Teachers-in-and-as-Discourse: A Foucauldian Analysis of Dominant Teaching Discourses in Student Agency Informed Primary School Classrooms

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Abstract

Student agency is a concept that has been implemented in primary schools globally, and here in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Student agency ideas position students as "having" agency, giving students a say in their experience of learning and being at school (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2001). Student agency is often associated with 21st-century skills and competencies that originated in global educational reform discussions that positioned the ideas around student agency as innovative, transformative and as a means of disrupting the traditional roles of the teacher in control of the classroom. However, student agency ideas appear to sit within existing educational and learning infrastructure including concepts of traditional timetables, compulsion and obedience, and particular types of knowledge and learning (e.g., literacy) that continue to be privileged over others. Some scholars question the possibilities for student agency ideas within an educational system structured around compulsion, obedience and obvious differential power relations.

This study explores the way teachers discuss what they do in their day-to-day teaching practice with their students in relation to student agency ideas. Michel Foucault's concepts of discourse, subjectivities and disciplinary practices are used to analyse how teachers are formed through discourse into particular kinds of teacher subjectivities and how these subjectivities influence the ways teachers can speak, act and teach as they interact with the ideas of student agency. Nine teachers from Auckland primary schools who had engaged in student agency professional development discussed their day-to-day practices and the way they implemented student agency within their various roles and responsibilities. The way teachers talk about their micro-practices of timetabling, meetings, expectations and workload provide interesting insight into the day-to-day life of the primary teacher. Findings include evidence of three teacher subjectivities formed in discourse: the above-and-beyond teacher; the teacher as performer; and the accountable teacher. These three subjectivities were analysed alongside the findings on how teachers discuss student agency ideas. Two insights emerge from the interaction between these teacher subjectivities and student agency ideas. First, teacher subjectivities are amplified alongside student agency. Student agency ideas do not transform or disrupt teacher subjectivities—they amplify them. Second, student agency ideas have been detached from their original educational purpose and assimilated into market-oriented, neoliberal ideas about producing future workers. There was little evidence of resistance to this and little evidence of any of the kind of system change that student agency ideas were originally designed to provoke.

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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 used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), 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.

Gina Potter

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study investigates the concept of student agency in primary schools in New Zealand. It looks at teachers' responses to the concept against the wider backdrop of their ideas about what it means to be a teacher. The study's purpose is to explore, through the focus on student agency, some of the reasons why change in education is so difficult. It looks at how teachers talk about—and use—the student agency concept, not to evaluate whether they are using it correctly, but as a means of identifying the underlying but unspoken discourses constituting what teachers can say and do. I am interested in the extent to which these discourses disallow new concepts and how they mitigate the threat of change. My aim is to explore whether looking at what is happening at the discourse level can provide insights for thinking in new ways about educational change.

I became interested in the student agency concept when I was a primary school teacher in Auckland, New Zealand. I observed the term student agency being used in ways that, I thought, did not fit with the intended meaning of the term when it first began to appear in the education policy documents of the time. As I understood it, *student agency* meant children having a say in their learning; children being empowered to actively make choices about, to take responsibility for, and to direct their own learning. I had encountered this idea when I was working in alternative schools. However, when teaching in mainstream schools, I noticed student agency being spoken about alongside literacy and numeracy progress and reporting matrices, and, when I investigated further, I saw similar tools and links on the websites of several other schools. The use of business management terms like *setting targets*, *providing evidence of reaching goals*, and *performance indicators* was common, and it appeared that student agency was being thought of a means of getting children to reach certain academic targets. The result of this was, it seemed to me, that the original meaning of the term student agency was changing. Student agency was being treated as if it was synonymous with the capacity to be self-motivated, self-directed or self-managing. And, alongside this, ideas about the purpose of student agency, how children experience it, and who was responsible for achieving it, were different to how I understood the term.

These observations made me wonder about other new concepts in education that may have been modified to fit with traditional teaching practices. In my earlier postgraduate studies, I developed an interest in both future-focused education and alternative/democratic education,

and, given this background, I found the new language of student agency, and what it might mean for children and learning, concerning. I wondered if it was the language itself that was creating an environment in schools that might be aligned with business models and economic aspirations. I also wondered if the idea of student agency could be used to maintain control and tradition in schools rather than to disrupt and transform schools.

As I began the work described in this thesis, I became aware that there was already a large existing literature on the concept of student agency. Some of this work focuses on exploring what the concept means, what it "should" mean, and/or what it should "do." Other work focuses on exploring teachers' and/or students' perceptions or experiences when student agency approaches are enacted in schools. My interest is not in how teachers and students understand student agency or whether it is being "correctly" implemented in schools. Rather, I am interested in how concepts like student agency interact with, and are affected by, existing teaching practices, and, importantly, what this means for change in education. To explore this, I designed a research project to investigate what happens when a concept like student agency is introduced into schools, and how this might shed light on what it is that drives teachers and schools. The aim of this research was to explore what lies "underneath" what can be observed at the surface. The study uses the French philosopher Michel Foucault's concepts of discourse, as in the discourse of school—how we discuss and speak of schools and the people within them—and subjectivity to frame this work.

Nine primary school teachers were interviewed about their day-to-day teaching practices, framed by the structure of the daily and weekly timetable. They were also asked about the work they completed and their roles and responsibilities outside of their in-class teaching time. Following this, they were asked how student agency featured within that daily structure. Their own personal perspectives and opinions of the value of student agency were not sought. This material was then used to investigate the underlying discourses that drive teacher practice and how they speak about their practice in primary schools that have embraced the concept of student agency.

Chapter 2 summarises the development of the student agency concept across a variety of different contexts. First, it describes the concept's origins in the philosophies of the alternative education movement. Then it outlines how student agency was defined, developed and used by educational psychologists. Following this, the incorporation of the concept into neoliberal education reforms and the 21st-century learning movement is described. The political context

for these reforms is outlined and some of the policy work of the time is described. The implications for classroom teachers, in particular the "mixed messages" they experienced, are explored, and, following from this, the study's research problem is outlined. This chapter works to provide an overview of multiple factors that were present prior to the concept of student agency being introduced and spoken about in schools and positions student agency as a potentially problematic concept.

Chapter 3 reviews the research literature on student agency. It describes the range of past approaches, showing that this work has either been conceptual (focusing on defining the concept and how it should be used), or, when it has involved empirical studies, these have primarily been phenomenologically influenced investigations of teachers' and/or children's perceptions of the student agency concept. The chapter works to expose gaps in the research, where there has been an emphasis on certain research approaches and policy foci by others engaged in the critique of student agency in schools. It presents the idea of investigating different ways of making sense of student agency that goes beyond surface level explanations and definitions of the concept. The chapter ends by making the case for an alternative research approach that focuses on teachers and briefly introduces the Foucauldian concept of discourse that is used to frame the study and analyse the data.

In Chapter 4, the methodological approach to the study is outlined with an acknowledgement of the overarching poststructural theoretical framework Foucault's work sits within. The concept of discourse, including the development of teacher subjectivities, and associated disciplinary practices is elaborated on in more detail. Foucault's notion of resistance is also introduced. The chapter includes an explanation of the research design and research methods with an overview of the nuanced approach to questions for interview participants. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the ways Foucault's concepts will be used in the study and frame the research project that focusses on the identification of discourses over the personal experiences of individual teachers. Chapter 5 follows on with a detailed review of a data analysis framework informed by the work of Bronwyn Davies, Deborah Youdell, and Jill Sanguinetti where discourses are located within the data and mapped into relevant constellations.

Chapters 6 and 7 present the study's findings, covering both the interactions between student agency and teacher subjectivities, as well as the findings from the study on transformation and change in primary schools. The two chapters work to answer the research questions posed and

deliver insights for consideration in the final chapters. Chapters 8 and 9 discuss the implications of the findings and draw links between what is happening in primary schools and what is happening in wider societal contexts. Here, discourse and subjectivities and the connections between school level discourse and wider social discourse are explored. The thesis finishes with a reflection on the real possibilities for change in primary schools and offers some further questions for future studies.

Chapter 2: The Development of Student Agency

This chapter maps out the development of the concept of student agency. It starts by describing its association with child-led learning and democratic schools within alternative education, then details the development of a psychology-informed view of student agency. I then outline the neoliberal ideologies that changed the structure of the New Zealand school system in the late 1980s and the subsequent formation of the "21st-century learner." The chapter concludes by questioning the appropriateness of inserting a concept derived from alternative education settings into mainstream, compulsory school environments.

Democratic Education Models

The origins of the student agency concept can be linked to two unrelated sets of events. Firstly, the development of the alternative education movement in the first part of the 20th century, particularly the unschooling and democratic schools movement; and secondly, the development of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) definition and selection of competencies (DeSeCo) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2001), and the disposition of acting autonomously (Rychen & Salganik, 2000). This first section explores the original school-based idea of students acting with agency within spaces of learning.

A key moment in time for democratic schools was the establishment of the Summerhill School in the UK in 1921 by A. S. Neill (Stronach & Piper, 2008). Summerhill promised an environment of self-directed learning, optional courses and classes, with children having a say in the running of the school (Woods & Woods, 2009). Having battled threats of closure and challenges, Summerhill is still open today, and has survived extensive investigations by state educational authorities and legal challenges (Cassebaum, 2003). The democratic environment at Summerhill is realised and practised through whole-school meetings (Stronach & Piper, 2008).

Summerhill, along with other democratic schools, was created in reaction to an authoritarian-based approach to the schooling of young children. Child development and the rights of the child entered the schooling discussion, challenging past educational models and suggesting that late industrial education had the potential to "stultify children's creativity and undermine their energies for learning" (Conroy et al., 2008, p. 9). Sudbury Valley School (SVS) and its subsequent offshoots (there are now 30 affiliated schools globally) follow similar principles to

Summerhill (Gray, 2013). At SVS, students decide how they spend their school day; they are involved in all decisions that affect them; and run judicial committees that maintain rules, set directions and consequences for rule breakers (Cassebaum, 2003; Gray, 2013). The longevity of this network of schools indicates that there is a place in society for educational spaces that directly contest mainstream ideas of what is considered normal in schools.

Anthropologist and author Peter Gray, and David Chanoff, co-founder of SVS, carried out extensive longitudinal studies on the lives of over 800 SVS graduates (Gray & Chanoff, 1986). Their findings reflect some of the potential longer term benefits of implementing student-led learning and democratic practices for young people:

> The students go on to lead deeply satisfying lives. Most are unusually resilient. Almost all feel that they are in control of their destiny. In disproportionately high numbers—42 percent—Sudbury graduates become entrepreneurs. The alumni study shows that a "spectacularly high number" pursue careers in the arts—music, art, dance, writing, acting. Math, business and education are popular routes, too. (Marano, 2006, p. 94)

In New Zealand, Auckland Metropolitan School (1976) and Timatanga Community School (1984) were established in Auckland, and Tamariki School (1966) and Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery (2001) opened in Christchurch. All except Auckland Metropolitan School remain open today. These schools follow (or followed) democratic principles similar to those practised at Summerhill and SVS schools. In the 1970s, *Deschooling Society* author Ivan Illich (1996) visited New Zealand to discuss his ideas about the negative aspects of compulsory, mainstream education, building on the alternative education movement. Influenced by Illich, the U.S. educationist John Holt argued that reforming public education was impossible, that true education required "unschooling," which Farenga (2010) defined as follows:

> This is also known as interest driven, child-led, natural, organic, eclectic, or self-directed ... When pressed, I define unschooling as allowing children as much freedom to learn in the world, as their parents can comfortably bear. The advantage of this method is that it doesn't require you, the parent, to become someone else—a professional teacher pouring knowledge into child-vessels on a planned basis. Instead you live and learn together, pursuing questions and interests as they arise and using conventional schooling on an "on demand" basis, if at all. (n.p.)

As outlined above, the concept of children having the ability to direct their own learning is central to the vision of democratic schools and unschooling environments. In these spaces, children play an active role in the running of the school, the management of rules and consequences, and how and when they experience learning. The concept of a democratic school and student agency appear to make sense together. It is the view of the child, along with the

environment and conditions that collectively make up a learning space, that is conducive to the development of a sense of agency for children. In democratic schools, the child is part of the learning environment—they are affected by the people, the physical environment, and the rules and routines that provide the structure to these spaces. The child's ability to have a say in their own learning remains in the context of a collective understanding of boundaries and expectations of each alternative setting.

However, more recent use of the term student agency in psychology-informed literature, has a very different meaning. In this context, student agency appears as internal motivation, individualistic in nature, and may also be aligned with the "growth mindset" concept (Dweck & Molden, 2008). This new, psychologically oriented meaning of student agency arose in a triad of aligned factors—the neoliberal reforms of the early 1990s, the development of the DeSeCo objectives and the construction of the 21st-century learner. The next section outlines how this happened.

A Psychological Construction of Student Agency

In 1998, Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische posed the fundamental question "What is agency?", drawing from various conceptualisations of agency including psychological, sociological, and discursive interpretations. They proposed that human agency is a vague and elusive concept that is often discussed in simplistic or tightly framed terms, ignoring the temporal variability that agency draws from:

> The result has been a flat and impoverished conception that, when it escapes the abstract voluntarism of rational choice theory, tends to remain so tightly bound to structure that one loses sight of the different ways in which agency actually shapes social action. (p. 963)

They addressed this by conceptualising agency through a temporal iteration that embraces the concept of past, present and futures orientations to action:

> Theoretically, our central contribution is to begin to reconceptualize human agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment). (p. 963)

One of the concerns raised by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) was the demarcations and boundaries around different conceptualisations of agency including the way psychological constructs are used to understand agency. Psychological, and sociocognitive perspectives of student agency are widely referenced in the field of student agency with the work of Albert

Bandura (1989, 2001) often cited in scholarly literature. Bandura conceptualised agency as a cognitive construct and offered a sociocognitive theory of agency. This view of agency prioritises the individual human subject as the source of intent and will to action. In turn, this deprioritises sociological and discursive theories of agency that could be picked up and applied in classroom and learning contexts. Bandura's psychology-informed theories are strongly supported by other theorists who have built on his conceptualisation of agency (Dweck & Molden, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006).

Carol Dweck (Dweck & Molden, 2008), Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (2000) and Richard Zimmerman (Zimmerman and Cleary, 2006), reinforced a psychology-informed view of student agency. They proposed that with the "correct" growth mindset (Dweck & Molden, 2008), self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006), self-regulating, self-motivated students will reach personal success and academic achievement. This view promotes the benefits for student agency in schools (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006). What these views don't allow for is an analysis of what is meant by the term *self* (Davies & Harré, 1990) beyond an assumed view of a stable, coherent being. Nor does a psychological view fully acknowledge the complexity and interdependencies within the classroom environment, with all its nuances, that the individual student is immersed in. This psychology-informed view has been challenged by some scholars from other epistemological positions (Charteris, 2016, Charteris & Smardon, 2018) who held different views to the ones presented by Bandura (1989, 2001), Dweck and Molden (2008), Ryan and Deci (2000) and Zimmerman and Cleary (2006).

The psychological view of agency is effective in placing the focus of the notion of agency onto the individual student who has or hasn't agency. This positions the possibilities for agency away from the complexity of classroom environments, and other mitigating factors that could influence the student's learning experience in the classroom, such as factors influencing students at home. A psychological framing may be dependent on assumptions that students arrive at school on an equal footing. Alongside the development of the psychological view of agency, global education reforms, informed by neoliberalism, were taking place. The next section briefly explores these reforms and the effect they had in repositioning students and their agency.

Neoliberal Agendas in Education

In the period 1987–1990, in New Zealand, the Labour government of the time led a complete review of the education system. A focus on the need for efficiency and effectiveness in education took a strong hold on educational discourse, driven largely by a global preoccupation with neoliberal ideologies that were supported by the then Treasury and State Services Commission. The formation of the Picot Taskforce in 1987, and multiple key reports of the time—Education and Science Select Committee (1986) *Report on the Enquiry Into the Quality of Teaching* (known as the Scott Report); Meade (1988) *Education to Be More: Report of the Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group* (known as the Meade report); and Picot (1988) *Administering for Excellence: Effective Administration in Education: Report of the Taskforce to Review Education Administration* (known as the Picot report)—led to a radical transformation of education. The Tomorrow's Schools policy (Department of Education, 1998) saw schools transformed into "autonomous and self-managing centres" and devolution was considered the way forward for schools. Each school would form a board of trustees that would be made up of parent representatives. One significant transformation was the assigning of responsibility for the performance of the school to the parents through the board of trustees.

> In New Zealand schools, boards of trustees have overall responsibility for the successful performance of their school and for fostering student achievement. (Education Review Office [ERO], 2007, p. 1)

The newly established Ministry of Education (MOE) provided direction to schools through the provision of a national, centrally prescribed curriculum. It set minimum standards and supported schools with accountability and understanding expectations. The implementation of Tomorrow's Schools was communicated as a pathway for greater choice for parents, introducing competition across schools for students, which would in some way ensure increased efficiency and effectiveness, as set out by the Picot Report (Picot, 1988). The justifications for these changes included the need to reduce bureaucracy, for the market to drive change, and to prepare the country and learners for a global economy that featured increased competitiveness across countries (Picot, 1988). These ideas frame the basic elements of neoliberalism.

Tomorrow's Schools and the influence of key players in the business sector was a key turning point for New Zealand schools and changed the way schools functioned (Trier, 2001). The influence of management vocabulary is evident in New Zealand schools and the language that features alongside the concept of student agency also mimics business speak (Ball, 2003).

Managing schedules, setting goals, tracking and monitoring sit alongside the self-monitoring aspect of student agency as does presenting proof of learning through evidence. The influence of this kind of corporate speak produced shifts in the language used in schools. One difference in this particular way of talking about learning is that it focuses on the outcome or output of the learning process, the capturing of the data of the result, and the ability to compare and measure individual children against each other, and school against school. While this approach of comparison and measurement may make sense within a business and production environment, there is the question of whether this way of speaking about learning is aligned to positive long-term educative and societal outcomes. This focus on the success of the individual detracts from alternative ideas of collective concepts of achievement and success (Ball, 2003). The focus on measuring and comparing individuals evolved alongside global preoccupations on competition between countries in measures of educational excellence. A consortium of countries (UNESCO) joined together to explore the desirable capabilities for competitive, confident and capable learners and future workers. The DeSeCo project grew out of this work, as did the 21st-century learner concept. These are briefly outlined below.

The 21st-Century Learner

The development of the psychology-informed construct of human and student agency coincided with a wider education discussion on desirable key competencies for young people to have for a prosperous future. Particular competencies were developed for global use in schools as part of the UNESCO DeSeCo project (OECD, 2001; Rychen & Salganik, 2000). UNESCO brought together representatives from 11 member countries to create a DeSeCo framework that could be used as a template for individual member countries. This project was aligned with the existing OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) work and was in response to, at least in part, increasing concern and questioning of the "adequacy and quality of education" (Rychen, 2004, p. 2) that had been developing throughout the 1980s. There was an unprecedented level of interest in educational policy formation from business organisations and interests that was effective in influencing the outcomes of the DeSeCo project (Rychen & Salganik, 2000). DeSeCo was in part driven by a heightened global concern with whether current school systems could provide students with the capacities needed to survive and thrive in the world of the future. Some scholars have described this as a time that business and economic agendas were driving educational goals and foci in a way that hadn't been seen in the past (Hughson & Wood, 2022; Trier, 2001). The employer emerged as a prominent stakeholder in these discussions, and in doing so positioned the student as the future

worker. Four competencies were selected within the DeSeCo framework including the competency of acting autonomously. Autonomy is described in the framework as

> an orientation towards the future and an awareness of one's environment, of social dynamics and of the roles one plays and wants to play. It assumes the possession of a sound self-concept and the ability to translate needs and wants into acts of will: decision, choice and action. (Rychen & Salganik, 2000, p. 14)

The description of Competency 3-B—the ability to form and conduct life plans and personal projects—states that individuals could apply the concept of project management to themselves (p. 15), and that "individuals need to be able to take responsibility for managing their own lives, situate their lives in the broader social context and act autonomously" (Rychen & Salganik, 2000, p. 5).

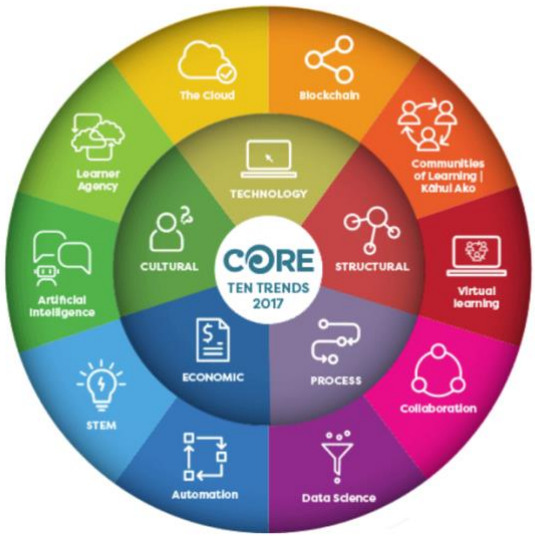
During the review of the existing New Zealand curriculum (NZC) in the early 2000s, the decision was made to integrate the DeSeCo competencies into the new curriculum, replacing the "essential skills" of the previous curriculum (Hipkins, 2018). Acting autonomously became the New Zealand key competency of "managing self" (Hipkins, 2018, MOE, 2007):

> This competency is associated with self-motivation, a "can-do" attitude, and with students seeing themselves as capable learners. It is integral to self-assessment. Students who manage themselves are enterprising, resourceful, reliable, and resilient. They establish personal goals, make plans, manage projects, and set high standards. They have strategies for meeting challenges. They know when to lead, when to follow, and when and how to act independently. (MOE, 2007, p.12)

The term student agency did not feature in the 2007 NZC; however, in 2016, the term learner agency appeared in NZC online resources (Te Kete Ipurangi, 2016) and was listed as a vital component of the top trends in education in Tātai Aho Rau Core Education's (2017) *Ten Trends in Education 2017* (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Ten Trends, 2017



From *Ten Trends in Education 2017*, by Tātai Aho Rau Core Education, 2017 (https://core-ed.org/en_NZ/ten-trends/2017-ten-trends/). Copyright 2017 by CORE Education Ltd. Reprinted with permission.

The term learner agency appeared alongside explanations about how schools could include personalised learning and teach within modern learning environments or innovative learning environments (OECD, 2013). Learner agency has been referred to as "deeply embedded in The NZC key competencies" (Charteris, 2014, p. 176) with the key competencies referred to in the NZC as "the capabilities that young people need for growing, working, and participating in their communities" (MOE, 2007). The psychological view of student agency is emphasised in the additional ERO Evaluation Indicator, as follows:

> Students are given explicit instruction in learning strategies (such as goal setting, self-monitoring and deliberate practice) that enable them to take control of their learning, develop meta-cognitive skills, self-regulate, and develop self-efficacy and agency. (Education Review Office, 2016, p. 33).

Ideas about 21st-century learning were emerging at the same time the DeSeCo framework was being developed—the two concepts are interwoven (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009). Personalised learning appears frequently alongside discussions of student agency and a wider discourse around 21st-century education. Personalised learning indicates a shift away from industrialised approach to education (Paluden, 2006) with the provision of choices for students as a route for increased academic engagement and, ultimately, performance. Though not the same as student agency, personalised learning suggests that learning does not follow a one-size-fits-all approach to education and is customised to fit the student. As students develop their individual

learning plans and learning contracts, they commit to certain goals and targets. In order to keep track of their learning and their progress, a plethora of learning- or project-tracking software has been developed to monitor and track students. Here, students can access their progress, as can teachers, often in real time, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

One such form of educational software (www.schooltalk.co.nz) graphs and charts young children's progress towards preset adult-directed targets. Here, young children have access to visuals that reveal if they are keeping up with expectations or not. Whitham-Blackwell (2017) suggested that there are complexities that surround students' constant self-monitoring that can reinforce the experience of self-criticism and unhealthy self-surveillance. This focus on the visibility of data through graphing and charting that are constant and accessible has the potential to produce a certain kind of student, which might not have been possible before the introduction of these tools. The constantly monitoring and self-assessing student is able to critique themselves against others and reflect on whether they have achieved the targets they set for themselves, or that were set by others, in their learning contracts. This shifting of responsibilities for learning to the individual learner through the self-monitoring techniques that educational tools like schooltalk.co.nz offers is part of a wider neoliberal discourse that permeated New Zealand and international educational policy formation in the late 1980s and 1990s. The neoliberalised, 21st-century learner is the result of decisions made during significant change in the New Zealand education system.

This chapter has described how the student agency concept was introduced into New Zealand schools. It has outlined the concept's origins in alternative or democratic educational philosophies, and its later uptake by—and assimilation into—the neoliberal-informed global education reform movement. The next chapter reviews the research literature on student agency, looking first at the range of different meanings it has had, and then at empirical studies of how it has been interpreted by schools and teachers.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Student agency—the concept of students leading their learning and having an active say in their experience of school—has been in place for the last 3 decades. This concept has emerged from alternative education settings, travelled through economic and political environments, and influenced educational policy formation. This chapter begins by reviewing the literature on student agency, exploring its different meanings and how it has been used. This is followed by a discussion of research that has focused on primary school teachers' responses to student agency, including studies that have investigated teacher beliefs regarding their role in enacting student agency. The final part of the chapter considers research that explores discourses of teaching and introduces the approach that this study takes.

Conceptualising Student Agency

Across the large body of research on student agency, there is a range of ways the term student agency is conceptualised. Much of the work is theoretical, drawing on key human agency literature (Bandura, 1989, 2001; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) providing a framework to then extend discussion to the specific field of *student* agency (Clarke et al., 2016; Klemenčič, 2015; Matusov et al., 2016). Some scholars claimed student agency is undertheorised (Adie et al., 2018; Arnold & Clarke, 2014), but there has been a significant increase in the analysis of the concept within the last decade (Clarke et al., 2016; Klemenčič, 2015; Mameli et al., 2025; Matusov et al., 2016; Schoon, 2018; Torres Castro & Pineda-Báez, 2023).

Acknowledging the complexity of conceptualising the term student agency, Clarke et al. (2016) proposed a hybrid approach of combining Bandura's (1989, 2001) sociocognitive views of agency alongside Giddens's (1984) social structures to resolve the issue of committing to one view or understanding of agency. They combined Bandura's (2001) ideas of intentionality and forethought alongside Giddens's (1984) structuration theory, where social structures and agency are intertwined. Klemenčič (2015) also drew from both Bandura (1989, 2001) and used Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) sociological theories to propose a combination of both perspectives of human agency in her theories of student agency and engagement. Klemenčič (2015) outlined many factors influencing the possibilities for students, as actors, to have the freedom to act. She drew on social cognition theory; aspects of past, present and future conditions; and also relational and social notions of agency. Subsequently, Klemenčič presented a conceptualisation of student agency that appears wide in scope.

The review of the literature in which scholars conceptualised student agency revealed several models that could be used by other scholars to understand and position student agency in their thinking and research projects. For example, Matusov et al.'s (2016) models incorporate four ways of framing student agency: instrumental—individualistic in nature and based on forms of mastery over tasks; effortful, which is determined by the desire and commitment of the self-regulating student; authorial, which goes beyond the individual and considers collective change efforts; and finally, dynamically emergent, where nonhuman agency is discussed (but this is not as commonly found as the other three framings of student agency). Vaughn's (2018) multidimensional model attempts to address the multitude of ways student agency is discussed. Here, Vaughn proposed three elements of student agency: dispositional, which considers the past; motivational, which incorporates self-belief (similar to Matusov's et al.'s, 2016, effortful agency); and positional, how students are positioned within the learning environment. Klemenčič (2023) also adopted a multidimensional conceptualisation of student agency, in addition adding a "dynamic, socio-structurally and relationally conditioned concept" (p. 15). Mercer (2012) built on this by stating that learner agency needs to be understood as being "situated contextually, interpersonally, temporally and intrapersonally" (p. 41). These different interpretations and explanations of student agency highlight the fact there is no one clear "idea" of student agency—it can be considered and positioned in many ways. Adie et al. (2018) adopted Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) temporal relational contexts of activity to explain student agency as:

> temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments—the temporal-relational contexts of action—which, through the interplay of habit, imagination and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations. (p. 970)

Finally, Arnold and Clarke (2014) advocated for a consideration of Davies's (1990) discursive agency when they insisted that "Discourses need to be developed in science education that do not rely on cognitive psychological assumptions" (p. 737). Davies (1990) proposed that children need access to three kinds of resources in the classroom to access opportunities for agency: discursive, personal and social:

> The question is not then whether individuals can be said in any absolute sense to have or not have agency, but whether or not there is awareness of the constitutive force of discursive practices and the means for resisting or changing unacceptable practices. It also depends on whether there is choice amongst discursive practices and whether amongst these are practices which provide the possibility of that individual positioning themselves as agent—as one who chooses and carries through the chosen line of action. (p. 359)

Other scholars have attempted to frame student agency as democratic authorial agency (Matusov et al., 2016). Democratic authorial agency challenges the notion of standardised, "no-child-left-behind" approaches to education (Matusov, 2011) and instead draws on the ideas of John Dewey's progressive education and, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the structures of Summerhill and Unschooling movements.

> Matusov argues that technological pedagogy, aiming at making all students arrive at standardized curricular endpoints, preset by the society, neglects if not actively tries to suppress authorial agency in students (and teachers) only to develop these particular, peculiar, and arguably distorted and paradoxical authorships of resistance and pleasing in this endeavor (Johnson, 2003), However, he insists that these authorships are not very educational in their nature. (Matusov et al., 2016, p. 438)

Here, student agency could be conceptualised as something more aligned to a broader view of children having the freedom to act within their mainstream school setting and to influence their experience of school. Children would negotiate a balance between "teacher-pleasing authorship" and "resistance authorship" (Matusov et al., 2016). However, Matusov et al. (2016) highlighted the ambitious nature of this desired situation and acknowledged that these attempts at agency, even in progressive school environments, are still within the control and the frame of adults' intentions and desired outcomes:

> We see student agency compartmentalized by the teachers' frame—students have free action within it but are expected to endorse the teacher's ends—progressive teachers want students to want what they want them to want and students may exhibit a great deal of effort and authorial creativity in achieving those wants. (p. 441)

Drawing from a tertiary education framework, Torres Castro and Pineda-Báez (2023) presented an analysis of the conceptualisation of student agency globally, attempting to locate cultural trends in how student agency is viewed and researched country by country. They identified dominant frameworks including sociocultural, sociocognitive, assessment and feedback:

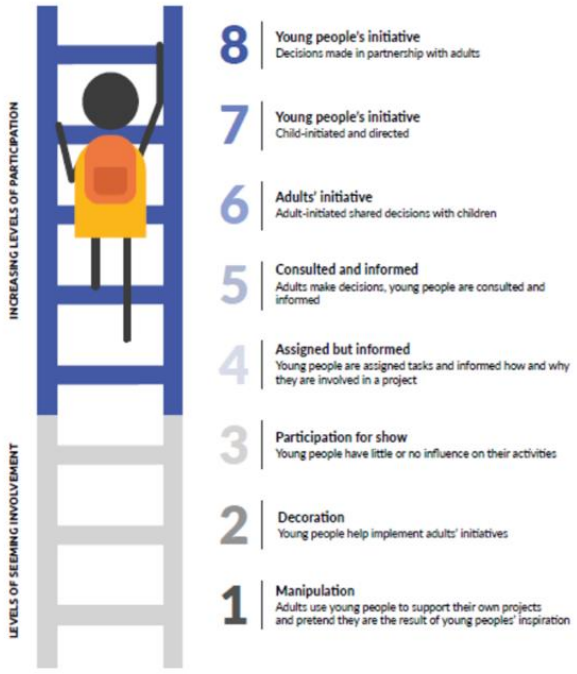
> Five "schools of thought" were identified as the pillars of this emerging literature: (1) a socio-cultural approach to agency; (2) a social-cognitive framework for agency; (3) feedback, assessment, and agency; (4) students' motivation and engagement; and (5) learning analytics, online education, and agency. (p. 1190)

This particular framework may be a useful way to acknowledge the different "threads" of student agency without negating some ways of seeing student agency and privileging others ways. In Castro and Pineda-Báez's framework, sociocognitive understandings of student agency sit as one "pillar," not the dominant pillar.

Other conceptual models have been developed that support the conceptualisation of student agency through the concept of student voice. In the literature on student agency, other related terms—e.g., learner agency and student voice—are also used, sometimes interchangeably and sometimes with different meanings. This has been confusing and some scholars have expressed concerns about the use of these terms. For example, the term student voice has historical links to "pupil voice" in the United Kingdom and "student voice" in the United States and the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 (Cook-Sather, 2014). Student voice research has revealed complications with authenticity, particularly where young people are invited to participate in educational research (Groundwater-Smith, 2007). Concerns around tokenism have also been discussed in the literature (Cook-Sather, 2006; Herriot, 2013), as have concerns around the manipulation of young people under the guise of student voice (Lodge, 2005). Hart's (1997) ladder of child participation (see Figure 2) can be used to consider the level of student voice from tokenistic through to rich child-led situations.

Figure 2

The Ladder of Participation: Eight Levels of Young People's Participation

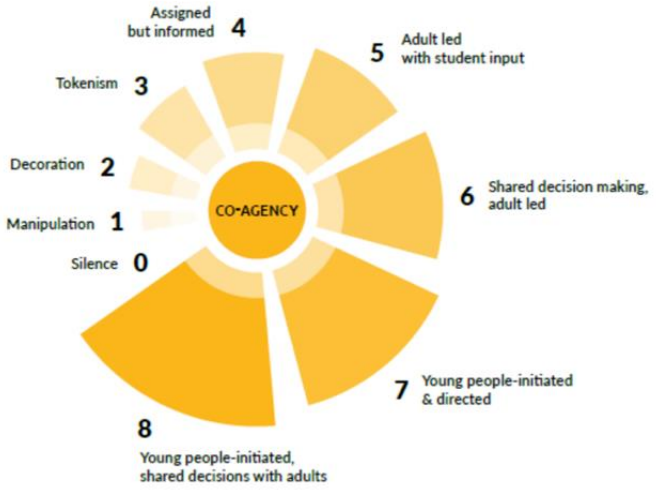


From *Student Agency for 2030*, by OECD, 2019, p. 9 (https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/about/projects/edu/education-2040/concept-notes/Student_Agency_for_2030_concept_note.pdf). Copyright 2019 by OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 Concept Note © OECD 2019. Reprinted with permission.

Hart's ladder was more recently developed into the sun model of co-agency as part of a child-led adaptation of Hart's original voice and participation ladder (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Sun Model of Co-Agency: The Light Is Brightest When We Shine Together



From *Student Agency for 2030*, by OECD, 2019, p. 11 (https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/about/projects/edu/education-2040/concept-notes/Student_Agency_for_2030_concept_note.pdf). Copyright 2019 by OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 Concept Note © OECD 2019. Reprinted with permission.

The intermingling of these concepts and models is an example of the different interpretations of student agency, for example, when student agency becomes seen as the same as student voice. Klocker's (2007) thin and thick agencies are another extension of Hart's ladder"

> "Thin" agency refers to decisions and everyday actions that are carried out within highly restrictive contexts, characterised by few viable alternatives. "Thick" agency is having the latitude to act within a broad range of options. It is possible for a person's agency to be "thickened" or "thinned" over time and space, and across their various relationships… Structures, contexts, and relationships can act as "thinners" or "thickeners" of individuals' agency, by constraining or expanding their range of viable choices. (p. 85)

Fielding (2001) inferred a more complex issue may be in place whereby student voice may be positioned as something exciting and transformative but may, in fact, be perpetuating the status quo in the student–teacher power dynamic:

> Are we witnessing the emergence of something genuinely new, exciting and emancipatory that builds on rich traditions of democratic renewal and transformation? . . . Or are we presiding over the further entrenchment of existing assumptions and intentions using student or pupil voice as an additional mechanism of control? (p. 100)

Mitra (2006) proposed that simply allowing children to speak and to be heard does not always eventuate in partnership and trust building in communities. Fielding (2010) proposed a more ambitious, radical approach termed *radical collegiality,* where students meet adults as equals in problem solving and decision making in "spaces of possibility" (p. 67), and promoted the idea of "creating spaces for restless encounters" (p. 67). He discussed the rarity of this scenario:

> One of the great weaknesses of formal institutions like schools is that they have a tendency to solidify and perpetuate the separate roles of those who come within their remit and in so doing deny or marginalise spaces of possibility. It is a weakness because, insofar as they do this, they close down the very opportunities for emergent and creative learning they are in large part intended to promote. (p. 67)

In a similar conclusion to Klemenčič (2015), scholars like Clarke et al. (2016) provided a platform for further generalisation and ambiguity when theorising student agency. They concluded by stating that student agency is both psychological and social, drawing on individuals' thought and freedom of will alongside consideration of their environmental constraints and conditions. This fluidity of thought regarding a complex, undertheorised concept could contribute to the ambiguity and confusion experienced by teachers working with the concept in their classroom. What is evident from this literature review is the significant complexity attributed to the term student agency, proof of the elusiveness (Vaughn, 2020), vagueness (Arnold & Clarke, 2014) and "dizzying" ways of defining it (Vaughn, 2018, p. 64).

For the purposes of the study described here, the work of Mameli et al. (2025) provided a robust definition for student agency:

> Student agency [is] generally conceived as learners' proactive and potentially transformative participatory acts through which they take the initiative and eventually influence their learning environment …. Politically, the promotion of student agency represents democratic values, as it encourages participatory citizenship and equity in education by giving all students a voice in their educational pathway (Cook-Sather, 2020; Klemenčič, 2017; OECD, 2019). (p. 1)

This definition acknowledges the importance of student agency generating transformative practice within the learning environment (not just focused on the individual student) that is linked to democratic values and equity in education.

Also contributing to the conflation of student agency and student voice is the use of the term learner agency instead of student agency in the literature. *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Te Kete Ipurangi, 2007) uses the term learner agency rather than student agency. The language of learning became more prevalent in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Biesta, 2005), shifting the

language from student to learner, teacher to facilitator, and promoting the emergence of lifelong learning. Some scholars included both terms (student agency and learner agency) in their research (Charteris & Smardon, 2019; Charteris & Thomas, 2017), while others made clear their reasons for selecting one or the other (Adie et al., 2018). In the study described here, I decided to use the term student agency rather than learner agency, in line with the position of Adie et al. (2018), who sought to use student agency to reflect the power relations that exist in school organisations:

> The term student agency has been deliberately used instead of learner agency in this issue to foreground classroom assessment situated within educational environments where teachers retain the majority of the power and control in setting curriculum and assessment goals. The articles consider how various historical, theoretical, relational and formal and informal structural contexts constrain or enable student choices and actions in assessment. (p. 2)

Following Biesta (2005), I was also interested in the shift away from the term student towards the term learner, and how that process was part of Biesta's critique on the "learnification" of education (Biesta, 2017).

In the literature, learner agency is linked to students having an understanding of not only what they are learning about, but also why, and knowing where they are at with their learning (Charteris & Smardon, 2018; Mercer, 2012; Özkeskin & Gökçe, 2025). It appears closely linked to assessment (Charteris & Smardon, 2018) and the improvement of academic achievement levels (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006), although the link between agency and improved literacy measures is disputed (Vaughn, 2020). The term learner agency infers that the focus is on the students' learning—having agency in their learning—as opposed to student agency where the focus is on the agency of the student, the person. Interestingly, a significant portion of the literature that referenced learner agency as opposed to student agency is not scholarly literature, but governmental publications (Schoon, 2018). This is an indication of the take-up of this particular term within governmental policy making rather than scholarly research in the field. Biesta (2017) cautioned against immediate acceptance of the term learning (as in learner agency versus student agency):

> Unlike the language of learning, a language of education always needs to pay attention to questions of content, purpose, and relationships. The danger with the rise of the language of learning in education is that these questions are no longer asked, or that they are already taken to be answered (for example according to the suggestion that the only relevant content is academic content, that the only relevant purpose is academic achievement, and the only relevant relationship is for teachers to train students so that

> they generate the highest possible test scores, for themselves, their school, and their country). (p. 45)

The adaptation of the concept of student agency in schools has been explored in detail by scholars concerned with the impact of major wider policy development on the education system, both globally and in New Zealand. This literature review connects the introduction of student agency and how scholars have conceptualised student agency, to the development of ideological ideas held by governmental policy developers and with influence from the business sector. The influence of business interests and the integration of neoliberal ideologies into public education repositions student agency in a particular way, which may look and sound quite different to the origins of student agency within progressive, democratic school environments. The next section explores the literature specifically concerned with the impact of neoliberalism on education and the intersection with the language of student agency in schools and classrooms.

A Neoliberal-Informed Student Agency

There is an existing body of research that brings together the ideas of neoliberalism and increased individual responsibility in learning (Ball, 2003, 2015; Ball & Olmedo, 2013) that runs alongside the introduction of student agency ideas (Charteris, 2014, 2016; Charteris & Smardon, 2018; Charteris & Thomas, 2017; Dargusch & Charteris, 2018). Ball's work critiqued the adoption of business management ideas and policy techniques by the education system. Charteris wrote extensively to critique student agency and student voice and challenged the dominant psychology-informed student agency theorisations in educational research. When read alongside each other, the literature on greater freedoms and responsibilities (Ball & Olmedo, 2013) and the ideas of empowerment (Charteris & Smardon, 2018; Charteris & Thomas, 2017) appear to intersect with the managerial discourse that is a feature of neoliberalism (Ball, 2003). Charteris & Smardon (2018) connected teacher and student agency or student voice with target and goal setting, and self-monitoring. Ball (2003) questioned whether teachers' day-to-day practices and attempts to enact new ideas in classrooms are weighed down by a process of data collection and paperwork overload, with constant reporting on others or themselves.

These bodies of research, when read alongside each other, highlighted the connections between neoliberal ideals and the positive language associated with student agency. The image of the self-motivated, responsible, autonomous entrepreneurs of neoliberalism sits alongside the self-

managing, self-directed student who takes responsibility for their learning (Bradbury, 2019; Miller, 2016; Özkeskin & Gökçe, 2025). Both concepts support the idea that the individual is responsible for their success and achievement (or otherwise), and most importantly the *outcomes* (Yoon & Rönnlund, 2021). Some scholars claimed these ideals suit a middle-class narrative in which learners and individuals in society have access to the same means and resources to support their future success (Biesta, 2020). For groups outside of the middle-class mainstream, access to these ideals can appear problematic (Beach & Dovemark, 2009). When self-direction becomes self-assessment, and self-monitoring becomes self-surveillance, the outcomes of student agency may look different. Matusov et al. (2016) proposed that these student capabilities can present as "self-crimination" (p. 432) in instances where students fail to meet the agreements that are stipulated in their co-constructed learning contracts that feature in 21st-century personalised learning discourse: "In essence, we argue that learning contracts create an illusion of freedom of choice and negotiability in the students, but govern them by guilt that necessarily emerges in students when they have transgressed their own signed contract" (p. 431).

The particular kind of student that is formed by the neoliberal-informed concept of student agency is one who is enterprising and competitive, cognisant of meeting high academic targets (particularly in literacy and mathematics) (Keddie, 2016), responsible, self-improving and self-regulating (Bradbury, 2019). However, Keddie (2016) revealed that under these discourses of what a good student is, students can experience anxiety, guilt, trauma and pain in an attempt to live up to these ideals. Students not meeting these ideals can be seen as unintelligible, or an "impossible learner" (Youdell, 2006a, p.2). These ideas of the more negative aspects of the successful, independent student will be expanded on later in this chapter and are introduced here in the context of the influence of neoliberal ideologies on children and their learning environments.

The literature that examined the connections between neoliberalism and student agency highlighted two further issues—the increased individual responsibility of the student and the powerful discourse of the need for competition and to be the best. There appears to be an acceptance of this even if this pathway is identified as a "fraught process" (Keddie, 2016, p. 116) for some young people and particular groups of young people. Interestingly, both marginalised groups *and* privileged, high-achieving groups of students are affected by these

not always so positive “ideals” of the certain kind of student that is being constituted, produced and reinforced across schools and in classrooms.

Deborah Youdell (2006a) drew on Foucault’s explanation of Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon, an ideal prison model where, rather than having a visible supervisory, physical presence of the regular prison guard, prisoners would not be able to see when they were being observed by guards and therefore would be on constant alert. Foucault (1977) used this model to illustrate the ways that disciplinary power can reach into individuals’ (and populations’) lives without direct force and visibility of the supervisor or one who governs behaviour: “It implies an uninterrupted, constant, coercion, supervising the processes of the activity, rather than its result” (p. 137).

Foucault’s work on power and control suggests the individuals are subjected to relations of power as they are categorised, normalised, observed and ultimately actively engage in self-surveillance (Foucault, 1977). On the surface it may appear that students experience greater freedoms and less hierarchical control when they adopt the self-monitoring and self-assessment of student agency. However, again, it is not until the discourse and the language are unpacked and analysed that concepts that imply freedoms can be assessed and understood. Youdell (2006a) proposed it is the process of the student turning their attention onto themselves in order to be seen as normal, in order to be seen as a good student, that is a form of control and governance of students from a distance. These ideas support the concerns of other scholars about student agency being covert and manipulative. Keddie (2016) proposed that where previously obedience was the cornerstone of top-down power flows in schools, now students are learning responsibility, and are governed without the requirement for such explicit expectations of obedience.

The development and reinforcement of this certain kind of student in education is produced in the classroom with the teacher who adopts various pedagogical approaches. Teachers have a significant influence on how students experience their school day and experience moments in learning (Hattie, 2008). John Hattie’s meta-analysis showed teacher influence as a key determining factor on student achievement. The classroom teacher teaches and facilitates learning in a particular way (Ball, 2003) to produce a particular kind of “desirable” student and future worker. The following sections explore the existing research student agency in the classroom and the impact it may have on students.

Teachers' Understandings of the Student Agency Concept

In student agency educational research, empirical research focuses on a relativist, humanistic position using phenomenological approaches. Those interested in the concept of student agency typically seek out the perspectives of individuals (students, teachers, or principals) to find out more about how the concept is enacted in the classroom (Cronin, 2018; Moses et al., 2020; Smith, 2020). Specific areas of interest in student agency include assessment (Adie et al., 2018; Dargusch & Charteris, 2018), questions around control (Dargusch & Charteris, 2018), links to self-efficacy (Vaughn, 2018) and how students or teachers explain student agency (Arnold & Clarke, 2014). Teacher and student understanding has been identified as a weak point in the research (Vaughn, 2018) and some scholars have attempted to address this (Cronin, 2018; Smith, 2020; Vaughn, 2018).

There are two key themes in the existing research about teacher engagement with the concept of student agency. Firstly, the multiple ways student agency can be understood and interpreted are acknowledged, with the research presenting examples of confusion, contradictions and misunderstandings about what student agency is, and how it can present in the classroom. Secondly, there appears to be little evidence that teachers have a view of student agency that is connected to its original form in democratic schools and alternative education. A significant proportion of the literature examined revealed examples of student agency that would sit on the lower rungs of Hart's ladder of participation (manipulation, decoration), and the small rays of the OECD sun model of co-agency (manipulation, silence).

Weak understanding of the concept of student agency and the conflation of multiple terms (student agency/student voice/learner agency) can lead to situations where teachers are pulled in different directions depending on the situation, as revealed in Rajala et al.'s (2016) research into contradictions in agency. Here, researchers found inconsistencies with teacher actions when attempting to enact student agency in the classroom. This is particularly relevant when children oppose the authority or knowledge of the teacher. Contradictions and inconsistencies become problematic when teachers, principals and policy makers expect children to take for granted the particular "truths" their teacher or the curriculum put forward (Charteris, 2016). Student voice can become student debate or develop into antagonistic situations when teachers are asked to hear and take notice of voices they don't want to hear (Bragg, 2001). This confusion sets up the potential for students to be positioned as troublemakers or off-task (Charteris, 2016) when they see themselves as acting agentically (Rajala et al., 2016). This

confusion or "murkiness" can lead to the negative impact of student voice on student agency (Cook-Sather, 2014), particularly if teachers enact even more authoritarian approaches in response to student debates and challenges (Rajala et al., 2016). These confusions about how teachers are positioned in their classroom as the expert or a guide or facilitator can contribute to a lack of understanding of what student agency looks and sounds like in a classroom.

When teachers were interviewed about student agency, they discussed concepts such as children having choices in the classroom or finding out what the child is interested in (Cronin, 2018; Smith, 2020; Yoon & Rönnlund, 2021). Contradictory language was revealed, reflecting mixed messages about agency and long-held ideas about who has control in the classroom. This is evident when notions of giving children agency and allowing children to make choices are revealed in interviews (Cronin, 2018; Vaughan, 2018). These choices tend to be limited, such as letting children choose what to write about. Nieminen et al. (2021) proposed that the whole idea of someone giving someone agency is "arguably an oxymoron" (p. 10). The use of this type of "giving and allowing" language has been further complicated in research language, with scholars claiming student agency is not something you have or possess (Priestley et al., 2015). Others suggested that the onus of experiencing agency in the classroom is on the student and that "students need to make the most of whatever agency they possess" (Molloy et al., 2020, p. 536).

Some scholars have argued that the ambiguity of student agency enables schools to use it in whatever ways work for them, at times keeping teaching practices anchored to what is considered more traditional classroom environments of teacher-directed teaching and learning (Yoon & Rönnlund, 2021). This idea reinforces Fielding's (2010) concerns about supposedly transformative practices being illusionary in terms of student voice and agency. The literature suggested that student agency and its associated ambiguity is reflective of other educational concepts and discourses that appear within education without sufficient exploration and conceptualisation (Dargusch & Charteris, 2018; Murphy, 2016; Smyth, 1992). Here, teachers grapple with adopting new approaches or pedagogies in their day-to-day practices without the sufficient conceptual tools to support them in their work (Yakavets et al., 2023).

While the introduction of student agency into mainstream primary school settings frames this research project, the concept itself is not the focus of the study. I am interested in the underlying discourses of teaching—specifically what it means to "be" a teacher in a primary school and how those ideas interact with the concept of student agency. This study investigates the

possibilities for the transformation of school and classroom systems, or the potential for conflict, when teachers are asked to take on new roles or approaches that differ from how they have previously taught children. What is important here is, firstly, how teachers currently explain their roles and responsibilities as a classroom teacher; and secondly, what the underlying discourses of school, teaching and learning are that have led to and maintained these understandings about their role. The next section reviews existing literature on these two aspects—teachers' explanations of their role and discourses of school—and considers them in the context of student agency.

Teachers' Perceptions of Their Role

Teachers' understanding of their role in the classroom and their ability to apply their own beliefs about teaching are important factors in what is taught in classrooms. Whilst curriculum policy and content outlines what a student is expected to experience in the classroom, how and what a student learns is dependent on how their teacher interprets and delivers the curriculum (Zambrano et al., 2025). The beliefs that the teacher holds about pedagogy and their view of the child influence their teaching practice. The literature on these ideas is wide in scope, but, for the purpose of this study, will be framed around concepts of agency and control in the classroom.

The work of Gert Biesta (Biesta et al., 2015) is useful to examine the ways teachers speak about their work in relation to both their classroom roles and the notion of agency. Day-to-day practices in Biesta et al. (2015) included reports of working long hours, the importance of developing positive relationships with their students and the provision of a safe, welcoming and, at times, fun environment. Teachers' beliefs related to children and young people specifically were examined, revealing themes of deficit views of the child, particularly children who did not meet expected norms or expectations. These children appeared as problems needing to be solved. This deficit view influenced the approaches taken to support children's learning and achievement and revealed a consensus that the academic achievement of young people and curriculum coverage drove their focus. Socialisation and coverage of specific skills were also mentioned. Biesta et al. (2015) raised concerns about the lack of longer term goals for young people and sufficient discussion around the actual purpose of schooling. In addition, there was an absence of discussions about social justice or democratic values. Instead, these ideas appeared to be replaced by notions of personal responsibility and participation when discussing ideas of citizenship. In regard to day-to-day pedagogical approaches, a commonly

held belief was that the teacher was now in the role of the facilitator of learning, rather than deliverer of knowledge and teachers in this study expressed a sense of comfort and ease with this particular shift. However, this opinion appears framed in a seemingly cynical way by one respondent:

> The teacher's role is as a facilitator (laugh) to encourage and enable the learner. To have access to the stimulus you need to encourage them to make the right choices. Or to learn in a particular style. To jump through hoops and pass exams because, at the end of the day, that is how it is measured (Teacher A). (p. 632)

Ball's (2003, 2015) analysis of teacher feedback on teaching in neoliberal times provides commentary on the current challenges teachers face in the United Kingdom, and the way they see themselves and their teaching practice. Framed around the context of neoliberalism, Ball (2003) presented evidence of a teaching climate of fear, anxiety and low trust for teachers. He suggested that the performances demanded of teachers as displays of quality are creating this climate of fear; "these struggles are currently highly individualised as teachers, as ethical subjects, find their values challenged or displaced by the terrors of performativity" (p. 216). He discussed the "ontological insecurity" teachers experience as they are judged by others, measured and assessed against measures of value that may not be compatible with their beliefs around teaching. In addition, the value of teachers' beliefs comes into question when it is only the output that is captured, measured and acknowledged—suggesting that having beliefs as a teacher is an outmoded discourse without relevance.

Davies and Bansel (2010) reinforced this outlook when they reported on their study of teachers in higher education. Like Ball (2003, 2015), they considered neoliberal ideologies appearing in educational policies as a factor contributing to the experiences of academics in universities. Their research provided evidence of teacher overwhelm, stress and self-applied pressure in this environment. The experiences of these teachers are often linked back to concepts of time—not enough time, time pressures, time for family outside of work—and are proposed as one area to investigate further. Administrative aspects of their role appear to contribute to the workload, and this is evidenced in other studies of primary school teachers as well. Watkins (2007) analysed teachers' desires linked to pedagogic practice and found a belief that being organised is what makes an effective teacher. Watkins proposed that teaching has become a form of "learning management" (p. 314), which has refashioned the role of the teacher. This study also built on Ball's (2003) notion of ontological insecurity when teachers desired to teach whole class with more teacher-led approaches but were compelled to teach in more personalised and

small-group approaches, as that was what was expected and asked of them. This appeared as a conflict and a tension.

Teachers' Perceptions of Control and Agency

The way teachers see their role in the classroom impacts their views of notions of what control and agency for learners looks like in schools. As far back as 1986, academics have been raising concerns about society's problematic expectation that teachers would control children's behaviour in schools as well as meeting the expectation that teachers would "teach" children and, as an outcome of that teaching, children would learn the content that had been taught to them (McNeil, 1986). In her book *Contradictions of Control*, McNeil (1986) suggested that this contradiction is insufficiently addressed or critiqued. Other scholars have picked up this critique (Dargusch & Charteris, 2018; Mameli et al., 2025; Rajala et al., 2016; Zambrano et al., 2025) and explored what happens when teachers grapple with notions of both controlling students and extending opportunities for student agency.

Mameli et al. (2025) acknowledged that combining the two expectations is a "complex interplay" (p. 2) and at times may cause confusion for some teachers. The idea of confusion between the terms *control* and *structure* provide an interesting platform for further investigation, whereby some teachers associate highly controlled classroom environments with the term structure (thus reducing opportunities for student agency). Conversely, Reeve (2009) suggested this is not the case and agentic classroom environments can be highly structured, with teacher supports and boundaries, and enable conditions where students experience autonomy. Reeve suggested that the two teaching behaviours—controlling and "autonomy supportive" (p. 159)—are usually present, although controlling behaviours are more likely to be seen in the classroom. One suggestion is that the dual expectations of teacher responsibility and accountability are a significant factor in how control or agency occurs in the classroom. Reeve reported that the presence of pressure on teachers by external sources, specifically the production of specific outcomes for students, impacts students. Teachers act as conduits for this pressure, applying it to their students via a more controlling style in their teaching and attempts at motivating students. Flink et al. (1990) reported that this approach has a negative effect on students and students perform worse than those who receive less controlling and more autonomy-supportive approaches.

Zambrano et al. (2025) also explored the duality of control and agency for teachers and what that means for teachers in their pedagogical approach. In this study, teachers discussed the

challenges of enacting the concept of student agency within certain time constraints of the school day and week, covering the curriculum and being able to manage "contradicting student needs" (Zambrano et al, 2025, p. 85). Time appeared again as an issue with the successful implementation of student agency as did a deficit view of learners, placing accountability for student difficulties onto the student and their families or communities. An understanding of the terms student agency and agentic engagement was also weak for teachers in the study. One teacher correlated agentic engagement—where a student suggests a direction for their learning—with inviting "mutiny" to his classroom (p. 82).

Moses et al. (2020) attempted to address the gap in teacher understanding of student agency with their case study of three teachers explaining their perspectives on student agency. This research is one example where teachers' beliefs about their role as teachers, and the inherent power relations between teacher and student, were visible as they discussed how they "gave" children agency. The teacher interviews featured multiple instances where students were "granted" space to share their ideas and were "allowed" to choose their own spot to work. Students having access to classroom supplies was positioned as part of a discussion on student agency. The examples in this research of student agency, when critiqued, appear as a logical, developmentally appropriate practice of opportunities for young children to participate in play-based, experimental learning and project-based learning. These are not necessarily new concepts in education but are framed as student agency.

One solution provided to address this weak understanding of student agency is for teachers to learn how to do these things in their classroom, to work on themselves, as opposed to addressing the structural conditions of the school, timetable and curriculum (Reeve, 2009). Teachers are given three suggestions to do this work: they need to 1) become less controlling, 2) want to support autonomy and 3) learn the how-to of autonomy support. This appears to place the accountability and responsibility onto the individual teacher. Teachers may or may not take up this accountability and responsibility, depending on their view of their own self-efficacy and beliefs about teaching and about themselves (Ball, 2019). Some may express resistance or refusal to adopt new approaches or concepts.

Teachers' Resistance to New Approaches

When struggling with the adoption of new approaches to teaching that appear to be in conflict with their own beliefs, Ball (2019) suggested that teachers adopt a Foucauldian "care of the

self," an art of living, or, in this case, an art of teaching approach, to remake themselves through self-formation:

> Starting with *self-formation* enables and requires us to dismantle the tired and constraining imaginary architecture of schooling—curriculum, pedagogy and assessment—and their very particular grammar or meanings and concomitant social arrangements of space and time—that we call an education. (p. 5)

He discussed the responses from a group of teachers in the United Kingdom who, in a series of emails, communicated their attempts at refusal or resistance of policy directives. Their comments suggested that while this was possible, it was tempered with challenge and difficulty. They were, however, successful in speaking out against issues they felt compelled to protest against, and in the process, through speaking out against performance-management-review systems, and also through writing via reflections, facilitated a version of resistance to "truths" positioned in their educational spaces as inevitable (Ball, 2016):

> I find that one of the most fundamental challenges of my job is trying to avoid becoming incorporated into market modes of thinking. Of course, the more time you spend at work trying to please your superiors, the more you use the language of performativity and begin to believe in it yourself. And then, when I go back to my dissertation, it is difficult to be surprised by the data.
>
> Martin is also here, I think, articulating a sense of refusal, a sense of who it is that he does not want to be—that is enabled in part by his dissertation work, which I will come back to. (p. 1134)

Ball (2016) distinguished between a shift in the truths teachers might tell themselves and the shifts in the truths we might tell others. When one speaks against commonly held truths, there is a risk of making oneself vulnerable and "making ourselves unrecognisable and irrelevant" (p. 1135). Speaking out against new reforms or policy directives is difficult for teachers when educational discourses, the way people speak about schools, teaching and learning, are strong and dominant. The work that Ball encouraged is hard when the discourses of school are inflexible and hard to resist and refuse. The next section explores what the research literature tells us about existing dominant teaching discourses and introduces the notion of utilising the concept of discourses as part of the methodological approach to this study.

Discourses of Teaching

The purpose of this section is to examine the way other scholars have identified and analysed dominant discourses that circulate in the education system. Foucault (1988) reconceptualised the notion of discourse as of bodies of knowledge, or truths that developed at certain points in time. This was different to a linguistic or grammatical understanding of the term discourse and

was related to the way people could think, act and speak in particular ways, based on these truths, which could also appear as common sense. Building on the work of Foucault, Sanguinetti (2000) suggested that discourses "construct our working environments" (p. 233) and "constitute us personally, professionally and politically" (p. 233). In order to examine the way teachers see their role as a teacher, we can look to these discourses that "swarm" around and constitute individuals into certain kinds of teachers.

In looking into the discourses of the contemporary teacher, Shaw (2012) revealed dominant discourses of teacher accountability, a need for teachers to focus on outcomes, and notions of professionalism in the teaching workforce. Here, Shaw suggested that discourses of neoliberalism as well government policies have been influential in the development of these "good teacher" discourses. This work correlates with Ball's (2003) concerns about the development of discourses of not only the aspiration to be an excellent teacher, but also the expectation that teachers are "passionate about excellence" (p. 224). Shaw (2012) proposed that the push and strength of these particular dominant discourses can have an impact on less dominant discourses, such as the caring teacher.

McGregor et al. (2017) suggested that it is these very dominant discourses that circulate through schools that are impediments to change. Their concerns about the power relations between teacher and student appear to be of relevance to this study:

> Thus, it is very difficult to change schools from within because the institutional zeitgeist of schooling as a function of modern and modernising societies *is too strongly entrenched in power relations between youth and adults.* The belief that adults have legitimate power to control, contain and direct the lives of young people extends to the legality of corporal punishment for children. (p. 164, emphasis added)

The same study highlighted discrepancies in countries adhering to the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in regard to corporal punishment of children, such as Australia where there are grey areas of its application to both public and private schools. This "lack of uniformity" (p. 165) in its application extends to early childhood centres. McGregor et al. (2017) reflected on the discourses of gross imbalances of power in schools, and the lack of clarity around whether physical punishment is ever acceptable as a means of discipline, and concluded that "changing schooling requires a fundamental rethinking of how we relate to and treat children and young people" (p. 165). This identification and critique of the existing dominant discourse of school and young people was the focus of Youdell (2006a, 2006b, 2010a, 2010b), who produced accounts of student subjectivities that are evident in school

environments. In particular, Youdell examined discourses of inequalities and gender in schools revealing stubborn truths that appear in the conversations and actions of both students and their teachers. Her proposal of the impossible student—the student who fails to make sense within dominant normalising discourses—highlighted the dangers of excluding certain kinds of student from ideals of success, normality and restrictive achievement aspirations.

These scholars have attempted to draw attention to the complexity of school environments and the multiple, sometimes conflicting, discourses that circulate within them. These dominant discourses influence the way teachers teach, speak and act. The literature indicated that it may be the discourses themselves, rather than the individual teachers, that have the power and strength to influence what remains in place and "stubborn" in schools. If these discourses are dominant and unchallenged, then the ways that teachers can be in school, the way teachers view children through a deficit lens (Biesta et al., 2015), and the complex discourses of power and punishment, will continue as normal. However, if there are opportunities to locate, consider and critique some of these dominant discourses, then, Youdell (2006b) suggested, there is always the possibility for discourses to "misfire" and be disrupted or hybridised (Charteris, 2016).

> Foucault's (1990a) account of discourse insists that no discourse is guaranteed—while particular discourses prevail in some contexts and endure over time, the potential for the meanings of these to shift and/or for subordinate discourses to unsettle these remains. (p. 515)

Conclusion

This literature review has explored the literature on student agency and reviewed its different meanings and how it has been used. I have discussed the specific literature on student agency alongside the literature on teachers' views on their roles as teachers. Most of the research explored in this review has theoretical underpinnings in psychological, sociocognitive, and sociocultural frameworks with a common approach of utilising phenomenological methodologies to access teachers' and students' unique perspectives on student agency. Phenomenological approaches in educational research look to the teacher for the answers as they are considered to be experts in their field. This approach aligns with the sociocognitive iterations of student agency. Here the methodological approach—qualitative phenomenological, humanist methods—investigates student agency as a mostly sociocognitive construct. I argue that these approaches discount the importance of the diverse ways student agency can be understood and conceptualised beyond the narrow and individualistic

psychology-informed and cognitive view of the term as reviewed at the beginning of this chapter. Phenomenological approaches are not able to sufficiently interrogate the enactment of student agency ideas as part of a complex and dynamic environment of classroom and wider school discourses. Teachers do not act out their roles and responsibilities as part of the implementation of student agency ideas, independent of the structures and ways of thinking, being and speaking, as part of the school system. They are part of the system they work in and can only speak, act and think in ways that are available from within that environment. How they speak about the possibilities for student agency is dependent on the resources that they have access to—conceptual understandings of the term student agency, the discursive environment of the classroom—and the personal agency they have to have a say in what they do and how they teach in their classroom. They enact student agency ideas within the other discourses of school, teaching and learning.

The outcome of this literature review is the identification of a need to investigate student agency at a deeper level beyond the surface, positive notions it attracts and beyond gathering the perspectives of teachers and students on their experiences with student agency ideas. This study requires a particular kind of critique removed from methodological approaches that seek the truth or perspectives from individual teachers. This study will look beyond the opinions of the individual, in keeping with the critique of the psychologism and the liberal humanistic position of the student that permeates the majority of educational research on student agency. The literature has revealed certain ways student agency is spoken about, within the context of a classroom with dominant teaching practices and roles that may or may not bend and adjust to shifts in control and freedoms. The focus of this study is not the concept of student agency, it is the discourses of teaching and discourses of school and the actors within them (students and teachers). This study will explore the dominant discourses of school and how these dominant discourses work alongside the discourse of student agency. This approach will not investigate the concept of student agency itself, as an idea, but will open up a wider discussion about the complexities involved in enacting transformative change within mainstream school settings. Changes in education impact children, students, teachers and families. Decisions behind these changes come from somewhere and need to be analysed, critiqued and researched in order to ascertain the value of changes and their resulting impact on young people.

Student agency has been positioned as a transformative, new pedagogy and a different way of teaching children. However, the results of this literature review suggest that the ideas of student

agency can potentially be used to maintain dominant discourses and traditional roles in the teacher–student power dynamic. This research project looks at the way teachers are able to speak and act through discourses of the classroom teacher and how that influences the way student agency is enacted in schools. This removes the focus from the individual teacher as the provider of insights into what is happening in classrooms that have adopted the ideas of student agency, and instead places a focus on the multitude of discourses that circulate around and through the teacher and student in classrooms. The initial research questions that were posed were:

- How do teacher subjectivities interact with the ideas of student agency?
- How do teachers explain and enact their ideas about student agency?
- What conflicts or transformations occur when teacher subjectivities interact with the ideas of student agency?

The concepts of discourse, as in the discourse of school, how we discuss and speak of school and the people within them, has been outlined in this chapter. Foucault's work on discourses has influenced other scholars (Ball, Charteris, Davies, Youdell) and it is his and their work that will provide the structure for the methodological approach for the study. The following chapter, Methodology, provides an overview of some of Foucault's concepts. The chapter will expand on Foucault's concept of discourse along with subjectivities, disciplinary practices and resistance.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter describes the methodological approach taken and the research design of this study. It starts by outlining poststructuralism as a theoretical framework and then describes the specific Foucauldian concepts used in the study. The second part of the chapter details the research design and discusses the influence of Deborah Youdell and Bronwyn Davies. The chapter concludes with an overview of the data analysis process informed by Youdell, Davies and Sanguinetti.

Theoretical Framework: Poststructuralism

Using poststructuralism as a theoretical framework for this study enables a focus on the discourses that constitute teachers and teaching in certain, very particular ways. For poststructuralists, the meaning we give to things does not originate in, or represent some external reality. Rather, meaning is generated in texts: that is, in language and discourse. Unlike other theoretical frameworks commonly used in educational research, such as social constructivism, poststructuralists argue that meaning is made, not in social interactions between people, but in discourses that are generated by ever-moving power relations operating at a much deeper level. These discourses change over time in response to shifts in power, and this in turn produces changes in the meaning-making systems they generate.

Poststructuralist-informed research pays attention, not to the thoughts and actions of individual social actors, but to the discourses that make it possible for these social actors to think, say, and do the things they do. Poststructuralist researchers often focus on the language used by social actors, not to look at the individual thought processes of these actors, but because it provides a 'window' into the underlying discourses that make this language possible.

Poststructuralist-informed research approaches are informed by assumptions that are very different from those underpinning the previous research work on student agency described in Chapter 3. I have chosen to use this approach in this study because it offered a way to look underneath individual teachers' accounts of why they do what they do, and because I hope that taking this approach may contribute new insights into why change in education seems to be so difficult.

Because I am interested in the power relations in which discourses are generated and in the possibilities for resisting these power relations, it seemed appropriate to draw on the work of Michel Foucault to frame this study. The specific concepts I used are outlined below.

Conceptual Framework

The work of Michel Foucault is utilised in this study to frame the exploration of the language of teachers and to analyse the discourses that are dominant in schools. Foucault's work is broadly poststructural, in that it assumes that meaning is made in discourses, that these are generated in power relations, that these are fluid and malleable, and that our 'subjectivities'—what we can say, do, and be—are constituted in discourse. This study predominantly draws on *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and his work on how certain subjectivities are made available to individuals through the discourses that circulate around them. However, it also uses Foucault's lectures of 1978 and 1983 where he explored his 'care of the self' concept and the possibilities for resistance to dominant discourses (in particular, the texts *What is Critique? and the Culture of the Self*, published posthumously in 2024). Foucault's *Critical Theory/Intellectual History* (1988) was also used for his account of dominant discourses and their formation.

Foucault placed a focus on statements made as truths, as true reflections of reality. He examined the formations of such truth statements and considered how and by whom these truths about the world were maintained and circulated. This work was used in this study to explore how teachers were talking about the ideas of student agency. The study used Foucault's concepts of discourse, subjectivities and disciplinary practices to explore the language and practices of teachers. I used these concepts to draw out dominant discourses woven within certain statements made about teaching and school that appeared to be construed as common-sense. Often there was no argument or critique about certain ideas about teaching e.g., that children must attend school in order to learn. I used common-sense statements made by teachers to identify discourses, to acknowledge the subjectivities located within these discourses, and to identify the multiple disciplinary practices that inform teachers' actions in the classroom.

I used these Foucauldian concepts to provide a window into *how* teachers have come to be formed as a particular kind of teaching subject, rather than *how they see themselves* as a particular kind of teaching subject. In this study, I viewed teachers as conduits of certain discourses of society and school: that is, they speak not from their unique perspective but as a

representation of discourse. I used three key Foucauldian concepts—discourses, subjectivities and disciplinary practices, which are outlined below.

Introduction to Foucault

The key text that influenced this study was *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1977). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault explored social institutions such as prisons, schools, monasteries and psychiatric wards that, he argued, worked to "discipline" subjects into certain kinds of individuals that could be controlled, measured, compared and governed by the state, through these institutions. He was concerned with how discourse acts to form social systems, and with the resulting force or impact on power and bodies, and the subsequent normalisation and categorisation of individuals or subjects (Olssen, 2014). Foucault interrogated prevailing ideas of power, in particular challenging Marxist ideas of the oppressed, dominated by those who held power over them. He suggested that relations of power active in social institutions were highly effective in controlling populations in covert ways—through disciplinary practices rather than punishment.

A key factor in my decision to use the work of Foucault in this study was my desire to critique some dominant stories of schooling in New Zealand that appear to resist change and disruption. Applying Foucault's work to this study allows for an exploration of the language that is used in schools to validate certain truths. It also provides a way to examine how certain teaching and disciplinary practices (observation, assessment) impact the possibilities for significant transformation and change in schools. In *Critical Theory/Intellectual History*, Foucault (1988) encouraged people to question why things were done a certain way, at a certain point in time, so that people could critique why things are as they are, and know that they could, therefore, be done differently if needed. As he put it:

> History serves to show us "that-which-is" has not always been i.e., things that seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances during the course of a precarious and fragile history. And that since these things have been made, they can be unmade as long as we know how it was that they were made. (p. 37)

In the next section I detail how the concepts of discourse, subjectivities, disciplinary practices connect with each other and explain how they are used in this study.

Foucault's Concept of Discourse

Foucault (1977) proposed that ideas of truths are located in discourses and that truths guide individuals' and populations' actions and speech. It is the very "common sense" and irrefutable

truth that discourse can maintain that is examined in this study of what teachers do and say in their classrooms. Discourses allow certain truths to emerge and circulate about certain kinds of subject positions for people functioning in different environments such as schools, hospitals, army barracks, mental institutions and other social institutions. Ball (2016) suggested these discourses constitute the subject through daily encouragement or instruction by either gentle nudging or a firmer push towards that which is considered the right or proper direction (McGushin, 2014). Sanguinetti (2000) proposed that discourses "construct our working environments" and "constitute us personally, professionally and politically" (p. 233). For example, the expectations of classroom behaviour and management are reinforced when a classroom teacher receives praise from others for how calm and settled their class is.

Teachers (and individuals) are immersed in certain dominant and also conflicting discourses as they are trained as teachers, and as they progress into senior roles. They are exposed to certain regimes of truths about what a teacher is, what knowledge is (and what kinds of knowledge matter), what learning is and how teachers should be in relation to their students. Foucault (1977) would say it is in fact these discourses that influence what parts of the learning day teachers put their energies into, and how they present outside of the school environment to society as "a teacher." Foucault conceptualised discourse as well-bounded bodies of knowledge, which come to be known of as truths at particular historical times. Sometimes this can result in a truth becoming common-sense knowledge that becomes unquestioned and unchallenged. One such example could be the common-sense notion that children need to attend school in order to be supported through healthy and "normal" social and cognitive development.

The concept of dominant discourses is used in this study to investigate how teachers are made possible within certain statements or truths about how teachers can or can't be in schools. What these teachers do in their classrooms is their reality, and those realities are made possible by the strength of certain kinds of statements that are made and reinforced about teaching, and also those ways of speaking about teaching that are silenced. Discourse as a concept is applied within the conceptual framework to capture these dominant statements but to also highlight things that appear as unsaid in teaching by teachers. This study also questions what some of the ways are that teachers are not able to be in their classroom—what is excluded from dominant discourses of teaching.

Foucault (1977) claimed it is in the day-to-day mundane practices that power is often masked (Marshall, 1997). The way teachers reinforce and accept their particular kinds of subject positions available, and how they act and speak in particular ways within that discourse, produce teacher subjectivities. How teacher subjectivities interact with their ideas about student agency is the focus of this study.

Foucault's Concept of Subjectivities

Foucault (1977) proposed that subjects exist within the subjectivities that are made available through discourse. That is, discourses allow only *certain kinds* of subjectivities or subject positions to emerge. Subjectivities can also be described as the possibilities of how one can *be*, within a wider historical and political construct (Ball, 2003). Other scholars have interpreted Foucault's idea of subjectivity not as a state of being, but as an activity we perform in society that is enacted within a "context of constraint" (Taylor, 2014, p. 180). In the process of speaking and acting, individuals can either reinforce the subjectivities available to them, or they can challenge and contest these subjectivities.

In this study, as those common-sense, unquestioned notions were identified in the discussions with teachers, they evoked the constellation of a certain kind of teacher that is possible in Auckland primary school classrooms. As teachers spoke of their mundane day-to-day practices as simply what they did, as unquestioned, they were constituting themselves within discourse. Those practices and actions and speech acts coalesced to constitute particular teacher subjectivities. For example, if a teacher discussed the multiple actions in their day that included forms of checking on students, of marking and classifying students and of grouping and grading subjects, they were constituting themselves as the marking and checking teacher and potentially the judge and the assessor. Through their actions, they were also constituting students as certain kinds of students, e.g., successful students or students requiring support or extra help. Social institutions (hospitals, prisons, schools) play a large part in constituting subjects through the disciplinary practices that are enacted in these spaces of social control and through the power relations that exist in them (Foucault, 1977). For Foucault, ideas of what is considered normal in society, or not normal, are reinforced through disciplinary practices.

Foucault's Disciplinary Practices

This study also applies Foucault's (1977) concept of disciplinary practices and how these represent disciplinary power within social institutions. Foucault proposed that schools were obvious sites for disciplinary practices where surveillance of students, normalisation practices,

and examinations worked together. These practices, usually embedded within coercive rewards or corrective punishments, could also be enacted through the processes of assessment and particular kinds of teaching practices (Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016).

Although Foucault did not write explicitly about schools in detail, they are mentioned in his books. Schools are examples of institutionalised spaces where elements of disciplinary practices are obvious (Foucault, 1977). Foucault showed how power travels through disciplinary practices, seen in the hallmarks of school organisation and structure: the art of distributions and enclosure, the control of activity and timetabling and its "exhaustive use" (Foucault, 1977, p. 154). The particular disciplinary power "instruments" noted by Foucault include hierarchal observation (as teachers observing students), normalising judgements (corrections to indiscretions, micropenalties of time, of behaviour), the use of both punishment and gratification, and the examination—where observation and normalisation meet to present a snapshot of the "object" that is the normal (or abnormal) student.

In this study, the concept of disciplinary practices was used during the data analysis process to identify some of these practices: in particular, hierarchal observation, normalising judgements and the examination. These disciplinary practices are evident within many common aspects of school organisation. The research design captured examples of these practices by locating disciplinary practices as part of the school timetable structure, the teachers' planning tools, and questions about assessment. They were located within discussions about what teachers "do" when they teach. These are all part of the existing dominant discourses of education that are supported by seemingly immovable disciplinary practices in schools that cement key "givens"—such as set times for schools to start and finish, and the constant grading and comparison of children. However, Foucault was clear that resistance to dominant discourses was possible, though this could be challenging. Teachers' resistance to discourse is also explored in this study.

Foucault's Concept of Resistance

Foucault (2024) proposed that transformation of dominant discourses is possible, but that it requires an ongoing critique of discourse. Following Foucault, Bazzul and Carter (2017) provided examples, in the education context, of the possibilities for resistance to *particular kinds of subjectivities*, stating that, for both teachers and students, resistance to discourse and subjectivities is *always possible*. This is important, as Foucault's work can sometimes be misconstrued as leaving no possibility for agency (Nola, 1994), or as positioning individuals

as powerless ~~"docile bodies"~~ docile bodies (Foucault, 1977) in a restrictive regime. For Foucault, resistance is always possible, wherever there is power (Foucault, 1978). Resistance can act in a similar way by minute refusals that are widespread and dispersed. Foucault (1978) suggested there is no one singular act or revolt, but they are numerous and multiple. He also saw his role as an intellectual to bring to the surface the idea the people "are much freer than they feel" (Foucault, et al., 1988, p. 11) and that to question dominant discourses, or the way things "just are," is essential: "people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes that have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed" (Foucault, et al., 1988, p.11). Therefore not only is resistance possible, but, as Foucault would say, it can be an ongoing and daily practice.

This study aimed to investigate what kinds of teachers are seen as "normal" when working with ideas about student agency in primary schools. Examples of resistance were considered alongside the presence of dominant discourses and certain teacher subjectivities. I looked at how teachers resisted or accepted dominant discourses together with notions of common sense, or rigid practices. Foucault's concepts fit within the overarching theoretical framing, poststructuralism, as these concepts are grounded in the belief that there is nothing outside of language and that it is language itself that constructs, develops and maintains reality. By engaging in Foucault's concepts of discourse, subjectivities and disciplinary practices this study is able to critically investigate what is being produced, and what happens when the ideas of student agency interact with discourses in the classroom.

The scholars discussed in the next section have engaged with Foucault's concepts of discourse and subjectivities and have applied these concepts to their research in both agency in the classroom, and wider educational issues. These studies invited an investigation of the strong discursive fields in schools in which truths are formed and established, and subjects are made or resisted. Their work, and its relevance to this study, is discussed in the following section.

Research Design

This section outlines the influences of Davies (1990) and Youdell (2006b) on the research-design process and how their application of Foucault's work in education settings informed aspects of this study. This section explains the approach taken to identify participants and collect data. The section concludes with an overview of the steps taken to organise and analyse the data by identifying families or clusters of discourse and conducting "discourse mapping" (Sanguinetti, 2000, p.239).

This research gathers representations of the everyday (Youdell, 2010b) by focusing on the truths teachers tell about their day-to-day practices. It is in the mundane, everyday practices that statements and practices can reveal unexamined assumptions ~~(St. Pierre, 2014a)~~ and paint a picture of the workings of a classroom at a level that captures timetabling, routines, responsibilities, systems, and procedures. This approach redirects the attention away from the thoughts and perceptions of the individual teacher and turns to the discursive and physical environment of the classroom. Marshall (1997) proposed that it is here in the "ordinary, everyday life" (p. 36) that we see how people are constituted into certain ways of being, along with particular ways of doing and saying things. It is these utterances and practices that form individual subjects, but also populations of people, that is explored in this study.

Bazzul (2012) described Foucault's concept of discourse as being "the nexus where truth and power circulate" (p. 1010). The circulatory nature of how power flows in a school can be understood in this study by focusing on the activities of teachers at a granular level. As teachers act out their day-to-day practices, they are working within possible frames or discourses that are both acceptable and accessible to them. As teachers list their activities, roles and responsibilities, they are speaking of the discourses they are immersed in. According to Youdell (2006b), subjects are not necessarily aware of the discourses from which they are speaking.

> As such, subjects need not be self-consciously alert to the discourses deployed in order for their familiar and embedded meanings to be inscribed. Furthermore, the analysis suggests, again after Butler (1997a), that discourses do not need to be explicitly cited in order to be deployed. Rather, multiple discourses are referenced through the meanings, associations and omissions embedded in the historicity of apparently simple and benign utterances and bodily practices. (p. 514)

Deborah Youdell and Bronwyn Davies have used Foucault's conceptual tools to explore how teachers and students are constituted within the discourses of schooling and the classroom. Their work, which has informed the approach taken in the design of this research project, is outlined below.

Bronwyn Davies (1990) drew on the concept of subjectivities to interrogate the notion of student agency in a 1980s classroom. Here, she explored Foucault's concept of discursive practices within a classroom environment that had student agency as a focus. Davies provided a view of agency which highlighted that, regardless of the teacher's best intentions, possibilities for agency depend on whatever dominant discourses are in circulation. Female students are positioned discursively within the classroom in certain ways that differ from the male students.

These possible ways of being in the classroom form girls in ways that only allow certain statements to be made by them and about them. For example, in seemingly innocuous discussions about holiday travel, the teacher inadvertently positions the female student in a vulnerable and gendered way:

> Deb becomes at one and the same time someone who was vulnerable and needed looking after by the hostesses (since called flight attendants), and someone who can herself imagine being one of those attractive hostesses who look after men and make their adventures more exciting by adding a sexual dimension. In both of these images Deb is not constituted as one who has agency, one who can be thrilled by the daringness of the adventure of flying in a plane without familiar adults. Her fragility, and her future capacity to attract and care for men have been the only subject positions made available to her in the discourse through which her story is told. (Davies, 1990, p. 352)

The male student in the same classroom, in the same conversation, is positioned as brave and heroic for flying independently. Therefore, Deb can only speak from the position she is placed in unless she is able to proactively and consciously contest, refuse and resist this position (which she doesn't).

Davies' research informed the intention and direction of this study. Davies (1990) proposed that there is always the possibility for agency, but that it is dependent on either teacher or student being aware of their place within that discourse, and if they choose to reinforce, challenge or refuse that discourse. In this study, I looked at how teachers are positioned in particular ways by discourse in their classrooms. I was interested to see if teachers in my study chose to reinforce, challenge or refuse discourses of the classroom teacher or discourses of school when they spoke of their approach to assessment, timetabling or other aspects of their day-to-day teaching practice.

Youdell (2010b) explored the possibilities for refusal and challenge of discourses when investigating student subjectivities across mainstream and alternative schools in the United Kingdom and Australia. Youdell ensured her research designs "foreground the circulation of discourses and their constitutive force… including the way they constitute particular sorts of subjects." (p. 75). She asked for whom is it possible (and impossible) to be here, in certain spaces? Working mostly in the spaces of student subjectivities and exclusion due to gender or ethnicity, Youdell conducted ethnographic research in schools, capturing dominant discourses through both observation and interviews. She explored and reported on dominant exclusionary discourses that form students in particular ways, discourses that can sometimes position students as "impossible." Youdell proposed that, within certain discourses of what is normal

within schools, these students can be seen as not normal and subsequently impossible to be seen *as a student*.

Key features of Youdell's approach to data are fourfold: the need to look at the minutiae of the everyday, the presence of subtlety and the need to be attuned to this, acknowledgement that the researcher is themselves immersed and entangled in discourses of educational research, and acknowledgement that the analysis process bears a "heavy interpretive burden" (Youdell, 2006b, p. 513). For myself, I acknowledge my presence as a researcher, but also as a primary school teacher, and additionally as a mother, as I record, process and consider statements made by other teachers who function in a world I am deeply familiar with. My initial wonderings about the possibilities for student agency within a social institution that is structured around concepts of control and compliance has always sat uneasily with me. Coming back to the concept of being immersed and entangled in discourses myself, I have attempted to examine the discourses captured in the research with a degree of impartiality. The methods used in this study to collect and organise the data prior to analysis are outlined in the next section. The work of Youdell, Davies, and others will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Research Methods

In designing this research, there was a need to distinguish between interviewing a teacher to find out their ideas about student agency, and interviewing teachers to explore discourses of school. Importantly, the questions posed to teachers did not ask for descriptions, explanations or examples of student agency. Instead, questions were framed to address two key aspects. Firstly, teachers were asked a series of questions about their day-to-day practices and what the structure of their day looked like. This group of questions focused on how teachers were constituted as teachers through disciplinary practices and their everyday practices centred around responsibilities, roles, timetabling and spaces in the school. The second group of questions sought to explore the ideas associated with student agency—specifically the ideas that have been communicated through teachers' involvement in student agency-themed professional development.

Interviews

Face-to-face interviews provided an environment for the participants to spend time with me exploring particular aspects of the interview as a fluid and collaborative process. The interviews followed a semistructured outline with the opportunity to spend more time on areas as required. This nuanced approach allowed for an "focus on the mundane" (Clegg, 2005, p.

157) and provided an opportunity to capture information from beyond an individual teacher's perspective on their ability to enact new educational directives. Teachers were not invited to share accounts of themselves, but instead were directed to discuss, and have documented, their daily activities. Through their speech, teachers produced data that provided evidence of how teachers act out their role as teachers from within the discursive environment in which they exist.

Interview Questions

In order to attend to both parts of the main research question, the interview questions were divided into two parts. The first set of questions focused on gathering data on teacher subjectivities by asking about their daily timetable and some of the practices they were involved in. Assessment questions were also included as this is a large part of the teacher's role. Foucault (1977) proposed that the measurement, comparison and classification of individuals are disciplinary practices that work to normalise individuals in social institutions. School and class assessment practices are aligned to this normalisation process. As teachers discussed assessment responsibilities and practices, they spoke of the discourses of assessment in schools—another way they are formed as certain kinds of teachers.

A small number of draft interview questions were formed—each one addressing the need to gather data on the "what" of the teachers' day and structure (see Appendix 1). For example, the first question posed was "Can you tell me a bit about the timetable structure of your 'typical' school day?", followed by "Would that structure be similar in other classrooms of the same year level at this school—across the whole school?" This question worked to determine if what the teacher was doing in their classroom was unique to their class, or if it was a structure adopted by their team and, possibly, the entire school.

Teacher Subjectivities Questions. Asking questions about the *function* or the *role* of the teacher in the classroom enabled me to hold the individual teacher "at arms length"—separating the personality of the teacher from the function of role and what they do. This reduced personal opinions about why they do what they do and focused only on the process and practices they act out as teaching subjects, from their position as the classroom teacher. When they were asked "What might I see in your classroom at this time?" this again focused on the what, the practice, rather than seeking an explanation of why they do what they do.

Interview questions were constructed to capture the effect of notions of time and timetabling on teachers. Teachers explained their responsibilities and routines were framed within the school day or the school week. The distribution of time within schools is one way that teachers are formed by the discourse of the timetable. In primary schools, learning areas or topics continue to be compartmentalised into separate blocks of time during the week, forming the school timetable that teachers adhere to. Foucault (1977) discussed the timetable and also the exhaustive use of time as ways that individuals are controlled through meticulous timing of activities in social institutions like schools. It is the discourse of time, how time is discussed, and what truths and common-sense ideas are attached to time in schools, that can work to form certain kinds of subjects. This study and the structure of the questions interrogate the timetable as a disciplinary practice that works to govern and produce certain kinds of acceptable teaching subjects.

Through this process of teachers speaking about their day, of their responsibilities and the actions they take as a teacher, teachers reinforce the discourse they are immersed in and are formed by. Whilst other scholars have utilised ethnographic observations within a Foucauldian theoretical framework (Dargusch & Charteris, 2018; Davies, 1990; Youdell, 2010a), this research was designed to access the spoken words that teachers use to represent teacher actions. This allows for the teachers' story of their day to be spoken by *the teacher as a conduit into discourse*. This reduces the influence of researcher interpretation of observed actions in the classroom. Interview transcript analysis is still vulnerable to researcher interpretation during the data analysis process, but the raw data, the transcripts themselves, are from the teacher as the *teacher-in-and-as-discourse.*

As teachers work through their various roles and responsibilities and say things out loud, then certain aspects of teaching are no longer silenced. It can be within "benign utterances" that dominant discourses of teaching can be revealed (Youdell, 2006a)

> Rather, multiple discourses are referenced through the meanings, associations and omissions embedded in the historicity of apparently simple and benign utterances and bodily practices. (Youdell, 2006a, pp. 64–65)

Through the process of outlining what the teacher does in the classroom, and also beyond the walls of the classroom, the teacher reveals for themselves, through their own speech, the way their days are organised and managed. Whilst the teacher may believe these to be their own words, these words have come from somewhere. The organisation of their teaching day and the timetable as an overarching "controller" are part of a dominant discourse in teaching. As

Bakhtin (1993) stated, “it is not after all from a dictionary that the speaker gets [their] words!” (as cited in Davies, 1990, p. 343).

Secondly, and most importantly, the interview allows for the teacher to hear their words spoken out loud and to see those same words written in a transcript. As teachers speak from their position of teacher-in-and-as-discourse and not the independent, stable human subject in psychology-informed research frameworks, they are separated from their unique, essential self and their “personality.” This separation from personal opinions, personal knowledge and experience places a focus on what they do within the timetable of the school day. It is through this lens that the possible ways teachers can be in their classroom, within the discourses in which they are formed (including discourses of time), which these interviews explored, that teachers can discuss and enact student agency in their classroom.

The second set of questions was designed to explore how the teachers discuss the ideas of student agency, in order to address the main research question that asks how teacher subjectivities interact with the ideas of student agency.

Student Agency Questions. In the course of exploring the pathway of the term student agency into the New Zealand education system, I discovered the instrumental part that New Zealand professional development organisations played in its dissemination. This initial exploration revealed professional development facilitators as a conduit between the outcomes of the DeSeCo project (and subsequent *New Zealand Curriculum* key competencies) and the language that was appearing in New Zealand primary school communications on student agency. Professional development language, and how student agency was discussed through this process, became the avenue to locate the ideas of student agency in the schools involved in this study. Where, in the previous section, the teacher was the conduit for dominant educational discourse, in this section it is the language of student-agency professional development that informs student agency ideas in the schools involved in this study. Interview questions that probed student agency ideas were centred around the content delivered by professional development providers and how that content appeared within teachers’ planning, timetabling and teacher practice.

Having constructed a series of questions to include in the interview process I then identified and approached potential participants. This was conducted in accordance with the AUT Code of Ethics.

Ethics

An ethics application to the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) was submitted prior to approaching potential participants. The design of this study included considerations of participants' time and vulnerability. A number of allowances were made to develop a research approach that addressed partnership, participation and protection as outlined in the AUT ethics application. These three foci areas align with the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi as outlined in the ethics application (see Appendix 2).

Firstly, participants are considered in partnership with the study as they provided feedback on the interview process in order to guide future interviews. They benefitted from the opportunity to discuss and reflect on their teaching practice and to discuss their practice with others. This research project would not have been possible without teachers in partnership so they will be acknowledged in the publication of the findings. Secondly, the principle of participation was applied when participants provided, through their discussions, representations of the multiple educational discourses they are part of. They were also involved in the review of their transcripts to ensure the accuracy and clarity of what was discussed in the interviews. Finally, the principle of protection was addressed through using pseudonyms for the schools and teachers involved. In addition to this, some specific-to-school programme names were removed as an additional measure to ensure anonymity for teachers. All participants were given the opportunity to delete any part of their interview transcripts if they were uncomfortable with any aspect of it. A number of teachers took up this option. This will be covered within the data analysis section as it reveals a level of vulnerability that teachers experienced once they had read their own words in their transcripts.

Participant Selection and Approach

A key element of this project is the discussion by teachers of both day-to-day practice and the ideas associated with student agency. It was essential that participants were in a position to discuss ideas related to student agency. Whilst this project was not about exploring the level of understanding teachers had about student agency, it was necessary that teachers could draw on a basic level of knowledge about the ideas associated with enacting student agency. Therefore, the participant recruitment criteria were set so that only teachers from schools that included student agency in their school strategic plans would be approached.

The initial broad criteria for a school to be considered were, first, if they were based in Auckland (due to time and cost restraints) and, second, had listed student agency in their

strategic plan on their school website. It was soon evident that some schools had been embedding the idea of student agency over multiple years and there were also those that had previously included student agency but were now focusing on other priorities. Some schools referred to learner agency, and I attempted to exclude these as the focus of this study was the language of student agency. I then compiled a list of all potential schools.

I approached 16 principals via email to request a short 10-minute slot at their staff meeting to discuss my study with their teaching staff (see Appendix 3). Of those 16, I secured seven presentations. From these seven presentations, I received nine responses from teachers who wanted to participate. The small sample was proposed in the research application given the extensive work involved in the data analysis process and the limitations of a PhD timeframe. Participants were asked to be involved in an initial interview of approximately 1 hour.

The restricted range of diversity, gender in particular, in the participant sample was notable, with seven women and two mend participating. However, the percentage of women primary school teachers involved in the research is generally reflective of New Zealand statistics (World Bank, 2023). Teachers were employed at middle- and high-decile schools (based on socioeconomic factors, 1 being areas of highest deprivation, 10 being high-socioeconomic areas) across Auckland (North, East and Central).

Once potential participants had made contact with me, we organised a time and space to meet for the interview. Interviews were conducted in cafes close to the teachers' schools. Most interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour. Interviews were recorded on a phone and a secondary recording device to allow for any recording failures with either device. Teachers were asked if they were comfortable continuing with the interview once it exceeded the 1-hour estimated time. Participants were provided with a thank you card and a gift voucher for their time at the end of the interview. Some of the feedback from participants about the interview experience has been included in the Findings chapter. Generally, participants appeared to enjoy the opportunity to discuss their practice with someone and showed little hesitation in speaking honestly and frankly about the structure and requirements of their role in the classroom.

This chapter has outlined the framework for conducting these interviews and indicated the parameters and limitations for the collection of data. The following chapter will explain in detail the process of collating, organising and analysing the data collected from the participants. I will discuss how the work of Youdell, Davies and Sanguinetti informed the overall approach

to data analysis. Finally, I will detail a step-by-step approach to ordering the data for analysis in preparation for the production and reporting on key findings from the data.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis

This chapter outlines the approach taken to organise and analyse the data collected from the teacher interviews. The approach applies Jackson and Mazzei's (2017) *thinking with theories* to analyse data in a poststructuralist, qualitative research context. Working with qualitative data in research projects framed by poststructural theories requires alternative approaches to those commonly associated with qualitative methodological approaches (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017).

Jackson and Mazzei (2017) proposed that in order to think with theories during data analysis, a researcher must first read theory and apply and consider those theories in their research. Researchers must show how theories work, "what they do, what they allow, and what they unsettle" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017, p. 733). This became part of the process of data analysis for this project, to read and wrestle with the ideas of Foucault, Youdell and Davies in order to organise and prepare the data for analysis.

My experience in this research where the interviews and transcribing process *gave* me reason to pause and reconsider what had been stated in the transcript or recording. Listening to participants' statements spoken *as if they were common sense* generated particular certain reactions during the analysis process. For example, there were moments when I paused the audio of the interview recordings in order to consider the impact of their words (spoken, heard, written) on bodily reactions (my breathing), and my physical actions (putting on my reading glasses, rereading, returning to a page, scrolling the mouse) and my emotions (fear, shock, grief, sadness, surprise).

This research project explores the formation of the particular kinds of acceptable teachers in the classroom and how teachers have come to be formed as certain kinds of teachers through educational discourses. Education research is also immersed in multiple overlapping discourses of what good research is and does. This project is one way of examining the discourse of the impartial, distanced "good" researcher in educational research and puts forward an alternative discourse as counter conduct (Foucault, 2007) to the dominant discourse of "evidence-based," "science-informed," educational research.

Putting Foucault's concepts to work in this research means an ongoing reflection on the discourses researchers can themselves be entangled in throughout the process of research. Ball

(2015) suggested researchers analyse their own practices when conducting research through a Foucauldian lens:

> Refusing the practices of reform and their freedoms and the subject positions of "good" teaching or *"impactful" research* is different from past struggles. For now it also encompasses resisting our own practices, it is about confronting oneself at the centre of our discomforts. (p. 310, emphasis added)

There is an ethics of self, or Foucault's (1986) care of the self, that is evident in this process where one decides to be *this kind* of researcher and refuses to be *that kind* of researcher (humanistic, quantitative). Ball (2019) described this as "negative ethics":

> "Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are" (Foucault, 2000a: 336). This is a negative ethics, not a matter of asserting ideals, but rather an aestheticism—an imaginative creativity. This is a form of ethico-politics that is visceral rather than abstract, rooted as much in the physical and emotional as it is in logic. It rests on a refusal to accept the grounds on which subjectivity is proposed within dominant discourses and a willingness to subvert them—a subversion that is transformative rather than just disruptive. (p. 7)

The following section describes how I structured the data analysis, informed by the work of Youdell (2006a, 2010b), Davies (1990) and Davies and Harré (1990) and applying the ideas of Sanguinetti's (2000) "discourse mapping" (p.239).

Developing a Framework

This section maps out the steps taken to prepare a framework for the data analysis. One approach applied in this study is to look for "crystallisations" of discourse—where discourses emerge and poke through at the edges, where appear amidst the thousands of statements within the transcripts. The location of families or clusters of discourses was guided by the work of Jill Sanguinetti (2000) that outlined a seven-step process of analysing transcripts. My use of phases as outlined below works through a series of steps to locate and identify discourses and then loosely form potential constellations of discourses. Sanguinetti's approach, which I have adapted, covers reading and re-reading of transcripts, looking for "traces" (p. 239) of discourses, developing a web chart of main traces, then collapsing elements into groups. Sanguinetti's web of discourses mimics my own constellations that were formed during the data analysis process for this study. The purpose of this chapter is to detail how these approaches are applied in this study. This chapter covers each of the six phases of data analysis:

- *Phase 1:* Listening to recordings while transcribing and the first read through of transcript. Noting crystallisations for future readings. Transcripts sent for approval to participants.

- *Phase 2*: Participant involvement in data preparation. Editing and omitting certain data as directed by participants. Consideration of silenced discourses.
- *Phase 3*: Reading and rereading. Considering initial crystallisations from first read to locate crystallisations of discourse.
- *Phase 4*: Organising discourses for analysis. Constructing teachers' subjectivity constellations.
- *Phase 5*: Selecting a lens or additional authors to view each teacher subjectivity constellation.
- *Phase 6*: Locating ideas of student agency within the transcripts.

Phase 1: Listening

The process of organising data in this study did not follow a rigid structure. Each phase overlapped and influenced the one before and after it, tangling itself into spaces and affecting the outcome. The first step was to listen to the interview. As the researcher, transcribing was part of my data preparation, but also an initial step into the sorting and selection of the data that were used in the research. There was a constant folding back to what had been previously heard in the original interview. Certain interviews had already caused a reaction during the interview itself. Possible sites of crystallisations of discourse were identified and were marked to return back to and explore further. One such crystallisation was a statement by a teacher that alluded to their being responsible for the lives of the children in their class. This crystallisation of discourse of responsibility would appear later in future transcripts.

Once I had transcribed the interviews, I read them through to check for obvious errors. I did this with a focus on picking up typed errors but also to identify crystallisations of discourse. I also checked for repetitions across the first few interviews. This administrative and organisational task of transcribing could have been delegated to an external person. However, when this task is part of the researcher's role, it straddles the boundaries of data organisation and data analysis. The process of typing up and reading through each transcript prior to sign-off by participants becomes part of the wider data analysis project. This process allowed me to view all content spoken, and it captured content that may have been removed by participants during the sign-off process.

Phase 2: Participant Involvement in Data Preparation

As part of this project, teachers were invited to discuss their day-to-day practices with me, a researcher unknown to them, in order to investigate teachers' day-to-day practices and the ideas

of student agency in primary schools. The relationship between those conducting educational research in schools and teacher participants involves a significant element of trust that anonymity will be maintained. Pseudonyms have been used in this study and any potential identifiers of the schools involved (e.g., school-specific programme names) were removed.

Following the interviews, recordings were transcribed and copies sent to participants for clarification and to sign off the use of their transcript for data analysis. Two participants requested some deletions. Viewing spoken language in written text can prove confronting or embarrassing if grammar appears incorrect or if the text is seen as damaging the participant's position in some way (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). One participant requested some significant deletions. It was possible that this participant thought the statements could appear damaging to their reputation or relationships with others should they somehow be identifiable to others. Their statements about student agency and the day-to-day practices of other teachers, and their own teaching practices, were raw and honest. Their action to later remove these statements could be considered an example of silenced discourse (Foucault, 1978):

> There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses. (Foucault, 1978, p. 27)

Two other participants made reference to some of their comments being "off the record" during the interviews. These comments were highlighted in the field notes, so they were not part of the transcribing process. These examples of requests for deletions reflect the situation in education where teachers feel that they can only say certain things in their role as a classroom teacher. These examples are evidence that dominant educational discourses can be incredibly strong and effective ways of dampening down alternative ways of speaking and thinking in education.

Phase 3: Reading and Rereading

I applied the work of Youdell in this study to foreground discourse in the interviews, not the participants' unique voice and opinions. Locating discourse within the interviews is fundamental to the data analysis process. This approach differs from other versions of coding collected data to prepare for analysis. After reading the first three interviews, it was apparent that there were recognisable moments when teachers made statements that appeared to be common sense—as simply what they did every day. Foucault would say that discourse

illustrates the way that words coalesce in statements based on what is considered truth and only certain statements can be made but not others. Therefore, in foregrounding discourse, this phase of data analysis looked for statements that implied a truth that existed in the classroom. These statements appeared in the first three interviews with common sentence starters such as "I have to…" "We do…" "We have to…" "You have to be …" "It is good if…." "I am…" "We all do this…" and "That's what we do here…"

The first three interviews were read and reread and passages that featured some of the above sentence starters were selected for closer analysis. These crystallisations from the first three interviews provided a lens or means of illumination for the reading process of the remaining six interviews. Once again, the process of bringing together annotated notes and the recording; and listening, pausing and typing up the interviews allowed for multiple opportunities to connect and listen to the statements teachers made. This layering of exposure to the statements, to the utterances, and checking to confirm, opened up the opportunities for embodied responses to the data. What was it about that statement that made me pause, rewind, listen to it again to confirm? This entanglement in the data and my position within it is guided by Youdell's (2006a) statement about researchers' entanglement in data:

> While at times discourses and their effects are clearly evident, more often these are subtle and oblique, needing to be teased out, inferred. This is not the collection of "real" or "actual" discourses but is wholly constrained by my own discursive repertoire—the discourse that I see and name—and my capacity to represent these. I am, then, absolutely entangled in my research data, data that are inevitably my own construction. (p. 56)

Moments when teachers spoke of particular ways of being as a teacher as if it was common sense were obvious within the data. In addition, moments of emotion, of correcting or silencing speech, were also revealed. Youdell (2006b) referred to moments when educational discourse emerges in the data as "sites" where discourse can crystallise, and this was the focus for this part of the data analysis.

> I am not, however, asking the researched to explicate their understanding of the context and relations within it. Rather, I am looking for moments in which subjects are constituted and in which constituted subjects act. I am looking for discourses and their subjectivating effects. I ask myself what discourses might be circulating inside and/or across school contexts, how these are being deployed, what their effects might be. (p. 513)

In the first three interviews, from my position as researcher and someone no longer in full time teaching, there seemed to be an unbalanced level of responsibility accompanied by an

acceptance of this responsibility. I wondered if this would appear in the other interviews. This served as a crystallisation for the initial readings of the other transcripts.

Other crystallisations, or crystals of discourse, included:

- Teachers being *responsible* for the lives of other peoples' children.
- Teachers being *available all the time* for parent communication.
- Teachers doing jobs *traditionally associated with parenting.*
- Surveillance of teachers, *being checked on*, *meeting targets* set for children.
- Teachers having *unreasonable expectations* placed on them in regard to high classroom numbers and high-needs students (e.g., 30 children and 5 autistic children or children on the ASD spectrum) but that those expectations weren't seen as unreasonable by the teachers.
- Teachers embracing and *acknowledging the need to improve their teaching practice* through professional development.

Once the nine transcripts were signed off and amended by participants, the next phase of the data analysis commenced. The initial crystallisations outlined above proved useful. Similar utterances or statements that built on these initial crystallisations were identified. For example, teachers discussed professional development but then also discussed situations where they were being observed by professional development facilitators, or their team leader, or senior leadership. They were similar discourses and seemed to belong close together, though they were not the same. These multitudes of discourse crystallisations were then organised for analysis.

Phase 4: Organising Discourses for Analysis

I needed to organise and structure data in order to facilitate a thorough analysis of how these discourses worked to constitute particular kinds of teachers. I developed a data analysis table to organise data that would capture the discourse identified in the transcripts and attempt to group them together. This table would then be added to throughout the phases of the data analysis. It became clear from reading through the raw data that there were three particular aspects of teachers' day-to-day practices, and their roles and responsibilities, that warranted a closer look and analysis. Firstly, the dominant discourses circulating within the context of the classroom, with students, and sometimes parents, reinforcing those discourses. Secondly, there were discourses that were circulating throughout the school, with involvement and

reinforcement by senior leadership, team leaders and professional development providers. Thirdly, there were discourses circulating in the wider societal context involving policy makers, politicians and the general public, related to how teachers taught students. These three elements—classroom, school, society—provided a framework to further analyse the data. The next step in the analysis was to locate specific discourses within these three parameters that emerged from the raw data.

From here, the crystallisations of discourse identified in Phase 3 were organised into the discourses of the classroom, the school and the wider community. Three to four strong discourse crystallisations that appeared to be working to form the classroom teacher, team member, or the public face of teaching, were located in the data. These elements were repeated throughout several transcripts, alluding to the strength of the discourse irrespective of which school and which teacher was involved (see Table 1).

Table 1

Data Analysis Process Influenced by the Work of Davies and Youdell: Locate

Data analysis step	Crystallisations of discourse		
Review transcripts and draw attention to one aspect (different spaces).	What teachers do as a classroom teacher.	What teachers do as a teacher in their school community.	What teachers do as part of society.
Locate specific examples across multiple transcripts.	• Tutoring before school. • Making costumes at home for students. • Being available to parents "24/7."	• "You have to be ready, on show." • Acceptance of observations, teachers' reinforcement of the value of observations.	• "There's always a spreadsheet to fill in." • "We love our spreadsheets." • Reporting on children to adults inside and outside of school.

Rather than exploring the impossibilities for teachers (Youdell, 2006a), I explored the possible ways of teachers being in their classroom, their school and society. These constellations of discourses coalesce to form examples of the way teachers can be that make sense to students and parents, other teachers, and wider society. From these constellations of discourses, I was able to describe three possible examples of teacher-subject positions or subjectivities.

These subject positions, these possible ways of being a teacher, develop as teacher subjectivities as teachers themselves adopt them, be them, reinforce them, and accept them. Foucault (Foucault et al., 1988) proposed that the process of being made a subject, or

subjectification, is dependent on two types of technologies. Firstly, technologies of power (through disciplinary practices and notions of common sense and normality), and, secondly, technologies of self. With technologies of self, the constitution of the teacher subjectivity is developed by the teacher themselves as they "do teaching," as they go about their day-to-day practices that reinforce the disciplinary practices they accept and reinforce their roles in the classroom, the school and society. Subjectivities can "misfire" and can be dismantled if teachers refuse certain practices and stop to question how they are constituted within the power relations and power flows in their school. In analysing this data for this project, I was looking for indicators of acceptance, reinforcement of dominant discourse and instances of pushback against what appears as common sense and accepted, every-day, taken-for-granted practice in schools.

In continuing to think with the theories of Foucault, on closer analysis I was able to identify the disciplinary practices that made these subjectivities possible in schools (see Table 2). In the classroom, school and society there appeared evidence of hierarchical observation, normalising judgements and the examination. Categorisation, monitoring, surveillance and self-surveillance were threaded through the data. This was noted and recorded on the data analysis tool to inform how disciplinary practices work to reinforce discourse and form teacher subjectivities. In addition to hierarchical observation, normalising judgements and the examination, the way other disciplinary practices of schools reinforced and made certain discourses dominant appeared through the data. Specifically, and as outlined in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1977), is the way space, time and activities are compartmentalised in schools. The inclusion of disciplinary practices in the data analysis tool allows the data to be analysed for both the identification of regimes of truths, discourse that teachers state as truths about their day-to-day practices, but also crystallisations of discourse that emerge clearly linked to Foucault's disciplinary practices (hierarchical observation, normalising judgements and the examination).

Table 2

Data Analysis Process Influenced by the Work of Davies and Youdell: Include Disciplinary Practices

Data analysis step	Crystallisations of discourse		
Review transcripts and draw attention to one aspect (different spaces).	What teachers do as a classroom teacher.	What teachers do as a teacher in their school community.	What teachers do as part of society.
Locate specific examples across multiple transcripts.	• Tutoring before school. • Making costumes at home for students. • Being available to parents "24/7."	• "You have to be ready, on show" • Acceptance of observations, teachers' reinforcement of the value of observations.	• "There's always a spreadsheet to fill in." • "We love our spreadsheets." • Reporting on children to adults inside and outside of school.
Disciplinary practices evident.	Normalising judgements. Compartmentalising space and time to contain and manage teachers inside classroom walls. This determines what is done "in school time" and work completed at home, outside of school hours.	Hierarchal observations, normalising judgement, the examination (assessment of teachers).	Measurement and comparison. Self-surveillance. Categorisation of groups.

In regard to thinking with theories, I returned to Foucault (1977) and examined the concepts of enclosure and timetabling that worked to form certain subjects in social institutions (See Table 3). Foucault proposed that these disciplines of time were imposed onto educational spaces through the arrangement of different stages of learning, increasing the difficulty, compartmentalising subjects and "qualifying individuals according to the way in which they progress through these series" (p. 159). As I reread the transcripts, I documented on the data analysis tool aspects of the way time, space and activities were used in schools to form teachers in certain ways. I could see the way teachers were repeating, and themselves reinforcing, these disciplinary practices. The practices of compartmentalising activities, teaching certain subjects at certain times, and the way teachers restricted their bodily actions based on what they could and couldn't do at certain times of the day, seemed important.

Table 3

Data Analysis Process Influenced by the Work of Davies and Youdell: Thinking About Theories

Data analysis step	Crystallisations of discourse		
Review transcripts and draw attention to one aspect (different spaces).	What teachers do as a classroom teacher.	What teachers do as a teacher in their school community.	What teachers do as part of society.
Locate specific examples across multiple transcripts.	• Tutoring before school. • Making costumes at home for students. • Being available to parents "24/7."	• "You have to be ready, on show." • Acceptance of observations, teachers' reinforcement of the value of observations.	• "There's always a spreadsheet to fill in." • "We love our spreadsheets." • Reporting on children to adults inside and outside of school.
Locate disciplinary practices that reinforce this.	Normalising judgements. Compartmentalising space and time to contain and manage teachers inside classroom walls. This determines what is done "in school time" and work completed at home, outside of school hours.	Hierarchal observations, normalising judgement, the examination (assessment of teachers).	Measurement and comparison. Self-surveillance. Categorisation of groups.
Thinking with theories to locate external origins of discourse.	Foucault's discourses, discourse of neoliberalism: competitive, individual responsibility.	Foucault's disciplinary practices in social institutions: observation, normalising judgments.	Foucault's neoliberal governmentality: managing the conduct of others from a distance.

Phase 5: Selecting a Lens or Additional Authors to View Each Teacher Subjectivity Constellation

Youdell's work was informed by Foucault (1977) and Butler (2014), but her analysis also drew from the work and theories of others in order to identify wider societal discourse. Foucault (1977) suggested that educational discourses are not formed within schools themselves but rather social institutions—of which schools are one—that act as a "hothouse" for wider dominant societal discourses. It is important to connect what is happening in schools with what is happening in society, in policy, and in the ways teachers are discussed outside of the school environment. In considering cultural discourses circulating within secondary school environments, Youdell (2006b) brought in Said's (1977) work on Orientalism, colonial

discourse, and anti-Islamic ideologies when analysing the subjectivities of Muslim students in schools. This approach helped her untangle and pick away at the ways young Muslim students are positioned as certain kinds of students in the school environment, informed by wider societal discourse. The analysis of the data in this study incorporates some of the wider societal discourses aligned with the discourses identified within the data (See Table 4). These connections between educational discourses and wider discourses will be explored in greater detail in the Discussion chapter.

Table 4

Data Analysis Process Influenced by the Work of Davies and Youdell: Additional Authors

Data analysis step	Crystallisations of discourse		
Review transcripts and draw attention to one aspect (different spaces).	What teachers do as a classroom teacher.	What teachers do as a teacher in their school community.	What teachers do as part of society.
Locate specific examples across multiple transcripts.	• Tutoring before school. • Making costumes at home for students. • Being available to parents "24/7."	• "You have to be ready, on show" • Acceptance of observations, teachers' reinforcement of the value of observations.	• "There's always a spreadsheet to fill in." • "We love our spreadsheets." • Reporting on children to adults inside and outside of school.
Locate disciplinary practices that reinforce this.	Normalising judgements. Compartmentalising space and time to contain and manage teachers inside classroom walls. This determines what is done "in school time" and work completed at home, outside of school hours.	Hierarchal observations, normalising judgement, the examination (assessment of teachers).	Measurement and comparison. Self-surveillance. Categorisation of groups.
Thinking with theories to locate external origins of discourse.	Foucault's discourses, discourse of neoliberalism: competitive, individual responsibility.	Foucault's disciplinary practices in social institutions: observation, normalising judgements.	Foucault's neoliberal governmentality: managing the conduct of others from a distance.
Bring in other authors' discussions into the analysis.	• Barker's (1993) concertive control: we are harder on ourselves when we aren't closely supervised. • Walkerdine and Lucey's (1989) choices/desires/ feminism: pressure to not just be a "good enough" mother (or teacher).	• Ball (2003, 2015): managed teachers, not professionals. • Englund and Gerdin's (2019, p.510) performative technologies: "the players have to be dressed in the proper clothing, they have to be displayed and compared." • Davies and Bansel's (2010, p.13) appropriate and appropriated subjects: "like a well-trained pony." • Dargusch and Charteris's (2018, p.28) teacher accountability: "must be seen to perform, and to perform in ways that are	• Easton's (1999, p.160) schools as businesses "more concerned with what can be …. compared, measured than the actual teaching itself." • Hood's (1991) New public management. • Grek and Ozga's (2008) governing by data. • Smyth's (1992) contradictions of devolution.

	measurable and thus are rendered visible to all."

Phase 6: Locating the Ideas of Student Agency Within the Transcripts

In order to locate dominant ideas on student agency from the data, I sought out crystallisations of student agency ideas that emerged in the same way I did with teacher subjectivities. One key approach I took to uncover or locate these truths was to locate and explore statements that included the words *is* or *it is*. This enabled me to see what the teachers believed to be truths of student agency, whilst ensuring I was not extracting data on their opinions or perspectives of student agency. When teachers say "it is," student agency appears as a truth, not an individual opinion or approach. Again, as with the teacher subjectivities data, I looked at how teachers spoke about student agency and what they did in their day-to-day practice when they talked about enacting the ideas of student agency. The data for this section on the ideas of student agency are mostly taken from the second part of the interview, where I specifically asked about professional development around student agency and how the term had been discussed as a school (See Table 5). However, I have also included the truths teachers held about student agency as they discussed their day-to-day practice. The findings, therefore, may be taken from statements within the second part of the interview (student agency focus) but also from the first part (teachers' day-to-day practice).

Table 5

Data Analysis Process Influenced by the Work of Davies and Youdell: Student Agency

Data analysis step	Crystallisations of discourse			
Review transcripts and draw attention to one aspect (language picked up by teachers from professional development sessions).	Student agency as assessment.	Student agency as literacy improvement.	Student agency as disjointed.	Student agency as stabilising.
Locate specific examples across multiple transcripts.	"But our facilitator for assessment for learning … in a sense the learner agency comes from there." Simone proposes that students being able to talk about where they were at with their learning (as a form of self-assessment, and as part of the AFL discourse, was not only connected with student agency, but was what student agency "is."	"The all-purpose student agency slash literacy person." "We were all focussed on writing, as a whole school. So student agency in writing that was what we were learning about." "So that's that is actually what my goal and my team's goal for our professional growth cycle is to look at student agency with reading and how you can, how we can improve those target readers, more quickly."	"We don't have the why. We definitely don't have the why here." "So what I see student agency, is that we still have that inconsistency—what student agency is. That definition for student agency."	"They can choose sometimes when they do their self- and peer assessing. But you've still got to have this strong, the teacher decides what you're doing for reading." "I facilitate the learning. I give the learning intentions. I say what we're going to do next. So it is a very structured day. And that's my role."
Locate disciplinary practices that reinforce this.	The examination. Self-surveillance.	Measurement and comparison. Individualisation and totalisation.		Dominant discourses. Absence of resistance and refusal.
Thinking with theories to locate external origins of discourse.	Foucault's neoliberal governmentality: managing the conduct of others from a distance. Conduct of others managed from a distance by OECD DeSeCo project—acting autonomously, NZC managing self-competencies.	OECD PISA comparative data across countries. Need to measure and compare countries' "success" in education against each other.	Youdell's misfiring of discourse: presents some confusion if discourse is not dominant. Incompatibility with the ideas of student-led learning in democratic schools and the application of student agency in mainstream school. Causes confusion around "giving" children agency in schools.	Student agency is understood as common sense that it is a good thing, not up for refusal or challenge. However needs to make sense in existing discourses. 21st-century learners discourse sounds transformative: can be superficial if it doesn't disrupt other dominant discourse and disciplinary practices.

Data analysis step	Crystallisations of discourse			
Bring in other authors' discussions into the analysis.	Ball (2003) neoliberalised individual..	Easton's (1999, p.160) schools as businesses "more concerned with what can be …. compared, measured than the actual teaching itself." Grek and Ozga's (2008) governing by data.	(Arnold & Clarke, 2014) discussed agency as vague and student agency as ambiguous.	Davies (1994) language can hold things in place what we are trying to change.

The following chapters will explain the findings drawn from the data analysis process, including the identification and description of three particular constellations of teacher subjectivities along with reporting on the ideas of student agency that circulated in the schools involved in this research. The Findings chapters bring both data sets together to address the research question "How do teacher subjectivities interact with the ideas of student agency?"

Chapter 6: Findings I—Teacher Subjectivities and Student Agency Ideas

The findings from this study are presented in two parts, across two chapters. Firstly, in this chapter, the findings about teacher subjectivities are presented as constellations of the ways teachers can be in their classroom, formed by the multiple discourses circulating in their classrooms and schools. These constellations are formed by the discourses located in the interview transcripts, as outlined in Chapter 5. Youdell (2005) suggested that "subjectivities might helpfully be thought in terms of constituting constellations that create possibilities and constraints for 'who' students can be" (p. 249). I use this approach to explore the possibilities and constraints on who teachers can be. Secondly, I outline the groupings of ideas that teachers in this study have about student agency from their involvement in professional development learning. In the next chapter, I present the findings about how teacher subjectivities interact with the ideas of student agency, and I also explore the presence of transformation or conflict within the data.

Firstly, in order to establish some of the teacher subjectivities that are possible in New Zealand primary schools, and to answer the main research question, "How do teacher subjectivities interact with the ideas of student agency?", I began by locating the discourses from the transcripts that worked to form classroom teacher subjectivities in this study. In this chapter, I introduce three teacher subjectivities and identify the dominant discourses from the data that work to form these subjectivities. I provide evidence of the ways that teachers, through their speech and actions, actively work to reinforce these subjectivities themselves. The three teacher subjectivities discussed in this chapter are "the above-and-beyond teacher," "the teacher as performer," and "the accountable teacher." These three subjectivities appeared strongly in my data; however, they are, of course, not the only subjectivities available to primary school teachers.

The second section of this chapter explores student agency as part of the language of teachers' day-to-day practices and by professional development directives. This section addresses the study's second question: "How do teachers explain and enact their ideas about student agency?" The way teachers talk about student agency and the way they enact the ideas of student agency in their classroom directly relate to the language and practices that have been presented to them via professional development facilitators or through internal experts. Student agency ideas that are discussed include student agency as being linked to literacy and assessment, and also the notion that student agency is misunderstood internally, which may be a consequence of professional

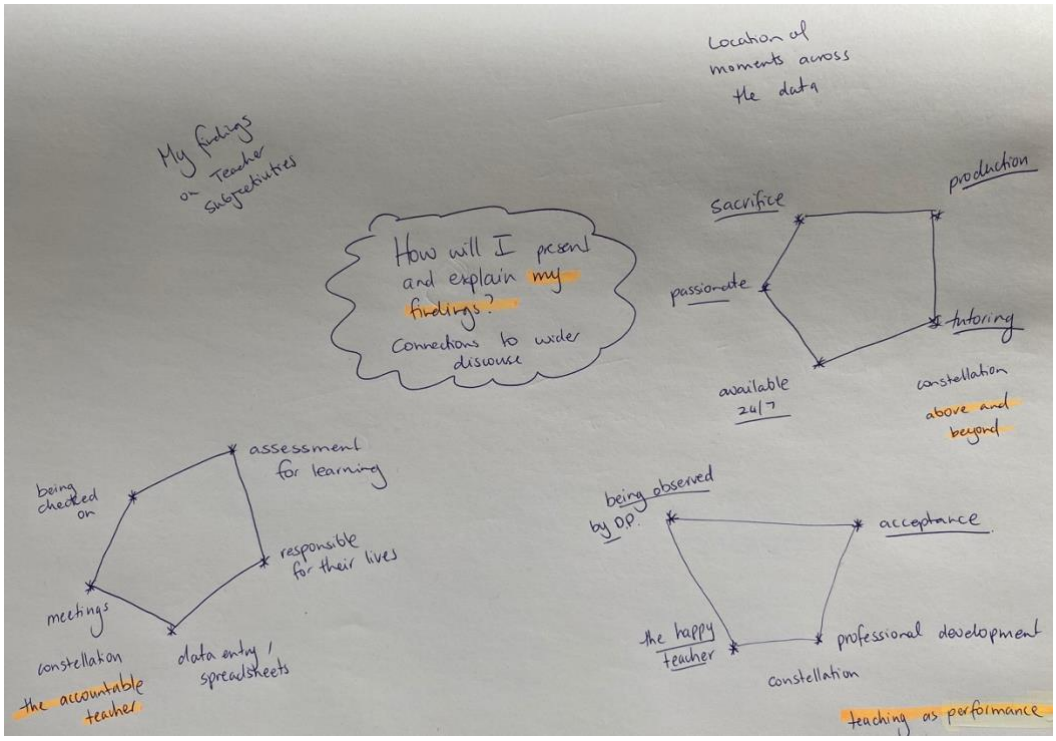
development fatigue for teachers. The idea that student agency is already old and forgotten about is included in the findings.

Teacher Subjectivities Formed in Constellations of Discourse

In this section, I introduce the approach of documenting certain constellations of discourses that work to form teacher subjectivities. As outlined in Chapters 4 and 5, these appear through the discussion of day-to-day practice but share similar attributes. These can be grouped together to form a constellation of discourses. From those constellations of discourses, the possible ways teachers can be in classrooms, or possible teacher subjectivities, can be identified. During the data analysis process, I drafted a visual representation of connecting discourses that form these constellations (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Draft Constellations of Discourse



Constellation 1: The Above-and-Beyond Teacher

The above-and-beyond teacher subjectivity describes a teacher who is unable to simply be a good-enough teacher in the classroom for their students. Discourses that appear in the data work to form a classroom teacher as someone who exceeds expectations. These statements are presented in a way that suggests teachers accept this, that this is "who they are" as a teacher, and this is what they do as part of their day-to-day practice. The statements call into question the possibilities for teachers to teach in a way that is simply being a good-enough teacher. Teachers make statements

about the need to be passionate, give 100%, be readily available for others, make sacrifices, and go beyond simply educational parameters for children's future development.

Passionate. The following statements from the data present a discourse of passion, how you must be as a teacher, and the need to give 100% every day. This is not a statement from one teacher in the study who thinks that she, as an individual, has to be passionate. It is a statement about teachers, that they have "got to be passionate."

> Meena: You've got to be passionate. You've got to really think about the students, you want to be making some positive changes in their lives, you know, especially now, we're in the age there's technology, there's domestic violence, there's so many things happening and students come to school confused, so many things and if you're not there for them, if you're just there… It is a job for a lot of us, but you've got to put your heart into it as well.
> Meena: You know you've got that passion and mindset that "Ah I'm here to make a difference" in the lives of these kids.
> Tracey: You have to be well rested and ready and mentally ready as well. Like you have to be 100% every day. Yeah, but it's good. Yeah you know... it's all part... those 5 hours you know that you have the kids in the classroom are the most important in my view point and the behind-the-scenes stuff, where you have to do all the planning... it's important to make those 5 hours really good, you have to be ready to be on show for 5 hours.
> Gina: What would you see as the responsibilities across that day?
> Daniel: Ensuring the wellbeing in most respects for your class and children outside of your class. Both educationally and beyond.

Meena expands on this discourse of being passionate as a teacher when she states that the role of the teacher includes making positive changes in the lives of students during times of technological changes and even in the context of domestic violence. This level of responsibility for making a difference in the lives of students is reinforced by an unfinished statement of "if you're not there for them…" with its inference of "then who else" will be there for them.

All of the above quotes coalesce to form the description of a teaching subject that is not only attempting to achieve an impossible emotional energy target of giving 100% every day, but is also insisting on the presence of passion in the role of the classroom teacher. This discourse permeates through teachers' talk of their day-to-day practice and is accepted and reinforced by the teachers themselves.

The data reflect the impact of COVID-19, which appears to have disrupted and impacted how parents see the availability of their child's teacher. Online learning during COVID-19 lockdowns allowed regular and frequent email communication between teacher and parent, and, in the following data, this appears to have continued even after children returned to the classroom.

Always Available. A second discourse emerges alongside the passionate teacher discourse, where, in order to be passionate about teaching, a teacher has to be always available. The following quote was selected for further analysis due to the identification of a moment where teachers are clearly being constituted by a discourse of "always available—24/7 access."

> Gina: Ok. We talked before about responsibilities, …. For their learning. What are your responsibilities as a teacher outside of classroom contact hours?
> Kim: Well I suppose I'm always accessible. So I've got parents emailing me anytime. Like 3 in the morning. When we were in lockdown. So you know I always try and be accessible to parents. Like we're on Seesaw, you know, so I'm constantly marking the work that they do. Give comments out of school hours. Available to meet parents. And I also have a kid I meet at 8 o'clock every morning to do work before school because his parents can't work with him at home.
> Gina: So that's quite a bit. So I was going to ask people about like what they did on their classroom release time, staff meetings, professional development, study, after-school tasks.
> Kim: Yup, do that. But I think since lockdown parents feel they have an all access, free access to you anytime.
> Sandra: I have a huge responsibility to the kids here. I don't know how to say it, but at 3 o'clock I don't stop thinking, I'm always planning, I'm making notes. Constantly, yes this comes home with me every night. It's a 24/7 thing I mean (inaudible…) on the weekend but it was when it was online because they would have to give me their work, send it to me and they'd want feedback and so that was like constant that was very full on.

Here, Kim provides evidence of how teachers constitute themselves as particular kinds of teachers. She reinforces the discourse herself when she states that she always tries to be accessible to parents. She is not refusing this accessibility or rejecting it. In addition, when she provides comments when reviewing students' work out of school hours, or when she replies to parents' emails that have been sent late at night, she reinforces the discourse of the always-available teacher. Kim has the opportunity to refuse this discourse and not respond to emails at night, and to not be so readily available to meet with parents, but she chooses not to. This is an example of a discourse that emerged in a different time and place (e.g., during home learning in lockdown) but has remained constant when teachers returned to the classroom.

Sacrifice. In order to always be available, the classroom teacher usually has to make sacrifices of personal time or sacrifices of time away from other classroom organisation responsibilities. The transcripts revealed repeated moments when teachers referenced some form of sacrifice in order to meet the requirements and needs of others (e.g., students or parents). This was often spoken about in terms of sacrifice of time to have a brief break during the day, a sacrifice of eating, of unhurried bathroom breaks, or time spent with family and friends out of school hours. This discourse of sacrifice was embedded in the interviews, sometimes in a subtle moment, and at other times in more obvious moments.

Tracey: Well I don't think people realise, it's a luxury to have lunch. Like if you do that, well you better be really well prepared for the next block. It's kind of... I always have student teachers, and they always look a little bit shocked when, they're like "oh, its morning tea time" and I'm like "yeah, but we've got to get ready for the next lesson." And they're kind of like "oh." Like run to the bathroom and maybe get a cup of tea. But you know... not all the time but I have to say I'd have to make a concerted effort to join yeah, you know you're just moving.

Laura's comments imply that previously she and her team would be available for students on their break times, but she is gradually attempting to step away from that practice:

Laura: There's times I have learnt too that, because other years, you've given… because as a team, we're always there, we're there [in the classroom] on our morning tea, we're there in our lunch time, you know we're there. I did find it became an expectation, that we were there then. So sometimes I'll purposely say if someone brings me something before school, like a piece of writing or something, I'll say actually no I'm not free right now, but you can give it to me later. So, no I'm not being readily available all the time.

The way the primary school environment and structured timetable is organised appears to limit teachers' access to food, drink, and the bathroom. As Tracey suggests to a student teacher, there is usually just enough time to visit the bathroom and have a cup of tea, as there is a need to set up and get ready for the lesson after morning tea break. Here, timetabling controls the actions of a teacher who then functions on a hastily grabbed snack and quick visit to the bathroom.

In Loco Parentis. Following on from the notion of sacrificing personal time to eat and drink comes the discourse of teachers acting in place of the parent. The term *in loco parentis* is used here, meaning in place of the parent (Hall & Manins, 2001). In analysing the data there appeared to be a blurring of boundaries between what may have been traditional parental responsibilities and what had become, or was in the process of becoming, the classroom teacher's responsibility. This section explores instances from the data where teachers see themselves in roles that, in the past, would have been the domain of parental responsibility.

Kim: And I also have a kid I meet at 8 o'clock every morning to do work before school because his parents can't work with him at home.
Kim: At the moment I'm making costumes. Production.
Gina: So are you literally organising costumes for your class?
Kim: I made 20 [animal] ears. I've got tails to make this weekend.

In these quotes, a teacher discusses how she is making school production costumes during her personal time in the weekend, sacrificing time with her friends and family, and provides one-to-one tutoring to a child because his parents can't work with him. What is significant here is the acknowledgement that because the child's parents are unable to support their child's home learning, the teacher accepts this as their new responsibility. Here, in this scenario, the teacher

steps into a space typically reserved for either the parent themselves or a paid tutor. The teacher knowingly accepts this "above-and-beyond" aspect of teaching (one-to-one tutoring) on a daily basis, not as a one-off.

All of the above quotes point to a certain kind of teaching subject—an above-and-beyond teacher. The above-and-beyond teacher is formed through the discourses of being passionate, always available, making sacrifices and acting in place of the parent. The above-and-beyond teacher subjectivity is reinforced by the speech and actions of teachers as they discuss their day-to-day practice and through their acceptance of these actions without too much consternation or disagreement. Through their speech and actions, they constitute themselves as aspirational teachers rather than teachers who are good enough. There is a marked absence of a push against, or a refusal of, the requests made of them by others. One possible way of being a teacher in New Zealand is to be the above-and-beyond teacher—this kind of teacher "makes sense."

Being a good-enough teacher is not reflected in the data and is not part of the discourse that has been uncovered in the findings. It could be that being a good-enough teacher is not seen as a possible way for teachers to be in the schools participating in this study. The teacher who doesn't express or show passion in their work, the teacher who doesn't sacrifice their lunch or morning tea break for their students, the teacher who can't (or refuses to) sew costumes, the teacher who refuses to support individual students with before- or after-school tutoring, may find that others don't see them as "normal" teachers. This constellation—the above-and-beyond teacher—is the first of three that are explored in this study. The next section explores a second teacher subjectivity—teacher as performer.

Constellation 2: Teacher as Performer

Teachers' acceptance of performing for others appears throughout the data. This is evidenced within the context of teachers proving to others they have understood the professional development they have been involved in and therefore know how to enact the ideas of the professional development in the classroom. In a similar way to how students are asked to provide evidence of their understanding, teachers are asked to provide evidence of their understanding of professional development learning through performance. The teachers in this study perform for and with others both when they actively participate in ongoing, continuous professional development training and when they are then observed by others as they perform these new learnings and classroom strategies. They accept that they will need to "work" on themselves as professionals and accept that they will be checked on and observed to make sure they have embedded the professional development they have been part of. As part of this performance, teachers in this study appear

happy and content about that situation. The data reveal a "truth": that this is good for them. Some of the vocabulary across the transcripts even reflects "stage-like" references (e.g., "So it's what I call the behind the scenes"). This section discusses two key discourses: professional development and observations that form the teacher as performer.

Professional Development. When asked about their responsibilities that fell outside of a typical 9.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. in-class-teaching timetable, one responsibility that all participants mentioned was attending professional development. This is evidence of a dominant discourse that pervades all primary schools.

> Simone: I feel ultimately it [professional development] makes us better teachers and if we're better teachers we'll have better learners. In simple form, I think the better we are at our practice, the more chance we have of bringing these children through the schooling system with a better understanding of why they're doing what they're doing.
>
> Or courses, like PD [professional development], I just was on quite an intensive one last term, …. So, that was half a day out of the classroom each week, so it's like prepping, doing the plan for the reliever, then the follow-on homework from that that had to be done in my own time. That type of thing and feeding back to my team about what I had learnt on the course. Yeah so it's lots of things.

It is expected that teachers will attend some form of professional development in the course of their school year. This may be in the form of specialist support from an external professional development facilitator or may be led by someone internally with expertise in the field. The transcripts featured numerous references to after-school workshops, teachers' university postgraduate study, and also workshops during the school day that required time out of the classroom to attend. Teachers discussed after-school weekly meetings as combining both staff communications and professional development. This dominant discourse is evident in Kim's transcript as she describes the transition from learning from home during COVID lockdowns—when there was a temporary suspension of professional development and whole-school staff meetings.

> Gina: So that's quite a bit. So I was going to ask people about like what they did on their CRT [classroom release time] time, staff meetings, professional development, study, after school tasks.
> Kim: Yup, do that. But I think since lockdown parents feel they have an all access, free access to you anytime.
> Gina: Has that been set off against a reduction in face-to-face staff meetings, professional development?
> Kim: No, we've ramped up.
> Gina: Ok. Because you can?
> Kim: Because I think they're trying to make up from the 2 years we haven't. Like we would have two PDs a week. … Yeah.

With some of the professional development offered in schools, there is an aspect of coaching or in-class follow up. This includes observation or monitoring of the teacher to see if the practices covered in the professional development have been adopted by the classroom teacher and embedded in their practice. The following section profiles the second discourse contributing to the teacher as performer subjectivity—being observed.

Being Observed. "A relation of surveillance, defined and regulated, is inscribed at the heart of the practice of teaching, not as an additional or adjacent part, but as a mechanism that is inherent to it and which increases its efficiency" (Foucault, 1977, p. 176). The teacher-as-performer subjectivity is evident as part of the discourse that dictates teachers are to act and present in a certain kind of way in order to be recognisable as a teacher. To be observed by an audience, even an audience of one (e.g., a professional development facilitator) means that the teacher presents a performance, constructed from a script or outline that sits within the discourse as acceptable and verifiable. As the teacher is observed, feedback is drafted, comments noted and next steps are proposed.

> Simone: Learning about the matrix and all of the compartments and then she [PD facilitator], alongside with our team leaders, would come and observe us. So we would have a preobservation conversation with our team leader about an area of focus that we wanted them to observe us on. Like an area of development for us in terms of student agency, and as a school, we were all focussed on writing, as a whole school. So student agency in writing that was what we were learning about. So we would come up with a little bit of a goal that we would want [PD facilitator] and our team leader to observe us on. They would come in and observe us and then we would have a postconversation about what they had observed, and next steps for us. So basically what we do, what we try and do with the children, we were having done on ourselves. So, it was a whole circle. So that was really good and that happened, so pre-COVID it was twice a year.

> Laura: So we all observe each other through the team. So we might say we're doing the same thing but the three of us, observe each other because you're each taking a different aspect from it and then as the BT [beginning teacher], because he takes a different, yeah so we do a lot of the PD in the sense of talking through each other.

This acting and assessing discourse places a different form of pressure on the teacher to the above-and-beyond teacher. The pressure in this scenario is directly provided by an external source, the assessor, who confirms if the teacher is valid and can be acknowledged as a teacher successfully "jumping through the right hoops." Here, Simone doesn't question it when a professional development facilitator treats her in the same way she treats the 5-year-old children in her class. It is the acceptance of observations and the fact they are embedded so strongly into the discourse of professional development that warrants a deeper interrogation of this strong, dominant discourse. This is explored later in the Discussion chapter.

Discourses of regular professional development sessions and being observed work together to produce the teacher-as-performer subjectivity. As teachers prepare for observations, as they participate and contribute during staff meetings and professional development, they reinforce the teacher-as-performer subjectivity. They become visible, possible, understood and make sense to others. This is one of three subjectivities selected from the data, along with the above-and-beyond teacher. The final subjectivity to be discussed in this chapter is that of the "accountable teacher," closely aligned to the teacher as performer and highly visible in schools that promote the ideas of student agency. These data are discussed in the next section.

Constellation 3: The Accountable Teacher

In this example of a teacher subjectivity, there is a shift away from what is happening in the classroom in relation to teaching students. Instead, there is a focus on the student data (outcomes of teaching and classroom practices) being provided as information for others outside of the school. Here, there is an emphasis on discourses that are circulating across the wider school community and across other agencies (e.g., boards of trustees and MOE). Interestingly, this section introduces a dominant discourse that connects the assessment of students to student agency ideas so explicitly that one teacher states that assessment for learning (AFL) *is* student agency. As teachers discuss their roles and responsibilities, they reinforce a strong emphasis on the teaching of literacy and numeracy and the need to accelerate children's learning in these two subject areas. Other discourses presented in this constellation include the spreadsheet that is created and submitted as evidence of children's learning. We see evidence of Foucault's (1977) concept of surveillance in teaching again, when teachers make statements about being "checked on" by others. Here, as discussed previously in the teacher-as-performer subjectivity, I present evidence that what is done to children (checking on them) is being done to teachers (being checked on by management). The dominant discourse of after-school meetings is discussed as well as the extreme end of accountability—being responsible for the lives of children.

Assessment for Learning. AFL was mentioned by several teachers during the interviews as they discussed their day-to-day practice but also when discussing student agency specifically. AFL is a MOE product that promotes the idea that the pathway to increased, accelerated academic achievement is via the student having a greater say in their learning: "Akonga who truly understand and are involved in their learning *will* experience accelerated rates of achievement" (MOE, 2025, n.p, emphasis added).

What was evident in the data was the repetition of key messages about AFL that had been adopted by teachers as if reading from a script. There was a clear dominant discourse of AFL that was

working to form these teachers in ways where they were accountable to others to ensure this approach was embedded, in order for their students to achieve accelerated rates of achievement. Using these ideas about AFL, teachers must ensure that their students are able to talk about what they are learning, where they are at with their learning and their next learning steps.

Following is the text taken directly from the MOE (2025) website that features in this section to highlight the mimicry of AFL that appears in the data:

> Students know:
> - what they need to learn
> - where they are with that learning
> - what their next learning steps are. (n.p.)

The following quotes provide evidence from the data of how this truth has been accepted and applied in classrooms by classroom teachers across various year levels and at multiple schools. What is particularly interesting is the near word-for-word use of the MOE definitions above:

> Simone: So the children had been learning about identifying what they're learning to do in the writing, why they're learning to do that, and how they're going to know they're successful, is the first sort of goal.
>
> Tracey: Making learning visible so that the children are explicit in what they need to know, what they're learning and develop and foster that next step for them.
>
> Sandra: One thing we were keen on was getting kids to know what they were learning, why they were learning it and what their next step was. Those three questions, what they're learning, why they're learning it and what their next step is.
>
> Laura: So taking it away next year but having the evidence slides, the evidence of learning is really good because it's a constant reminder of "so, what are you learning, why are you learning it, provide evidence of it."

Another teacher discusses AFL at greater length and how she has embedded it into her day-to-day practice, in the context of her maths lesson.

> Meena: Students straight away know the routine, so they come in, find a buddy and start doing the warm up activity and then so that's about 10 to 15 minutes so during that time I just wander around and see their work, and I do my AFL strategies, you know, what their communication, their collaboration, all the things that they do together and then that becomes my assessment as well. I will exactly know and see what students are doing, who needs help, what strategies we could focus on next time.
>
> Gina: That's good. So you're already mentioned the term assessment, and you've talked about AFL and how student agency and AFL work together. So the question was how do you use assessment in your day to day practice?
>
> Meena: Well, like I said, assessment looks different in different areas, but AFL is powerful because AFL assessment for learning it's about knowing your students and knowing their needs and the students knowing their next steps as well. So it is through those communications, those, especially those communications what did they did together, you see that so and so needs help with this, or perhaps I could do more around this. And then

> you link it with your OTJ [overall teacher judgement] so there is there is a lot of AFL during the day, but then of course you've got those other assessments that you have to do. Which is at the end of the, maybe for writing moderation, or maths moderation, or PM readers, you that you have to do for the reports, for example. But then if you have established really good AFL strategies in your classroom, those assessments become a lot easier.

It is important to draw attention to this statement as the term student agency is being used in a particular way. This language places an emphasis on the accountability for the teacher to enact AFL principles and approaches as part of their responsibility for the child's academic advancement.

Along with the language associated with AFL comes the expectation that students make the accelerated progress that has been predicted and proposed by the MOE. The gathering of student achievement data is required to provide evidence of this expected progress (or otherwise). As students progress in their academic learning, through stages or levels of learning, they produce data points. For example, a shift from Stage 3 to Stage 4 in numeracy. These data of progress of academic achievement are then collected by the teacher as part of their successful teaching and the production of favourable results. In enacting and reinforcing this process of data collection, the teacher maintains the discourse of the importance of data and measurement of particular kinds of valued knowledge and certain ideas of success in schools. Data collection and student reporting are explored in the following section on the presence of spreadsheets and data artefacts as part of teaching practice and the formation of the accountable-teacher subjectivity.

Spreadsheets as Evidence. Another way teachers are formed as the accountable teacher is through the teaching practice of recording student data in quantitative formats, often in spreadsheets or online student management software. This may be requested by senior leadership in the school to include in board of trustee reports, or to inform future planning for the school. The act of collecting and entering data reinforces the constellation of the accountable teacher, one who provides evidence and black-and-white numerical data to justify their efforts, their teaching practice and the immediate-to-short-term impact they have had on their students' academic knowledge or skill level.

> Tracey: So it's what I call the behind the scenes. We're doing the, this is what people don't get, we're doing meetings with parents, so if I have learning concerns with a child then I'm scheduling meetings with parents, with my DP [deputy principal], I'm doing spreadsheets, we love our spreadsheets at [school]. I'm doing numerous spreadsheets, I'm plotting…we've added an intervention…so I'm a team leader as well so there's a few other aspects that I have to focus on.

The collection of data that informs teachers' practice and planning for the class may also be used for different purposes. The data considered in this study are data on students that teachers use to report back to *other parties* i.e., senior management, boards of trustees or the MOE. How these data are used by those parties outside of the classroom and what decisions they inform sit outside of the act of the teacher collecting and recording data for their own teaching purposes. As teachers agree to this practice of data collection of assessment data, they position themselves as teachers who record and capture data as evidence and statistical proof of something occurring or not occurring. The following quotes show the ways teachers speak of the practice of data collection for others and whether they show resistance to this or not.

> Kim: Report writing. And there's always some spreadsheet that needs to be done. And we have a progression for each kid that we have to fill out too. Priority learners and everyone. Just next steps and things like that. And then there's like discussion documents that we do for parent consults. There's always something at our school.
>
> Kim: Which we just copy from the report and put it into the spreadsheet.
>
> Gina: So that would be like where each child is at in their reading, writing and maths.
>
> Kim: Yup, what they can do, and their next steps. And we're supposed to do it every 6 weeks.
>
> Gina: Does it say that Johnny was at Level 5 in Term 1, he's working on this. And then you go in at Term 2 and he's at a different level?
>
> Kim: Yeah.

In the following quote, Kim does appear to question this practice. There was no other evidence of pushing against this discourse in the transcripts. The teachers in this study conform and reinforce the subjectivity of the accountable teacher in their complicit approach.

> Gina: What about any other assessment approaches?
>
> Kim: Well I suppose your OTJ you're always sort of listening, seeing how they… and again it's not so much whether they can read the text it's if they can comprehend it. And answer questions and understand.
>
> Gina: What about outside of reading? So thinking about maybe maths and writing. What other assessment approaches?
>
> Kim: Yeah, again I suppose I have that, I just use assessments as a back-up. Because I think, well we've been teaching a wee while, so you sort of have an idea of where they are at. It's not like you're going in blindly.
>
> Gina: And is it also, is the purpose of them…
>
> Kim: To put the data in the [school student management system]? Is that why we do them? (laughs)

Here, Kim implies an acceptance that this is just what she does. However, this acceptance is accompanied by the use of humour and laughter as a possible cover for how she actually feels

about the task of inputting assessment data into the school management system. She asks, “is that we why do them?” and laughs.

Spreadsheets and entering data onto schoolwide student management systems appear in the data as necessary and just part of school practice. One teacher does comment on the amount of paperwork involved in teaching; she had thought her time would be spent teaching in the classroom but acknowledges she underestimated the amount of time spent on paperwork in relation to actual teaching in the classroom.

Teachers are not only asked to create and maintain spreadsheets for their data. There is also evidence of the need to provide proof of planning and quality of planning for others in what appears to be a quality-assurance process. This checking in on teachers by others as part of a quality assurance regime will be explored in the next section.

Monitoring of Teachers. This section presents evidence in the data of a clear presence of hierarchical observation (Foucault, 1977). Senior-level staff appear to monitor the actions of teachers in order to determine if they meet the norms and expectations of the discourse of the organised, efficient and therefore “good” teacher. A good teacher here ensures that their planning is completed and available for review on a Sunday night prior to teaching on Monday. Learning intentions, learning activities and expected outcomes are captured in the week’s planning, which will be checked on. This checking on is a form of quality assurance.

Gina: Ok, what about your responsibilities as a classroom teacher outside of classroom contact hours? So outside of that kind of 9 to 3 time, what are your responsibilities? And it can be off site or on site as well.

Kim: Like to parents?

Gina: Things that you see as your responsibility.

Kim: Making calls to parents. Yes, I get numerous emails from parents. Just about anything. And then the responsibility of doing the next day, planning and getting things ready. And also even though you do your planning at the beginning of the week, it depends how the lessons are going, which changes your planning, so you should be planning as you go.

Gina: Did you say sometimes you should be planning as you go?

Kim: Yes, or even back planning but… but at our school our planning has to be in by Sunday so you can’t do that.

Gina: So to clarify, what does that look like? In terms of that being a responsibility that you might have on a Sunday night at home like outside of that 9 to 3, if one of your responsibilities is to ensure your planning is completed, what does that look like in terms of who knows that you’ve done that?

Kim: They check.

Gina: OK. So do you forward it to a team leader or something?

Kim: It's all in a shared folder. And they are all in different folders. So you've got your own room number folder. And then [DP] will check to make sure they're in there and then [principal] goes in and checks.

Gina: So just to tease that out a little bit, so there was still that planning done in advance?

Tracey: Yeah.

Gina: Was there sort of a level of flexibility in terms of which…?

Tracey: I think the thing is the planning is done in advance but as I always say the planning is not, I know we get checked on it but, I do believe the planning is a living document. So as a classroom teacher I could modify it to, for my students' interest, as long as I show my reflection and documentation. I feel that you know this is where the children more veered towards this and they were interested so we spent more time on that area. So that allows me flexibility. I don't know if that's something that as you teach for a while you get a little bit more, empowered, like I'm going to do what I want to do. You know I have the plan but it's also changeable. I don't think, and like it's just your weekly planning, you have your weekly plan, but you know you could have someone come in and say I need this, so you do it. You flip flop or you have to take on another class so your plan might collapse for a little bit.

These quotes provide examples of the need to provide evidence for others about teaching practice. Providing evidence also comes up for students in the data. Again, it is an acceptance of being checked on that is interesting in these excerpts. Teachers know they will be checked on and therefore the teachers' actions, of having planning ready for others, even if they have the freedom to deviate from that planning, "proves" they are being accountable in the classroom. Submitting plans that can be viewed by others from a distance contributes to the constellation of the accountable teacher. Once again, teachers are complicit in their subject positioning through their actions and their acceptance of this discourse.

In the following excerpt, Meena reflects back on a time before her decision to implement a more fluid and responsive approach to her weekly planning. Here, Meena outlines how she had to fight for the right to plan in a way that could be considered high trust, and less controlling, with a reduction in the need to plan extensively a week in advance as evidence of her plan to teach for the entire week.

Meena: And it wasn't like that in my classroom before. I had to fight for it.

Gina: Sorry, so it wasn't like that in your classroom?

Meena: No, it wasn't like this before because you know they want to see a nice, plan for the whole week done.

Gina: So you had to fight for this… openness?

Along with planning documentation, attendance at school meetings is expected and compulsory for teachers. Staff meetings were discussed previously as part of the findings of the above-and-

beyond teacher subjectivity. It features here again as part of the subjectivity of the accountable teacher.

Staff Meetings. This particular element of the accountable teacher features across every single transcript. All teachers listed meetings as a responsibility—to attend, to be present, sometimes to lead. It is a highly visible discourse, obvious not just in its repeated mention throughout the study but also the frequency and regularity of the meetings that feature across the transcripts. Typically, teachers in this study attend a staff meeting once a week, a team meeting once a week and then a third subject-lead meeting, or professional development meeting, each week. Some of the teachers are involved in mentoring beginning teachers and have weekly meetings to support them. Sometimes staff meetings are for communication and keeping people up to date with information and at other times they incorporate professional development workshops (e.g., a new literacy approach the school is implementing). The following quotes are from responses to a question about responsibilities outside of the 9.00 a.m.–3.00 p.m. classroom teaching time.

> Simone: So it would be, it would be planning. It would be labelling artwork, cutting out things, um, yeah parent communications, staff meetings, team meetings, resetting the classroom for the next day. Maybe I'd try and get marking done throughout the day, but if there is work to be looked at I would do that. Yeah. Those types of things.
>
> Meena: I've got COL [community of learning] meetings, as well as part of the maths project group and I'm also part of the strategic goals group so I've got meetings that I attend those, and of course you've got your syndicate and staff meetings, and you've got your professional developments and when you've got a student teacher of course..
>
> Carlo: Well we have meetings. We have two meetings a week average, after school. We also have times of the year when we have parent interviews. We have a staff meeting early on a Monday morning so like 8 o'clock on a Monday morning and it's just quick but it's the fact it's a routine. It just sets the week up, what's ahead in the week. Tuesday is our syndicate meeting or team meetings, and a Wednesday is professional development meeting. We call them PLGs, professional learning groups.
>
> Laura: So basically I get there about 7 and could leave anywhere from, I've got a little bit better, like 5, 5.30. So I'm a team leader so I've got leadership meetings, got team meetings, got staff meetings I've got a beginning teacher so meet with him. He's in my team though.
>
> Joanne: So I spend some time doing that I have a team leader meeting on a Monday afternoon and then I'll come back and same thing I'll make sure that everything is set, they've got everything they need for the next day. Tuesday is a staff meeting day. And Wednesday we've got a team meeting, so I do have three meetings a week but not always three meetings a week. I normally come back after that and just, go over my reflections just make sure…if there's any kids I wasn't quite sure about on that day I'll then do my little tags in the books ready for the next day.
>
> Sandra: Yeah, we do. We have a Tuesday team meeting and then on Wednesdays, I'm a professional learning leader so I have a group of teachers, that's Wednesdays. Monday morning before school, 8.15 is the whole school staff briefing. Those are the official

meeting times and then you have priority learner conferences with these kids who need a bit of extra help, once a term.

Tracey: And I also think we have our team meeting, we have our PCT [provisionally certified teacher] meetings, your mentor meeting as part of PCT mentoring, all of those things that you try to complete whilst also having requests randomly that you get from the senior leadership team that they might need something.

It should be acknowledged that these meetings occur straight after a full day of teaching. As Daniel mentions in his interview below, it is expected that one can shift from the physical and mental demands of teaching 25 children straight into a 1 or 2 hour meeting. As mentioned previously, Daniel is the only teacher who attempts to challenge and question this discourse he is part of. Here, he attempts to reposition himself as a teacher who does short meetings.

Daniel: So we have meetings every Tuesday is a team meeting and again it's getting better. Again when I came to this school I couldn't believe how long the meetings were.….I'm a PLG leader this year so I make sure my meetings are short. Everyone speaks, no ones being told what to do, it's an open atmosphere, then it's finished by 5 to 4. Everyone knows it's not going to go into overtime.

AFL language, data collection practices, acceptance of being checked on, and frequent after-school meetings all coalesce to form the accountable-teacher subjectivity. The last aspect to contribute to the constellation of the accountable teacher is not something that would be captured in numerical data, in spreadsheets, or checked on by senior management. It is not something that is measurable or likely to be asked about. This is an example of a typically unspoken discourse. One teacher said that they were responsible for the lives of the children they teach. This statement is an example of a moment in time in the interview process, prior to officially analysing the data, where this statement caused a dissonance or disruption in my experience as the researcher. Amongst all the other statements and phrases uttered in the interview; this statement caused a bodily experience of being jolted and shaken by the ferocity of the statement. It made me contemplate if other teachers in Aotearoa believe, through discourses of accountability, that they are in a way personally responsible for the very lives of the children they taught.

Summary

I found three different teacher subjectivities evident in the data: The above-and-beyond teacher sacrifices their personal time to attend to tasks that have previously been the responsibility of the parent; the teacher as performer accepts the need to be on show for others to prove they have taken up new approaches to teaching; and the accountable teacher has a sense of responsibility to society where they have the weight of societal expectation on their part in "growing great citizens."

The above findings inform the first part of the research question "How do *teacher subjectivities* interact with student agency ideas?" Here I have an understanding from the data of three examples of teacher subjectivities that are present that I can use to explore the second part of the main research question. "How do these subjectivities interact with *student agency ideas*?" The next section presents the findings of the ways teachers spoke about the ideas of student agency that are circulating in their schools.

Participants' Ideas of Student Agency

This next section will discuss the ideas of student agency evident in the data. Taking a similar constellation approach to student agency, the data highlighted a number of dominant ideas of student agency that are interlinked and work to support each other. Firstly, student agency as improving literacy is linked to student agency as AFL; and two other closely connected ideas—student agency as misunderstood is linked with student agency as forgotten about, or old.

Student Agency as Improving Literacy

One of the most dominant and surprising student agency ideas to emerge from the data is the idea participants have that student agency helps them focus on the importance of literacy skills and abilities in primary schools. While the importance of developing literacy skills in the early years of education is acknowledged, in this study the references to literacy outnumbered other curriculum areas. This idea of student agency as literacy improvement was unexpected but is clear throughout several transcripts particularly when schoolwide professional development was discussed. One teacher describes a professional learning development facilitator as covering both student agency and literacy.

> Daniel: [Facilitator] was supposed to be about that I think to a degree as well. She was sort of all-purpose literacy slash agency person, I'm not sure.
>
> Simone: Like an area of development for us in terms of student agency, and as a school, we were all focussed on writing, as a whole school. So student agency in writing that was what we were learning about.
>
> Sandra: Well, it sort of sat at the same time as launching the Daily 5 literacy programme, which was meant to increase student agency because students could sort of choose activities that they wanted to do based on their learning goals.
>
> Daniel: It's where you have, I guess you'd say student agency is involved in that because multiple students have roughly five categories of literacy activities, which they then choose three from over about an hour period or thereabouts and then they have to switch, the idea is they switch and then they're in charge usually of what they're doing during those times, you give them options and things.

When schools are given the choice of learning areas to focus on when enacting student agency, literacy seems to be chosen as a priority area. For example, Simone's school has a whole-school

focus on writing, so it has chosen this area to focus on for student agency in its professional development with an external facilitator. Two other teachers at a different school discuss the integration of student agency into their daily literacy activities, where students can choose which kinds of literacy activities they do. In addition, during discussions on professional development and student agency, one teacher poses the question: "How can we enable greater student agency through literacy, then numeracy then inquiry?"

This is the order of the focus for the school's professional development around student agency. Here we see not only the prioritisation of literacy and numeracy, but also student agency through particular, valued subject learning areas. Student agency appears as linked predominantly with the improvement of academic achievement. This is built on when a secondary, closely linked discourse is evident in the data—student agency *as* AFL.

Student Agency as Assessment for Learning

As outlined previously, AFL is a MOE product that was introduced through MOE communication channels in the early 2000s (Darr, 2018). AFL promotes the idea that the pathway to increased, accelerated academic achievement is via the student having a greater say in their learning:

Under the framework of ideas connected with AFL, the teacher must ensure that their students are able to talk about what they are learning, where they are at with their learning, and their next learning steps. What appears in the data is evidence of the notion that, for the participants in this study, student agency either comes *through* AFL or student agency comes *from* AFL or that children talking about their learning (a key component of AFL) *is* student agency.

> Meena: So I would be using those AFL strategies because if we are promoting student agency and ownership it is through those AFL strategies you have to have that relationship with your students for them to unpack their learning by themselves.
>
> Laura: But our facilitator for assessment for learning... in a sense the learner agency comes from there.
>
> Gina: Because it is almost like, you know you could be like, teaching them stuff but have they learnt it right?
>
> Simone: Do they actually understand?
>
> Gina: And can they talk about their learning to someone else?
>
> Simone: Which is what student agency is, right?

The participants' ideas link student agency with AFL, which is linked to the acceleration of academic learning. Through these ideas, student agency is the acceleration of academic learning. Student agency as AFL, as one idea, coalesces with student agency as literacy improvement in Simone's statement when she connects acceleration of learning with student agency:

Simone: So that's, that is actually what my goal and my team's goal for our professional growth cycle is to look at student agency with reading and how you can, how we can improve those target readers, more quickly.

This builds on, if not mirrors, the MOE (n.d.) description of AFL contributing to accelerated achievement. Whilst these ideas appear as clear ideas about student agency, the following section suggests that there are misunderstandings about student agency, or lack of clarity, for some teachers at some schools.

Student Agency as (Mis)Understood Internally

One of the clear findings and themes from the previous research was that student agency is not understood well by teachers (Arnold & Clarke, 2014). Data from this study reveal some evidence of this in New Zealand schools. Whilst some schools participate in professional development led by an external facilitator, other schools seek to explore student agency from within their own school, drawing on existing expertise. Observation of others and sharing ideas with other teachers were discussed as part of the professional development for student agency.

Laura: So we all observe each other through the team. Yeah we do a lot of the PD in the sense of talking through each other.

Joanne: Staff member responsible for student agency—for seeing what we're doing now at the moment, what we think it looks like.

Carlo: So I would share what I'm doing in my class and other teachers might get ideas from that. At the same time I might get ideas from other teachers about what they're doing.

The result of this is that a number of teachers in the study acknowledge that their understanding of student agency is mixed and definitely reveals some uncertainty. Some teachers comment on the fact that their school doesn't have a strong united view of the concept of student agency. There is also the potential for teachers to adopt their own ideas about student agency in their class. Whilst this might sound creative and fluid, it also allows for teachers to continue doing exactly what they have always done.

Joanne: We don't have the why. We definitely don't have the why here.

Meena: So what I see student agency, is that we still have that inconsistency—what student agency is. That definition for student agency. …Like I said to you before, what I'm doing in my classroom for some other teachers it will not be student agency. Or probably not be the right definition of student agency, it is about how you describe it, … and how you make it look like in your classroom. It is based on those definitions that you provide.

This section reveals some of the statements and language that position student agency ideas as ways of keeping things in place in teaching. It also reveals some confusion and misunderstandings around student agency, or a lack of unified school understanding. In this situation, the possibilities for student agency are reduced if there are misunderstandings as a school about the concept. In

addition, if the concept that has been introduced (in this case student agency) is misunderstood, or there is ambiguity around it, then teachers are likely to not have a sense of commitment to that concept, if they feel that they don't even really understand it anyway.

Given that student agency is one concept in professional development that teachers are absorbing, processing and understanding, it is possible that professional development overload could be an issue for some teachers. Here, new approaches and programmes are introduced to schools and teachers as part of sector- or schoolwide "improvement." Student agency could potentially be something that has taken a back seat to new educational foci like structured literacy, curriculum subject-area refreshes or even the introduction of mindfulness practices in schools. In the following section, evidence of teachers' views of student agency as old or forgotten, possibly due to professional development fatigue, is explored.

Student Agency as Old, Forgotten About

In order to locate teachers with some experience with enacting the ideas of student agency, I chose to focus on schools that had specifically stated their commitment to student agency by including the concept in their strategic plan. Given this, it was likely most schools would have participated in some form of external or internal professional development on the concept, as it featured in their strategic plan ambitions. As predicted, all of the teachers in this study had done so. What comes through in the data, though, is evidence of professional development crowding, if not fatigue, for teachers as they juggle multiple foci for their school at the same time.

What is interesting here is the notion that a concept that appears, on the surface, to have the potential to disrupt the teacher–student power-relations dynamic, could be introduced, considered, then possibly fade away due to other more pressing professional development foci.

> Tracey: So he did address our… so we had three different strategic goals and student agency was incorporated in that and discussed along with [other strategic areas] but again that was a few years ago. So it hasn't been a current thing that we've talked about. I think with COVID it's kind of been there but not been there, you know with PDs, and this year it hasn't been a focus PD. So I think that's part of it. It hasn't been the most current one that we've looked at recently.
>
> Laura: It's been in the COL for 2 or 3 years. It's an expected thing. So it's not a new thing.
>
> Kim: It's not in our new plan. Taken out.

COVID-19 and its impact on the ability to participate in consistent professional development appear in the data alongside a discussion of student agency being something "we used to do," or almost forgotten about in terms of teachers being able to articulate what they could remember from the professional development, or key takeaways of the concept. When the ideas of student agency

as being old and forgotten coalesce with teachers speaking of an absence of unified understandings, then these two ideas can work together to hold things in place—providing the conditions for an environment where no real change occurs.

In summary, these findings show that, for the group of teachers participating in this study, student agency means students talking about their learning; student agency is "done" through AFL and student agency *will* support the acceleration of literacy achievement. These are not teachers' opinions or perspectives—they reveal the dominant ideas of student agency in schools that state they are invested in developing the concept in their school. At this point, it is important to acknowledge the history and origins of student agency into primary schools. As outlined in Chapter 2, and as outlined as a concern in the literature of Chapter 3, the introduction of the ideas of student agency via the DeSeCo project, and through *The New Zealand Curriculum* key competencies, was influenced by business interests and neoliberal ideologies of the time. The focus on the individual who can talk about what they are learning, where they are at with their learning and what their next learning steps are, builds on the ideas of individual, rather than collective or state, responsibility that is a key element of neoliberalism. The investment in professional development (externally or internally) that reinforced these specific ideas is testament to that. The effectiveness of this professional development is evident in the "mantra-like" way teachers speak about student agency in relation to AFL.

Summary

From these findings, student agency can be seen as supporting students to improve in a learning area (English) and as an assessment-focused construct. The ideas of student agency can be conceptualised by educators in a way that works to hold things in place if so desired. Student agency ideas therefore can be operationalised to resist change in schools as opposed to enacting and generating change. Student agency ideas, in these findings, are presented as keeping things stable and in place. This has implications for other approaches that are positioned as transformative and new in education. My research question asks: How do teacher subjectivities interact with the ideas of student agency? Whilst I acknowledge that the focus of this chapter is to outline the findings in order to answer the research question, it was essential for me to present just *how* teachers are positioned in classrooms in particular ways. It was essential to communicate the complexity of teachers' roles, the responsibilities they hold, and the possible (and potentially limiting) ways teachers are able to *be* in classrooms today. In the following chapter, I discuss the interaction between the three teacher subjectivities I have described above and student agency

ideas. I will also explore the conditions and possibilities for transformation or conflict in schools that are working with the ideas of student agency.

Chapter 7: Findings II—Interactions, Transformation and Conflict

In this chapter, I address the main research question: How do teacher subjectivities *interact* with the ideas of student agency? I discuss how the three teacher subjectivities interact in different ways with student agency ideas. I describe how the above-and-beyond teacher interacts with student agency ideas at a *classroom* level; where the teacher as performer interacts with student agency ideas at a *school-wide* level; and how the accountable teacher interacts with student agency ideas at a *societal* level. In each of these three, I identify a duality between the particular kinds of teachers being formed in primary school classrooms and the particular kinds of students that are being encouraged by student agency ideas. Both teachers and students are immersed in the ideas of student agency that exist within a wider discourse of neoliberalism. I analyse these interactions with consideration for the literature on the self-motivated, measured and compared, individualistic 21st-century learner that features in the literature review within psychology-informed conceptualisations of student agency. I draw attention to how the teacher subjectivities in the findings reflect similar attributes. The above-and-beyond teacher does work beyond what is expected of them due to self-motivated attributes. The teacher as a performer accepts the need to continually improve themselves. The accountable teacher exemplifies the managed-from-a-distance, controlled-and-efficient neoliberalised teacher who is both self-managing and managed by others. The accountable teacher presents in a similar way to the student who is under the illusion of greater freedoms and autonomy though student agency, but the choices and freedoms they have exist within tightly held boundaries and outcomes set by others. What is notable and noticeable within the findings is the absence of a link to the original ideas of student agency grounded in progressive education and the theories of Dewey, Illich and Holt—as explored in Chapter 2. The ideas of student agency appear, in the neoliberal context of today's primary schools, as the parroting of scripts aligned with academic achievement and through the discourse of AFL.

At the end of this chapter, I present the findings of the noticeable lack of conflicts and transformation when student agency is enacted in primary schools. Here I answer the secondary research question: What conflicts or transformations occur when teacher subjectivities interact with ideas of student agency?

Interactions Between the Above-and-Beyond Teacher and Student Agency (Classroom) Ideas

When looking at how teachers discuss the ideas of student agency alongside the findings of the above-and-beyond teacher subjectivity, there is evidence of an interaction between the way

teachers explain their expectations that students will work towards their next self-selected goal, and teachers pushing themselves to go above and beyond for their students:

> Simone: So the children had been learning about identifying what they're learning to do in the writing, why they're learning to do that, and how they're going to know they're successful, is the first sort of goal.
>
> Tracey: Making learning visible so that the children are explicit in what they need to know, what they're learning and develop and foster that next step for them.
>
> Meena: You know you've got that passion and mindset that "ah, I'm here to make a difference" in the lives of these kids.
>
> Tracey: You have to be well rested and ready and mentally ready as well. Like you have to be 100% every day.

When layering the two data analysis tables, this interaction is a "making sense" of student agency in the classroom environment. There is no disruption here. Student agency and the above-and-beyond teacher make sense or are subsumed into each other. This is also evident in the data when Tracey says that to give 100% is good for her:

> Tracey: You have to be well rested and ready and mentally ready as well. Like you have to be 100% every day. Yeah, but it's good.

What is evident here in the data is the intersection of the idea of student agency as students pushing and self-managing themselves, and teacher subjectivities of pushing and going above and beyond for their students. In these examples from the findings, student agency is presented as linked to self-managing as in *The New Zealand Curriculum* key competencies (Te Kete Ipurangi, 2007). The findings also show that although students are expected to be self-managing, and teachers are meant to go above and beyond and exceed expectations beyond teaching children content (e.g., tutoring, making costumes), today's contemporary classroom still features hierarchal observation and normalising judgements. This is evident in the monitoring and assessment of students and teachers by others seen to be in positions of higher authority (e.g., student/teacher, teacher/facilitator, or teacher/principal). The next section outlines examples of the interactions between the teacher who performs for others, and is assessed on their learning, and student agency being utilised as a form of assessment of learning and monitoring of progress.

Interactions Between Teacher as Performer and Student Agency (School) Ideas

This section will discuss the finding that the teacher as performer interacts with the ideas of student agency that circulate throughout the wider school, beyond the student/teacher/classroom context. In one example in the data, Simone accepts without question that she will be observed by those in a perceived position of authority (facilitator or senior staff member). As she does this, the teacher

subjectivity of the teacher as performer is reinforced as accepted and normal. Beyond merely accepting this, she amplifies it by saying "because it is good for us."

> Simone: They would come in and observe us and then we would have a postconversation about what they had observed, and next steps for us. So basically what we do, what we try and do with the children, we were having done on ourselves. So, it was a whole circle. So that was really good and that happened, so pre-COVID it was twice a year.

This interaction of student agency with the teacher-as-performer subjectivity, as outlined in the previous section on the above-and-beyond teacher, reinforces the idea that student agency has become part of a wider discourse of the neoliberalised individual who is competitive and performs for others. Here, if students are expected to be assessed by others, as they are when their advancement in literacy is monitored and assessed, as well as being self-managing students, then the teacher also expects to be monitored ("they check!") and observed ("but it's good for us"). Again, the findings show that the interaction between student agency ideas and the teacher as performer is one of compatibility, aligned and undisruptive or transformative. There is no conflict evident in the data. When Simone not only accepts and reinforces these ideas, but also reiterates this is good for her, she actually amplifies the discourse of self-improvement through both hierarchal observation and monitoring by others. The next section considers the interaction between the third kind of teacher subjectivity identified from the data—the accountable teacher.

Interactions Between the Accountable Teacher and Student Agency (Societal) Ideas

Evidence of the accountable teacher is located in the data in statements such as "our school loves spreadsheets, there's a spreadsheet for everything," and day-to-day practices such as the collection and presentation of data. This is often done in order to provide evidence of students' academic advancement in literacy. The findings in this study highlight the complex nature of the multiple roles and responsibilities of classroom teachers, but the evidence of student progress appears weighted on data points that children achieve, which teachers are then asked to compile and present to others as proof of the impact of their teaching. In addition, the amount of planning and written documentation prior to teaching students is discussed in the interviews.

> Kim: And our books get checked. They get checked every 6 weeks.
>
> It's [planning] all in a shared folder. And they are all in different folders. So you've got your own room number folder. And then they will check to make sure they're in there and then [principal] goes in and checks.
>
> Sandra: I don't know how to say it, but at 3 o'clock I don't stop thinking, I'm always planning, I'm making notes. Constantly, yes this comes home with me every night. It's a 24/7 thing I mean (inaudible…) on the weekend.

> Tracey: So, yeah, it's all the paperwork. It's a lot of paperwork. I didn't really realise that when I was like, I'm going to be a teacher, it'll be great, I'll be in the classroom, but yeah there's the paperwork.

In addition, the paperwork and planning involved in the act of teaching appear aligned to the "proof" or evidence of the intent of the teacher. Student agency has been used to support this accountable-teacher subjectivity, such as when student agency is communicated in policy documentation stating that students taking responsibility for their learning will improve their literacy levels (MOE, 2025).

Summary

The main findings from this section answer the main research question How do teacher subjectivities interact with the ideas of student agency? in the following ways. Firstly, that student agency interacts with the above-and-beyond teacher subjectivity by amplifying the neoliberalised ideas of the self-managing, independent individual, who aspires to go above and beyond. Secondly, the teacher-as-performer subjectivity interacts with student agency by reinforcing a competitive aspect of teaching and learning, through performing for others as proof of ability or competency. Thirdly, the accountable teacher interacts with student agency by amplifying the measurement and comparison of individuals through practices of monitoring by others and self-monitoring practices. From this data, student agency ideas do not appear to disrupt teachers' day-to-day practices, nor do they challenge the classroom positions of the teacher and student. Instead, student agency ideas can amplify neoliberal ideas, and business-orientated ideas about efficiency and effectiveness in education, rather than initiate more authentic ideas about student agency (see Hart's ladder of participation). The next section discusses the findings that answer the third research question: What conflicts or transformations occur when teacher subjectivities interact with the ideas of student agency?

Transformations and Conflicts

In this section, I discuss the impact of student agency on schools, teachers and students. I ask the question, "what does student agency do in classrooms?" to help understand the wider issue of why change is hard in schools. In this study, I expected to find evidence in the data of teachers pushing back against the ideas of student agency, of teachers rejecting the idea that students should have agency over their learning. Instead, the data indicate minimal conflict or transformation. For the most part, there is a business-as-usual tone in the data. The examples below are evidence of student agency keeping things in place.

When day-to-day practices are discussed alongside the concept of student agency, there is an opportunity to look for conflicts, contradictions, disruptions and transformations in the language and actions of classroom teachers who may have traditionally been positioned as the one in control, the one in charge. Findings from the data reveal that teachers who have been involved in considerable external professional development on the ideas of student agency are still attached to day-to-day teaching practices that reinforce traditional concepts of classroom practices and routines.

> Simone: Ok, so for Block 1, I would always start the day like gathering the children onto the mat area, having a little story, a little good morning chat and then we would go into taking the roll and looking at our daily calendar and incorporating our number of the day and our calendar maths that type of thing.
>
> And if the children, if it's a guided reading session for myself, then I will set the children up with an independent activity that they could work on and it could be anything ranging from a phonics activity, an art activity just something that they can do independently while I'm working with my reading groups.
>
> If it's writing that we're doing we have a modelling session first where we'll talk about what the topic will be that day, getting some turn and talk and some conversation going with that, so that the children are set up with hopefully the skills that they can use to go away and think of a sentence or sentences we talk about the things we're working on in our writing for example, this is what we're learning to do, talking about why we're learning to do this, trying to get feedback from the children on why they think they're learning to put a full stop at the end of a sentence for example.

In particular, traditional timetabling and classroom organisational practices with an emphasis on literacy and numeracy reveal a commitment to things remaining stable and in place, undisrupted. A typical morning in a primary school classroom, as outlined by Simone, reveals a structure that mirrors my own experience as a primary school teacher 20 years ago. What is significant with Simone's detailing of her day is that her structured, relatively traditional timetable is still in place following external professional development on student agency. When asked if student agency professional development has changed the way she teaches, she is adamant it has. However, when reading through the detailed structure of her classroom day, traditional, conventional structures are still in place. What she is teaching could be considerably different to previous years before student agency professional development, but the disciplinary practices of the segmentation of subjects, the prioritisation of some subjects over others, and the compartmentalisation of time is still locked in place. The discourse of teaching subjects separately and at set times directed by the teacher does not appear to be disrupted or challenged in the context of student agency ideas.

There was, however, evidence in the data of contradictions that could be considered conflicts. In the following quote, Laura discusses student agency at one moment, then in the next states that

she is the one in control. Laura's statements reveal one contradiction of children making decisions, but not really making decisions, and that the teacher is the one who decides.

> Laura: I don't know. I mean in your report you talk about them being self-directed, you know, they're reflecting that sort of stuff. I think people could get a little bit scared of the word learner agency and think oh my gosh the children are making decisions.
>
> Yeah they're making decisions but they're not making decisions about what they're learning and what level they're learning at. They're still… and I think that's the hard thing about those learning hubs and a teacher who will let the children go and spend a whole lot on planning their personalised learning. No, you as the teacher still know what needs to be taught and where the gaps are in every aspect.
>
> But you've still got to have this strong, the teacher decides what you're doing for reading.

Laura does introduce the notion of people (possibly parents) being scared of the term *learner agency* and the notion of children making decisions, revealing some contradictions about the positive perceptions of student agency, but she reroutes this parental concern by concluding that ultimately it is she who is still very much in control. She also implies that there is an underlying belief that student agency will open the door to chaos and disruption when she states that teachers in learning hubs (Innovate Learning Environments) may let children work independently too much and that it needs correction.

Tracey's commentary also indicates some conflict between what she is saying about her practice and pedagogy and the ideas of student agency where students might have a say in their learning. The first line of text implies she is in control. However the second statement appears to mirror the student agency "mantra" of what I'm doing, why I'm doing it, and what are my next steps. Therefore, using the evidence from the data, this quote could be seen in one way as in conflict with more progressive ideas about student agency. But through the lens of the professional development language of student agency, as outlined previously, her statement is perfectly aligned.

> Tracey: I facilitate the learning. I give the learning intentions. I say what we're going to do next. So it is a very structured day. And that's my role.
>
> Getting them prepared for what they're doing and making sure they know what they're doing and where they need to go.

Finally, the transcripts also revealed some of the particular vocabulary used when discussing student agency that seemed to be connected to the language of *Effective Literacy Practice: Years 1–4* (Thompson, 2003), a MOE text used in initial teacher education (ITE) over the past 20 years. Now over 20 years old, the language of success criteria and learning intentions is taught to ITE students, beginning teachers and experienced teachers today. This language appears in discussion

about day-to-day practice and doesn't seem to generate any level of conflict with what has been done in the past 20 years in schools and what is being done today.

> Tracey: And so what you would see in a writing programme that's delivered like for example with our narrative writing we would have a teacher model and you would have the learning intention at the top and some cases the success criteria so the children could follow...they should see that... you always have the learning intention...but then what we should see in your writing, is the actual, like if I wanted adjectives I should see three adjectives circled or... the success criteria.

The interview question "Would that timetabling be similar across your team, or across the school?" helped to determine if what the classroom teacher is doing with their day-to-day practice is different or disruptive within their own school environment, and to identify the dominant discourses in the school around timetabling. This can generally reflect the prioritisation of certain subjects and also the level of flexibility individual teachers may have over their daily timetable. Invariably, when asked this question, all teachers confirm that what they are doing is followed throughout the school, albeit with some adjustments for senior school students.

> Simone: Yes, yes, so over the school from Years 0 to 8 we all have, we all work in those three blocks and the junior school definitely work to the same sort of programme with their literacy numeracy in the mornings, reading and then art and PE and music in the afternoons. Senior school can do that slightly different, some of them have sport time earlier on and things but generally, we all run to the same timetable in the day, same morning tea breaks, same lunch breaks yeah.

In addition to the absence of any evidence of significant transformation in the schools involved in this study, there is little evidence of conflict between the ideas of student agency and the teacher subjectivities in this study. Based on the research covered in the literature review, I expected that this study would expose conflicts and challenges for teachers enacting the ideas of student agency. Whilst there is some evidence of contradictory language in the data, as outlined in the previous passage, the findings reveal that student agency, when enacted in New Zealand primary schools, works to not only support the formation and reinforcement of the teacher subjectivities I have described, but also to amplify them to heighten or extend these particular kinds of subjectivities. The language that Tracey uses of giving 100% every day appears to heighten the notion of teachers being passionate teachers. This amplifies the other ideas in the data that teachers reference in regard to the level of responsibility on their individual shoulders. These particular kinds of teachers, the above and beyond, the performer, and the accountable, are possible ways of being a classroom teacher in schools that have made a commitment to the ideas of student agency. This lack of conflict suggests that student agency ideas not only support these particular kinds of teachers to be and make sense in classrooms, but in fact amplifies them. This ensures that the status quo, the strong focus on academic advancement in literacy and numeracy that is measurable,

comparable and proof of a teacher's ability, remains solid and undisturbed through the ideas of student agency.

An Absence of Conflict, an Absence of Resistance

The teacher-as-performer subjectivity also contributes to the findings about conflict. Within the teacher-as-performer constellation of discourses is the acceptance and acknowledgement that professional development and observation are a good thing for teacher development and self-improvement. Simone's interview features evidence that "professional development for teachers is a good thing" as she talks about the professional development that she and her whole school have received on the concept of student agency. Professional development workshops and after-school meetings take time—that means time away from other classroom planning or classroom setup, marking, reporting and additional classroom teaching responsibilities that fall outside of the 9.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. instructional teaching time. The acceptance of this level of out-of-classroom responsibility is evident in that most of the teachers in the study don't question the relevance of the professional development, nor the necessity of the structured, repetitive staff meetings. This acceptance shuts down any conflict between the teacher as performer and the ideas of student agency. The exception is Daniel, who raises the issue of long meetings being a strange feature of New Zealand primary school environments. Here, within the transcript, there is evidence of a level of resistance in the Foucauldian sense. Foucault (1978) saw resistance as a questioning of a discourse, an acknowledgement that one was part of a discourse that reinforced a certain issue or problem. By pausing to reflect on the discourse, and the teacher's subject position within that discourse, the teacher is able to, in a sense, distance themselves from the discourse and consider their own ethical or moral sense of obligation to participate in the professional development or meeting. Here, Daniel acknowledges meetings as necessary but questions the purpose of them running for too long, especially after a full day of teaching. He also attempts to resist this discourse of long after-school meetings by taking control of his own meetings and ensuring he doesn't reinforce this discourse.

> Daniel: So we have meetings, every Tuesday is a team meeting and again it's getting better. Again when I came to this school I couldn't believe how long the meetings were. My principal, I said to him, this is weird these are long. Instead of saying yeah I agree, oh you got to go as long as you need to. I'm like no you don't… we used to have extra-long meetings, more meetings and it was just…I was sitting in some meetings where people were getting so tense. And the people had been in the school for more than five years. It was just intense meetings on all the time. I don't really remember any of those meetings, whatever was discussed….I'm a [subject] leader this year so I make sure my meetings are short. Everyone speaks, no ones being told what to do, it's an open atmosphere then it's finished by 5 to 4. Everyone knows it's not going to go into overtime.

A notable absence in conflict in the findings is emphasised by the "happy" aspect of teachers involved in the interviews. There is minimal pushback from teachers on the implementation of the ideas of student agency, being observed, and attending meetings and professional development (except for Daniel, as outlined above). Simone, in particular, appears happy and gracious about being a recipient of professional development, indicating she is grateful for it.

> Simone: Yeah I'm so grateful that we had it [professional development session] because it's that professional accountability and also knowing, like not just doing it because we know we're going to get observed every now and again. Like, yes that comes into play you want them to see you in a good light and it all working but it's ultimately, it's not about that, it's we've learnt it and its ingrained now so much in our teaching practice, that I personally don't think that would ever go back because it's just what I do now.

Simone reinforces the dominant discourse that professional development is there to benefit teachers and to improve their teaching practice. She, along with a significant majority of the other teachers involved in the study, discusses their practice, their roles and responsibilities, in general in a contented, accepted way. There is a distinct absence of excessive complaining about their workload or the pressures they face. Most of the discussions about meetings and about being observed are communicated in what could be described as a happy tone. Upon reading and rereading, it becomes apparent that there is a subtle discourse circulating where teachers in primary school classrooms act, and appear to be, content and happy within their role. While statements are not explicitly made—as interview questions did not probe whether teachers are happy in their roles, what isn't being said, what is missing—is any consideration of "giving up the job." Participants don't express a level of frustration to the point that they plan to leave, nor speak of frustration at not having sufficient resources to do their job. As they speak about their class ratios of 30 children to one teacher; as they speak about having six autistic children in their one class; when they list the wide-reaching range of responsibilities they have in any 1 week, and multiple weekly meetings; it is never followed with a statement of despair, frustration or anger.

> Joanne: I like to be able to do that you know I've got six autistic kids in the class so there's often a lot of communication going on with that or you know checking in with them, letting them know what's going on sharing those little successes, I do that more with those kids because the parents are really anxious about their children doing well and succeeding so I do share if anything happened the day before, I send a little, quick little photo and a quick blurb about it but I don't do it for all kids and I don't do it all the time. But I definitely communicate with the parents probably not enough. Junior classes are really good at doing that.

The focus of this research study was not to analyse if the teachers are being honest with me about their level of satisfaction with their roles. However, what I noticed is the absence of negative language about their role, an absence of refusal to action policies and new approaches, and very

little pushback or questioning about the day-to-day practice or complaining about the school systems and structures teachers are part of. In this particular study, with this cohort of teachers, in schools that are actively engaging with the ideas of student agency, they seem to be part of a discourse that retains positivity even in a role that appears to be challenging and complex. It is possible that these teachers are holding in feelings of dissatisfaction or being disaffected, it simply doesn't appear in the written evidence in the transcripts.

Summary

The previous section answered the main research question about the interactions between teacher subjectivities and student agency. This section has covered the findings that answer the third research question What conflicts or transformation occur when teacher subjectivities interact with the ideas of student agency? The data show that there is little evidence of student agency ideas transforming, disrupting or conflicting with the classroom environment. What is evident in the findings is that, when inserted into existing classroom discourses, new approaches or ideas such as student agency can be subsumed or can even cause existing traditional practices to be amplified rather than transformed and disrupted. The findings show that the inclusion of student agency into classrooms, as one microexample of new ideas being introduced into schools, has not transformed or shifted the day-to-day practices of classroom teachers. The data show that the circulation of student agency ideas has not challenged a tightly focused emphasis on literacy and numeracy outcomes and the measuring and categorising of students. The findings show that the adoption of student agency ideas in schools helps to *hold in place* the measurement, judgement and categorisation of individual students in order to achieve economically driven, narrow outcomes for "possible" students that fit within visions of "normalcy." Through these findings, I propose that, whilst the language of student agency sounds like children may have a greater say and a sense of control over what happens to them at school, a lot of what is happening in New Zealand primary schools is locked into retaining the status quo where very little has changed. These findings are presented through the concepts of discourse and subjectivities in order to argue that transformational change in schools is not dependent on teachers' psychological "growth mindsets" or *their* ability to accept, adopt and implement change. I argue that, instead, it is the influence and power of dominant discourses that circulate within schools that determine the possibilities for change in schools. These dominant discourses are clearly evident in the teacher subjectivities presented in the previous chapter.

In the following chapter, I discuss the implications of the findings in this study and apply them to the wider problem of the real possibilities for change in the New Zealand education system.

Student agency is used as one example of a new concept that was introduced into primary schools, but the wider issue of why change is so difficult in New Zealand schools is what requires further interrogation. I will propose that difficulty in enacting change in schools should not be conceptualised as a psychological, teacher-mindset, or growth-mindset, issue, nor something that can be compartmentalised as professional development. I argue, using the evidence in this findings chapter, that significant change won't occur in primary schools while these discourses continue to circulate.

Chapter 8: Discussion

This study's exploration of the interaction between teacher subjectivities and student agency via a Foucauldian-influenced methodology has produced some interesting findings about the work of the contemporary primary school teacher. Some of these findings were expected, but others were not. This chapter will discuss the main findings of my study in relation to my research questions. First, I will discuss the finding that the teacher subjectivities I identified interact with student agency ideas in a way that amplifies neoliberal ideologies in which student agency ideas are embedded in. Secondly, I propose that, because of this amplification and consolidation of dominant discourses of teaching, there is no identifiable transformation or conflict. Thirdly, I discuss Foucault's resistance and identify the inequality of the ability of some teachers to engage in parrhesia or fearless speech while some feel that they can't speak in this way. I conclude the chapter with discussion on the wider societal influences and implications of the continuation of these dominant discourses. I draw on the work of Valerie Walkerdine (Walkerdine, 1993; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989; Walkerdine & Ringrose, 2006) to describe the extent to which the primary school teacher role continues to be embedded in wider social discourses about what it means to be an acceptable woman/mother, drawing attention to the connections between the above-and-beyond teacher in this study and society's "supermom."

Teacher Subjectivities Amplified Through Student Agency

As part of this study, I wanted to investigate the potential conflicts and transformations that occurred in schools that had adopted the ideas of student agency. However, I didn't find examples of conflict, I found evidence of alignment. Within student agency ideas, both students and teachers are managed by others and self-managed; they both accept their need to improve, and the ongoing requirement to be observed and assessed by others. Teachers are also constituted and constitute themselves as subjects that go above and beyond in their role and their responsibilities as a classroom teacher. These subjectivities work collectively to exemplify neoliberalism's effective and efficient teacher (Ball, 2003). Student agency is absorbed into the educational discourses of the classroom and school and wider society *as* AFL and *as* accelerating literacy, as these ideas make sense within existing foci for educational reforms and progress. There is no conflict or disruption to the discourse of schools' focus being individual academic success and raising literacy and numeracy levels. Children may be afforded choices through student agency ideas, but ultimately school is still an environment where children act out what is required by adults. The expected outcome of the production of work-ready, independent, self-managing citizens remains the same. These ideas of student agency differ significantly from the origins of student agency,

explored in Chapter 2, in progressive alternative learning spaces. Student agency ideas are aligned with the three teacher subjectivities covered in this study, if not interwoven with them, in a space of compatibility and sense making, not conflict and contradiction.

When considering the interactions specifically between the above-and-beyond teacher and student agency ideas in the classroom, there is a positive interaction where one concept consolidates the other. Both are told by others that, through student agency, they are "empowered"; both believe they have a level of involvement in their own educational journey; and both are part of wider social agreements about how to be in the classroom. These ways of being part of something bigger appear important to the teachers in this study, as they agree to new roles and responsibilities that, on the surface, appear to make sense, even when these new responsibilities make additional demands on their personal time. For students, they are told repeatedly that they "have" student agency when they can explain what they are learning, why they are learning it and what their next steps are. This parroting of script by the teachers, and students repeating what teachers expect them to discuss, is an interesting aspect of the findings. This alignment supports an ongoing discourse of teachers going above and beyond whilst ensuring they don't deviate from the boundaries of social expectations and norms (as when one reads from a script). This ensures belonging to the group, being admired and liked, and is a pathway to accepted views of success for both students and teachers.

The interactions between the teacher as performer and schoolwide student-agency ideas again appear as woven together, consolidating the teacher-as-performer subjectivity. Here, we are able to see what student agency does. It does something to teachers. It ensures they continue to accept performing regularly for others in a certain way in order to provide evidence of their ability and their worth as a teacher. Choices are presented to teachers just as choices are presented to students as part of student agency ideas. Teachers are "allowed" to choose which subject areas they are observed in—but the freedom to say no to being observed is missing. The way the teacher is treated by others in this situation mirrors how the ideas of student agency are communicated to students. One of the features of neoliberalism is the promotion of the ideas of personal autonomy within an environment that is, ultimately, still highly controlled centrally (Ball, 2003).

The accountable-teacher subjectivity and the ideas of student agency in a wider societal sense highlight the necessity for grades and measurement of academic achievement as educational illusions that are taken for granted as common sense or as Foucauldian "regimes of truths" (Foucault, 1980, p. 131). Many students in homeschooling, unschooling or other alternative spaces of learning, learn, but their results are not captured as a data point, compared against others and

judged by restricted criteria set by administrators or politicians (Gray & Riley, 2015). These children are not given labels of being a success or failure. The notion that students and teachers *must* be graded, compared, observed, checked on and categorised in order to learn, is so embedded in wider society it has become unquestionable. This is evidence of dominant discourse—there appears to be no other way to ascertain the worth or success of a student, and the relative success of how their school has contributed to their outcome, other than by exam or standardised assessments that are graded and compared. This comparison occurs between individuals, schools and countries. This focus on measurable outcomes, compartmentalised success measures based on rigid biological age groupings, almost appears as an impenetrable discourse. However, Foucault (1978) said wherever there are power relations (and disciplinary practices such as examinations) there is always the possibility of resistance. The focus on individual test scores and individual success is aligned to the neoliberal messages of "survival of the fittest" and the notion of a good citizen who does not need to rely on the state for their growth and independence in society.

An important finding from this study is that not only do these three subjectivities appear as consolidated and reconstructed in a student-agency school environment, but they are also amplified and heightened. The neoliberal agenda within which student agency ideas are embedded creates a concentrated version of the desirable attributes of an independent, competitive, work-ready future citizen. The teacher subjectivities in this study are amplified through the reformation of the above-and-beyond teacher who is adaptable, amenable, and can change to suit like Davies's (2010) "chameleon" (p. 65) neoliberalism worker; and the teacher as performer appears amplified like Davies and Bansel's (2010) "well-trained pony" (p. 13), participating in dressage-like events. I argue that the teacher subjectivities in this study are not new, but they are amplified, reconstituted and reinforced in this current environment. This generates a stronger dominant discourse of what school is "about," what good teachers look and sound like, and makes it harder for individual teachers to push back or resist such dominant and strong discourses. The next section will detail the possible ways this amplification occurs and the implications of this.

Conditions of Amplification

There are two possible explanations for this amplification that can be drawn from the findings and the relevant literature. First is the environment with an emphasis on continual self-improvement, of tracking progress and presenting evidence of progress for both students and teachers alike. This appears in the findings as attendance at professional development and compulsory meetings and being observed. Second, again, for both students and teachers, there appears to be an environment of an escalation in the constant surveillance, both self-surveillance and hierarchal observation,

encouraged by online tracking tools and fuelled by increased data input requirements. One such example appears in the findings as "our schools love spreadsheets." One of the consequences of this emphasis of tracking and plotting data is that student agency itself becomes something that is tracked and monitored for impact. Student agency matrices appear as an artefact of student agency professional development in the findings.

These conditions of amplification sit alongside wider social discourses of good mothers and good teachers whereby teachers continue to accept, without refusal, certain ideas about teaching and learning that on the surface appear to make sense to them. This is explored later in this chapter. It is possible, for the teachers in this study, that when they take on additional roles and responsibilities, when they accept new tasks without debate, and when they take up tasks traditionally done by families, they do so because it feels good to them, not because someone is forcing them to do something. In addition, and building on this notion of feeling good, is that teachers accept these additional tasks because, when they do, they are seen as belonging to a group, they are seen by others as making sense, and as being part of the team. Under these conditions, the findings from Barker's (1993) concertive control studies appear to be of relevance here—where teams of employees put more pressure on themselves and monitor themselves and their peers more harshly than when they were under the supervision of a manager. As new teachers enter their teaching-team environment, they become immersed in existing and established discourses that may prove difficult to push against. To do so could risk them being seen as "not one of the team." The ability for the individual teacher to refuse or resist these discourses is, as has been previously outlined, incredibly hard. The purpose of this chapter is not to position teachers in a place of blame for the perpetuation of certain discourses and consolidation of particular teacher subjectivities, but it is to highlight why transformative change is hard in education. By analysing the possibilities for change from this viewpoint, teachers may be able to see that their own day-to-day actions and speech do have power. That is the power to reinforce and consolidate a dominant discourse or, instead, to push against it and question it. This is one of the key goals that Foucault (1988) saw for himself as an intellectual:

> My role—and that is too emphatic a word—is to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed. (p. 10)

This discussion brings to the surface how teachers themselves are instrumental in the reinforcement of dominant educational discourses. Here, what could be useful for future projects or discussions is the notion of teachers considering their own role in the ongoing discourse of the

above-and-beyond teacher. If teachers are offered the "opportunity" to lead a new initiative, but within their own time; or coordinate a sports team for a sport they enjoy; or organise an art show (or any other opportunities that appeal to teachers), this opportunity is still going to add to a teacher's existing workload without allowances for extra noncontact class time to work on it. The ability to say no to these things is most likely hard for some teachers but ultimately necessary in order to reduce workload for teachers. The offer to help, to literally put up one's hand when asked, most likely plays into the multiple constellations of the good teacher. Being the good teacher who offers to help, who is a team player weaves seamlessly through the ideas of student agency and the neoliberalised context student-agency ideas function within. To push against this can be challenging. Foucault's concept of resistance is explored in the next section.

An Absence of Foucault's Resistance

Foucault (1977) argued that power is not something done to someone by another person, but that power is capillary, it works its way around people and populations through actions. Foucault (1978) proposed that the key to confronting power is the act of resistance—not as a refusal to do something, but resistance to dominant discourses. He would argue, however, that one must be aware of their position within that dominant discourse in order to resist. Teachers in this study, speaking as conduits of discourses of primary school teaching and the ideas of student agency, are complicit in their own subjectification, and are complicit in the ways in which they are as teachers. Although, at times, it must certainly feel like it, teachers, in this Foucauldian framework, are not victims of some power from above, enforcing intense workloads and unmanageable workloads. Every time a teacher makes an utterance or statement about being available at all hours for parents; when they accept the job of costume making in weekends as part of their role; when they happily accept people watching and assessing them in their classroom; and accept having what is done to young children being done to them, they reinforce one or more of the possible teacher subjectivities. Those who refuse to do these things, aware of the power of their individual actions on discourse, these minutiae speech activities, can push against dominant discourses and resist the ongoing subjectification of the above-and-beyond teacher or teacher who performs for others.

In Kim's transcript, there is repeated evidence of Kim accepting additional responsibilities, such as tutoring individual children and making costumes, as well as being seen as responsible for the lives of the children in her class. The fact these words were initially uttered, then approved for use in this study, reinforces not only how Kim cements these ideas in her day-to-day practices, but also how, as others around her observe her actions, they can become seen as "typical" and simply part of being a teacher. The day-to-day practices of one teacher in a team are viewed and watched by

other teachers, and this environment can act effectively to consolidate and reinforce a discourse of what a good teacher does. Similarly, when Simone says out loud that professional development is good for her, then views it in a transcript and agrees to its use in a study—this reinforces this discourse. Finally, when Laura complains that there aren't enough meetings scheduled in the week, when teachers already have three meetings a week, she consolidates and reinforces the discourse of the need for frequent and regular after-school meetings. These teachers are active in their own constitution of the above-and-beyond teacher, the teacher who performs and the accountable teacher, not by some higher power but by self-monitoring and self-surveillance.

The findings do include the position of one teacher who pushed against the general acceptance of regular, frequent and long after-school administration or professional development meetings. Though a small act of resistance, it is still acknowledged as a pushback. That teacher, where he is able to, runs his own meetings in a different kind of way to the "dominant" position in his school. It could be proposed that this small act of resistance, now it is spoken of and captured in text, can be acted out, seen and heard. Interestingly, this pushback came from one of the male teachers in the study, not one of the female teachers. In addition, some of the female teachers deleted commentary from their transcripts, indicating those words could not be shared with others even via an anonymous pseudonym. Foucault proposed that to speak out against dominant discourses can be "dangerous" and those who do speak out run the risk of being ridiculed by others. He referred to this element of risky speech as parrhesia (Foucault & Pearson, 2001). It is possible that these female teachers had spoken in what Foucault would call parrhesiatic speech. However, their removal of this kind of speech from the transcripts emphasises the level of risk these teachers felt. The absence of their words in this study is significant as it acts as missing data, and missing examples of resistance.

The function of Foucault's work in this study has been to bring together discourse, subjectivities and disciplinary practices in order to view ideas of change in education as problematic and beyond the confines of the individual, psychological view of the teacher as initiator of change. The following passage by Foucault (1989), reinforces that adding new things to existing discursive structures and systems (as in schools) can be problematic when change is assumed to be a cognitive, psychological construct. This emphasises why change and transformation can be hard and needs new ways of being understood:

> It is an attempt to reveal discursive practices in their complexity and density; to show that to speak is to do something—something other than to express what one thinks; to translate what one knows, … *to show that to add a statement to a pre-existing series of statements is to perform a complicated and costly gesture*, which involves conditions (and not only a

> situation, a context, and motives), and rules (not the logical and linguistic rules of construction); to show that a change in the order of discourse does not presuppose "new ideas," a little invention and creativity, a different mentality, but transformations in a practice, perhaps also in neighbouring practices, and in their common articulation. I have not denied—far from it—the possibility of changing discourse: I have deprived the sovereignty of the subject of the exclusive and instantaneous right to it. (p. 230, emphasis added)

In this study, I have positioned teachers as conduits of dominant discourses in schools that are connected to dominant discourses in society. In this next section, I explore this further with an acknowledgement of the impact of wider societal discourses on the teacher subjectivities outlined in this study.

Teacher Subjectivities as Part of Wider Societal Discourses

Based on the findings in this study and the existing literature explored throughout this thesis, I propose that the discourse of the above-and-beyond teacher, in particular, makes sense to women teachers as they have been immersed in similar societal discourses for most of their lives. The social institution of primary school provides a stable environment for discourses to become dominant, to be reinforced, through disciplinary practices and the development of ideas of "normalcy" including measurement, identification and classification of groups of people and the grouping of possible and impossible "subjects" (in this case students and teachers). This makes sense when schools and the populations within them are specifically asked to follow various rules, and the students and staff to adopt school values and ways of being while they are on school grounds. In order to be part of the school community, the population within the school adheres to these values, norms, rules and language. If there is a discourse of individualism and always trying to improve and better oneself, then that discourse can be "hot-housed" within a school.

The origins of discourses of women teachers going above and beyond are not too difficult to locate. The above-and-beyond teacher appears to make sense alongside the concept of the supermom (Walkerdine & Ringrose, 2006)—a categorisation that emerged in the 1970s and continued into the 1990s to encapsulate the woman that can not only "have it all" but can go above and beyond societal expectations and in fact be like a superhuman—or superwoman (Erwin, 1996, as cited in Walkerdine & Ringrose, 2006). Foucault would ask who benefits from this caricature of women and in whose interests is it for this to remain the status quo and not be critiqued. In this section, I draw attention to a predominantly female primary teaching workforce that views going above and beyond for others, and making sacrifices, as normalised, to the extent that it is hard to critique something that feels right to them. This is the impact of powerful dominant discourses and their ability to keep certain institutions and their practices locked into the status quo with little

transformation or shifts. What is evident in the findings is that the teachers in this particular study appear to repeatedly constitute their subjectivities as they repeat their teaching practices of taking on additional tasks, of making sacrifices, of producing evidence of their worth to others and performing for others. These subjectivities make sense to the teachers involved and they continue to reinforce them in their speech and actions such as when they say these things are "good for them."

Walkerdine's research (Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989) on the way middle-class mothers' communications with their daughters compared with working-class mothers' communications, revealed evidence of dominant discourses of motherhood, labour, and social class. Her studies describe how, through a Foucauldian analysis, we are able to explore discourses that are intertwined with desires that we believe to be our own, but that those desires have origins, they have come from somewhere. Walkerdine and Lucey's (1989) *Democracy in the Kitchen* portrayed the powerful ways social discourse can work to form particular kinds of acceptable or normal women/mothers. The female teachers in my study speak as if it is normal that they sew costumes on their weekends. They speak as if it is normal that they sacrifice access to food, rest and unhurried bathroom breaks. I propose that it is possible these aspects of teaching are accepted particularly by female teachers as they reinforce aspects of mothering or parenting (sacrificing your own needs for the wellbeing and health of your child) that are deemed normal in wider society. The point raised here is that teachers might consider why these ideas of sacrifice should be accepted as part of the job not rejected.

Equally important is the question of why teachers continue to see being observed and judged by others as good for them and likewise accept ongoing professional development and participation in courses as a good thing. Do teachers stop to ask why these ideas are deemed desirable and normal? I argue that the ideas promoted through student agency (as aligned with a wider neoliberalised ideology) support this acceptance and reinforcement of these ideas of what is normal for women, for women teachers, and ultimately amplify these teacher subjectivities.

One outcome of this study, in regard to the way women teachers are made subjects in primary schools, is the idea that schools may at times exacerbate certain negative social discourses, particularly ones that may be outdated and anachronistic. Other researchers have proposed that there is systemic racism within New Zealand primary schools (Milne, 2013) and such discourses may even be unnoticeable unless they are pointed out by others. The sexual harassment of teachers by male students in secondary schools may appear as a contemporary issue of the day, with a heightened awareness of online influences fuelling misogynistic content. However, research in

2000 was already capturing the impact of sexist discourses in society openly played out in the classroom by male students (Robinson, 2000).

If schools are environments that feature dominant discourses that have circulated unchallenged over long periods of time, then the likelihood of resistance to these discourses remains low, but always possible. Some of the participants in this current study attempted to initially push against certain dominant school discourse when they spoke to me during the interview process, even if they later deleted these comments. One area that was not noticeably resisted was the way teachers currently go about their day-to-day practices. How teachers are formed as subjects through discourse and via disciplinary practices, like hierarchical observation, normalising judgements and monitoring and testing behaviours, was not fully challenged by teachers in this study. The findings show that teachers actively contribute to their subjectification within existing dominant discourses, and that the teacher subjectivities presented in this study are consolidated by teachers themselves as they reinforce practices that align with neoliberal ideologies of competition and survival of the fittest. Based on the findings of my study, Foucault's concept of resistance seems absent.

Is Transformation Possible in the Absence of Resistance?

As outlined in this chapter, I propose that currently, in schools, transformative change in education is reliant on the interactions of the three following conditions: how teachers can currently be in schools (the normalised, acceptable primary teacher subjectivities); the dominant discourses that circulate in schools formed in wider society; and how new ideas that are adopted by schools conflict with, or support, existing discourses of learning. These interactions are connected to my initial research questions:

- How do teacher subjectivities interact with the ideas of student agency?
- How do teachers explain and enact their ideas of student agency?
- What conflicts or transformations occur when teacher subjectivities interact with the ideas of student agency?

Foucault (1978) suggested that real change requires resistance to dominant discourses and that these discourses can always be challenged and changed. This resistance, he suggested, is not necessarily one big revolt, but a series of microresistances within day-to-day practices and questioning of who benefits from the status quo. As a pathway to exploring change in schools, this study attempted to locate contradictions between the teacher-in-control associated with traditional ideas of classroom management, and the notion of student agency where students lead their learning. Student agency is simply one example of change installed into the preexisting discursive environment of the primary classroom. What the findings reveal is that the ideas of student agency

work to reinforce a set of neoliberalised ideas of education that have been developing over the last 3 decades. These ideas of student agency have simply been subsumed into existing discourses of teaching and learning, as they make sense. In effect, these particular ideas and views of student agency have heightened or amplified existing teacher subjectivities.

As outlined in Chapter 2, the competitive, comparative, individualised, self-managing student that is idealised by business interests appears in the findings and in the literature. Fielding and Moss (2010) proposed that these qualities align with neoliberalism's particular kind of student: "flexible, competitive, choice-loving and autonomous, able to thrive in markets; and it requires considerable management to produce this subject—*starting from the earliest age*" (p. 23, emphasis added). These ideas of the self-managed, agentic student sound attractive and thus may remain unquestioned and unchallenged. The findings in this study show that primary teachers have not necessarily applied a level of critique to the introduction of student agency or to the ongoing, existing practices that they engage in on a day-to-day basis. This is evident in the way most classroom structures remain grounded in traditional structures such as compartmentalised notions of time, control, and prioritisation of certain kinds of valued knowledge (e.g., a literacy and numeracy focus).

Another interesting finding from the study is that some of the participants believed they had have implemented significant change into their classroom—they were adamant their teaching practice had changed due to professional development around the enactment of student agency. What they didn't see is that a lot of their day-to-day practice remained unchanged and undisrupted. They didn't appear to see that nothing much may have changed for the student in terms of how they continued to be managed, compared, observed and graded. The change for both students and teachers, with regard to student agency, was contained and neutral within wider, stronger educational discourses of control and undisrupted power relations between teacher and student, and the prioritisation of certain subject knowledges.

However, one of the participants in the study did work to disrupt one aspect of disciplinary practices in schools—the regular, compulsory, after-school teachers' meetings. That participant is a male teacher, underrepresented in the total make-up of primary school teachers (female teachers make up 86% of all primary school teachers in New Zealand; World Bank, 2023). The findings of this study include examples of some of the women participants not being able to speak in a certain way and express resistance to dominant school discourse, thereby reinforcing the current practices that form them in particular ways. In the absence of resistance, dominant circulating discourses are able to accelerate in the hothouse environment of a school community.

I suggest that the inability for some teachers to say or not say certain things about their practice is linked to the impact of wider social dominant discourses as outlined in Davies's (1990) analysis of discourses available to some children but not others. The implications of this inability to speak, or inequitable speech acts, are significant in relation to analysing how transformation and change is possible in schools. If teachers, or some groups of teachers, are unable to express resistance to dominant discourses that circulate within schools, then it is possible that certain teaching practices and approaches will remain undisturbed, unchallenged and unchanged. The following chapter discusses this further.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

In this research, resistance to discourse is presented as difficult but possible. However, it would appear that some teachers cannot speak these words of resistance out loud or have them captured in text as part of this study. Foucault would say that there is no one great revolt or refusal. That resistance is always possible. This is, in essence, one of Foucault's arguments presented by Leask (2012):

> Resistance is as widespread as power itself: the "strictly relational character of power relationships" (Foucault, 1981, p. 95) depends upon constant resistances . . . And so, in turn, resistance must be reconfigured in suitably multiple terms, as a kind of immanent, teeming, swarm. As Foucault puts it:
>
> > ... there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead, there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. (Foucault, 1981, pp. 95–6)
>
> Resistance, then, is reclaimed, and made *common*. (p. 66)

I argue that, in order for the conditions in schools to be part of transformative change, all teachers need to experience equitable environments for resistance to dominant discourse. This is a complex proposal. Firstly, I put forward the question that *if* there were more men in primary teaching, then would there be a greater presence of teachers contesting dominant, sometimes anachronistic, seemingly maternal discourses of what it is to be a good teacher? If the portion of responsibility for both raising *and* educating children was not so unbalanced, and instead was more evenly distributed in society, then this could potentially influence the entire landscape of primary school settings, practices and discourses. Secondly, the other possibility is that there is a greater critique, questioning and challenge to wider societal discourses around societal expectations of the good mother and in relation to this, the good teacher. Critique of the ways mothers are both spoken about by others, and speak about themselves, in relation to their roles in society, could in turn challenge dominant societal discourses around the supermum and the above-and-beyond teacher. In New Zealand specifically, this could include critiquing the seemingly positive language that appears in school curriculum documents such as learners being at the centre. This kind of language would be challenged as both teachers and students would be acknowledged at being at the centre of all learning together. (In reality, you cannot have one without the other.) These two scenarios, more men in teaching and/or the role of the mother or teacher being more valued in society, illustrate how hard it would be for either of these to be realised and, therefore, how seeking and expecting change and transformation in the schooling sector is challenging. When new innovations,

approaches and proposals are presented as "silver bullets" and solutions, this study and the findings within it should be considered as an illustration of why change is so hard in schools. Simple solutions will not address complex problems and complex discursive environments.

When considering the possibilities of change in education, Foucault's discourses and subjectivities have proven to be useful tools. Viewing possibilities for change in education through these particular lenses highlights how powerful dominant educational discourses and wider societal discourses can impede genuine transformational change to the education system. New programmes or pedagogies can also, it would appear, be introduced under a guise of change and transformation, but with both intended and unintended consequences. When teachers and school leaders uncritically adopt and accept these new approaches, there is a risk of what John Dewey (1904) would refer to as "intellectual subservience" (p. 11), "the willingness of our teaching corps to accept without inquiry or criticism any method or device which seems to promise good results" (p. 11). Student agency was used in this research as just one example of many new approaches in education. This research illuminates the need for a greater level of analysis and critique prior to the implementation of new approaches in schools. In addition, this research highlights the need to question the things that remain stable and unchanged in schools when new ideas and concepts are introduced.

The Foucauldian understanding of discourse, as it is conceptualised in this study, allows for an understanding of how difficult implementing change can be in education if dominant discourses continue to be reinforced through their acceptance and circulation through, by and as classroom teachers. I describe this as *teachers-in-and-as-discourse*. Foucault would say we are only able to speak from within the discourses made available to us. In teaching, the origins of these discourses can be located from within professional development facilitators or via educational policy development, or wider societal discourses. Marshall (1997) reinforced Foucault's concept of discourse by proposing that these discourses are how we tell the truth about teaching. Ball (2015) emphasised Marshall's position when he discussed the regimes of truths teachers tell about themselves:

> Policy discourses provide us with ways of thinking and talking about our institutional ourselves, to ourselves and to others; in other words, they form "a regime of truth" that "offers the terms that make self-recognition possible" (Butler, 2005, p. 22). Such discourses enable us to think about whether we are "good" teachers or "effective" teachers, to think about what learning is and how we recognise it, and to know what a "good" lesson looks like. (Ball, 2015, p. 307)

The process of research and analysis in this study has attempted to explore and analyse dominant discourses that may contribute to or impede possibilities for change and transformation in New Zealand schools. Davies (2002) explained the challenges in the complex process of unravelling discourses and envisioning new pathways of change:

> Language is both extraordinarily powerful in its capacity to give us new ways to see the world and equally powerful in its capacity to hold in place the very things we are trying to interrupt (Davies, 1994). (p. 131)

This study is grounded in a commitment to poststructuralist imperatives of challenging humanistic theories of the coherent, stable human subject. As a result, I chose to focus on a discursive lens on transformation and change in schools. This thesis attempts to counter balance the phenomenologically informed student-agency educational research that has, to date, featured prominently in policy documents that direct educators and teachers to implement particular views of student agency in schools. This study also opens up a critique of the positive implications associated with student agency, a concept that has been adopted almost uncritically into the New Zealand education system. Examining the origins, and critiquing the ideas of student agency, provides an insight into one example of how innovations and programmes are installed in primary schools. My contribution to knowledge in educational literature is that changes in education need to be seen in the context of the historical and social conditions that formed the dominant discourses of teaching. Through exploring these dominant discourses as they are circulated and reinforced in the contemporary New Zealand primary school classroom, I was able to carefully analyse the particular ways teachers are able to speak about their practices, their roles and responsibilities, from those dominant discourses. This contribution to knowledge is of importance in the 21st-century school system, as ongoing national and international educational reforms are enacted, sometimes at an accelerated pace, with little time for critique and resistance.

However, this study does have its limitations. The study sample was small and predominantly made up of female middle-aged participants. When I consulted the data on the teaching population in New Zealand, I found that 86% of the current primary school teaching workforce is female. The average age of the primary school teaching workforce is 45 years, both in New Zealand and internationally (OECD, n.d.). Whilst this study may not have captured the voices of younger primary school teachers, it is representative of the total teaching population. In addition, this study is focused on the original concept of student agency as opposed to learner agency. I have outlined my reasons for this in Chapter 4, Research Design. When I approached principals of Auckland primary schools, I selected schools that used the term student agency in their strategic plans, rather than learner agency. This means a sector of primary schools would not have been approached if

they used the term learner agency rather than student agency. This is also of relevance to the literature review, where the emphasis is on literature that contained the term student agency, rather than learner agency.

The timing of the study also contributed to its limitations. I commenced the initial application process at the beginning of 2020, shortly before the introduction of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. School principals were navigating unprecedented times and my request for access to teacher staff meetings, in order to invite teachers to be involved in my study, was not a priority for them at the time. However, I was granted time at several school meetings, and from those meetings, the required number of participants was secured.

The conclusions outlined in this chapter circle back to the original problem that was posed. My initial concern arose from noticing that very little changes in schools even when new ideas are introduced with promises of transformation and change. I noticed that things aren't taken away from schools, new things are simply added. Day-to-day practices, the prioritisation of certain subjects and rigid timetables all remain a constant. Such practices are impervious to proposed disruption and expectations of shifts in teachers' thinking. The introduction of student agency into primary school classrooms is one such shift that is connected to the positive language of students leading their learning and having agency. Change in schools is not dependent on teachers' mindsets—it depends on the dominant discourses that circulate throughout our schools, forming both teachers and students in particular ways.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Indicative Questions for Interviews

To inform Research Question 1

1. Can you tell me a bit about the timetable structure of your 'typical' school day?

   (clarification) - Would that structure be similar in other classrooms of the same year level at this school?

2. What is the function or the role of the teacher in the classroom?

   (prompt) - What are you doing in your role as a teacher throughout the day?

   (prompt) - What are your responsibilities?

3. Could you describe one curriculum subject area (e.g. numeracy or literacy) lesson for me.

   (prompt) - What might I see or hear in your classroom at this time?

4. What role are you taking in that lesson?

   (prompt) - What's your function as a teacher?

5. What part do assessment tools play in your day-to-day practice and the organisation of your classroom?

6. What are your responsibilities as a teacher outside of classroom contact hours?

   (prompt) – What are you doing in your Classroom Release Time (CRT), staff meetings, professional development/study, after school tasks?

To inform Research Question 2

7. Can you tell me about the professional development around student agency that you have been involved in.

   (prompt) – Have you had external people come into your school to talk about student agency? What conversations or ideas came out of those meetings?

   (prompt) Have you had staff meetings to discuss the ideas of student agency? What conversations or ideas came out of those meetings?

8. Have these ideas of student agency influenced your 'typical' school day or curriculum lesson planning?

   If yes, how?

   If no, why do you think these ideas have not transferred into your classroom?

Appendix 2: Ethics Application



Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Auckland University of Technology
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

19 May 2022

Jane Gilbert
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Jane

Re Ethics Application: **22/69 Tangled knots : A Foucauldian analysis of student agency discourse in New Zealand primary schools.**

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 in stages for three years until 19 May 2025.

This approval is for the interview stage of the research. Full information about future stages of this research needs to be provided to and approve by AUTEC before the data collection for those stages commences.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. In the Information Sheet remove the reference to observations as this for a later stage.
2. Please provide a 'Permission to Access' form for the principal.

Non-standard conditions must be completed before commencing your study. Non-standard conditions do not need to be reviewed by AUTEC before commencing your study.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research and as approved by AUTEC in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. 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.
7. 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 and that all the dates on the documents are updated.
8. AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

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

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz. The forms mentioned above are available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: gpotteredu@gmail.com; Megan Lourie

Appendix 3: Email to School Principals

Kia ora,

My name is Gina Potter and I am a PhD candidate at Auckland University of Technology. I am writing to invite your school to participate in a study that investigates student agency in New Zealand primary schools. I am inviting your school to participate as student agency appears as a focus area on your school website.

The study will explore how teachers talk about their day to day practices in the classroom and the different roles they hold, and how those practices and roles interact with student agency ideas. The research will involve one (1) interview for approximately 1.0-1.5 hours.

I would like to ask for your support by giving me permission to speak at a staff meeting about the study where I would invite teachers to participate in the study. I would only need five minutes to briefly explain the study, extend the invitation to participate, and leave information sheets and my contact details.

Please let me know if this is possible. I look forward to your reply.

Ngā mihi,

Gina Potter
gina.potter@autuni.ac.nz