

# **COMMUNICATING HIGH EXPECTATIONS TO STUDENTS: MAXIMISING LEARNING SUCCESS IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM**

Written by

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## **Abstract**

The quality of secondary school education that a student receives can significantly shape that young person's future. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of teacher expectations on student learning success; which is ultimately an important attribute and measure of a quality education. As teacher expectations are a variable reality for students, this research set out to examine how the communication of high expectations from the classroom teacher can contribute to maximising student learning success at secondary school. Using a qualitative approach, two methods of data collection were used: semi-structured interviews with six teacher participants; and two focus group interviews with six Year 13 students participating in each discussion.

Three interconnected themes were identified from the data generated: effective communication, authentic and productive relationships, and engagement. This study highlighted that teachers know that the communication of high expectations is an important contributor to student learning success. Furthermore, students are experts in identifying teachers' perceptions of student ability - they understand the significance of teachers communicating high expectations for their own learning success and the learning success of their peers. Professional learning and development for teachers that concentrates on the importance of learning relationships between a classroom teacher and their students supports the communication of high expectations by teachers and the learning success of students was highlighted as being beneficial on multiple levels within a school. In addition, this study concluded that the benefit of teachers who have high expectations for the learning success of their students is twofold: teachers enjoy stronger connections with their students; and students experience an increase learning success and positive impact on their personal well-being.

Whilst the importance of effective and productive relationships between a classroom teacher and a student is not new to educational research, the themes and findings of this research may challenge a teacher's personal values and assumptions and the impact of these in providing equity of opportunity in their classrooms. Further study that illuminates secondary students' perceptions could be a promising direction for future research.

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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 institution of higher learning.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "M Heather". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M" and a trailing flourish.

Michelle Ann Heather

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## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>AUTEC</b>	Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee
<b>HoD</b>	Head of Department
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>NCEA</b>	National Certificate of Educational Achievement
<b>PLD</b>	Professional Learning and Development
<b>SLT</b>	Senior Leadership Team



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# **Chapter One: Introduction**

## **Introduction**

Having high expectations of oneself is fundamental to reaching personal potential. Deep down everyone hopes that others have high expectations of them; however, it is really believing that they do that can make significant difference to a person's life. As well as affecting the individual, high expectations of others are instrumental in shaping society's ability to function effectively, develop and grow. Schools are tasked with the important responsibility of contributing significantly to the lives of their students to ensure that they are "confident, connected, actively involved, and life-long learners" (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 8). Today's school students shape tomorrow; therefore it is imperative that today's school students know that their teachers and school have high expectations of their learning success and personal potential. This belief needs to permeate into classroom learning, experiences and relationships to enable today's youth to challenge themselves, take calculated risks and grow into happy, contributing members of society (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy, 2009; Bishop, 2010).

Expectations can contribute to personal success (Walkey, McClure, Meyer, & Weir, 2013). Personal success, though a relative term that is very subjective in nature, is an experience that everyone deserves. Schools have the opportunity, and responsibility for contributing to the personal success of every student that walks through their doors. This opportunity and responsibility must be a school priority and classroom learning experiences are the ideal environment for schools to ensure that this outcome is met (Bishop et al., 2009). A significant challenge for schools is ensuring that individual students have their learning needs met so they are successful learners. Having high expectations cannot mean having the same expectations for every student; "high expectations are relative to each individual student" (Rubie-Davies, 2015, p. 218). However, having high expectations means that "all students are likely to be challenged and extended" (McDonald, Flint, Rubie-Davies, Peterson, Watson & Garrett, 2016, p. 290). Personal potential cannot be realised or achieved if students do not have this learning opportunity in our secondary school classrooms. This is why this research is important. New Zealand's secondary school students need classroom learning experiences that contribute to shaping positive learning journeys and it is imperative to understand how a teacher's expectations can contribute to shaping a student's educational experience (Bishop et al., 2009; Bishop, 2010).

## **Research rationale**

The importance of expectations "do not reside solely 'in the minds of teachers' but instead are built into the very fabric of our institutions and our society" (Weinstein, 2002, p. 290). When thinking about secondary school education in New Zealand and the important role of a classroom teacher, I believe it is imperative that the effect of teacher expectations on student learning success at a secondary school level be examined and discussed. Teachers' expectations exist in every classroom (Rubie-Davies, Hattie & Hamilton, 2006); it is a reality of education at every level.

I believed it was essential to approach this investigation through a positive lens by focussing on the effect of 'high expectations'. Inevitably I believed, some of the effects of 'low expectations' from teachers towards their students would come to fruition through this small-scale qualitative study that was influenced by a subjective ontological perspective and an interpretive paradigm. This is because Rubie-Davies' (2015) point of view that there are teachers with high expectations and low expectations of their students learning success in every school is correct; it is naïve to think otherwise. My sense is that concentrating this research on the effects of teachers communicating 'low expectations' towards their students learning potential and anticipated academic success would have been restrictive. As teachers, we are encouraged to reflect on our practice and adapt to meet the needs of the students sitting in front of us – a practice I wholeheartedly agree with. However, I sense that we, as teachers, are very good at reflecting on what we do not achieve or are not good at. My hope is that the findings and conclusions of this research are transferable. Comparing our practice to aspects identified as positive through this research could potentially be both affirming and educational, just as the opposite could be potentially confronting and equally educational.

These reasons and personal opinions outlined above have motivated my topic of investigation. My interest in conducting this research has also stemmed from being a parent observing my children's education from outside of the classroom and, as a secondary school teacher and a current senior leader in a mid-sized secondary school, being involved in the education of other people's children. This is why I feel that researching the effect of communicating high expectations on student learning success in the secondary school classroom is important and relevant. Undoubtedly, some students receive this type of education; however, I firmly believe that all students deserve this quality of education.

## **Research aims and questions**

The main objective of this research was to critically examine how communicating high expectations to students can maximise learning success in the secondary school classroom. This research was guided by the following aims and research questions:

### Research aims

The aims of this study were:

- 1) To identify what students and teachers perceive learning success to be;
- 2) To critically examine how communicating high expectations impacts learning success in the classroom;
- 3) To critically examine whether the communication of, and belief in, high expectations needs to be a school-wide practice; and
- 4) To critically examine school-wide practices that enable high expectations to be communicated effectively in classrooms.

### Research questions

The guiding questions of this investigation were:

- 1) What are teachers' perceptions of 'high expectations' and what practices are used in schools?

- 2) What other factors do teachers identify as important in the way that the communication of high expectations contributes to learning success for their students?
- 3) What enablers and barriers do teachers experience when communicating high expectations to students?
- 4) In what ways do students perceive high expectations contribute to their learning success?

## **Thesis organisation**

The structure of this thesis is as follows:

**Chapter One:** presents my position as the researcher, the rationale for this investigation along with the aims and research questions that guided this research project. The organisation of this thesis concludes this paragraph.

**Chapter Two:** presents a critical review of the literature pertaining to the topic of this investigation. This chapter begins with a definition of 'expectations' in relation to teachers and the students within their classrooms. The remainder of this chapter is structured around three areas for discussion: teachers' expectations of students; teachers' expectations as part of a school culture; and teachers' practice in regard to expectations. There are subheadings within these three areas of discussion designed to review literature that relates to the aims and guiding questions of this research study.

**Chapter Three:** presents an overview of the influences that guided the methodological approach and research design. The use of purposive sampling is discussed, along with data collection and analysis. An explanation about the importance of research validity and credibility is followed by a discussion of ethical considerations.

**Chapter Four:** presents the data analysed from the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. The data are presented in tables in two sections dictated by the two methods used to differentiate teacher perspectives and student perspectives. Each table is supported with samples of participants' responses. From the data analysis is the identification of the three themes that emerged. This chapter concludes with an example of the way in which categories identified from the data gathered were analysed and the theme of 'effective communication' arrived at.

**Chapter Five:** presents a discussion of the three key themes that emerged from the data analysed in Chapter Four. Each theme is critically examined and linked to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

**Chapter Six:** presents conclusions made from this investigation. Recommendations are presented on a national and school level. The school level recommendation is a discussion of how I would approach a school-wide focus on the communication of high expectations to maximise learning success for every student in the school where I currently work, based on the learnings I gathered during this investigation. This thesis then concludes with a personal reflection

that shares the impact of this research on my current practice as a classroom teacher and a senior leader.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Introduction

As previously indicated, this chapter concentrates on literature relating to high expectations and its impact on student learning success. This literature is examined and critically reviewed. This chapter begins with a brief discussion that defines 'expectations'. The examination of literature then follows and is presented under the following headings: teachers' expectations of students; teachers' expectations as part of school culture; and teachers' practice in regard to expectations.

#### Defining 'expectations'

Having high expectations for students is an essential component of a successful education. Rubie-Davies (2015) explains that expectations are necessary, and it is essential for all teachers to have expectations about their students learning. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the definition presented by Rubie-Davies (2015), who believes that "teacher expectations may be defined as the notion that all teachers hold about current and future academic performance and classroom behaviour of their students, based on their interpretation of available information" (p.xv). Good and Brophy (2000) define expectations in a similar vein to Rubie-Davies (2015). They conclude that "teachers' expectations are inferences that teachers make about the future behaviour or academic achievement of their students, based on what they know about these students now" (p. 74). These definitions indicate that expectations exist about students' academic and behavioural potential from conclusions made by their teachers.

### Teachers' expectations of students

This section will discuss the concept, importance and influence of expectations. I then examine teachers' expectations and how they are shaped. Finally, I examine the effect of teachers' expectations on students.

#### What are 'expectations' and are they an important aspect of education?

Research suggests that 'expectations' are very real in our schools and classrooms. They exist in various forums and are expressed through a multitude of mediums. School-wide expectations exist (Leo, 2015; Rubie-Davies, 2015; Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2003). Expectations exist in classrooms (Good et al., 2000; Hattie, 2012; McDonald et al., 2016; Weinstein, 2002). Rubie-Davies (2015) agrees, explaining that teachers' expectations are "closely aligned with both the instructional and psychosocial environment of the classroom" (p.xv). She explains that it is common for teachers to form expectations based on the class as a whole and on individuals within that class. Good et al. (2000) concur, and add that teachers also hold expectations about groups and they "sometimes communicate these expectations in their classroom behaviour and assignments" (p. 14). Weinstein (2002) also shares her observations about teacher expectations in classrooms. At times she voices her frustrations that educators "respond to individual differences among students by lowering our expectations and providing inferior educational opportunities" (p. 2). However, she is very clear in the communication of her belief that expectations are ingrained in societal

beliefs and educational theory; therefore, teachers practice what they have been taught and what they have experienced.

There is an assumption that 'high expectations' exist for every student in every New Zealand secondary school. A central question, however, is how 'high expectations' are evidenced, and deemed to be a successful component of a school. New Zealand's guiding educational document, *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007), identifies high expectations as one of its leading principles, thus reinforcing the importance of expectations in New Zealand schools and classrooms. Schools are required to provide a curriculum that "supports and empowers all students to learn and achieve personal excellence" (p. 9). A huge challenge for educators is determining what personal excellence is. Schools, their students, teachers, parents and community members can have their view of learning success dominated by measurements of standards met and qualifications gained. Articles with headlines such as 'NCEA results: How did your school rate?' (Dogan, 2016) from the New Zealand Herald can reinforce such mindsets with the presentation of a league table listing the country's top performing NCEA schools. Literature by Weinstein (2002) insists there is an increase in the "culture of schooling that focuses narrowly on the point of differences on standardized tests" rather than "helping each child become all that she or he can become" (p. 303). Weinstein believes that schools' expectations tend to be ability-based because of societal expectations and she challenges educators to look at "how expectancy effects take place and what consequences they have for children" (p. 11). Rubie-Davies (2015) also believes that there needs to be a "move from an achievement-based culture to one that focussed on progress" (p. 229). She is a firm believer in the importance of expectations in our schools; however, through such statements she challenges how these expectations are formed and measured, again challenging schools and teachers to examine their practice.

The literature also explores how expectations that maximise student learning success in the classroom recognise the needs of individual students. Hattie (2012) asserts that "it is important to develop high expectations for all students relative to their starting point" (p. 161). He explains that high expectations are powerful in the classroom and advocates for teachers showing "a passion that all can indeed attain success" (p. 26) in their classroom. Rubie-Davies (2015) concurs, believing that "high expectations do not mean having the same expectations for all students" (p. 218) - they need to correspond to the individual student. She explains that high expectations in the classroom are about all students progressing with their learning. As well as making learning gains, Rubie-Davies (2015) believes that teachers with high expectations create a classroom where "students are eager to come to school each day" as "they have a teacher who believes in every one of them" (p. 219), thus emphasising that high expectations are an important part of effective schooling.

#### The shaping of teachers' expectations

The literature suggests that mental models shape expectations. A person's mental models are deeply ingrained in their psyche; they shape the way a person sees the world. Cardno (2012) notes that "mental models explain why two people may see the same event differently" (p. 51).

She describes how mental models are often unspoken; they can exist without a person actually realising that they do. Bolman and Deal's (2013) view of mental models is similar to Cardno's (2012). Bolman et al. (2013) explain that mental models influence our interpretation of various situations, including expectations. They describe the role of mental models in expectations as "what we expect often determines what we get" (p. 38). Therefore, if a teacher has high expectations of a student's learning success, the student is more likely to learn successfully in their class.

It is naïve to assume that teachers have the same expectations for all students' learning success. Hattie's (2012) discussion about mind frames illuminates learning as "a very personal journey for the teacher and the student" (pp.15-16). He advocates for teachers seeing the learning that occurs in their classrooms "through the eyes of students" (p.14) and understanding the power of their influence on a student's learning success. Hattie (2012) explains that there are teachers who have a "high-effect" or a "low-effect" (p. 23) on student learning success in every school. He is adamant that the difference in teacher effect is "primarily related to the attitudes and expectations that teachers have" (p. 23). According to Hattie (2012), it is essential that teachers and senior leaders in schools understand that mind frames influence expectations and teacher mind frames are important to ensuring learning success for all students.

Another dominant theme in the literature is the importance of teachers recognising and acknowledging the power of their expectations in the classroom. This includes scrutinising their own beliefs and bias and examining what really drives their expectations. This examination may challenge and surprise teachers, as perceived superficial influences may prove to dominate deeply. One such examination that exposed superficial influences is presented by Timmermans, de Boer and van der Werf (2016). They conclude that teachers have higher expectations of learning success for students who are more self-confident and for those who meet their expectations of having good work habits. They explain that expectations are, at least partially, shaped by teachers' "perceptions of students' behaviour in the classroom and students' motivation while working on tasks" (p. 218). A student's background can shape a teacher's expectations according to these researchers, as can "the working habits, popularity, self-confidence, student-teacher relationships, and classroom behaviour" (p. 220) of individual students. Good et al. (2000) challenge teachers to pay attention to, and appreciate, the full range of a student's abilities, and these writers believe that it is imperative that these differing abilities are utilised in the classroom. Weinstein (2002) concurs, believing that "the art of knowing, appreciating, and learning from children's unique and diverse talents has been all but lost" (p. 303).

The literature highlights the importance of respecting and meeting the educational needs of the individual learner as a fundamental contributor to learning success. Teachers need to really know their learners and this means really knowing who they are, who and what inspires them and how they learn. They must also "believe that students can succeed" (Bendikson, Robinson & Hattie, 2012, p. 7). This belief can shape teacher expectations and must be reflected in their



expectations, as high expectations can enhance the learning success of an individual and the learning climate of a classroom. Acknowledging the diverse learning needs of their students and developing positive and respectful relationships that promote learning success for all can be reflected in the expectations of teachers. Bishop (2010) reinforces the importance of this by explaining that “improvements in learning outcomes can result from changing the learning relations and interactions in the classrooms” (p. 61). He believes that teachers need to understand, care and respect “students as culturally located individuals” (p. 61). Openness to acknowledging such factors can shape teacher expectations and help to encourage learning success in the classroom.

#### The effect of teachers’ expectations on students

The literature that I have reviewed also illuminates the considerable effects of a teacher’s expectations on their students. Weinstein (2002) emphasises the importance of teacher expectations on the learning success of a student. Her book identified that children “are socialized primarily to look to the teacher as the defining agents of ability” (p. 97). This reinforces the importance of the teacher in the educational life of a student. Teachers possess considerable power and influence in the lives of many students in their classrooms. While it is imperative to acknowledge, “not all children are equally vulnerable to teacher expectancy effects” (p. 163), Weinstein (2002) believes that students do not really look “to themselves or to their peers and family” (p. 97) when deciphering their learning potential. Beyond endorsement of learning potential, teacher expectations can potentially enhance motivation and self-efficacy for a student (Rubie-Davies, 2015; Walkey et al., 2013). Believing in one’s own ability to succeed, and working with determination to achieve this learning success, will undoubtedly have short-term and long-term benefits for the student. Walkey et al. (2013) identified through their study that “students with lower achievement aspirations perceive that their teachers do not care about their learning and may even feel rejected by their teachers” (p. 312). Often, according to these researchers, this leads to students doing the minimum or “just enough” (p. 312). Walkey et al. (2013) discuss the importance of positive relationships between teachers and students in the classroom as being crucial to “enhancing academic performance” especially “with teachers communicating high expectations” (p. 312). Teachers’ expectations can impact student motivation levels considerably, suggesting that these beliefs potentially have a significant effect on students and their learning success.

A prominent theme in the literature is that of the influence of expectations in the classroom and the potentially detrimental effects if these expectations do not meet the needs of the individual student. Brault, Janoz and Archambault (2014) elucidate that teacher expectations in secondary schools are predominantly focussed on a group of students rather than individual students. They believe that group-based expectations can have substantial effect on individuals. Group-based expectations tend to be formed using a “comparative benchmark” (p. 149) and this way of forming expectations significantly impacts the classroom climate and classroom processes. More often than not, group-based expectations do not meet the needs of each student in the class, thereby signalling the potential detrimental effect of such expectations. Self-fulfilling prophecies can result

from teacher expectations in the classroom according to Brault et al. (2014), where students' actions reflect their belief in their teacher's expectations. Usually this "prophecy is manifested through students' reactions to their teachers' differential treatments" (p. 149) of students in the class. Brault et al. (2014) explain that if a teacher has low expectations of their learning success, the student tends to believe that they are less capable, and their behaviour reflects this. Weinstein (2002) concurs, emphasising that students are "pry to the differential expectations that teachers may hold for students within the same classroom" (p. 288). She explains that these differences can be internalised by the students and argues that "when high expectations are framed in ways that always value the child, support reachable goals on the way to cherished dreams, and provide children with strategies that help overcome obstacles in their path, such expectations can inspire children to grow" (p. 298). Weinstein (2002) explains that the opposite is a reality reflected in the educational experiences of many students and these experiences can be life-limiting or life-changing, thereby suggesting that teacher expectations can have significant effect.

As alluded to in the prior paragraph, the literature emphasises that students are sophisticated observers (Babad, Bernieri & Rosenthal, 1991; Weinstein, 2002). An important finding in the literature is that students know if their teacher has high or low expectations of them and their learning (McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Peterson, Rubie-Davies, Osborne & Sibley, 2016; Rubie-Davies, 2010). When students believe that classrooms are unfair or unsafe, or their teachers do not care about their achievement, students will become demotivated and disengaged. Bishop (2010) reinforces this with his argument that when students believe that their teachers think, "they are deficient they will respond negatively" (p. 58) to the learning activities in the classroom and to the teacher. Researchers such as Bohlmann and Weinstein (2013) and Robinson (2011) also reinforce this point through their discussions. They effectively explain that students will engage more readily in the classroom and become more confident learners when they believe that their teacher knows who they are as a person and believes in them. The expression of high expectations by the teacher, both verbally and non-verbally, endorses whether the teacher does or does not believe in the student's ability to achieve learning success, undoubtedly having an effect on each student.

A classroom's climate is significantly affected by teacher expectations. Literature by Good et al. (2000) argues that teacher expectations influence the climate of an already complex entity - the classroom. Complicated social dynamics can be associated with most secondary school classrooms and this is a crucial consideration when examining student learning success at all levels of the New Zealand education system. In their discussion about secondary school students, Good et al. (2000) remind educators about the importance of learning about and recognising the ways that teenagers protect themselves from feelings such as embarrassment. Often a student will remain passive, seem disinterested in the learning and avoid answering questions, to protect themselves from exposing their lack of understanding and potential public ridicule if they are wrong. Good et al. (2000) believe that "students who need the most help are the least likely to seek assistance" (p. 90), thus reiterating the importance of knowing each student individually and "convincing them that they can learn if they put forth reasonable effort" (p. 90). As previously

mentioned, teachers form “differential expectations and act on them by treating students differently, and students perceive this differential treatment and draw inferences about what is expected of them” (p. 90). Having high expectations for the learning success of all students may change pessimistic attitudes to feelings of optimism thereby having significant effect on each student.

Teachers who have high expectations for all of their students encourage and support their students by fostering a “positive socioemotional climate” (McDonald et al., 2016, p. 291) in their classroom, showing genuine care, positivity and respect for their students. Throughout the literature it is evident that these teachers work with each student individually to set relevant and current learning goals, provide regular and quality feedback, and promote student autonomy (Good et al., 2000; McDonald et al., 2016; Rubie-Davies, 2006; Rubie-Davies, 2010; Rubie-Davies, Peterson, Sibley, & Rosenthal, 2015; Weinstein, 2000). Pedagogy that incorporates such practices has positive effects on students and their learning success. Literature such as that by Bishop et al. (2009) speaks of learning partnerships that are created between students and teachers. These partnerships have a foundation of high expectations and mutual respect where the student and teacher co-construct “the process of learning” (p. 740). The classroom climate optimises learning success by making it safe to make mistakes, allowing students to make choices about their learning and feel empowered to take ownership for contributing to their learning success. Such classroom practice can enhance teacher expectations and have noteworthy effects on students. Such classroom practice can influence student and teacher relationships and positively affect the culture of a school.

## **Teachers’ expectations as part of school culture**

This section will discuss the factors that influence the impact of teacher expectations. I then examine the role of trust in developing teachers’ expectations and, finally, I examine the development of a school culture that endorses teachers’ expectations that maximise student learning success.

### Factors that promote the impact of teachers’ expectations

A prominent theme in the literature is that effective educational leaders are knowledgeable about pedagogy (Cardno, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). This is a factor of considerable influence that can promote the effectiveness of teachers’ expectations. Researchers such as Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) note that “the closer educational leaders get to the core business of teaching and learning, the more likely they are to have positive impacts on students” (p. 47). The literature also discusses the importance of instructional leadership and the influence this leadership has on the academic success of students. Cardno (2012) believes that instructional leadership is one of the leadership tasks of an effective educational leader. She does, however, identify that Heads of Department (HoD) are more likely to “perform instructional actions” (p. 21) with teachers, especially in large secondary schools. Her statement reinforces the importance of leadership coming from a variety of people within a school. Bush and Middlewood (2013) also recognise instructional leadership as crucial,

noting that this must be at the forefront of the minds of an educational leader as instructional leadership concentrates on the school's core business, the quality of teaching and learning. Advice and guidance from educational leaders about improving the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom can be powerful. Bendikson et al. (2012) draw attention to this through their discussion about the importance of the school principal talking with other school leaders and teachers about pedagogy. The literature emphasises that the influence of the principal and other senior leaders on student learning success is often indirect (Bendikson et al., 2012; Cardno, 2012; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Pina, Cabral & Alves, 2015; Robinson et al., 2009). However, effective schools need a strong "focus on leader involvement in teaching and learning" (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 37). Hattie (2012) concurs and challenges instructional leaders to become learning leaders who "construct the learning of adults in the schools" (p. 154), thus maximising their impact on teaching practice and effectiveness and influencing teacher expectations.

The literature suggests that the implicit communication of high expectations for the learning success of every student is an essential component of a high performing school (Hattie, 2012; Rubie-Davies, 2015). Hattie (2012) insists that high expectations are non-negotiable and "articulating high expectations" (p. 153) is a key way that senior leaders influence teachers and their practice. He describes how this practice, along with consultation, effective school processes, and reviewing achievement data regularly is motivating for teachers and students. Rubie-Davies (2015) agrees with the importance of articulation, but she insists that this alone is not effective communication. She emphasises that teachers with high expectations have classrooms with stimulating learning activities, mixed-ability grouping of students, goal-setting specific to each student and that these teachers "regularly evaluated student progress, and feedback was focused on the student goals and next steps in learning" (p. 183). Therefore, along with articulation must be guidance as to what this looks like in the classroom and support for teachers to emulate this practice. This view has been previously echoed by Seashore Louis et al. (2010) when they stated that principals often "wrongly assumed that if a vision of high-quality instruction was well articulated then high-quality instruction would happen" (p. 91). Words alone are not an effective form of communicating high expectations; teachers need the support of actions to promote the effectiveness of their expectations in a school.

The importance of targeted professional learning and development in promoting the effectiveness of teacher expectations is also addressed in the literature (Bishop et al., 2009; McDonald et al., 2016; Rubie-Davies et al., 2015; Weinstein, 2002). Bishop et al. (2009) identify how "pathologizing classroom practices such as transmission teaching, remedial programs and behaviour modification programs" (p. 736) can perpetuate low expectations for Māori students. In an effort to raise teacher expectations and challenge deficit theorising, these researchers speak of a prior project that focused on targeted professional learning and development (PLD) with strong links to classroom practice and relationships. Literature by McDonald et al. (2016) also focuses on the merits of PLD with links to classroom practice. These researchers discuss the aim of their intervention project as being to "change teacher expectations for their students by informing them about the strategies and practices used by high-expectation teachers" (p. 290). They explain that

PLD for teachers must be linked to student learning but are clear in expressing their belief that, more often than not, PLD cannot be accurately assessed with regard to changing teacher practices in the classroom and positively impacting student learning success. McDonald et al. (2016) explain that exposing teachers to “the beliefs and practices of high-expectation teachers” (p. 293) was an important first step in their intervention; this was then followed up with classroom visits to identify how the strategies that had been previously discussed were being implemented in the classroom. Whilst this was not the entirety of the project process, McDonald et al.’s. (2016) approach reinforces their belief in the importance of PLD for teachers being linked to classroom practice to promote high expectations in classrooms.

There is literature such as that by Brault et al. (2014) that identifies school climate as an influencing factor on teacher expectations. Brault et al. (2014) explain that school climate is a broader concept of school culture and is influenced by perceptions about values – it “refers to the school’s atmosphere” (p. 150). Teacher expectations, according to Brault et al. (2014) are higher when teachers believe that their colleagues place value on “learning and academic achievement, engagement in academic work, and interpersonal respect” (p. 150). These researchers explain that it is imperative that teachers understand what influences the expectations that they have of their students and their learning success. Understanding the conscious and unconscious effect of school climate on influencing their expectations will promote the effectiveness of teachers’ expectations.

#### The importance of trust in teachers’ expectations

A key theme explored in the literature is the crucial role that trust has in classroom learning (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000; Weinstein, 2002). Classroom learning opportunities are influenced by teacher expectations and Weinstein (2002) explains that learning opportunities can be constrained for some students because of differentiated expectations of various students from the teacher. She discusses the way that a selection-based classroom culture that distinguishes students by their achievement levels can result in “labelling and differential expectations” (p. 140) being communicated to students. Weinstein (2002) explains that students who experience low expectations from their teacher often receive less trust from their teacher and in turn trust that teacher less. This can potentially lead to long-term detrimental effects in a student’s education. Weinstein (2002) believes that some students can “find themselves locked into a cycle of low achievement out of which they cannot escape” (p. 173). She notes that “children always want a more positive, respectful and trusting climate” (p. 174) that fosters equality, rather than focussing on labelling and difference. Tschannen-Moran et al. (2000) examine trust and its role in society and in organisations such as schools and believe that “trust is pivotal in efforts to improve education” (p. 550). Their discussion about the importance of trust in effective relationships expands to the student and teacher relationship with their summation that a student “must trust their teachers in order to learn” (p. 551). Tschannen-Moran et al. (2000) explain that if a student does not trust their teacher, their focus is on “self-protection and away from learning” (p. 585). Reflection on literature previously discussed, such as Timmermans et al. (2016) where influences on teacher expectations such as student confidence levels and work habits, strongly suggests

trust plays an important role influencing teacher expectations in regard to student learning success.

Literature by Hattie (2012) emphasises the importance of trust as a contributor to student optimism and high expectations. He explains that students need their teacher to show them that they understand their point of view and “trust means students seeing the teacher believes in them – especially when they are struggling” (p. 140). Trust is one of four attributes that Hattie (2012) identifies in a student-centred teacher. Classrooms with these teachers have a climate that is fair and trustworthy where mistakes are viewed as an essential part of learning. He also explains that students in these classes know their teachers have high expectations for their learning, believe in them and know them as the individuals they are, thus demonstrating the importance of trust in teachers and their expectations.

Another important idea that is evident in the literature is that learning partnerships in the classroom need trust to exist and be effective (Bishop et al., 2009; Bishop, 2010; Rubie-Davies et al., 2015) Bishop et al. (2009) uses evidence from student interviews to explain the importance of trust. A student narrative shared the following about a teacher: “You can tell that he respects us, because when it comes to learning big time he’s always there...you can rely on him” (p. 737). Bishop et al. (2009) explain the merits of co-constructing the learning where students and teachers are “co-learners” (p. 740), explaining that these partnerships have a foundation of high expectations and mutual respect. Literature by Rubie-Davies et al. (2015) builds on this idea by identifying that teachers with high expectations for the learning success of all of their students create a sense of community in their classroom where students are provided with choices about their learning. Students are respected learning partners in the classroom and collaboration is enacted in these classrooms. They discuss the “warmer classroom climate” (p. 75) created by teachers with high expectations where engagement levels are high and interaction between the students and the teacher is positive. Students work with their teachers to “choose the focus for their learning goals” (p. 75) and teachers provide regular feedback directly related to students’ learning. According to these researchers, this classroom environment increases student motivation. Weinstein (2002) expands this idea to a discussion about the role of trust in effective classroom relationships. She explains that “differential trust” (p. 108) affects teacher interaction with students and students associate this as an indication of “their academic abilities” (p. 108). As Bishop et al. (2009) do, Weinstein (2002) uses student voice to articulate the importance of trust in enhancing student learning success and the differences experienced when students feel their teacher has high or low expectations of their learning success. Students, she explains, who feel their teacher has high expectations of their learning success, trust that their teacher knows their learning capabilities, expects them to meet certain learning levels and will help them if they do not.

Trust expands into demonstrating care in the classroom. There is literature that explores the importance of care as a means of demonstrating high expectations in the classroom (Bishop et al., 2009; Robinson, 2011; Walkey et al., 2103). Robinson (2011) believes that students stay away

from classes that they cannot connect with. She explains that when a student feels that their teacher cares for them enough to know who they are as individuals and what is important there is an increase in feelings of connection. Walkey et al. (2013) articulate that students who have low learning aspirations usually believe that their teacher does not care about their learning; students often lack the motivation to succeed in the classroom when they believe their teacher is detached and does not demonstrate care for them. Therefore, a teacher that does not demonstrate care does not promote high aspirations for learning success and this lack of care is perceived by students as an overt way of communicating low expectations in the classroom.

The literature also emphasises that student engagement is “influenced by the level of trust students experience” (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011, p. 95) in the classroom. MacDonald et al. (2016) explain that students also need to feel connected with what is happening in the classroom and this connection is found in classrooms of teachers with high expectations. They explain that the classroom climate “should be a secure environment” (p. 303). A number of researchers expand on this idea further by identifying that the classroom climate of a teacher with high expectations optimises learning success by making it safe to make mistakes, allowing students to make choices about their learning, and feeling empowered to take ownership for contributing to their learning success (Bishop et al., 2009; Hattie, 2012; Stoll et al., 2003; Robinson, 2011; Rubie-Davies, 2015). Trust is central to this classroom climate, and classrooms with strong relational trust are perceived to be fair to everyone. As Bishop (2010) describes, there are rules and boundaries, and these classrooms are organised environments conducive to learning. Trust and respect are fundamental components of a classroom where the teacher has high expectations for the learning success of all students.

An important theme in the literature is that trust is also fundamental in supporting pedagogical change (Bush et al., 2013; Cardno, 2012; Hattie, 2012; Rubie-Davies, 2015; Robinson, 2011; Robinson et al., 2009). As previously mentioned, the classroom of a teacher with high expectations has components such as flexible grouping, a positive and safe classroom climate and individual learning goals for each student (Rubie-Davies, 2015). Rubie-Davies (2015) explains that in order for teachers to develop their practice to enable high expectations to be a reality for every one of their learners, they need to feel safe enough to expose their pedagogical weaknesses without feeling judged. Rubie-Davies (2015) articulates that it is challenging for teachers to share difficulties that they may be experiencing if trust in colleagues and leadership does not exist. Robinson et al. (2009) also believe this to be true, explaining that school improvement requires relational trust to encourage “levels of enquiry” and “risk-taking” (p. 47). These researchers believe that pedagogical support is fundamental to raising student outcomes and school leaders can be influential. However, they explain that even the educational leader with the strongest level of pedagogical knowledge will be ineffective if there is a lack of trust in this person. Hattie (2012) builds on the importance of pedagogical leadership; he believes there needs to be learning leaders in schools who ensure that all teachers continue to develop their pedagogy. However, he is clear that trust is imperative, as trust allows for discussions about the need for and results of changed actions in the classroom. He explains that high expectations of teachers

and schools are non-negotiable, and teachers who have high expectations for learning success tend to have these expectations for all of their students. Fundamental to high expectations for all students is an ability to see learning from the learner's perspective and this may be a change in mind-set that requires a teacher to put trust in a colleague in order for change to begin.

The literature also examines the collaborative nature of schools that have teachers with high expectations of their students (Stoll et al., 2016; Weinstein, 2002). Leo (2015) discusses how schools can be "more effective when collective expectations are important to everyone" (p. 468), and discusses the importance of building a vision for a school where high expectations are a shared expectation. What is imminently clear from the literature is that building a school culture where every teacher has high expectations of the learning success of every student requires a culture of strong relational trust. Literature by Rubie-Davies (2015) examines the process of creating a high expectation school. She explains that "the first step in creating a school in which all teachers have high expectations for all students is to create a collaborative community among the teachers" (p. 218). A high trust environment is fundamental to creating this community according to Rubie-Davies (2015), as teachers need to feel safe asking for help and also feel safe making mistakes from which they can learn. She is adamant that teachers must work together and learn from each other to develop high expectation in every classroom of a school. Teachers must trust that there will not be too many changes demanded of them in an overwhelming manner, and that support will be given in a "collaborative" and "non-judgemental manner" (p. 220). Trust is essential in developing a school culture where teachers have high expectations of the learning success of all of their students.

#### Developing a school culture of high expectations

The power of the culture of an organisation is a theme explored in the literature (Bolman et al., 2013). These researchers explain that culture influences how and why things are done in an organisation. As previously mentioned, collaboration is fundamental to developing a culture of high expectations for the learning success of every student (Rubie-Davies, 2015). She describes the strength of a collaborative community where staff "work together constructively and as a community of professionals" (p. 224). Weinstein (2002) believes that schools with a culture where teachers are encouraged to work together are more likely to have a greater number of teachers with high expectations. She explains that a school's senior leaders who immerse themselves in the instructional life of their school by working alongside their teachers can contribute significantly to a school culture. The culture that permeates is one of high expectations for the learning success of all students.

Weinstein (2002) also examines the connection between the school culture and the classroom culture. She explains that they must reflect each other when attempting to raise expectations in a school. According to Weinstein (2002), school processes and expectations influence teacher expectations, but high expectations for all students can be difficult for a teacher to have if the school culture is one that is "highly stratified" (p. 202) in academic expectations. Ultimately, Weinstein (2002) believes that schools need to "move from a selection-driven achievement



culture to a development-focused one" (p. 290). This, she explains, means providing students with curricula that is challenging, allowing students to have opportunities to learn rather than have restrictions placed on them. Such a school culture will encourage inclusive practice in the classroom rather than promoting restriction. As long as schools categorise students and focus exclusively on achievement, student difference will constrain rather than inform the teaching. An inclusive school culture will promote an inclusive classroom culture where the "intrinsic motivation of students" (Weinstein, 2002, p. 207) can be fostered and a culture of belief in all students having the ability to be successful learners can be developed. This is essential in fostering high expectations from teachers.

## **Teachers' practice in regard to expectations**

This section will discuss elements of effective teachers practice. I then examine student responses to teachers' practice, the enablers to and barriers of effective teachers' practice. Finally, I examine deficit theorising and the role of bias in teachers' expectations.

### Effective teachers' practice

There are suggestions that there are commonalities in the practice of effective teachers (Bohlmann et al., 2013; Good et al., 2000; Rubie-Davies, 2015; Rubie-Davies et al., 2015; Weinstein, 2002). Rubie-Davies et al. (2015) explain that teachers with high expectations work with individual students to meet their learning needs; they emphasise this practice as effective. These researchers believe that teachers with high expectations "set mastery goals with each of their students based on regular formative evaluation of their learning needs" (p. 75). They maintain that regular reviewing of these goals with the student concerned is imperative, as is providing students with regular feedback about their progress. Their belief is that these are effective forms of communication. In the classrooms of teachers with high expectations, Rubie-Davies et al. (2015) describe the use of flexible grouping where student choice is promoted, and all students have "a similar opportunity to learn" (p. 82). They also explain that effective practice in the classroom that demonstrates that the teacher has high expectations is where "student autonomy" (p. 75) is promoted, and teachers generally have better relationships with their students. Weinstein (2002) concurs, and develops her discussion about the importance of flexible grouping with her explanation that outlines how teachers who use "differentiated learning groups" (p. 70) in their classrooms often provide students with different learning opportunities and promote the labelling of students. These groups, she believes, can also erode the connection to learning and school for students who are placed in the lowest group and the academic ability of some students can be "seriously underestimated" (p. 83). Goal setting is also an effective practice according to Weinstein (2002). Like Rubie-Davies et al. (2015), she implores goals to be learning based rather than focussing on performance. She also believes that classroom climate is important, effective practice incorporates "highly involved" (p. 171) teachers, student choice and ownership, and the development of reciprocal relationships between student and teacher. Rubie-Davies (2015) demonstrates that her line of thinking is in-line with other literature reviewed. She believes there are three elements of an effective teacher's practice: "flexible grouping, class

climate, and goal setting” (p.220), and she is adamant that these are effective practices of teachers with high expectations.

A prominent theme explored in the literature is that effective teachers connect with their students by ensuring that their students know they care and they believe in their ability to be successful in their classroom (Bishop et al., 2009; Rubie-Davies, 2015; Walkey et al., 2013). Rubie-Davies (2015) identifies how teachers with high expectations ensure that every student in their class makes progress with their learning. This is effective practice. Walkey et al. (2013) discusses how students perceive differential treatment of students if they believe that teachers have high or low expectations for student learning success. They explain that teacher encouragement is important to students. These researchers believe that students tend to do their best when they know that teachers believe in them. The fostering of such a positive relationship, they explain, results in better learning outcomes for students. Literature by Bishop et al. (2009) speaks of the importance of teachers caring about the performance levels of their students and also caring and appreciating the cultural identity of their students. These researchers also believe that effective teacher practice is based on “positive learning relationships” (p. 740), where learning is co-constructed in the classroom and relationships between student and teacher are partnership-based, not hierarchical. Bishop et al.’s. (2009) research emphasises the importance of the learner as an active participator rather than a passive receiver, thus empowering the learner by increasing motivation, engagement and ownership of their learning success. This practice stems from care for each student and belief in their ability to be a collaborative partner in their learning journey.

The literature speaks of effective teachers having high expectations that are realistic for each student (Good et al., 2000; Rubie-Davies, 2015). Rather than having general expectations, Rubie-Davies (2015) clarifies that effective practice by teachers focuses on the augmentation of “the learning trajectory of all students” (p. 218) in their class. Literature by Good et al. (2000) discusses not only the importance of teachers having high expectations for every student in their class, they are adamant that while these expectations must be positive they must “not be carried to the point of distorting reality” (p. 104). They explain that it is important to acknowledge and appreciate that students have differing “learning abilities and interests, and these cannot be eliminated through wishful thinking” (pp. 104-5). In a similar vein to Rubie-Davies (2015), Good et al. (2000) discuss effective practice concentrating on each student making progress with their learning. They maintain that teachers need to “form and project expectations that are as positive as they can be while still remaining realistic” (p. 107). In essence they believe that effective teachers know they are “change agents” (p. 107), they concentrate on developing and positively progressing each student’s learning in their class.

#### Students’ responses to teachers’ practice

There is clear evidence in the literature that students are aware of the expectations that their teacher has for their learning success and teacher expectations are influential (Brault et al., 2014; Peterson et al., 2016; McKown et al., 2008; Weinstein, 2002). McKown et al. (2008) develop this idea with their explanation that “the more children perceive teachers treating high and low

achieving students differently, the stronger the predictive relationship between teacher expectations and year-end achievement” (p. 238). These researchers describe how students can often internalise teacher expectations, and perceived differential treatment and expectations can significantly contribute to the achievement gap. Opinions such as these are supported by researchers such as Bishop (2010), who states that a teacher’s actions are affected by their opinions about the students in front of them and students respond in a like-minded manner. Brault et al. (2014) reiterate this point by explaining that students believe their teachers’ expectations and act accordingly. These researchers discuss how teachers who have low expectations tend to give their students “less instructional feedback or less challenging subject matter” and students often “come to believe they are low achievers and behave as such” (p. 149). Therefore, low expectations are as influential as high expectations; low expectations promote lower levels of engagement and learning success. Researchers such as Good et al. (2000) and Weinstein (2002) believe that students are keen observers. They notice differences in opportunities presented to themselves and their peers, they also notice differences in teacher interaction with specific students (Good et al., 2000). According to these researchers, students can perceive differential treatment by the teacher between students “as biased and inappropriate behaviour” (p. 88), and that students need help to understand why there may be differences in the way that some students are treated by their teacher. These researchers explain that if students do not understand the rationale for this differentiation then students may respond to this practice by becoming disengaged in the learning, especially if they perceive that other students get more challenging classwork. Weinstein’s (2002) agreement is reiterated in her discussion about the importance of giving all students access to a challenging curricula, but ensuring that the needs of the individual learner are met. She describes the importance of teacher expectations to the self-efficacy of many students and that student motivation can erode, if ability-based practice permeates through the classroom.

Another dominant theme in the literature is that students respond favourably to teachers who prioritise relationships with students in their classes (Bishop et al., 2009; Bohlmann et al., 2013; Hattie, 2012; Robinson, 2011). Through their research, Bishop et al. (2009) identify that Māori students believe they are “able to thrive at school” when they feel that they have “good relationships with their teachers” (p. 736). These authors discuss the strength in teacher commitment to knowing their students individually, genuinely believing in their students’ ability to learn, and demonstrating commitment to building “caring and learning relationships” (p. 737). Learning partnerships where students bring their identity and knowledge safely into the classroom are significant. Bishop et al. (2009) are veracious in their view that learning partnerships and shared ownership for learning rectifies power imbalances. In classrooms where expectations are high for all learners, students and teachers communicate effectively together and they learn together. As previously mentioned, learners are empowered by choice and autonomy and Hattie (2012) challenges teachers to see the learning from the student’s point of view. He explains that students value teachers who know them as individuals and think about how they learn. Teachers who are student-centred, Hattie (2012) explains, are optimistic about student learning and they

prioritise positive relationships with their learners. Students respond favourably to this practice by the teacher and a climate of trust exists in their classrooms.

Throughout her work, Rubie-Davies (2015) emphasises that “students learn what they are given the opportunity to learn” (p. 218). She believes that students respond positively to the elimination of streaming. As previously mentioned, the practice of flexible grouping is found in classrooms where teachers have high expectations for all of their learners and that students react positively to this learning environment, as they are able to choose activities and learning experiences. Rubie-Davies (2015) believes that students respond to this practice with increased motivation, engagement and self-efficacy levels. Other researchers, such as Bohlmann et al. (2013) and Weinstein (2002), also endorse the merits of flexible grouping in the classroom. Importantly, Rubie-Davies (2015) does acknowledge the scepticism that this practice may generate when discussing that countries like New Zealand are anchored in educational strategies such as ability-based groups within classrooms. However, she is adamant that this classroom practice is likely to result in the largest learning gains for the students involved.

Non-verbal communication can have significant impact on students, as Babad and Taylor (1992) explain, students are attuned to a teacher’s body language and facial expressions. These researchers surmise that students can ascertain whether a teacher has a high or low expectancy of them and their peers from these non-verbal cues as “teachers probably have distinctive nonverbal styles” (p. 124). Babad et al. (1991) believe that students of all ages are “keen observers of subtle nuances” (p. 232). Even though teachers may believe that they are exercising control when talking directly to students, they demonstrate “more negative affect” (p. 214) when talking to students of whom they have low expectancy. These researchers explain that there is more likely to be a condescending tone to a teacher’s voice, increased tension, and less warmth. As previously mentioned, as sophisticated observers, students will undoubtedly be affected by these differences in communication. Students are affected by this practice as students who have teachers with high expectations of them receive “a more positive climate than the low expectancy student” (Babad et al., 1991, p. 232).

#### Enablers of effective teachers’ practice

There is literature that suggests that the principal can be an enabler of effective teachers’ practice. As previously mentioned, PLD is instrumental in developing teacher practice of high expectations in their classroom. A principal can demonstrate their support by actively developing the focus, delivery, and receiving of professional learning and development in their schools (Robinson et al., 2009; Seashore Louis et al., 2010). Rubie-Davies (2015) explains that the principal is critical in creating “a collaborative community among teachers” and this is “the first step in creating a school in which all teachers have high expectations for all students” (p. 219). She explains that the principal can help to create an atmosphere where teachers feel comfortable with the fact that they are “learners too” (p. 220). This atmosphere is not dissimilar to effective classroom practice where it is safe to make mistakes and ask for help, as this is a process of learning. Rubie-Davies (2015) believes that PLD should be led by “teachers who have strengths” (p. 220) in the practice of high

expectations in the classroom and the principal is instrumental in encouraging these teachers to take this lead. She explains that as well as sharing the strengths of these individuals, this practice reinforces the importance “that everyone’s ideas are respected and valued” (p. 220), and becomes an enabler of effective collaboration, which is fundamental in a school where teachers have high expectations.

School expectations are enablers of effective teachers’ practice. Brault et al. (2014) maintain that teachers have higher expectations for student learning success when the school has a climate where “high achievement, learning, school engagement, and perseverance were valued” (p.156). Researchers such as Good et al. (2000) agree, stating that “high expectations and commitment to bringing about student achievement are part of a pattern of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that characterise schools that are successful in maximising their students’ learning gains” (p. 99). Priority given to learning success for all students is a powerful determining factor that influences teacher expectations in the classroom.

A dominant theme in the literature is that enhanced collective responsibility in schools can have positive effects on meeting the learning needs of students (Bendikson et al., 2012; Rubie-Davies, 2015; Robinson, 2011; Stosich, 2016). Building on the idea of collaboration and school expectation discussed above, Brault et al. (2014) discuss the importance of high expectations in schools, they believe that these expectations are a “key component of effective schooling” (p. 148). These researchers also importantly point out that teachers need help in forming positive expectations. Working collectively is a way in which help can be given and gained, it is an enabler of effective practice, and can promote dialogue between colleagues about teaching practice. This dialogue will almost certainly promote reflection and this reflection may result in a change or adaption in classroom practice that enhances the learning success of students. Good et al. (2000) agree that dialogue based on pedagogy between colleagues can encourage teachers to have high expectations of all learners in their classroom. These writers also emphasise the importance of quality feedback to enhance classroom practice. They believe classroom observations are extremely important, but emphasise that it is important that observers are knowledgeable about what to look for to ensure classroom practice enhancement. Hattie (2012) discusses the importance of teachers seeking feedback by trying to see the learning from the perspective of the student. This ability must also be extended to the person who is giving feedback as well, so there are professional learning and development opportunities on multiple levels to schools that promote this practice. Partnerships are promoted, and collegiality is enhanced, strengthening a school’s vision of maximising learning success for all.

Teacher belief is an enabler of effective practice that Hattie (2012) discusses in his book. As previously mentioned, he encourages teachers and school leaders to recognise that they can perpetuate change. Teachers are encouraged to believe in the changes that they can make to student learning, Hattie (2012) encourages teachers to have this view contrary to the idea that achievement levels are “immutable or fixed” (p.162). His point of view is further strengthened by

his insistence that learning must be valued in its own right; it is not solely about achievement. Learning is personal progression. It is a journey, personal to each student.

#### Barriers to effective teachers' practice

A potential barrier examined in the literature is the concept of change (Rubie-Davies, 2015; Stosich, 2016; Weinstein, 2002). Change can be a mechanism for learning, have positive connotations for a person's self-esteem and can strengthen a school's ability to live up to the expectations of its many stakeholders. However, change can also have the opposite effect. Literature that examines the effects of change identifies the importance of realising that change in an organisation such as a school "is a complex, systematic undertaking" (Bolman et al., 2013, p. 377). Fullan (2001) argues that "change is a process and not an event" (p. 40). This idea is further developed by Elkin, Jackson and Inkson (2008) who explain that change is a transitional process and will not be successful if implementation omits the acknowledgement and phasing out of old ways and accepts that there is a transition phase for the acceptance of a new way of doing things. Weinstein (2002) also implores schools to examine the process of change. Teacher individuality is often evident in their classroom practice; therefore, it would be short-sighted to expect that every teacher in a school is either a high or low expectation teacher. Some may have attributes of both in their classrooms. It is essential that PLD around the practice of high expectations to maximise learning success for all students in every class, is structured and meets the needs of teachers. Rubie-Davies (2015) explains that there cannot be too many changes in classroom practice expected at once; one change or adaption needs to be established before moving onto the next. She explains that a barrier to effective teachers' practice "would be to make too many changes too quickly" as teachers will likely "feel overwhelmed and less inclined to assimilate the new practices" (p. 220) into their classrooms. Therefore, schools need to manage the process of change to ensure it is not a barrier to effective teachers' practice.

As previously mentioned, the school principal can be an enabler of effective teacher practice; however, there is literature that examines how the principal can also be a barrier (Rubie-Davies, 2015; Stosich, 2016). Stosich (2016) suggests that teachers need their principal to be supportive of the examination of pedagogy within the school. She believes that a school's principal needs to support changes to ensure that they are school-wide and not just evident in one classroom. This finding suggests that if a school's principal is not supportive, then they can be a potential barrier to effective teacher practice that promotes and engages in high expectations for the learning success of all students. Rubie-Davies (2015) further examines the role of the principal as a barrier in her discussion about the difficulties that teachers may face if their principal does not support the practice of flexible groupings in their classes or mixed-ability class allocation. She believes that this lack of support will leave teachers feeling as if they are working in isolation. As previously mentioned, flexible grouping is one characteristic of the practice of a teacher with high expectations, Rubie-Davies (2015) is adamant that "flexible grouping is the strategy likely to result in the largest learning gains for students" (p. 221). However, she is clear that such practice is often viewed sceptically as the practice of "within-class ability grouping is entrenched" (p. 221) in

New Zealand schools. Changes in practice require support from the principal so that this is not a barrier to effectively practising high expectations for every student in every classroom.

Another potential barrier examined in the literature is the role of assessment in education (Hattie, 2012; Rubie-Davies, 2015; Weinstein 2002). Rubie-Davies (2015) believes that education is too reliant on assessment results. She comments in her literature that this intensive focus on assessment contributes to societal inequalities. The pressure associated with assessment impacts students and teachers. Rubie-Davies (2015) discusses the disillusionment that occurs when some students do not succeed in assessment situations. She also highlights that the focus on assessment encourages teachers to feel that their success as a teacher is based solely on assessment results: “The former vision of education to holistically educate the citizens of tomorrow” (p. 226) may be lost to potentially narrow teaching that concentrates on assessment outcomes rather than the journey or progression of successful learning.

#### Deficit theorising and the role of bias

A prominent theme examined in the literature is the role of deficit theorising in impeding the practice of high expectations in the classroom (Bishop et al., 2009; Bishop, 2010; Rubie-Davies et al., 2016; Walkey et al., 2013). Bishop (2010) explains how deficit theorising centres on the mind-set that teachers have of their students and how thoughts of deficiencies in some students can lead to teaching practice that tends to demonstrate this thinking with interactions and relationships in the classroom that are negative, unproductive, and limiting. Central to research involving Bishop (2009; 2010) is the educational disparity faced by Māori students in New Zealand classrooms. Believing that there has been little shift in educational policies and practices, Bishop et al. (2009) maintain that education “continues to serve the interests of a mono-cultural elite” (p. 735). They also adamantly believe that deficit theorising is responsible for low expectations of Māori students. Evidence, they state, is in the “classroom practices such as transmission teaching, remedial programs and behaviour modification programs” (p. 736). They advocate for the importance of interactive learning in the classroom to maximise student success. The approach requires the teacher to see themselves as a participant, along with the learners, in learning conversations. This effective form of communication allows traditional classroom leadership roles to be challenged. Teachers who engage in learning conversations empower their students by co-constructing the learning with them, thus challenging traditional power imbalances and sharing the leadership of learning in the classroom. By engaging in this practice, teachers support students to be active participants who can take ownership of their learning and share in the teacher’s high expectations of their learning success.

The literature also discusses that teacher expectations can be influenced negatively by seeing students as a member of a stereotypical group rather than as the individuals they are (Rubie-Davies, 2015; Rubie-Davies et al., 2016). Rubie-Davies (2015) believes that as well as culture and ethnicity, aspects such as social class can affect a teacher’s expectations. Often, she believes, if the teacher develops stereotypical views of students they often present differential learning opportunities and tend to be less tolerant of certain behaviours. As a result of this

practice, students “may experience reduced opportunities to learn” (p. 51). She explains that barriers to learning created by the teacher emphasise the negative impact of deficit theorising on teacher practice and expectations. Rubie-Davies et al. (2016) further explore this idea and believe that “teacher expectations are known to contribute to student achievement and, similarly, some student beliefs have been associated with achievement” (p. 72). Therefore, based on the inconsistencies these researchers identify in their discussion about reduced educational opportunities for Māori, there are inconsistencies in teacher expectations. According to these researchers, students who have teachers with low expectations of them often subsume the teacher’s low expectations, feel low self-efficacy and have low motivation levels. This emphasises how the negative effects of deficit theorising can be experienced beyond the classroom lives of students.

As insinuated, deficit theorising is an action resulting from bias. When examining the role of bias in schools it is essential to look to the literature to provide a definition; bias is a reaction to a person’s view of the world, often “seen as deep, cognitive and emotional responses” (Meissel, Meyer, Yao & Rubie-Davies, 2017, p. 58). Bias is undoubtedly an important influence on a person’s expectations of oneself and others. Often demonstrated through a person’s actions, bias is usually the result of deeply ingrained values and beliefs that have been influenced by personal experiences. Bias is usually associated with assumptions and can often be used to rationalise the actions of a person or explain their predisposition to acting or thinking one way rather than another (Bolman et al., 2013; Cardno, 2012; Schein, 2010).

Bias is a real phenomenon that impacts classroom practice and relationships (Bohlmann et al., 2013; Brault et al., 2014; Good et al., 2000; Peterson et al., 2016). Marzano (2007) identifies bias as “one of the most powerful hidden dynamics of teaching because it is typically an unconscious activity” (p. 162). However, whether it is conscious or unconscious, bias exists and it influences teacher expectations. As previously explained, there is literature that emphasises how teacher expectations influence the potential learning success of many students. Teacher expectations are usually reflected in the interaction, or lack of, between the teacher and student; in different learning activities that are available to different students in the classroom, and group and classroom organisation (Weinstein, 2002). McKown et al. (2008) believe that when teachers have high expectations of a student’s learning potential they tend to give that student more attention and provide them with higher level instruction. Good and Nichols (2001) agree with this sentiment and believe teachers generally provide students of whom they have low expectations with less challenging work, but they adamantly believe that “differential teacher behaviour does not equal low teacher expectations” (p. 116). They believe that differential approaches are necessary to meet the learning needs of all students; however, Weinstein (2002) insists this does not mean limiting the exposure to challenging activities and the curriculum. Student learning success and development depend on the learning activities that they can access - difference in learning activities can definitely add to the achievement gap between students (McKown et al., 2008; Peterson et al., 2016). Therefore, teacher bias can severely hinder or incredibly support the



learning success of individuals by influencing a teacher's expectations and affecting teacher practice in the classroom.

The literature suggests that there are many influences that create bias in teachers and acknowledging and suppressing this bias is difficult (Peterson et al., 2016; Turner, Rubie-Davies, & Webber, 2015). Prejudicial behaviour can be associated with bias and automatically conjures up images surrounded by negative connotations. However, prejudice can also positively impact the learning success of some students often because of what and who these students 'aren't' rather than whom and what they 'are'. Turner et al. (2015) discuss the effect of teacher prejudice based on specific ethnic groups. These researchers believe such a prejudice is critical in shaping teacher expectations; this is because a teacher cannot suppress their feelings of bias and their bias will influence the teacher's behaviour. Peterson et al. (2016) explain that there are significant influences such as a student's prior achievement, gender and ethnicity that can potentially affect teacher expectations. They also identify other factors such as a student's personality, family connections and even a child's name that can, albeit to a lesser extent, sway a teacher's expectation of a student's learning potential. When challenged about this bias, a teacher may deny the existence of prejudice in their classroom but "may still implicitly show discriminatory behaviours" (Peterson et al., 2016, p. 125). This bias is much harder to tackle as the teacher may or may not be consciously aware of their attitude being reflected through their actions.

Another theme explored in the literature is that bias does not just target individual students. Groups of students and even entire classes can be subject to teacher bias (Brault et al., 2014; Good et al., 2000; Good et al., 2001; Timmermans et al., 2016) and this can affect teacher practice. The commonality - regardless of if the bias is expressed towards an individual student, a group of students or a class - is that bias influences teacher expectations and there is a strong correlation "between high expectations and pupils' progress, development and achievement" (Stoll et al., 2003, p. 53). Without a doubt, teacher expectations are influential. Learning opportunities are often at the mercy of teacher expectations and no one can master what they are not exposed to. When teacher expectations are positive, learning opportunities are plentiful and challenging. However, when learning opportunities are restricted, self-expectation and motivation often reflect this negative bias. Differentiated classes and classroom activities create a hierarchy and, as previously discussed, ultimately impact the self-efficacy of the young person, group or class (Bohlmann et al., 2013; Rubie-Davies, 2006; Rubie-Davies et al., 2016). Naturally if a student, group or class is at the top of the hierarchy, learning experiences will be positive, encouraging, challenging and often extremely rewarding. Walkey et al's. (2013) poignant reminder that teachers are instrumental in encouraging students to have high aspirations and showing them the relationships "between work and a better life beyond school in future years" (p. 312), must be adhered to for the betterment of New Zealand's tomorrow.

In his research, Babad (1985) explains that classroom reality means that "expectancy bias is now an undisputed phenomenon" (p. 175) and it influences the potential learning success of students in a variety of positive and negative ways. As previously identified, students are astute; they know

if there is a difference in treatment and teacher expectations (Good et al., 2000; Peterson et al., 2016; Rubie-Davies et al., 2016; Walkey et al., 2013; Weinstein, 2002). Therefore, students are aware of teacher bias in the classroom. Rubie-Davies et al. (2016) explain that “young students are very sensitive to teachers’ low expectations” (p. 73) and Weinstein (2002) believes that “older students for whom teachers held lower expectations had more negative perceptions of their ability” (p. 164). The link between these authors’ statements is the significant potential of a teacher’s negative bias on all students regardless of their age. A huge limitation to a student’s learning success in the classroom will undoubtedly be repeated exposure to negative and restrictive learning experiences.

However, it is important to acknowledge that there is literature that suggests there are students who can and do resist teacher bias and expectations (Good et al., 2000; Good et al., 2001; Weinstein, 2002). This does not mean that these students are unaware of differential treatment in the classroom. As previously mentioned, students are perceptive; they can identify differences in the classroom, whether it is in teacher interaction or curriculum exposure (Weinstein, 2002). The challenge for secondary schools and students is that as they get older students’ “views of themselves tend to be more influenced by the opinions of others” (Kuklinski & Weinstein, 2001, p. 1557). Teacher bias definitely influences the classroom environment, thereby influencing teacher practice and affecting every student in one way or another.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, literature concerned with teachers’ expectations of students, teachers’ expectations as part of the culture of a school, and teachers’ practice in relation to expectations have been reviewed. This literature review reveals that teacher expectations are potentially very powerful, and they can affect student learning success.

The next chapter discusses the aims and guiding questions of this research and outlines guiding principles in the selection of the appropriate methodological approach to investigate how the communication of high expectations can maximise student learning success in the secondary school classroom. Reflections are also shared about the process of gathering and interpreting the data in this investigation.

# Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

## Introduction

The purpose of this research was to examine the impact of high expectations expressed by classroom teachers in the secondary school environment on maximising student learning success. As mentioned in Chapter One, the aims of this study were: to identify what students and teachers perceive learning success to be; to critically examine how communicating high expectations impacts learning success in the classroom; to critically examine whether the communication of, and belief in, high expectations needs to be a school-wide practice; and to critically examine school-wide practices that enable high expectations to be communicated effectively in classrooms.

The research questions that guided this study were:

- 1) How do teachers define and communicate 'high expectations' in the context of their secondary school students' achievement?
- 2) What other factors do teachers identify as important in the way that the communication of high expectations contributes to learning success for their students?
- 3) What enablers and barriers do teachers experience when communicating 'high expectations' to students?
- 4) In what ways do students perceive that 'high expectations' contribute to their learning success?

This chapter begins with an overview of the influences that guided the methodological approach and research design for this investigation. The rationales for the two methods used, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews, are presented. The rationale for the sampling selection is shared and the sample for this study is examined. The collection of data is discussed with specific reference to the methods used, along with a description of the stages of data analysis. The significance of validity and credibility, and the importance of triangulation, are examined. This chapter ends with a discussion of ethical issues considered.

## Methodological approach

### *Positioning*

A researcher's ontology is influential in the development of research design and in the research processes that are followed. Wellington (2015) defines ontology as "differing beliefs in the nature of reality" (p. 6). This definition emphasises the role of assumptions in a person's ontology. Everyone has assumptions that influence their view of the world and what they believe is their reality. This research project was influenced by a subjective ontological perspective. The belief that the actions of people are motivated by their perceptions of reality was crucial. In essence, perceptions are influenced by personal assumptions, values, beliefs, and interpretations (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012).

As ontology is crucial to research design and process, so is epistemology. Morrison (2005) considers epistemology as “central to research endeavour” (p. 11). Wellington (2015) believes that epistemology can be defined as “the study of nature and the validity of human knowledge” (p. 341). An interpretive epistemology influenced the research design and process in this study. Bryman (2012) explains that an interpretivist epistemological approach focuses on “the understanding of the social world through the examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants” (p. 380). The research design for this project is contrary to the positivist approach where the researcher is an observer, almost external to the data collection process (Saunders et al., 2012). A positivist researcher views people as objects to be observed, feelings and interpretations of those being observed “need to be ruled out, unless they can be rendered observable and measured” (Morrison, 2005, p. 15). As an interpretive researcher, I had to acknowledge that I played a role in this research especially when creating and presenting questions to my research participants. My intention was to engage with my research participants with an aim of looking for rich insights into their perspectives about communicating high expectations to students to maximise learning success in the classroom and exploring reality from my participant’s point of view (Bryman, 2012; Morrison, 2005; Wellington, 2015).

Ontological and epistemological approaches strongly influence the paradigm that shapes a research project. A paradigm is a set of beliefs about how data analysis from researched information “might be patterned, reasoned and compiled” (Morrison, 2005, p. 12). As the “interpretive lens” (Schram, 2006, p. 41) influenced the epistemological approach of this research project, it also influenced the paradigm. Using an interpretive paradigm encouraged my understanding through listening to and interpreting different participants’ perspectives. My intention was that the research data would emerge from open-ended questions answered through the lens of the participants. Data analysis evolved during and post data collection. Bryman (2012) explains that “analysis starts after some of the data has been collected” - this is the “iterative” (p. 566) approach. I found ongoing analysis shaped my strategy for data collection.

### *Methodology*

Educational research is dominated by two methodological approaches - quantitative and qualitative. Theory and its role is one of the crucial differences between these approaches. Punch (2009) explains that “theory verification” is central to quantitative research, whereas “qualitative research has typically been more concerned with theory generation” (p. 23). This suggests that quantitative research is more likely to follow a deductive reasoning process and qualitative research lends itself more to inductive reasoning (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Mutch, 2013). Another key difference between the two approaches is in the type of data collected. The concentration on gathering numerical data and analysing this using statistical methods by the quantitative researcher contrasts with the qualitative data gathering methods that concentrate on the words of research participants through in-depth “descriptive accounts” (Mutch, 2013, p. 24) of their opinions and experiences (Bryman, 2012; Morrison, 2005; Mutch, 2013; Wellington, 2015). Influenced by a subjective ontology and an interpretive epistemology, this research project comprised a small scale qualitative study from an interpretive perspective. This research aimed

to “understand individual's perceptions” (Bell, 1999, p. 7) about maximising student learning success in the classroom through the communication of high expectations. Participants were encouraged to share their thoughts and insights on this topic. Central to the success of this research project was my appreciation of each participant's reality.

## **Research design**

Punch (2009) explains that research design is connecting research questions to the data collected. Just as the research approach is fundamental, so are the research methods. Methods are the tools, or the instruments used by the researcher to collect data to answer the research questions that have been posed (Cohen et al., 2007; Mutch, 2013; Punch, 2009).

### *Methods of data collection*

The interpretive paradigm that influenced the research design of this project and the four key research questions that were developed suggest that enquiring and emerging methods, where questions asked of participants were mainly open-ended and could build on each other through the data gathering stage, were ideal. Semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews were used in this research project - both of these methods are commonly used in qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). Both are primary methods and have the capacity, if designed and executed well, to provide rich data through the use of questioning techniques that will encourage the research participants to express their opinions based on their personal experiences and interpretations.

### *Semi-structured Interviews*

Interviews in some form are the most commonly used qualitative method of data collection (Bryman, 2012; Morrell & Carroll, 2010). It is an ideal interpretive method to probe and elicit a participant's “thoughts, values, prejudices, views, feelings and perspectives” (Wellington, 2015, p. 138). Interviews can generate in-depth data as they are a multi-sensory method, and are a vehicle designed to provide verbal and non-verbal data for interpretation and analysis. What is said and how it is said are two extremely important forms of data that can be captured during an interview (Cohen et al., 2007).

Interviews can vary in structure. As a qualitative researcher influenced by an interpretive perspective, semi-structured interviews were the most suitable form of interview to use in my research. The flexibility of this style of interview allowed me to use an interview guide with thirteen pre-planned questions, along with probes, to elicit in-depth responses to the four questions that framed this research. Another strength of using semi-structured interviews as a data gathering method was that they were “more conversational than a structured interview” (Morrell et al., 2010, p. 82). This conversational tone allowed for some deviation from the interview guide that occurred when a participant shared their personal experiences and reflections. This deviation strengthened the data collected and while it could prompt some researchers to include an extra or different question in future interviews, it enabled me to ask an extra question to clarify a response that had been shared. Of equal importance, the interview guide was a useful tool for me to use to get an

interview back on track if a participant deviated too much from the topic of discussion (Bell, 1999; Creswell, 2008; Wagg, 2005).

#### *Focus group interviews*

Focus group interviews were the second method used to provide suitable data to support the research design of this study. Focus group interviews provided a forum where my research participants could share their opinions and perspectives about communicating high expectations to maximise student learning success in the classroom. However, whereas semi-structured interviews are conducted with individual participants, focus groups are an “intensive group discussion ‘focused’ around particular issues” (Waldegrave, 2003, p. 251).

Focus groups are a more time-effective method of data collection than semi-structured interviews (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2008). Literature that describes research methods suggests that the use of focus groups would be more successful as a method of data collection if they were relatively small in size (Thorne, 2008; Waldegrave, 2003). Wellington (2015) explains that a focus group of “three or four people together can often have advantages” (p. 148), however he states that, in reality, they are usually “a small group made up of perhaps six to ten individuals with certain common features or characteristics” (p. 241). A considerable benefit of the use of focus group interviews was that participants seemed to feel more secure and less isolated than if they were to participate in a one-on-one interview. It was anticipated that participants would be able to discuss their opinions, potentially prompt each other, and hopefully cause the other participants, and themselves, to reflect on comments made. This happened in both focus group interviews particularly as the participants grew in confidence. Cohen et al. (2007) believes that focus groups can generate more insights than an interview, thus making them an effective method in qualitative research. To an extent this was demonstrated in the focus group interviews that I conducted, especially in relation to the data gathered pertaining to the fourth research question.

As with the semi-structured interviews conducted in this research, a set of pre-planned guiding questions were created prior to gathering data. These questions were mainly open-ended “designed to capture the in-depth experiences of respondents” (Rosenthal, 2016, p. 510). Initially the tone of each focus group was quite formal; this may have been because the participants were working with me for the first time and felt a little nervous. However, as each focus group discussion progressed the tone developed to be conversational, demonstrating Wellington’s (2015) view that participants “brought together in a suitable conducive environment can stimulate or ‘spark each other off” (p. 242). This was particularly evident when focus group participants shared past experiences that other group members could relate to or had shared memories of.

### **Sampling**

Sampling is crucial to producing quality research. As a qualitative researcher, the validity of my findings was greatly dependant on the sample of participants selected. Participants needed to be knowledgeable and have experiences that allowed them to share their knowledge about

communicating high expectations to maximise student learning success in the classroom. Therefore, the title of this research and the four research questions that were developed provided important sampling direction for this project (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013; Punch, 2009). As teachers and students are the focus of the title and research questions, they were the participants that made up the research sample.

Wellington (2015) explains that there are two types of sampling in research; “probability and non-probability sampling” (p. 117). He believes that non-probability sampling can be more convenient and “more informative in qualitative research” (p. 117). A non-probability sampling strategy using purposive sampling was used in this research project. The purposive sampling method is most commonly used in small-scale qualitative research as the researcher aims to “seek to generate rich, contextually laden, explanatory data” (Guest et al., 2013, p. 47). Purposive sampling is the deliberate selection of participants who have the knowledge and experience about what is being researched (Bryman, 2012; Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2008; Guest et al., 2013; Punch, 2009; Thorne, 2008). As Mutch (2013) explains, “purposive samples are selected because they suit the purpose” (p. 50) of the research that is being undertaken. Students were one sample group in my research because they were the subject of my research topic and their experiences and perspectives could be compared to my other sample group of teachers (Guest et al., 2013).

The depth of the data collected was crucial for the validity of the findings of my research; therefore, the sample selected was relatively small. This was important as too many participants overall, or too many participants in either of the methods used, could have meant that breadth could potentially dominate depth of the data collected (Bryman, 2012; Guest et al., 2013). It is essential to note that the sample selected was not intended to “represent the wider population” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 115); instead participants were selected to meet the needs of this research project.

#### *Sample selection*

To ensure that my research was relevant to my colleagues, my intent was to select schools similar to the school where I have worked for the past eleven years. This similarity extended to geographical location and decile rating as initial indicators. This decision shaped my initial preparation for application for approval to begin my research from Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC). Once permission had been gained from AUTEC, I invited two Auckland secondary schools in the geographical vicinity and with decile similarities to participate. Permission was gained to work in each school after speaking with each principal and sharing the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix A) for the school and the School Access Form (see Appendix B) with them. The Participant Information Sheet for the school reinforced the purpose of my research, the intended methods of data collection, the criterion for participants and ethical considerations. Fortunately, both schools agreed to participate. As previously mentioned, this research was a small-scale qualitative study; therefore, the depth of data from two schools was preferred over a breadth of data gathered from more schools.

The research questions that guided this investigation also influenced the parameters that I set around participant involvement. Guest et al. (2013) emphasise the importance of participants being knowledgeable about the topic of research to ensure informative and valid research findings. To adequately answer the interview questions and to enable me to collect appropriate data to make conclusions and present findings based around my research questions, teacher participants needed at least three years of teaching experience in the participating school. It was anticipated that this minimum length of service would enable the participants to draw adequately on their teaching experience, as well as understand and be able to articulate their school values and aspects of the school climate. I requested three teacher participants with a minimum of three years' teaching at each school to participate in a semi-structured interview. I also requested six focus group participants from the Year 13 cohort at each school who were 16 years of age or older. This criterion for participation was twofold; it was anticipated that these students could draw from a range of classroom experiences across at least four years participation in the secondary school environment and they would be of age to consent on their own behalf to participate in this research.

It was anticipated that access to all potential participants, students or teachers, would be "guarded by 'gatekeepers'" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 109) and I would need to be adaptable in my approach in order to meet the needs of the participants and the schools concerned. This was indeed a correct assumption. Each school had a member of staff that I liaised with who ensured that I could meet with participants who had agreed to participate in my research at a time that did not impact on their school commitments. The two schools had different timetable structures and this particularly impacted when I could meet with the focus group discussion participants. In School A Year 13 students had a study period that could be utilised, so potential participants were approached by the school liaison asking for volunteers from this class. School B did not have a study class to use. The school liaison at School B spoke with various Year 13 classes about my research and asked for volunteers to participate in a focus group discussion during a scheduled lunchtime. The school liaison at both schools also organised a room at the school for me to conduct the semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussion.

## **Data collection**

As a qualitative researcher influenced by an interpretive paradigm, the opinions of my participants were paramount to the success of my research. To effectively capture these opinions and perspectives, all participants in both the interviews and focus groups were asked a series of questions. These questions were mainly open-ended to encourage full and descriptive responses (Creswell, 2008; Tolich & Davidson, 2003). However, it is important to note that a couple of closed questions were also useful as they allowed for the checking to see if participants had "thought about, or are aware of the issue" (Tolich et al., 2003, p. 145) being discussed. The raw data generated were the most common form of data generated in qualitative research; that is words, (Robson, 2011). The "sheer volume of information collected" (Davidson & Tolich, 2003, p. 169)



from the participants required careful management to ensure thorough analysis. However, this is not an unusual challenge for a qualitative researcher.

The first qualitative method of data gathering that I used at each school was semi-structured interviews. I had not planned to gather my data in such a formulaic pattern; it just happened to be the organisation that worked best for both schools. My approach reflected the literature of Savin-Baden and Major (2013) who explained that semi-structured interviews were a good approach if there is “only one opportunity to interview someone” (p. 359). Every teacher participant commented on the busyness of the term; it was the middle of Term 3, and I respected and appreciated this. When completing the consent forms, only two of the six teacher participants indicated that they would like a copy of the transcript to check and make amendments if needed prior to my analysis.

As previously mentioned I used an interview guide to order my pre-planned questions. This guide had space for note-taking directly after each question aimed at supporting the audio data collected. Initially I had planned to ask each participant 8 to 10 questions designed around the four key research questions that shaped this investigation. However, when finalising my questions on my interview guide the total number of questions expanded to 13 (see Appendix C). With the literature of Tolich et al. (2003) in mind, all of the introductory questions were open-ended as they were designed to put the participants at ease and to get them talking. Most of the remaining questions were also open-ended because, as I reflected on the literature by Wellington (2015), these were designed to entice the sharing of personal experiences and perspectives. However, there were closed questions that were important to ask and each of these had a pre-planned probe designed to elicit explanation and detail.

Semi-structured interviews are advantageous in qualitative research because of their flexible nature (Bryman, 2012; Cohen et al., 2007; Morrell et al., 2010; Punch, 2009). Reflecting on literature by Savin-Baden et al. (2013) that emphasised the importance of listening to and observing the participants as the researcher, was important in this research. Of equal importance was reflecting on the words of Bryman (2012), who emphasised the importance of being attentive to what is being said and paying attention to “the way that they say it” (p. 482). Another of my focuses prior to gathering data were to heed the words of Savin-Baden et al. (2013) who stress that a prominent weakness of this method of data collection is that semi-structured interviews “do not always provide the interviewee with the opportunity to offer his or her unique perspective” (p. 359). Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2012) also influenced my research with their emphasis around the lack of flexibility and the limitations and constraints that standardised wording in open-ended interview questions can cause. As I wanted to gather rich data from each participant’s point of view, I was extremely mindful of not influencing my participants in any way. Literature by Bryman (2012) explains that failing to do this would potentially result in exerting my own bias. However, upon reflection, being mindful of the potential limitations and constraints of this method of data collection meant that the interviews that I conducted at School A lacked a lot of the flexibility that they could have, or should have, had. My interaction with these participants, whilst being

courteous and appreciative, was potentially too distant and not as conversational in tone as it could have been. Reflection about my practice as an interviewer was important as this influenced the semi-structured interviews at School B. I endeavoured to use a more conversational tone when conducting the semi-structured interviews in School B and a less formal tone emerged.

Each semi-structured interview varied immensely in time. Wagg (2005) maintains that it is hard to estimate the time that each interview will take, and this proved to be very true. My Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix D) indicated that an interview would take 45 minutes. In reality interview times spanned from just over 15 minutes to almost 60 minutes in length. However, these times did not impact the contribution each participant made. The difference was essentially the way in which each participant felt they needed or wanted to justify their initial responses. There was certainly value in every semi-structured interview regardless of the length of time each semi-structured interview lasted. Literature by Bryman (2012) explains the importance of taking notes when the participant continues to talk after the interview has officially ended and the recording device has been switched off. This proved to be a valuable piece of advice as four participants initiated further discussion about the topic after the interview had officially ended. The challenge continued to be ensuring that my bias did not impact what they were saying. To guarantee that I did not influence their continued responses in any way I asked their permission to take further notes as they talked and listened rather than contributed my own ideas and perspective to the conversation.

As previously implied, the focus group interviews were the second method of data collection at each school. As with the semi-structured interviews at the first school, the focus group discussion at School A was more challenging than at School B. Literature by Savin-Baden et al. (2013) resonated with my first experience. These writers highlighted an important challenge which was that the quality of data collected depends on the “willingness of the participants and the group dynamics of the conversation” (p. 389). This challenge was especially relevant to the focus group discussion conducted in School A. Four of the six participants made significant verbal contributions to the discussion. The other two participants, while nodding in agreement to the points mentioned by their peers, did not make any verbal contribution. Literature by Frey and Fontana (1991) also proved to be relevant to my research. They explain that group dynamics can significantly “impact interaction” (p. 175) and I saw evidence of this while conducting the focus group discussion at School A. Thinking about my role as the researcher and moderator of the discussion I reflected on the literature by Savin-Baden et al. (2013). I needed to listen, take notes, ask questions and encourage all participants to voice their points of view. Guiding each discussion but not being “too intrusive” (Bryman, 2012, p. 501) was essential in effective facilitation of focus group interviews. Frey et al. (1991) calls this the “non-directive approach” (p. 180). Rather than targeting individuals, I gave the group general encouragement and asked for general contributions whilst making eye contact with each participant in turn. As everyone’s opinion was valid I needed to ensure that every participant had the opportunity to, and felt safe to, express their point of view.

The focus group discussion at School A may have benefitted from better facilitation of the discussion; alternatively, perhaps some of the participants from School A were not as knowledgeable as others about the topic being discussed. Kruger and Casey (2015) discuss the importance of ensuring that all participants are knowledgeable about the topic when selecting participants and these writers remind researchers that they have minimal knowledge about a person's background in a focus group. The only criterion for participation in a focus group discussion for my research project was that each student was Year 13 at their school and 16 years or older in age (see Appendix E). Both of the students from School A who did not contribute verbally met this criterion. Their lack of verbal contribution proved to be evidence of another important consideration that, as with semi-structured interviews, contribution can be beyond words. Communication can extend the verbal boundaries with such non-verbal forms of communication as gesture being valid contribution and adding another dimension to the data gathered.

Wagg (2005) discusses the importance of the setting when conducting interviews. He believes that a comfortable, less formal setting works well. This idea can definitely be expanded to the setting or location of a focus group discussion. In School A, I was given the use of the Boardroom with a set of large tables around the perimeter of the room for participants to sit at. I was given permission to move these tables and formed a smaller rectangle. However, I believe that the formality of the Boardroom was quite intimidating and could have proved influential in the contributions, or lack of, from some participants. In contrast, in School B I was given the use of a small room with an oval table. This room was an official meeting room in the school, but its design was less intimidating and definitely easier to manage as the space was smaller. The shape of the table ensured that there were no gaps between participants and they could converse relatively freely in such a small, yet comfortable setting. All participants in School B contributed regularly to the focus group discussion. As previously mentioned, this did not occur in School A.

Kruger et al. (2015) explains that spontaneous comments can be made during focus group discussions and individuals may use words differently. These writers also believe that differing points of view can arise in focus group situations. Bryman (2012) concurs, explaining that participants can "challenge each other's views" (p. 503). There was evidence of this in the focus group discussion conducted in School A. One participant had differing views to another participant on multiple occasions. However, this participant who seemed to be at odds with the other participant always ensured that everyone knew that it was just an expression of a point of view. This enabled both participants to continue to participate regularly in the discussion. The participants from School B seemed to complement each other more by often building on ideas expressed or providing assistance and support to their peers in the discussion.

## **Data analysis**

Digital audio recordings and note-taking comprised the raw data that was collected from the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. Transcriptions of all digital audio recordings and

notes taken ensured that data was not lost or distorted, as outlined by Cohen et al. (2007). Initially I planned to have all transcripts generated by an external provider. However, due to the cost and the quality of the recording device that I used, I transcribed the focus group interviews and an external provider transcribed the semi-structured interviews. Bryman (2012) emphasises the value of transcribing as it creates opportunity for more in-depth analysis and is a resource that can be viewed by others. Wellington's (2015) warning about the volume of word-for-word transcription proved also to be important for me to heed in anticipation of the size of the resource each semi-structured interview and focus group discussion would generate. However, as Watling (2005) insists, analysis in qualitative research is not "a separate activity which will only be done at the final stages of the project" (p. 262). As Wellington (2015) explains, data analysis is "not a separate stage, coming towards the end of a linear research path" instead it "is an integral part of the whole research process" (p. 260). These transcripts were not to be the beginning of my analysis; instead, they were a resource to continue analysis during the research process and, at times, supported or refuted key ideas that I had already identified through reviewing literature. This initial analysis, especially directly after each semi-structured interview and focus group discussion, enabled me to start identifying some key messages that had been shared by the participants.

Data must be interpreted to create meaning for the findings of research. Once all of the transcripts had been created data analysis could continue. Initial analysis occurred through reading and re-reading each transcript in its entirety, Creswell (2008) calls this "exploratory analysis" (p. 250). Notes that I made during each interview and focus group discussion were also reviewed. Making notes in margins of transcripts and interview notes enabled me to identify key phrases and write down initial ideas about the messages that had been shared through the data. Literature by Bryman (2012) and Lofland and Lofland (1984) refer to this practice as writing memos. Identification of emerging ideas and initial themes was the beginning of the coding process in this research.

Bryman (2012) believes that coding is the breaking down and naming of data. The reviewing of the codes that I identified was an important step in the analysis of the data gathered. This allowed me to look for overlaps in the codes I had used, as well connections and commonalities between the codes. Literature by Creswell (2008) explains that this is extremely important to do, as it is the "inductive process of narrowing" (p. 251) the data. The codes were then developed into categories and presented in table form to illustrate participant perspectives. Key themes then began to emerge from this analysis and synthesising. The literature reviewed prior to gathering the data for this research also influenced the development of this thematic approach. The themes that were identified were "built up out of a group of codes" (Bryman, 2012, p. 578) or categories that I used. These themes then formed the basis of the interpretation and presentation of the findings of my research.

## **Research validity and credibility**

Credibility, trustworthiness and transferability are essential measurements of validity in qualitative research. As previously mentioned, the depth of data gathered was of paramount importance. Unlike a quantitative researcher who is concerned with the reliability of their findings as justification for the generalisations that they make, this research was concerned with ensuring validity. Wellington's (2015) belief that "validity can be seen as a measure of the confidence in, credibility of, or plausibility of a piece of research" (p. 345) resonated deeply with me as a researcher. It was my intention to ensure validity through internal processes and external measures as "the strength of qualitative research lies in its validity" (Davidson & Tolich, 2003, p. 34).

Internal validity was demonstrated in this research project through the recording, transcribing and transparent analysis of the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. External validity of this research will also come from the presentation of findings that are transferrable. Creating and engaging in research that is worthwhile to others has been a key motivation behind this project. Ultimately if a colleague who reads this thesis when it is published and believes the findings are relevant and potentially useful in their school, then this thesis will be validated and successful. As this research gathered qualitative data based on the perceptions of individuals, it is imperative that readers trust that the research process is robust and has been followed (Morrell et al., 2010; Punch, 2005). Ultimately, presenting a thesis that demonstrates integrity will make this research "trustworthy and credible" (Mutch, 2013, p. 109).

Triangulation is important to the validity of a piece of qualitative research (Bush, 2005; Creswell, 2008; Morrell et al., 2010). Bush (2005) believes that triangulation "determines the accuracy of the information" and is "a means of cross-checking data to establish its validity" (p. 68). Triangulation can be achieved through the use of multiple data sources, multiple methods, "theory triangulation" (Wellington, 2015, p. 35) and, as he and Mutch (2013) suggest, by more than one researcher giving their perspective on a specific study. Multiple data sources and multiple methods triangulate this research project. Students and teachers were the two data sources and semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews were the two methods that were used thus allowing triangulation to ensure the validity. Frey et al. (1991) explain that group interviews, such as the focus group interviews used in this research, are an important source of validation as they allow the researcher to gain the opinions of multiple participants "rather than being the definitive statement of a single respondent" (p.178).

## **Ethical considerations**

Wellington (2015) reminds educational researchers that they are people "studying people" (p. 112). It is for this reason that ethical considerations are of paramount importance. Care, respect and integrity are core values that encourage ethical behaviour. These values were fundamental in my interaction with my research participants, just as they were central to my research design. Brooks, te Riele and Maguire (2014) explain that "ethical issues need to be addressed at all

stages of a research project” (p. 14). Wellington (2015) concurs and states that “ethical considerations override all others” (p. 113). Ethical considerations continuously impacted this research. These considerations were at the forefront of my mind as I planned, conducted, analysed and presented my research. Design of the research questions, decisions about the methodological approach and methods used, thoughts about data collection and analysis all involved ethical considerations and potential dilemmas to ponder and work through. These ethical considerations continued to be critical as this research project moved from theory to reality.

As a qualitative researcher it was extremely important that I acknowledged that I was asking a great deal of my participants. I was asking them to share thoughts and experiences that were personal to them. It was imperative that participants trusted the integrity of this research and the integrity of me as the researcher. Demonstrating care and respect for my participants was also essential (Busher, 2005; Creswell, 2008). Ultimately it was my responsibility and intention to carry out this research “as ethically as possible” (Busher, 2005, p. 87) to minimise harm to others and respect the privacy of my participants. This research project was guided by the principles of ethical research as outlined by AUTECH. Primarily these principles are designed to protect research participants, the Auckland University of Technology, the supervisor, the researcher and the research design. It was also envisioned that my primary supervisor would be instrumental in guiding this research project by discussing, outlining and challenging me with potential ethical dilemmas and considerations, and this proved to be very true.

Informed consent was a major ethical consideration in this research project. Busher (2005) and Cohen et al. (2007) believe this is the most important ethical consideration as it encompasses the voluntary nature of participating in academic research. Brooks et al.’s (2014) reminder that “the concept of informed consent is based on the assumption that research should respect the autonomy of those being studied” (p.83) was a crucial consideration for me when designing, implementing, analysing and presenting this research. This research project definitely respected a person’s choice whether to participate or not. Informed consent was sought and gained in order for this research project to progress and ultimately meet its purpose. Morrell et al. (2010) explain that all consent should be sought and gained in written form and this was demonstrated by all participants completing their own Consent Form (see Appendix F; G). Following written approval from AUTECH (see Appendix H), I sought permission from the principals of two Auckland secondary schools to conduct research in their school with members of their teaching staff and student body as participants. This practice correlated with Wellington’s (2015) reminder for researchers that “seeking permission from the right people, through the right channels” (p.115) is essential and it is for this reason that permission to access participants within a school was requested in this way.

Three different Participant Information Sheets were created for my research. The first document was a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix A) for the school and was supported with a form requesting written permission from the principal; the second Participant Information Sheet (Appendix D) was for the teachers who considered participating in the semi-structured interviews.

The third Participant Information Sheet (Appendix E) was for the students who considered participating in the focus group interviews. It was important to use three Participant Information Sheets because the language used needed to be appropriate to the target audience.

Consent from all participants was gained in written form. Prior to gaining participant consent, I verbally reiterated my intention to respect the confidentiality of all participant responses and before beginning each focus group discussion, I asked participants to respect the confidential nature of the conversations that were about to occur and to respect the opinions and contributions of others. I also took this opportunity to ensure that participants had read the Participant Information Sheet and gave them an opportunity to ask any questions that they may have. I placed considerable emphasis on the voluntary nature of their participation and prior to gaining written consent from each participant I sought verbal assurance from them. The teacher and student participants were then asked to read, complete and sign the consent form prior to their participation. One final check to ensure informed consent was gained from the student participants was to ask if anyone had any questions about the consent form that they had signed, prior to beginning the focus group interviews. This proved to be an important step as students from both schools had questions they asked me. One student wanted to know what pseudonym meant, and students from both schools enquired about what the sharing of research findings meant. This question was particularly useful as I was able to explain that the sharing of the summary of the research findings was only possible if every participant consented to it being so. Discussing this also ensured that every focus group participant ticked their preference for the sharing and receiving of research findings as well as indicating their agreement to the statements listed by ticking the available boxes.

Minimising harm was another fundamental ethical consideration for this research project. As Brooks et al. (2014) and Busher (2005) note harm can be physical or psychological in nature and it is the researcher's ethical responsibility to endeavour to avoid harm coming to their participants because of their participation. A key priority of mine was adapting to meet the needs of the participants, especially after reflecting on Busher's (2005) explanation about the researcher's responsibility to minimise the disruption and intrusion in the lives of the participants. To minimise harm, it was imperative that I demonstrated care for the well-being of my participants. This was evident in the types of questions that I used in the interviews and the focus groups that I conducted. Heeding Wagg's (2005) suggestion that all questions that were used in my interview guide were checked for suitability by someone else was important in ensuring care for my participants. Ensuring language was appropriate and professional jargon was minimal were key considerations when writing questions to ask my various participants. Care was also evident in my interaction with all participants, I was always mindful of Bryman's (2012) reminder not to place any participant under any "undue pressure" (p. 479). Both methods selected for this research were flexible and did allow me to be adaptable in when, where and how they took place. Participants from both focus group interviews asked me to reword or repeat questions at times; I also felt it was important to share a summary of their answers to some of the questions throughout the discussion to ensure that my understanding of what they were saying was accurate. I also

ensured the minimisation of harm or risk by giving each teacher participant an opportunity to be sent the transcript of their interview for verification prior to analysis of these transcripts in the next stage of beginning to determine my research findings.

The third ethical consideration is avoiding deceit. Deceitful actions conflict with the notion of informed consent. Deceit was avoided by presenting a truthful and transparent document for consent to participants and abiding by what was outlined. Reflecting on literature such as Creswell's (2008) was important in ensuring that deceit was avoided in this research project by reporting all research honestly. This included citing authors appropriately, collecting data ethically and reporting data that is "honestly and transparently analysed and managed" (Brooks et al., 2014, p. 117). Another way of avoiding deceit was by giving all participants who participated in a semi-structured interview an opportunity to check transcripts of their interview and make any amendments they wished to prior to analysis of the transcripts beginning. Participants were able to indicate whether or not they wanted to take this opportunity when completing their consent form prior to the interview commencing.

Respecting privacy is an ethical consideration of great importance especially in qualitative research. As previously mentioned, research such as mine which was influenced by an interpretive paradigm asks participants to share a great deal. Creswell (2008) reminds qualitative researchers that they must respect that each participant actually exposes aspects of themselves when they agree to participate by sharing their experiences, values and perceptions. The methods that I used and the locations where my data collection took place did mean that I could not guarantee anonymity for my participants. However, I endeavoured to do my best to protect their anonymity and be mindful that "participant confidentiality is of utmost importance" (Creswell, 2008, p. 240). To ensure confidentiality, I was influenced by Creswell (2008) and Morrell et al. (2010). I recorded only information that pertained to the research questions, codes were used in place of participants' names, pseudonyms were used in place of school names and names of anyone to whom they might refer, data were analysed through coding and it was my intention to publish findings in a way that a third party could not identify specific participants.

Ethical consideration of others from a social and cultural perspective is fundamental in successful qualitative research. Adhering to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi; partnership, participation and protection, helped to ensure that my research was socially and culturally sensitive. As a qualitative researcher I asked my participants to contribute their perspectives to my research. In return they deserved to be valued and respected for the individuals they were. Acknowledging what is socially and culturally important to my participants, protecting and respecting their values and working in partnership with them, whether they are students or teachers, was crucial.

## **Summary**

Engaging in research about the communication of high expectations to maximise student learning success in the classroom through an interpretive lens was a very rewarding experience. This



chapter has outlined the impact of my subjective ontological and interpretive epistemological perspectives on my research design and methodology. By effectively using the methods that I have discussed, it was my intention to learn from the experiences and interpretations of others. The analysis of all data collected has hopefully led me to presenting transferable findings that may be of interest to my colleagues in the teaching profession. The ethical considerations outlined were of utmost importance, as was the ability to reflect critically as my research developed. It was anticipated that the drawing together of all of these elements that have been discussed in this chapter will culminate in a thesis that is valid, trustworthy and credible.

The following chapter is the presentation of the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. The data is analysed and themes that emerge from the data are identified.

## Chapter Four: Findings and Data Analysis

### Introduction

This chapter presents the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. The data are presented in two sections. The first section presents the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews, while the second section presents the data gathered from the focus group interviews. Each section looks at each question asked, a table is presented communicating the categories identified and a discussion with supporting commentary from participants is presented. The data collection in each school comprised of three semi-structured interviews with teacher participants, and a focus group discussion with six Year 13 students. In order to protect the identity of the schools and participants, teacher participants from each school have the participant code that associates them with their school and a number from 1 to 3. Student participants have similarly been assigned a code and number from 1 to 6. These codes are shown in full in Table 4.1.

The following is an example of a teacher participant code from School A and a student participant code from School B:

SAT1 = Teacher participant 1 from School A

SBS1 = Student participant 1 from School B

**Table 4. 1: School and participant codes**

School Code	Teacher Participant Code	Student Participant Code
School A	SAT1 SAT2 SAT3	SAS1 SAS2 SAS3 SAS4 SAS5 SAS6
School B	SBT1 SBT2 SBT3	SBS1 SBS2 SBS3 SBS4 SBS5 SBS6

### Presentation of data

The presentation of participant responses to each question is shown by highlighted boxes in each table.

## Section 1: Semi-structured interview data presentation

### Question one

Question 1 asked: "Please describe what student learning success means to you". This question was designed to be a broad introductory question aimed at identifying what teacher participants focussed on when identifying learning success. Eight categories emerged from this data as shown in Table 4.2.

**Table 4. 2: Teachers' perceptions of 'student learning success'**

	SAT1	SAT2	SAT3	SBT1	SBT2	SBT3
Achievement of specific level or task						
Consistent attitude and performance						
High levels of classroom engagement						
Teacher focus on individuals						
Expectations are known by students						
Ownership of learning responsibilities						

The data suggested that teachers believe that student learning success results from a combination of factors and influences with no teacher responding by identifying only a single factor. Whilst there were commonalities across participants' responses within each school, there were also commonalities between the schools, particularly in relation to 'high levels of classroom engagement' and 'ownership of learning responsibilities'. Three out of six teachers identified 'high levels of classroom engagement' as a contributing factor in determining student learning success. The following comments show that teachers believe that student engagement is fundamental to student learning success:

*It's...engagement in a nutshell (SAT1).*

*It's application as well (SBT1).*

Similarly, three out of six teachers identified ownership of learning responsibilities as a contributing factor. Of interest is that teachers commented on ownership of learning responsibilities either by the teacher or the student. SAT3 made the following comment about teacher ownership in terms of commitment to their class:

*I have a good plan as a teacher ... I'm offering a variety of learning material for students (SAT3).*

Conversely, SBT3 referred to student ownership:

*It's the student's perception of their success and how they are able to say they've learnt and improved (SBT3).*

Progression in learning was identified by two teachers as an important part of student learning success. The following comments suggested that learning enhancement and student recognition of the development in their learning is an attribute of successful learning in the classroom.

*Move them [students] forward in their understanding (SBT2).*

*Moving from one point along a continuum to an area where they feel they [student] have learnt and are better prepared for the next stage (SBT3).*

These comments varied considerably from SAT2's belief that achievement of a level or a specific task was important in determining student learning success. The following is SAT2's comment:

*When students are achieving the curriculum level (SAT2).*

It was clear that what constitutes student learning success seemed to be a very subjective topic. There was very little common ground to be found across the whole data set for Question 1, demonstrating the variety of teacher ideas and perceived ways of identifying successful student learning.

## **Question two**

Question 2 asked: "How do you help your students to achieve learning success in your classroom?" This question built on participants' answers to the first question and in essence provided a chance to reflect on their pedagogy. Again answers were varied with six categories transpiring in the data as shown in Table 4.3.

The data suggested that there was a variety of ways that teachers helped students to achieve learning success in the classroom. The importance of communicating effectively was highlighted by five out of six teachers, as shown in the following participant quotes:

*I talk to them a lot, talk with them (SAT1).*

*I enjoy going around and talking to students (SBT2).*

The three teacher participants from School B identified the importance of knowing their students. This extended to a discussion about student learning styles as shown by the comment:

*I try to determine the learning styles of my students...I use various teaching methods that are out there to cater for as many personalities of the learning styles that I have (SBT1).*

Also prominent in the discussion from two teacher participants from School B was the importance of knowing their learners beyond merely as students in their class. The following are comments that were made in justification of this:

*For me the most important thing is getting to know my students and that's the hard part because it's not just knowing them, it's knowing the extensions to them, the family, the family set up, what is going on at home, what is going on in your [student] sporting life, your [student] outside of school life (SBT2).*

Firstly, seeing who they [the students] are individually and seeing where they are...knowing who they [the students] are...because I teach kids, I don't teach programs (SBT3).

**Table 4. 3: What teachers believe they do to help student learning success in their classroom**

	SAT1	SAT2	SAT3	SBT1	SBT2	SBT3
Communicate effectively						
Focus on learner/teacher relationships						
Know the learner						
Make learning more relevant						
Create partnerships						
Set expectations						

### Question three

Question 3 asked: "What do you understand by the phrase 'high expectations for your students' to mean?" Again, this question had significant links to the prior question and was designed to begin leading the teacher participants to the crux of this investigation. Four categories emerged from the data analysis in relation to this question as shown in Table 4.4.

**Table 4. 4: Teachers' understandings of the meaning of 'high expectations for their students'**

	SAT1	SAT2	SAT3	SBT1	SBT2	SBT3
<b>Achievement of specific level or task</b>						
<b>Teacher/student commitment to learning success</b>						
<b>Individualised learning pathways</b>						
<b>Working in partnership</b>						

The importance of shared commitment was the most commonly mentioned category for teachers. A sense of commitment from both the teacher and the student to the student's achievement was identified. The following comments demonstrate one teacher's perception of the importance of commitment:

*I totally believe that everyone can be successful (SAT1).*

*You need attendance...also you need that cohort group to be mostly engaging, you can't have a lot of distraction in the class because it undermines all the healthy conversations (SAT1).*

*I need to do that extra work, and inside the extra work the programs evolving (SAT1).*

SAT1 identified specific elements of commitment from both the teacher and their students as needed for high expectations in their classroom. A deep sense of belief in every student and a commitment to work beyond the classroom contact time demonstrated commitment from the teacher to their students. In return the teacher identified the need for student commitment personified through the students' actions, in this case attending school, and being focussed in the classroom.

This sense of the importance of a teacher's belief in their students' ability to succeed in their classroom was further emphasised by the following comments:

*High expectations would be believing in students...know what they can achieve, it's important, believing in students, believing in students' abilities (SAT2).*

*To me it means you never give up on your kids [students] (SAT3).*

Again, the importance of demonstrating a teacher's commitment to their students learning success was emphasised. All three teachers from School A identified teacher commitment to their students as a significant contributor to their understanding of high expectations for their students. Their comments draw attention to their perception that students need their teachers to believe in them.

The notion of 'individualised learning pathways' also featured in the teacher participants' responses with three out of six participants discussing the importance of this in their

understanding of high expectations for their students. The following is a selection of comments that these three teacher's made:

*I have over 70 senior students and they're all, it's all about individualising, individual resources (SAT1).*

*We critique the journey so far and have conversations about what we could do next (SAT1).*

*They're all different, because if you have the same high expectations for 32 students in the class I think there's something wrong with that (SBT2).*

*So high expectations really is setting goals and standards with the kids [students] (SBT2).*

*You move them [the student] to the point where they are going to be able to access the next level of study (SBT3).*

These comments highlighted the importance of working with individual students to meet their learning needs. This practice built on the points raised under the category of commitment by emphasising that most of the teacher participants believed that at the heart of their understanding of the phrase 'high expectations for their students' is a commitment to the individual student.

#### Question four

Question 4 asked: "Please describe how a 'high expectation teacher' acts in the classroom." This question was designed to allow teacher participants to draw on their own practice and the practice of their colleagues. This question was closely aligned to the prior question. However, the emphasis was on teacher practice rather than the understanding of the teacher. Five categories emerged from the data as shown in Table 4.5.

**Table 4. 5: Teachers' perceptions of the practice of a 'high expectation teacher'**

	SAT1	SAT2	SAT3	SBT1	SBT2	SBT3
Effective classroom routines						
Individualised learning goals						
Positive relationships with students						
Role-modelling through actions and attitudes						
Student – centred practice						

The most common element identified by the teacher participants in response to this question was the belief that teachers with 'high expectations' have positive relationships with their students, as reflected in the following comments:

*I'm actually talking with the kids [students]...they [the students] tell me, if they don't like it they just tell me (SAT1).*

*By having strong, positive relationships with students (SAT2).*

*Students know the teacher really cares for them, is really interested in them (SAT2).*

*I just sum it up as the F's. Firm, fair but friendly (SBT1).*

*It comes back to the relationship. If the kids [students] understand that this teacher is dealing with me and I trust the way he deals with me, I know he's firm but fair, and they know that's the relationships you have with them (SBT2).*

*There may be these high expectations of them but it will be different to students sitting next to me or my friends but it's still high expectations. It's tailored and students tend to understand when you have a relationship with them (SBT2).*

*It's working with them [the students] to identify what they think good looks like, what they could engage with (SBT3).*

*In the relationships I have with them...sharing my own life experience in a way that is authentic (SBT3).*

These comments emphasised that positive relationships between the teacher and the individual student are paramount to the classroom actions of a teacher with high expectations. Positive relationships were seen to bring a sense of care and respect to the classroom thus allowing for differentiation in teaching and achievement to be recognised, valued, understood and accepted.

Teachers with high expectations also seemed to engage in other behaviours and actions that contributed to a proactive, purposeful learning environment. The following comments were made in relation to the categories identified where at least two participants acknowledged its importance:

*Of course sets goals for students, learning goals that are achievable but also challenges them [the student] as well (SBT1) – 'Individualised learning goals'*

*[The teacher's] actually treating me to my standards or to the standards we've agreed are high standards (SBT2) – 'Individualised learning goals'*

*A high expectation teacher should be a role model to the students (SAT2) – 'Role-modelling through actions and attitudes'*

*Model expected behaviours, expected performances, expected attitudes (SBT3) – 'Role-modelling through actions and attitudes'*

### **Question five**

Question 5 asked: "Do you believe that it is important that every teacher communicates high expectations for learning success to every student in their class?" If yes, why is this important? If no, why is it not important?" All teacher participants believed that the communication of high expectations to every student in every class was important. The second part of this question asked each participant 'why it was important?' Four categories arose from the data gathered:



**Table 4. 6: Teachers' perceptions of why communicating high expectations to every student in every class is important**

	SAT1	SAT2	SAT3	SBT1	SBT2	SBT3
Environment that promotes learning success						
Meet assessment criteria						
Support individual success						
Support students beyond the classroom						

As Table 4.6 shows, each participant's response related to a single category, with four categories emerging. There are two categories that demonstrated an overlap in participant thoughts and beliefs about the importance of communicating high expectations. The first is 'environment that promotes student learning success'. The following comment was made in the identification of this theme:

*Consistency is important, that will inculcate the students' ability, desire to, if everybody is saying yes you can achieve it, right? Then students will aspire to achieve that (SAT2).*

Of interest is that whilst discussing the importance of achievement, SAT3 emphasised this theme in a very different way from SAT2. This participant focussed on measures of achievement but also emphasised student awareness around the teacher expectations of them. The following comment was made:

*They [the students] know when you don't believe in them. They could be ESOL, they could be the top of the class, middle, they know, this is just my opinion, they will never respect you and if they don't respect you well you may be the gun teacher, they aren't going to learn from you (SAT3).*

These two very different comments both reinforced the importance of creating an environment that encouraged and supported students to achieve learning success. SAT2 identified the importance of consistency but also emphasised the importance of demonstrating teacher belief in student learning success. SAT3's comment supported the importance of the teacher demonstrating their belief in student learning success in a genuine way as students are astute, they know if their teacher did not believe in them and their ability to achieve learning success. SAT3's comment suggested that a lack of teacher belief or being disingenuous was a barrier to student learning success.

The second category that demonstrated an overlap in participants' thinking had definite links to the first category identified. Two teacher participants made comments that suggested that it is important to communicate high expectations to every student to enable and support individual success in the classroom. The following comments were made:

*Everyone thrives on success, they want to feel that they are successful. And success again is different for different kids [students], you know success for a low ability as compared to the high flyers can be very different but every kid thrives on knowing that they've been successful. Knowing that they, they are moving forward...Because kids want to feel that, yes I feel successful. I'm not getting the E's [Excellence level in NCEA] that he's getting, but I've got an A [Achieved level in NCEA], I never got A's last year, so I'm moving forward. I couldn't write a paragraph, now I can write 5 sentences and they make sense, I couldn't do that last year...every kid is different, how they look at success, what high expectations mean for them are really different and teachers need to be able to communicate that to kids. That it's always high expectations but for you [a student] it's there, for you [another student] it may be here but for all of you I don't expect you to be doing what you did last year or performing at a level at which you did last year. You need to be progressing...and this kid knows 'I've achieved success (SBT2).*

*It gives them [students] focus...it gives them some direction. Some direction, some focus and if it's a realistic expectation that's even more motivating...something that they can look at themselves and their situations and think I can do this. So not so high as to be impossible and they lose hope but not so low that they feel there is no, well why should I work towards that, it needs to be challenging enough but takes into account who they are and what it is they want for themselves (SBT3).*

These comments concentrated on the notion of knowing each student as an individual, and setting expectations that are specific to each student's learning needs in an effort to ensure learning success in the classroom. The communication of these expectations to each student allowed for recognition of personal success rather than a focus on comparison between students.

### **Question six**

Question 6 asked: "How can the communication of high expectations contribute to the learning success of each student?" This question was designed to enable participants to build on their previous answers by identifying actions that occur in the classroom. Actions described by the teacher participants transpired into three main categories. These categories were intended outcomes from the teacher actions.

**Table 4. 7: Teachers' perceptions of how communicating high expectations can contribute to learning success for every student**

	SAT1	SAT2	SAT3	SBT1	SBT2	SBT3
Create an environment that values learning						
Enhance student understanding						
Make students feel valued						

This was the first time that all teacher participants' perspectives identified one category; 'enhance student understanding'. Participants spoke of a variety of learning situations where student understanding was or could be enhanced through the communication of high expectations. These situations were not always classroom-bound; they did also extend into life lessons. The following commentary is a selection of comments made by the teacher participants:

*If you give clear directions to the students, right? Clear directions, what is required of them then they will be able to work on, if no direction is given, a high expectation is not inculcated in them (SAT2).*

*Feedback and that's spoken but also when you are looking at their work (SAT3).*

*Communication is the key to having success in classes and setting those high expectations and kids [students] living up to those high expectations. If they are taught what it looks like, what it sounds like, what it feels like, what it should be, kids understand oh okay, this is what he means by, I expect you to be a learner (SBT2).*

*It gives them [students] those markers...the markers along a journey where the journey is more important than the destination because you [the student] are continuing on the journey and it gets a bit ethereal, the discussion of it, but also bringing those ideas in the kids [students] can appreciate it, you know, that you are constantly learning (SBT3).*

Communication, verbal or written, by the teacher to the student(s) is the action identified by teacher participants that occurs in the classroom where high expectations contribute to the learning success of students. The teacher participants' responses suggested that communicating high expectations incorporates task-related direction, role modelling, and discussion that promotes immediate and long-term success.

### Question seven

Question 7 asked: "Is there an expectation in your school that every teacher has high expectations of learning success for every student in each of their classes? If yes, please explain how this expectation is conveyed to staff. If no, why do you think that this is not an expectation?" This question was designed to move teacher participants beyond their classroom doors and think about having high expectations of student learning success from a school-wide perspective. As with question 5, there were two parts to this question. The second part of the question was based

on their answer to the first part of the question. Data gathered from the participants' responses to the second part of the question highlighted four categories that are presented in Table 4.8.

All participants believed that there was a school-wide expectation that every teacher had high expectations of learning success for every student in every class. Three key ways that this expectation was conveyed to staff were shared and this data revealed four categories. The table below presents the data for the second part of this question: "How is this expectation conveyed to staff?"

**Table 4. 8: Methods of conveying school-wide expectations**

	SAT1	SAT2	SAT3	SBT1	SBT2	SBT3
Achievement analysis						
Curriculum leadership						
Pedagogical conversations						
Professional learning and development						

The data showed that professional learning and development was the dominant method of conveying school-wide expectations. All three teacher participants from School A discussed whole school professional development sessions as a means of communicating school-wide expectations. Two teacher participants simply identified professional learning and development (PLD) sessions as a method of communication. One teacher participant commented on the presentation and effectiveness of PLD in their school:

*I've been at so much PD, I feel like I'm a walking PD...there are ways to get people to do it...at the data presentation I just thought oh I can't get up there and speak to staff about data, so what did I speak of? I spoke about what you talk about [high expectations]...I focussed on the conversations that I have with the kids [students]...I tried very hard to make it authentic (SAT1). I think we need PD that really supports our doing...That's where PD needs to go eh? Making that, linking the ideology to the practical applications (SAT1).*

This participant signalled that professional learning and development sessions need to present ideas and develop teachers' skills to enhance their classroom practice. This extends to the communication of high expectations to students in the classroom; teachers need to know what this looks like in the classroom and how to make this expectation a reality.

Two other categories had equal weighting when looking at the perceptions of how school-wide expectations were conveyed. 'Achievement analysis' included looking at achievement targets as a school and the identification of students who were underachieving. Comments made included the following:

*Always monitor where the students [are] and we look at why a particular student or group of students are not achieving and then trying to find out reasons or ways we can help them (SAT2).* Sharing academic targets was identified as a means of conveying school-wide expectations of achievement. SAT2's comment suggests that on-going analysis was a pivotal part of reinforcing school-wide expectations and meeting school academic targets. Focussing on the students who were not achieving was a means of re-evaluating some of the learning needs of students in an attempt to maximise learning success in relation to assessment criteria and guidelines.

'Curriculum leadership' was another way that participants felt that expectations were conveyed to staff. This leadership was identified as being from Head of Departments and the following are comments made to support this:

*It [high expectations] definitely disseminates down from our HoD (SAT3).*

*In my department, I'd like to think that [high expectations] is what I communicate to my staff in the things I do or the things I say about students (SBT2).*

These comments demonstrated the important role that HoDs have in conveying the school-wide expectation of high expectations for all students in all classes. One participant (SAT3) discussed the standard of expectation from the HoD and the importance of this for student learning success. SBT2, as an HoD, recognised the importance of their actions in influencing the staff in their department. Role modelling is imperative, in this instance from the HoD, to ensure that high expectations were conveyed to staff.

HoDs were also identified as instrumental in conveying school-wide expectations through 'pedagogical conversations'. Participants discussed conversations that emphasised strategies and expectations. The following is an example that demonstrates this:

*In the XXX Department we have a korero and say okay you could try this...that really works in our department, different departments have different strategies but there is an expectation definitely (SAT3).*

Along with HoDs, another person mentioned as key to 'pedagogical conversations' conveying school-wide expectations was the principal. The following was discussed in light of this:

*When I talk to [Principal] I really get excited...[Principal] helps it [expectations] with some quite good visualisations about adaptive learning (SAT1).*

Both participants highlighted the importance of discussing teaching practice with colleagues. Adaption to current practice by trying new strategies may enhance student learning success, as indicated by SAT3. SAT1's comment highlighted the importance of the principal as a pedagogical leader; the principal can ignite passion and enthusiasm in the classroom by discussing pedagogy with their staff.

## **Question eight**

Question 8 asked: "How do members of the Senior Leadership Team support you to communicate high expectations to your students? This question was designed for participants to discuss the support they get personally from their SLT to enable the communication of high expectations to their students in their classes. The data gathered identified three categories.

**Table 4. 9: Methods of support by SLT to individual teacher participants**

	SAT1	SAT2	SAT3	SBT1	SBT2	SBT3
No support provided						
Support through dialogue for individuals						
Presentations to staff by SLT						

Presentations to staff from the SLT was the dominant way that the teacher participants felt that the SLT provided them with support to communicate high expectations to their students. These presentations were always shared at Professional Learning and Development (PLD) sessions or in staff meetings. The following is a selection of comments made by the teacher participants:

*In our PD and data tracking...they keep on emphasising...we've got a school-wide goal that each student gets at least XX credits at NCEA level 1, 2, 3 (SAT2).*

*Well you know when we have our meetings and things, you know, [the Principal] would say...this is what we are aiming for the school's level 1, level 2 (SAT3).*

Both of these participants identified the reinforcement of school academic targets by members of the SLT through presentations to the entire staff at dedicated PLD and staff meeting times. These presentations were identified as ways of supporting these participants to communicate high expectations to their students.

SAT1 also discussed presentations at PLD sessions. However, this participant made comment about the disengagement of staff.

*I can see people in the staffroom playing on their phones while its [expectations] being vocalised...no one's engaging because it's all got a bit unreal (SAT1).*

Comments such as this suggest there is an assumption made about what teachers need and perhaps there is a big gap between ideas presented and classroom practice. SAT1 went on to say:

*I think that the leadership team have a, do have a lot to offer*

This comment personalised the impact that the SLT members had on this participant - there were definite positives in the messages being presented but further connection to the practices in the classroom was needed.

'Support through dialogue for individuals' was the other category with positive connotations that was shared through the perspectives of two teacher participants. SLT members engaged in dialogue or promoted discussion in departments. The following is a selection of comments made: *Having those targets and looking at encouraging us to discuss in our departments how we are going to reach these targets (SBT3).*

*Coz I know that [Principal] has really opened my eyes up a few times... when [Principal] talks I really can get it (SAT1).*

Whilst SAT1 is complimentary of the dialogue they have with the principal, they did go on to state:  
*I know that thinking, talking and doing are two different things*

Again, comments such as this reinforced the need for connections between ideology and classroom practice to be stronger and more authentic to really support teachers to communicate high expectations to their students.

Two participants felt that the SLT did not provide them with support to communicate high expectations to their students. The following is a selection of the comments made:

*I don't get support in that regard. I think they assume that I'm an experienced teacher so, no, not really, I've never personally had an interaction where I've been spoken to or it's actually directed to me, towards that you should have high expectations in the class. I think they just assume that as a teacher at XXX that's what you do (SBT1).*

*They just give us a lot of work. Give us lots and lots of work (SBT2).*

Both of these teacher participants went on to discuss that the SLT could support them to communicate high expectations to their students by developing positive relationships with all staff and getting to really know each person, visiting classrooms and emphasising a team approach to maximising student learning success. SBT2's comment below emphasises the isolation that teachers can feel:

*It's about the relationships, as much as we need to get to know our students, you [SLT] need to know the staff and not just, Mr XX the XX teacher, it's not superficially knowing staff, it's about really getting to know your staff, knowing what grinds their wheels, what sets them in motion, what enthuses them, what are they passionate about...so the [SLT] know all the naughty kids [students] and they give a lot of work to teachers and that's pretty much it. Getting to know staff, so that's why teachers struggle, because there's a disconnect, them and us. It's not that we create it, it's just that it's there by the nature of the way you [SLT] do your job...We're all in this together, you can't tell us that all the time, we're all in this together, we're all in this together. Show us that we're all in this together. So actions need to come after the words or before the words.*

### **Question nine**

Question 9 asked: "How do other colleagues support you to communicate high expectations to your students?" This question was designed to look at where support for the teacher participants to communicate high expectations to their students came from. Two categories arose from the data.

**Table 4. 10: Methods of support by colleagues to individual teacher participants**

	SAT1	SAT2	SAT3	SBT1	SBT2	SBT3
Support through dialogue						
Professional support						

The data gathered in response to this question was quite remarkable. There was 100% identification of the same ways in which colleagues provide support to enable teachers to communicate high expectations to their students. 'Support through dialogue' between colleagues was identified by every participant as a way they were supported or provided support for others; the following is a selection of comments made:

*We have a conversation around expectations (SBT1)*

*We do have conversations about, and it's not just minuted conversations, it's also just in the collegial discussions we may have...it's the nuts and bolts of what we are doing, how are you doing this? (SBT3).*

These comments suggested that dialogue that occurs about expectations in the classroom is deemed successful practice. Teacher participants are suggesting that teachers engage in reflective dialogue that enhances their practice and supports them to communicate high expectations to their students. Often these conversations are within their department or in mentoring roles.

Either providing or receiving 'professional support' was the other way colleagues provided support to enable the communication of high expectations to students to occur. Teacher participants that alluded to being more experienced discussed the way that they provided support:

*Those who feel that they agree about, meet what I'm setting, they tend to want to emulate in their class as well (SBT1).*

*With new teachers coming in that will ask the question then I would show that support... with new teachers or teachers who are struggling (SBT3).*

There was also discussion about providing support by working collaboratively:

*As a collective department, we all work together collaboratively and helping each other (SAT2).*

*Staff do that, we tend to do that because we know that we need to, we need to work as a team, that collective, we need to (SBT2).*

*If there is something that I can't handle, you know, out of my league then I say right and ask my colleagues (SAT3).*

Having or providing a sense of belonging is important support for teachers. Being able to ask for support or providing support to others was promoted as effective practice by the teacher participants.

## **Question ten**



Question 10 asked: “Are there any barriers that prevent you from communicating high expectations to your students? If yes, please outline these and tell me of any ways that you feel these barriers could be overcome.” Two teacher participants believed there were barriers that prevented the communication of high expectations, four teacher participants did not. The second part of the question; “if yes, please outline these and tell me of any ways that you feel these barriers could be overcome” generated data from four teacher participants. Four categories were identified as barriers.

**Table 4. 11: Barriers to communicating high expectations to every student**

	SAT1	SAT2	SAT3	SBT1	SBT2	SBT3
Lack of support from SLT						
Ineffective school systems						
Inappropriate student behaviour in classrooms						
Teacher as a barrier						

The dominant category, ‘inappropriate student behaviour in the classroom’, was seen as a significant barrier by two teacher participants. The following comments were made:

*It’s sometime very challenging to get them [students] to listen* (SAT1).

*There seems to be a disconnect for some students...some students think ‘oh I can get away with it’* (SAT3).

These comments identified barriers but unfortunately solutions to these barriers were not shared.

‘Ineffective school systems’ was another barrier that frustrated one participant. They shared the following comment in relation to support for inappropriate student behaviour:

*We need consequences that really address that [student action]* (SAT3).

SAT3 spoke about a school-wide behaviour system, PB4L, and explained that there used to be detentions held at school. In their opinion:

*It [detentions] tended to just keep a lid on all the silly behaviour* (SAT3).

This comment suggested that the reintroduction of school-wide detentions would overcome the barrier felt by this participant.

SBT1 identified the teacher being their own barrier to communicating high expectations to their students. The following comment was made:

*The teacher, him or herself, there is no one stopping you from doing that [communicating high expectations to every student]* (SBT1).

The relevance of this comment suggested that if a teacher does not genuinely believe in the importance of communicating high expectations to each of their students then they will not do it. Teachers needed to believe in the merit of something to do it, and they also needed to understand what having ‘high expectations’ meant in the context of their classrooms with their students.

Lastly, ‘lack of support from SLT’ was a barrier identified by one teacher participant. The following comment was made:

*The support we don’t get that could be a barrier (SBT2).*

This participant felt that this barrier could be overcome by the teacher not allowing this to be a barrier:

*You [the teacher] could look at it and make it an issue, or you could look at it and say it is an issue but I am going to move beyond that (SBT2).*

This suggestion reinforced the isolation that some teachers may feel. This participant also believed that the SLT could remove this barrier by ensuring:

*The relationship between us [SLT] and the teachers is up there. You know, so they [the teachers] feel that there is support (SBT2).*

## Question eleven

Question 11 asked: “Do you believe that students think it’s important that their teacher communicates high expectations for their learning success. How do you think students know their teacher does or does not have high expectations for their learning success?” The data gathered in response to the first part of the question presented a resounding finding in the affirmative. All participants believed that students think it is important that their teacher communicates high expectations for their learning success. From the data gathered for the second part of the question: “How do you think students know their teacher does or does not have high expectations for their learning success”; emerged two categories.

**Table 4. 12: How students know whether their teacher has high expectations of them**

	SAT1	SAT2	SAT3	SBT1	SBT2	SBT3
Communication to students						
Positive relationships between teachers & students						

As Table 4.12 identifies, the two categories identified by participants dominated their responses. ‘Communication to students’ expanded into realms of verbal and non-verbal communication, and was deemed by teacher participants to be an essential indicator for students to gauge a teacher’s expectation of them. The following is a selection of comments:

*When they know where the goal posts are (SAT1).*

*If you are constantly talking about high expectations, role-modelling high expectations, the kids [students] understand, this teacher is about high expectations, about moving us forward (SBT2). Constant explicit verbalisation and demonstrating these expectations through expected actions in the classroom are essential to ensure students know their teacher's expectations of them.*

The teacher participants also believed that students know their teacher's expectations based on the type of classroom relationship that they have. Positive relationships demonstrated care and interest from the teacher towards the student's learning success and participants' articulated that this creates trust. The following is a selection of comments about the importance of positive relationships:

*If I'm not taking interest in students' work...if I'm not building that positive relationship, if I'm not encouraging them, it would be very evident to the student that the teacher is not showing [high expectations for student learning success] (SAT2).*

*Just being able to trust that you [the teacher] has their [the student] best interests at heart...being authentic with them...nothing motivates success and also congruent praise where they can see you mean it because you have that relationship with them (SBT3).*

The teacher participants' comments also indicated the crucial role the teacher has in forming positive relationships with their students. The teacher participants believed that students take their lead from the teacher.

## Question twelve

Question 12 asked: "How do you think students perceive high expectations contribute to their learning success?" This question was designed for the teacher participants to step into the shoes of their students and share their perceptions about the importance of their role as a teacher and whether they can influence student learning success by communicating high expectations. Three categories arose from the data gathered.

**Table 4. 13: Teachers' perspectives of how students perceive high expectations from their teacher contributes to their learning success**

	SAT1	SAT2	SAT3	SBT1	SBT2	SBT3
Builds student confidence						
Demonstrates care for them as individuals						
Promoting shared ownership of learning						

From the teacher participants' perspectives 'promoting shared ownership' of learning was the most dominant way that students perceived teacher expectations contributed to their learning success. Teacher participants believed that students were likely to take more ownership of their learning and work in partnership with their teacher to achieve learning success. The following is a selection of comments:

*They [the students] are going to get involved in the learning...They'll take ownership of the learning, high expectations means that they will take ownership of the learning (SAT2).*

*An important question for teachers to ask, how do you need me to be to help you [the student] get to where you want to go? (SBT3).*

Two teacher participants believed that student confidence in their ability to achieve learning success increased when their teacher communicated high expectations of them and to them. The following comments were made about the building of student confidence:

*Something changes...you get this kind of wake up a little bit and you can see that there's something...little things can shift (SAT1).*

*I think for all students they eventually see that... I'm actually being successful because of the little things I've improved (SBT2).*

### Question thirteen

Question 13 asked: "Do you have any further comments that you would like to make about communicating high expectations to maximise student learning success in the classroom?"

The purpose of this question was to give teacher participants a chance to discuss further recommendations and perspectives if prior questions did not present an opportunity. Five categories arose from the data gathered.

**Table 4. 14: Further comments from teacher participants**

	SAT1	SAT2	SAT3	SBT1	SBT2	SBT3
Same expectations for community/family/school						
Consistent practice in the classroom for every student						
Explicit explanation of expectations						
Know the whole student/the whole person						
Make learning relevant to students						

The data gathered demonstrated that, at times, teacher participants used this opportunity to emphasise the importance of what they had previously discussed rather than adding new or additional information. However, three teacher participants discussed the importance of aligning

expectations between school/family/community; this was a new point of discussion. The following is a selection of comments made:

*Positive but honest with some of the parents, I said look your child should be operating here but I can tell you why not here because I think the behaviour is not right, I need you to be a bit more encouraging (SAT3).*

*I think as schools this is one of the most important things... we also need to make sure that in this community these are the expectations (SBT2).*

*Have these conversations about tying up home expectations and school expectations and finding and seeing the child in it (SBT3).*

Conversations that align expectations are essential. These teacher participants highlighted the importance of schools working with the parents and caregivers of their students to maximise student learning success inside and outside of the classroom.

## Section 2: Focus group interview data presentation

In addition to the presentation of verbal (green boxes) and non-verbal responses indicating agreement (blue boxes), the participants that did not respond to a particular question are indicated by a blank box on the appropriate table.

### Question one

Question 1 asked: "Please describe what learning success in the classroom means to you." This question was designed to get student participants to identify what indicators they use to gauge learning success in the classroom. Five categories were revealed through the analysis of this data as presented in the table below.

**Table 4. 15: Students' perceptions of what learning success means**

	SA S1	SA S2	SA S3	SA S4	SA S5	SA S6	SB S1	SB S2	SB S3	SB S4	SB S5	SB S6
Assessment achievement												
Contribution from student to their learning												
Enthusiasm for learning												
Improvement from year to year												
Increased mastery of classroom material												

'Increased mastery of classroom material' was a central measurement of learning success from the perspective of the focus group interview participants. The following comments were made by the student participants in response to the question asked:

*I understand what I'm supposed to do (SAS3).*

*Understanding what has been taught and being able to summarise the main points (SBS3).*

*When I go home and I'm not stuck on my homework (SBS4).*

*When I understand what is happening in class (SBS6).*

Learning success was recognised by students when they understood classwork and were able to apply this understanding in class and at home.

## Question two

Question 2 asked: "If you know of teachers who have helped you to achieve learning success in the classroom, how did they help you to achieve learning success?" This question was designed so student participants could comment on the classroom practice or attributes of any teacher they have had, or do have, that has, or is, helping them to achieve learning success. Five categories of attributes and teachers who help students achieve learning success emerged from the data gathered.

**Table 4. 16: Students' perceptions of how teachers have helped them achieve learning success**

	SA S1	SA S2	SA S3	SA S4	SA S5	SA S6	SB S1	SB S2	SB S3	SB S4	SB S5	SB S6
Challenge the learner												
Demonstrate care and support												
Effective communication												
Know the learner												
Passion for their subject and role/job												

There were three dominant categories that the student participants identified. Teachers that demonstrated a sense of 'passion for their subject and their role/job' were instrumental in helping their students achieve learning success in their classrooms. The following comments were made:

*When they are enthusiastic themselves about what they are teaching (SBS5).*

*It's really easy to see, we can tell if you are not keen on the subject you are teaching (SBS6).*

The following comment was made about the importance of a teacher's passion; unfortunately, this participant's comments did not suggest they were speaking from a place where they had observed passion, rather from a place of frustration and desire to see that passion:

*Sometimes I feel like some teachers don't have passion for their jobs...Do they even love being a teacher like I don't know about others but I don't see them loving their job or wanting to get everyone, every single person through. Where is that love? I don't know, should they have that love? For me, I would love that. (SAS1).*

It is clear that students are keenly aware of teachers who demonstrate passion for their craft. Students who have enthusiastic, passionate teachers are motivated and, unfortunately, the opposite students that do not are frustrated and this could potentially lead to demotivation.

Student participants felt that they achieved learning success when their teacher knew them as an individual. Often this meant knowing, or at least acknowledging life outside of the classroom. This finding was justified by the following comment:

*A close relationship between a teacher and a student will help the student enjoy their learning much more and make them want to come to school...maybe sometimes I might not really be keen on attending school for some certain reasons like it might not even have to do with classrooms...to do with like, maybe how I am being treated by kids and behaviour outside of the classroom. And yeah, it might not always be situations with teachers but sometimes it is. (SAS1).*

The comment made by SAS1 implores teachers to try to understand why a student may act a certain way or seem demotivated or disinterested. SAS1 stressed the importance of the student and teacher relationship where the teacher is approachable, understanding and interested in their learners as the individuals they are, interest does not fade as the classroom door closes at the end of the lesson.

Such thoughts are extended by the recognition of the importance of teachers demonstrating care and support of their students to enable their students to achieve learning success. The following comments are simple, yet powerful:

*Even just caring (SAS3).*

*They build you up (SBS6).*

### **Question three**

Question 3 asked: "How important is to you that your teacher has high expectations for your learning success? Why?" This question was designed to allow student participants to identify whether there are actually varying degrees of importance in teacher expectations about individual learning success. The data gathered that pertained to the first part of this question resulted in three categories.

**Table 4. 17: Students' perceptions of the importance of their teachers' high expectations for their learning success**

	SA S1	SA S2	SA S3	SA S4	SA S5	SA S6	SB S1	SB S2	SB S3	SB S4	SB S5	SB S6
Extremely Important												
Important												
Not Important												

From the data gathered that identified key reasons why teachers' expectations are important emerged three main categories.

**Table 4. 18: Students' perceptions of why their teachers' high expectations for their learning success is important**

	SA S1	SA S2	SA S3	SA S4	SA S5	SA S6	SB S1	SB S2	SB S3	SB S4	SB S5	SB S6
Increase self-confidence												
Increase engagement and interest in class												
Motivation to do well												

The data gathered suggested that students experienced an increase in confidence in their own ability when their teacher expressed high expectations for their learning success. The following is a selection of comments:

*If they [the teacher] believe that you'll pass or if they want you to pass or they expect you to pass then you are more likely to pass (SBS3).*

*If the expectation is there you are more likely to try to meet it...whereas if there is nothing at all it's like oh well (SBS6).*

Self-belief increased for students when there was a sense that their teacher believed in them, therefore their confidence increased.

#### Question four

Question 4 asked: "Can you describe what it is like to be in a class where the teacher has high expectations for every student's learning success?" This question was designed to get student participants to describe the classroom climate of a teacher who had high expectations for the



learning success of every student in their class. Three categories transpired from the data gathered.

**Table 4. 19: Students' perceptions of class climate when their teacher has high expectations for their learning success**

	SA S1	SA S2	SA S3	SA S4	SA S5	SA S6	SB S1	SB S2	SB S3	SB S4	SB S5	SB S6
Increased engagement from everyone												
Increased pressure to succeed												
High levels of trust in the teacher												

The student participants discussed levels of engagement in the class when their teacher had high expectations for the learning success of all students. Increased engagement from everyone was found in these classes. Student participants commented on the increase in their own engagement and their observation of the teacher and student engaging more together. The following is a selection of comments:

*An example that comes to mind is my XXX teacher. She always goes around to everyone and ask do you get what I just taught and she asks and has like conversations with students to see if they understand what she has taught because she has the expectation and she wants them to succeed (SBS3).*

*They engage in the class (SBS1).*

*They provide more stuff for you to learn, not just the surface stuff to pass (SBS5).*

*I often find they have really good resources (SBS6).*

These comments highlighted the recognition of the teacher's role in increasing engagement in the classroom. Teacher commitment increases engagement. The student participants acknowledged the quality of teacher interaction with students, resources provided, and classroom activities in the classrooms of teachers who have high expectations for the learning success of all of their students. The following comment identified that students know when their teacher is not fully committed to maximising the learning success of their students and therefore not truly engaging with their students:

*I've been talking to some people and I feel like there, it seems their teachers have set them up to only pass not to actually get a high grade, that's really sad (SBS6).*

Another participant concurred:

*Yeah, I think it's really sad and I don't think it's right either (SBS2).*

### Question five

Question 5 asked: "What does a teacher do that makes you realise they have high expectations for your learning success?" This question asked the student participants to reflect on their own learning success and their relationships with their teachers. From the data gathered, five categories became apparent.

**Table 4. 20: Students' perceptions of what their teacher does when they have high expectations for their learning success**

	SA S1	SA S2	SA S3	SA S4	SA S5	SA S6	SB S1	SB S2	SB S3	SB S4	SB S5	SB S6
Showing genuine care												
Challenge students to do their best												
Influence through their actions												
Know their learners												
Create a high-trust classroom												

There was an overwhelming sense of positivity portrayed through the categories identified by student participants when reflecting on what their teacher does when they have high expectations for their learning success. 'Showing genuine care' was the most dominant category identified. These are a selection of the comments made about the care shown for students by these teachers:

*I think they make you more open, like open to them (SAS1).*

*If they [the teacher] are open with you, if they are easy to get along with, yeah, I guess that automatically makes you like them...I know I'm not easy (SAS6).*

*They act like they care, it's not like ok I'm [the teacher] getting paid for this and I don't care what we do this period (SBS2).*

*She said I want you [the student] to pass and for you to get high marks (SBS3).*

These comments identify how perceptive students are; they know whether there is genuine care and dedication from their teacher as opposed to a lack of sincerity or someone just 'doing their job'. Students appreciate the care shown by these teachers; care creates openness in the teacher and student relationship, again something that is clearly appreciated by students.

### Question six

Question 6 asked: "What are the biggest challenges for you when you feel that your teacher does not have high expectations for your learning success?" This question was designed to highlight any negative impact that students may experience or feel if their teacher does not have high expectations for their learning success. Two categories arose from the data.

**Table 4. 21: Students' perceptions of biggest challenges they face when their teacher does not have high expectations for their learning success**

	SA S1	SA S2	SA S3	SA S4	SA S5	SA S6	SB S1	SB S2	SB S3	SB S4	SB S5	SB S6
Lack of motivation												
Negative effect on self-esteem												

Student participants identified the negative impact on their self-esteem and motivation levels when they felt that their teacher did not have high expectations for their learning success. Disillusionment about their own ability and the ability to learn, improve and reach their potential were perceived repercussions. The following is a selection of comments made about the negative impact on a student's motivation to achieve learning success in the classroom:

*You zone out...yeah then you just do your own thing (SAS3).*

*You don't feel motivated (SAS6).*

*I actually need motivation to listen in class and maybe go that extra step (SBS5).*

This lack of motivation also extended to learning at home, as demonstrated by the following comment:

*Someone who is in authority in a class and like if you sense that they don't really care if you don't pass or get a high grade, it doesn't make you want to study at home let alone pay attention in the classroom (SBS6).*

The passion for learning can disappear from students when they believe their teacher is disinterested in their learning success and this potentially limits their learning potential and significantly impacts their self-esteem in a negative way. The following comments were made about the negative impact on student self-esteem as a significant barrier when students believe that their teacher does not have high expectations for their learning success:

*I think it makes you feel really sad, depressed and it makes you think you are going to fail (SAS1).*

*It's a self-esteem killer really (SBS6).*

### Question seven

Question 7 asked: "If you think that it is important that teachers communicate high expectations to each student for their learning success, do you have any ideas how this could be done better in the classroom?" This question allowed student participants to identify aspects of communication and pedagogy that could enhance learning success in the classroom. Four categories emerged from the data gathered.

**Table 4. 22: Students' perceptions of how communication of high expectations could be better in classrooms**

	SA S1	SA S2	SA S3	SA S4	SA S5	SA S6	SB S1	SB S2	SB S3	SB S4	SB S5	SB S6
Show care and genuine interest												
Demonstrate equal treatment of all students												
Provide better formative feedback												
Demonstrate passion for learning and their subject												

Feedback that enhanced understanding was a category identified that would improve the communication of high expectations by teachers. Students want feedback to understand where they are correct, where they are wrong and where they can improve. The following is a selection of comments made:

*I feel like in most of my classes we do the work but we don't go through the answers...it would be good if we went through the answers so we know if we did it right or not...if they [the teacher] gave detailed feedback we would probably understand (SBS2).*

*Whenever we submit something or hand it in they [the teacher] are happy, oh yeah you passed, instead of suggesting ways that we could improve individually (SBS6).*

Fairness, care and genuine interest in the individual, and passion from a teacher for their subject and for learning were all ways that students believed could enhance the communication of high expectations for their learning success from their teacher as demonstrated by the other categories identified. These considerations prove that communication takes many forms and is not always verbal.

### Question eight

Question 8 asked: "How important is each student's learning success in your school and how do you know this?" This question was designed for student participants to identify and reflect on school-wide messages. This question proved challenging for participants to answer as participants' felt they could not answer the first part of the question. The following is a selection of comments made in response to this part of the question:

*I think they [the school] are trying but they don't know how (SAS1).*

*I think they [the school] want to (SBS3).*

Answers about how participants know whether the learning success for each student was important to the school crossed between identifying what the school could do compared to what they actually do. There were two categories that arose from the data gathered.

**Table 4. 23: How students believe the school could demonstrate the importance of the learning success of individual students**

	SA S1	SA S2	SA S3	SA S4	SA S5	SA S6	SB S1	SB S2	SB S3	SB S4	SB S5	SB S6
Show care for others												
Consistent expectations for all students												

Care was the primary category identified by participants. The following is a selection of the comments made that suggested that care needs to come from the school as a whole and also from students to their peers:

*I don't think that some students care really (SAS1).*

*People just care about their own lives these days (SAS6).*

*I don't want to say that it's almost like they [the school] don't care, but they kind of don't (SBS2).*

*But I feel that the school has recently been trying to sort of motivate people to study and because of this new thing that we have, an every week focus and getting teachers to do plans and stuff. I feel that is their way of showing that they are starting to care (SBS3).*

These comments demonstrated the significance of a school culture that emphasised the importance of high expectations for every student's learning success. A school with such a culture will embed this importance into the psyche of staff and students. This is something that is obviously important from the point of view of students.

Consistency was the other category and the data gathered identified this as almost as important as care to students. 'Consistency in expectations for all students' was central to discussions. Regardless of what class a student was in, students felt that all students should have high expectations for successful learning emphasised by all of their teachers. Inconsistencies of current practice were identified in the comments made:

*It's like different for every staff member (SBS5).*

*I feel right from the get go in Year 9 there is a group called XXX...It was the smart class; they obviously put higher expectations on this class compared to others...Yeah. I don't know if you have all noticed this, but I am in XXX class in XXX [department] and its really good achievement standards and sometimes we, especially for practical standards we collaborate with the ### class and they do unit standards. I feel like, and some people have been moved from the ### class to the XXX and sometimes people in the ### class feel that they have been. I don't know, I'm not them of course but I feel that some of them have not been groomed... (SBS6).*

Differences in pathways and further opportunities were identified by the inconsistencies between classes within the same subject. Students felt these inconsistencies were unfair and restrictive. The comment above demonstrated that even when the same classwork was done, assessment methods were different and this created inconsistencies.

## Question nine

Question 9 asked: “Are there any further comments you would like to make about whether you think high expectations contributes to your learning success?” The purpose of this question was to give participants the opportunity to make any additional comments about communicating high expectations to maximise student learning success that they had not previously been able to. Three categories emerged from the data.

**Table 4. 24: Benefits of communicating high expectations for student learning success**

	SA S1	SA S2	SA S3	SA S4	SA S5	SA S6	SB S1	SB S2	SB S3	SB S4	SB S5	SB S6
Improvement in motivation/engagement in classes												
Promotion of expectations of learning success												
Realistic and achievable expectations for students												

Communicating high expectations is important. However, as participants have identified students need these expectations to be realistic and achievable for each student. The following is a comment made that stresses the importance of setting high but appropriate expectations:

*I like it when they are high but when they are too high I will get stressed...and that makes it realistic and not just a shot in the dark (SBS6).*

The emphasis is clearly on knowing the individual student, setting high expectations that are measured by the same achievement outcome is detrimental to the learning success of some students.

## Summary

As I described in the previous chapter, the data gathered through the semi-structured interviews with the teacher participants and the focus group interviews with the student participants has been presented through the identification of categories. In total there were 66 different categories identified and an additional 17 categories that were in essence the same as a previously identified category. Once these categories had been listed, further analysis enabled me to identify three key themes. These themes are:

- Effective communication;
- Authentic and productive relationships; and
- Engagement.

The emergence of these themes came from identification of commonalities between the categories that had been identified. For example, the theme of effective communication crossed the boundaries of the questions asked of both sub-groups of participants and transpired from the following categories. These links are shown in Table 4.25.

An identical process was followed in the generation of the other themes: authentic and productive relationships, and engagement. The following chapter will examine the three themes that emerged and link these themes to the literature that was reviewed in Chapter Two.

**Table 4. 25: Links to the theme of effective communication**

<b>Theme: Effective Communication</b>		
<b>Method</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Identified category</b>
Semi-structured interviews	1	Knowing expectations
Semi-structured interviews	2	Communicate effectively
Semi-structured interviews	2	Setting expectations
Semi-structured interviews	4	Effective classroom routines
Semi-structured interviews	4	Role-modelling through actions and attitudes
Semi-structured interviews	6	Create an environment that values learning
Semi-structured interviews	7	Pedagogical conversations
Semi-structured interviews	7	Professional learning and Development
Semi-structured interviews	8	Support through dialogue
Semi-structured interviews	8	Presentations by SLT
Semi-structured interviews	9	Support through dialogue
Semi-structured interviews	9	Professional support
Semi-structured interviews	10	Ineffective school systems
Semi-structured interviews	11	Communicate to students
Semi-structured interviews	13	Align expectations between school/home/community
Semi-structured interviews	13	Consistent practice in the classroom for each student
Semi-structured interviews	13	Explicit explanation of expectations
Focus group interviews	2	Effective communication
Focus group interviews	2	Passion for subject and job
Focus group interviews	5	Influence through actions
Focus group interviews	7	Provide better feedback that helps understanding
Focus group interviews	7	Demonstrate passion for learning and their subject
Focus group interviews	8	Consistency in expectations for all students
Focus group interviews	13	Promotion of expectations of learning success



# Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings

## Introduction

This chapter discusses the research findings that emerged from the data gathered. As mentioned in the previous chapter, three key themes were identified: effective communication; authentic and productive relationships; and engagement. Fundamental to the discussion presented in this chapter is the overall research aim: To investigate the effect of communicating high expectations to maximise student learning success in the secondary school classroom. Arising from the aforementioned themes are sub-themes which are, at times, interconnected. The structure of the discussion that follows is based around these three key themes and their connection to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

## Research themes

### Theme One: Effective communication

A prominent theme that unfolded from the data analysis was that effective communication crosses multiple thresholds of a school and its community, with students, teachers, senior leaders and whanau talking with each other to ensure high expectations for student learning success are shared by all. The related sub-themes in Theme One are: classroom conversations; feedback; role-modelling; departmental conversations; and the explicit articulation of high expectations. Discussions of these sub-themes tend to relate to more than one of the three key themes thus demonstrating the linkages between the research findings.

#### Classroom conversations

The findings of this research highlight that classroom conversations between individual students and teachers are an essential component of effectively communicating high expectations to maximise student learning success. In essence, interaction in the classroom between students and their teacher promotes learning partnerships. Teacher participants emphasised the value of these conversations in enabling them to gain an understanding of a student's interests, talents, and learning needs. This finding concurs with the views of Weinstein (2002), who advocates for the importance of teachers knowing the talents and abilities of each of their learners. Weinstein (2002) implores teachers to listen to their learners and learn from them. This practice is further emphasised in the work of Bishop et al. (2009) in their discussion about the importance of teachers listening to the opinions of students as a means of empowering their students and improving their educational outcomes.

The student participants in this study generally concluded that teachers with high expectations for the learning success of all of their students did indeed engage in classroom conversations with them and their peers. These participants believed that teachers who engage in conversations with individual students check their understanding of current learning, empower their students, and create personal connections with them. This finding aligns with Bishop et al. (2009) and is

echoed in Bishop's (2010) journal article. As mentioned above, Bishop et al. (2009) advocate for the importance of these conversations when they describe the learning partnerships that develop between a student and their teacher. They explain that the student is able to co-construct their learning with their teacher and this encourages students to take ownership of their learning because they know that their opinion matters. Students are further empowered and move from being passive receivers of knowledge to active contributors in their learning journey. Power imbalances in the classroom can be addressed, according to Bishop and his colleagues (2009), through the relationships that develop from these conversations as connections grow and learning goals are co-constructed through a shared vision.

### Feedback

Another means of effectively communicating high expectations to students for their learning success is demonstrated by teachers through feedback and feedforward, this being another important finding from this research. This view is shared in literature such as that of Good et al. (2000) who argue that regular and quality feedback is evident in the classrooms of teachers who have high expectations for the learning success of all of their students. They explain that diminished feedback "directly affects students' opportunity to learn" (p.87), thereby resulting in less progress being made. Effective feedback and feedforward is presented in the secondary classroom in either verbal or written form, or through a combination of both. At times, secondary school teachers concentrate on the importance of providing adequate feedforward in preparing their students for assessments, rather than emphasising the importance of this practice in supporting a student's learning journey. Rubie-Davies et al. (2015) discuss the importance of clear feedback and feedforward that drives the direction of what each student needs to do next. An important difference in my research findings is that when teacher participants linked the importance of feedforward to assessment the assumption was that learning success was measured by assessment success. In contrast, Rubie-Davies et al. (2015) believe that feedforward guides the next steps in learning; there is no mention of assessment being a central focus. This belief is similar to Hattie (2012) who articulates that learning must be viewed as its own entity rather than being measured by assessment outcomes. Secondary school students value feedback and feedforward that is specific, detailed and individualised to their learning success. Students are very clear that generalised feedback does not enhance their understanding. This view is shared by Bishop et al. (2009) who discuss the merits of specific feedback, and go on to explain that when academic feedback increases, behavioural feedback seems to decrease thus reinforcing the positive effects of focussing on the learning in the classroom.

### Role modelling

An important finding from this research is that teachers believe that role modelling is a form of communication that is instrumental in expressing high expectations to, and for, their students. Teachers role model expected behaviour to their students through their preparation for classes, the language they used to ensure respectful, authentic communication, and consistent practice in the classroom. Setting such examples in the classroom is a way of communicating high

expectations of learning success for every student. This finding resonates with Bishop's (2010) discussion with regard to the practice of an effective teacher and the *Effective Teacher Profile* (p. 58). Bishop's (2010) discussion of the prior research that he and his colleagues carried out with Māori students at the secondary school level identified that students notice whether their teacher is prepared for their lesson and they appreciated organised classrooms. Bishop (2010) also ascertains that effective teachers know they can make an impact on all of their students. This knowledge reinforces the importance of teachers acknowledging and understanding the significance of their role and their actions. Role-modelling behaviour is a form of communication that can have significant impact on the educational lives of students and can be instrumental in maximising student learning success in the classroom.

Another important finding emphasises the way that Heads of Departments (HoDs) contribute significantly to the effective communication of high expectations for learning success in teachers' classrooms. This study emphasised that HoDs lead pedagogical discussions with teachers and this practice role-models reflective practice and continuous pedagogical growth. This finding resonates in the literature that explores instructional leadership. Many researchers discuss the importance of effective educational leaders being knowledgeable about pedagogy (Bendikson et al., 2012; Robinson, 2011; Robinson et al, 2009; Seashore Louis et al., 2010). However, more often than not, this discussion centres on senior leaders in a school. Importantly, there is evidence in the literature that does not focus solely on senior leaders. Cardno (2012) maintains that pedagogical leadership cannot be confined to senior leaders. She explains that whilst an educational leader's core work must centre on the learning and teaching in their school, their impact on student learning success is usually indirect. Robinson et al. (2009) also discuss the indirect influence of senior leaders, and the opinions of these researchers and Cardno (2012) are further echoed in other literature (Bendikson et al., 2012; Hallinger et al., 1995; Pina et al., 2015). Cardno (2012) also explains that those in roles such as an HoD have more direct impact on teaching and learning in a school. My research finding that discusses the importance of HoDs as role models correlates with this literature and that of Bendikson et al. (2012) whose message is similar to Cardno (2012), and asserts that the responsibility of quality teaching usually lies with those in middle leadership roles such as HoDs.

#### Department conversations

As well as engaging in individual conversations about pedagogy with their HoD, a key finding was that teachers view departmental conversations as a means of ensuring consistent practice in an effort to ensure that high expectations for learning success for all students was a reality in their classroom. This finding emphasised the importance of collaboration and a sense of 'team' in the eyes of the teacher participants. This closely aligns with literature such as that of Hallinger et al. (1998) that promotes the importance of teachers working in groups. Hattie (2012) is also an advocate of the benefits of teachers talking with their peers about their practice and its impact on student learning. Often the literature I reviewed did not necessarily concentrate on departmental conversations but was concerned with a general discussion about teachers having the opportunity to talk with their colleagues and share elements of effective practice without pinpointing who can

take part in these conversations. What is clear from this research is that secondary school teachers have these conversations with members of their departments and teachers find these conversations extremely beneficial.

#### Explicit articulation

There is literature that promotes the importance of articulating high expectations. Researchers such as Hattie (2012) and Rubie-Davies (2015) discuss the articulation of high expectations for student learning success by senior leaders as a way of influencing teachers and their practice. However, Rubie-Davies (2015) believes that articulation must be supported with guidance about what the practice of a teacher with high expectations looks like in the classroom. Her belief resonates with an important finding from this research; teachers need senior leaders to ensure that the articulation of high expectations for every student's learning success be supported with what this practice looks like in the classroom. This study identified the value of senior leaders discussing pedagogy with teachers and being visible in classrooms to ensure support and guidance. This finding emulates discussions in the literature by Robinson et al. (2009). These researchers articulate that senior leaders who get close to their school's core business - teaching practice and student learning - can positively affect their students' learning experiences.

In support of the previous discussion, this research found that teachers are inconsistent in the communication of high expectations to students. This finding again aligns with the opinion of by Rubie-Davies (2015) who believes that there are teachers with high expectations and teachers with low expectations in every school. As this study concentrates on secondary school students, students are more likely to experience an inconsistency in teacher expectations of their success as multiple teachers usually teach them. Students believe that class and course placement influence teacher expectations and create inconsistencies that are unfair, restrictive, and demotivating for the students who were in classes or courses where teachers had low expectations of the learning success of their students. Several authors note that school-wide expectations are a reality (Leo, 2015; Rubie-Davies, 2015; Stoll et al., 2003). Rubie-Davies (2015) explains that the elimination of streaming and the inclusion of flexible grouping in classrooms promote the practice of high expectations for the learning success of all students. However, my findings do not reflect that the integration of flexible groupings into classroom practice or the elimination of school-wide streaming occurs in all schools. My findings do align with Bohlmann et al.'s (2013) discussion about ability-based practice in the classroom favouring some students and excluding others. These researchers claim that such practice advocates a system of hierarchy and promotes inconsistencies in the self-expectations, motivation and learning opportunities of students. As Weinstein (2002) explains, disparity in opportunities presented to students is a reality and my findings concur. She remains concerned about the "potential for low expectations and self-fulfilling prophecies" (p. 85) which, she believes, erodes connections that these students make with school.

### **Theme Two: Authentic and productive relationships**

The importance of authentic and productive relationships is the most significant finding from my research. Relationships permeate through all of the findings of this research. Relationships are

prominent on two levels; firstly, this research illuminates the fundamental need for relationships where participants work together. Secondly, an essential facet of effective relationships that emerged from my research is the importance of caring for the individual and endeavouring to meet their personal needs. Hence, the thematic discussion about relationships will be in two parts; working together and knowing the individual.

### **Working together**

Ultimately, an effective relationship requires partnership. My research elucidates several key relationships that are essential in communicating high expectations to maximise student learning success. These are: students and teachers relationships; students and their peers; teachers and their peers; and senior leaders and teachers.

#### Student and teachers

The most dominant relationship emerging from the data gathered was that of students with their classroom teachers. Maximising student learning success does not come from students and teachers working in isolation in the classroom; learning partnerships between both participants are fundamental. A prominent finding from this research is that teachers understand the importance of the student in a successful classroom relationship and know that they need to nurture this relationship. Considering, acknowledging, and appreciating what the student brings to the relationship - their knowledge, passion, values, and identity - is crucial and forms the basis of an authentic relationship. This is fundamental in promoting the partnership needed in enacting high expectations to maximise the learning success of all students in the classroom. The literature that immediately resonates with this finding is the work of Bishop and his colleagues (2009; 2010). Researchers were told by the Māori students they spoke with that students learn better when they feel a personal connection with their teacher. These students identified that they believed “they were able to thrive at school” (Bishop et al, 2009, p. 736) when there was a strong classroom relationship between the student and their teacher. These students knew their teachers had high expectations for their learning success. This study concurs with this literature. Students appreciate teachers who develop a personal connection with them, hear their contributions and opinions, and take an interest in them as individuals and their success.

Another finding of my research was that genuine care is essential in effective classroom relationships between student and teacher. Teachers know that demonstrating genuine care for students and their learning success is a way of communicating high expectations in their classroom and students appreciate caring teachers who are genuinely interested in them and their learning success. As the literature suggests, care demonstrated daily by the teacher, along with high expectations of learning success, positively affects student learning and self-efficacy (Bishop et al., 2009). Walkey et al. (2013) suggests that students have greater aspirations for their own learning success when they know their teacher cares about them. My findings align with this literature; students admit to working harder for teachers who cared for them and had high expectations for their learning success. Students who believe that their teacher does not care for them and their learning success know that their self-esteem is negatively impacted, and they admit to lacking the motivation to learn in class and at home. This finding also connects with

literature by Robinson (2011) when she explains that if students know that their teacher cares for them, they connect more with the teacher. This point is further emphasised in literature by Bishop et al. (2009) who believe that this connection promotes learning. Connection and self-belief are pivotal in maximising student learning success in the classroom and care demonstrated by the teacher is extremely influential.

Trust is another fundamental component of an effective classroom relationship between student and teacher. This finding from my research correlates with literature by Hattie (2012) that discusses the impact that trust has on student learning success in the classroom. He explains that trust affects classroom climate. A classroom that is optimal for learning has “a climate of trust between student and teacher” (p. 26). Hattie (2012) suggests that students need to know that mistakes are seen as an integral part of learning and classrooms must be deemed to be safe, fair to everyone, and seen as respectful environments. Van Maele et al. (2011) also suggest that student engagement in the classroom is reliant on trust. An extension of the importance of trust emerged from this study when students spoke of the negative impact on their learning when they did not trust their teacher. They did not perceive classroom relationships to be strong in these classrooms and they did not enjoy the classroom environment. They described inconsistencies in learning opportunities when they perceived that teachers favoured the learning success of some students over others and they expressed a sense of injustice at this. This negative impact on student learning is reinforced in literature by Tschannen-Moran et al. (2000) who explain that students will not learn if they do not trust their teacher. There is further research that identifies how students engage more readily in classroom learning when they trust that the teacher believes in them and has high expectations for their learning success (Bishop, 2010; Bohlmann et al., 2013; Brault et al., 2014; Robinson, 2011).

Teachers recognise that effective classroom relationships are vehicles for expressing high expectations of student learning success in their classrooms. Many teachers know that setting learning expectations for each student that are realistic yet challenging is an important component for ensuring learning success. Teachers know that effective relationships with individual learners in the classrooms of teachers with high expectations can promote difference in the classroom as a positive rather than negative. My finding is reflected in literature that describes how setting individual learning goals with students is evident in the classrooms of teachers with high expectations (Good et al, 2000; Rubie-Davies, 2015; Weinstein, 2002). For example, Good et al. (2000) explain that students need help in understanding why different treatment given to themselves and their peers occurs in the classroom. These researchers explain that if students do not understand why these differences occur, they tend to think the teacher is biased and is demonstrating actions that are unfair and inappropriate. This study connects with this literature. Another important finding is that when students feel they do not connect with their teacher, they perceive different learning opportunities in the classroom or between classes as being unfair. Students often will indicate ‘difference’ as meaning differing expectations for learning success from teachers; they may not equate difference to meeting individual learning needs. Rubie-Davies et al. (2015) speaks of the power of positive relationships as a means for teachers to begin to

meet the learning needs of all of their students. They believe that teachers with high expectations for the learning success of all of their students have classrooms where every student is educationally challenged and stimulated. To successfully do this, it is important that teachers know each young person who is sitting in front of them and effective educational relationships with all students as individuals are evident.

#### Students and their classroom peers

Another finding from this research is that students do not always believe that their learning success is influenced by their relationships with classroom peers. Students who feel that their peers did not care about their learning success believe that their peers are only concerned with their own lives therefore there is no peer relationship. Social media was identified as a key contributor to this and some students felt it caused isolation rather than interaction. In comparison, some students believe that peer relationships have a positive impact on their learning success in the classroom. Students believe that positive peer relationships occur in classrooms when teachers with high expectations for their learning success encourage students to work with each other and learn from each other in their classrooms. This practice demonstrates that teachers are extremely influential in promoting positive peer relationships that enhance learning in the classroom. This finding aligns with Rubie-Davies (2015) discussion of the way that positive classroom relationships between students and their teacher can influence the support that peers give each other. This sentiment is echoed by Weinstein (2002) who explains that peer relationships are often influenced by the tone set by the teacher.

#### Teachers and their peers

The literature suggests that teachers value working with and learning from each other. Hattie (2012) places great emphasis on the importance of teachers sharing elements of their practice with each other and discussing the impact of their teaching on student learning success. Good et al. (2000) and Weinstein (2002) explain that schools are more effective in meeting student learning needs when staff have the opportunity to learn from each other. Findings from my research align with this literature. As previously mentioned, teachers believe in the merits of providing and receiving support about their classroom practice from their teaching colleagues. Sharing positive classroom experiences with, as well as seeking the guidance of, their peers strengthens pedagogy in the eyes of teachers who desire to ensure the communication of high expectations to every student for their learning success is a reality.

#### Senior leaders and teachers

Those in senior leadership roles can be influential in schools. A finding of this research is that teachers enjoy speaking with senior leaders who are passionate about pedagogy. However, teachers require assistance in ensuring the ideas discussed come to fruition in their classrooms. Classroom visits are a method identified in this study of senior leaders supporting pedagogical practice in their schools. Robinson et al. (2009) emphasise how influential senior leaders, especially the principal, can be on teaching and learning in their schools and that effective schools have strong involvement by their educational leaders in this area. This study also illuminates the importance of classroom visits by senior leaders in enhancing their relationships with teachers.

Teachers believe that senior leaders who are in classrooms engage in dialogue based on sharing pedagogical knowledge and experiences.

### **Knowing the individual**

The merits of knowing the individual was a finding that was consistently reinforced in this research. Teachers spoke of the importance of knowing their students and students acknowledged the influence that teachers who knew them personally had on their learning success. Many students see teachers as individuals and can identify attributes that they either personally connected with or struggled with. Teachers appreciate when their individuality is acknowledged. From this study emerged the value teachers placed on this or frustration felt when this was not a reality. Hence, this discussion will be in two sections; know the learner and know the teacher. There is crossover in the discussion within these two sections especially when teacher participants spoke of themselves as learners. The term 'learner' within a school must encompass students and teachers. However, for the benefit of this discussion I have chosen to use the phrase 'know the learners' when discussing findings that have arisen from, or about, students and use the phrase 'know the teacher' when discussing findings that have arisen from, or about, teachers.

#### Know the learner

A finding that was apparent from this research is that teachers with high expectations know their students individually and students feel that this helps them to achieve learning success in the secondary school classroom. As the literature suggests, knowing each student and appreciating who they are as individuals is an essential component of maximising student learning success and is a way of teachers demonstrating their commitment and interest to their students. Research by Good et al. (2000) and Weinstein (2002) emphasises the importance of teachers appreciating a student's full range of interests and abilities and they also challenge teachers to utilise these in the classroom. To recognise a student's full range of abilities requires an understanding of whom the young person is as an individual. This idea is further emphasised by Bishop et al. (2009), who note the strength of relationships between classroom teachers and individual students in forging learning partnerships to maximise learning success for all students in the classroom.

Students describe effective teachers as teachers who interact with them personally in class, check their understanding of the current learning and challenge each student to do their best. This finding correlates with McDonald et al.'s (2016) belief that teachers with high expectations for all of their students' learning success extend and challenge their students. These researchers explain that these teachers provide encouragement and provide more feedback to their students about their learning. Rubie-Davies et al. (2015) concur, discussing how these teachers monitor students' progress closely and set clear directions of 'where to next' with each student. Time and time again, there is evidence in the literature that identifies that students know whether their teacher has high or low expectations of them (Bishop, 2010; Bishop et al., 2009; Good et al., 2000; McKown et al., 2008; Peterson et al., 2016; Rubie-Davies, 2006; Weinstein, 2002). Bishop (2010) explains that students respond positively when their teacher has high expectations for their learning success. Another finding from this study was that students work harder and endeavour to



meet their teacher's expectation when they feel that their teacher has high expectations for their learning success. This finding aligns with Bishop's (2010) belief that students acknowledge and appreciate when they feel that their teacher knows them personally and what will contribute to their learning success.

Another finding that emerged from my research was that some students believe that teachers with low expectations negatively affect the learning success of either themselves or their peers. Students know when their teacher provides them or their peers with minimal learning opportunities. This finding reinforces Babad et al.'s view that students are sophisticated observers who notice "subtle nuances in verbal and nonverbal communication" (p. 232) from their teachers. Students know if they are affected by a lack of belief in their learning potential from their teacher and students believe that this can negatively affect their self-esteem. This finding aligns the work of Rubie-Davies (2015) and Walkey et al. (2013) who both discuss the impact of teacher expectations on a student's self-efficacy and motivation. Low expectations from teachers signals a lack of care and interest in student learning success and well-being, which results in disinterest and a lack of motivation from many students to be successful learners.

Many students perceive inconsistencies in assessment tools used between classes as a measure of teacher expectations for student learning success. In this study, differences identified were in the use of Unit Standards and Achievement Standards to assess learning outcomes. Students believe that the use of different assessment tools is unfair and potentially restrictive to the educational pathways in the case of Unit Standards. Many students believe that assessment tools are not selected because of their individual needs but instead they are selected based on the streaming of classes and courses. Weinstein (2002) recommends the delivery of a common curriculum that meets the needs of individual learners. However, her warning of the negative impact of differentiated learning groups and the huge difference in academic expectations that students in various groups experience correlates with the negative effects alluded to earlier in this paragraph. According to Weinstein (2002), the connection to school and learning erodes for students who are placed in what is perceived to be the lowest group. It was clear from the finding of my study that Achievement Standards are seen by students as superior to Unit Standards. Rubie-Davies (2015) emphasised that students who have teachers with high expectations for all of their students do not let their students be "narrowly funnelled into a particular achievement trajectory" (p. 226). These teachers know their learners and work with each student to achieve learning success.

Another finding of my research was that it is incorrect to assume that every student believes that teacher expectations are important to their learning success. Students who do not believe that their teacher knows them personally are less likely to admit to the importance of teacher expectation effects and effective relationships in the classroom. This finding further emphasises the importance of teachers knowing their learners and aligns with Weinstein's (2002) explanation that it is untrue to state that all students are affected personally by teacher expectations, as some students are more vulnerable than others. However, despite acknowledging this, Weinstein

(2002) does advocate for the significant contribution to the learning success of individuals when teachers have high expectations of all of their students.

Students value teachers who believe in their ability to succeed in the classroom and beyond, and work with each student to be successful learners. This finding from my research is reflected in the literature by Bendikson et al. (2012). These researchers found that it is fundamental that teachers believe that their students can be successful. Students know that teachers with high expectations believe that they will be successful learners in the classroom and these teachers support them individually to achieve this. Teachers who understand the importance of believing in their students' ability to be successful know how each individual student in their class learns best and what their personal learning expectations are. These teachers set specific learning goals that are both challenging and achievable for the individual student. Rubie-Davies (2015) endorses the merits of such practice in her literature. She stresses the importance of teachers not only having high expectations for the learning success of all of their students but also having expectations that are realistic and comparative to the needs of individual students. Hattie (2012) also draws our attention to the importance of this practice in maximising learning success for individual students by explaining that high expectations for students need to ensure that learning progression occurs for everyone.

The literature discusses the dangers of fixed expectations and an important finding from my study is that many teachers who believe they have high expectations for the learning success of their students acknowledge the inappropriateness of such an approach in the classroom. Good et al. (2000) implore teachers to recognise that students are constantly changing and developing, something that seemed impossible yesterday could very well be possible today. These researchers discuss a practice of fixed expectations called "sustaining expectation effect" (p. 75). This practice occurs when a teacher focuses on existing expectations and fails to see the development or change in a student's learning potential. Ultimately knowing the learner for who they are as the person who presently sits in a teacher's classroom is vital to maximise learning success in the classroom.

#### Know the teacher

Knowing the teacher is the second section of the discussion that concentrates on the importance of acknowledging and knowing the individual in effective relationships. Student participants focussed their observations on individual teachers and elements of their practice that demonstrated to them whether the teacher had high or low expectations of their learning and the learning of their peers. Teacher participants often reflected on their individual needs as classroom practitioners and, at times, the importance of knowing each teacher as a person, beyond their teaching role. More often than not, teacher participants centred their discussion on the senior leaders' knowledge of the teaching staff and their impact on classroom practice.

A finding from my research was that teachers describe effective professional learning and development (PLD) as opportunities to learn about, reflect and refine their classroom practice.

Teachers want to be able to connect PLD they participate in to their own classroom, and aspire to do so to ensure that they communicate high expectations and meet the learning needs of their students. Many teachers often deem school-wide PLD ineffective, as it does not meet their individual needs. This finding supports the PLD approach taken in the Te Kohitangi project. Bishop et al. (2009) outlined the PLD process previously undertaken; explaining that central to the success of this programme was the concentration on classroom practice and student outcomes. Teachers know that their senior leaders have high expectations through the sharing of achievement targets and data tracking in PLD sessions but are not able to use this information to affect change in their classroom without pedagogical direction that meets their individual teacher needs. Rubie-Davies (2015) suggests that senior leaders expect their teachers to have high expectations for the learning success of their students. However, as she explains, senior leaders provide very little guidance as to what high expectation teaching looks like in the classroom and this aligns with the finding discussed.

Senior leaders knowing each teacher for who they are beyond their role as a subject teacher was deemed important by some teachers. This finding demonstrates an important parallel between teachers knowing their students and senior leaders knowing the staff in ensuring high expectations was a school-wide expectation. Authentic relationships where senior leaders know the passions and frustrations of individual teachers were suggested as a means of avoiding an 'us and them' mentality that can manifest in schools. This finding suggests that acknowledging the importance of mental models is essential in organisational culture (Bolman et al., 2013; Schein, 2010). As Schein (2010) suggests, organisational culture is a complex entity. Cardno's (2012) discussion about how a person's mental model shapes the way they see the world seems particularly relevant to this finding. Knowing that a person's passions and frustrations are aligned to their mental models and getting to know each teacher may help to begin to understand why decisions are made and actions are done. Senior leaders who know their teaching staff as the people they are, rather than solely for the job they do, are more likely to foster a sense of togetherness. Simply voicing this intention is inadequate, substantial personal relationships require the demonstration of genuine interest and care, and they take an investment of time. Authentic relationships between senior leaders and teachers help to develop a culture of high expectations in every classroom as all participants can begin to understand the influences and expectations of each other.

Students see teachers as individuals rather than solely as a collective group. This finding from my research supports the theme 'knowing the teacher', and emerged from student reflection about how they knew if their teachers had high expectations for their learning success. Students believe in the strength of the relationships they shared with teachers who had high expectations of them; they identified these teachers as showing more care for them and their learning. On the other hand, they were equally able to identify teachers who did not have high expectations of their learning success. In the classrooms of these teachers, students expressed feelings of isolation and demotivation. This information correlates with literature by Babad et al. (1991) and Weinstein (2002), who both reveal how students are sophisticated observers. Students know what

expectations their teacher has for their learning success; high or low. My findings emphasise the important individual contribution that every teacher in a secondary school can make to the learning success and well-being of their students.

Another finding from my research was that students believe that effective teachers are passionate about their subject and their roles as teachers. Students identify these teachers as enthusiastic about what they teach and how they teach it. This description of an effective teacher suggests that students know their teachers and view them as individuals rather than as a collective entity. Passionate teachers are described as being caring and fair, thereby insinuating that these teachers have genuine and caring relationships with their students. Bendikson et al. (2012) explain that teachers need to know what inspires their learners to be effective. However, the impact of a teacher's passion seemed to be omitted from the literature reviewed. Findings from my research indicate that individual teachers who are passionate classroom practitioners are recognised, appreciated and enjoyed by the students in their classes. Passion and enthusiasm are attributes of teachers with high expectations of the learning success of all of their students.

### **Theme Three: Engagement**

Undeniably engagement contributes to maximising learning success in the classroom. This theme presented itself in this research as an ultimate outcome that was desired by teachers and enacted by students in classrooms where high expectations for students' learning success were identified as a reality. Findings that emerged demonstrate the connectivity between this theme and the themes that I have previously discussed. Rather than using sub-themes, the discussion of this theme centres around the classroom as the findings tended to focus primarily on students, teachers, and influences on classroom learning.

A finding from my research was that an effective classroom relationship between a student and their teacher promotes student engagement in the classroom learning. Students value personal classroom relationships with their teacher and it is evident when a student's teacher knows who they are as an individual, believes in their ability, and understands how they responded to academic pressures and challenges. My finding correlates with Bohlmann et al. (2013) who believe that when students know that their teacher believes in their ability to learn they "feel more competent and report more engagement" (p. 289). Students appreciate individual attention in the classroom that they receive from teachers with high expectations for their learning success. In return these students ask more questions of the teacher and report an increase in personal motivation to do well and as a result, engage more with the classroom learning.

Teachers are equally aware of the importance of effective classroom relationships between themselves and their students to maximise student learning success. Teachers who view their students as individuals and approach their learning needs in a way that reflects the student's individuality believe this encourages increased engagement from students and is an attribute of being a teacher with high expectations. My finding aligns with the work of Good et al. (2000) who comment on the importance of knowing each learner to effectively be able to teach them. They

explain that teachers with high expectations who really know how their students learn have appropriate expectations for each student's learning success rather than distorted unrealistic expectations. These researchers are adamant that individual differences in academic ability "cannot be eliminated with wishful thinking"; instead, "expectations should be appropriate given students' current capabilities" (p. 105). Hattie (2012) further endorses this practice with his discussion about effective teachers seeing learning from the perspective of a student. Using the lens of a student will educate the teacher and potentially maximise student learning success.

Teacher bias, both real and perceived, negatively affects student learning success. This finding often presents itself in the classroom through disengagement of students in their learning. As previously mentioned, students are perceptive observers. As Weinstein (2002) explains, students perceive teacher expectations through teacher tone, facial expressions, and negative and positive classroom experiences. Good et al. (2000) explain that students take note of differences in both public and private classroom interaction from the teacher towards students. Students notice inconsistencies that teachers demonstrate in their classroom interaction and relationships with and between students. When teachers engage more with some students than others in their class, students perceive that favouritism is occurring. When students believe they have little or no positive interaction with their teacher, they disengage in the classroom. Marzano (2007) believes that teacher bias is a very real phenomenon in the classroom and he explains that at times teachers can lack awareness of their own bias, hence making it a conscious and unconscious entity. There is further evidence in the literature that suggests that teacher expectations can be reflected in the interaction levels between the teacher and the student. McKown et al. (2008) surmise that a teacher who has high expectations for the learning success of a student tends to give that individual more of their time and higher levels of learning activities. The opposite is also suggested to be true by Good et al. (2000), and their suggestion resonates closely with findings of my research that have been discussed.

Another finding from this research was that teachers believe that role-modelling behaviours and expectations in the classroom promote increased engagement. Teachers role model their high expectations in a variety of ways, which included thorough lesson planning, their dialogue with their students, and in their classroom practice. Classroom expectations such as providing students with learning intentions and success criteria are also aspects of effectively demonstrating a teacher's expectations to their students. Explaining the impact of perceived negative behaviour as a way of impeding learning progress for a student and outlining learning and behaviour expectations is another identified effective classroom practice. My findings align with literature by Bishop (2010) who emphasises the importance of rules and boundaries in the classroom. He explains that students appreciate this practice in the classroom and recognise the impact these have on their ability to learn. This recognition, understanding and value identified can potentially have positive effects on student learning success in the classroom and equates to increased engagement.

The literature suggests that learning partnerships in the classroom promote engagement. Bishop et al. (2009) emphasise that student engagement increases when there is a connection and shared vision between the student and teacher. A key finding from my research was that teachers believe that engagement increases when learning partnerships are evident in the classroom and this practice was found in classrooms of teachers with high expectations. Teachers who engage in learning partnerships with their students tailor their expectations to support each of their students to be successful and acknowledge the importance of what each student brings to the classroom; whether it is their talents, passions, experiences, or a combination of attributes listed. These teachers also recognise the importance of providing students with detailed learning-based feedback. The finding from this study aligns with the discussion of Bishop and his colleagues (2009; 2010) who discuss the strength of inclusive relationships between a student and their teacher to enhance student learning success. These researchers are adamant that learning partnerships promote engagement in the classroom.

It is imperative to recognise that student engagement cannot be forced. Genuine engagement is a process that needs to be shaped by the actions of and interactions between a student and their teacher. It is important for students to understand the relevance of what they are learning. Teachers with high expectations for the learning success of their students work hard to ensure that the learning is relevant and accessible to students and this practice promotes student engagement. This finding links with the work of McDonald et al. (2016) who believe that students need to be able to connect with the learning that is occurring in the classroom. This connection positively enhances classroom climate and learning outcomes for students. Students who have teachers who have high expectations of their learning success experience personal connection with the learning and this promotes student engagement.

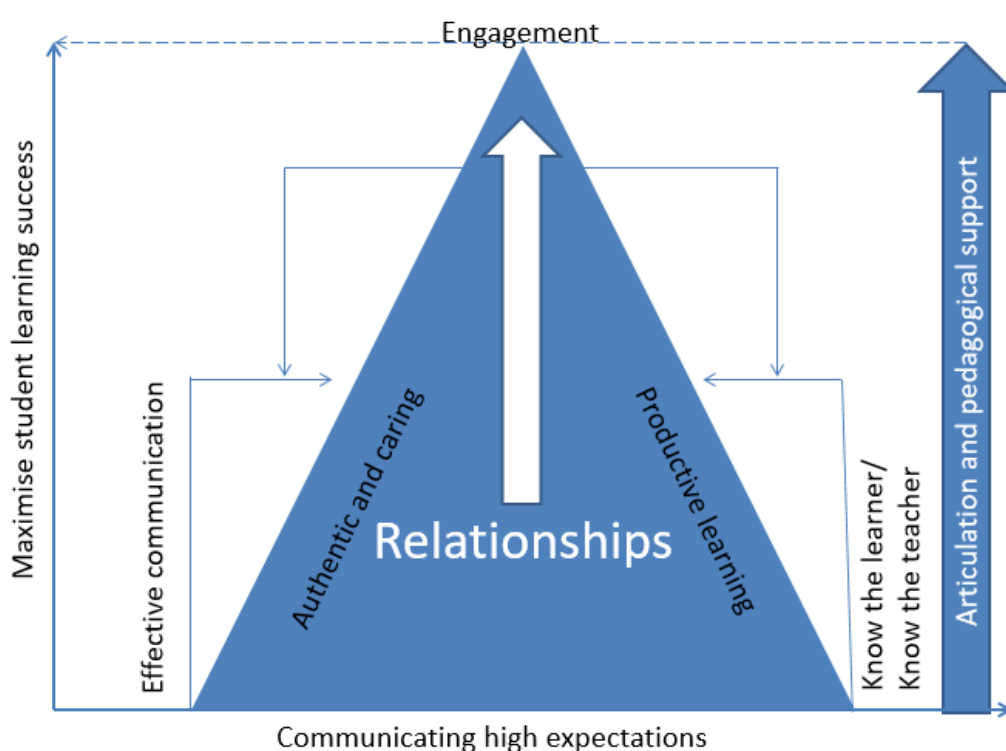
Another finding from this research is teachers who do not believe in the ability of their students to be successful learners promote disengagement of their students in the classroom learning. As previously noted, students need to feel a sense of personal connection with their teacher. My findings align with literature by Bishop (2010) who believes that a student's responses and actions often reflect their teacher's actions. There is a clear warning in his literature that centres on students responding negatively when their teacher's actions reflect deficit theorising. Teachers with high expectations for the learning success of all of their students believe in their students' ability to succeed and this is reflected in high levels of student engagement.

Teachers believe that schools that promote and value the importance of learning and address barriers to learning have teachers with high expectations for the learning success of all students. More often than not, teachers expect senior leaders to address barriers to learning such as attendance and late issues, and unacceptable classroom behaviour that seriously impedes the learning of other students. This study found that if these issues were not addressed then teachers' expectations can be negatively affected. Brault et al. (2014) emphasise the importance of an "orderly teaching environment" (p. 151) which expands to a discussion beyond the classroom and includes the influences of the school climate on teacher's expectations of student learning

success, thus supporting this finding. These researchers explain that the accepted values and norms of a school are reflected in the school climate. Teachers relish a school environment that prioritises the importance of learning that goes on in their classrooms and around the school. An orderly school environment supports the communication of high expectations from teachers to their students thereby potentially maximising student learning success.

## Summary

Three interconnected themes - effective communication, authentic and productive relationships, and engagement - were critically examined in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Figure 5.1 presents a summary of the interconnectedness of these themes.



**Figure 5 1: Interconnectedness of key themes**

This figure demonstrates that central to the communication of high expectations to maximise student learning success is relationships. The importance of relationships must be acknowledged within a school, as productive and positive relationships create engagement within and outside of the classroom. Relationships affect students and teachers, classrooms and staffrooms. This figure emphasises that engagement is needed to maximise student learning success, it is the pinnacle of what a school strives for. However, authentic and caring relationships, and productive learning relationships drive engagement from students and teachers.

As demonstrated by the arrows in this figure, relationships influence the effective communication in a school. Schools need strong, positive relationships on various levels to ensure effective

communication and, as demonstrated in this figure, effective communication enhances relationships. Furthermore, relationships are productive and successful in schools when individuals feel appreciated and respected. Students and teachers must be known and valued as individuals rather than viewed as members' of specific collectives. It is essential to believe in the merits of the contribution that students and teachers bring to different relationships within a school.

Sitting alongside the merits of knowing the teacher is the identification of the importance of supporting the articulation of high expectations to teachers with pedagogical support. This approach will drive classroom practice that supports the communication of high expectations for learning success to all students and will be reflected through increased engagement. Pedagogical support that meets the individual needs of a teacher to enact the practice of having high expectations for learning success of all students in their class will promote increased teacher engagement. Student engagement will in turn increase when they experience learning in an environment where they know that their teacher believes in them and supports their learning success.

Ultimately, student learning success will not be maximised in schools without valuing the importance of relationships. Relationships underpin everything within a school; undoubtedly, high expectations will not be implemented successfully without believing in the power of, and prioritising relationships.

Chapter Six will elucidate the conclusions of this investigation. Recommendations are discussed, limitations are identified and personal reflections are shared in this final chapter.



# Chapter Six: Conclusion

## Introduction

This chapter discusses the conclusions that have arisen from this research. Limitations of this study and recommendations resulting from my research are presented with personal reflections based on this learning journey.

## An overview of the research

The overall aim of this research was to critically examine the importance of communicating high expectations to maximise learning success for all students in all secondary school classrooms. Student and teacher voice contributed to the findings of this research and the three conclusions that are subsequently presented have emerged from investigation that has been guided by the following four key questions.

The four key questions were:

- 1) How do teachers define and communicate 'high expectations' in the context of their secondary school students' achievement?
- 2) What other factors do teachers identify as important in the way that the communication of high expectations contributes to learning success for their students?
- 3) What enablers and barriers do teachers experience when communicating high expectations to students?
- 4) In what ways do students perceive that high expectations contribute to their learning success?

## Conclusions

### 1. Students are experts in identifying a teacher's perceptions of student ability

This research concludes that secondary school students are able to identify and articulate if their teacher has high expectations for the learning success of themselves and their peers. Students believe that a teacher's expectations are influenced by the structure of a school's curriculum and timetable, as well as personal perceptions of a student that a teacher may hold. High expectations of a student's ability are characterised by students as coming from teachers who have individual conversations with them about their learning. These teachers also provide detailed feedforward to guide 'where to next' in their learning journey and celebrate their learning successes. Lack of interaction from a teacher towards an individual student indicates low expectations and students admit that this results in disengagement in classroom learning. This disengagement often extends beyond the classroom and erodes connections that students make with school and learning in general. Students who believe that their teacher has low expectations of their ability to be successful learners feel a sense of isolation. There is no sense of a learning partnership between the student and their teacher; instead, students identify the responsibility for educational success residing solely on their shoulders and this is an isolating and daunting feeling.

Students care about their own learning success and make connections between this success and enjoying school. They are also sensitive observers of their peers and are able to identify if a teacher has low expectations of other students and high expectations of themselves, and vice versa. Students connect the quality of a student's relationship with their teacher as an indicator of teacher belief in their ability to maximise learning success in the classroom.

## **2. Having high expectations benefits teachers and students**

Teachers who believe they have high expectations of their students learning success enjoy the contribution they make to a young person's life. This can equate to greater job satisfaction. These teachers comment on their ability to connect with students in their class and these connections often last beyond the classroom and school years of the student. A highlight for these teachers is often meeting a past student as a successful and happy adult. This conclusion reiterates the importance of relationships that begin in the classroom.

Students identify passion in teachers with high expectations for the learning success of all students in their class. This passion reveals itself to students through the love of what the teacher is teaching and pride in how they teach it. Students benefit from having teachers with high expectations as they enjoy being taught by a passionate teacher, and at times are driven by their teacher's passion. Students identify a teacher's passion through a desire for them to enjoy their learning and be successful learners.

Having a teacher with high expectations for their learning affects students in important ways. Confidence in their ability to be a successful learner is fostered through productive learning relationships with their teacher, and this permeates into other facets of a student's life. Students know that having a teacher with high expectations promotes positive self-efficacy and promotes students taking ownership of their learning journey. Often this may mean inspiring further study or a career in an area where the student felt their skills were recognised and appreciated.

A teacher with high expectations will often challenge their students without excessively pressuring them and students recognise this is because their teacher understands who they are as individuals, how they learn, what they value, and what they enjoy. Students remember teachers who have high expectations for their learning with fondness and appreciation and they understand the important contribution that teacher made to their learning success.

## **3. Schools that prioritise teacher professional learning and development on the importance of relationships are likely to contribute significantly to student learning success**

Teachers must understand the importance of having an authentic and productive relationship with each of their students. These relationships can contribute significantly to many facets of a young person's life, including their learning success and connection with education and school. However, it is unacceptable to assume that teachers understand the significance of relationships in promoting student learning success in their classroom. Once teachers understand the importance of classroom relationships, pedagogical approaches are likely to enhance the success

of effectively communicating high expectations to every student. This is because teachers will be more likely to see the individuals sitting in front of them, rather than view the class as a collective. Learning partnerships are important in the classroom and once a teacher understands the significance of valuing the individual and the influence that a teacher who genuinely cares for their student has on educational success, these partnerships can move the learning in a direction where high expectations and learning success are a reality.

Learning about the power of productive and respectful relationships will strengthen a school's collegiality and collective focus on ensuring students have teachers with high expectations for their learning success. Along with classroom relationships benefitting from such PLD focus, staff relationships can also be enhanced. Just as students appreciate being acknowledged and respected as individuals, teachers do too. Teachers appreciate senior leaders who show genuine care and interest in who they are, what drives their decision-making, their values, and their teaching passion. It is naïve to assume that senior leaders understand the importance of this or are naturally inclined to forge these relationships, therefore emphasising that this PLD is imperative and beneficial. When relationships between teachers and senior leaders are genuine and caring, they too can parallel those in the classroom and be productive learning relationships. Common foci and purpose can develop or be strengthened through relationships that foster a sense of partnership. In school, this common foci and purpose must include maximising student learning success. Learning about the power of productive relationships should provide senior leaders with more opportunity to influence the learning and teaching in a way that is appreciated and helpful to teachers. In return, teachers are less likely to feel segregated from senior leaders and more likely to encourage them into their classrooms to see the purposeful learning that is going on. Schools with teachers and senior leaders who work together are more likely to have students who experience learning success from teachers with high expectations.

## **Recommendations and my intended approach**

Drawing on the conclusions made resulting from this investigation, several recommendations are proposed. These recommendations are at national and school level.

### **National level**

It is the recommendation of this research that training providers who specialise in secondary teacher training programs delve deeply into the essence and importance of productive learning relationships in the classroom. In preparing their students for secondary school teaching, these providers could look to utilising current secondary school students to share their classroom experiences with the pre-service teachers. Nothing would be more powerful than hearing the effect of positive and negative relationships that students have experienced with teachers, and the impact of these relationships on student self-efficacy levels and learning success.

There are two ways that training providers could look to implement this approach into a training programme. Firstly, a small group of secondary school students could be invited to the training

institution to speak with the pre-service teachers. However, this study recommends the second approach; pre-service teachers could be presented with a set of guiding questions to ask a small group of students at every school where they are on practicum, much like a focus group interview. Ideally the participants in this focus group would not be students that the pre-service teacher taught in an attempt to protect existing relationships that may have formed while on practicum. Training providers could then develop a reflection task for their pre-service teachers where elements of successful and unsuccessful classroom relationships were compared to classroom relationships developed by the pre-service teacher on practicum. Another reflection could be linking successful and unsuccessful classroom relationships to student learning success. From here, the final recommendation is that pre-service teachers share their learning from this activity with their peers once they return from practicum; this practice will promote the importance of discussion with peers, which is essential practice once these students begin their teaching journey in schools.

### **School level**

There are two recommendations from this research. Both recommendations are written from the perspective of sharing my learning from this investigation with the colleagues at the school where I currently work.

The first recommendation I would make is to source PLD opportunities for staff on the importance of productive learning relationships in the classroom. Similar to the recommendation made at a national level, I would like to include student voice and perspective in this PLD. We have a Student Council that could lead the collection of student voice. The Student Council has teacher liaisons that would provide help and guidance to the student council; however, it would be important that the students lead the gathering of this vital information. I believe that providing the student leaders with the purpose of this investigation and some guiding questions would be imperative. If they felt comfortable, once the data had been collected, I would encourage the Student Council members to share their findings with staff and I would ask the teacher liaisons to support them.

To complement this recommendation, I would endeavour to run my second recommendation in support of the PLD focussed on the importance of productive learning relationships. My reasoning for this is that teachers who participated in my research clearly told me that they need support to connect PLD strategies with classroom practice.

My second recommendation is based on establishing or revisiting the practice of communicating high expectations of student learning success in every classroom within a secondary school. Regardless of whether the focus is to establish or revisit the focus, I recommend the use of an inquiry approach. In the school where I currently work I would recommend using the spiral of inquiry (Timperley, Kaser & Halbert, 2014) as this is an inquiry approach that our staff is becoming more confident with as it is the inquiry cycle currently being used in our Kāhui Ako. However, the Teaching as Inquiry model (Ministry of Education, 2007 p. 35) may be more suitable in some schools.

Reflecting on my learning from this investigation, I recommend that a lead inquiry team be formed. Membership of this team must include some senior leaders and the school curriculum leaders or staff who are confident they communicate high expectations effectively in their classrooms to all of their students to maximise learning success. To do justice to such an inquiry, I would recommend that this is at least a 12-month school PLD focus and be actioned mainly in small groups or department teams that are led by members of the lead group. I anticipate this inquiry will need some school-wide PLD sessions but as these often do not provide opportunities to meet the needs of individual teachers, my recommendation is minimal use of this approach, as teachers tend to view these PLD sessions as information giving forums rather than information sharing forums.

As with my first recommendation student contribution is essential to the success of this inquiry. I would again recommend that the Student Council lead the collection of student voice. I would recommend that our principal speak with the Student Council to explain the purpose and process of this inquiry. As with my first recommendation, I believe that the Student Council would also benefit from some sample questions provided by the lead inquiry team to help guide their focus of the data and opinions collected from the students. Once this data has been collected, I would recommend that members of the Student Council present this to staff during a whole-staff PLD session. I believe that hearing what our students think from our students would be powerful and inspirational, albeit potentially confronting for some. Ideally I believe this contribution would support the scanning stage of the inquiry process.

### **My personal reflection**

Engaging in this research has changed my practice, both as a classroom teacher and as a senior leader. I acknowledge that there are limitations of this study. A primary limitation for consideration is that this is a small-scale study based on gathering data from two schools that were similar to the one where I currently work. However, I believe that the findings of this investigation are transferable. As I have previously mentioned, this study has re-emphasised the importance of relationships in ensuring quality education. This study was based on the secondary school level; however, it would be short-sighted to believe that relationships are only important at this level of education. At the crux of effective education, regardless of the level, are people and effective relationships that are essential to maximise learning potential and create personal affinity with the merits of life-long learning and personal development.

As I reflect on my classroom practice, this investigation has reminded me of some very valuable lessons. I have been reminded to share my passion for what I teach, to articulate my expectations to my students on a class and individual level, and to remind every student who walks through my classroom door that they are important, they are special, and that I value what they bring to our learning relationship and our classroom. I have been reminded that I am in a very privileged

position. As a teacher my opinions matter and I need to remember the influence that I may have in the lives of the many students that I teach.

As I reflect on my role as a senior leader in our school, I know that this investigation has been valuable in developing my leadership vision. It has shaped my approach to the relationships that I have or attempt to forge with colleagues; this investigation has opened my eyes to the importance of knowing colleagues beyond their role in the school. I have endeavoured, and will continue to do so, to go into as many classrooms as I can. These classroom visits allow me to talk with students about their learning and to talk with teachers about their practice and this is something that I learn from and enjoy. I have also found myself discussing the importance of articulating high expectations with my colleagues and enquiring into ways in which teachers can be supported to make this a reality for every student in their classes. I know this is important; the students that I spoke to when gathering my research data told me so.

Recently a colleague shared with me a conversation that she had with a student I teach. This conversation affirmed the importance of the learning I have gained through completing this research. It emphasised for me that the changes and adaptations in my practice are positive. My colleague explained that she asked this student, who is currently Year 9, how school was going and what classes she was enjoying and why. This student replied that she was enjoying my class. When asked what she enjoyed about it, this student said it was because I had high expectations of her and her classmates and their learning success. The teacher asked how she knew I had high expectations and the student's response was because I told her and her classmates regularly. When asked how this made the student feel, her reply indicated that my belief in her made her feel good about herself and this student in turn had high expectations of herself and her own learning success.

As a teacher, I do not think that I could ask for better than that!

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## Participant Information Sheet: Schools

23 August 2017

**Title of thesis: Communicating high expectations to students: Maximising learning success in the secondary school classroom**

Tēnā koe,

My name is Michelle Heather and I am currently enrolled in the Master of Educational Leadership in the School of Education at Auckland University of Technology. I am seeking your help in meeting the requirements of research for a thesis project which forms a substantial part of this degree by requesting your permission to work with members of your teaching staff and Year 13 cohort.

### **What is the purpose of this research?**

The purpose of my research is to examine teachers' perception of the impact of communicating high expectations on student learning success in secondary school classrooms. I intend to gather the perspectives of students and teachers on this issue and want to ask participants to comment about school leadership practices and processes, and potential support and barriers within school. The information shared by the participants will provide me with the information needed to present research findings in a published thesis on this topic. It is my aim to potentially present findings that may be relevant and potentially useful to colleagues in the education profession.

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

My research has a secondary school focus. I have chosen to contact you as your school is a significant secondary school in Auckland. If you agree, I would like to use two methods of research at your school. Firstly, I would like to interview three teachers who have taught at your school for a minimum of three years. Secondly, I would like to engage in a focus group discussion with six of your Year 13 students who are 16 years of age and older.

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

If you are agreeable to your school participating in my research please complete the permission form that is attached within seven working days of receiving this letter. I am happy to come into your school to collect the completed permission form or alternatively I would be happy to have the form scanned and emailed to me.

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

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

This project involves three teacher participants engaging in a semi-structured interview individually with me. If you agree, I would like to put an advertisement in your staffroom and/or staff work rooms asking for volunteers to participate in these interviews and prior to their participation I will provide them with a Participant Information Sheet outlining key aspects of this research. Teacher participants will also be required to sign a consent form before participating in an interview. Student participants will engage in

a focus group interview with me and five of their peers. To explain the purpose of my research and to ask for student volunteers I would ask permission to talk with Year 13 students in 2-3 classes at the end of a lesson or during a tutor/form class session. If students indicate that they are interested in participating in my research, and they are 16 years or older, I will give them a Participant Information Sheet and ask all participants to sign a consent form prior to their engagement in a focus group discussion. In order to not impede on classroom learning these focus groups would not be conducted during class time and I will ask to meet with teacher participants during a time that does not impact the teaching of their classes or any other school responsibilities they may have. I believe that each interview and the focus group discussion will be 45 minutes in duration. Please be assured that the data that I collect will only be used for the purpose of this research. I would appreciate it if you would give me permission to conduct these interviews and the focus group in a room at your school so that I do not inconvenience any of the participants. I ensure you that will adhere to all school and tikanga Māori protocols at all times.

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

I believe that participants will be unlikely to experience discomfort or risk as a result of participating in this research project. However, it is possible that they may feel some level of discomfort or embarrassment if they feel that they cannot answer a question. In addition, focus group participants may feel that they cannot contribute to the group discussion or they may feel uncomfortable hearing the responses of their peers. The interviews and focus group discussion will be digitally recorded; this may make some participants feel slightly uncomfortable.

#### **How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

I believe it is my responsibility to demonstrate care and respect for my participants and to encourage them to show these courtesies to each other. The language that I use will be age and experience appropriate and the methods that I have chosen to use allow me to be adaptable in presenting questions in a way that respects the needs of individual participants. I will carefully explain that to all participants that I will make every effort to keep their contributions confidential by ensuring that the person transcribing the digital recordings of each discussion or interview has signed a confidentiality agreement form. I will endeavour to make all of my participants feel safe, informed and appreciated at all times.

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

I believe that this research could be beneficial to others. Potential participants could benefit from having the opportunity to voice their opinions and perceptions about whether communicating high expectations to each student does contribute to maximising learning success for each learner. Participation in this research may also be a chance for participants to reflect on their own contribution to successful learning as either a student or a teacher. The wider community may also benefit from this research as findings may stimulate reflection and potentially an adaption of a colleague's practice, thus potentially positively impacting learning experiences of students in New Zealand secondary schools. As the researcher I will also benefit from conducting this study. This research will provide me with an opportunity to develop research skills including developing a research plan, ethical considerations, data collection, data analysis and the presentation of research findings all demonstrated in the publication of a completed thesis. The completion of this thesis will hopefully lead to successful completion of the Master of Educational Leadership qualification.

#### **How will my privacy be protected?**

Whilst I cannot promise the participants anonymity I will assure them and yourself that I will respect their privacy and I will present my findings in a way that protects their identity, the identity of your school and the identity of any other person that they mention. Perspectives shared with me in the semi-structured interviews will be confidential. Unfortunately, because focus groups involve multiple people sharing their perspectives during one meeting I cannot assure participants that their comments will be confidential. However, please be assured that I will be asking that participants undertake to keep all discussion confidential to group members and they respect the contribution of others.

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

The cost associated in participating in this research is time. I believe that each interview and focus group will be 45 minutes in duration. Teacher participants will also have the opportunity to check and make any amendments to the transcript of their interview prior to the beginning of analysis.

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

I do hope that you find my intended investigation of interest. Please let me know within 7 working days if you are happy for me to ask for volunteers from your teaching staff and Year 13 cohort to participate in my research.

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

I would be happy to provide you with an emailed summary of my findings if you desire these once I have the permission to do this from all participants and have completed my analysis.

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

If at anytime you have any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Alison Smith. Alison's email address is [alison.smith@aut.ac.nz](mailto:alison.smith@aut.ac.nz) and her contact phone number is 09 921 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 Permission Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

***Researcher Contact Details:***

Michelle Heather's email address is [michelle.heather10@gmail.com](mailto:michelle.heather10@gmail.com)

***Project Supervisor Contact Details:***

Alison Smith's email address is [alison.smith@aut.ac.nz](mailto:alison.smith@aut.ac.nz)

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request.

Nāku iti noa, nā

Michelle Heather

## Appendix B:

## Permission Form: Principal's permission for access to the school.

*Project title:* **Communicating high expectations to students: Maximising learning success in the secondary school classroom**

*Project Supervisor:* **Alison Smith**

*Researcher:* **Michelle Heather**

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 23/08/2017.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (teachers' and students' choice).
- ☐ I understand that the teachers who consent to participate in this research will be interviewed, and that the data gathered from these interviews will be digitally recorded, transcribed and appropriately analysed.
- ☐ I understand that the students who consent to participate in this research will be participants in a focus group, and that the data gathered from this focus group discussion will be digitally recorded, transcribed and appropriately analysed.
- ☐ I understand that if teachers or students withdraw from the study then they will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to them removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of their data may not be possible.
- ☐ I agree for this research to take place at Mangere College.
- ☐ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

School representative's signature:

.....

School representative's name: .....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

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

Date:

***Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2017, AUTEC  
Reference number 17/246.***



## Appendix C: Interview Guide

### Questions for semi-structured interviews with teacher participants:

1. Please describe what learning success means to you
2. How do you help your students to achieve learning success in your classroom?
3. What do you understand the phrase 'high expectations' for your students to mean?  
What does this phrase mean in the context of secondary school achievement?
4. Please describe how a high expectation teacher acts in the classroom.
5. Do you believe that it is important that every teacher communicates high expectations for learning success to every student in their classes? If **yes**, why is it important? Or, if **no**, why is it not important?
6. How can the communication of high expectations contribute to the learning success of each student? **Or**, why do you think that the communication of high expectations can't or doesn't contribute to the success of each student?
7. Is there an expectation in your school that every teacher has high expectations of learning success for every student in each of their classes? If **yes**, please explain how this expectation is conveyed to staff. If **no**, why do you think this is not an expectation?
8. How **do** members of the Senior Leadership Team support you to communicate high expectations to your students? Or, how **could** members of the Senior Leadership Team support you to communicate high expectations to your students?
9. How **do** other colleagues support you to communicate high expectations to your students? Or, how **could** other colleagues support you to communicate high expectations to your students?
10. Are there any barriers that prevent you from communicating high expectations to your students? If **yes**, please outline these and tell me of any ways that you feel that these barriers could be overcome.
11. Do you believe that students think it's important that their teacher communicates high expectations for their learning success? How do you think students know their teacher does or does not have high expectations for their learning success?
12. How do you think students perceive high expectations contribute to their learning success?
13. Do you have any further comments that you would like to make about communicating high expectations to maximise student learning success in the classroom?

### Questions for focus group interviews with student participants:

1. Please describe what learning success in the classroom means to you.
2. Do you know teachers who have helped you to achieve learning success in the classroom? If yes, please describe how these teachers helped you to achieve learning success.
3. How important is it to you that your teachers have high expectations for your learning success? Why?

4. Do you think that if your teacher has high expectations of you that this helps you to achieve learning success in the classroom? If yes, please describe how this helps you.
5. Can you describe what it is like to be in a class where the teacher has high expectations for every student's learning success?
6. What does a teacher do that makes you know that they have high expectations of your learning success?
7. Are there any things that this teacher does differently to teachers who you feel do not have high expectations of you and your learning success?
8. What is the biggest challenge for you if you feel that your teacher does not have high expectations for your learning success?
9. If you think it is important that teachers communicate high expectations to each student for their learning success, do you have any ideas how this could be done better in the classroom?
10. How important is each student's learning success in your school and how do you know this?
11. If you think that it is important that schools communicate high expectations to each student for their learning success, do you any ideas how this could be improved?
12. Are there any other comments you would like to make about whether you think that high expectations contribute to your learning success?

## Participant Information Sheet: Teacher participants

23 August 2017

### **Title of thesis: Communicating high expectations to students: Maximising learning success in the secondary school classroom**

Kia ora

My name is Michelle Heather and I am currently enrolled in the Master of Educational Leadership in the School of Education at Auckland University of Technology. I am seeking your help in meeting the requirements of a research project that I am embarking on.

#### **What is the purpose of this research?**

The purpose of my research is to examine teachers' perception of the impact of communicating high expectations on student learning success in secondary school classrooms. I intend to gather the perspectives of students and teachers on this issue and want to ask participants to comment about school leadership practices and processes, and potential support and barriers within school. The information shared by the participants will provide me with the information needed to present research findings in a published thesis on this topic. A successful thesis will form a substantial part of achieving a Master of Educational Leadership. It is also my aim to potentially present findings that may be relevant and potentially useful to colleagues in the education profession.

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

My research has a secondary school focus. I have chosen to contact you as your school is a significant secondary school in Auckland. I would like to interview three teachers who have taught at your school for a minimum of three years. If you are a teacher with this length of service at this school, I am requesting that you to consider participating in my research.

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

I am adaptable to meeting with you at a time in the school day that suits you and I will request the use of a room on the school grounds so that I do not inconvenience you in anyway. Once we have agreed on a time that is convenient to you, I will ask you to complete a Consent Form and answer any further questions that you may have. Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

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

If you volunteer to take part in this research you will be asked to participate in an interview with me. This interview is semi-structured and will be based around 8-10 questions that I would like to ask. However, I am very interested in additional information that you would like to share with me around your perceptions of the impact of high expectations on student learning. I would like to digitally record our conversation and also take additional notes. I will be happy to share the transcript with you for your approval prior to beginning any analysis of your transcript. I would ask that you return the transcript to me within 10 days with any amendments you wish to make and your approval so that I can meet my thesis deadlines. Please be assured that I will only use information that you share with me that is appropriate to meeting the aims of this research and I will respect your opinions and am grateful for your contributions to my research.

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

I believe that you will be unlikely to experience discomfort or risk as a result of participating in this research project. However, it is possible that you could feel some level of worry that you may not be able to answer all of the questions that I ask or you may be concerned about being digitally recorded.

**How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

I will be extremely grateful if you agree to participate in my research. I intend to conduct a semi-structured interview when talking with you. This method is less formal than an interview and I hope that this will alleviate any worry that you may have. I anticipate that your length of service at this school will mean that you will be adequately prepared to answer any of the questions that I have. I am requesting that you give me permission to digitally record our interview and I will also take some additional notes, I am requesting to do this to ensure that the transcript accurately conveys your perspectives.

**What are the benefits?**

Ultimately it is my aim to potentially present findings that may be relevant and potentially useful to colleagues in the education profession and I am asking for your contribution to achieve this. Potential participants, such as yourself, could benefit from having the opportunity to voice their opinions and perceptions about whether communicating high expectations to each student does contribute to maximising learning success for each learner. Participation in this research may also be a chance for reflection on your contribution to successful learning as a teacher. The wider community may also benefit from this research as findings may stimulate reflection and potentially an adaptation of a colleague's practice, thus potentially positively impacting learning experiences of students in New Zealand secondary schools. As the researcher I will also benefit from conducting this study. This research will provide me with an opportunity to develop research skills including developing a research plan, ethical considerations, data collection, data analysis and the presentation of research findings all demonstrated in the publication of a completed thesis. The completion of this thesis will hopefully lead to successful completion of the Master of Educational Leadership qualification.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

I cannot ensure anonymity but I do promise to respect your opinions and contributions. I will not share any of your comments or your identity with a third party. When publishing my findings I will endeavour to present these in such a way that your identity, the identity of your school and the identity of any colleague or student that you may mention will not be identifiable by a third party. If I use one of your phrases as a direct quotation I will use a pseudonym in place of your name, I will also use a code or your pseudonym in all note-taking. Confidentiality and respect for you and your perspectives are of upmost importance to me.

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

Your time is a very valuable commodity and I am asking for you to share some of it with me. I believe that our interview will take approximately 45 minutes and if you decide that you would like to check the transcript of our interview this will take a little more of your time.

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

Thank you for your initial enquiry into participating in my research. I ask that you consider whether you would be happy to partake in an interview with me and share your perspectives with me. Please advise me if you wish to be a participant within five working days of receiving this information sheet.

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

If you and the other participants give me permission I will provide your school with an emailed summary of my findings if they would like to receive these. I would also be happy to email you a copy of these findings if you would like to receive this information.

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

If at any time you have any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Alison Smith. Alison's email address is [alison.smith@aut.ac.nz](mailto:alison.smith@aut.ac.nz) and her contact phone number is 09 921 9999 ext. 7363. Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTECH, 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 I will ask you to keep a copy of the Consent Form once it is signed for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

***Researcher Contact Details:***

Michelle Heather's email address is [michelle.heather10@gmail.com](mailto:michelle.heather10@gmail.com)

***Project Supervisor Contact Details:***

Alison Smith's email address is [alison.smith@aut.ac.nz](mailto:alison.smith@aut.ac.nz)

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request. I do hope that you find my intended investigation of interest and that you would agree to take part.

Ngā mihi nui

Michelle Heather

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2017, AUTEK Reference number 17/246.

## Participant Information Sheet: Student participants

23 August 2017

### **Title of thesis: Communicating high expectations to students: Maximising learning success in the secondary school classroom**

Kia ora

My name is Michelle Heather and I am currently enrolled in the Master of Educational Leadership in the School of Education at Auckland University of Technology. I am seeking your help in in meeting the requirements of a research project that I am currently doing.

#### **What is the purpose of this research?**

The purpose of my research is to examine the impact of communicating high expectations on student learning success in secondary school classrooms. I intend to gather the perspectives from students and teachers on this issue. I would like to ask participants to share their experiences and opinions about school leadership practices and processes, and potential support and barriers within school. The information shared by the participants in this research will provide me with the information needed to present research findings in a published thesis on this topic. A successful thesis forms a large part of achieving a Master of Educational Leadership degree.

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

My research has a secondary school focus. I have chosen to contact you as your school is a significant secondary school in Auckland. I would like to run a focus group discussion with 6 Year 13 students who are 16 years or older, as you meet this criteria I would like to ask you to consider participating in my research.

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

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

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

If you agree to participating in this research you will be asked to participate in focus group discussion with me. This is a discussion involving 6 Year 13 volunteers discussing their answers to 7-8 questions that I would like to ask. However, I am very interested in additional information that you would like to share with me around your perceptions of the impact of high expectations on student learning. I believe that this focus group will take 45 minutes of your time, for which I will be extremely grateful. The focus group discussion will take place at a mutually convenient time in the school day that does not interfere with your learning or other school-based commitments. I will request the use of a room on the school grounds so that I do not inconvenience you in anyway. I will digitally record our conversation and also take additional notes, please know that I will only use the information shared with me that meets the aim of this research when I write and publish my findings. The transcription of this interview will be done by an external provider and please be assured that they have signed a confidentiality agreement prior to creating this transcript.

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

You will be unlikely to experience discomfort or risk as a result of participating in this research project. However, it is possible that you may feel worried that you will not be able to answer the questions that I ask or you may feel unsure about sharing your thoughts in front of other students. You may also feel slightly uncomfortable because I am digitally recording the focus group discussion.

**How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

I will be extremely grateful if you agree to participate in my research. I have decided to gather your perspectives in a focus group as I am hoping that this will make you feel more comfortable than participating in an individual interview with me. I will respect your privacy and your contribution, and I will be asking all focus participants to do the same for each other. I believe that as a Year 13 student you will be adequately prepared to answer any of the questions that I have. I am requesting that you give me permission to digitally record our interview and I will also take some additional notes, I am requesting to do this to ensure that the transcript accurately conveys your perspectives. I hope these explanations have addressed any worries that you may have.

**What are the benefits?**

Ultimately it is my aim to potentially present findings that may be relevant and potentially useful to teachers and schools. Potential participants, such as yourself, could benefit from having the opportunity to voice their opinions and perceptions about whether communicating high expectations to each student does contribute to maximising learning success for each learner. Participation in this research may also be a chance for reflection on your contribution to your learning success. As the researcher I will also benefit from conducting this study. This research will provide me with an opportunity to develop research skills including developing a research plan, ethical considerations, data collection, data analysis and the presentation of research findings all demonstrated in the publication of a completed thesis. The completion of this thesis will hopefully lead to successful completion of the Master of Educational Leadership qualification.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

I cannot promise you anonymity as I will know who you are when we are working together in the focus group discussion. However, I will assure you that I will respect your privacy and I will present my findings in a way that protects your identity, the identity of your school and the identity of any other person that you mention. If I use one of your phrases as a direct quotation I will use a pseudonym in place of your name, I will also use a code or your pseudonym in all note-taking. Confidentiality and respect for you and your perspectives are of upmost importance to me.

Unfortunately, because focus groups involve multiple people sharing their perspectives during one meeting I cannot promise you that your comments will be confidential. However, I will be asking that all participants undertake to keep all discussion confidential to group members and respect the contribution of others.

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

Your time is a very valuable and I am asking for you to share some of it with me. I believe that our focus group discussion will take approximately 45 minutes. The focus group will take place at a mutually convenient time in the school day that does not interfere with your learning or other school-based commitments. I will request the use of a room on the school grounds so that I do not inconvenience you in anyway.

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

Please let me know if you are happy to participate within 7 days by emailing me on

[michelle.heather10@gmail.com](mailto:michelle.heather10@gmail.com) **Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

If you and the other participants give me permission, I will provide your school with an emailed summary of my findings if they would like to receive these. I would also be happy to email you a copy of these findings if you would like to receive this information.

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

If at anytime you have any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Alison Smith. Alison's email address is [alison.smith@aut.ac.nz](mailto:alison.smith@aut.ac.nz) and her contact phone number is 09 921 9999 ext. 7363. Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTECH, 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 I will ask you to keep a copy of the Consent Form once it is signed for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

***Researcher Contact Details:***

Michelle Heather's email address is [michelle.heather10@gmail.com](mailto:michelle.heather10@gmail.com)

***Project Supervisor Contact Details:***

Alison Smith's email address is [alison.smith@aut.ac.nz](mailto:alison.smith@aut.ac.nz)

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request. I do hope that you find my intended investigation of interest and that you would agree to take part.

Ngā mihi nui

Michelle Heather

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2017, AUTEK Reference number 17/246.



## Appendix F:

**Consent Form: Teachers**

*Project title:* **Communicating high expectations to students: Maximising learning success in the secondary school classroom**

*Project Supervisor:* **Alison Smith**

*Researcher:* **Michelle Heather**

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 23 August 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 they will also be audio-taped and transcribed by an external agency.
- ☐ I understand that the researcher will use a pseudonym in place of my name when producing the findings to protect my identity.
- ☐ 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 wish to receive a copy of the transcript of my interview and I know that I have 10 days to make any amendments (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐
- ☐ I agree that Michelle Heather can provide the school with an email summary of her research findings if they would like one (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐
- ☐ I would like Michelle Heather to provide me with an email summary of her research findings if all participants agree to this being generated (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐ I agree to take part in this research.

Participant's signature: .....

Participant's name: .....

Date:

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2017 AUTEC Reference number 17/246.**

## Consent Form: Year 13 student participants

*Project title:* **Communicating high expectations to students: Maximising learning success in the secondary school classroom**

*Project Supervisor:* **Alison Smith**

*Researcher:* **Michelle Heather**

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 23 August 2017.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that identity of my fellow participants and our discussions in the focus group is confidential to the group and I agree to keep this information confidential.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the focus group and that it will also be audio-taped and transcribed by an external agency.
- ☐ I understand that the researcher will use a pseudonym in place of my name when producing the findings to protect my identity.
- ☐ 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, while it may not be possible to destroy all records of the focus group discussion of which I was part, I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ☐ I agree that Michelle Heather can provide the school with an email summary of her research findings if they would like one (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐
- ☐ I would like Michelle Heather to provide me with an email summary of her research findings if all participants agree to this being generated (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐ I agree to take part in this research.

Participant's signature: .....

Participant's name: .....

Date:

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2017 AUTEK  
Reference number 17/246.**

## AUTEC Secretariat

Auckland University of Technology  
D-88, WU406 Level 4 WU Building City Campus  
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316  
E: [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz)  
[www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics](http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics)

## Appendix H:

23 August 2017

Alison Smith  
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Alison

Re Ethics Application: **17/246 Communicating high expectations to students: Maximising learning success in the secondary school classroom**

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

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 23 August 2020. **Standard Conditions of Approval**

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

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

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

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

For any enquiries, please contact [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz)

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K O'Connor', with a stylized, cursive script.

Kate O'Connor  
Executive Manager  
**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**  
Cc: mheather@ohs.school.nz