin@manukau.ac.nz, 021 252 7513.

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Leon Benade, leon.w.benade@aut.ac.nz, +64 9 921 9999 ext: 7931

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *26th September 2018*, AUTEC Reference number *18/361*.

APPENDIX E: Participant consent form

Project title: ***The lived experience of students representatives in a New Zealand polytechnic: A critical examination***
Project Supervisor: ***Dr. Leon Benade***
Researcher: ***Daryl Parkin***

- ○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 12/9/2018.
- ○ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ○ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ○ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ○ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ○ I agree to take part in this research.
- ○ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes○ No○

Participant's signature:
.....

Participant's name:
…….....

Participant's Contact Details:
……..

Contact number :
……..

Email address:
……..

Date: ……

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 26th September, 2018 AUTEC Reference number 18/361.

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

APPENDIX F: Confidentiality agreement

Confidentiality Agreement

Project title: The lived experiences of student representatives in a polytechnic in New Zealand. A critical examination.
Project Supervisor: ***Dr Leon Benade***
Researcher: ***Daryl Parkin***

- ○ I understand that all the material I will be asked to transcribe is confidential.
- ○ I understand that the contents of the digital recordings can only be discussed with the researcher.
- ○ I will not keep any copies of the transcripts nor allow third parties access to them.

Transcriber's signature:

.....

Transcriber's name:

.....

Transcriber's Contact Details (if appropriate):

Email: _____

Mobile: _____

Date: _____

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 26th September, 2018 AUTEC Reference number 18/361.

Note: The Transcriber should retain a copy of this form

APPENDIX G: Interview questions

Interview questions

In this interview, I would like to gain an understanding of your experiences as a class representative within MIT. I'm particularly interested in your understanding of the role, your motivation, preparation for the role and some of the barriers and enablers that might influence you to completing your role effectively.

My first set of questions is about your **understanding** of the class representative role.

1. How long have you been in the role of student representative?

2. Prior to this role, had you been involved in any other student or employee representative role?

3. Can you describe for me your role as student representative?

4. Please clarify what may have contributed to your changed understanding.

5. In your opinion, how important is the role of student representatives within tertiary? Explain

6. What initially motivated or influenced you to become a student representative?

7. What were you hoping to get out of being a student representative? How has this changed?

8. What did you see as the benefits of being a student rep? How has this changed over time?

9. What process did you go through to become a class representative?

10. How well prepared were you for the student representative role?

11. What training/induction did you receive on becoming a class representative?

12. Describe the support you receive from MIT to perform your role?

13. How do your peers relate to you as a student representative?

14. The student rep role are obviously supported by the institute, how well do you feel supported at department level?

15. How would you generally gather feedback from your peers?
16. What happens if your classmates raise concerns about a programme or an assessment? What actions are you able to take?
17. What process do you follow to report back on these concerns?
18. What prevents you from performing your student representative role effectively?
19. What helps you to perform your student representative role effectively?
20. In what ways does MIT encourage you in your role as a student representative?
21. Do you see yourself as an effective advocate for student voice here at MIT? Why/why not?
22. Do you think that being a student representative has personally enhanced your skills as a leader? In what way?
23. Final comments: