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Mapping affect in critical moments of schooling for disenfranchised students

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ABSTRACT

Students disenfranchised from school have something important to teach us about how the education system might be shaped more equitably. Currently, meta-narratives of student failures and pathologies prevail and are reinforced by dominant behaviourist teaching practices. In this action research project, we sought to understand how teachers might inquire with students about critical moments from their past schooling experiences. Working within Alternative Education settings, students and teachers inquired together using a variety of mediated arts-based methods. In our analysis, I-poems illuminated the power of affective spaces to shape student identities. We identified that affect and disenfranchisement were connected through lived schooling experiences of shame, exclusion and racism. In addition to critical moments, we identified there were microaggressions in the everyday of schooling experiences, and we explored the healing power of microaffirmations in student–teacher relationships through the practices of emergent listening and relational pedagogy. Students' affective storytelling and the analysis from this research invites us to suspend our attachment to dominant behaviourist approaches and modern, industrial concepts of schooling and consider alternatives. We invite educators to consider alternative approaches to student–teacher relationships by leaning into lessons taught from students in this research.

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Introduction

Students disenfranchised from school rarely have the opportunity to share their stories with those in positions of power. Yet, they have insights that are crucial if we take seriously the idea that schooling is for all (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018). Within Aotearoa New Zealand, each year around 2000 students are quietly moved to the edges of education and placed in Alternative Education (AE) settings. AE exists to meet the needs of secondary students disenfranchised from mainstream schooling, with the aim of providing short-term intervention and support. Very little is known about AE students' schooling experiences, but their stories have something important to teach us about what it means to be excluded by the system, and how the system might be shaped more

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equitably. Without the students' voices, their stories are at risk of being told as meta-narratives of disengagement, student failure and pathologies. We argue that historically, the stories told about students, have 'acted to obscure the lived realities of young people and even bear upon them, shaping their identities' (Schoone et al., 2022, p. 2). In this research study, we sought to shift the narrative by positioning students as the narrators of their own stories, allowing them to share their perspectives, experiences and understandings on their own terms.

Responding to the need to attend to marginalised students' stories of schooling, we (the researchers) undertook an action research project with AE teachers and students (Schoone et al., 2022). The AE teachers inquired with their students into the critical moments that had occurred during their schooling. What emerged were stories that connected affect and disenfranchisement through lived schooling experiences of shame, exclusion and racism, as well as the affective power of space to act on and shape identities. Stories of becoming 'unstuck' through microaffirmative practices provide insights for teacher–student relationships (Ahmed, 2010; Jones & Spector, 2017; Purcell, 2024; Rowe, 2008).

The purpose of this article is to illuminate the stories of AE students through applying various understandings of affect, trauma and shame. Further, we pay attention to the critical moments of microaffirmations and moments of becoming 'unstuck' (Berlant, 2011; Jones & Spector, 2017; Rowe, 2008) and consider implications for teacher–student relationships. We critically engage with understandings of affect through poetic inquiry to shed light on students' experiences of microaggressions and microaffirmations. By conceptualising an alternative imaginary shaped by student experiences of microaffirmations, we seek to challenge the dominant development theory of behaviourism and deeply ingrained industrialist modern concept of schooling. In so doing, we seek to disrupt prevailing discourses that position disenfranchised students as problems to be solved (Schoone et al., 2023b).

Unpacking affect

Challenging dominant views of the rational, agentic self within education settings offers promise for thinking otherwise about disenfranchisement. Historically, education has been situated within the rational/logic, and emotions theorised through the psychological fields of 'emotional intelligence' or 'pathologies' (Kenway & Youdell, 2011). Kenway and Youdell (2011) suggest a socio-cultural-spatial analysis of education and emotion through exploring emotional geographies situated within the affective turn.

Affect as a social force within schools happens on, within, and across subjectivities—never fixed and always in motion–the result of which is for students and teachers to experience emotions, and the shaping and reshaping of identities. While emotions are commonly discussed in schooling contexts, affect is less understood. The Spinozian idea of affect is useful here, suggesting it is before will, thought and emotion. Massumi (2002) develops the Spinozian idea further by drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Massumi (2002) describes affect as 'bodily sensations and intensities . . . understood as beyond or before thought, emotion or interpretation and so are conceived of as pre-personal, experiential states that flow between bodies and demarcate what a body can do' (p. 134). Works on affect and emotion challenge traditional understandings of the

rational, autonomous Cartesian subject and this is fundamental to behaviourist foundations in modern teacher–student relationships. Wetherell (2013) explains the way in which affect provides a 'spectacular demonstration of the limits of human agency . . . it arrives unbidden, and we find ourselves in a state of grief, anxiety, rage or euphoria' (p. 221).

Leaning into the affective turn affords us opportunities to read stories of affect and emotion within schools in novel ways (Clough & Halley, 2007). Rather than understanding emotions as individual or private, we are invited to consider the idea that emotions are 'located in movement and circulated between bodies' (Zembylas, 2011, p. 152). One reading of affect and emotion within a schooling context may be understood through exploring the idea of affect as social – or collective (Ahmed, 2004a). In a study of emotional geographies in a school setting, Zembylas (2011) explored the power of collective affect and emotion that contributed to experiences of disenfranchisement and exclusions for some students. Drawing on Ahmed (2004a), Zembylas (2011) shares stories of the way emotions collide and 'stick', generating 'relations of towardness or awayness' for young people experiencing trauma through incidents of racism, bullying, and abuse while at school (p. 151). Reflecting on racism specifically, Ahmed (2004b) describes the way affective encounters 'shape histories that stick . . . it is here on the skin surface that histories are made . . . and borders materialize as an effect of intensifications of feeling' (p. 39).

Collective affective experiences moving within/across/between bodies in school may be experienced cumulatively over time, occurring as microaggressions – or what Berlant has described as 'crisis ordinariness' (2011, p. 10). In the ordinariness of everyday school, disenfranchised students are experiencing recurring and destructive affective moments that give rise to feelings of shame, anger, fear and hurt–at times leading to violent outbursts (Jones & Spector, 2017; Schoone et al., 2023a; Zembylas, 2020). Microaggressions (Pierce et al., 1977) may be defined as 'everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons solely upon their marginalized group membership' (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). The intersections of microaggressions, critical moments and trauma can be complex (Bryant-Davis, 2018). Microaggressions are not always significant singular events, but rather micro-moments of cumulative traumas diffused within the ordinariness of everyday 'traumas that are enfolded into bodies, both collectively and individually' (Jones & Spector, 2017, p. 302).

The ordinariness within everyday school life means that microaggressions experienced by students might be invisible or minimised by school leaders and teachers because they appear insignificant or unimportant. The invisibility or minimisation gives rise to a number of responses including: (1) the invisibility of unintentional expressions of bias; (2) the perceived minimal harm when it is believed that the student has overreacted; (3) a cultural clash of different ways of being and knowing; (4) and responding to microaggressions with a denial of the experiential reality, loss of integrity and pent-up anger (Sue et al., 2007). The pent-up anger (fear, shame, frustration) may result in an outburst – a predictable genre of protest (Berlant, 2011). While named *micro*aggressions, the occurrences are, nevertheless, aggressions. And while school leaders and teachers might not recognise the affective impact on students, they are nevertheless cumulatively building.

Cumulative everyday experiences of exclusions, bullying and racism, when understood as trauma diffused into the ordinary, provide us with new ways of understanding the affective flow and emotional landscapes circulating in school spaces. Exploring emotions, including outbursts and genres of protest, through reading the affective landscape of microaggressions experienced by disenfranchised young people may illuminate the otherwise unseen. We sought to explore this further through giving voice to students' experiences of schooling through the medium of affective storytelling (Skattebol & Hayes, 2015). Amidst the stories of microaggressions, we discovered kernels of hope experienced by students through microaffirmations or small acts of caring toward them. A term first used by Rowe (2008), microaffirmations are described as 'tiny acts of opening doors to opportunity, gestures of inclusion and caring, and graceful acts of listening' (p. 46). Rather than trauma infused in the ordinary, microaffirmations act upon subjectivities to evoke a sense of becoming 'unstuck' (Berlant, 2011). Conceptualising teacher–student relationships through a microaffirmative approach might offer an alternative imaginary to dominant 'stuck' behaviourist practices. This conceptualisation emerged through our analytical approach that followed the method of affective storytelling.

Affective storytelling and stories of affect

Using a critical affective lens, affective storytelling attunes researchers to social relations and patterns of power (Skattebol & Hayes, 2015). Affective storytelling is a form of 'memory work which encourages people to excavate their embodied memories, [and] the powerful feelings associated with their educational experiences' (Kenway & Youdell, 2011, p. 132). Affective storytelling and reading stories of affect provided us with a sociological lens for mapping the emotional and affective geographies of students' experiences. The mapping was informed by a socio-cultural-spatial analyses of education and emotion (Kenway & Youdell, 2011; Skattebol & Hayes, 2015). Kenway and Youdell (2011) share the ways in which fresh perspectives may emerge through a 'socio-cultural, discursive, spatial and affective approach' (p. 132) to analysis of contexts. They build on the work of Boler (1999), Britzman (1998, 2009) and Walkerdine (1988, 1989) who challenge rationality in education and invite affective readings.

Working with affect, and utilising action research methodology, we sought to understand the critical moments of schooling for disenfranchised students (Schoone et al., 2023a). Specifically, we were interested in understanding how teachers might inquire with students about critical moments from their past schooling experiences and what schools might learn from the insights. In our research, and within the refuge sanctuary of AE settings (Nairn & Higgins, 2011), teachers and students journeyed alongside each other, inquiring together.

The idea of AE as a refuge sanctuary is significant to this research project. The typical settings for AE in New Zealand are small places of learning away from mainstream high schools. Few places are purpose built, and many operate from community centres or church halls with limited resourcing and funding. There are usually kitchens with free food available, games areas and comfortable seating like couches and bean bags. While the physical environments are different to mainstream school settings, the real strength of AE is the low ratio student-to-staff relationships which are based on high-trust relationships built over sustained periods of time.

Table 1. Student participants.

Age	14, 15(9), 16 (3), 18*, 19** *One past AE student participated **One young person who was considered on the pathway to AE participated.
Ethnicity	Samoan (6), Samoan/Niuean (2), Pākehā/NZ European (1), Tongan (2), Māori/Pākehā (1), Māori/Cook Island (2), Cook Island/Samoan (1)
Gender	Male (13) Female (2)

Many young people attending AE describe the ways in which they feel safe to begin to learn again, and students in this research shared similarly. Students referred to AE are those who are excluded from mainstream secondary schools. Students are typically aged 14–16 years. Students attending AE in New Zealand are more likely to be male and identify as Māori or Pacific Island. Table 1 provides an overview of student demographics for this research study.

Two AE managing schools in Auckland were invited to participate in this research. In total, 10 teachers and 20 students participated in the study alongside four academic researchers. Present and past AE Consortium managers contributed in an advisory capacity. Cognisant of Walsh's typology of reflexivity (Walsh, 2003), we practiced personal, interpersonal, methodological and contextual reflexivity through a range of strategies. As a team of researchers, teachers and advisors, we worked collaboratively, drawing critically on the strengths and perspectives of each contributor. We sought to create a safe and critical culture of reflexive practice in order to honour the students' stories, both during the data collection and data analysis phases.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC). From the outset, we were committed to ensuring that students did not feel pressured to disclose any traumatic experiences within the education system. To reinforce this, the Participant Information Sheet emphasised, *'This is not a "tell-all" – share only what you feel comfortable sharing'*. Students were aware that what they shared would be anonymous and pseudonyms would be used to protect their anonymity. Interview data were audio recorded and transcribed. AE teachers worked with students with whom they already had established trusting and safe relationships. This was a critical ethical component of the research and contributed to stories of affect unfolding in revealing and illuminating ways (Dempsey et al., 2016; Garakani, 2014; Gombert et al., 2016; Tilley & Taylor, 2018).

The research project was conducted over a three-year period and students, teachers and researchers inquired together through a series of action research phases (Piggot-Irvine et al., 2021). During the data gathering phase, a range of different data collection methods were thoughtfully developed by the teachers with input from researchers and feedback from students (see Fair et al., 2023, for a comprehensive outline of these methods). The methods reflected the relational context of AE and included reciprocal shared storytelling, arts-based methods such as photo-elicitation and go-along interviews, and talanoa (Carpiano, 2009; Croghan et al., 2008; Faʻavae et al., 2016; Vaioleti, 2006). Talanoa is a Pacific research approach to meaningful conversation and includes relationally focused conversations in small groups or one-on-one. During the data collection phase with students, AE teachers gathered 15 stories. While inquiring with students, AE teachers also shared some of their own

experiences of schooling. The reciprocity of sharing stories fostered rapport and invited the possibility for vulnerability and trust to unfold further (Dempsey et al., 2016). Reflecting on the opportunity to story-tell through talanoa, one of the students shares how this impacted him.

> I have never got the opportunity before to speak freely about the situations that happened but more importantly explain how I felt. This talanoa has given me open ears so that my voice has the opportunity to be heard. It felt really cool to be a part of this. It made me feel important and that somewhere, my story could be making change.

The teachers 'put to work storying devices' (Skattebol & Hayes, 2015, p. 7) using arts-based methods such as go-along interviews and photo-elicitation techniques (Carpiano, 2009; Croghan et al., 2008). The methods helped to create safe distancing and 'mediating tools' between the teachers and the students (Eisner, 2002; Niemi et al., 2015, p. 610). The storying devices were interactive and collaborative as students began to tell stories of critical moments while at school. The art-based approaches are in and of themselves affective approaches, as Eisner (2002) has noted, 'the sense of vitality and the surge of emotion we feel when touched by one of the arts can also be secured ... in the challenges we encounter in doing critical inquiry' (p. 13). Throughout the data analysis phase, the researchers worked together with the teachers to gain insights and make sense of the stories through an in-depth cyclical process of encounters with each story. We used different mediums, including reading and rereading of the original data, sorting and sifting, I-poems, storyline creation, identification of critical moments and visual representations through animated storyboards (Schoone et al., 2023a). In this article, we focus our attention on one aspect of analysis–I-poems.

During the data analysis phase, I-poems afforded a particularly unique technology for attending to the affective (Woodcock, 2016). The creation of I-poems provided unique illuminations of student voice. In this phase of data analysis, teachers and researchers read and highlighted each time pronouns were expressed by students in the interview transcripts. I-poems were then created by writing down what the students shared when referring to themselves in relation to others (Schoone et al., 2023b). What was written was almost always verbatim, and in some instances, the teachers and researchers adapted the wording slightly to strengthen comprehension. However, it was very important to honour student voice, and the integrity of what they shared was not altered in any way. By attending to the young person's voice (I, you, me, we, us), we became aware of the social relations and power circulating in the way they positioned themselves in relation to others (they, them, s/he). Relationships are illuminated in I-poems as students collide with others – the human and the material. Similar to Zhang (2024), I-poems were used a means of distilling and representing the felt sense of microaggressions. Zhang (2024) found that poems enabled her to 'continually revisit, reassess, and reimagine the intricate details and nuanced emotions of the moments when microaggressions occurred' (para. 8). There is only scope here to include a limited number of I-poems. We have selected poems that reflect the data from all AE students. Through a visiting and re/visiting of the students' stories in this research, three themes emerged of affect and disenfranchisement, affect and spaces and affect and healing. The latter theme invited us

to consider otherwise for teacher–student relationships historically situated in the behaviourist paradigm.

Affect and disenfranchisement

While we were interested in understanding critical moments for students during their time at school, we identified there was often no single defining moment. As Sutherland (2016) found in an earlier study on youth offenders' formal schooling, 'the cumulative effect of negative school experiences' (p. 115), or microaggressions, could lead to their alienation from the school system. In our research, we noticed how microaggressions acted as affective forces upon students' feelings. They shaped and reshaped identities, often culminating in a crisis within the ordinary–the crisis overflowing into the violent genre of protest (Berlant, 2011). The following I-poem was created from the words and phrases of one of the students in this research. Junior was a 16-year-old Samoan student who experienced a lot of transition in his early years. He attended multiple primary schools. While he recalled mostly positive primary school experiences, Junior struggled with the transition to secondary school. While there, he was frequently bullied. The bullying began as everyday microaggressions such as mean words spoken to him, insults, or being ignored, sidelined and excluded by other students in his year group. The repeated microaggressions culminated in a violent genre of protest–an outburst of rage (Wetherell, 2013).

Rage

I was getting bullied, getting beaten up
I was made a fool out of
Me in front of the school
I wanted
the Deans to get them to stop.
I still remember
I stood there crying, just looking at them.
I was like if
the Deans weren't gunna help me,
I'll do it myself.
I felt it was a bitch move
I was mad
I couldn't control myself
I got the bat
I smashed
him to the ground.

Junior recalled that he tried to get help. On numerous occasions, he asked teachers and the Dean to stop the bullying but their responses were consistent with minimisation of microaggressions. Junior's request for help from 'hostile, derogatory, and negative messages' was minimised or ignored (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). When he didn't get help, he thought 'in my head I was like, if the Deans weren't gonna help me, I'll do it myself. I started a gang'. While sharing his story, Junior reflected that after the incident 'no one fucked with me anymore'. Wetherell (2013) sheds light on rage and the way in which

affect provides a 'spectacular demonstration of the limits of human agency . . . it arrives unbidden, and we find ourselves in a state of grief, anxiety, rage or euphoria' (p. 221). Sadness, anger, rage, shame and hope circulated in Junior's storytelling. The everyday microaggressions preceding this incident built cumulatively and affectively within him. His shifting subjectivities were being shaped and reshaped by identity politics, power, and the colliding of history, bodies and place while at school. Jones and Spector (2017) write that students 'have acquired these nuanced trauma-filled literacies so well in their bodies that their encounters with these ideas flow through them affectively and pour out of them in undeniable bodily ways' (p. 311).

Junior's story provides insights into the way in which 'shame arises from a collision of bodies, ideas, history, and place' (Probyn, 2010, p. 82). Analysis of affect and shame offers possibilities for thinking otherwise about disenfranchisement of students in school. Shame and dignity are shared human experiences rarely spoken about within school contexts. Surfacing conversations and directing experiences of shame 'towards constructing conditions of dignity' is critical work for educators (Probyn, 2000, p. 57).

While disenfranchisement for Junior centred around his experience of being bullied by other students, for Ardie, disenfranchisement was affectively experienced through racialised microaggressions. Ardie was a New Zealand born Samoan student. While Ardie did have positive and respectful relationships with some of his teachers, he recalls experiences of racism on many occasions 'just being pre-judged, but not all teachers were like that though, but I just felt like most were . . . how they looked at us, how they treated us'. Like Junior, the microaggressions affectively impacted Ardie and culminated in one critical moment. The I-poem illuminates for us the way in which he read and questioned his racialised identity through an affective socio-cultural-spatial experience.

Walking home

Me and a group of other boys:
My boys
My friends
We'd walk home, six or seven of
Us walking home.
We'd wake up in the morning
walk to each
Other's houses
walk to school
Together
walk home
Together
being boys,
We're going to have some noise
play fighting, pushing around
I just feel like that's all part of growing up.
Next day,
We walked to school
We got called up the office and
We're like, 'What the heck'?
Our Deputy Principal

He looked really frustrated
He sat us down
He said: Look here, boys.
We're just gonna put it straight.
You can't walk home together
You're going to have to walk home in groups of two
or just by yourself.
I hadn't really found my voice yet
I couldn't really put an opinion forward
I was so young
but yeah,
We definitely thought it was racist
along the lines of
Our skin colour
being Brown
Another Deputy Principal
He's Brown
He said to us: Look, boys
I'm going to put it to you straight.
It's definitely because yous are Brown.
We don't get it because
Our minds are so young.
We were just in shock
We just want to get home
walking home is
Our time to unwind
walking home feels like
Our freedom
a daily ritual between
Our boys.

Ardie's story speaks directly to the power of affect as something that happens to us. And it can be after, sometimes much later, that emotions surface and meaning is constructed. For Ardie, looking back and reflecting, he shares 'I hadn't really found my voice yet; I couldn't really put an opinion forward; We don't get it because our minds are so young'. Ardie's story resonates with Ahmed (2004b) description of affective encounters which 'shape histories that stick . . . it is here on the skin surface that histories are made . . . and borders materialize as an effect of intensifications of feeling' (p. 39).

Like Ardie, affect and racism are prevalent in school spaces and in the lived experiences of many disenfranchised students (Purcell, 2024). As 'Pacific Island boys', he and his friends experienced racial violence at work through the affective encounter of walking home from school. While walking home presents as a critical moment, Ardie shares how this experience was situated within micro-moments of racial aggression over time. He recalled 'Just being brown, sometimes you've already got a record because of past students. He spoke of the way in which this affected him and the way he was at school 'I'd been naughty and smart at the same time. Most of the reasons I played up. . .is because of the way my school treated Pacific Islanders, the students, how they looked at us, how they treated us, and I just felt really strongly about it'. Dernikos et al. (2020), referring to the work of Franklin-Phipps (2020), explains that 'racism works on and across bodies, teaching outside of rational or

conscious grasp like buzzing background noise' (p. 7). The buzzing background noise for Ardie and his friends became the 'taught' lessons on race and racism and disenfranchisement.

Affective spaces and geographies of disenfranchisement

Through affective storytelling in our research, students shared various ways in which school spaces became powerful educational events or 'scenes of conscious learning' (Snaza, 2020, p. 115). Dernikos et al. (2020) shares that 'something is in the air in schools. It is hard to describe, yet it presses in on you. Heavy, an invisible blanket that you can't shake off. You can't touch it, but you know it is there' (p. 16). For students in this research, affect emerged from inanimate, material spaces and often left them feeling unacknowledged. In the following poems, students talked about the in-between 'isolated' spaces of schools as 'like a prison'. Their recollections of the withdrawal room, the toilets with bars and the office confinement all tell affective stories of the power of in-between classroom spaces and the unintended role of these spaces becoming powerful teachers (Dernikos et al., 2020). In this section, we share three student stories demonstrating the power of affective spaces to act upon students' identities.

Avontales shared his memories with one of the AE teachers in this study through Talanoa (Faʻavae et al., 2016; Vaioleti, 2006). Avontales was a 15-year-old student whose family migrated to New Zealand from Samoa before he was born. A successful athlete, Avontales represented his region in sport. While primary school years were mostly positive for him, learning at secondary school was a struggle. Avontales recalled what it was like to be sent to the withdrawal room repeatedly over his 18 months of attending secondary school. His experiences were similar to other AE students in this study, who had previously attended the same school.

Withdrawal room

We call it prison.
You can't eat
You can't do anything
You just sit there and write.
It's not even going to change me
It just made me get angrier and angrier.
I just felt like, left out
My boys were gone
I felt hurt
I wanted to be with
My boys.

For Avontales, the isolation space was not just physical and repressive, but the repeated affective experience evoked feelings of 'hurt', 'anger' and aloneness. The containment served as a behaviourist measure of control, perhaps attempting to 'fix' him. Yet Avontales reflected 'it's not even going to change me, it just made me get angrier and angrier'. Following days of being repeatedly sent to the 'prison', Avontales recalled feelings of anger and frustration. He had an encounter with a school leader, 'who blamed

me for something I didn't do . . . I got a massive hiding from my dad. The next day I went to school, and I just swore at her'. It was a short time after this that Avontales was excluded from school. His experiences reflect ways in which microaggressive moments can cumulate and become critical moments of crisis – crisis in the ordinary (Berlant, 2011).

Shani (also Samoan) shared similar experiences of isolation when she was sent to the 'office 24/7'. She recalled many reasons for the class withdrawal including being a 'trouble maker', not 'listening to teachers' and 'getting into fights'. She remembered the affective experience of isolation as evoking feelings of loneliness, recalling that it was 'lonely . . . really lonely'. Using photo-elicitation and a story board approach (Croghan et al., 2008), Shani and her AE teacher engaged in affective storytelling. She recalled frequently being sent to the office and being told to complete a 'thinksheet'. Her strongest memories–the repeated experiences of isolation as a form of microaggression–are reflected through this I-poem.

Office 24/7

I always went to the office 24/7
I always went to the office
I always 24/7
I had to write what
I did wrong
I had to write what
I did wrong
I had no friends.

Sami's repeated affective experiences of physical isolation 'stuck' to her, shaping her understanding of self in relation to others (Ahmed, 2004a; Zembylas, 2011). She recalled 'I was the troublemaker. I was the bad influence. Watch out! Here comes the trouble-maker!' Sami's cumulative experiences of microaggression were a 'training of intuition' to know her place in the school system (Berlant, 2011, p. 53). Socio-cultural-spatial configurations resonated through affective experiences for many of the AE students including Shami. While alienated by physical spaces, AE students also reflected on ways in which they felt alone and disconnected relationally with their teachers. Both Shami and Atawhai (Samoan/Niuean) struggled to adapt to the lack of relational connection with teachers in secondary school. Atawhai captures this by recalling the ways in which the teachers 'just looked very dead'. The 'like a prison' reflections are shared in this I-poem.

Like a prison

Our school buildings were old and dark like a prison
They had bars on the toilets
I just hated it.
They just looked very dead, the teachers, like almost in a coffin
They just looked very dead, one foot in the grave kind of thing.

Atawhai had positive memories of her primary school, but things changed abruptly when she transitioned to high school. She recalled 'no more fruit breaks … it gets replaced with exercise'–the body disciplined (Markus, 1993). Atawhai also found learning in class alienating and wondered if it was because she was 'PI' (Pacific Islander). She recalled 'I did ask for help a lot at the beginning. They won't actually help you. I don't want to say it was because we're PI or anything. They would go to all the other kids and then come to us at the last minute. I knew I wasn't going to get help. I just didn't bother showing up'. For Atawhai, there wasn't any critical moment, but rather she recalled cumulative negative messages verbal and nonverbal of who she was in relation to others and in relation to spaces constructed and affectively experienced.

Like Avontales, Shami and Atawhai, all AE students recalled lessons taught, or perhaps intuitively sensed in the in-between spaces of schools. The recurring microaggressions were a 'training of intuition' to know their place in the school system (Berlant, 2011, p. 53). Drawing on the work of Foucault and Bernstein, Sibley (1995) provides a useful socio-spatial critique on the social geographies of exclusion. He highlights the ways in which we might trace the genealogical foundations of schools to make sense of current practices of exclusion. Supported by institutional control and behaviourist approaches, in-between spaces across schools are for some students 'like prisons'. Through students' affective storytelling, we read the ways in which spatial affect resonates across school spaces through acts of discipline, surveillance, power and control (Lohmeyer & Threadgold, 2023). Markus (1993) writes, 'time and space are joined in rules which govern … the building and its management determine who does what, where, with whom, when and observed by whom' (p. 97). Repeatedly being withdrawn from the classroom/learning spaces, the AE students in this research learned lessons of exclusion. Atawhai recalled 'I knew I wasn't going to get any help, so I just didn't bother showing up'. Shami, shared how after years of isolation and exclusion, she was expelled– 'I don't know what I got expelled for'. The social spaces and the in-between affective spaces of exclusion, for the AE students, were often pedagogical. They shaped and reshaped through affectivity, identities and 'stuck' to bodies–training intuition (Berlant, 2011). School environments were not merely containers or backdrops where learning occurred, or didn't occur. This research resonates with the idea that schools are 'social spaces that produce and reproduce models of social interactions and practices, while also mediating the relational and pedagogical practices that operate within' (Baroutsis et al., 2017, para. 13). Schools are landscapes of affect whose cartography of contours, ridges and boundaries have been made visible by these students' stories.

There are critical questions that emerge from disenfranchised students' affective stories about the power of teacher–student relationships. The affective stories shared are powerful 'lessons learned' by disenfranchised students about who they are (the shaping and reshaping of their identities) and about what matters most (and who scripts the narrative). This research raises questions of agency when students experience disenfranchisement. What if a young person is unable to 'improvise the literacies' needed to survive in the spaces of trauma – in the crisis moments (Jones & Spector, 2017, p. 302)? Are students exercising agency when they disengage from school, or are there exclusionary forces acting upon them, leaving them no choice but to leave? For example, Junior's experience was one of hope (that the Dean might help) and hopelessness in the face of helplessness (when he wasn't heard). Berlant (2010) describes this phenomenon as

cruel optimism, 'the condition of maintaining an attachment to a problematic object in advance of its loss' (p. 94). Specifically relating to schooling, Berlant (2011) explains that 'the compulsion to repeat optimism, which is another definition of desire, is a condition of possibility that also risks having to survive, once again, disappointment and depression, the protracted sense that nothing will change and that no-one, especially oneself, is teachable after all' (pp. 121–122). Schools were, for many students in this research, sites of cruel optimism. Disengagement and non-attendance became the best way forward to a more hopeful space, as Atawhai articulated 'I knew I wasn't going to get any help, so I just didn't bother showing up'.

Students previously experiencing microaggressions and crises in the ordinary everyday school, shared the ways AE was conversely a safe space for them – a place where microaffirmations were commonplace. Reimer and Longmuir (2021) state, 'the persistent experience of microaggression requires persistent counteraction to dispel its effects' (p. 74). Counteractive microaffirmations within AE were the frequent, small things that provided positive experiences for AE students. Unpacking the alternative idea of becoming 'unstuck' through a microaffirmative approach is explored in the following sections. We pose some signposts for what might be considered otherwise as an alternative imaginary to the dominant behaviourist teacher–student relationships.

Affect and healing: becoming 'unstuck'

While most students shared stories of negative experiences, there were kernels of hope also. The hopeful stories often centred around microaffirmative student–teacher relationships, and these are reflected in this theme of affect and healing. In this section, we share I-poems from student reflections within AE and school settings. The first I-poem is based on a reflection from Shane–an AE student who at the time of this research had transitioned back to secondary school. Previously, Shane was excluded from secondary school for an incident of fighting with another student. At that time, Shane was experiencing challenges in his home life and acknowledged that this affected him at school. In this I-poem Shane shares his views of being excluded from school.

Reflection

I think there is a lot more than just like a bad kid who doesn't care
I think there is more to that
I feel like
they don't understand that.
I do feel if
they got to know me before
I got expelled
I was just like
I won't say but
I think
I was a good kid in a bad situation
I feel like it shouldn't have been enough to,
you know, end
My whole future, basically.

The healing space that was co-created by Shane and the teacher in this research project provided the opportunity for Shane to reflect safely about critical moments at school. He was able to conclude that he 'was a good kid in a bad situation' and 'not the bad kid who didn't care'. This healing encounter demonstrates the power of emergent listening and trust in teacher–student relationships (Davies, 2014). Shane's teacher spent many weeks 'constructing conditions for dignity' (Probyn, 2000, p. 57) through microaffirmative practices. Shane began to make sense of his past experiences, reimagining himself as 'not the bad kid . . . a good kid'. Drawing on the concept of emergent listening, Jones and Spector (2017) explored with students, ideas about sensemaking, or deep listening, that afforded opportunities for 'new ways of knowing and ways of being' (Davies, 2014, p. 21). Berlant (2011) describes this healing process as the feeling of 'becoming unstuck' (p. 92). For many of the students, including Shane, AE created a safe space for reimagining subjectivities toward new ways of knowing and being.

Kane was part of this research and although his friends attended AE, he remained at school. He wanted to share his story with one of the AE teachers. Kane was brought up in a Samoan-speaking home, and he recalled numerous moments of microaggressions –often racist–toward him and his friends. He also recalled numerous affirmative encounters with teachers, especially three secondary school teachers who believed in him. He recalled how one teacher 'always pushed me. She never ever talked bad about me. She always said "you can do it . . . it was always that you can do it, or you can do better. I know you can do better"'. This I-poem captures another affirmative encounter with a teacher.

I think it was maybe three days in a row
We didn't do work at all
He just wanted to get to know us
He built connections between every single one of us
I thought
He was really cool
He identified really quick
Our learning
Our backgrounds
He just knew us really well
You could tell
Us just the best
He really believed in us
He believes in
You so much it gives
You a little hope, and that's all it took.
I passed, the only ever English class throughout the whole of high school.

Through this reflection, and the microaffirmative encounters with other teachers, Kane linked teacher belief and high expectation to academic success. In his talanoa with the AE teacher, he remembered thinking 'Oh damn, why is this guy, why does this teacher believe in me so much'? He recalled 'a bit of hope and that's all it took. That was the only ever English class I passed throughout the whole of high school'. Out of healing relational connections with his English teacher and several other teachers at his school, Kane became 'unstuck' from previous years of academic failure.

Shane, Kane and other students in this study, experienced microaffirmations that counter-acted affective 'sticky' microaggressions (Reimer & Longmuir, 2021). The

affirmative moments with AE and school teachers enabled a 'training of intuition' otherwise (Berlant, 2011, p. 53). Jones and Spector (2017), drawing on (Berlant, 2011) suggest that through the practices of emergent listening and training intuition, teachers may support students to undo the affective stuck-ness layered through years of accumulated crisis in the ordinary.

Lessons from the edge

In this section, we focus on affect and healing and the implications for teacher–student relationships reimagined away from behaviourist responses situated within 'hierarchical power-dominant structures' (Yoneyama & Naito, p. 318). In a recent study, Lohmeyer and Threadgold (2023) examined teacher to student bullying as affective violence and recognised the complexity of social and moral hierarchies that typically exist in schools to maintain power and control. The students' stories from this study, and that of Lohmeyer and Threadgold (2023), invite teachers into a different way of seeing and knowing. There are signposts from these studies indicating that typically teachers have 'trained their intuition' (Berlant, 2011, p. 53) to respond in a reactionary, disciplinary way to affective moments of trauma experienced by students while at school. In many of the AE students' stories, teacher behaviourist responses led to student alienation and exclusion. Shane captured this in his reflection of being expelled 'they just thought about this kid, you know he did wrong, he should be punished but not like why did he do wrong and how could we help him?'

In this article, we argue for an unlearning and relearning of teacher–student relationships by leaning into the affective turn. Probyn (2000) provides one possibility of a reframing of teacher–student relationships through creating relations of dignity. This is especially pertinent in moments of student trauma and shame. Earlier in this article, we reflected on the idea that shame is rarely spoken about within school contexts. In many AE students' stories, shame and rage were interconnected and circulated in affective spaces, at times unconsciously known and unnamed. The students' stories highlight the need to surface conversations that direct experiences of shame 'towards constructing conditions of dignity' (Probyn, 2000, p. 57). If our default as educators is to pathologise, alienate and exclude students for rage, we miss the real story and the deep need that stems from affective experiences that give rise to shame. In the I-poem, *Rage*, Junior was excluded for beating the boy who had bullied him. The previously untold story and the deep need are shared earlier in the poem. He shares 'I was made a fool out of; me in front of the school . . . I stood there crying, just looking at them [the Deans] . . . if they weren't gunna help me, I'll do it myself'. Junior reveals to himself and the teacher his story of needing to be heard and understood. Through the practice of talanoa, relational dignity and emergent listening, Junior became, in that moment, 'unstuck' (Ahmed, 2010; Davies, 2014; Probyn, 2000).

As educators, how might we witness shame and honour students' lived experiences of pain with respect and understanding? And how might we listen with all of our senses, in ways that open up new possibilities and the reshaping of identities otherwise? Signposts are offered to us from the students' stories that may suggest ways forward toward microaffirmative effective teacher ontology and pedagogical practice. All AE students shared stories of microaffirmations from empathetic teachers through practices such as emergent listening and relational pedagogy (Bishop, 2019; Davies, 2014; Jones & Spector, 2017). Emergent listening was powerful as a healing practice, enabling students the safe space to surface and share stories

about affective experiences of trauma, bullying, racism, exclusion and shame. Teachers, especially those in AE contexts, practiced listening in ways that invited students to consider and reconsider their identities and retell narratives of their affective experiences in affirming ways. Students constructed and deconstructed their stories and, in so doing, journeyed toward becoming 'unstuck' (Ahmed, 2010). Ardie and Junior's I-poems provide us with insights into the ways in which they were able to tell, to question, to retell–shaking off their 'stuck-ness'. Jones and Spector (2017) describe this as an 'undoing of embodied certainties' through listening that 'tunes us into bodily literacies as we witness and partake of new becomings' (p. 311).

Reimer and Longmuir (2021) remind us that 'the persistent experience of microaggression requires persistent counteraction to dispel its effects' (p. 74). Counteractive microaffirmations were the frequent, small relational connections that provided positive experiences for AE students. Microaffirmations hold promise for reshaping teacher–student relationships and creating safer affective spaces in school contexts.

As educators conditioned by the dominant development theory of behaviourism and deeply ingrained in the industrialist modern concept of schooling, it is hard to shake off the 'stickiness' (Ahmed, 2004a) of entrenched epistemologies to entertain alternative imaginaries. Rasmussen (2013), drawing on Berlant (2011), invites us to 'suspend our attachments to repair' that are our default taken-for-granted practices (p. 204). This research invites us to consider the possibility that teachers may unlearn and relearn, training intuition otherwise through a deeper understanding of affect and the power of affective social-spatial dynamics in teacher–student relationships.

This research is based on the premise that students disenfranchised from mainstream schools have critical insights to share with policymakers, school leaders and educators (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018; Schoone et al., 2022). We suggest that these insider perspectives should be privileged when it comes to school improvement considerations. As Bourke and Loveridge (2018) assert, 'in order to take student voice seriously, the system (policy and practice) that children learn in must radically change *through* listening and acting on their views, and position student voice as political and educational imperatives' (p. 1). As indicated earlier, one of the students in this research project shared that an opportunity to talanoa 'has given me open ears so that my voice has the opportunity to be heard . . . somewhere my story could be making a change'. Historically within Aotearoa New Zealand, students excluded from school have rarely shared their stories with researchers and educators. Through this research project, we have learned that when students are afforded opportunities to be heard, new ways of knowing and understanding might be realised for both students and teachers.

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