

# **RAISING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF PRIORITY LEARNERS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

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## ABSTRACT

The ultimate role of an educational leader is to lead their staff to positively influence teaching and learning to enhance educational achievement of all students (Allison & Rehm, 2007; Cardno, 2012). Over recent times, the New Zealand population has changed significantly and has become far more ethnically diverse, and primary school leaders and their teams are faced with more complex workplace demands than ever before (Ministry of Education, 2007). However, the critical challenge for New Zealand's educational leaders at present is that there is a disproportionate number of Māori and Pasifika students who are not achieving their potential within the current New Zealand education system (Ministry of Education, 2008). The challenge for educational leaders and educators is to better respond to the learning needs of the increasingly diverse populations within schools to better serve the needs of the students, particularly those with disabilities and Māori and Pasifika who are not experiencing educational success (Ministry of Education, 2008).

The aim of this research was to examine the teaching and leadership practices perceived by teachers to raise the achievement of priority learners in primary schools. A qualitative methodology was employed for this research. Six semi-structured interviews were undertaken with six teachers who came from three different primary schools in the wider Auckland region. The participants held varying teaching roles within their schools, with experience ranging from eight years to over 30 years.

The major findings from this study indicate that establishing and maintaining productive relationships between home and school is essential in ensuring positive educational outcomes and wellbeing for students with a great emphasis being placed on culturally responsive practice. Teachers knowing their learners holistically is vital in supporting their learning to raise achievement and that by providing opportunities for student agency, collaborative learning and with the use of assessment for learning practices, students are more likely to be motivated and engaged in their learning. Additionally, by creating a climate of inclusive strategic thinking and resourcing, educational leaders can greatly influence the raising of achievement for priority learners.

The findings and recommendations made from this study emphasise that educational leaders and teachers give considerable attention to the ways in which they facilitate whānau engagement so that engagement is appropriate and meaningful for whānau and to create a school culture and environment whereby it is expected that teachers know their students holistically. This is crucial in building meaningful and productive relationships to positively influence educational outcomes and wellbeing for students. Furthermore, educational leaders need to provide opportunities for their staff to honestly reflect on, consider and challenge their worldviews and beliefs of those whom they teach to understand how their beliefs and perceptions influence their interactions and relationships with their students.

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## ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

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

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Alana McKenzie", is positioned above a horizontal line.

Alana McKenzie

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*Ehara taku toa I te toa takitahi*

*engari he toa takatini.*

*My strength is not that of a single warrior*

*but that of many.*

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Raising achievement for priority learners, in particular Māori and Pasifika students, has been an ongoing issue for the New Zealand education sector (Hattie, 2003; Parr & Timperley, 2015). This is of particular interest to me, as an educational leader in a Community of Learning (CoL) that has a large Māori and Pasifika demographic with a substantial number who fall into the priority learner category. My research examined the practices of teachers and school leaders that are perceived to raise the achievement of priority learners in primary schools, this gave me an insight into how primary schools and their leadership teams might be able to best support raising the achievement of their priority learners.

The term 'Pasifika' is used by the Ministry of Education and the Pacific Island Affairs to "describe people living in New Zealand who have migrated from the Pacific Islands or who identify with the Pacific Islands because of ancestry or heritage" (Fletcher, Parkhill, Fa'afoi, Taleni & O'Regan, 2009, p.24). Anae (2001) and Manu'atu and Kepa (2005) raise concerns with the use of the term 'Pasifika' as they believe the broad term generalises ethnic identity and individuality of those from the Pacific Island nations. Therefore to acknowledge this perspective, the use of the term 'Pasifika' in this thesis and literature review will be used "in the spirit of unity through diversity" (McCaffery & McFall-McCaffery, 2010, p.87). Also, for the purposes of the literature review, the primary focus in reference to raising achievement will be on Māori and Pasifika students who are not experiencing success in the New Zealand education system and are therefore achieving below their expected level. These are the students who are referred to as 'priority learners' (Education Review Office, 2012).

Raising the achievement of priority learners is a pertinent and topical issue for me as a member of a leadership team working within a Community of Learning (CoL) that has a large Māori and Pasifika demographic with a substantial number who fall into the priority learner category. The research undertaken was a small-scale qualitative study, involving six primary school teachers. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews which allowed teachers' perspectives and perceptions to be expressed and heard.

The research questions were:

- What teaching practices are perceived by teachers to be effective in raising the achievement of priority learners in primary schools?
- How do teachers monitor the progress of their priority learners and how does this influence their teaching practice?
- What specific leadership practices do teachers perceive as influencing achievement for priority learners?

The study has produced findings that may be used by the researcher and the participants within their own school contexts to help better understand the teaching and leadership practices perceived to raise the achievement of their priority students and may also be applied by other educators within their unique contexts if found to be applicable.

This thesis is structured into six chapters. Chapter One is an introduction to the study and describes the rationale and aims of the research. Chapter Two presents a literature review, exploring literature and connecting themes relevant to factors perceived to raise the achievement of priority learners. Chapter Three describes and explains the rationale for selecting the methodology and data collection methods of this research. Ethical considerations and possible limitations are also discussed. Chapter Four presents the research findings from the participants' interviews, and the themes that emerged from the data are identified. Chapter Five presents a discussion of findings where the emerging themes are critically examined, and connections are made to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Finally, Chapter Six concludes the thesis with the presentation of the overall findings along with recommendations for future effective practice in raising the achievement of priority learners. The strengths and the limitations of the study are also explored.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The achievement gap is of serious concern in New Zealand's primary schools. The gap between the highest and the lowest achieving ethnic groups is a serious issue, and Māori and Pasifika students are most at risk of leaving school without qualifications due to underachievement (Ministry of Education, 2008; Parr & Timperley, 2015; Turner, Rubie-Davies & Webber, 2015). The Ministry of Education's ultimate objective is to increase the proportion of learners achieving at or above their expected level in Literacy and Mathematics (Education Review Office, 2013a). From 2010-2017, the benchmark used was the 'National standards' (Ministry of Education, 2009). Currently, with the recent removal of the 'National Standards' due to a change in Government, educators refer to a student's expected curriculum level (Ministry of Education, 2007; 2010c). In order to accomplish this Ministry of Education objective, achievement outcomes for students who are from low-income families, identify as Māori or Pasifika and who are not achieving success, must be addressed (Education Review Office, 2013a). The academic achievement of Māori and Pasifika primary and secondary school students in New Zealand has been an issue faced by educators and the government for quite some time (Parr & Timperley, 2015; Turner, Rubie-Davies & Webber, 2015).

Educational leaders and schools are being inundated with official reports and reviews highlighting perceived effective pedagogical practices that evidently accelerate learning and raise educational outcomes for underachieving learners. However, this educational disparity continues to be of major concern (Lock & Gibson, 2008). Reforms and policies to date have failed to improve achievement disparities since they were first identified over four decades ago (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2009). Unless educators and policymakers address this disparity and challenge the deficit theorising that is present in many New Zealand educational institutions, change will not and cannot be meaningfully implemented (Bishop & Berryman; 2013). The Ministry of Education (2014) outline in their *Statement of Intent for 2014-2018* that:

there is compelling international evidence that the way the education system is performing for particular groups of children and students needs to improve. Not

achieving to their potential has a social and economic cost for children and students  
-and for the country as a whole. (p. 20)

The policies and practices that have been and are being established “continue to be developed within a framework of neo/colonialism and as a result, continue to serve the interest of a monocultural elite” (Bishop et al., 2009; p. 735). Bishop et al. (2009) believe this is why educational disparity continues in New Zealand, despite educators and policymakers attempting to address this gap through interventions and reforms. Lock and Gibson (2008) suggest that this gap in the educational attainment for Māori, in particular, is of great concern for New Zealand, as Māori have a “youthful population structure” (p. 11) and, if this disparity is not addressed and the achievement gap reduced, then “the future New Zealand workforce is likely to be less educated and consequently less productive” (p. 11).

This literature review presents research that is linked to this longstanding issue of raising the achievement of priority learners in New Zealand schools and will be presented in three sections. In the first instance, I identify the issue being reviewed. I then provide a synthesis of literature concerned with this topic according to five themes: relationships; educational leadership and strategic resourcing; professional development and reflective practice; assessment; and collaboration. Finally, I discuss and critique the connections across the themes.

## **Raising achievement of priority learners and the achievement gap**

The ultimate essence of the work of educational leaders is to influence teaching and learning in ways that positively impact on the educational outcomes of all students (Cardno, 2012). Teachers’ core work, through effective leadership, is to ensure educational success for all students to ultimately create a confident, connected and actively involved community of lifelong learners (Ministry of Education, 2007). As recognised by the Ministry of Education (2008), “our students are from a variety of cultural backgrounds and come with a range of experiences and needs. This means that schools have to respond to different and greater challenges than ever before” (p. 8). With this increased challenge in mind and with the knowledge of New Zealand’s educational disparity that has been apparent for a number of generations, the Ministry of Education (2014) has made raising achievement for at-risk learners a priority in their *Statement of Intent for 2014-2018*.

New Zealand has a “high performance, low equity profile in literacy” (Parr & Timperley, 2015, p. 29). The OECD (2005) and Ogle et al. (2003) maintain that while high achieving students continue to excel, there are increasingly large proportions of ethnic groups that are over-represented in the lowest quartile. These groups are often referred to as ‘at risk’ learners and are disproportionately made up of Māori and Pasifika students, students from low socio-economic backgrounds and students with special needs (Education Review Office, 2013a; Ministry Of Education, 2014).

Māori and Pasifika peoples have the highest birth-rates and, by 2021, it is predicted that these populations will constitute around 60% of the total school-aged population in Auckland (Parr & Timperley, 2015). It is statistics such as this that provide the stimulus for interventions and reforms that aim to reduce educational disparity and accelerate rates of progress to ensure the greatest gains possible for these lowest achieving groups (Parr & Timperley, 2015). A critical examination of current leadership and teaching practices perceived by teachers to raise student achievement for Māori and Pasifika in primary schools is needed to address this long-standing issue. There is a vast number of scholarly works (see, for example: Bishop & Berryman, 2013; Rubie-Davies & Peterson, 2016; Webber, 2013) that are reporting the same findings and statistics regarding effective pedagogy and practices for raising achievement. These include practices such as those that promote partnership between home and school, ‘leadership for learning’, being inclusive of all learners, and using formative assessment to provide ‘next learning steps’ (Education Review Office, 2013b). Despite this, the New Zealand primary schooling system is still characterised by educational disparity and underachievement, with a disproportionate number of these students being Māori or Pasifika. Socio-economic status is the best indicator of student achievement, (Taylor & Yu, 2009) and Māori and Pasifika people in New Zealand are over-represented in low socio-economic groups (Parr & Timperley, 2015). Marriott and Sims (2014) maintain that “this growing gap in inequality between Māori and Pacific people, and the European population, warrants greater government attention if the gaps are not to continue increasing into the future” (p.27).

The literature suggests that educational leaders can no longer ‘underserve’ these ethnic groups – the issue has gone on long enough and needs to be addressed (Baskerville, 2009; Irvin & Darling, 2005;

Macfarlane, 2004). It seems that leaders and teachers have become better at collating data on 'priority learners', setting targets and recognising the disparities within their schools, but effective practice or resources to support and sustain acceleration or raised achievement remains elusive (Education Review Office, 2013a). The Ministry of Education continues to expect school leaders to respond to and address the ongoing disparity, yet fails to give any real direction as to what this response might look like (Ford, 2012). As emphasised by Rubie-Davies and Peterson (2016):

In any nation with indigenous students, who are also often students from socioeconomically deprived areas, until they are achieving at the same levels as students from the dominant culture, education in the respective countries cannot be judged to be successful. (p. 82)

If change is to occur, and for our education system to be deemed totally successful, policymakers and leaders need to understand what it is that needs to be implemented and embedded within teaching and leadership practice to reduce the educational disparities faced by many of our Māori and Pasifika students (Bishop, 2011; Bishop & Berryman, 2013). A shift needs to be made away from a mono-cultural or teacher-centric view to a multicultural view, to encourage more effective home-school partnerships and engagement of Māori and Pasifika whānau (Milne, 2009). The literature focuses on the importance of relationships, an issue to which I turn in the next section.

## **The importance of relationships and building productive partnerships**

The literature that I have reviewed explores the idea that relationships are vital on multiple levels when it comes to raising achievement, and are of particular importance in Māori and Pasifika students' contexts. Relationships are seen as fundamental in the engagement of students in their learning (Ford, 2012; Milne, 2009; Turner, Rubie-Davies & Webber, 2015). Productive partnerships that are built on trust and openness and that are nurtured and sustained, tend to create home-school partnerships that support whānau engagement and ultimately play a part in raising achievement (Fletcher et al., 2009).

When addressing the issue of raising the achievement of Māori and Pasifika students, productive relationships are seen as one of the key factors, as relationships are a central cultural element. 'Whanaungatanga' is considered as the base element that holds all things Māori together. It is at the heart of relationships and seen as a fundamental part of Māori life (Hohepa & Robson, 2008; Macfarlane



et al., 2007). 'Whanaungatanga' is described by Bishop (2008) as relationships, and 'whakawhanaungatanga' as the process of establishing relationships. Likewise for Pasifika families, as indicated by the Education Review Office (2015), "Relationships are the foundation on which most Pacific activities are built" (p. 3). In Pasifika cultures, many families are raised traditionally in their homeland within villages and have large extended families. Furthermore, here in New Zealand, their way of life is dependent on relationships and working together, even though they may not be living with extended family members (Fletcher et al., 2009). Educationally, this reinforces the importance of relationships for Māori and Pasifika students if they are to experience academic success at a level commensurate with other ethnic groups. This includes relationships within the classroom, between home and school, and within and between the school and the community (Macfarlane, 2004; Macfarlane et al., 2007). Productive relationships between all stakeholders are vital as, in turn, they enable support for learning and skill development to optimise learning and raise achievement (Alton-Lee, 2003; Biddulph, Biddulph & Biddulph, 2003; Bishop, 2011).

### **Relationships between leaders and within the staff**

The literature suggests that the fundamental job of educational leaders is to lead and positively influence others to enhance teaching and learning. It is essential that leaders engage with teachers confidently to establish relationships that are built on trust and that will allow issues around teaching and learning to be addressed professionally (Cardno, 2012). What is crucial for educators is that the relationships that are created between adults are done so in a way to serve the betterment, achievement and well-being of students (Hohepa & Robson, 2008). As Cardno (2012) reiterates "it is a leader's responsibility to influence others in ways that create these conditions for learning, change and effectiveness" (p. 2). A breakdown of relationships, failure to establish relationships and deficit theorising by teachers can have detrimental effects on achievement of students (Fletcher et al., 2009; Turner et al., 2015). Results from Cavanagh's work show that relationships are the "core element for a culturally safe ethos within the school" (Macfarlane et al., 2007, p. 69). Ultimately, relationships within and between staff and educational leaders should be based on trust, encouragement, tolerance and support.

### **Teacher-to-student and student-to-student relationships**

Another theme in the literature is that of student-teacher relationships. These should be established on openness and honesty and be built around developing a rapport between them, whereby the student is set up to feel successful and valued (Macfarlane, 2004; Macfarlane et al., 2007). Productive relationships are critical to successful, culturally-inclusive schools and are a fundamental motivator for students and their engagement in learning (Macfarlane et al., 2007). Many international studies, such as those conducted by Santoro (2007) and Thorpe, Bell-Booth, Staton, and Thompson (2013), assert that for indigenous students to become engaged in their learning, their teachers must understand the importance of enhancing relationships with their students by embracing and respecting their cultural background and cultural capital. It is crucial to understand that the quality of these relationships between teacher and student, and student and student, is the key to positively impacting on student achievement and well-being (Wilson, 2005 as cited in Baskerville, 2009). Partnerships need to be built on genuine care and acknowledgement of students' cultural capital, experiences and understanding (Bishop & Berryman, 2013). As Gay (2002) proclaims, "caring is a moral imperative, a social responsibility, and a pedagogical necessity" (p. 109). Furthermore, it is an expectation of the Ministry of Education that teachers affirm and recognise the unique identity of each of their students (Ministry of Education, 2007).

### **Relationships between home and school and the community**

The literature claims that relationships that create alignment between home and school, create a sense of belonging for students and whānau. It is important that parents and whānau feel welcome and can actively support their child's learning. This alignment can create one of the strongest impacts on student achievement, particularly in literacy (Alton Lee, 2003). Research conducted by Fletcher et al. (2009) further supports the importance of these relationships in that Pasifika students who were achieving well in reading were from schools that had developed strong, reciprocal home-school partnerships. Research conducted by Bishop and Berryman (2010) in the development of the *Te Kotahitanga* programme used in some secondary schools in New Zealand, found that whānau recognised the importance of relationships between home and school and that this contributed to their child's success at school. They also found that whānau believed that "these relationships were often constrained and restricted by the school" (Bishop & Berryman, 2013, p. 377). As educational leaders and educators, it is essential that these productive partnerships and relationships between home and school be developed, nurtured and sustained to ensure relational trust, openness, and parental and whānau

engagement. When a partnership occurs between schools and community organisations, student achievement also benefits (Mapp, 2011).

However, the literature states that engaging whānau is crucial in raising achievement although it is acknowledged that this can be challenging for teachers. Schools often hold the control in these partnerships and, for families from low socio-economic backgrounds, this can be damaging to relationships and disconcerting as it “privileges the institution above the process” (Goodall, 2017, p.86). This school-centred model reinforces the status-quo - a more “equitable distribution of power” (Goodall, 2017, p.90) is necessary for it to be fair and inclusive for all involved. Olmstead (2013) describes two types of interactions in relation to whānau engagement - reactive and proactive. Reactive involvement describes interactions such as attending consultation meetings, meet-the-teacher evenings or volunteering. Proactive interactions are described as involvement in activities such as helping with homework, listening to their child read or reading to them, and regularly following their child’s achievement and progress (Olmstead, 2013). Educational leaders must be aware of school-centric and teacher-centric views and consider what types of involvement are happening in their schools. They need to be prepared to embrace change if there is an imbalance of the types of whānau engagement or lack thereof. This is crucial in establishing collaborative relationships, in sustaining and maintaining them, and ensuring they are fair and inclusive to all whānau (Bojuwoye, 2009; Goodall, 2017; Olmstead, 2013). As Goodall (2017) asserts “parental engagement with children’s learning has the potential to be a major lever toward narrowing the achievement gap” (p. 129). Everyone benefits from these productive partnerships when the relationships are authentic. Students’ achievement improves, teachers feel supported and morale increases, whānau feel empowered and involved, and consequently, communities become more supportive and involved (Bojuwoye, 2009).

## **Effective educational leadership and strategic resourcing**

The components of educational leadership and strategic resourcing form another key theme that occurred throughout the literature reviewed. Effective educational leadership is crucial as it ensures that there is whole school alignment and coherence through the implementation of systems, policies and resources that focus on and support quality teaching and learning (Education Review Office, 2013a). The essential role of educational leaders and their leadership teams is to create a collaborative environment which builds educational, organisational and cultural conditions necessary

for successful learning and teaching (Hayes, Christie, Mills, & Lingard, 2004; Silins & Mulford, 2002). Educational leadership is about leading by example, influencing others to improve teaching practice, raising achievement and building relationships (Cardno, 2012). As Pont, Nusche, and Morrmann (2008) assert, educational leadership plays a key role in improving educational outcomes through positively influencing change to the school culture and systems.

Educational leaders have the ability within their schools to move, structure and allocate resources and systems to fit the needs of their students, their school's context and culture, and the broader school community (Ministry of Education, 2008). Leaders are also responsible for setting the conditions and creating a culture for successful learning (Lee, Kwan, & Walker, 2009). The way that educational leaders manage resources and funds within their schools can have a great influence on the teaching and learning programmes which ultimately impacts on student achievement. This is described by the Ministry of Education (2008) in *Kiwi leadership for principals*:

Support for teaching and learning is also generated by allocating material and human resources in ways that are aligned to the agreed goals and expectations of the school.

Principals who plan well for and provide strategic resourcing have an effect on the quality of student outcomes. (p. 23)

By creating a culture within their schools where teachers willingly take responsibility for raising achievement and reducing educational disparity for priority learners, not only in their classrooms but school-wide, educational leaders set up a successful learning environment (Education Review Office, 2013a). Effective educational leaders who want to address the achievement disparity within their schools will create systems whereby achievement information is analysed. Teachers who are making the most difference for their priority learners will be recognised and encouraged to share their successful practices with other educators within their schools (Education Review Office, 2013a). As leaders have an indirect impact on student learning, it is important that they make necessary changes to their systems, set goals and seek positive outcomes through influence, and utilise the commitment, enthusiasm and expertise of their staff. Successful educational leaders monitor their effectiveness through the evaluation of teaching and learning programmes and put procedures in place to ensure these goals and outcomes are being met (Bush, 2008). As Bishop (2011) states, "effective leadership that aims to sustain an educational reform takes ownership of the reform. The first characteristic of

ownership is a leader taking responsibility for the performance of students who are currently not benefiting from their school/system” (p. 36).

The literature suggests that curriculum leaders also play a vital part in raising achievement for indigenous and ethnically diverse students. Without effective curriculum leadership in relation to curriculum design and the implementation of culturally-sound pedagogy, student achievement for priority learners is likely to be compromised (Averill, Hynds, Hindle & Meyer, 2015). Teaching that is responsive not only has an impact on priority learners and lower ability achievers success but also on high ability achievers too (Alton-Lee, 2003). Curriculum leaders have the control to ensure that the curriculum being taught in their schools is meaningful and relevant to indigenous and ethnically diverse students. This can be done through co-constructed learning, by applying learning experiences that are culturally located, and by tapping into their students’ worlds through student-centred approaches and pedagogies (Averill et al., 2015; Hohepa & Robson, 2008). However, for curriculum leaders to effectively lead their teams and for teachers to become responsive practitioners, targeted professional development is necessary to ensure improved student outcomes and particularly to ensure that indigenous students enjoy educational success as Māori (Averill et al., 2015). Relevant, ongoing professional development and reflective practice are essential elements in raising the achievement of priority learners, an area in which is addressed in the next section.

## **Professional development and reflective practice**

Another theme in the literature is that of effective leadership practice being critical in assuring success and well-being for all students. Educational leaders have a critical role in ensuring that their institutions have efficient and robust systems and structures in place, such as professional development, to provide success for all (Education Review Office, 2013a; Ford, 2012; Macfarlane et al., 2007). Desimone (2009) describes five key factors that can be associated with teachers making effective changes to their knowledge and practice, and that can be referred to as “holding promise” (p. 183), regarding raising achievement. These factors are content focus; active learning opportunities; coherence – in reference to consistency with teachers’ knowledge and beliefs and systems policies; duration; and collective participation.

Professional development is an essential element in any institution that embraces effective practice. Closing the gap in achievement and reducing educational disparity requires regular input into lifting teacher capability and encouraging reflective practice (Fletcher et al., 2009; Hohepa & Robson, 2008; Parr & Timperley, 2015). As some researchers (see, for example: Alton Lee, 2003; Nye, Konstantopoulos & Hedges, 2004) believe that teachers have the most significant effect on student achievement at systems level; therefore constant input of high-quality professional development is essential. It is necessary to maintain quality teaching and learning programmes through effective teacher practice and reflection that, in turn, accelerates learning and raises the achievement of priority learners. A large proportion of this development needs to be around the area of identity, language and culture (Fletcher et al., 2009; Ford 2012; Macfarlane, 2004; Macfarlane et al., 2007; Turner et al., 2015). This has significant influence in engaging Māori and Pasifika students, establishing and maintaining relationships, and ultimately raising achievement.

Learners from diverse ethnic backgrounds have a diverse range of unique cultures and language identities (Allison & Rehm, 2007; Fletcher, Parkhill & Fa'aoi, 2005). Teachers, now more than ever, have an ongoing challenge in educating these learners as well as celebrating and embracing the cultural capital that they bring to the classroom (Allison & Rehm, 2007; Macfarlane et al., 2007). Quality professional development to support teachers in this area is necessary to ensure success for all (Education Review Office, 2015; Ford, 2012). Rubie-Davies and Peterson (2016) believe that significantly investing in professional development aimed at culturally responsive pedagogy in primary schools would enable substantial improvement in educational equity for Māori and raise achievement for all, but particularly for priority learners. This is supported by the significant improvement of student outcomes of those involved in the secondary school-based *Te Kotahitanga* programme (Bishop & Berryman, 2010). All students involved showed improvement even though the programme was specifically devised to target the teaching of Māori learners (Rubie-Davies & Peterson, 2016). Such professional development will create new challenges in the way teachers think and teach. As Hale, Snow-Gerono, and Morales (2008) illustrate, “educators must embrace new ways of challenging themselves to think differently about the world they live in and how the world affects the educational experiences of their students” (p. 1424).

The inconclusive nature of professional development in regards to the effectiveness on raising student achievement is difficult due to the complex nature in the work needed to produce and measure effect at student level (Meissel, Parr & Timperley, 2016). There is some tension around the fact that in New Zealand, there has been many decades of professional development for teachers, however, we still have a number of students who fall into a substantial achievement gap, and are not performing where they should be (Bishop et al., 2009; Meissel et al., 2016; Parr & Timperley, 2015).

## **Assessment for learning and monitoring progress**

The importance of assessment was another strong theme in the literature reviewed in regard to raising achievement for Māori and Pasifika priority learners. Assessment, or more specifically '*Assessment for Learning*' (Ministry of Education, 2010b), refers to assessment that focusses on improving students' learning and the way teachers teach. Assessment for learning was a Ministry of Education funded initiative that has been a feature in New Zealand primary schools for a number of years. Hargreaves (2005) describes 'Assessment for learning' as a practice whereby teachers use targets to monitor performance, use assessment to inform next steps, give feedback for improvement, learn about students' learning, allow students to take control over their learning and assessment, and allow assessment to be a learning experience. The *Assessment Reform Group* (2002) defines 'Assessment for learning' as "the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where they are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there" (p.2). 'Assessment for learning' encourages students to work collaboratively and focuses on appreciating expertise and experience within the class (Ministry of Education, 2010b). This is of fundamental importance, as assessment information needs to be used to identify students who are not meeting the necessary learning outcomes, to monitor their progress and evaluate the impact of the teaching programmes and systems over time. It is crucial that at leadership level, these systems are in place and filter through to teachers' assessment expectations and procedures (Education Review Office, 2013b).

Literature suggests that assessment tasks that are implemented to measure and monitor learning, need to be culturally inclusive and appropriate for all students. Assessment techniques should be "compatible with and relevant to cultural backgrounds, learning styles and life experiences of all students" (Allison & Rehm, 2007, p. 16). Learning should be a progressive change in what students know, and layer onto

their existing knowledge and connect to their experiences. Therefore, it is essential that assessment tasks allow students to share the growth they have made. Allison and Rehm (2007) assert that educators need to be using alternative ways of assessing students as it is a “universally sound teaching practice that is particularly appropriate for diverse learners” (p. 16). Some such alternative ways of assessing students learning could be through performance based methods such as projects, journal entries, demonstrations, multi-media presentations or samples of independent work (Allison & Rehm, 2007). These alternative ways will allow students to show what they know, and allow teachers to tap into their worlds outside of the classroom and make those connections.

Educational leaders often become too entrenched in standardised testing, graphing the results and making summary reports. There may be a time and place for this to track achievement and progress over time, but it is not helping with the day-to-day raising of achievement for priority learners (Nuthall, 2002). Standardised assessments often do not tell teachers what it is they need to know about their Māori and Pasifika learners; they instead discriminate against students with diverse backgrounds as they fail to connect to their language, culture and identity (Allison & Rehm, 2007). As Nuthall (2002) describes, “the scores that students get on standard paper and pencil tests are primarily the result of the students’ motivations and cultural background, and only secondarily about what the student knows or can do” (p. 15). Assessment practices have improved with ‘Assessment for learning’, as schools are better at knowing their ‘at risk’ learners, analysing and tracking their progress, reflecting on teaching practice and using this to inform teaching (Education Review Office, 2013b). However, a move to more culturally compatible open-ended assessment practices will be a supporting factor in raising the achievement of priority learners, as well as catering adequately for all other learners (Allison & Rehm, 2007; Ford, 2012).

## **Collaboration**

Another theme that is noticeable in the literature reviewed is that of collaboration. Collaboration amongst students is strongly perceived to be a positive facilitative practice used in raising the achievement of priority learners in the literature reviewed. It is a learning approach whereby a small group of students work together to solve a problem or a task. Gerlach (1994) explains that “collaborative learning is based on the idea that learning is a naturally social act in which the participants talk among themselves. It is



through the talk that learning occurs” (p. 8). The concepts of reciprocal learning and cooperation are important elements in many cultures. The Māori term ‘ako’ is often used when talking about reciprocal learning and collaboration. Bishop (2010) defines ‘ako’ as the concept whereby teachers can learn from their students as well as students learning from their teacher, within a context where there is a co-construction of knowledge.

As both Māori and Pasifika cultures are based centrally around the notion of relationships, collaboration is part of daily life (Education Review Office, 2015; Hohepa & Robson, 2008; Macfarlane et al., 2007). The concepts of tuakana teina, whereby an older person supports a younger person in learning, and ako, co-current and reciprocal learning, are often crucial elements of the Māori culture (Macfarlane, 2004). Likewise, this is the case in Pasifika cultures. This can be represented with this Samoan proverb *‘a fia vave oo lou va’a, alo na o’oe, ae a fia tuli mamao le taunuu’uga tatou ‘alo’alo faatasi – if you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.’* Students who have the opportunity to experience collaborative power relations with their teachers, tend to show increased confidence in their identity as it is reaffirmed with these collaborative interactions (Cummins, 2000). These collaborative power relations allow students to work alongside their teacher and peers, and take ownership of the teaching and learning process. Cleary (2010) describes this shared power relation notion as times “where learners can initiate interactions; learners’ right to self-determination over learning styles and sense making processes are regarded as fundamental to power-sharing relationships, and collaborative critical reflection is part of an ongoing critique of power relationships” (p.13). This can be a difficult concept for some students, where shared or collaborative power relations go against their culture or belief systems. This is a consideration that needs to be made. As described by Bishop et al.(2007) collaborative power sharing is when power is shared in a way that is non dominative, interactive, connected and supportive of all involved for the purpose in improving educational outcomes for all involved.

Co-operative grouping or learning, peer tutoring and peer collaboration are all seen as crucial elements in increasing motivation and engagement in learning for priority learners (Allison & Rehm, 2007; Macfarlane, 2004). Co-operative learning aligns with the concept of ako and is the unified co-operation of teaching and learning (Macfarlane, 2004) – whether it be between teachers, students and teachers,

or just students. An example of co-operative learning and ako in action is kapa haka whereby new members are put among experienced members to achieve mastery of a new skill (Macfarlane, 2004). The classroom is an optimal learning space for ako to occur as it allows expertise to be tapped into and valued, whether that be expertise from the learner sharing with peers and the teacher, or just with peers (Macfarlane et al., 2007). This reciprocal learning is an example of whakawhanaungatanga, as it involves the total co-operation and participation of peers (Macfarlane, 2004).

Educational leaders underestimate the power of collaboration in the classroom and within the community. Cummins (2000) suggests that by using a collaborative creation of power, students can succeed through engaging and developing their self-confidence and capability. Collaboration and participation exercised through strong, meaningful ties with family and whānau, staff, and the wider school community increases the likelihood of enhanced educational outcomes for priority learners (Macfarlane et al., 2007; Fletcher et al., 2005).

## **Discussion**

Several criticisms and connections run through the literature studied for this review in critically examining the factors perceived to raise student achievement for Māori and Pasifika in primary schools. Although there is a reasonable amount of literature and research on raising achievement, it took some searching to find relevant material specifically about raising the achievement of Māori and Pasifika in New Zealand primary schools. Much of the material found was not scholarly. In addition, it was either based in a secondary school context, raised questions about the transferability to the primary sector, produced by the government or government agencies, or based on international studies.

### **Deficit thinking and teacher expectations**

The first noticeable connection throughout the literature reviewed was that of 'deficit theorising' and teacher expectations. One argument is that teachers' and leaders' attitudes towards their learners underpin the significant achievement disparity of our priority learners (Rubie-Davies & Peterson, 2016; Turner et al., 2015). Using an applied critical leadership and critical race theory lens (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012), it seems that the culture of all students and, in particular, those from diverse backgrounds, defined here as a way of acting, thinking and feeling (Nuthall, 2002), is not being

recognised, embraced and celebrated. Instead, culture and ethnicity are being used by some educators as an excuse, a deficit (Bishop et al., 2009; Rubie-Davies & Peterson, 2016).

Researchers such as Turner et al. (2015) argue that some teachers use the fact that a large proportion of at-risk learners come from low socio-economic homes or particular ethnic backgrounds to explain their underachievement, or to provide an excuse for teachers not acting to improve achievement. Rubie-Davies and Peterson (2016) support this, as they uphold the position and notion that teachers' expectations have a great influence on the achievement of their students. Macfarlane et al. (2007) explain that often educators that are from more dominant cultures are more likely to hold "impositional values and attitudes" (p. 66) towards ethnic and cultural communities. Macfarlane et al. (2007) also assert that "this mode of thinking is a key factor in the subsequent performance of those students as it causes educators to focus on less positive indices in terms of Māori achievement" (p. 66). Blame is put on culture, intelligence or living arrangements, and therefore the problem is placed on the students, their whānau and community (Macfarlane et al., 2007). Turner et al. (2015) conclude that poor relationships, teachers' deficit beliefs, and an unwillingness to take responsibility for students' learning are contributing factors to underachievement, with teacher expectations being the most influential. Rubie-Davies, Hattie and Hamilton (2003) propose that low expectations held by teachers towards students from ethnic minorities could contribute to the achievement gap:

If teacher expectations for student learning are lower for one ethnic group than another then it is possible that these beliefs and expectations may affect teachers' judgements of student achievement. If this was the case, then we might expect that teachers would assign lower marks to one ethnic group than another, controlling socioeconomic status and ability. (p. 3)

In a further search for more literature concerned with teacher expectations in relation to ethnicity and achievement in primary schools, little of significance was found. In the research conducted, mainly in secondary schools, teachers were found to have lower expectations for Māori students than any other ethnic group (Rubie-Davies et al. 2003).

## **Terminology**

The terminology used and the issues around raising the achievement of priority learners in the New Zealand education system are considered by some to also be an element of this deficit theorising. As stated by Milne (2009), “often we see ‘diversity’ as a problem or a challenge we have to come to terms with, so we address the issue from a deficit perspective” (p. 2). Bishop (2015) maintains the position that, even when teachers have the best intentions and mean well, if they are “led to believe that students with whom they are interacting are deficient, they will respond to them negatively” (p. 411). This, in essence, has a detrimental effect on student self-esteem, on teachers’ perceptions of their students’ learning, and their expectations that students will achieve well. When teachers focus particularly on specific groups of students to raise achievement or track data, these students are often identified and labelled as ‘below standard’, ‘underachieving’, ‘focus’ or ‘target’ students, or ‘priority’ learners. Bishop (2015) explains that “if we think that other people have deficiencies, then our actions will tend to follow our thinking” (p. 411). Milne (2009) believes that even having a major focus on raising the achievement of Māori and Pasifika to ‘national norms’ and increasing engagement is in itself a deficit mindset.

Boereboom (2017) upholds the belief that New Zealand’s rapidly changing and growing ethnic diversity brings a challenge to the way data are reported on to ensure that it is culturally sensitive to all ethnic groups. He maintains that:

An unintended potential effect of the system of ethnic priority ranking is that it could inadvertently distort and bias the reporting of trends in the education system by ameliorating or exacerbating ethnic differences in the reporting on key outcomes.  
(p. 5)

Boereboom (2017) also believes that to avoid further “ethnic stereotyping” (p. 8), it is of great importance that care is taken when data are collected to report on educational outcomes of ethnic groupings. He suggests that a more appropriate and inclusive method to represent students’ data would be to use an approach whereby data is weighted ethnically or through the use of proportional representation whereby all nominated ethnicities in students’ backgrounds are recognised. Milne (2009) believes that “schooling will not become more equitable until paradigm shifts happen in the way we think about and define achievement” (p. 2).

### **Cultural responsiveness and engagement**

Deficit theorising and terminology usage aside, it seems that when critically examining the factors perceived to raise the achievement of priority learners, the most often noted factors in the literature are the motivation and engagement of learners and cultural responsiveness. This was an extensive theme with many connections to other factors that significantly stood out in the literature reviewed and form the main argument in this review. As expressed by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013): “In order to ensure that all students feel safe, welcomed and accepted and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning, schools and classrooms must be responsive to culture” (p. 1). Fletcher et al. (2009) and Macfarlane (2004) claim that culturally responsive pedagogy could be a highly influential factor in remedying the educational disparity that exists for our Māori and Pasifika learners. Gay (2002) similarly states that “because culture strongly influences the attitudes, values and behaviours that students and teachers bring to the instructional process, it has to likewise be a major determinant of how the problems of underachievement are solved” (p. 114).

As the literature shows, relationships, collaboration, robust and meaningful professional development and reflective practice, educational leadership, and strategic resourcing and assessment for learning are all crucial elements for raising student achievement for priority learners. It seems that without motivating and engaging students with culturally responsive pedagogy, this disparity may continue to remain as it has done for many decades. As Macfarlane (1998) indicates, “the continuation of a dominant and mono-cultural classroom delivery will essentially serve to perpetuate the underachievement of Māori students within mainstream education” (as cited in Macfarlane et al., 2007, p. 73). Schools are complex yet dynamic places, where many unique and diverse cultures and ethnicities come together. Nowhere else in society does this happen in such a small place and this is why it is so important that cultural capital – and the languages, cultures and identities that come with it – is acknowledged, celebrated and embraced (Macfarlane et al., 2007). Educators need to use this to their advantage and not allow one culture to dominate over another (Macfarlane et al., 2007). Teachers who are continuing to ignore their learners’ ‘cultural competence’ will be detrimental to the achievement of Māori and Pasifika priority learners (Fletcher et al., 2005).

Averill et al. (2014) assert that teachers that include Māori tikanga and knowledge in their programmes on a superficial level need to be wary that they are not conveying a negative message about the place

of indigenous culture and knowledge within the curriculum. Siteine (2010) explains that “affirming identity is an ongoing, dynamic process. The sensitivity and understanding that teachers need to show to their students are more critical in the affirmation of identity than the factual information or celebratory experiences they may engage in within their classroom programmes” (p. 9). Webber (2013) also expresses that to be culturally responsive, teachers must get to know their students at a deeper level and be prepared to question how their students relate to their own ethnicities and create learning opportunities that suit these needs. A personal commitment by teachers to be culturally responsive in their teaching practice is vital in raising student achievement (Te Maro, Higgins & Averill, 2008).

Teaching and learning practices within New Zealand schools should be responsive to the learning and cultural needs and values of the students present (Macfarlane, 2007). As our schools are becoming more and more diverse regarding cultures and ethnicities (Ministry Of Education, 2008), it is essential for teachers to become more knowledgeable about the backgrounds of their students, their cultural capital and the experiences that they bring to the classroom (Ministry of Education, 2008; OECD, 2017). This will allow leaders and teachers to be more successful in the implementation of effective practices to accommodate differing learning styles to meaningfully engage and motivate students and to meet their educational needs (Allison & Rhem, 2007; Macfarlane; 2004), therefore building their culturally responsive pedagogy. Gay (2002) believes that culturally responsive teaching is as much about using culturally responsive teaching strategies and styles as adding culturally responsive content to the curriculum, and that as “culture is deeply imbedded in any teaching, therefore, teaching ethnically diverse students has to be multiculturalised” (p. 112).

Ladson-Billings (1995) uses the term ‘culturally *relevant* pedagogy’ which she defines as a theoretical model that assists students to affirm their cultural identity, develop critical perspectives to challenge inequalities as well as address student achievement. Theorist Paris (2012) has taken Ladson-Billings idea of ‘culturally *relevant* pedagogy’ even further in terms of finding out what it means to “make teaching and learning relevant and responsive to the languages, literacies and cultural practices for students across categories of difference and (in)equality” (Paris, 2012, p.93). The outcome of this is the alternative idea of ‘culturally *sustaining* pedagogy’. Paris (2012) defines culturally sustaining pedagogy

as one that “seeks to perpetuate and foster – to sustain – linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 93).

However, whilst Lourie and Rata (2014) acknowledge that there “is no doubt that Māori are under-achieving in comparison with other groups in the New Zealand population” (p. 26) they believe that the answers may, in fact, be due to the “complex mix of demographic, ethnic identification and socio-economic class location” (p. 26). They argue that “despite the claim made that a cultural approach to Māori and Pacific education will lead to educational success, it is likely that a culturalist education contributes to under-achievement” (p. 33). Tomlins-Jahnke (2008) assert that it is key to remember that what counts as knowledge in schools, the way that it is organised, structured and taught, is determined by the dominant culture. Additionally, Milne (2009) illustrates that:

The reality is that as teachers, as school leaders, or as education policymakers and officials, we are all part of each child’s learning journey. If some children are failed by our education system, we are all complicit in that systematic failure, and we all need to take responsibility for changing it. (p. 3)

Educational leaders have an ethical responsibility to ensure that school environments are conducive to learning by being inclusive, authentic and people-centred, and to ensure there is not an imbalance of power (Duignan, 2006; Fitzgerald, 2003). Educators have the choice to either have ‘power over’ their students or give ‘power to’ their students (Sullivan, 2001). It maybe that leaders revert back to their readily understood views, due to not fully understanding the complexity of educational organisations, and that this often leads to them adopting views that are “based on hierarchical structures and power over people approaches to relationships” (Duignan, 2006, p.7). Therefore, it is an educational leader’s obligation to assume an approach to change that pays particular attention to the unique cultural context of the organisation and the specific challenges it faces and customise improvements accordingly (Harris & Lambert, 2003).

## **Summary**

Cultural responsiveness and student engagement, as indicated through literature reviewed, could be the glue that joins the factors perceived as being the most effective in raising the achievement of priority learners. Building robust and trusting relationships, strong educational leadership practices and

strategic resourcing, providing ongoing and responsive professional development and reflective practice, the presence of assessment for learning principles and collaborative learning, are all factors found in primary schools to varying degrees. However, there is still a disparity in achievement. The lack of motivation and engagement of learners through authentic culturally responsive pedagogy in primary schools could, in fact, be the missing link to raising the achievement of priority learners in New Zealand. This is what the research conducted in this thesis looks into by examining the factors that teachers perceive to enhance the achievement of priority learners in primary schools.

As discussed and highlighted in this review, a combination of processes is needed to build capacity to motivate and engage learners and teachers around culturally responsive, relevant or sustaining pedagogy. There is a need to put an end to the superficial nature of acknowledging culture, and power imbalance created through a teacher or school-centric view. The language, culture and identity of all of the students within our schools needs to be meaningfully and authentically embraced, through professional development and reflective practice, assessment for learning and collaboration. Along with sound educational leadership and resourcing, increased involvement of whānau and the community through enhanced and productive relationships, educators will create a culturally safe, effective practice base that will put an end to deficit theorising and build cultural capital within the schools and the systems and structures surrounding them. This will provide an ultimate and definitive aim of removing the longstanding educational disparity through raising the achievement of Māori and Pasifika priority learners.



## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology and the research methods selected and applied to this research. It begins by giving the rationale behind the research and identifying the aims and guiding questions. It then explains the relativist ontology of the research and the epistemological positioning of constructionism. Next, there is an explanation of the reasoning behind the selection of the qualitative approach used and a description of the methodology. An explanation around how data was gathered and how the analysis and synthesis of the data took place follows and finally, I explain the ethical considerations and limitations of the research.

### Rationale, research aims and research questions

Raising student achievement and reducing the educational disparity that exists in New Zealand is an ongoing issue frequently faced by educational leaders (Ministry of Education, 2008). This disparity is of major concern, particularly as it continues even though the education fraternity is aware of it and encouraged to address it (Education Review Office, 2013a). The Ministry of Education (2014) has made raising the achievement of priority learners a *Statement of Intent for 2014-2018* to address the issue and explain that:

There is compelling international evidence that the way the education system is performing for particular groups of children and students needs to improve. Not achieving to their potential has a social and economic cost for children and students and for the country as a whole. (p. 20)

The purpose of this research was to critically examine factors perceived by primary teachers to raise the achievement of 'priority learners', and to gain insight into practice that can support raising achievement to address this disparity. The term 'priority learners' refers to Māori and Pasifika students who are not meeting the relevant National Standards, special needs students and those from low-income families (Education Review Office, 2013a).

The study's aims were:

1. To engage in discussion with primary school teachers to find out the factors perceived to raise the achievement of priority learners;
2. To ascertain how these teachers monitor the progress of their priority learners; and
3. To establish how this influenced their teaching practice.

The research questions leading this study were:

1. What factors are perceived by teachers to be effective in raising the achievement of priority learners in primary schools?
2. How do teachers monitor the progress of their priority learners and how does this influence their teaching practice?
3. What specific leadership practices do teachers perceive as influencing achievement for priority learners?

The purpose of this thesis was to conduct a small-scale qualitative study that would provide answers to the research questions and fulfil the aims of the research by conducting a critical examination of the leadership and teaching practices that are perceived by teachers to raise the achievement of priority learners.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Positioning**

Conducting educational research is a complex and challenging task as it is underpinned by theories, paradigms, approaches and positions. As described by Briggs, Coleman, and Morrison (2012), "Educational researchers bring a broad range of theoretical perspectives to their work" (p. 15) as they strive to fulfil the aims of their study. It is important for the researcher to understand positions and theories about the nature of reality, as this affects what can be 'known' (Briggs et al., 2012), as well as the relationship between these positions in relation to the proposed research. Therefore, an important element in research design is identifying ontological and epistemological positioning.

Braun and Clarke (2013) explain that "Ontology determines whether or not we think reality exists entirely separate from human practices and understandings – including the research we conduct to find such things out - or whether we think it cannot be separated from human practices" (p. 27). The

ontological position underpinning this research on raising achievement assumes a relativist lens. Relativism, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2013), is the belief that “reality is dependent on the ways we come to know it” (p. 26) and “differs across time and context” (p. 27). This positioning is relevant to this research project as its aim was to identify the teaching and leadership practices that teachers believe raise the achievement of priority learners. The data gathered came directly from the teachers’ experiences, beliefs, values and contexts – their way of knowing is dependent on their unique backgrounds and experience in teaching priority learners.

Epistemology is defined by Wellington (2015) as “the study of the nature and validity of human knowledge (p. 341) and therefore determines what counts as ‘true’, trustworthy and valid and what is possible to know (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The epistemological position underpinning this research was that of constructionism. Constructionism questions the idea of knowledge being objective, with the belief there is “no singular underlying reality” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.30). It takes on a social approach with the belief that what we know is tied to our social and cultural contexts and the world in which we live. Therefore, as our understandings change, so do the ‘truth’ and understandings we hold (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This supports this research as it involved the construction of shared meaning and interpretation of perceptions that the teacher participants held. The research sits within social and cultural contexts based on the teachers’ experiences and beliefs and underpinned by the acceptance that there are multiple realities and that knowledge is constructed through human interpretation and understanding, in this case through the semi-structured interviews.

In alignment with the ontological and epistemological positioning, this study was shaped by the interpretive paradigm. As an interpretative researcher, I worked with individuals to explore perceptions and perspectives and, through this, constructed shared meaning to form conclusions and insights into issues or problems that the research aimed to examine (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Wellington, 2015). Briggs et al. (2012) argue that “researchers whose purpose involves understanding more about how individuals think and perceive are taking an interpretive approach” (p. 251). An interpretive researcher, as stated by Wellington (2015), “accepts that the observer makes a difference to the observed and that reality is a human construct” (p. 26).

## **Methodology and sampling**

### **Qualitative methodology**

When researchers decide on their methodology, they go through a process that requires them to think critically about their understanding of the nature of reality and how they come to know and understand (Briggs et al., 2012). They reflect on their research questions and decide on the best approach to adopt that will best fulfil the research aims. Russell, Gregory, Ploeg, DiCenso, and Guyatt (2005) indicate that qualitative and quantitative methods have very different frameworks and theories behind them in regards to the nature of reality and what there is to 'know'. Therefore, the decision made by the researcher about whether their research and positioning best fit with a qualitative or quantitative methodology, will underpin, influence and form the elements within their research design.

This research was a small-scale qualitative study that analysed and synthesised data using an interpretive paradigm. This qualitative methodology and theory were the best approach for this research as this allowed exploration and examination of the factors perceived by teachers to raise the achievement of priority learners. It is an approach that is used to collect data from a "real life, natural setting and are therefore often rich, descriptive and extensive" (Wellington, 2015, p. 259). Qualitative research design begins with research questions and an outline of the design but, as the study progresses, the design also evolves and becomes further refined (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

As this research has an ontological and epistemological positioning that recognises multiple realities and that knowledge is constructed socially and contextually, there is direct alignment with a qualitative framework. As Braun and Clarke (2013) describe:

It [qualitative research] tends not to assume there is only one correct version of reality or knowledge. Instead, it comes from a perspective that argues that there are multiple versions of reality – even for the same person - and that these are very closely linked to the context they occur in. (p. 6)

Briggs et al. (2012) also define the qualitative researcher as one who looks for understanding by gathering data through the sharing of values and experiences, and who relies on interpretation and mutual meaning rather than facts and a fixed answer. The qualitative research methodology recognises that bias does exist. It allows it to be acknowledged in the analysis of the study - what we see and

understand reflects individuals through their identity and experiences within a given context (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This methodology has allowed the study to produce transferable findings that other educators may take and apply within their contexts.

## **Sampling**

Potential participants for this research were identified through non-probability, purposive sampling. As stated by Russell et al. (2005), “most qualitative studies use purposeful sampling, a conscious selection of a small number of data sources meeting particular criteria” (p. 125). The use of purposive sampling increased the likelihood that the data gathered were valid and the findings would fulfil the aims of the research. With the study being small scale, the ability to be able to explore and examine the perceptions of a particular range of participants more deeply, rather than being concerned about breadth (Russell et al., 2005), was paramount. The type of purposive sampling used is described by Wellington (2015) as ‘critical case’ or ‘special case’ sampling. This involved “selecting carefully chosen cases (e.g., pupils, students, organisations) with certain special characteristics” (Wellington, 2015, p.119). This approach was used to ensure that the data gained were valid and credible. As this study focused on raising the achievement of priority learners, the research participants were selected from primary schools, similar to my own, within the Auckland region that had a combined school population of more than 35% Māori and Pasifika students. This was important as a high number of students affected by educational disparity are Māori and Pasifika (Education Review Office, 2013a; Ministry of Education, 2014; Parr & Timperley, 2005). Furthermore, it was necessary to collect data from teachers who teach Māori and Pasifika students to ensure that the data were meaningful, valid and aligned with the research being undertaken. The six participants were selected from two primary schools with similar demographics to my own organisation and who had a particular focus on raising the achievement of priority learners.

## **Recruitment of participants**

To recruit participants, I initially contacted the school principals via email, having accessed their emails from their school’s websites. A time was set for me to meet with them to discuss my research and gain permission to talk to their staff. A time was made at this meeting to meet with all teaching staff at the beginning of their staff meeting or at a morning tea time to talk about the intended research. Potential participants were given the Participant Information sheet (Appendix B) at this recruiting

stage, and this had my contact details on it so that they could contact me if they were interested in taking part. This is how I gained their contact details. This Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B) explained the aims and purpose of the research, stated that the data was to be obtained through interviews and that the specifics of this would be arranged privately with each participant. Once the interested participants made initial contact with me to state their interest, they were contacted individually and a date, venue (selected by the interviewee) and time were set for the interview to take place, and informed consent (see Appendix C) gained. As both Wellington (2015) and Briggs et al. (2012) acknowledge, gaining informed consent is an essential step in research involving human participants and is an ethical requirement.

## **Data collection and analysis**

An important feature of qualitative research is that the “human being or beings involved are the main research instrument” (Wellington, 2015, p.259). The data in this research came from six teachers through the use of in-depth, individual semi-structured interviews. Fontana and Frey (2000) describe interviews as one of the most powerful data collection tools for gathering an understanding of perceptions, experiences and thoughts. Through the use of interviews, and in alignment with this small-scale qualitative study, information was gained through eliciting participants’ thoughts, perceptions and perspectives, which is not possible through observation (Wellington, 2015). By using semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions, there was flexibility in the ability to prompt, clarify and probe as necessary to ensure the data gained was rich, meaningful and fulfilled the aims of the research. It also ensured that the information shared was understood and interpreted accurately, keeping in mind the ontological and epistemological positioning of relativism and constructionism. As Wellington (2015) asserts “the possibility of removing ambiguity and lack of clarity is also the main advantage of a personal interview” (p. 148). The use of open-ended questions also offers an advantage in qualitative research as “it allows you as a researcher to discover opinions or answers that you have not thought about before” (Briggs et al., 2012, p. 149). This allowed flexibility to delve into the perceptions held by the teachers in regards to factors that raise the achievement of priority learners, how teachers monitor their progress and the impact that this has on their teaching practice.

When conducting an interview, it is important that the interviewee is clear on the purpose of the interview. This was done at through the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B) and at the time of gaining informed consent at the beginning of the interview. It was also important that the participant felt safe, comfortable and valued before the interview commenced and throughout the interview so that the data gained were credible and valid. The participant was given the opportunity to decide on where they would like the interview to take place. I also worked hard to develop a genuine rapport with participants and created an environment whereby they felt comfortable in sharing their thoughts, perceptions and experiences. As Briggs et al. (2012) concur, “the content of the interview will very much depend on the individual being interviewed, the empathy of the interviewer and the rapport that grows between them” (p. 253). The relationship formed between the researcher and participants is something that I saw as essential in ensuring trust and integrity. Selecting research participants from schools within the area in which I teach helped relationships form and develop quickly, as I had a number of things in common with each participant. It is vital that the researcher does not know the participant well personally, as it can result in bias (Wellington, 2015). However, it is equally important that “sufficient rapport should be established between the parties, enhanced by some degree of social interaction, in order to allow any ambiguity or lack of clarity to be sorted” (Wellington, 2015, p.150). The creation of the interview guide was an important part of the process of ensuring the quality of the data gained was high and fulfilled the aims of the research, as was acknowledging that errors in the collation of data can sometimes occur (Wellington, 2015). This also reiterates the importance of establishing a strong rapport with each interviewee to allow clarification of uncertainties and triangulation through ‘member-checking’ of the transcription of the interview (Briggs et al., 2012).

Once the interviews had taken place, data began to be interpreted immediately. This allowed the opportunity to reflect on the data gathered and the formulation of common themes and ideas that begin to emerge as well as key phrases or ‘buzzwords’. Data analysis took place throughout the entire research process and design – from analysing literature, conducting interviews, recording and handling data, through to forming conclusions and writing up findings (Briggs et al., 2012). Once the interview recordings were transcribed by a transcriber and checked for accuracy by interviewees, the deeper analysis of the data occurred.

Wellington (2015) offers six steps in the data analysis phase. These are immersion, reflection, taking apart and analysing, recombining and synthesising, relating and locating and presenting. These are the steps that were followed, although not in linear fashion, in the analysis of the data gathered in this research study. It is important to acknowledge that qualitative data analysis is not necessarily a linear process whereby you complete one step and move to the next. Wellington (2015) explains that “analysing qualitative data is often more messy and complicated” (p. 261).

As Wellington (2015) explains, there is “no substitute for initially ‘immersing’ oneself in data” (p. 269) and Briggs et al. (2012) indicate that “the structuring and coding of data underpin the key research outcomes and can be used to shape the data to test, refine or confirm established theory, apply theory to new circumstances or use it to generate a new theory or model” (p. 391). The use of coding was of vital importance, and this was done manually by collecting common ideas and factors identified through keywords, colours and numbers which were then reduced and condensed into categories. These categories were then reduced further to six themes which produced the findings. Briggs et al. (2012) describe the process of coding as one that “involves putting tags or labels against large or small pieces of data, in order to attach meaning to them and to then index them for further use” (p. 391). Data were split into four sections using alphabetical coding and five sections using numerical coding. These codes aligned the data to the aims of the research and the research questions. An explanation of these codes is shown in Figure 3.1 overleaf. The colour coding represented the different participants - a different colour was used for each research participant so the individual data could be tracked to each participant (as shown in Figure 3.1).

The type of research methodology used and methods employed to gather data determines whether the themes or categories are pre-determined, known as ‘priori’, or emerge from the data, known as ‘posteriori’ (Wellington, 2015). As this was an interpretative, qualitative study, underpinned by constructionist and relativist positioning, the categories emerged from the data itself and were not pre-determined. This is otherwise known as ‘posteriori’ and is developed through the “process of induction” (Wellington, 2015, p. 268). The literature previously reviewed on raising the achievement of priority learners helped in the process of analysing, recombining and synthesising the data. As acknowledged by Wellington (2015) “existing categories, derived from past research and previous



literature, can be brought to the data and used to make sense of it” (p. 268). Once the data was coded directly onto the Microsoft Word transcript (Appendix F), each set was then transferred electronically to a new Microsoft Word document, the numerical and colour coding remained, and then the data was cut up and manually sorted into recurring themes (Appendix G).

A sample of these codes is shown below in Figures 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 overleaf.

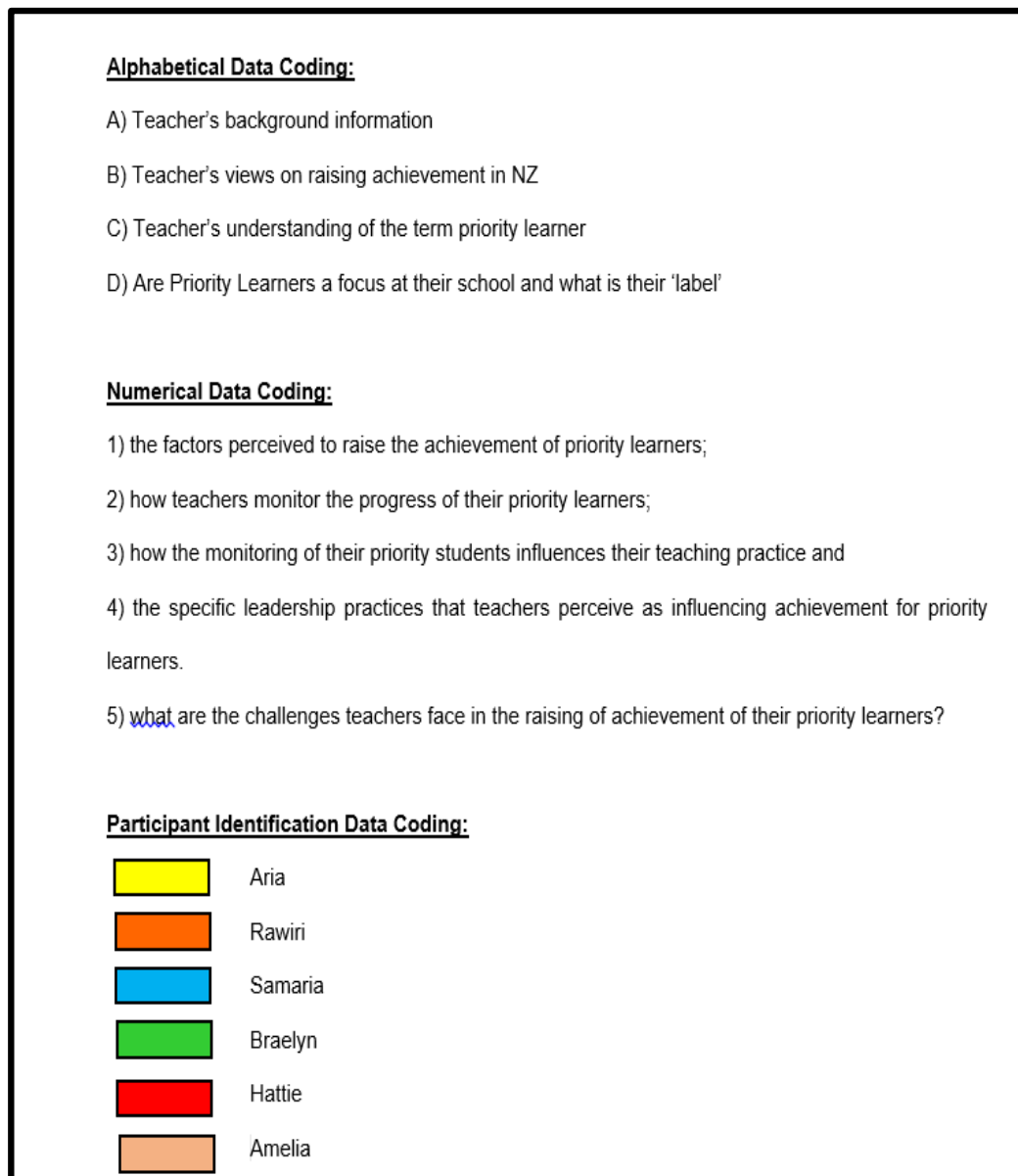


Figure 3.1 Explanation of coding used

<sup>2</sup> Increased teacher teaching time for these students	<sup>2</sup> Specific programmes being implemented to support and accelerate achievement for PL	<sup>2</sup> By knowing the learner	<sup>3</sup> By giving them ownership of their learning	<sup>3</sup> Use of learning logs to show goals and progress	<sup>3</sup> Using exemplars for writing
<sup>3</sup> Use of technology to support students who need instructions repeated for chunked into step by step	<sup>3</sup> Empowering students to take risks	<sup>3</sup> Making learning fun	<sup>1</sup> Relationships - a close relationship that knows where they are as learners and what they are doing and what will light their fire for learning	<sup>1</sup> Motivation and Engagement by building curiosity	<sup>1</sup> Providing achievable challenges
<sup>1</sup> By making learning fun	<sup>1</sup> Assessment for Learning – students constructing their own learning and next steps, teacher the guide on the side	<sup>1</sup> Teacher a reflective practitioner	<sup>1</sup> Ako – reciprocal teaching and learning relationship	<sup>1</sup> Learning about students' cultures, celebrating them and utilising cultural capital	<sup>1</sup> Believes in biculturalism and Maori has an important part in education
<sup>5</sup> Teachers aren't listened to about what their pedagogical beliefs are (in general) like we listen to students	<sup>5</sup> We are told what to do – little room for creativity, not treated like critically reflective educators	<sup>5</sup> The reciprocal relationships are not there between educators (in general)	<sup>5</sup> Teachers are constricted	<sup>4</sup> By making teachers accountable	<sup>4</sup> Through assessment – A for L
<sup>4</sup> Professional development	<sup>4</sup> Don't believe planning helps raise achievement	<sup>4</sup> Time for teachers who are extending their own learning e.g post grad			

Figure 3.2 a sample of numerical coding

<sup>A</sup> Decided to get teaching degree later – mature trainee	<sup>A</sup> Experienced – junior school	<sup>A</sup> Passionate and enjoys teaching	<sup>A</sup> Prefers teaching in lower <u>decile</u>	<sup>B</sup> Believes there is a lot out there about raising achievement	<sup>B</sup> Lots of PD around raising achievement
<sup>B</sup> Believes that there is lack of transition and pedagogy or consistency in practice between sectors	<sup>B</sup> There is conflicting information coming out from research – confusing for schools and leaders to choose which to follow	<sup>B</sup> Teachers are told what best practise is and what to do rather than let them put their philosophy to the test – technicians rather than teachers	<sup>B</sup> Lack of trust in teachers	<sup>B</sup> There are equity issues around funding for things like IT devices and environments	<sup>B</sup> Fast changing system
<sup>B</sup> Conflicting pedagogy in interventions	<sup>B</sup> Teachers should be allowed to teach to students interests as well as needs to create rich experiences. Shouldn't be dictated to by overviews	<sup>B</sup> Teachers should have sound curriculum content knowledge and trusted to implement it	<sup>B</sup> Feels teachers are being made to fit it into the same shaped box and it doesn't fit and it's constrictive	<sup>B</sup> Early developmental play very important	<sup>B</sup> Believes that children learn through playing and doing
<sup>B</sup> Knowing your curriculum	<sup>B</sup> Teachers should be given freedom to implement curriculum as they see fit, not restricted to long term plans and overviews	<sup>C</sup> Students who have low achievement but won't get supporting interventions	<sup>C</sup> Anybody who is faltering on that line of not understanding what they should be understanding at their age and stage	<sup>D</sup> Yes, priority learners are a focus in my school	<sup>2</sup> Through assessments such as running records and tracking progress over time

Figure 3.3 a sample of colour coding used to identify each participant's data

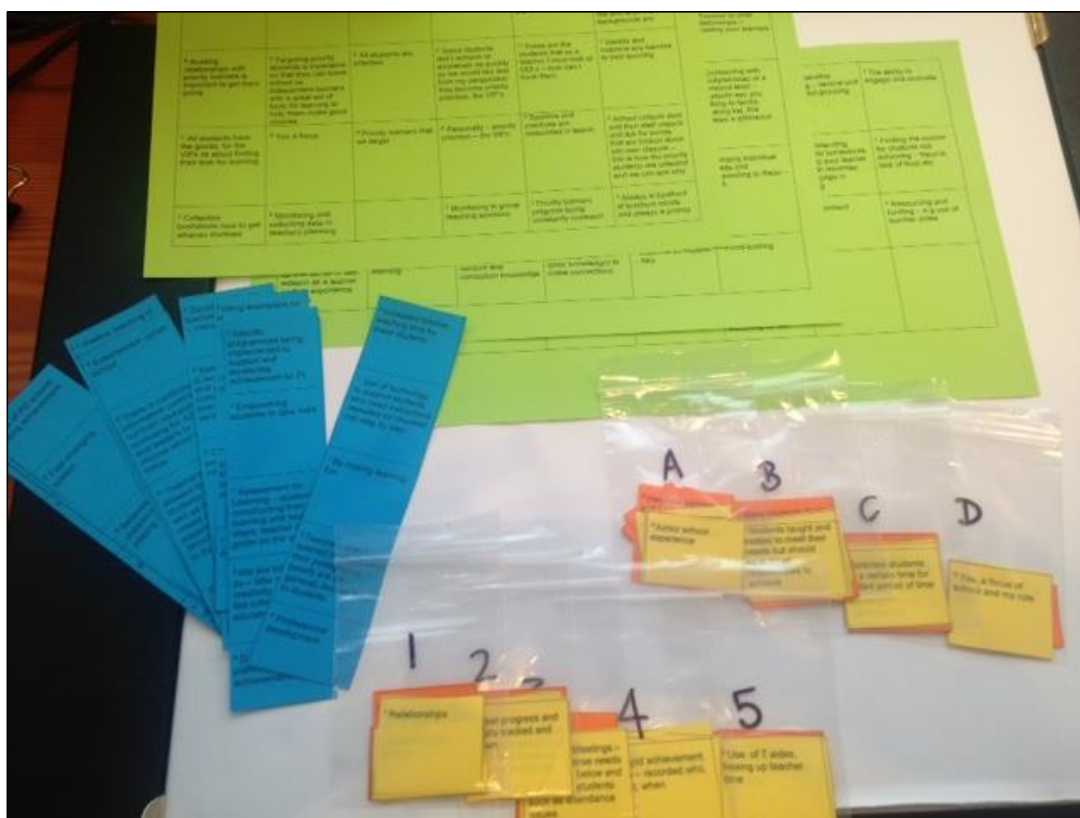


Figure 3. 4 colour codes representing participants and their data

The data were grouped initially into between 8-15 categories for each research question. This was done by putting like ideas together from each participant's data. These categories were then synthesised across the research questions by looking for similarities in the data. This process was done several times to produce six key themes. These themes were used to frame the findings. Sample of these codes are shown overleaf in Figures 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7.

### Validity and credibility

To ensure academic rigour of this research, it was vital to ensure validity through transferability, trustworthiness and credibility. As defined by Wellington (2015) "validity refers to the degree to which a method, a test or a research tool measures what it's supposed to measure" (p. 41). There are two types of validity, internal and external. Internal validity relates to how well the research findings represent the issue being studied (Briggs et al., 2012) and external validity relates to how well the findings relate to the wider population in which the data sample represents (Briggs et al., 2012). Validity can be ensured through the use of triangulation. Triangulation is "viewed as a qualitative research strategy through the

convergence of information from different sources” (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014, p. 545). In this research, the triangulation took place in the form of ‘member checking’ whereby the transcripts of the interviews were checked by the interviewee for clarification that the interpretation of the content of the interview was accurate and credible (Briggs et al., 2012) and therefore increased validity.

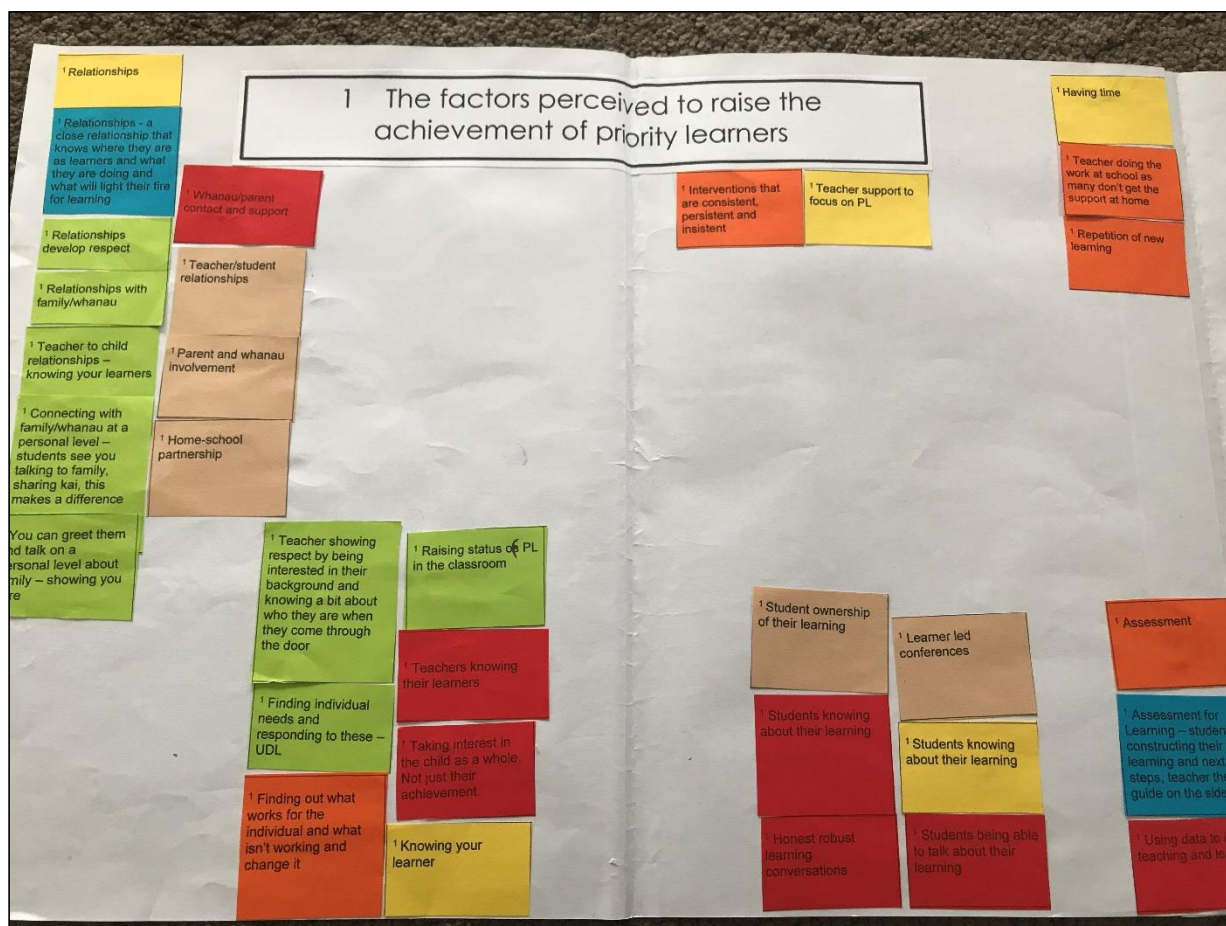


Figure 3.5 a sample of colour codes representing participants in numerical categories

Russell et al. (2005) assert that to judge whether data are analysed adequately and can be considered comprehensive, the researcher should reach analytic saturation through alternate data collection and analysis. For this reason, data in this study began to be analysed during the additional note taking of key ideas at the time of the interviews. More formal and detailed analysis occurred once transcriptions had been reviewed by the participants. This was when the data was coded, reduced and condensed. Key language and concepts were identified and noted throughout the data collection process.



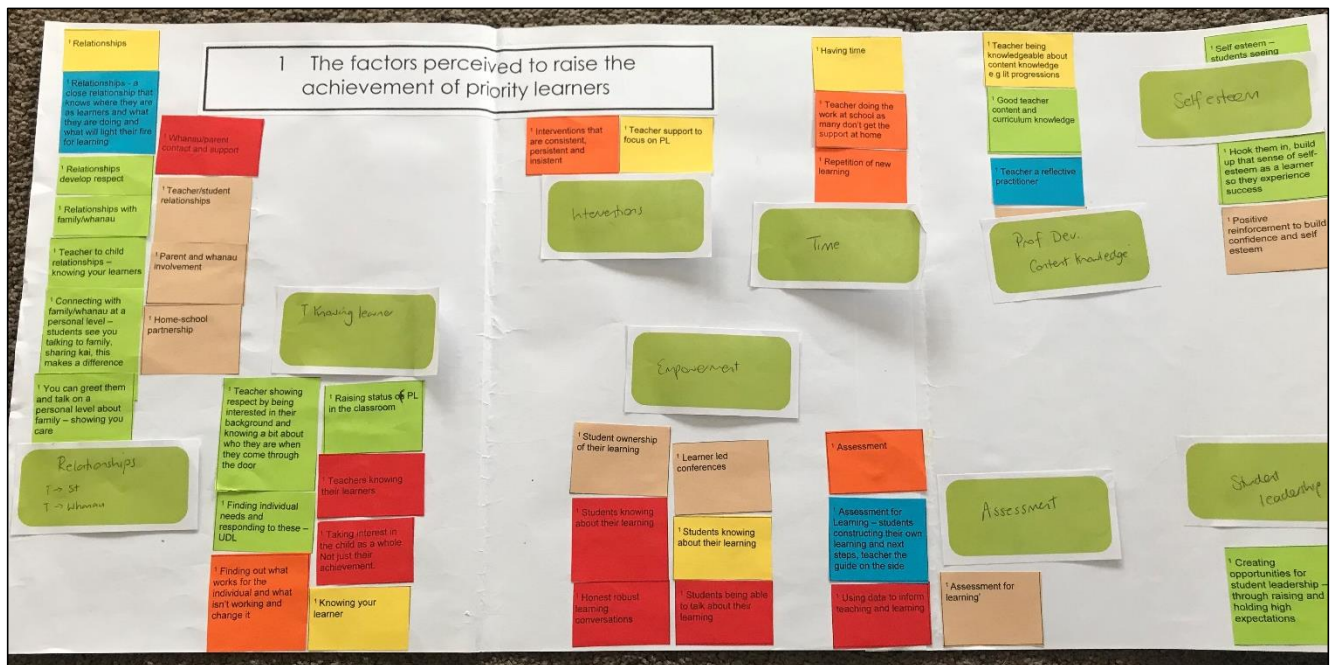


Figure 3. 6 a sample of data being grouped into categories within the numerical coding

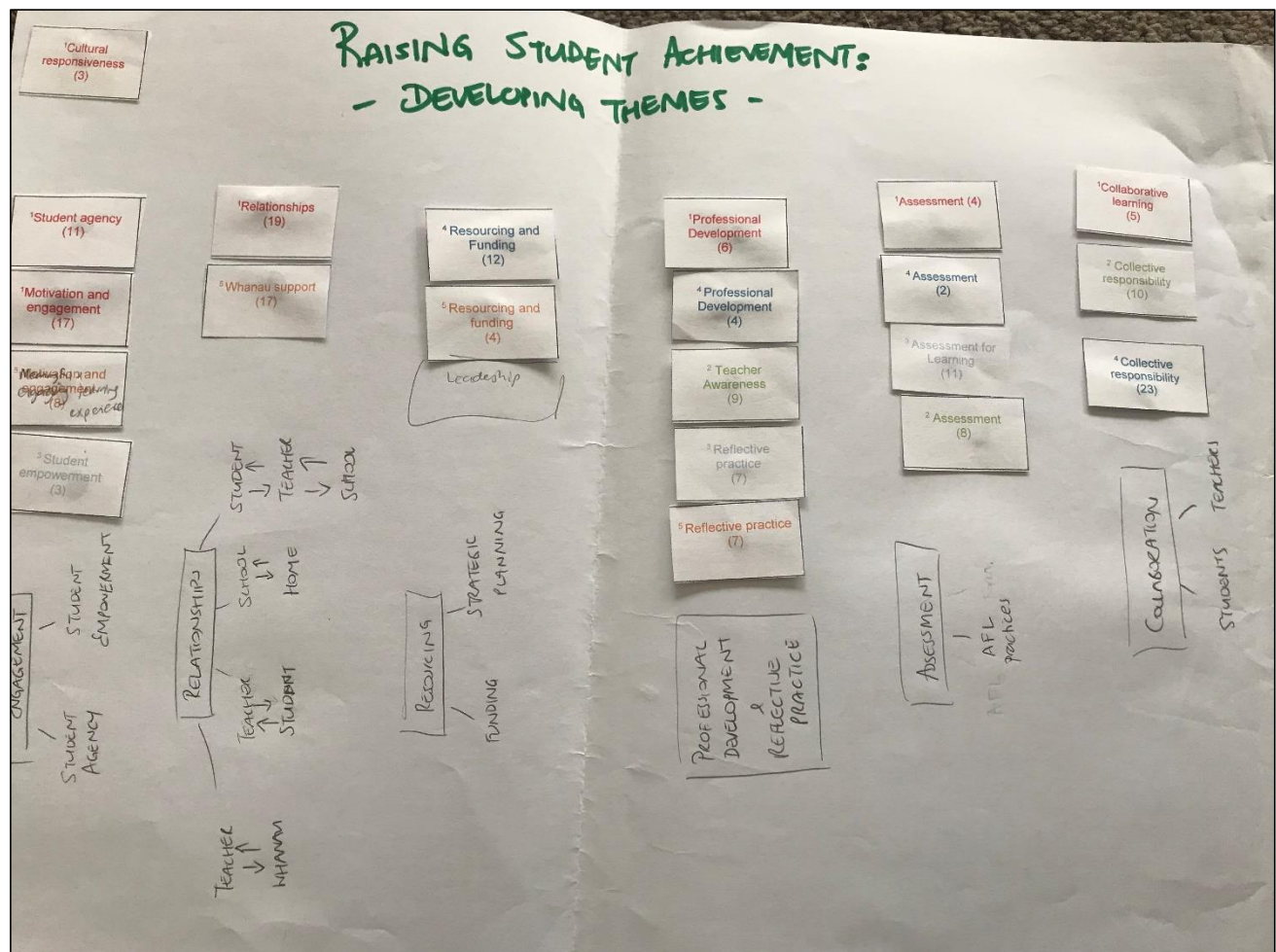


Figure 3.7 a sample of categories being synthesised into the key themes

Reliability and replicability are virtually impossible in qualitative research as researchers are not looking for the one “truth”. Instead, they are concerned with accessing information from participants that rely on the sharing of experiences and perceptions. Briggs et al. (2012) reiterate this when they state that “it is more difficult to ensure reliability using unstructured or semi-structured interviews because of the deliberate strategy of treating each participant as a potentially unique respondent” (p. 79). The value of this study is that it has produced transferable findings that may be applied contextually by other educators in their settings. The intention was never to find the one ‘truth’ or answer as a quantitative researcher might.

### **Ethical considerations and possible limitations**

Ethics play a significant role in educational research, particularly when it involves human participants (Wellington, 2015). Fontana and Frey (2000) assert, that when interviewing, researchers must take great care to avoid harm of their participants. Since this qualitative study was dependent on gaining data from teachers through the method of interviews, I was required to gain ethics approval from Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) to ensure that all ethical considerations were met and adhered to before any part of the research commenced. AUTEC has seven main principles when it comes to ethics. These are: informed and voluntary consent; respect for the rights of privacy and confidentiality; minimisation of risk; truthfulness, including limitation of deception; social and cultural sensitivity – including commitment to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi; research adequacy; and avoidance of conflict of interest (Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC), 2017).

#### **Informed and voluntary consent**

As researchers have a “duty of care” (Glenn, 2000, as cited in Briggs et al., 2012, p.92) it is important that potential participants were briefed from the very beginning to ensure they were clear on the purpose of the research, what the data would be used for and the benefits of the study. As Briggs et al. (2012) state, “research is intended to be of reciprocal or mutual benefit to researcher, participants and society” (p. 91). Potential participants were given a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B) at an informational briefing at the beginning of their staff meetings where I briefly explained the purpose and

the process of the research. This information ensured that potential participants were clear on their involvement so that they could then make an informed decision whether to participate in the study or not. Those who indicated they would like to participate were then encouraged to contact me through the details found on the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B). Contact was then made directly by the participant, and I was able to organise a time and place to meet them for the interview. At the time of the interview, but before the actual interview commenced, the participants were asked to read through the Consent Form (Appendix C) and asked if they still wished to proceed as a participant, which they all did, and they then signed the Consent Form. By doing so, they acknowledged that they were aware of the purpose of the study, the intentions of the data gained from their interview and that they had a right to withdraw themselves and their data from the study any time up until the findings were produced.

### **Respect for rights of privacy and confidentiality**

Sapsford and Abbott (1996) refer to confidentiality to being “a promise that you will not be identified or presented in identifiable form” (p. 7). Research participants in this study were guaranteed confidentiality, as pseudonyms have been used to ensure neither names of interviewees nor their schools were identifiable. Data, when being analysed, were sorted using pseudonyms and codes. Participants were given the opportunity to nominate where they would like their interview to be conducted to protect their privacy. All correspondence and communication were done directly via email.

### **Minimisation of risk**

To minimise the risk of harm to participants, I endeavoured to build a strong rapport with them to ensure that they felt safe and secure throughout the process, particularly in the interview. The interview guide was written carefully, the interview questions piloted with a critical friend, and changes made as necessary to minimise any potential harm and ensure clarity of what was being asked. All data and information from this research were treated with honesty and respect and kept in a secure place. Interviews were held in an environment chosen by the participant where they felt comfortable and secure. As Briggs et al. (2012) advise, “secure environments ensure that the risk to participants is minimised” (p. 101).

### **Truthfulness, including limitation of deception**

When conducting research, it is important to be honest, transparent and 'upfront'. Deception is avoided when the aims of the research and the benefits of the research are shared with potential participants from the very beginning through informed consent (Briggs et al. (2012). The teachers being interviewed were given the opportunity to opt into the research being conducted, and through a robust informed consent process, participants were very clear on the nature of their involvement. As Wellington (2015) states, data analysis "requires a researcher to be 'true to the data' and to make a faithful representation of the data collected, especially with presenting it and publishing it" (p. 274). Participants were given the opportunity to view the transcription of their interview to check for accuracy and eliminate ambiguity, and were also given the opportunity to withdraw themselves and their data from the study up until the findings were generated.

### **Social and cultural sensitivity, including a commitment to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi**

As this research examined factors perceived to raise the achievement of priority learners and as I was relying on teachers to share their perceptions and experiences it was crucial that I was socially and culturally sensitive throughout the research process. To ensure that I honoured the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi of protection, participation and partnership, respected Māori protocol and was culturally sensitive to all of my research participants, I sought the expertise of two critical friends. Briggs et al. (2012) assert that "researchers can respect participants' cultural plurality by structuring research projects to take account of participants' cultural preferences" (p. 95). These critical friends were a Māori educator who is actively involved in upholding Māori tikanga and reo and a well-respected Pasifika educator. With these critical friends having experience in education and strong cultural capital, they were able to give me the confidence that my proposed research process was culturally appropriate.

### **Research adequacy**

Reaching research adequacy refers to the necessity for the proposed study and design to meet the research goals and for the findings to contribute positively to the wider educational community (AUTEC, 2017). The research proposal and ethics application were approved by AUT and by AUTEC to ensure that these met AUT's requirements for study. By adhering to the proposed study outlined in the PGR1 and the ethics approval, I was able to ensure that the research undertaken was adequate and met the



intended aims. An interview guide was used, and this outlined key questions to ensure that the data gained met the aims of the research. Throughout the process, I sought advice and critique from my AUT thesis supervisor to ensure my research was on track and met research adequacy.

### **Avoidance of conflict of interest**

To avoid any potential conflict of interest, I did not use any participants in this research study that were from my workplace, former colleagues or anyone that I interact with socially. I only engaged with family or close friends when piloting my interview guide and seeking cultural sensitivity advice from my critical friends.

### **Possible limitations**

The primary limitation of this research study was that it is on a small scale, involving a small sample of research participants. These participants were from a small number of schools within one area of Auckland. Therefore the findings will not necessarily represent the perceptions, perspectives and experiences of all primary school teachers in New Zealand. However, two key features of qualitative research are that the main research tools are human participants and the data is collected in real-life settings through sharing perceptions, perspectives and experiences (Wellington, 2015). This means that the findings are contextual and subjective. The purpose of this study is to accord mutual benefit to the research participants and the researcher. As the research findings are transferable, trustworthy and credible, this may allow other interested educators from the wider education fraternity to take them and apply them to their contexts if they wish. Braun and Clarke (2013) explain:

Qualitative researchers recognise that the data analyses we produce are like stories – they are partial, and they are subjective. But any good analysis needs to be plausible, coherent and grounded in the data. You don't need to be claiming to tell the only or absolute truth to be telling a compelling 'truth' about your data. (pp. 20-21)

With our country having a concerning educational disparity, with a disproportionate number of Māori and Pasifika students not achieving where they should be (Education Review Office, 2013a, Parr & Timperley, 2015) and with the Ministry identifying this and making it a *Statement of Intent for 2014-2018* (Ministry of Education, 2014), the analysis and findings that show the factors perceived by teachers to raise achievement of priority learners, will potentially be of interest to many.

## **Summary**

This chapter has provided a discussion and explanation of the design process of this research into the factors perceived by teachers to raise the achievement of priority learners, how they monitor their progress and the influence this has on teaching practice. It has described the ontological and epistemological positioning of relativism and constructionism and explained the methodology of a small-scale qualitative study, using an interpretive approach through the use of in-depth individual semi-structured interviews. The analysis process has been described, and the validity of the study justified, with moral and ethical considerations explored and ways in which the study will adhere to these explained. Lastly, possible limitations of the study have been discussed and justification of the research's credence through transferability and validity exposed to explain the value of the findings to the primary education sector.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Introduction

In this chapter, data collected from the six teacher participants are presented. In the first instance, background data on the participants is presented. This is followed by an explanation on how the data are presented, which is followed by an analysis of the findings. The chapter ends with a summary of the findings. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to critically examine teaching and leadership practices perceived by primary teachers to raise the achievement of 'priority learners', and to gain insight into practice that can support raising achievement to address the educational achievement disparity that is currently present within the New Zealand education system.

### Research participants

Purposive sampling was used in the study as the participants needed to meet eligibility criteria. The criteria were that the participants needed to: be a fully registered teacher in New Zealand; have taught at least two years in a primary school; be currently teaching in a primary school with a combined school population of more than 35% Māori and Pasifika students, and be a classroom teacher. Participation was voluntary, and potential participants were given Participant Information Sheets (see Appendix B) which outlined the purpose and process of the study. Six participants volunteered and signed Consent Forms (see Appendix C) before the interviews took place.

Table 4. 1 Participant information

Participant	Teaching Experience: (Years)	Places Taught:	Teaching Experience: (Age groups)	Experience in other roles:
Aria	20+	Auckland	Years 1-4	Special needs Senior leadership
Amelia	8	Auckland	Years 4-8	Gifted and talented
Rawiri	30+	Auckland	Years 1-8	Middle and senior leadership
Braelyn	30	Auckland and a range of provinces throughout the North Island	Years 1-6	Middle and senior leadership
Harrie	20+	Auckland Other areas within New Zealand Overseas	Years 1-4	Middle leadership Special needs
Samaria	14	Auckland	Years 1-4	Middle leadership

The participants currently work in three highly multi-cultural and multi-ethnic primary schools across the Auckland area, with the schools' decile ratings ranging from 1 to 5. This indicates that 5 out of the 6 participants teach in areas where the school population draws from low socio-economic communities. Teaching roles varied amongst the participants, with many having some form of leadership experience or experience in working with special needs students or remedial interventions such as reading recovery. To acknowledge and protect the confidentiality of all of the participants, their specific leadership roles or teaching positions have not been specifically identified.

## **Structure of data presentation**

Each set of data for each research question are initially presented in a table, followed by brief narrative comments. Some of the questions have been combined and shortened to avoid repetition. The questions do not necessarily occur in the order that they were asked in the interviews, as this order varied from interview to interview. The raw data were coded into a maximum of nine categories, then further coded into five themes that are discussed in the next chapter. Some questions have multiple responses from a single participant. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of the participants and their schools. Where acronyms specific to the education sector have been used, the full term will be stated the first time it is used, with the acronym in brackets. Thereafter, only the acronym will be used.

## **Findings**

The first question in the interview was asking participants to give some information about their background in education. These data are shown in Table 4.1.

### **Question Two: What are your views on raising achievement in New Zealand?**

When asked their views on raising achievement in New Zealand primary schools, participants indicated that the raising of achievement is very important, and acknowledged that it is a focus in their schools, particularly for their priority learners (see Table 4.2 overleaf).

The majority stated that their belief is that all students should have equal opportunities to become literate and numerate as this will allow them to gain a good education and give them better employment opportunities later in life.

Table 4. 2 Views on raising achievement in primary schools in New Zealand

Categories	Number of responses from participants
Greater pre-school education uptake is needed for students to come 'ready' for school	11
Equal opportunities need to be given for all to become literate/numerate	10
Greater teacher flexibility and autonomy is needed to raise achievement	7
Teachers need to have clear understandings of effective pedagogy	4
Teacher/student professional relationships are vital in raising achievement	4
Professional development is necessary in raising achievement	3
Acknowledgement that New Zealand as a bicultural nation	2
Poverty has an impact on student achievement	2
There are equity issues around school infrastructure and funding	1
<b>Total number of responses</b>	<b>44</b>

The following quotes illustrate these beliefs:

*Becoming literate and numerate is important for all kids, even though we might treat and teach the children differently and the context may be different [Aria]*

*I think it is hugely important. I am quite worried at the gaps when I see them. I have been a senior teacher, and so I have dealt with a lot of data and seeing those gaps is quite scary. Looking at how we put things in place to support children's learning is really important [Harrie]*

*It is really important because literacy and numeracy is the basis of all learning and it is crucial for children to be able to achieve to the highest potential that they are able [Amelia]*

The need for greater uptake of pre-school education was also mentioned. The participants who teach in the junior school (5-7 years of age) believed that their students often have low oral language skills and have a lot to learn quite quickly. Therefore, it takes them a few years to really 'flourish' and get to where they need to be. By this stage, they have often already been identified as priority learners as they are not where they should be in relation to their age, stage or expected levels and benchmarks. It was also acknowledged that poverty and transience are some of the reasons behind this and experimental play and oral language are very important in the early years. The following quote illustrates these beliefs:

*Our children don't all come prepared in the same way in many ways academically, behaviourally and experience wise. They are lacking in many of those pre-school experiences. So in a way, I don't think sometimes we see our children flourish ahead until being at school for a couple of years. They bring all sorts of knowledge, but academic*

*knowledge is often really lacking. For a number of reasons, poverty is probably the biggest reason of all [Rawiri]*

Other participants felt that there are many conflicting ideas and theories in regard to teaching and learning and that this may be having an adverse effect on students' learning and also be contributing to underachievement for some students. One participant believed that professional development around raising achievement is often done ineffectively as it is done in a way whereby teachers feel like they are being dictated to and told what to do, rather than it being a collaborative process of learning and development. Two participants believed that all teachers should be given more freedom in designing learning programmes that 'ignite the fire' for students and to find their 'passion' for learning. To do this, they believe that teachers should be trusted as professionals to implement the curriculum in ways that they believe support their learners and meet their needs. The following quotes illustrate these beliefs:

*There are conflicting things and conflicting research that comes out all the time. It is like we are technicians rather than educators who can try out our own philosophy. If I could teach to the kids' passions and bring in my curriculum knowledge so that it was full of rich experiences, I would get through more of the curriculum in a year. I always feel like we are trying to do something new and fit it into the same shaped box and it doesn't fit, and it is constrictive [Samaria]*

*There has been a lot of professional development, and in a lot of places it has been done poorly to teachers, rather than with teachers [Samaria]*

Two participants expressed their view that building relationships is key to raising achievement, that students should feel respected and valued by their teachers, and that this contributes to raising student achievement. The following quote illustrates these views:

*After all, what is teaching? It is being a salesperson. You have a product, and that is learning. You want them to be able to be independent learners, love learning and building up their knowledge and their sense of who they are. How do we do that? Well, it is our job to sell it to them. So I guess we do that by finding out who they are, what they like, [and] what their backgrounds are...building that relationship and getting them going [Braelyn]*

Overall, the participants' comments reflected a genuine concern about the effects of children not having attended early childhood education, along with frustration at the learning issues that children are already

experiencing when they start school at age five. The participants also expressed the desire for more autonomy in their teaching practice in order to meet the diverse needs of these children.

### Question Three: What is your understanding of the term ‘priority learner’?

Table 4. 3 Participants’ understanding of the term ‘priority learner’:

Categories	Number of responses from participants
Students who are not achieving where they should be or at risk of not meeting the National Standards/curriculum expectations	8
Students are selected to be a focus for a nominated period of time to try and raise their achievement	2
Students who take priority	2
All students should be priorities	1
<b>Total number of responses</b>	<b>13</b>

The Education Review Office (2012) define priority learners as “groups of students who have been identified as historically not experiencing success in the New Zealand schooling system. These include many Māori and Pacific learners, those from low socio-economic backgrounds, and students with special education needs” (p. 4). All participants understood priority learners to be students that are not reaching the expected level or benchmark that they should be, or who are at risk of not doing so. Two spoke of priority learners being students that are often not eligible for remedial interventions within the school, but with an intense focus on an area and extra support within the classroom, they are able to meet the expected benchmark or another target set. One participant described priority learners as the students who take priority in their thinking, assessment and planning to accelerate and raise their achievement in a particular area:

*At this time and for a limited period of time those children will take priority in your thinking, assessment schedule and teaching schedule, to raise a certain piece of what you have decided they most need [Aria]*

Another participant expressed the idea that all students should be a teacher’s or a school’s priority but that there are some students that need extra support to raise their achievement and described these students are the ‘priority priorities’ or ‘VIPs’:

*When you think about a classroom, they are all priorities because at the end of the day we want them all to accelerate and achieve. However, some don’t achieve or accelerate as quickly as we would like and from my perspective, they become priority priorities, the VIPs [Braelyn]*

Overall, participants showed they believe that priority learners are the students they identify as at risk of not achieving at a particular benchmark but are likely to meet the set target with extra support. All participants were clear as to the reason behind the selection of their students identified as priority learners, which was always supported by assessment data.

**Question Four: Is raising the achievement of priority learners a focus at your school? If so, what term do you use to identify them?**

Table 4. 4 Participants' responses to what priority learners are known as in their school

Categories	Number of responses from participants
Priority learners or priority students	6
Personally, calls them priority priorities – the VIPS	1
Target students	1
Focus groups	1
<b>Total number of responses</b>	<b>9</b>

All participants identified that raising achievement for their priority learners was definitely a focus in their schools. Some participants identified that their schools referred to the students whom they were focussing on raising achievement for as 'priority learners'. One participant said their team referred to them as their 'focus groups' and another participant reported that the term 'target students' was used in their school. One participant said that although the term 'priority learners' was used in their school, she preferred to refer to these students as 'priority priorities'.

**Question Five: What do you believe are the factors that help support the raising of achievement for priority learners?**

All six participants gave a range of factors that they perceived to raise the achievement of their priority learners (see Table 4. 5 overleaf). However, even though these participants teach a variety of different levels and were from different schools, there were many similarities in their perceptions. The participants believed that building positive relationships with their learners and getting to know them in a genuine and meaningful way is a compelling way to raise achievement for all learners, particularly for priority learners.



Table 4. 5 Participants' perceptions of factors that raise achievement for priority learners

Categories	Number of responses from participants
Professional relationships between teachers, students and their whānau	19
Motivating and engaging learners e.g. hooking them into learning, lighting their fire and using the UDL framework	17
Promoting student agency and giving students opportunities to control their learning	11
Ongoing and relevant professional development for teachers	6
Opportunities for collaborative learning	5
Assessment for learning	4
Cultural responsiveness and inclusive environments	3
<b>Total number of responses</b>	<b>65</b>

They also believed that forming relationships is a vital way to develop respect between the teacher and the learner and that it forms the basis for getting to know the learner in ways that will help teachers to understand them. One participant indicated that building relationships allows the teacher to find out what 'works' for individuals, and when something doesn't work, they can look for ways to change the programme so that it does. The following quotes illustrate these views:

*Relationships are key; I think that goes hand in hand with knowing your learner [Aria]*

*A close relationship that knows where they are as learners and what they are doing and what will light their fire for learning [Samaria]*

*As a teacher I need to look at the Universal Design for Learning (UDL), looking at what their thing is that is going to hook them into learning. Maybe examine any barriers that might be there and identify what they are. Looking at the strengths that they have got and just hooking them in and clearly, that is my job to do [Braelyn]*

Relationships with family and whānau and creating a home-school partnership was also expressed as being an essential factor in the raising of achievement for priority learners. All participants acknowledged that this is not always easy to accomplish and, even though it is also identified as a challenge (see Table 4.6), it is a vital factor. Another participant expressed a belief that for all students, and particularly for priority learners, seeing their teacher greeting and talking to their parents on a personal level showed that their teacher cares about them as a person and as a learner. The majority of participants also believed that if a home-school partnership is formed and maintained, then the

learning that happens at school can be reinforced and practised at home, which participants believed to help accelerate learning and raise achievement. The following quotes illustrate these beliefs:

*You need to bring the parents on board. If you don't have that partnership, it is very difficult to raise the achievement* [Harrie]

*Definitely parent and whānau involvement and encouraging the students to talk about their learning and their schoolwork at home. Taking it home and kind of filling in those gaps, sharing it with their parents* [Amelia]

Motivation and engagement along with student agency and empowerment were two other influential factors perceived by the participants to raise achievement for priority learners in primary schools. Responses for this category included elements such as creating a positive atmosphere for teaching and learning and motivating and engaging learners by building curiosity. One participant explained the importance of students being empowered through student leadership, student-centred learning and increasing student confidence through building self-esteem and self-worth. The following quotes illustrate these beliefs:

*What helps them to learn is self-esteem... if they see themselves as a learner and experience success in class, there is evidence for them that they can do stuff ... it is building up that sense of self-esteem as a learner, and they experience success, they are following [an] inquiry that interests them. So it is child-directed, not teacher* [Braelyn]

*The key is that the kids have fun during learning. Otherwise, they are not going to learn. Motivation to learn and building curiosity and having exciting lessons* [Samaria]

Professional development and assessment for learning were also identified as factors perceived by participants as contributing to raising achievement. They expressed the importance of teachers being up-to-date with the latest pedagogy and effective practice research. The participants believed it is crucial for teachers to know and understand the curriculum and learning progressions for acceleration to occur, and therefore, improvement in the progress and achievement of their priority learners. The following quotes illustrate these beliefs:

*Knowing exactly what it is we are trying to change and being knowledgeable about the progressions for getting there* [Aria]

*Targeting the priority ones [students] first, assessing what they need and putting some intervention that is insistent, persistent and consistent* [Rawiri]

Participants believed that by using formative assessment to inform future planning and by sharing this data with students so they know what their learning goals and next steps are, students can take ownership of their learning. This also connects with student agency mentioned earlier, as an ‘assessment for learning’ approach involves students and their teachers working together collaboratively to identify next steps and set learning goals to drive new learning and raise achievement. In addition, when students are incrementally scaffolded by the teacher towards these next steps, and ‘frontloaded’ with information when necessary, students are more likely to progress and achieve. The following quotes illustrate these perceptions:

*If you set tasks that are achievable, that are meaningful, so they can have some success as learners, then you can incrementally scaffold them to harder stuff...setting your programme at the right pace and finding out what they want to learn [Braelyn]*

*Knowing the bigger picture – where they need to go, to be able to talk about their learning and to strive for that acceleration...it all comes down to data and knowing the students and exactly where they are at [Harrie]*

Collaboration, both within the classroom between students and their teachers as well as collaboration amongst teachers, was one of the final two categories identified. One participant maintained that collaboration through ‘Ako’ is essential. Ako is a Māori term defined by Bishop (2010) as teachers and their students learn from each other or where there is a co-construction of knowledge. This participant believed that it was important to bring about not only collaboration but also empowerment and student agency. Additionally, another participant spoke about how they allow students to work together in a variety of different groupings, where there is a co-construction of knowledge in a tuakana-teina context or collaborative learning amongst peers. All participants spoke about the notion of collective responsibility in some way and the sharing of data and priority students’ progress, utilising others’ expertise to help identify next steps and problem-solving when progress was not being made. One participant explained that they believed a vital part of raising achievement in their school was collegiality. The following quotes illustrate these views:

*It is important to be data driven and have honest, robust conversations with our colleagues...the collective responsibility...it comes down to creating that atmosphere [Harrie]*

*There are no barriers in our school to talking to each other. There is an openness if we are having difficulties or concerns. Being able to feel free to talk and brainstorm, that support is there [Braelyn]*

Cultural responsiveness was the final category identified by two participants as a factor that supports the raising of achievement of priority learners. These participants believed that learning about and celebrating their students' cultures, and utilising their cultural capital was very important. Other participants touched a little on this, but more in regard to forming relationships through getting to know their learners in a cultural sense. Two participants also talked about the importance of acknowledging New Zealand as a bicultural nation and emphasised that tangata whenua are an important group within schools and in supporting Māori learners. The following quotes illustrate these beliefs:

*I am learning from them and am including their culture in my classroom so that part of their home feels like home in their classroom....Māori are here, and this is their place as tangata whenua, and it can't be found anywhere else in the world, so we really need to be protective of that and nurturing of that [Samaria]*

*I see New Zealand as being bicultural and so tangata whenua have a particularly important place in that belief [Aria]*

Overall, the participants' comments reflected a genuine belief that knowing their learners through building strong, productive relationships with them and their whānau, along with motivating and engaging them in their learning is crucial in raising the achievement for priority learners. The participants also expressed the belief that empowering students by allowing them to take ownership of their learning, and building their self-esteem and self-worth, is vital.

**Question Six: What challenges do you face when trying to raise the achievement of your priority learners?**

Participants identified building and maintaining relationships with parents and whānau as a key factor in raising achievement for priority learners in primary schools (see Table 4.6 overleaf). This was also a key factor identified in the challenges faced by teachers when trying to raise the achievement of their priority learners. The participants identified that, at times, they are faced with challenges in trying to get parents involved in the process of establishing high expectations for learning.

Table 4. 6 Perceptions on challenges teachers face when trying to raise the achievement of priority learners

Categories	Number of responses from participants
Building relationships with whānau	6
Building and sustaining professional relationships within the staff	6
Motivation and engagement of students	5
Managing students' behaviour	5
Teacher time and energy to provide additional scaffolding and support for priority learners	4
The lack of funding to provide adequate resourcing	3
Transience and students' building and maintaining trust	2
<b>Total number of responses</b>	<b>31</b>

They found that some parents hold low expectations of their children, or have low self-esteem and expectations of their own learning which can impact on their view of their child's education and abilities. One participant explained that sometimes when talking to priority learners' family members about where their child is in relation to where they should be, it is not uncommon for the parents say "That is the case for myself and most of my family members", showing that they have low expectations of themselves and the achievement of their children because of their own negative experiences with learning at school in the past. The following quotes illustrate these views:

*Parents will often say, 'yes in my family that is the case', so that is the first challenge, to say that may not be the case for this child [Aria]*

*Definitely family involvement and having that link between home and school...what is difficult is parental contact....if you don't have that partnership, it is very difficult to raise the achievement [Harrie]*

It was also acknowledged that professional relationships with staff members, in a general sense, can be a challenge faced by some teachers. As collective responsibility and collegiality were recognised as factors perceived to raise achievement, it is notable that it is also seen as a challenge. This can be in reference to teachers not listening to each other or educational leaders not being collegial and taking a part in the notion of collective responsibility. The following quote illustrates these beliefs:

*I don't feel that we [teachers, in general, in New Zealand] are listened to about our deep beliefs the way we listen to our children. I don't believe those reciprocal relationships with teachers are there...I don't think we are treated like critically reflective educators. I believe we are treated more like technicians [Samaria]*

Motivation and engagement was another challenge identified by multiple participants, as was managing student behaviour. These challenges seemed to go hand-in-hand as several participants believed that behaviour can become a real issue when students are not motivated or engaged in their learning. It was mentioned that sometimes students' lack of motivation or behaviour is due to transience, resulting in children attending several schools. These students were seen as facing significant challenges in building trust and relationships with their teachers. The following quote illustrates these views:

*Some of the students are challenging to find out how to hook them in when they are really turned off and know that they are really behind academically. It is not that they are not smart, it is that they haven't had that consistent schooling...a lot have moved around so much, and when they come to the classroom it is actually trying to get them to engage and to trust and build a relationship [Braelyn]*

Funding and resourcing were also perceived as a challenge. Participants talked about schools not having enough funds to employ teacher aides for appropriate periods of time to support teachers and priority learners in the classroom. In addition, they expressed concern about the lack of funding to implement support programmes and interventions, and the resources needed to support the raising of achievement of all of their priority learners. The following quotes illustrate these beliefs:

*Often there is a huge need for support staff, and unfortunately, they are not always available because of schools' budgets [Amelia]*

*I strongly believe that extra hands in the classroom are key for freeing teachers' up to being available to students [priority learners] for their learning [Aria]*

Overall, the participants' comments reflected the main challenges faced when trying to raise the achievement of priority learners as being building productive relationships that can be maintained with whānau and developing professional relationships within the staff to build trust and collegiality. The participants also expressed that motivation and engagement is a challenge, particularly with students who have moved from school to school and may have behavioural needs and trust issues.

#### **Question Seven: Do you monitor your priority learner's achievement? If so, how?**

All six participants stated that priority learners' achievement was monitored within their schools (see Table 4.7 overleaf).

Table 4. 7 Participants' responses to how their priority learners' achievement is monitored

Categories	Number of responses from participants
Teacher monitoring and observing	9
Through formal and informal assessments	8
Meetings to discuss student progress and data	4
Collective responsibility within teams and the staff	4
Interventions and special programmes	2
<b>Total number of responses</b>	<b>27</b>

The most common way that teachers monitored their priority learners' progress and achievement was through teacher monitoring and observations, and the use of assessment through tracking data over time and using it formatively to inform future teaching. The following quotes illustrate these beliefs:

*In our weekly planning as teachers, we have our priorities in mind as we roam and teach and observe. We are collecting data on those kids all the time, indirectly as well as through teaching groups, so they are always a priority [Braelyn]*

*I collect baseline data at the start of each term. I look at what they can do and their next steps. I teach to the next steps and then assess that....if they are not understanding we revisit and I look at different ways... they [the children] need to know that they are doing that too [Harrie]*

Participants also identified that talking to other teachers about their priority learners in designated meetings also helped them to monitor and reflect on their students' progress. In these meetings, they share their students' progress, next learning steps and any frustrations that they may be experiencing. Two participants emphasised that this helps to build collegiality and forms a collective responsibility as teachers brainstorm ideas together to support the acceleration of achievement for these students. The following quote illustrates these views:

*In our teams we look at the global child and talk about our ideas, brainstorming what we can do as a team to get those children hooked into learning and accelerating their learning in those areas. Every syndicate meeting, every team meeting we have, we talk about our priority students [Braelyn]*

Overall, participants' comments expressed that teacher monitoring and assessment practices were the most common practices used in their schools to monitor the achievement of their priority learners. In

addition, regular meetings and discussions were held with colleagues in teams and as a staff to discuss and monitor their learners' progress and next steps.

**Question Eight: How does the monitoring of your priority learners influence your teaching practice?**

Table 4. 8 Participants' responses to how the monitoring of their priority learners influences their teaching practice

Categories	Number of responses from participants
Scaffolds new learning and next steps for learners experiencing difficulty	6
Informs future planning	5
Builds professional development to improve teaching practice	5
Allows students to be empowered and take ownership of their learning	3
Enriches teaching programmes	2

The majority of participants identified that scaffolding their learners incrementally through the use of exemplars, visual aids, teacher modelling and using the technique of 'frontloading' to make connections to prior knowledge, were significant ways that the monitoring of their priority learners influenced their teaching practice. Additionally, they recognised that the information gained through the monitoring of their priority learners was used to formatively inform their future teaching and learning programmes. Three participants acknowledged that they also sought expertise from other members of staff or through more formal professional development measures to help positively influence their teaching practice to raise achievement. Creating opportunities to empower students by encouraging them to take ownership and control of their learning and by enriching their teaching programmes to help engage their learners, were also identified as having influenced their teaching practice to raise achievement. The following quotes illustrate these views:

*We brainstorm about ways of getting the whānau in to support them, how we can wrap around that child and just utilise what we have got to be able to get them to be successful learners...if they are going well, everybody else benefits. So it is not like the others are getting any less, as the more you offer the others, it enriches the programme and opportunities for other people too [Braelyn]*

*Straight into future planning, straight into organising groups that can support. I have lots of visuals in the classroom...I think it would be very silly to collect data and not use it. It becomes formative assessment, the data collecting for teaching. That informs my daily teaching [Harrie]*



Overall, participants' comments show that the monitoring of their priority learners influenced their teaching practice through scaffolding students learning incrementally and by empowering learners to take ownership of their learning. In addition, teachers' used the information to inform their planning to develop the next steps for learning and to enrich their learning programmes to motivate and engage learners.

**Question Nine: How does your leadership team support raising the achievement of priority learners?**

Table 4.9 Participants' responses on leadership practices they believe support the raising of achievement for priority learners

Categories	Number of responses from participants
Collective responsibility of all staff for student achievement	23
Strategic planning through adequate resourcing and funding	12
Creating meaningful professional development opportunities	4
Provision of assessment for learning (AFoL) professional development?	2
<b>Total number of responses</b>	<b>41</b>

All participants acknowledged in their responses that senior leadership teams taking on a collective responsibility for students' learning alongside the teachers helps to ensure that achievement for priority learners is best supported. They believed that this was achieved by everyone taking responsibility for all priority learners and their progress, by supporting one another in problem-solving, and through offering advice and ideas. Two participants identified that this was also a way of contributing to their *Teaching as Inquiry* (Ministry of Education, 2007) work. Half of the participants also identified that creating a positive culture around sharing and transitioning students from year to year was a crucial practice in supporting priority learners and their achievement. The majority of participants also held the perception that strategic planning of inclusive resourcing and funding is challenging for educational leaders, but an important part of how senior leadership teams can support teachers in raising achievement. Responses were about making good budgeting and timetabling choices for optimising teacher aides' time to work alongside and support teachers in the classrooms, along with strategic budgeting to support programmes and interventions where possible. The implementation of meaningful professional development that was timely and consistent and that focused on raising achievement was also a leadership practice that was recognised as supporting the raising of achievement for priority learners by three participants. The following quotes illustrate these views:

*The way we talk about our priority students and we brainstorm, that collegiality. Deliberately placing teacher aides where there is a need, extra hands and thought around that...really it is that you are catering well for your priority students, there is richness throughout the school really and a focus on wellbeing. Wellbeing for them is well-being for all [Braelyn]*

*Sharing the responsibility alongside the teachers and they can offer different examples and experiences just so we are clear on how to best deal with the data and how to use it. Providing us with professional development when needed, specific to teacher needs [Amelia]*

Overall, the participants' comments reflected the perception that the two key leadership practices that help support and influence raising the achievement for priority learners are taking collective responsibility of students' progress and achievement and the importance of careful and strategic funding and resourcing.

## **Summary**

This chapter has presented all of the data given by the six teacher participants. This was collected during the semi-structured interviews about their experiences, beliefs and perceptions in regards to raising the achievement of priority learners in primary schools. Five key themes have emerged from this data. These themes were identified by grouping participants data into key categories that aligned with the literature reviewed. These were then synthesised into key themes as I have described in the methodology chapter, Chapter Three.

These themes are:

1. Establishing and maintaining productive relationships between teachers, students and whānau can be challenging but is essential in raising achievement.
2. Collaborative learning and student agency are essential factors in motivating and engaging learners.
3. Teachers need to be given opportunities to work collaboratively and be given regular and relevant professional development to reflect on their practice and increase their capability to make a difference in student achievement.
4. The monitoring of student progress and the use of assessment for learning principles are crucial factors in influencing teaching practice to raise achievement.

5. Effective educational leadership and strategic resourcing are influential leadership practices that support teachers in raising the achievement of their priority learners.

The next chapter will explore each of these themes in more detail and provide a discussion linking them to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter Four and provides links to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The key themes that emerged from these data are the factors perceived by the participants to be effective in raising the achievement of priority learners. This chapter will also discuss the leadership practices perceived to help support the raising of priority learners' achievement and address how the participating teachers monitor their priority learners' progress to best support raising their achievement.

The five main themes emerging from the findings are:

1. Establishing and maintaining productive relationships between teachers, students and whānau can be challenging but is essential in raising achievement;
2. Collaborative learning and student agency are essential factors in motivating and engaging learners;
3. Teachers need to be given opportunities to work collaboratively and be given regular and relevant professional development to reflect on their practice and increase their capability to make a difference in student achievement;
4. The monitoring of student progress and the use of assessment for learning principles are crucial factors in influencing teaching practice to raise achievement; and
5. Effective educational leadership and strategic resourcing are influential leadership practices that support teachers in raising the achievement of their priority learners.

There is one additional key idea that also emerged from the research data and the literature reviewed - that cultural responsiveness is essential in building productive relationships and motivating and engaging learners. I have not included this as a key theme, as such, as it is linked to building relationships to motivate and engage learners and is filtered throughout the five themes mentioned above, and as shown in the *Raising Achievement* model (Figure 5. 1) presented later in this chapter. In this discussion, the key idea of cultural responsiveness has been placed after the section that discusses establishing and maintaining productive relationships. The five themes form the structure of this chapter. Links between the research questions, themes, sub-themes and the literature reviewed are also

explored and discussed with links made to the *Raising Achievement* model (Figure 5. 1) that has been created specifically to illustrate the findings of this research.

**Establishing and maintaining productive relationships between teachers, students and whānau can be challenging but is essential in raising achievement.**

The first major theme that emerged from the data is the importance of productive relationships between teachers, their students, their students' whānau and the wider school community. These relationships are considered a network of two-way relationships where students are at the centre. The two specific sub-themes within this theme are (i) the importance of teachers getting to know their students, and (ii) encouraging whānau support and engagement. The importance of these relationships is represented by the placement of this factor in the *Raising Achievement* model (Figure 5. 1). It has been positioned as a central factor as building productive relationships to motivate and engage and is illustrated in the middle layer of the model, as establishing and maintaining relationships as both are perceived as essential in raising achievement for priority learners.

The findings of this study concur with the literature that notes the establishment of productive relationships between teachers and their students as crucial in motivating and engaging students in their learning (Ford, 2012; Turner, Rubie-Davies & Webber, 2015). These relationships need to be developed at the outset for learning to occur, and this was seen to outweigh the influence of assessment, curriculum and pedagogy in the participants' views. Participants expressed the importance of getting to know their students as learners, as well as gaining an understanding of their cultures, their families and their lives outside of school in a genuine way, as crucial elements in building relationships. This is also reflected in the positioning of cultural responsiveness in my *Raising Achievement* model (Figure 5. 1) as the second layer of influence in raising achievement. It was reinforced by the literature and participants that this was vital in building trust and respect between educators and their students and showed that they cared about them and what their interests and aspirations were. Through the process of interviewing all six participants, there was an overwhelming feeling of genuine care that these teachers felt for their students and their wellbeing. There was a great sense of concern in their voices when talking about their priority learners, and a sincere feeling that they were prepared to do everything that they could do as teachers to raise their achievement and ensure that their time at school was a positive and fun experience. This suggested that they had taken the time to get to know their

students well in an authentic, genuine and caring way. Genuine relationships are connections that teachers and students make that build trust and compassion with sincerity. These relationships differed from everyday teacher-student relationships as there was a deliberate intention and action taken by the teacher to gain an insight into each individual student's life as a person and as a learner in a deeper more meaningful way.

These findings are reflected in the work of Macfarlane (2004) and Macfarlane et al. (2007). These writers assert that productive relationships that are effectively developed, maintained and sustained allow an honest and robust connection to be built where a rapport is developed and where the student can feel successful, cared for and valued. Bishop and Berryman (2013) also express that relationships need to be built around an understanding and acknowledgement of students' cultural capital and their experiences with genuine care. The participants spoke with passion and enthusiasm when talking about building these relationships with their students and their whānau. They expressed that the students that needed a meaningful relationship developed with their teacher the most, were often students from transient homes – this meant that building that initial trust was often a challenge but crucial. This practice confirms Bishop and Berryman's (2013) findings in their research conducted for *Te Kotahitanga*, as the students emphasised the importance of teachers having high expectations of them, understanding what they needed to learn and how, and showing genuine care towards them as people as well as in ways that supported their learning. The literature from Macfarlane et al. (2007) and Bishop and Berryman (2013) support the findings of this research - to improve the performance of priority learners and raise their achievement, productive and robust relationships must be formed and nurtured between teachers and their students.

Getting whānau involved and engaged in their child's education is key in raising the achievement of their priority learners in the view of the research participants. This aligns with the work of Mapp (2011) who maintains that when meaningful and productive relationships are formed between home and school, student achievement greatly benefits. Macfarlane (2004) has a similar view, stating that "parental participation is an indispensable ingredient in academic excellence" (p. 69). This thesis research study supports the research of Macfarlane (2004) in that educators need to encourage whānau to support their child's learning by being actively involved in their education. It gives students a more

sincere belief that they are cared for, and it shows that their teacher is taking a genuine interest in them and their family. This finding aligns with the research of Alton-Lee (2003) who states that relationships and communication between home and school can create alignment for students, where parents or caregivers can support their students learning and can have some of the strongest influence on achievement.

Participants acknowledged that sometimes relationships between home and school and the ongoing communication networks with whānau and the wider community could be a challenge to establish and maintain. This challenge can be interpreted as deficit theorising. Therefore, what educational leaders need to address when these challenges are faced, is whether or not, they as a school are going about making these connections the right way for their community. Participants all acknowledged that these connections with whānau are worth pursuing as they can have such a positive influence on achievement. These relationships can take time to establish but the perseverance and work taken to seek these connections is outweighed by the benefits once the whānau are engaged and there is a strong connection between school and home. Bojuwoye (2009) explains that when a partnership is created between home and school, and the information is shared closely between the two, students' achievement and wellbeing both benefit.

My research study's findings are reflected in the work of Bryk and Schneider (2003) who suggest that educational leaders have a responsibility to positively engage with whānau by building learning-focused partnerships to help encourage whānau engagement and support raising the achievement of priority learners. Good pedagogy is not always enough to engage whānau authentically and meaningfully. This has clear implications for the ways in which educational leaders and schools review their use of the *National Standards* (Ministry of Education, 2009) in the wake of changes made by the new Labour Government elected at the end of 2017. Systematic changes are needed in the ways schools' systems interact with parents and the community to enhance and increase whānau engagement when there is minimal engagement (Goodall, 2017). A school-centred approach where schools facilitate learning and parents support the school, who in turn support the student, is no longer good enough. This approach places emphasis on the school telling parents how to support their child's learning; however, whānau engagement with learning rather than just the school is what raises student achievement (Goodall,

2017). School, family and community partnerships cannot simply raise achievement in isolation. These partnerships need to be carefully designed and fostered to engage and encourage students in their learning. By doing so, students feel that their teachers and parents care about them and are more likely to be motivated to work hard and therefore succeed educationally (Epstein, 2010; Campbell, 2011). For meaningful and productive learning-centred partnerships to be created, there needs to be an “equitable distribution of power” (Goodall, 2017, p. 90), in order to empower whānau. This promotes genuine, trusting relationships between home and school where parents can share their knowledge and aspirations of their child. Teachers can then engage in learning conversations with whānau and support and develop learning for that child with them (OECD, 2012).

Campbell (2011) and Olmstead (2013) describe two types of whānau interaction or engagement – reactive and proactive. They describe reactive interaction as whānau being involved in activities such as attending a ‘Meet the teacher’ evening or volunteering their time. Proactive involvement is described as whānau involvement with their child’s learning by helping or supporting them with their homework, listening to them read and following their achievement and progress regularly (Olmstead, 2013). The implication and challenge for schools is to gain a balance of the two and diversify the types of involvement and opportunities for proactive interactions available to whānau, catering for their needs and interests too.

### **Cultural responsiveness is essential in building productive relationships and motivating and engaging learners.**

This was a category that was unable to be placed within an existing theme as it is intertwined throughout them all. It has many connections to much of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and links with all of the themes that developed from the research findings. When interviewing the participants, it was a topic that came up in different questions and at different times for each person and within all of the overarching themes. It was primarily spoken about in relation to the topic of relationships and motivating and engaging learners through acknowledging and utilising their cultural capital. When spoken about in regards to relationships, teachers explained it was about really getting to know students meaningfully and genuinely by taking an interest in, and learning about, their culture, their cultural capital and what they can bring to the classroom. In terms of cultural responsiveness and motivating and engaging learners, participants explained about tapping into their students’ cultural worlds that exist, particularly



outside the four walls of the classroom. Many international studies (see, for example: Santoro, 2007; Thorp, Bell-Booth & Staton, 2013) assert that for indigenous students to be engaged in their schooling, it is critical that teachers build relationships with their students by acknowledging and respecting their cultural background and cultural capital. Therefore, cultural responsiveness has been placed as a central factor perceived to raise achievement as illustrated in my *Raising Achievement* model (Figure 5. 1) created to demonstrate the findings of this research. This factor has been deliberately placed between building productive relationship to motivate and engage learners and the other key themes developed from this research. The reason being that building productive relationships and cultural responsiveness are the two factors that are considered critical and must be in operation before any of the others, in order to raise achievement of priority learners.

Participants talked about being culturally responsive in regard to teachers being skilled in areas of culturally responsive or culturally sustaining pedagogy. As indicated by Fletcher et al. (2005), if teachers do not value and acknowledge the cultural capital and competence that students bring to the classroom, this can make schools 'risky' places for diverse learners and can have adverse effects on student achievement. The knowledge that teachers need to acquire to be considered culturally responsive goes beyond just an awareness of and respect for cultural and ethnic differences. They must acquire thorough information about cultural accuracies of relevant cultural and ethnic groups to make education more engaging, authentically meaningful and successful for culturally and ethnically diverse students (Gay, 2002). Cultural responsiveness was also referred to in this research in relation to assessment for learning. Teachers must be highly aware of ensuring that assessments and learning experiences are suitable for the students that they are teaching. They must create a mutual understanding of learning and tap into their students' experiences and their world to encourage them to share and show what they have learnt. It is important that teachers are aware of and challenge the power relations within their classrooms (Milne, 2009). This creates an opportunity to critically analyse their current practice and embrace power-sharing with their learners, especially when it comes to cultural capital and competency. As described by Redwing Saunders and Hill (2007) it is "authentic and restorative/equitous education [that] will improve the learning of all students" (p.1023) and that this must start in the classroom. Macfarlane (2004) describes culturally responsive pedagogy as a "style of teaching that takes into account students' cultural background with respect to how they learn" (p. 81). He continues by saying

that this includes “using the students’ cultural experiences as a foundation upon which to develop knowledge and skills” (p. 82).

Participants expressed their views about cultural responsiveness in reference to collaborative learning and the concept of ako. Their views support the work of Cummins (2000) which identifies that students who create opportunities to experience power-sharing relations with their teachers and their peers gain confidence and their sense of identity is affirmed through these collaborative interactions. Power sharing relations occur when students assume the teaching role and lead learning for a period of time. A challenge for schools is to ensure that teachers know how to use ‘cultural scaffolding’ in their teaching and learning programmes to encourage students to use their cultural capital and experiences outside of school and apply it to their learning to ensure academic success (Gay, 2002).

The points raised above assume that teachers are non-judgemental in terms of culture, religion, race and ethnicity. However, this may not be the case, as teachers are seldom challenged to honestly critique their own worldview and belief systems (Hyland, 2005; Milne, 2009; Redwing Saunders & Hill, 2007). Teachers cannot be expected to increase their cultural consciousness or become more culturally responsive in their practice if they are not aware of their own worldviews, biases and beliefs or have not been given the opportunity to critique and reflect on them. It is quite possible that cultural consciousness is lacking and therefore has resulted in educational policies that suppress some cultures and identities within our schools and wider school communities (Battiste, 2000). Educational leaders’ and teachers’ perspectives and beliefs have a great influence on the way they establish relationships with their students and their whānau. Relationships are built on and around the beliefs that educators hold. Their expectations, personal racism and beliefs about the educability of their students can all have huge implications on the interactions they have, and therefore the engagement and success their students experience at school (Ullucci, 2007). As Hyland (2005) indicates, teachers can “mitigate or exacerbate the racist effects of schooling for their students of colour, depending on their pedagogical orientation” (p. 429). Therefore, to address the achievement gap and raise achievement for priority learners, it is essential that current Euro-centric educational norms and policies and modern-day assumptions need to be unearthed, challenged and addressed to prevent the current climate continuing and these gaps from growing even more (Battiste, 2000; Ullucci, 2007).

However, before considering change in practice and curriculum, it is essential that educational leaders insist that educators within their institutions reflect on and critique their own beliefs about the students in which they teach to understand how these influence the “educational realities” of their students (Ullucci, 2007, p.1). If this doesn’t happen, then schools will continue to be “constrained by equality” (Ullucci, 2007, p.1). If educators harbour limiting or deficit beliefs, these will be influenced and reflected in the school's culture and in the policies and procedures created by them. It is essential that educational leaders challenge their teachers to honestly critique their worldviews and beliefs (Ullucci, 2007).

### **Collaborative learning and student agency are essential factors in motivating and engaging learners.**

The next major theme that emerged from the data was that collaborative learning and student agency are essential factors in motivating and engaging learners. The four specific sub-themes within this theme that developed are (i) providing opportunities for collaborative learning, (ii) motivating and engaging learners, (iii) providing meaningful and relevant learning experiences, and (iv) promoting student agency and student empowerment.

The key findings of this study concur with the literature in that motivating and engaging learners through collaborative learning and student agency is viewed as fundamental to aiming the achievement of priority learners, as illustrated in the middle layer of my *Raising Achievement* model (Figure 5. 1). Researchers such as Arthur Applebee and Jerome Bruner identified that “improving student engagement is a necessary condition for improving educational achievement” (Bishop et al., 2009, p. 736). Additionally, participants emphasised that teachers need to make teaching and learning experiences meaningful, relevant and fun to ensure engagement of students in their learning. This practice is supported by Bishop et al. (2009) who explain that student engagement is improved through positive interactions and inclusive relationships that are established between students and their teachers. Participants talked openly and passionately about feeling restricted at times by curriculum expectations in their ability to plan to meet the interests, needs and passions of their students. They demonstrated that the use of frameworks, such as the *Universal Design for Learning* known as *UDL* (Ministry of Education, 2018), help when planning to assist in meeting the diverse and individual needs

of their students, particularly students who are hard to 'hook in' to learning and have particular learning needs. This practice reinforces that students need to be learning about what they are interested in, as this brings about intrinsic motivation and empowerment over their learning. This is consistent with the work of Bishop and Berryman (2013) - in their research conducted for *Te Kotahitanga*, students revealed that it is how teachers interact with their students, the ways they teach, what they teach and the relevance of it that strongly influenced whether they would be engaged or motivated to learn or not.

Participant data confirmed the value of allowing students of all ages to work collaboratively in mixed ability vertical grouping and horizontal ability grouping. Therefore, by allowing different types of grouping, teachers can provide students with different roles for different tasks and provide opportunities for the concept of Ako to be implemented where reciprocal teaching happens between the teacher and students. Ako is described by Metge (1984) as "the unified co-operation of learner and teacher in a single enterprise" (p. 2). Additionally, it could be the concept of tuakana teina with older or more experienced students teaching the less experienced or younger students. This collaborative practice supports the work of Cummins (2000) as he emphasises that students that have been exposed to collaborative teaching and learning have greater self-esteem and confidence as it is reaffirmed through reciprocal collaborative interactions. This practice is also reflected in the work of Allison and Rehm (2007) as they determine that students, when peer tutoring, become teaching resources for each other, relating better to teach other than they would to a teacher. This in turn promotes communication, motivation and fosters friendships, while also attaining better achievement for the students involved. Wilkinson et al. (2000) also emphasise the benefits of higher-level thinking, greater motivation and engagement, and therefore improved student outcomes, when students work together in collaborative learning environments.

The findings of my research show that students need to be taught in ways that are unique to them and their culture and that tap into experiences they have had in the world outside of school. This can be somewhat of a challenge for teachers who do not have cultural competence and knowledge of their students and, to be honest, we can never fully know and understand the intricacies of another culture entirely. The concern here is that teachers allocate identities for their students based on their own beliefs, experiences and understandings or in their implied knowledge, in an attempt to be culturally

responsive (Siteine, 2010). This may or may not be accurate. Therefore, as described by Averill et al. (2015), initial teacher education around cultural responsiveness and sustainability is vital, as is ongoing teacher education for experienced teachers. This will enable teachers to tap into their students' backgrounds, experiences and cultural capital in a more authentic way. It will then allow their students to utilise their cultural competencies and take ownership of their learning and determine ways that they learn best. Cummins (2000) acknowledges that when students are given the opportunity to take control through the sharing of power and control in the classroom, their ability to become engaged and motivated to learn increases as does their confidence and drive to succeed. The implication here is that teachers and educational leaders need to provide opportunities to use cooperative learning techniques such as peer tutoring and tuakana teina as part of their teaching and learning programmes for students to embrace leadership roles in the learning of others. Additionally, this will benefit their learning and well-being by developing their confidence and self-worth. As Allison and Rehm (2007) state, "peer tutoring enhances the development of leadership and interpersonal skills, self-confidence, and self-esteem" (p. 15). Teachers that do not have enough knowledge of the family and community contexts of their students' lives outside of school are unable to create opportunities for adequate student agency when co-constructing routines and learning experiences within the classroom (Macfarlane et al., 2007). Glynn, Wearmouth and Berryman (2005) state that an important socio-cultural approach to learning is one where "children are seen as assuming autonomy over their own learning and seen as entering into learning interactions, activities and routines, and developing social relationships with more skilled members within their cultural communities" (p. 2).

In summary, the literature reviewed closely aligns with the data provided by the participants that the motivation and engagement of students are fundamental in raising the achievement of priority learners. Teachers must provide collaborative opportunities for students to take ownership of their learning and learning of others by providing opportunities in their teaching programmes for them to assume leadership roles. This will engage and motivate students and positively influence students' achievement.

**Teachers need to be given opportunities to work collaboratively, and be given regular professional development to reflect on their practice, in order to increase teacher capability to make a difference in raising student achievement.**

The next major theme that emerged from the data was teachers need to be given opportunities to work collaboratively and be given regular and relevant professional development to reflect on their practice and increase their capability to make a difference in student achievements, as illustrated in my *Raising Achievement* model (Figure 5. 1). The four specific sub-themes within this theme are: (i) the importance of meaningful and relevant professional development, (ii) teacher awareness and consistency, (iii) reflective teacher practice, and (iv) collective responsibility and collegiality.

The findings of my study concur with the literature that states that meaningful, timely and relevant professional development and reflective practice have a significant influence in raising student achievement. The participant data confirmed that not only is professional development and reflective practice seen as an essential practice for teachers in raising achievement, but an essential leadership practice to support raising the achievement of priority learners. Additionally, collegiality and collective responsibility for students' performance in supporting teachers to raise the achievement of their priority learners is also an essential leadership practice.

The participants' responses demonstrate their perceptions that educational leaders could greatly support their teachers in raising the achievement of their priority learners by creating professional development opportunities that were relevant to the teachers' and students' needs, and which brought about consistency and consolidation with effective teaching practice within the staff. It was also reinforced that professional development should be timely and differentiated for teachers in the same ways as learning is for students. At times, it is recognised that educational leaders could provide this development; at other times it would be necessary to seek the expertise of outside facilitators. Expertise within the staff was also expressed as a great way to share knowledge within the staff and raise teacher capability and effective practice. The Education Review Office (2013a) affirm that educational leaders with highly effective leadership ensure that they provide relevant and meaningful professional development for teachers to meet their professional learning needs, often drawing on expertise from the staff. For schools to be successful, their leadership teams need to plan their time and budgets strategically to ensure they build teacher capability meaningfully. This will improve learning opportunities for students, increase their engagement and raise achievement (Education Review Office, 2015; Rubie-Davies & Peterson, 2016; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2004).

The findings of my research also show that it is essential that educational leaders create a culture within their schools where teachers have an awareness around their practice, and understand the impact that their practice has on their teaching and consequently the achievement of their students. Teachers need to be encouraged and expected to reflect on their teaching practice regularly, and it should become a part of their everyday practice. If a culture is developed within the school where this becomes an everyday practice for everyone, then teacher consistency around effective practice for teaching and learning and teacher expectations improves. This practice is supported by the Ministry of Education (2008) as they suggest: "Building strong learning communities where there is shared commitment to investigating, exploring, and evaluating practice is a critical leadership responsibility" (p. 8). Additionally, these findings are reflected in the work of Waters et al. (2004), who emphasise the importance of developing a culture of learning and providing the necessary resources for teachers to successfully implement effective practice to raise achievement. It is crucial that teachers challenge their thinking about the students they teach and the world in which they live and how this impacts on the learning experiences of their students (Hale, Snow-Gerono & Morales, 2008).

The participant responses also support the work of Ford (2012) who identifies that taking responsibility for raising achievement should be done collectively. For this to be effective the discussions need to be about working together and holding each other accountable through reflective practice, using a growth mindset, rather than a deficit mindset (Ford, 2012). Participants identified that taking collective responsibility was a pivotal factor in both teaching and leadership practice when addressing educational disparities and focussing on raising achievement. Participants described their schools to be places where a culture has been created where teachers and leaders meet regularly to celebrate progress and success and discuss next steps and frustrations collectively. They determined this as being a vital factor in working together collectively and collegially to take ownership of the progress, or lack thereof, of the priority students within the school. Brainstorming together and sharing were seen as ways that everyone collectively took responsibility for the students who were not meeting their desired educational outcomes. This is consistent with recommendations from Macfarlane et al. (2007) who maintain that relationships between staff should involve appreciating, supporting, valuing and encouraging to share talents, expertise, trust and tolerance. Macfarlane et al., (2007) affirm:

The importance of sharing, consultation, collaboration and participation should not be underestimated. When such processes and concepts are embraced by teachers and schools, then strong cultural links are more meaningfully secured, leading to the likelihood of enhanced educational outcomes for Māori students. (p. 73)

In summary, the findings of this research align with the work of Ford (2012); Macfarlane et al., (2007) and Waters et al. (2004). To raise the achievement of priority learners, educational leaders need to ensure that teachers are given the opportunity to work collaboratively, provided regular and relevant professional development to allow them to reflect on their teaching practice to increase their capability around teaching and learning.

**Monitoring student progress and ‘assessment for learning’ principles are crucial factors in influencing teaching practice to raise achievement.**

The next major theme that emerged from the data was that monitoring of student progress and the use of ‘assessment for learning’ principles are crucial in influencing teaching practice, as illustrated in the outer layer of my *Raising Achievement* model (Figure 5. 1). The two specific sub-themes here are (i) the significance of forming ‘next steps’ and learning goals, and (ii) scaffolding students to support new learning. The findings of the study concur with the literature that assessment for learning has a vital place in schools to ensure learning outcomes are met for all learners, particularly in raising achievement for priority learners. The participant data confirmed that the use of assessment for learning principles are an essential factor perceived by teachers to raise achievement for priority learners. Additionally, assessment for learning practices and monitoring student data was also seen to be a vital element in how educational leaders can influence and support the raising of achievement within their schools.

Assessment for learning principles allow schools to ‘know’ their students better – analysing and tracking their progress, reflecting on progress or lack thereof, and using this information to inform future teaching and planning (Education Review Office, 2013a). The participant responses demonstrate that many of the principles of assessment for learning are dependent on teachers developing strong, productive relationships with their students as it allows them to get to know their students as learners and work alongside them to empower them to take ownership of their learning. These findings are reflected in the work of Alton Lee (2003) and Hargreaves (2005) in regard to recognising the importance of teachers and their students engaging constructively in goal-orientated assessment for learning. Additionally, it is



essential that teachers ensure that assessment practices are relevant, improve learning and impact positively on student's motivation and engagement. It is vital that students have a strong sense of involvement in the setting of their goals and next steps. The findings and research align in stating that students should be receiving regular feedback so that students feel supported, scaffolded and suitably challenged in their everyday learning (Alton Lee, 2003; Hargreaves, 2005).

The participant data confirmed that scaffolding was an element of support emphasised by teachers to be vital in assisting priority learners' achievement as it empowered them to take ownership of their learning, like everyone else. However, in partnership with their teachers, priority learners were able to develop their next steps and learning goals at a pace that was appropriate and achievable for them. This finding is reflected in the work of Cohen and Grossman (2016) as they explain that "different types of school environments provide different affordances and constraints for teaching, and may also necessitate different repertoires of teaching practice to impact student achievement" (p. 316). A challenge for teachers is to ensure that the support offered to students is enough to guide them in the right direction but still allows them to have ownership and empowerment over their learning.

It is essential that educational leaders create opportunities where teachers can develop their capabilities around assessment for learning for students with ethnically diverse backgrounds. This finding is consistent with the recommendation of Allison and Rehm (2007) whereby alternative assessments are necessary when it comes to assessing students from multicultural and multilingual backgrounds. This allows them to demonstrate their understanding in multiple ways to ensure that they can show their achievement and success. These findings are reflected in the work of Macfarlane (2004) who states that teachers can develop their cultural competence to ensure inclusivity and improved student outcomes for all students by promoting the use of culturally appropriate assessment and instructional strategies. Additionally, Nuthall (2002) advises that "the scores that students get on standard paper and pencil tests are primarily the result of the students' motivations and cultural background, and only secondarily about what the students know or can do" (p. 15).

In summary, the participant responses align with the work of Alton Lee (2003), Hargreaves (2005) and Cohen and Grossman (2016) in which assessment for learning principles are essential in monitoring student achievement, positively influencing teaching and raising student outcomes.

**Effective educational leadership and strategic resourcing are influential practices that support teachers in raising the achievement of priority learners.**

The next key theme that emerged from the data was that effective educational leadership and strategic resourcing are influential leadership practices that support teachers in raising the achievement of their priority learners. This is illustrated in the middle layer of my *Raising Achievement* model (Figure 5. 1). The three sub-themes found within this theme are (i) resourcing and funding, (ii) support programmes, and (iii) transition and support for teachers. The findings of the study align with the literature that notes that educational leaders who are inclusive in their strategic planning and resourcing of their schools have a greater impact on raising the achievement of priority learners. Participant data confirmed that the way educational leaders budgeted and allocated resources such as teacher aide timetabling and teaching resources had a great influence on the raising of achievement for students who are considered priority learners. These findings are reflected by the Education Review Office (2013a) which emphasise “strong leadership ensures whole school alignment and coherence across policies and practices that focus on, resource and support quality teaching” (p. 17). The role of an educational leader is to build conditions conducive to provide successful teaching and learning programmes – pedagogically, administratively and culturally (MacBeath, 2006). As described by the Ministry of Education (2008) in *Kiwi Leadership for Principals*, educational leaders “have some autonomy to manage resources to meet the needs of their school communities...they can shift resources and structure systems to better meet the learning needs of their students” (p. 20). Similarly, Hayes, Christie, Mills and Lingard (2004) describe this notion as one of the key characteristics of productive leadership. They state that good educational leadership focus on developing structures and strategies that will create organisational processes that will assist with the smooth running of the school for the betterment of teaching and learning and ultimately raising achievement.

Bush (2008) states that leadership teams have the ability to put procedures in place to monitor the effectiveness of teaching and learning to ensure goals, and learning outcomes are being met. Participant data indicate that when this is done openly in a collaborative environment, it ensures support

can be put in places that are necessary. These may be in the form of intervention support programmes for students such as Reading Recovery (Reading Recovery New Zealand, 2018) or a Maths Support Teacher programme [MST] (Ministry of Education, 2017) or maybe creating a transition policy and system to support students in moving to the next year level. By implementing and reviewing structures and systems such as these, educational leaders help to support the capability of teachers and allow teachers who are raising achievement successfully to share their expertise and work in a collegial nature. This is consistent with the recommendations of the Ministry of Education (2008) as they state that “building strong learning communities where there is shared commitment to investigating, exploring and evaluation practice, is a critical leadership responsibility” (p. 8). Additionally, educational leaders have an indirect influence on student achievement. They do this by positively influencing teachers’ capability through motivating and engaging them (Bush, 2008). The Ministry of Education (2010a) stipulates that “educational leadership is primarily focussed on improving teacher effectiveness and learner achievement and wellbeing” (p. 7). Lambert’s (2002) work reflects these findings as she stipulates that educational leadership is about creating an emphasis on working collaboratively with a “shared purpose” to “strengthen and evolve” (p. 2).

In summary, as described by Schleicher (2012) and communicated by the participants in this study, the way that educational leaders and their teams align their pedagogical practice and the strategic planning of the use of resources and funds can greatly influence the raising of achievement by improving teaching and learning.

## Factors perceived by teachers to be effective in raising the achievement of priority learners in primary schools

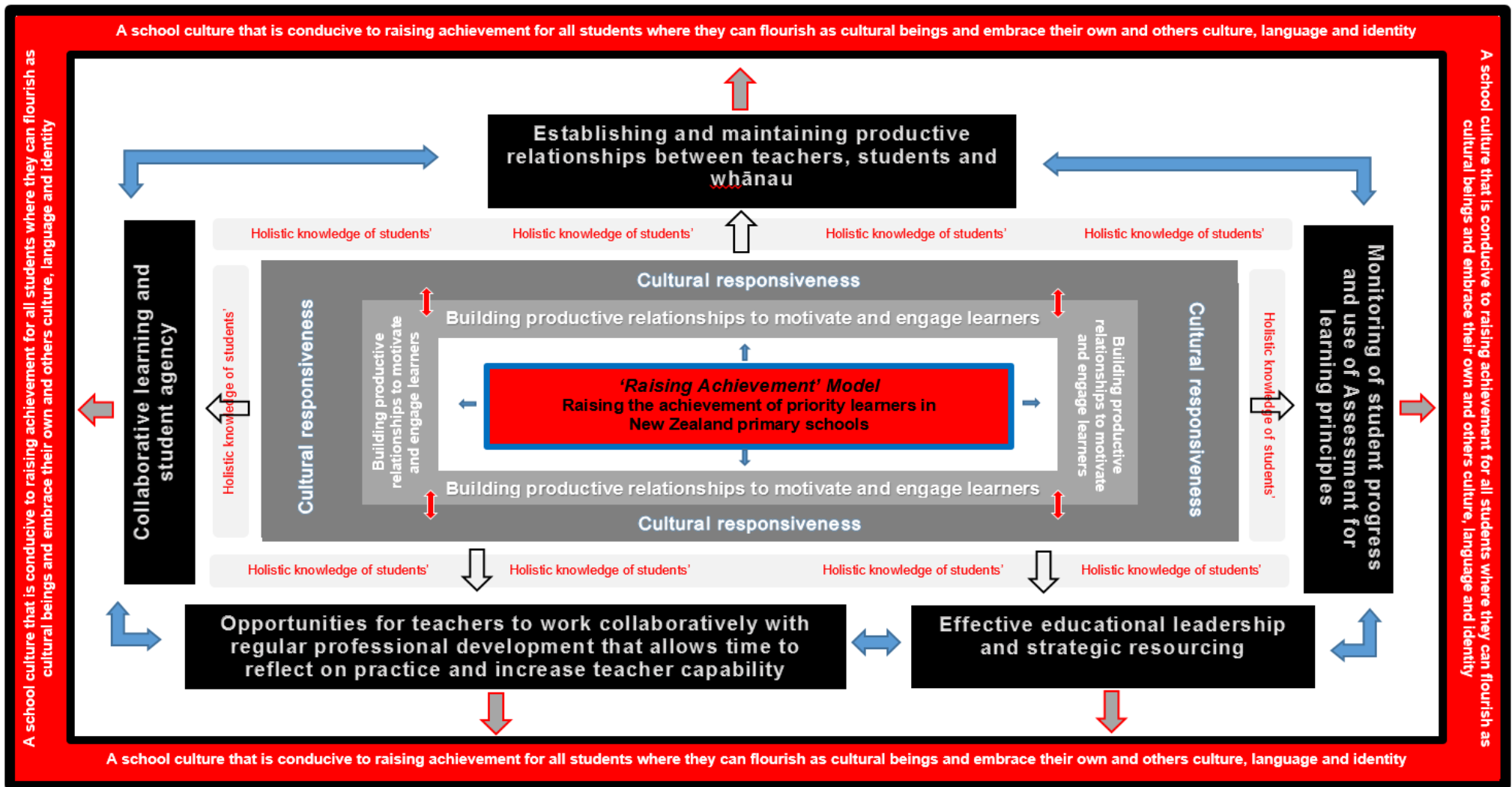


Figure 5. 1 'Raising Achievement' model - factors perceived by teachers to be effective in raising the achievement of priority learners in primary schools

This *Raising Achievement* model shows the key factors perceived by teachers to be effective in raising the achievement of priority learners in primary schools. It also illustrates how building productive relationships to motivate and engage learners and cultural responsiveness are essential in raising achievement and how they filter into all other five factors identified as key in raising the achievement of priority learners in New Zealand primary schools.

## Summary

The data gained from the participants and the literature reviewed for the purpose of this research clearly align to show five themes that demonstrate the teaching and leadership practices that are perceived to raise the achievement of priority learners in primary schools in New Zealand.

As indicated in the model, there are two factors that are considered initially vital components in raising achievement of priority learners. These are building productive relationships to motivate and engage learners and being culturally responsive. These factors allow teachers and educational leaders to tap into students' cultural capital through building productive relationships to motivate and engage. By doing this, teachers develop a holistic view and understanding of their students. The fundamental part that relationships play is indicated in the model as it features twice (in the inner layer and as a factor in the middle layer). The model is designed to show that it is not enough to just build these productive relationships, they need to be established, maintained and nurtured. From here there are four other interdependent factors or elements that must also then come into play in order to raise achievement of priority learners. These are indicated in the middle layer of the *Raising Achievement* model (Figure 5. 1). These factors indicate that teachers and educators need to know their learners holistically and that by providing opportunities for student agency and collaborative learning and by monitoring their learning with the use of assessment for learning practices, students are more likely to be motivated and engaged in their learning. Additionally, by creating a climate of inclusive strategic thinking and resourcing, educational leaders can greatly influence the raising of achievement for priority learners.

The research and literature show that these factors are all necessary in raising achievement, but the fundamental point is that these factors are interdependent. They must all be present and in operation in order to raise achievement, as indicated in the *Raising Achievement* model (Figure 5. 1). This will then create a school culture that is conducive to raising achievement for all students where they can flourish as cultural beings and embrace their own and others culture, language and identity.

Additionally, as alluded to earlier in this chapter, it must be noted that throughout the six interviews conducted for this research, these teachers showed overwhelming care and concern for the students that they teach and true commitment to their job. They radiated a genuine love of the children not only

in their class but within their school and the wider school community. As an experienced educator and aspiring Principal, this was awe-inspiring and very humbling to know that there are many dedicated teachers out there genuinely concerned to make a difference. I feel very privileged to have had such passionate educators participate in my research and share their perceptions, experiences and beliefs to give me such rich and sincere data.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Introduction

In the previous chapter, the findings of this research were discussed in relation to the aims of the research and with support from the literature reviewed. This final chapter will provide an overview of the research conducted, draw valid overall conclusions of the study, evaluate any limitations of this research and make recommendations for educational leaders and teachers and for further research.

### An overview of the research study

The overall aim of this research was to critically examine factors perceived by primary teachers to raise the achievement of 'priority learners' to gain insight into practice that can support raising achievement to address educational disparity experienced in primary schools in New Zealand. This was done by engaging in discussions with six primary school teachers to find out the factors they perceived to raise the achievement of priority learners and to ascertain how they monitored the progress of their priority learners and how this influenced their teaching practice.

The research questions leading this study were:

1. What factors are perceived by teachers to be effective in raising the achievement of priority learners in primary schools?
2. How do teachers monitor the progress of their priority learners and how does this influence their teaching practice?
3. What specific leadership practices do teachers perceive as influencing achievement for priority learners?

Six conclusions have been made in relation to this research and all connect to the research questions and aims of this study.

### Conclusions

***Research Question One: What factors are perceived by teachers to be effective in raising the achievement of priority learners in primary schools?***

**Conclusion One: Establishing productive relationships between home and school appear to be critical in motivating and engaging learners to ensure positive educational outcomes and wellbeing for students.**

These research findings conclude and suggest that productive relationships that are built on trust and openness between students and their teachers are fundamental in engaging students in their learning and in raising achievement (Fletcher et al., 2009; Ford, 2012; Turner, Rubie-Davies & Webber, 2015). This has been represented in my *Raising Achievement* model (Figure 5. 1) as the first layer that must be in operation in order to raise achievement of priority learners. These relationships create the foundation for and encourage home-school partnerships whereby parents and whānau can work with the school to support learning, build cultural capital and raise achievement for all learners, particularly priority learners. Productive relationships that create an alignment between home and school can have one of the strongest impacts on raising student achievement (Alton-Lee, 2003). Establishing, building and maintaining these relationships, particularly with whānau, can be challenging, but are worth pursuing where possible due to the benefits it has in raising achievement. If whānau engagement is difficult to establish, educational leaders must investigate why it is that whānau engagement is difficult and make necessary changes to ensure these relationships are built and sustained.

**Conclusion Two: Cultural responsiveness is essential to building relationships to engage learners and create a school culture and environment that is conducive to raising achievement.**

This research concludes that being culturally responsive is essential in creating an environment whereby conditions are conducive to raising achievement. This is indicated in the *Raising Achievement* model (Figure 5. 1) as the core foundation and central factors that must be in operation in order to raise achievement. Teachers and educational leaders must ensure that students' culture, language and identity are embraced and recognised to encourage every student to flourish as cultural beings and embrace their own and others' culture, language and identity. This is the first step towards raising the achievement of priority learners.

**Conclusion Three: Providing opportunities for student agency and collaborative learning is powerful in motivating and engaging learners.**

This research concludes that providing opportunities for students to learn collaboratively, whether it be through co-operative grouping, peer collaboration, peer-tutoring and/or tuakana-teina relationships, is a vital element in raising achievement by motivating and engaging learners. Collaborative learning allows students to co-construct knowledge and skills with their peers and their teachers by sharing



expertise and tapping into their cultural capital, and in turn, increasing self-esteem and confidence to succeed (Allison & Rehm, 2007; Cummins, 2000; Macfarlane, 2004). Collaborative learning provides opportunities for learners to be empowered through sharing what they know, take ownership of the learning process, to motivate and engage. This is indicated as one of the five fundamental interdependent elements that must be in operation in order to raise achievement of priority learners as indicated in the *Raising Achievement* model (Figure 5. 1).

***Research Question Two: How do teachers monitor the progress of their priority learners and how does this influence their teaching practice?***

**Conclusion Four: Teachers knowing their learners holistically is vital in supporting their learning to raise achievement.**

This research concludes that teachers who know their students as learners and as individuals have a fundamental influence in raising achievement. This includes knowing each student's learning background, their current learning needs, their cultural and family background, their interests and what cultural capital they bring to the classroom. This shows each individual and their whānau that they are cared for in a genuine way which motivates them to learn, positively impacting on their wellbeing and achievement (Bishop & Berryman, 2013). This is indicated in the middle layers of the *Raising Achievement* model (Figure 5. 1), as if are being culturally responsiveness and build productive relationships to motivate and engage learners, they gain a holistic view of their students as learners and as cultural beings.

**Conclusion Five: Collegiality, opportunities to work collaboratively and assessment for learning practices greatly support teaching practice and enhance achievement.**

This research suggests that creating a climate of collective responsibility whereby teachers collaborate and form a sense of collegiality is a fundamental aspect of supporting reflective practice and in raising student achievement. This will allow the sharing of expertise and collaborative problem solving to raise the achievement of their learners. It promotes accountability and collective responsibility for improving educational outcomes. The findings also suggest that assessment for learning practices are vital in understanding where each individual is at and what their next learning steps are. This includes the use of a combination of assessment types that are inclusive of all students and allow them to connect to

their experiences and share what *they* know (Allison & Rehm, 2007). Additionally, these findings suggest that assessment for learning practices, if used effectively, empower learners to take ownership and responsibility for their learning and this is powerful in motivating and engaging learners, positively enhancing achievement. This is indicated as two of the five fundamental interdependent elements that must be in operation in order to raise achievement of priority learners as indicated in the *Raising Achievement* model (Figure 5. 1).

***Research Question Three: What specific leadership practices do teachers perceive as influencing achievement for priority learners?***

**Conclusion Six: Creating a climate with effective educational leadership practices and inclusive strategic thinking and resourcing is fundamental in the raising of achievement for priority learners.**

This research concludes that a fundamental aspect of effective educational leadership is establishing, maintaining and sustaining strong relationships with all stakeholders. For educational leaders to influence others to make change to positively enhance learning outcomes for students, they must ensure that relationships teachers, students and whānau are professional, reciprocal and productive. Additionally, if educational leaders can create well established and well-operated systems and processes, particularly for performance appraisal and professional development, an environment and culture conducive to effective teaching and learning programmes is created and promoted. This is an essential and constructive way to positively influence student achievement and wellbeing which benefits everyone in the educational community (Cardno, 2012). If strategic thinking and resourcing is inclusive and learner-driven, then it will effectively meet the needs of students, teachers, leaders and the wider school community (Cardno, 2012). Effective educational leadership and strategic resourcing is indicated as one of the five fundamental interdependent elements that must be in operation in order to raise achievement of priority learners as indicated in the *Raising Achievement* model (Figure 5. 1).

## **Limitations of the study**

The primary limitation of this research is the small number of research participants due to the nature of the study and the time and resource constraints of the researcher. Therefore, the conclusions made are not intended to be generalisable to all primary schools in New Zealand, nor do they necessarily provide an accurate representation of all primary school teachers within New Zealand. However, it is hoped that the findings of this research will be transferable to other school contexts and may be of use to educational leaders and teachers elsewhere.

## **Recommendations for educational leaders and teachers**

The findings of this research study have produced recommendations for educational leaders within the primary education sector in New Zealand and may also have relevance to teachers, Boards of Trustees and the Ministry of Education. This research study has concluded that it is essential that effective educational leaders build an environment that is pedagogically, administratively and culturally sound which is conducive in producing successful teaching and learning programmes (MacBeath, 2006). This can be done through the five following recommendations.

### **Recommendation One:**

That educational leaders and teachers give considerable attention to the ways in which they facilitate whānau engagement so that this engagement is appropriate and meaningful for whānau. This could be exploring new ways and involving whānau in determining what these ways will be.

### **Recommendation Two:**

That educational leaders and teachers create a school culture and environment whereby it is expected that teachers know their students holistically. In this context, holistic means knowing a student as a whole person, not just as a learner. Knowing about their academics; passions; fears; family; culture; aspirations and so on. This is to be done by understanding not only each student's learning needs but the experiences and cultural capital they bring with them to the classroom. This is crucial in building meaningful and productive relationships to positively influence educational outcomes and wellbeing for students. This can be done through the initial building relationships stages - by teachers taking the time to talk to their students, by inviting whānau early in the year to events such as a school picnic or whānau hui and through learning experiences in class that create an understanding of Whanaungatanga.

**Recommendation Three:**

That educational leaders and teachers create a climate of collaboration for learners which encourages student agency and motivation to learn. This will encourage students to take more meaningful ownership of their learning and create opportunities for student voice in authentic ways.

**Recommendation Four:**

That educational leaders encourage and promote collective responsibility within their schools to improve teaching practice. This encourages teachers to take accountability for their practice and in the raising of achievement of their priority learners. By thinking strategically and through inclusive and effective resource allocation, educational leaders will be able to provide timely and meaningful professional development. In turn, this will encourage teachers to regularly and meaningfully reflect on their practice to increase their teaching capability.

**Recommendation Five:**

That educational leaders provide opportunities for their staff to honestly reflect on, consider and challenge their worldviews and beliefs of those whom they teach. This is vital in understanding how their beliefs and perceptions influence their interactions and relationships with their students. This then creates a sounder cultural consciousness and is the beginning of building culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy and practice.

**Recommendations for future study**

It would be beneficial to conduct a similar study in a larger sample of schools either across Auckland or across New Zealand, with a larger sample of participants. Additionally, research could be carried out into related areas such as what students believe to be effective in accelerating their learning, in both primary and secondary school settings. Also, research into factors that educational leaders [who are in non-teaching roles] perceive to be essential in raising the achievement of priority learners.

**Final conclusion**

This study has explored the factors perceived by six Auckland based primary school teachers to raise the achievement of 'priority learners', to gain an insight into practice that can support raising achievement to address educational disparity experienced in primary schools across New Zealand. The

findings add to the body of literature that can be found on raising student achievement and may be of interest to educational leaders and teachers who share a similar context to the participants' schools. This study acknowledges that there are certain key factors and educational leadership practices that teacher participants identified as essential in raising achievement for priority learners which aligns with academic literature that has been reviewed in this research study.

These findings have been illustrated in my *Raising Achievement* model (Figure 5. 1) which shows that there are two central factors that must be in operation initially. These are building productive relationships to motivate and engage and cultural responsiveness. This then gives teachers a holistic understanding of their students which they can then build on to establish productive relationships between home and school by embracing whānau engagement. This then creates opportunities for collaborative learning and student agency in the classroom where teachers and students monitor their progress through the use of 'Assessment for Learning' principles. Effective educational leadership and strategic resourcing creates opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively and engage in regular professional development that allows time to reflect on practice and increase teacher capability. As illustrated in the model, these factors are all interdependent and must all be in operation in order to raise achievement of priority learners in New Zealand primary schools.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A – Glossary of Terms

Ako	A unified co-operation of learner and teacher (Metge, 1984)
Kapa haka	A Māori performing arts group or Māori cultural group
Māori	Indigenous people of New Zealand
Pasifika	People living in New Zealand who have migrated from the Pacific Islands or who identify with the Pacific Islands because of ancestry or heritage (Fletcher et al., 2009)
Priority learners	Groups of students who have been identified as historically not experiencing success in the New Zealand schooling system. These include many Māori and Pacific learners, those from low socio-economic backgrounds, and students with special educational needs (Education Review Office, 2012)
Tangata whenua	Indigenous people of New Zealand
Tuakana teina	Cross-age mentorship (Macfarlane, 2004)
whānau	Extended family
Whanaungatanga	Relationships (Bishop, 2008)
Whakawhanaungatanga	The process of building relationships (Bishop, 2008)

# PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

## Date information sheet produced

4<sup>th</sup> July 2017

## Project Title

Raising the achievement of priority learners in primary schools

## An invitation

Kia ora, Talofa lava, Malo e lelei, Hello. Ko Alana McKenzie ahau.

I have been a teacher for the past 14 years in both Primary and Intermediate schools. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Educational Leadership degree at Auckland University of Technology. I am currently on study leave from Glen Eden Primary until mid-November and I am seeking your help in meeting the research requirements of the thesis paper that will allow me to complete this qualification. The information below provides details of the study. Please take time to read through it and consider whether or not you would like to participate.

## What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to critically examine factors perceived by primary teachers to raise the achievement of priority learners and to gain insight into practice that can support raising achievement. I intend to interview 6-8 primary/intermediate school teachers to explore their perspectives about the factors and practices that they perceive to raise the achievement of priority learners.

The aim of this study is to critically examine the teaching and leadership practices that are currently used to raise the achievement of priority learners.

The research questions are:

1. What factors are perceived by teachers to be effective in raising the achievement of priority learners in primary school?
2. How do teachers monitor the progress of their priority learners and how does this influence their teaching practice?
3. What specific leadership practices do teachers perceive as influencing achievement for priority learners?

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

You are being invited to participate in this study as I am focussing on using primary schools within the West Auckland area that have a high Pasifika and Māori demographic. Initial contact was made with your Principal to gain permission to come to talk to you in an information briefing and leave you with this information.

## How do I agree to participate in this research?

To be eligible to participate in this research you need to:

- Be a fully registered teacher in New Zealand;
- Have taught at least 2 years in a primary school;
- Currently teaching in a primary school that has a medium to high proportion of Māori and Pasifika students;

- Be a classroom teacher; and
- Not be a present or former colleague of the researcher.

If you fulfil the criteria and would like to participate in this research, please email me, using the contact details provided at the end of this information sheet to let me know you are interested. We can then set up a time and place to conduct the interview.

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

If more people show interest than are needed for this study, participants will be allocated a number, and an online randomiser will select 6-8 participants. I will then contact all interested participants to let them know whether they have been selected or not.

### **What will happen in this research?**

If you choose to participate, the process will begin with a brief meeting to enable us to meet each other and talk about the research process, go through the consent and arrange a time and place for an interview. The interview will take the form of a semi-structured meeting which will allow an opportunity to share your perceptions and perspectives around factors you believe to be successful in raising achievement and the practices that surround this. No student data are required as this study is all about perceptions, beliefs and perspectives.

The interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed. Pseudonyms will be used in any written recordings, so neither you nor your organisation will be identifiable. The information from the interview will be analysed and data collated to build a picture around common themes between the interviews. Transcriptions will be sent to you to check after the interview. You will have the opportunity to remove yourself and the information you have shared from the study. As there is a schedule for this thesis completion, any withdrawals need to be done before or within 14 days from receiving the transcription. The findings will be written up in a Master of Educational Leadership thesis and could potentially be used for journal publications. You will be given a summary of the findings upon the conclusion of the study via email or through a preferred method specified at the end of your interview.

### **What are the discomforts and risks?**

The risks and discomforts of participating in this study are likely to be very minimal.

### **How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated and how will my privacy be respected?**

Every effort will be taken to ensure confidentiality in the recording, analysis and reporting of findings. Codes and pseudonyms will be used for all participants and organisations, so they are not identifiable. Recordings, transcriptions and consent forms will be stored securely and separately for six years at AUT, and then appropriately destroyed.

Throughout the interview, answering questions will be entirely voluntary, and you will have the option to stop the interview at any time, pass on any particular question or withdraw from the study. You will be given the opportunity to check your transcription for accuracy and make changes by contacting me up to 14 days after receiving it. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

### **What are the benefits?**

This study will provide participants and the researcher with information regarding the factors that are perceived to raise the achievement of priority learners. It will potentially produce findings that will help other educators gain a better understanding about factors that can raise achievement, and how teaching and leadership practices impact on student achievement.

This study will also allow me to complete my thesis and graduate with a Master of Educational Leadership.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

The research is estimated to take the following time:  
Semi-structured interview                      45 - 60 minutes (approx.)  
Checking of your transcript                      20 minutes (approx.)

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

Please feel free to consider this invitation and respond within the next 7 days.

**How do I agree to participate in this research?**

You can complete the attached form showing your interest, and I will respond back to you via email to set up an interview time and venue. If you prefer you can contact me via phone.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

A summary of the findings will be sent to you upon the conclusion of the study should you so wish.

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

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Alison Smith, [alsmith@aut.ac.nz](mailto:alsmith@aut.ac.nz), phone 921 9999 ext 7363

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTC, Kate O'Connor, [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz), 921 9999 ext 6038.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

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

**Researcher contact details:**

Alana McKenzie, [alanam@geps.school.nz](mailto:alanam@geps.school.nz), phone: 027 309 6814

**Project Supervisor contact details:**

Alison Smith, [alsmith@aut.ac.nz](mailto:alsmith@aut.ac.nz), phone 921 9999 ext 7363

I would like to thank you very much for considering to take part in this research, as without participants it will not be possible.

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor if you have any further questions about the study.

Regards,  
Alana McKenzie

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 7 August 2017**

**AUTC Reference number 17/243**



## Consent Form

*Project title: **Raising the achievement of priority learners in primary schools.***

*Project Supervisor: **Alison Smith***

*Researcher: **Alana McKenzie***

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 4th July 2017.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that the interview will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study, then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ☐ I understand that neither my name nor the name of my organisation will be used in any public reports. I also give consent for any findings from this study to be published in related educational journals.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature: .....

Participant's name: .....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....  
.....  
.....

Date:

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 7 August 2017**

**AUTEC Reference number 17/243**

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

## Confidentiality Agreement

Project title: ***Raising the achievement of priority learners in primary schools.***

Project Supervisor: ***Alison Smith***

Researcher: ***Alana McKenzie***

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

Transcriber's signature .....

Transcriber's name: .....

Transcriber's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Date:

Project Supervisor's Contact Details:

Alison Smith

Email: [alsmith@aut.ac.nz](mailto:alsmith@aut.ac.nz)

Phone: (09) 921 9999 ext 7363

***Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 7 August  
2017***

***AUTEC Reference number 17/243***

### Indicative interview questions for semi-structured interviews:

**Topic:** *Raising achievement of priority learners in primary schools.*

#### Initial prompts (getting to know the participant and building a rapport)

1. Please tell me a little bit about your teaching experience in NZ.

#### Focus questions/prompts:

2. What are your views about raising achievement in NZ?
3. What is your understanding of the term 'priority learners'?
4. a) Is raising the achievement of 'priority learners' a focus at your school?  
b) If yes, please explain how.  
If no, do you believe it should be and why?
5. a) Do you have 'target' 'at-risk' 'focus' students identified that you are specifically trying to raise the achievement of?  
b) What collective term is used to identify these students in your school?  
c) Is this school-wide practice or something you have chosen to do as an individual?
6. What do you believe are the factors that help support the raising of achievement for these learners?
7. What challenges do you face when trying to raise the achievement of your priority learners?
8. a) Do you monitor the achievement of your priority learners (use the term previously identified by the participant)?  
b) If yes, how is this done?  
c) If yes, how do the outcomes of this monitoring influence your teaching practice?
9. How does your leadership team support raising the achievement of priority learners?

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 7 August 2017**

**AUTEC Reference number 17/243**

## APPENDIX F – Example of coded transcript

<p>learners that are VIP's and start to hook in and become independent learners;</p>	<p>2 All students have the goods, for the VIPs <sup>1</sup> about finding their look for learning</p>
<p><b>Is raising achievement of priority learners a focus at your school? Absolutely.</b>  <b>How are priority learners monitored and how does this influence teaching practice?</b>          We look at the system and how practices are embedded I guess, in our teams. The school collects data and then we as a staff look at the data and then we look at trends, what's going on for groups, then we break it down to our own classes. We look at that data and look at those children in terms of achievement and we that decided then from that data who our priorities and why. In the main it is academic, the focus because the main data we capture through national standards is the academic side, but we recognise there is a hell of a lot more to kids than the academic, so having got that, generally through numeracy and literacy; then as a team we look at the global child and talk about our ideas, brainstorming what we can do as a team to get those children hooked into learning and accelerating their learning in those areas. Every syndicate meeting, every team meeting we have, we talk about our priority students. Each teacher talks about who they are, how they are going and raises any 'stuckness' or successes to celebrate. We brainstorm about ways of getting the whanau in to support them, how we can wrap around that child and just utilise what we have got to be able to get them to be successful learners. At our staff meeting, say once a month, we all bring, both syndicates bring our priority students and through our inquiries. We talk about successes and things that didn't go so well and put it to the group, group brainstorming. It is part of the cyclic meeting pattern, it's consistently being reviewed. In our weekly planning as teachers have our priorities in mind as we roam and teach and observe we are collecting data on those kids all the time, indirectly as well and through teaching groups. So they are always a priority. So they are always in the forefront of your mind? Yes, how can we get that group going, how are they doing because if they are going well everybody else benefits. So it is not like the others are getting any less, is the more you offer the others, it enriches the programme and opportunities for other people too.</p>	<p>2 Yes a focus</p> <p>2 Priority learners that we target</p> <p>2 Personally – priority priorities – the VIPs</p> <p>2 Systems and practices are embedded in teams</p> <p>2 School collects data and then staff unpack and look for trends that are broken down into own classes – this is how the priority students are selected and we can see why</p> <p>2 Captured through National standards – numeracy/literacy – so mostly academic but acknowledging the global child</p> <p>2 Every syndicate meeting priority students are talked about – successes and what is not going so well</p> <p>2 Collective responsibility through brainstorming what next and collaborating with each other</p> <p>2 Collective brainstorm how to get whanau involved</p> <p>2 Monitoring and collecting data in teachers planning</p> <p>2 Monitoring and collecting data through informal observation</p> <p>2 Monitoring in group teaching sessions</p> <p>3 Teaching as inquiry – cyclic meeting pattern – what went well, successes and where to next</p> <p>3 Priority learners progress being constantly reviewed</p> <p>3 Always in forefront of teachers minds</p>
<p><b>What factors do you believe are key in raising achievements for students?</b>          Without a doubt, it is the relationship you have with the children, so teacher to child. When I unpack that bit, it means those kids really knowing that you know them and that you have gone out of your way to know who their mum and dad are. Say their names properly, understand a little bit about their culture. So when you meet and greet them in the morning as each one comes through the door, you can say, 'how is your nan now?'. That is a symbol to them that you really care about them. If you do that, then there is the respect that develops and if that respect is there, it somehow gets them on their way if there is that relationship.          Relationships with family, when you see you. Like, at the start of the year we have a big school picnic and it is free for everybody, so we are all out at Cornwallis and we all make a point of going to see the parents of the kids and sitting down on the mats with them and sharing some food and find out who they are. When the kids see us talking to their parents that makes a difference as well. So it is respecting them and their background and knowing a bit about who they are when they come through the door.          What helps them to learn is self-esteem, so I guess that links into self-esteem. If they see themselves as a learner and experience success in a class, there is the evidence for them that they can do stuff. So you set tasks that are achievable, that are meaningful so they can have some success as learners and then incrementally scaffold them to harder stuff. But setting your programme at the right pace and finding out what they want to learn. Finding out what is at the heart of their interest. I am thinking of an example of a boy I have got, who finds it really hard to be</p>	<p>1 Teacher to child relationships – knowing your learners</p> <p>1 Students knowing that you know them, about their family, understand their culture and say their name correctly</p> <p>1 You can greet them and talk on a personal level about family – showing you care</p> <p>1 Relationships develop respect</p> <p>1 Relationships with family/whanau</p> <p>1 Connecting with family/whanau at a personal level – students see you talking to family, sharing kai, this makes a difference</p> <p>1 Teacher showing respect by being interested in their background and knowing a bit about who they are when they come through the door</p> <p>1 Self esteem – students seeing themselves as a learner and experiencing success in the classroom</p> <p>1 Setting tasks that are achievable and meaningful</p> <p>1 Incrementally scaffolding learning for</p>

## APPENDIX G – Example of coding to create themes

