



‘Write-on!’ Investigations into relationships between teacher learning and student achievement through writing

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2007



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www.tlri.org.nz

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1. Aims and objectives

The context of the project

The original proposal for a research project to address student writing literacy was developed by a group of heads of departments at Kakariki College, (a decile 2 co-educational ethnically diverse suburban secondary school in a main urban centre) who were concerned at the level of students' achievement in writing within their school. The teachers recognised that NCEA assessment has increased the significance of written language within the senior secondary curriculum, making attaining national qualifications, regardless of subject specialisation, dependent upon competency in writing. This shift is reflected in the national initiatives for building the literacy capability of teachers and learners, such as *Effective Literacy Strategies in Years 9-13* (Ministry of Education, 2004) and the *Secondary School Literacy Initiative*, which demonstrate an increasing interest in the intersection between student literacy and educational outcomes. Before this project, the school had already made a commitment to the national drive to improve literacy standards, with an in-house professional development initiative entitled 'What Works', which was supported by a school advisor funded by the Secondary School Literacy Initiative.

At Kakariki College there was also statistical and anecdotal evidence to suggest that the writing competency of students was a barrier to their attainment of NCEA, even beyond that of students in similar schools. In 2004, 54.8 percent of students assessed at Level 1 achieved the eight literacy credits necessary for the full qualification; the national average for a decile 2 school was 61.6 percent. However, a survey of staff undertaken by the school claimed that the students do bring strengths to writing (e.g. confidence in writing genres that are close to oral traditions) and that many students are interested in improving their skills. A meeting of heads of department at the school demonstrated a desire on the part of staff to work with these strengths and improve writing literacy amongst Kakariki College students. The school submitted an expression of interest to the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI), with feedback that suggested that this was a valuable endeavour; however a more coherent research focus was required. Input from the School of Education at the University of Canterbury enabled the development of a more sophisticated research design and conceptual framework, and Kakariki and the University of Canterbury School of Education were jointly awarded funding for the research project.

The input of the university researchers stretched the school's focus on writing achievement outcomes to develop a research proposal that acknowledged the complex issues surrounding raising student literacy achievement within the context of low decile ethnically diverse secondary schools. Recent international literature on schools with a similar demographic suggests that

literacy itself is a complex construct, and that secondary content area literacy learning and its use are particularly so (Moje, Ciecchowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, & Collazo, 2004). Addressing student literacy achievement is also challenging given that school knowledge and discourses, which tend to be aligned with the knowledge and discourses of white middle class families, clash with knowledge and discourses that diverse learners bring from their home and community knowledge bases (see Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Moje, Collazo, Carrillo, & Marx, 2001).

While this study, and its attempt to develop writing pedagogy, was a response to an assessment driven curriculum, Nuthall (2001) challenges teachers and researchers to look beyond normative assessments as conclusive measures of learning and therefore teaching. It was the intention of the overall study to examine the impact of the programme on student achievement in formal assessments of learning (e.g. AsTTle, NCEA), yet the researchers are mindful that these assessments need to be examined in the light of the variables that can impact on student achievement. Some of these variables include: the disjuncture between school knowledge and discourses, and the knowledge and discourses of students (Moje et al., 2001); the extent to which students' expectations of their capacity for success play an important role in engaging them in school and learning (Akey, 2006); the industrial production-line model of schooling which tends to privilege normalcy in relation to academic achievement (Gilbert, 2005), especially in terms of narrowly defined, academic constructions of literacy (May, 2002); teacher and school expectations of diverse learners (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003; Moje, 2002), and the cultural realities of classrooms as a sites of learning (Nuthall, 2001; Quinlivan, 2005).

While it is of critical concern to this study to understand how Kakariki College might build a culture of high achievement and expand possibilities for students, it is also important to understand what challenges may stand in the way of this aim. Of particular concern to the researchers are the social inequalities that impact on the achievement of Kakariki students, including the specific challenges faced by Māori, Pasifika, and learning support students. To address these issues a group of university researchers, in liaison with curriculum and professional development leaders from the school, worked with four classroom teachers to examine (a) teachers' practices and students' experiences of the teaching and learning of writing, (b) how teaching and learning practices intersect with teacher and student locations within sociocultural frameworks and, (c) the possibilities for teacher interventions revealed by this investigation.

Research evidence on building and sustaining literacy practices is consonant with aspects of the literature on successful school reform. Successful literacy practices in schools are dependent on '... a deep and broad understanding of literacy and its implications across the curriculum, coupled with active leadership strategies that support literacy (such as by the principal, LL [literacy leader], heads of department/faculty)' (Wright, 2005, p. 4). However, as Brodsky (1996) and others (McDonald, 2006; Moje et al., 2004) suggest, notions of literacy are complex and highly contested, and current constructions of literacy tend to reflect the dominant ideologies of the time. Despite the best intentions, the enactment of school literacy work risks becoming narrow and instrumental within a neo-liberal climate that increasingly values competitive individualism (Davies & Saltmarsh, 2007; Street & Street, 1991), or solely academic constructions of literacy

(May, 2002). As we shall show, attaining congruence of a deep and broad understanding of literacy amongst the school, university and School Advisory Service research participants became a challenging prospect.

So while Wright's (2005) model may be an ideal, changing practice is recognisably fraught, with many challenges to be overcome by school reformers (Gunter, 2001; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The outcomes of this project have included recognising the extent to which the complex discursive make-up of schools, and their location within diverse social, cultural and economic communities, may inhibit as well as enable teachers' interventions in student achievement (Moll, Velez-Iobanez, & Greenberg, 1989). Despite these challenges, this project generated a valuable evidence base that reveals some of the kinds of teaching practices that could support the specific literacy needs of Kakariki students through valuing students' cultural locations (Phillips, McNaughton, & Macdonald, 2001; Bishop et al, 2003), the funds of knowledge students bring from their home, peer, and community networks (Moll et al., 1989), and engaging in relevant and meaningful discipline rich learning contexts (Comber & Nixon, 2006; Moje, 2002). Our research also indicates that teachers' engagement with this evidence base and associated research literature, as well as the processes they each undertook in their individual classroom projects, have resulted in changes to their thinking about writing pedagogies and, in some cases, changes in classroom practice. In addition, members of both curriculum leadership teams and the newly formed distributed leadership team within the school have committed to ongoing discussions and workshops with the university researchers to explore ways in which the research findings can be useful in informing the improvement of teaching and learning practices in classrooms within the school.

Aim

The aim of the pilot study was to investigate the possibilities, in a low decile multicultural school, for teachers to improve student learning outcomes through writing. This was to be achieved through teacher research and through theoretically informed professional development.

Pilot study objectives

Specifically, the original objectives were to:

1. provide baseline data for a longitudinal study that drives future practice of a whole-school writing initiative (including teacher learning) and evaluates the impact on outcomes for students through investigating teacher and student perceptions and experience of learning, writing competency, achievement, and student diversity (particularly with regard to Māori, Pasifika, and students with identified learning needs)

2. trial, refine and evaluate a cross-disciplinary professional development programme for secondary teachers founded on best evidence for professional learning, sustainable reform, and effective practices for teaching subject-specific writing by embedding four teacher-researchers and their case study research on writing literacy within an existing professional development initiative at the school.

However, in the early stages of the project, the link between the teacher researchers and the existing school professional development was severed, and the first objective and the case studies with accompanying teacher professional development through classroom-based research became the central work of the project. In the case study research the teachers developed individual subject-specific research questions related to writing, in response to student data and their own practice needs (see Table 10).

A third objective emerged as the researchers undertook an investigation into the dynamics that lead to the severance between the TLRI project and other school professional development initiatives.

3. To make an account of and find some means to negotiate the challenges of embedding research-informed practice within existing professional development at the school.

2. Research design and methodologies

Research design

In recognition of the long term and challenging nature of affecting student learning outcomes and undertaking school reform (Tyack & Cuban, 1998), the pilot study was embedded within a larger longitudinal project to be developed concurrently with the pilot study (see Appendix A). While the pilot study was initiated as a standalone project, it was also intended to act as a catalyst for further school reform.

The pilot study centred on engaging a core group of four Year 10 teachers in a model of professional development designed to build the research and teaching capacity for subject-specific writing programmes within the school. Within the pilot, this model was intended to be developed, trialled, refined and evaluated for use across the whole school in 2007. It was also to be used as a source of research evidence (using both research literature and the situated research evidence collected by the university researchers) for a whole-school professional development programme running alongside the research.

The focus of the pilot study was to build capacity among the four teacher researchers, investigate classroom practices in-depth, and develop a situated model of professional learning. The longitudinal project was intended to locate the reforms at Kakariki College within existing research evidence on school-wide reform, teacher professional learning, subject-specific writing literacy in secondary schooling and their relationship to student achievement through a combination of macro-contextual statistics and in-depth field data collection and analysis. A combination of research methods would enable the development of a complex picture of the relationships between school interventions, student achievement and sociocultural location. The collection and analysis of statistical evidence was initiated during the pilot; however the statistical analyses most significant to the aims of the overall longitudinal project was intended to occur outside of the scope of the pilot study.

In the first half of 2006, the university researchers developed a proposal for a longitudinal study using University of Canterbury funding. However, on the advice of the school leader on the research project team, the newly appointed school principal made the decision not to proceed with the longitudinal study before the 2007 TLRI funding round closed in the first half of 2006.

The foci of the pilot study

The project was conceived as having three foci—a research focus, a professional development focus, and a writing literacy programme focus. Each of the foci was intended to inform the structural design of the pilot study and the roles that the participants played in the initiatives undertaken within the school.

Research Focus. The research focus of this pilot was centred on a group of four teacher researchers who worked with the university researchers to research their own practice with regard to the subject-specific teaching of writing. Drawing on action research paradigms, the teachers developed research questions informed by student perspectives and the teacher's research interests that related to the connections between student achievement and the teaching and learning of writing appropriate to their subject (see Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998; Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003 for examples). These investigations were intended to be used as the basis for the development, implementation, and evaluation of a whole-school programme of subject-specific writing for Year 10 students. The teacher researchers contributed to the development and trial of each of their research questions within the context of their writing programmes in a Year 10 classroom. It was intended that the teacher researchers would be supported by the resources of the school's 'What Works' professional development programme, fellow teacher researchers, the project team, and student researchers, along with input and guidance from the university researchers.

Professional Development Focus. The professional development aspects were tied to building the capacity of the teacher researchers. The school contributed some funding to teacher researchers' involvement in the project from their professional development budget. It was the intention of the project that the professional learning of the teacher researchers would in part be supported by the expertise of the university researchers. It was also envisaged that the action research projects undertaken by the teacher researchers in their Year 10 classrooms would significantly build on, and contribute to ongoing literacy professional development initiatives that were already under way within the school through the teacher researchers' situation within the 'expert group', facilitated by the school's specialist classroom teacher and a member of the external school advisory service who was funded through the Secondary School Literacy Initiative.

Writing Literacy Programme Focus. The programme focus of the pilot was to be centred on the teacher researchers' development of their own subject-specific writing programmes based on pre-existing data within the school (including a heads of department survey, asTTle data, NCEA results, writing exemplars) and professional development facilitated by the university researchers. The results from the research focus of the project were designed to feed into the whole-school professional development programme, with the teacher researchers and project team contributing to facilitating the development of a whole-school writing programme for 2007.

Methodologies

The structural design of the pilot study

The structural design of the pilot study comprised a group of nested and interlocking initiatives within the school (see Appendix B). The pilot study was designed to use the findings from the case studies to inform, build upon, and expand existing professional development initiatives within the school. The core operations of the pilot study were to be coordinated by the project team comprising members of the school community and university researchers.

The project team

The role of the project team was to collaboratively drive both the research and professional development initiatives within the school related to the project. Members of the project team combined the resources and expertise of university researchers with Kakariki personnel's knowledge of professional development, curriculum, and educational leadership within the school. The project team comprised three school members; the head of the English department who initiated and developed the original TLRI expression of interest, the school leadership team member with responsibility for professional development, and the specialist classroom teacher who was involved along with a member of the School Advisory Services in the implementation of the National Literacy Initiative within the school (Ministry of Education, 2004).¹ The two lead university researchers, Ruth Boyask and Kathleen Quinlivan, were also members of the project team.

The group coordinated both the research and practice components of the project. It was intended that leadership within the research project be taken up by members of the project team on the basis of expertise and interest. The work of the project team was supported by an advisory group who met with the project team to provide input and guidance. Members of the advisory group comprised university educational researchers, educational consultants, and a manager of the College of Education School Advisory Service. The project team met with the advisory group three times over the course of the project, with the school principal joining us for the final meeting.

The teacher researcher group

The work undertaken by the teacher researcher group formed the core focus of the pilot study. The group of four Year 10 teachers, representing a range of subject areas and ability groupings, opted to take part in action research projects to learn about, develop, and trial approaches to

¹ The specialist classroom teacher resigned from the project team in April 2006, citing work pressure, leaving four members of the Project Team.

develop students' subject-specific writing literacy. It was intended that professional development support for the teacher researchers would be provided through their participation in the school's 'expert group', or the project team as had been planned. This did not eventuate, for reasons outlined in Section Three: Project Findings. A series of ongoing one day workshops, facilitated by the university researchers, was implemented as an alternative means of support. At these workshops, the teacher researcher group discussed diverse issues that affect educational achievement and issues in subject-specific writing literacy such as how students learn, and how teachers can facilitate learning in the classroom (Nuthall, 1999, 2001) making connections between school literacy and students diverse social worlds and understandings (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003; McCarthy & Moje, 2002; Phillips et al., 2001), and what it means to be a writer within their subject areas (Comber & Nixon, 2006; Moje et al., 2001).

Throughout the first two terms of 2006, the teachers reflected upon data gathered by the teacher researchers regarding the experiences of students and the teacher's own beliefs. Informed by the data findings, and in collaboration with the university researchers, the teacher researchers developed research questions that were appropriate to their subject discipline (Moje et al., 2001) and drew on the expertise and knowledge of their students (Moje et al., 2004; Moje, 2002), and the teachers' own interests. The teachers then developed a subject-specific writing programme for their Year 10 class that they trialled with their students in Term 3 of 2006. At the suggestion of the university researchers, support from the school advisory service for the classroom trials was offered to the teacher researchers. One teacher researcher took up the offer, while the other two chose to rely on researcher feedback. The resultant intended and unintended learning of both teachers and students was reported to the university researchers in Term 4 of 2006.

Over the course of the year, the teacher researchers participated in a professional development programme designed to build teaching and research capacity. Facilitated by the university researchers, the programme was designed to support the development of subject-specific writing programmes undertaken in the classroom with students.

School-wide professional development programme

While the professional development focus of this pilot study centred on the trial and refinement of a professional development model for teachers within the teacher researcher group, a second aspect of the study was to generate research findings from the teacher researcher group that could inform the implementation of a whole-school professional development programme. This was to be supported through the school's provision for professional development. The research evidence collected in the pilot study was intended to inform the programme for 2006. It was envisaged that the programme for 2007 would be developed in consideration of issues arising from the pilot study research report. However this possibility did not arise because the school declined to participate in the longitudinal study. An analysis of the challenges that faced the project in drawing on the classroom teacher classroom studies to inform the development of school-wide professional development, and using the existing professional development networks within the

school to support the teacher researchers in the classroom, is included in Section Three of this report.

Ethics

The research project gained the ethical approval of the University of Canterbury ethics committee. Informed consent consistent with the ethical conventions of qualitative research practice was gained from all participants in the project including members of the project team, the principal, the teacher researchers, and the student participants and researchers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The participants had the right to withdraw at any stage of the project. One member of the project team chose to do that, citing work pressure. The confidentiality of participating teachers, students, and the wider school has been protected through the use of pseudonyms. Members of the project team will have the opportunity to respond to the draft of the research report before it is produced in its final copy. As much as possible, approval will be sought from the participants before the data is used in a public sphere.

Demographic information

Kakariki College is a decile 2 co-educational ethnically diverse suburban secondary school in a large urban centre. The school has a roll of 796 students: 48 percent New Zealand European/Pākehā; 33 percent Māori; 10 percent Samoan; 5 percent Asian and 4 percent 'other'. Boys comprise 52 percent of students and girls 48 percent. In 2006 55.5 teachers (FTTE) worked within the school.

Since October 2004, the school has been under limited statutory management. Over the time that the research proposal was developed, and in the early stages of the research project, the school was being led by a caretaker principal. The newly appointed principal took up his position at the beginning of Term 2 in 2006.

The demographic features of the participants can be seen in the following tables.

The Project Team. The four school members of the project team (Table 1) represented a range of school management, curriculum management, professional development and classroom teaching experience and expertise. Unfortunately, attempts to invite representatives from Māori and Pasifika communities on to the team were unsuccessful.

Table 1 **Project team membership**

Pseudonym	Position	Ethnicity	Age	Time at School	Years Teaching
Joseph	Assistant Principal with responsibility for professional development	Pakeha	Over 40	5	20
Phillip	Principal	European	Over 40	1 year, 1 term	27 years teaching, 13 of those in leadership roles
Heather	English, Media Studies teacher. Specialist Classroom Teacher.	NZ European	Under 40	5 years	5 years
Sue	Head of Department English	NZ European	Over 40	15 years	15 years

Teacher Researchers. Four teachers self-selected to become teacher researchers (Table 2). They represent a range of subject areas, length of teaching experience, genders, and time teaching at the school.

Table 2 **Teacher Researchers**

Pseudonym	Class & subject area	Ethnicity	Age	Time at School	Years Teaching
Jill	10 Blue Social Studies	New Zealander	Under 40	1.5 years	7 years
Joanna	10 Red English	New Zealander	Over 40	15 years	15 years
Gina	10 Yellow PE	New Zealander	Under 40	3 years	3 years
Garry	10 Green Science	New Zealander	Over 40	8 years	9 years

Student Interviewees. Between 7 and 10 students from each of the participating Year 10 classes were interviewed by the researchers (Tables 3–9). The students were interviewed in small friendship groups with attention given to ensuring a range of genders and ethnicities, and a range of achievement levels and perspectives on writing, across each class sample.

10 Blue Social Studies is streamed in the top ability band, based predominantly on their literacy and numeracy results, and was the second highest of the six Year 10 form classes. However, anecdotal comments from teachers at the school suggested that many of these students were in this class as a result of overall declining standards in basic literacies at the school rather than their particular achievement.

Table 3 **10 Blue Student Interviewees**

Student Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Age	Gender
Cathy	NZ European	14	F
Tiresa	Samoan	14	F
Doug	Australian	15	M
Peter	NZ European/Irish	15	M
Edward	NZ European/Irish	15	M
Natasha	NZ European	15	F
Anna	NZ European	14	F

10 Green Science: 10 Green, a Year 10 Science class, met for four periods a week. 10 Green was streamed officially as a mid-band ability class, based predominantly on their literacy and numeracy results. However in practice, it functioned more as a low-mid band ability class because of the number of lower ability band students moved into the class. Of the 23 students in the class, seven were girls, one of whom identified as Samoan, three as Māori and three as New Zealand European. Of the 16 boys, three identified as Māori, two identified as Samoan, one as Māori/Tongan/New Zealand European, and 10 as New Zealand European.

Table 4 **10 Green Student Interviewees**

Student Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Age	Gender
Roger	NZ European	14	M
Jake	NZ European	14	M
Laura	NZ European/Irish	15	F
Fono	Māori/English/ German/Tongan	15	M
Iris	NZ European	15	F
Dan	NZ European	15	M
Mathew	NZ European	14	M
Shirley	NZ European	15	F
Jade	NZ European	15	F

10 Yellow PE: 10 Yellow PE was a composite of the female students from two Year 10 form classes, because it was a policy at the school to divide physical education classes into male and female groups. This meant that half of the class was from a low ability band Year 10 class and half of the class was from a mid ability band Year 10 class. 10 Yellow PE met for two periods a

week. All of the 19 students in the class were girls. Four identified as Samoan, two as Māori, one as Chinese, and 12 as New Zealand European.

Table 5 **10 Yellow Student Interviewees**

Student Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Age	Gender
Marilyn	NZ European	14	F
Fiona	NZ European	14	F
Salofa	Samoan	15	F
Kate	Samoan	15	F
Roslyn	NZ European	15	F
Petra	NZ European	14	F
Hine	Māori	15	F
Hanna	NZ European	15	F
Victoria	NZ European	15	F
Gloria	Samoan	14	F

10 Red English: 10 Red English met four periods a week. It was identified as in the top band Year 10 class, along with 10 Blue; however, it was referred to as ‘the extension class’ and it was generally recognised by students and teachers that 10 Red was the top Year 10 class. Of the 23 students in the class, 16 were girls, one of whom identified as Tongan, three as Māori, and 12 as New Zealand European. Of the seven boys, one identified as Māori and six as New Zealand European.

Table 6 **10 Red Student Interviewees**

Student Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Age	Gender
Amy	NZ European	14	F
Eve	NZ European	14	F
Rachael	Cook Island Māori	15	F
Ben	NZ European/Māori/ Samoan	14	M
Michael	NZ European/Māori	15	M
Joseph	NZ European	14	M
Gen	Māori	14	F
Vicky	NZ European	15	F
Anita	NZ European	15	F

Student Researchers: Small groups of students from each of the Year 10 classes volunteered to act as student researchers in the project. The numbers in groups varied across each class, and changed over the course of the year as the composition of classes was altered.² The greatest number of student researchers who volunteered came from 10 Red, the top band English class. The student researcher groups provided ongoing feedback to teachers and the researchers over the course of the classroom projects.

Table 7 **10 Blue Social Studies Student Researchers**

Student Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Age	Gender
Peter	NZ European/Irish	15	M
Edward	NZ European/Irish	15	M

Table 8 **10 Green Science Student Researchers**

Student Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Age	Gender
Roger	NZ European	14	M
Jake	NZ European	14	M

Table 9 **10 Red English Student Researchers**

Student Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Age	Gender
Gen	Māori	14	F
Vicky	NZ European	15	F
Ben	NZ European/Māori/ Samoan	14	M
Michael	NZ European/Māori	15	M
Joseph	NZ European	14	M
Amy	NZ European	14	F
Eve	NZ European	14	F
Anita	NZ European	15	F
Tiresa	Samoan	14	F

² No students from 10 Yellow volunteered to become student researchers because of the resistance of the class to undertake a project that focused on writing in physical education. However a range of students from the class were interviewed by the researchers to understand and account for their resistance to participating in the project.

Baseline data collection and analysis

Data collection

The focus of the baseline data collection was developing a comprehensive picture of teacher professional learning and student writing literacy within the school. Data were gathered from student, teacher, and management participants within the school. A range of different methods was used in order to understand the complexities of the interrelated practices from a range of participants' perspectives. Qualitative semi-structured (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) tape-recorded face-to-face interviews were initially undertaken with the four participating teacher researchers. Students in each Year 10 class were initially surveyed through a questionnaire in order to gain a general impression of their perception of themselves as writers, and the issues that they considered important in relation to writing in their subject areas. On the basis of the questionnaire responses, qualitative semi-structured face-to-face tape-recorded interviews were undertaken with up to 10 students from each class. In order to gain varied perspectives on writing within each class, the students represented a range of achievement levels and demographic locations. The students were interviewed in small friendship groups with attention given to ensuring a range of genders and ethnicities across each class sample. Participant observations also were undertaken by the university researchers in each of the four case study classes.

The data were transcribed, and then thematically coded and analysed by the researchers using standard qualitative methodologies (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The researchers and teacher researchers worked together to consider and discuss the findings in the light of student relevance (McCarthy & Moje, 2002), and the teacher researchers' own professional interests and expertise (Eraut, 1994; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2003). Data findings were presented to the students in each class, with opportunities for feedback provided. As a result of discussion and feedback from both teachers and students, four research projects were the focus for the case study (see Table 10).

Table 10 **Research Questions in the Four Case Study Year 10 Classes**

1. Social studies	Do students' research report writing skills develop by conducting a research project that is relevant and meaningful to students in Social Studies: 'What Would Your Ideal School Look Like?'
2. English	Are students' sense of themselves as capable, confident, and well- motivated writers increased through developing 'writing buddy' skills in providing high quality peer feedback?
3. Science	Can students' confidence and ability as scientific writers be improved through engaging in relevant and meaningful scientific learning processes?
4. Physical education	Originally the area of investigation planned was 'Exploring the use of personal journal writing as a strategy to encourage writing that is relevant and meaningful to students in PE'. However in response to student resistance to participation in the project, this was revised to 'What does it mean to be a writer in PE?'

The analysis of the baseline data was also fed back to the project team members, and the newly appointed principal. There has been no opportunity as yet to feed back the analysis of the baseline data to the newly established professional development working party, or to whole staff during professional development sessions. However, as a result of discussion on the draft research report, a group of curriculum and educational leaders have expressed an interest in working with the researchers to explore the implications of the project findings for teaching and learning in the school. This will be occurring in Term 3 of 2007.

The trial of writing strategies in the case study classrooms

The four teacher researchers (science, social studies, English and physical education) implemented writing innovations at the beginning of Term 3, 2006 in response to the initial data findings, student feedback, reading on learning and literacy in their subject areas, and their own professional interests. In response to overwhelming feedback from physical education students, who indicated that they were unprepared to participate in a project to trial a subject-specific writing programme, the research in this class shifted focus to investigate pupil resistance to writing in physical education. Despite deciding against the full implementation of her writing strategies, the physical education teacher chose to remain involved in the project. The other three classes continued to introduce writing strategies into their programmes throughout the term.

A variety of data collection methods were used to capture the complexity of the classrooms from a range of student, teacher, and researcher perspectives. Forms of data collection included classroom participant observations undertaken by the researchers and the writing of teacher and student research journals. Student researchers within each class provided feedback to the researchers over the course of the projects. As a result of classroom observations undertaken by the researchers, researchers gave feedback and made suggestions to the teacher researchers when it was possible.

Professional learning and development within the wider school

Operating since 2005, the expert group was an existing, flexible grouping of teachers supported by the Secondary Schools Literacy Initiative to develop and trial evidence-based strategies for enhancing student learning within the school, and it had been identified by school project team members as the natural home of the project. However, despite a promising start, attempts to create connections between the TLRI project and the school-based professional learning expert group were unsuccessful. The failure of the project to establish this link meant that while the project could continue its work within individual classrooms, its potential to gain leadership support for the teacher researchers, and have a wider professional development impact within the school, was considerably reduced.

In the absence of this link, the university researchers suggested to the project team that time be devoted to understanding why an alignment between the interests of this group and the TLRI

project was difficult to develop and maintain. In response to the severance of the link between the TLRI project and the expert group, semi-structured tape-recorded face-to-face interviews were conducted with the project team and followed up by interviews with both the school facilitator of the expert group and the leader of professional development within the school. Repeated approaches were made to Teacher Support Services leaders of the expert group once it became clear that connections between the classroom-based research and professional development networks in the school were not going to eventuate. While meetings between the university researchers and key personnel at the advisory service, including the advisors supporting the expert group, revealed some of the tensions that had led to this severance, interviews with the Teacher Support Services were not forthcoming and these issues remain outside of our legitimate data collection. Despite the challenges, these meetings did open productive discussion on the development of protocols for working with school advisors and led to the offer of support from subject advisors for the teacher researchers on their individual classroom projects.

Development of the longitudinal research proposal

As is indicated in the original research design, in mid 2006, the researchers developed a longitudinal research proposal in order to build on the work undertaken in the 2006 pilot study. Acting on advice from the senior management member of the project team, the newly appointed school principal made the decision not to proceed with a longitudinal study within the school, citing disjuncture between the school and university vision for the project. After the school's withdrawal from this initiative, project team member Joseph, who held the senior management portfolio for professional development within the school, reduced his involvement in the direct management of the pilot study.

Follow-up data collection and analysis

Data collection

Follow-up data collection was undertaken, in the first instance, to gain an understanding of both the intended and unintended outcomes of participating in the classroom-based research projects from both teacher and student perspectives. In addition, interviews were conducted with school leaders and teachers to further understand the challenges that arose in establishing supportive links between the classroom-based research projects and wider professional development initiatives within the school.

The university researchers conducted follow-up semi-structured tape-recorded face-to-face interviews with the teacher researchers and selected groups of students from each the three Year 10 classes participating in the classroom research projects to trial subject-specific approaches to writing. The university researchers undertook classroom observations in each Year 10 class.

Writing samples were collected from the four targeted Year 10 classes. The Centre for Educational Measurement's (CEM) attitudinal test, SATIS, was administered in both Terms 3 and 4 across the whole of Year 10 as part of the data collection.

The university researchers conducted follow up semi-structured face-to-face tape-recorded interviews with the assistant principal who was responsible for professional development within the school, and also with the school principal and the specialist classroom teacher.

Data analysis

The gathered data has been coded and analysed thematically using standard qualitative research methodologies (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). This analysis has been drawn on in the writing of the final research report. Teacher researchers, members of the project team, and the school principal have been provided with the opportunity to provide feedback on the analysis presented in the research report.

3. Project findings

This section presents the research findings from the pilot study. In light of the complex design of the project, and the deviation from the intended programme of research upon the school's withdrawal from the longitudinal initiative, the data findings are presented in the following three parts. First, we look at the initial data findings that generalise teaching and learning practices of Year 10 at the school. These are the outcomes of the baseline data findings that were presented initially to the teacher researchers, then students in each of the case study classrooms, and finally to senior management within the school. These data findings informed the direction of the teacher researchers' projects in each of the four case study classrooms by assisting them to develop research questions and develop interventions to address their individual agendas for improving student writing. It was also the intention that this baseline material would be part of an empirical database that would be used to assess the outcomes of the longitudinal study (along with school achievement data). It was on production and dissemination of these initial findings to the project team and the principal that the school decided to withdraw from the longitudinal initiative, citing that the agenda of researchers was not satisfactorily aligned with the school's goal of improving student writing. However, they have since been re-presented to senior management at the school in the form of synthesised diagrams. Recent discussions at the school indicate they will be used in upcoming discussions between curriculum and school leaders and teacher researchers within the school.

Second, the data findings reveal what was achieved in the four case study classrooms. This project was designed with the specific intention of encouraging teacher researchers to address issues that they perceived as important within the context of their subject area, the particular class make-up, and their own teaching identities. As intended, this resulted in four quite different projects, which ultimately achieved four different outcomes. The university researchers have attempted to situate the teacher researchers' findings within a more detailed analysis that makes connections between student outcomes, teacher findings, and research literature relevant to improving writing literacy in a low decile school. The university researchers suggest that this section in particular provides a valuable evidential base on the possibilities open to teachers for improving teaching and learning practices, such as the teaching of writing, within secondary school classrooms.

The final section was developed in response to the challenges that this project presented to both the school and university partners and explores the limitations of the research project. Throughout the study, both partners have suggested that while initially there appeared to be common ground in the development of the project, its enactment brought to the surface discrepancies in the capacity to engage with the processes and purposes of educational research. The university researchers suggest that these discrepancies arise because practices of both researchers and

teachers are constructed within sociopolitical economies of knowledge. According to conventional literature on research partnerships, productive relationships are dependent upon mutuality and consensus (Robinson & Lai, 2006; Timperley & Robinson, 2000). However, others suggest that conflict is also an inevitable marker of the social production of knowledge (Avis, 2005; Davies et al., 2007; Stronach & McNamara, 2002), since knowledge and power are distributed differently amongst partners. Examination of these dynamics reveals the complexities that may emerge within research partnerships, as well as indicate possible means for their negotiation (Quinlivan, Boyask & Carswell, 2006).

Baseline data findings

The baseline data findings relate to the Year 10 students' and teachers' experiences of learning and writing in social studies, English, physical education, science and other subjects at Kakariki College.

Adolescents are engaged in identity building, an active process that occurs in response to the different contexts they operate in and the relationships they forge within them. Our research sits within recent literature that suggests that identity construction is both a social and psychological process (May, 2002; Moje, 2002; McCarthey & Moje, 2002), indicating that students' individual psychologies and, in the case of this research project, capacities to write, are developed dialogically within their social milieu. However, research that examines the microcontexts of classrooms suggests that not only should teachers be cautious in overgeneralising the extent to which identity development occurs in relation to large and powerful social institutions such as schools, churches, and the justice system; in fact, the bigger and more meaningful influences may be through interpersonal relationships formed in peer, family, and community networks (Clark, 2006; Nuthall, 2001; Lingard & Mills, 2002; Moll et.al, 1989, Moje et.al, 2004). This body of research supports transforming school practices as well as the teaching and learning relationships that underpin them, so that school learning becomes more meaningful, is more equitably distributed, and has greater influence on the identity building of secondary students.

However, we would suggest the dialogic nature of this process means that unless interventions are carefully and strategically planned, interpersonal relationships and personally relevant experiences are largely determined by cultural norms and the conservative sociopolitical impulses that sustain them (see Cole & Scribner, 1974; Lave & Wenger, 2001 on the primacy of social structure and practice in determining psychologies). Within a low decile school like Kakariki College, where the percentage of the roll to achieve qualifications from the National Qualifications Framework was approximately half the national average in 2005 (NZQA, 2007), teachers evidently have wide discrepancies to overcome between the experiences and values of their students, and those required to be successful at school (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Moll et.al, 1989). Whilst there are broader debates to be had regarding success and achievement within the current political economy (see Boyask et al., forthcoming June 2008), successful interventions

require overturning the entrenched norms of what recent literature and policy describes as ‘underachievement’. Student data from the school suggests that low achievement in schooling may be related to low level of interest, and consequent value that students attribute to their experience of school. Interviews with Year 10 students at Kakariki College indicate that for some students, school, and its culture, is almost entirely foreign and meaningless:

- Ruth: What about things that you’re interested in outside of school? What are the types of things you are interested in firstly?
- Shirley: What do you mean?
- Jade: Yeah.
- Ruth: Are any of them related to school?
- Jade: Just hanging out with your friends.
- Shirley: Shopping
- Jade: And that’s about it really
- Ruth: So you don’t have any interests that might be related to schoolwork?
- Jade: Not really.
- Shirley: Not really. (Interview with Shirley and Jade, 17 March, 2006)

Both of these students were in a low/mid band class, frequently truant and regularly in contact with the school’s disciplinary system. Ultimately, one was required to leave the school.

More successful students have identities that mesh with school norms as they are defined in both the macro and micro settings of schooling (e.g. policy context, school-wide setting, classroom setting). Current features of a ‘successful student’ include one who is literate, compliant, works hard, achieves well in tests, is articulate, and forms relationships that assist in being successful (see Wylie, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2006). In view of the banding system at Kakariki College, and the low number of students within the school who conform to the norm of success, ‘successful students’ are most likely to be in the top band class. Students in this class indicated that their teachers appeared to be resting their hopes for achievement in national qualifications on this class. This is supported by data from the Centre for Educational Measurement (CEM) SATIS test that was administered at Kakariki College in Terms 3 and 4 as part of the baseline data collection for this study. Results across the four Year 10 classes under study indicate that students in the top band class were more likely to like school, feel that they belonged at school, and believe that they would stay on at school after Year 11 (see Appendix D).

Our own survey of the students (see Appendix C for the questionnaire) also indicated that there was a significant difference in how the four classes perceived themselves as writers. Within the top band, most of the students in the top class (10 Red) enjoyed writing and thought they were either *sort of* or *good* at writing. The second to top class (10 Blue) had very poor perceptions of themselves as writers, with all but one student thinking that they were not good writers and only

one student indicating that they enjoyed writing. The class 10 Blue was also distinguished through the SATIS data as the class who least liked school, adding quantitative support to our assertion derived from qualitative data. Overall the SATIS and questionnaire data support our claims that within student perceptions there are close relationships between teaching, learning, writing, and the attribution of meaning and value to schooling. It is apparent in all of our data collection that the practice of banding is reinforcing social norms of success for the top band class, albeit a more complex picture than straightforward reproduction, and limiting possibilities for those in lower band classes (for comparable research see Quinlivan, 2005). We explore these dynamics and their effects in the following analysis of student data.

What makes a successful student?

The premise that writing competency can be enhanced in conjunction with students' appreciation and value for schooling is an identifiable entry point for the development of teaching interventions. Through interpersonal interactions, adolescents develop value for institutional practices, like the ones schools provide access to (e.g. learning opportunities, attaining credentials, and better life chances). This value develops when there is some congruence between their sense of self and the prevailing norms of the institution. As Amy suggests;

Kathleen: Well, how would you rate her expectations for you?

Amy: I think they're very good. It could improve writing for me. I really like to write stuff in my own time and that. And that could improve that as well. I feel like this year could really help me out. (Interview with Amy, 14 March, 2006)

But this meshing is not straight forward. Students are diverse in terms of interests and values. Students who are successful at school negotiate school norms in different ways from each other, let alone from their less successful peers. For example some are better at some subjects than others because the logic or practices of these subjects are more congruent with the students' identities (see Boyask, 2003; Gee, 2004; Moll et al., 1989; Moje et al., 2004). Secondary schooling has always presented a challenge for school improvement initiatives at least in part because traditionally less emphasis has been placed on interpersonal relationships between student and teacher than in primary schools. Initiatives such as Te Kotahitanga have attempted to strengthen that bond through emphasising the importance of student—teacher relationships (Bishop et al., 2003). However, research on the role of student interest in increasing motivation for learning and enhancing performance would also suggest that a shared subject interest is one of the most profound strengths of secondary teaching (see McPhail et al., 2000; Isaac, Sansone, & Smith, 1999). Of course, this presents significant challenges for students who are not interested in the subjects that school has to offer, or whose interests may lie in marginalised areas of the curriculum.

The baseline data suggested that those students who are currently disengaged from school show a discrepancy between the identities they are crafting for themselves and those valued within normative understandings of schooling. As Peter indicates:

Peter: Other people *are* the brainy ones, eh. They want to do good; they want to get somewhere and that. That's fine. But different people—different objectives in life. (Initial Interview with Peter, March, 2006)

Despite the fact that 'braininess' and its association with success in school qualifications and therefore life opportunities is not always the cultural norm of Kakariki College students, evident through their performance in national qualifications, students still associate schooling with academic enquiry. Students can become disengaged when they think that school is for other types of people. Students who find school more challenging to their identities are also more likely to not comply with school regulations. However, they are less likely to have agency in how they negotiate these regulations, because while they can take recourse in resistance, ultimately power to remain successful in the terms of the school is dependent upon complying with the regulations. It appeared that the disengaged students' primary form of resistance was to find ways to be successful that were not valued within school norms. As Eve and Amy explain:

Eve: People assume that ... going against authority is kind of like the cool thing.

Amy: I guess they don't actually want to learn about this sort of stuff. There are a few students in the class that actually want to learn about writing and how to improve our writing and you know, think, but a lot of the people don't care. (Interview with Amy and Eve, 14 March, 2006)

Students' attempts at feeling successful and enhancing their status amongst peers in these terms appear to limit the possibilities of making use of what school could offer them. Edward suggests:

Kathleen: Can I ask you a question and you can be honest about this: Is—do you feel—how do you see yourself as being successful at school?

Edward: Not really. Just the way I am. I would have been successful if I was. I was in Year 6 and Year 7. When I went to Year 8 just changed eh. I just got into the habit of not doing any work. I can't get back to the way I was. (Initial Interview with Edward, March, 2006)

Since it also remains the case that the majority of relationships formed at school are with peers, peer culture has a very significant influence on how students develop identities and commitments (Nuthall, 2001; Quinlivan, 2005; Wexler, 1992). Peers help to sustain norms of 'success' amongst their friendship groups, whether that is success as it is valued within the school or alternatively how it is valued amongst their peer groups. Jake and Roger explain:

Kathleen: And you know these groups, do they all work differently in terms of the work that you do in class?

Jake: The cool people don't get any work done ... but the quiet people usually try to get their work done. But with me and Roger ... the in between kind of normal group, we get just enough work done.

Roger: So you can get out of class.

Jake: We still do our work. But we don't do excessive amounts. We just do what we need to do. (Interview with Roger and Jake, 13 March, 2006)

Powerful learning opportunities can arise if teachers take advantage of the meshing of peer culture and school values (Moje et al., 2004). The following two students are in the top class, indicating that the school has recognised them as successful learners qua writers; however, both Eve and Amy explain that it is the writing that they do and share among themselves that provides the most meaning for them:

Eve: I don't like reading authors' books as much. I like reading what people my age have written because it's got—it's more relatable for me. And you know, I would rather read people's emotions than something like a textbook.

Amy: We would personally like stories and stuff. Read each others'. Give it to each other to read ... you know it's hard to find a book about what you really want to read about, but when you're writing it yourself or something of your good friends it makes it a lot funnier too.

Kathleen: That's interesting. So what you're telling me, then, is that you actually show each other your writing. And does that help you write better, or how does that influence your own writing?

Eve: Yeah, it does influence, because I know that people are going to read it so I think more deeply about what I'm writing. In classes I probably could do my work better writing wise, I just write whatever I don't really think about it as much as I should because it's not really relatable—the work. (Interview with Amy and Eve, 14 March, 2006)

The university researchers suggest that taking cognisance of students' opinions on what they find meaningful is a very productive starting place for teachers who are looking to change their own practice. As others also claim, it provides a source of evidence that can be reflected upon in order to develop types of practices that may address the contextually specific needs of classrooms (Bishop et al., 2003; Moje et al., 2004; Nuthall, 2001; Quinlivan, 2005). In this sense, the baseline student data from this project provided a specific source for the teachers within the school, demonstrating how teachers can use research to support the development of their teaching. Student interview transcripts can be analysed for examples of teaching practice that have either aided or hindered their learning. In Table 11, the university researchers carefully selected some of these instances, particularly examples that could be related to writing literacy, and linked them with premises derived from social theory and psychological theories of learning (Alton-Lee, 2003; Comber & Nixon, 2006; Moll et al., 1989, Moje et al., 2004). These were presented to the teacher researchers at the second of their professional development days, as a source of discussion, and for them to consider the implications of students' experiences of schooling for their own teaching practice.

Table 11 **What did the students tell us about how they could become successful learners/writers?**

In terms of cognitive development	
<p>Relevance is made transparent to students</p>	<p>Amy: ...whoever I talk to about algebra that I'm learning right now they say it's useless. What are we going to use algebra for? Replacing a number with a letter and making it more difficult and more complicated.</p> <p>Kathleen: Does your teacher ever make any connections to you about how algebra's related to the rest of the world?</p> <p>Amy: No. We learn how to do algebra but we don't actually learn about how it's related to ... I think if there was a – if you knew the reason behind why we're learning it would make it a lot simpler and easier work. (Interview with Amy, 14 March, 2006)</p> <p>Doug: He writes the learning outcomes on the board, and we've gotta write them out. But I don't, they take up too much paper ...He's like 'write this down' 'ok', so I pretend I'm writing, but he doesn't notice that I'm not.</p> <p>Amanda: Yeah. Why don't you write them?</p> <p>Doug: 'Cause it's pointless.</p> <p>Amanda: Yeah?</p> <p>Doug: I'm never gonna read them back to see what my learning outcomes are. They only need to be on the board. (Interview with Doug, 17th March, 2006)</p>
<p>When teaching recognises and builds on students prior knowledge and experiences</p>	<p>Kathleen: So you feel quite comfortable in being an achiever...?</p> <p>Rachael: Yeah, 'Cause I love achieving things. 'Cause last year - I just did an achievement last night. There's this girl that runs - she's like the fastest in the grade. And then, I've never beat her and then last night I beat her.</p> <p>Kathleen: And would you talk about any of that with your teachers?</p> <p>Rachael: Nah.</p> <p>Vicky: Teachers that want to listen, you would.</p> <p>Rachael: Yeah. (Initial Interview with Rachael and Vicky)</p>
<p>Linking students' cultural resources into their learning programmes</p>	<p>Kathleen: Do you think reading helps you write?</p> <p>Ben: Yeah, in a way. It can give you some new words as well. Like, when I was reading through some scriptures or parables and stuff out of the satanic bible on the Internet. You look at the word and you'd be: That's an interesting word. And you look it up on Dictionary.com and then sometimes I use those kinds of words.</p> <p>Kathleen: That's interesting aye? (Interview with Ben, 14 March, 2006)</p>

In terms of cognitive development (Contd.)

<p>When cultural practices (like writing) are made transparent and taught</p>	<p>Amy: I think there are a lot of things that we need to learn that a lot of people take for granted and think we can learn by ourselves but really, we can't. We actually need help. But I guess they don't realise unless you tell them I can't do this on my own I need to learn how. So I guess it's partly our responsibility to tell them that we have to still be pushed to learn how to keep ourselves on task but you know anything. (Interview with Amy, 14 March, 2006)</p>
<p>Ways of taking meanings from text, discourse, numbers or experiences are explicitly taught</p>	<p>Jade: The literacy thing I didn't quite get, s/he didn't really explain it enough for me. And I was kind of like, lost on it. We had a test. We had a test and I didn't really know what to do. It was really confusing.</p> <p>Shirley: Sometimes his/her stuff doesn't really get into...</p> <p>Jade: Yeah like doesn't make sense, like doesn't explain it properly. (Interview with Shirley and Jade, 17 March, 2006)</p>
<p>New information is linked to students' experiences</p>	<p>Kathleen: So what would you suggest about how [your teacher] could teach that subject in a way that hooked you in and got you interested? Do you think it's possible?</p> <p>Edward: Not really.</p> <p>Kathleen: Is that because you're not interested in geography and history and the subjects?</p> <p>Both: Yeah.</p> <p>Peter: Our lifestyle's like physical work. We have to be moving, outside, chucking a ball, playing rugby. That's what we do. We don't like sitting there writing a book ... (Initial Interview with Peter and Edward)</p>

In terms of social processes

<p>Use of collaborative peer friendship groups that enable group processes to facilitate learning</p>	<p>Eve: Well some teachers who actually take the time to get to know us better do understand the groups and they do like when they're saying can you do this work in groups of whatever they'll make it flexible so that people can be with their friends. But some teachers, like, don't take the time to get to know us and they don't really care about the groups and they'll put you – I think sometimes I work better with the people that I know because I don't feel pressured.</p> <p>Amy: Yeah, like it'd be a lot harder for me if I was to work with a bunch of not – I wouldn't say strangers but you know, kids – like, unlike me in a way. I'm not pushing myself away and calling myself different that much but yeah, I think it'd be a lot easier to work with friends. (Interview with Eve and Amy, 14th March, 2006)</p>
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In terms of cognitive development (Contd.)

<p>Caring and support in the interactions and practices of teachers and students</p>	<p>Rachael: I find it enjoyable how she got the principal in to ...</p> <p>Vicky: Yeah.</p> <p>Rachael: ... talk to us about all the things.</p> <p>Vicky: A big group discussion.</p> <p>Rachael: But our class was too shy to stand up and say something. We just thought we were blank in the head, we had nothing to say.</p> <p>Vicky: He's coming back though. Like, we're telling him what needs to be improved in the school and how it's a good place here and stuff.</p> <p>Kathleen: And so why do you think that it's good that the principal, how does that help you learning when the principal comes into the classroom?</p> <p>Vicky: Shows that he cares. About students' opinions. (Initial Interview with Rachael and Vicky)</p>
<p>Teaching practices value and address student diversity</p>	<p>Kathleen: Yeah, so you find – do you do that subject?</p> <p>Michael: I did it last year. I did it like crap.</p> <p>Ben: He didn't like the teacher.</p> <p>Kathleen: Oh, really so you like the subject but you don't do it. That's a shame, eh. What was it about the teacher that was so bad?</p> <p>Ben: She treated black people bad.</p> <p>Michael: Yeah.</p> <p>Kathleen: You're joking.</p> <p>Ben: Yeah it was funny 'cause she was treating me bad, him bad and all the black kids in the class bad.</p> <p>Michael: And one of them swore at her and just left the class.</p> <p>Ben: And when she saw my mum – 'cause my mum's white - she started treating me better - after the interviews so I thought that was a bit weird.</p> <p>(Interview with Michael and Ben, 14 March, 2006)</p>
<p>Recognizing the interdependence of academic and social norms</p>	<p>Rachael: Kind of 'cause we see goals that we want to achieve at school and like outside of school...I want to save for a car. And get a car by the time I get my restricted.</p> <p>Kathleen: Wow ... that's pretty amazing. And you think you'll be able to do that with the money that you earn from your job and stuff?</p> <p>Rachael: Yes.</p> <p>Kathleen: Cool. And what about your school aims and stuff like that?</p> <p>Rachael: To go right through school and pass all my exams.</p> <p>Kathleen: So you want to be academically successful in terms of NCEA and stuff like that. (Initial Interview with Rachael)</p>

As the university and teacher researchers discussed the baseline findings, we posited that making classroom writing activities more personally relevant for students may encourage them to be more willing to take the risks associated with writing. In line with prevailing research on the importance of interest for motivation, we considered that classes where there was a bigger discrepancy between student identities and normative constructions of success may require more deliberate and careful attention to establishing and sustaining interest in writing activities (McPhail et al., 2000; Isaac, Sansone & Smith, 1999). Our student interviews clearly indicated that many students at this school are not interested in writing. Other research suggests that motivating students to write is made more difficult when students do not see writing as connected to their interests and identities, because shifting their achievement also requires shifting their sense of identity so that it includes writing (Moje et al., 2004). However, the same students who professed no interest in writing also recognised that their writing was better when it centred on their existing areas of interest and engagement. There were also some responses from students that suggested new areas of student interest could be fostered by teachers. These responses from Kakariki students provided both evidence and suggested some means for enhancing connections between student interests and classroom writing activities.

The university researchers' contended that the students' reluctance to write was a consequence of the power that is invested within writing as a school activity, perhaps even more intensely than other forms of forms of school work. Its enactment provides material evidence of students' competence and ability. While its status varies within specific cultural contexts, and is evidently diminished in some of the students' own subcultures, writing occupies a singularly high status position within schooling. However, as the teachers who initiated this project had found, this is profoundly problematic in a low decile school such as Kakariki College. A critical analysis explains why Kakariki students struggle with writing literacy. Their social situation within a school and community with low socioeconomic status largely determines their schooling outcomes and achievement (see Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Nash, 2003). Low decile schools reproduce existing social stratification because they are embedded within communities where there is limited cultural capital required for schooling success. In this situation, low self-esteem in relation to writing may seem inevitable because students genuinely do not have the resources to succeed. Rather than accepting this structural explanation as an admission of defeat, both the university and teacher researchers were committed to better understanding the barriers students encountered, with the intention of developing personally significant strategies that could intervene in the social reproductive function of schooling at the level of the individual, thereby offering students possibilities for producing new cultural and social outcomes.

Whilst the subcultural and peer groups revealed in student interviews were evidently engaged in their own forms of cultural production, ethnographic data from the case study classrooms collected before the teacher researchers' interventions revealed that writing activities set by teachers generally supported the reproduction of existing social norms within the school and wider schooling culture. For example, participation in writing for authorised learning and assessment purposes required a significant commitment that many were reluctant to attempt.

During an initial observation within one of the mid-band case study classrooms, Ruth noted the following during a classroom activity where students were asked to complete a worksheet by answering a series of four questions in their books:

Two girls seated near me write in their books with pink and purple pens. One of them has a pink pencil case. Two more girls enter the class, 35 minutes late and join another at the back of the room. They don't get any work out. The girl near me rips out the page she's been working on and screws it up. Her friend follows suit. One of them begins writing the title of the work on a new page, but then starts to leaf through the rest of the book. She rips out the corresponding page of the one she's just ripped out. This time they don't write down the questions, only the answers, but in 10 minutes they have only written two one word answers. The teacher comes over to the girls and talks to them about the third question, which requires a whole sentence answer. They never complete it. The two girls who arrived late still have no work in front of them. One of the girls near me keeps flicking to the front page of her book where there is one full page of beautifully neat blue handwriting with headings underlined in red. But now she has still only answered the two questions (10 Green Field Notes, 27 February 2007).

All of the girls observed here were identified by their teachers as having problematic behaviour and a lack of motivation for learning. The problematic features of their writing literacy are certainly dominant in the narrative; however, we also looked for the possibilities for participation in writing embedded within this story. Did the girl who repeatedly turned to her beautifully written page derive pleasure and pride from her work? In a later interview, one of the girls who did not even attempt to write talked about her aspirations for the future:

Well I want to go to university, but nah that probably won't happen (Jade interview 17 March 2006).

Talking to Jade about her future suggested that she was quite aware of the discrepancy between what she thought education could do for her, and what she was actually prepared to undertake at school. While she was almost convinced of the unattainable nature of her desire, she was still open to its possibility. Many of the student interviews revealed similarly high aspirations. As this observation of Jade and her classmates suggests, while students' desires may not be apparent through their writing, they may be accessible to teachers through other means, such as observation or conversation. Paying attention to students' desires rather than their performance, can shift our understandings of their identity and motivations, and has the potential to change the way that teachers relate to their students, and in doing so, perhaps shift student outcomes.

The other element we considered in this phase of the project was teacher researchers' own understandings of the teaching and learning of student writing within their subject area. At the third teacher researcher professional development day, teacher researchers were given a summary from their own interview transcripts to add to the evidential-base from which they designed the research agenda for their classrooms. Table 12 shows the summary statements the teachers received.

Table 12 **What are the teachers saying about teaching and learning practices in the classroom in relation to student writing?**

Jill	<p>Is concerned that students do not strive to achieve beyond what they consider to be 'just enough' despite teacher expectations that all students are engaged in work related activity.</p> <p>Frames students as similar within all school settings, and thinks that the same issues and challenges for teachers arise regardless of socioeconomics, ethnicity, and culture because what all schools have in common is a focus on results.</p>
Joanna	<p>Expresses commitment to two pedagogical visions, both teaching as a technical endeavour, using scientific processes for the teaching of writing (where teachers are accountable for managing student achievement efficiently), and using a creative, caring and responsive pedagogy that acknowledges student diversity and expertise.</p> <p>Suggests that the school is quite traditional in its curricular, pedagogical and administrative functions.</p>
Gina	<p>Has a strong moral motivation for teaching, based on own experience of being a disadvantaged learner.</p> <p>Wonders about using practical activities as a tool for students who respond well to physical activity to enable them to develop their literacy skills.</p>
Garry	<p>Has a strong belief in a vocational function for schooling, particularly learning appropriate work behaviours.</p> <p>Has a focus on basic literacy in class, rather than specific content knowledge.</p>

The university researchers believe that the combination of teachers reflecting on their own beliefs and values, how these are interpreted by others (i.e. the university researchers) and how they are experienced by students has the potential to produce profound pedagogical shifts. While we hoped to find evidence of these shifts throughout the project, measurable outcomes were significantly limited through the school's withdrawal from the longitudinal initiative. Similar efforts suggest that significant and sustainable change would require longer and more continual effort than allowable through this pilot study (McPhail, 2006; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). However, the following section that looks more closely at the prevailing pedagogies, students' classroom experiences, and the changes that occurred through participation in the project show some results that are quite encouraging.

Four classroom case studies

This part of the project findings reports upon the four classroom case studies, and discusses the process and outcomes of the case study research agendas. While these analyses draw upon the teachers' own findings, these were orally reported to the university researchers who have written the final report. This has enabled the university researchers to situate the individual research concerns of the teacher researchers (evident through the individual classroom research questions identified in Section Two of this report) within a wider analysis of the intersections between

personal relevance and interest and the development of writing literacy in a low decile school. In some respects, this approach to analysis is an outcome of the context of the project. This was a small-scale pilot study that was intended to be the start of ongoing work within the school. The classroom effects were inevitably limited because of the short time frame allowed for the interventions (one term), and the limited support provided to the teacher researchers as a result of turbulence and uncertainty in the project, school professional development, and leadership. However, it was important for the project to develop rich findings despite limited classroom effects to support the ongoing work of the school. The university researchers have attempted to do this by situating the case study findings of the teacher researchers within the collective knowledge of critical literacy, multiliteracy, and teaching and learning research. For the university researchers, this highlights the importance of acknowledging the expert roles that both teachers and university researchers bring to research partnerships.

Case study 1: Writing as a personally relevant activity

The concern to develop classroom practices that supported student interest and personal relevance was an idea picked up by the teacher researchers within each of the four case studies. In particular, Jill, the social studies teacher, decided to focus her study on the implementation of a unit of work that was intended to be relevant and meaningful to a class where many of the individuals appeared disengaged and disruptive to the learning of others:

Can students' research report writing skills be developed by conducting a research project that is relevant and meaningful to students in social studies: 'Students exploring what they would like their ideal school to look like'?

Drawing on critical and multiliteracy approaches to addressing student writing literacy, the class was asked to draw on their own funds of knowledge and take social action to make a material difference to their school environment (Moll, et al., 1989; New London Group, 2000, Comber & Nixon, 2006). Recently the school had received money to upgrade their facilities, and so Jill set the students a task of conducting a research project that looked at how the resources could be spent to improve the school's buildings and facilities. Using social science research methods, the students were asked to work in groups to decide upon the focus of their research, write at least two questions, and then collect information relating to these questions (see Cummins, 2001). The remainder of the project was to be completed individually. They were asked to draw maps, graphs, and diagrams with short written explanations showing what they had found. The individual writing tasks for the project included the following: (a) writing a paragraph to introduce their research project, following a set structure or rubric for writing; (b) conducting a questionnaire and writing a short paragraph summarising the results of at least four questions asked; (c) writing a concluding paragraph; and (d) evaluating their research, and writing about whether their research was successful or not.

For the student and teacher researchers it was apparent that this project had the potential to be more relevant to students than some previous social studies units. However, most of the students in the follow-up interviews suggested that their experience of the research project was not considerably different from their usual experience of social studies. Natasha suggested that the processes for undertaking the project made it boring because even though students were supposed to be working together initially, they were then required to work individually to complete the same kind of work and were not able to use their strengths within their groups. Some students also expressed concern that only certain group members were trusted to collect data outside of the classroom, making it harder for the ones left behind to interpret results and less motivated to complete the work to a satisfactory standard. Other students suggested the pace of work was similar to other social studies projects, where they felt they started many projects that had potential, but had little opportunity to finish them. Doug drew an analogy with a painting project when he explained:

So say you start a painting job and you start painting and it's got its first coat but it needs a second coat to look good, and so like we're not getting a second coat. (Doug, interview, 3 November, 2006)

Overall, it appears that this case study reinforced the students' existing perceptions of schooling, and this was mirrored in their perception of social studies, as evident in Figures 1 and 2 from the SATIS survey that was administered after the project.

Figure 1 **10 Blue's opinion of school after the writing interventions**

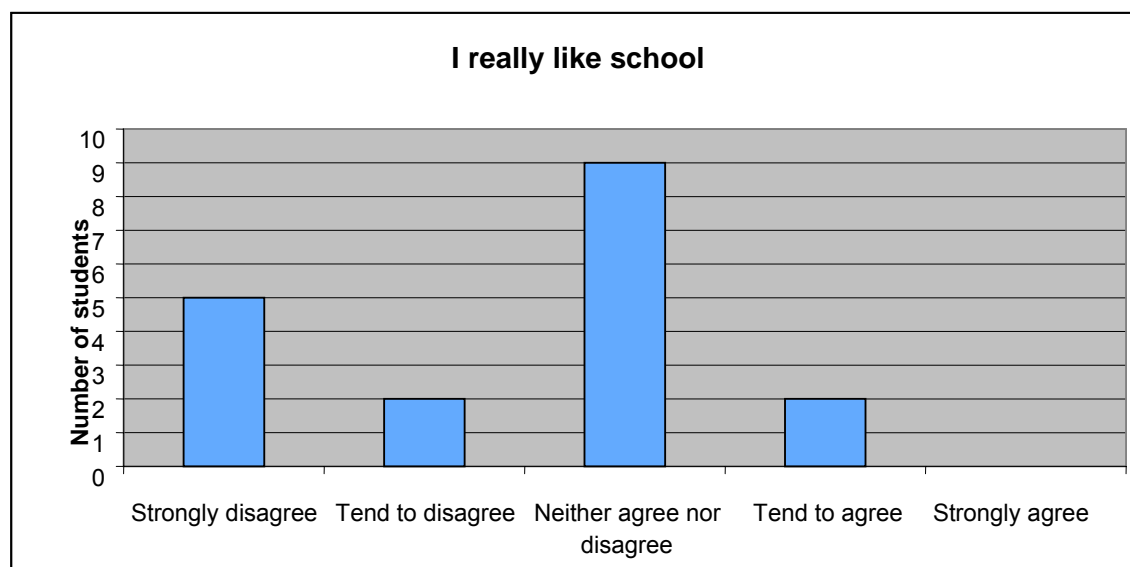
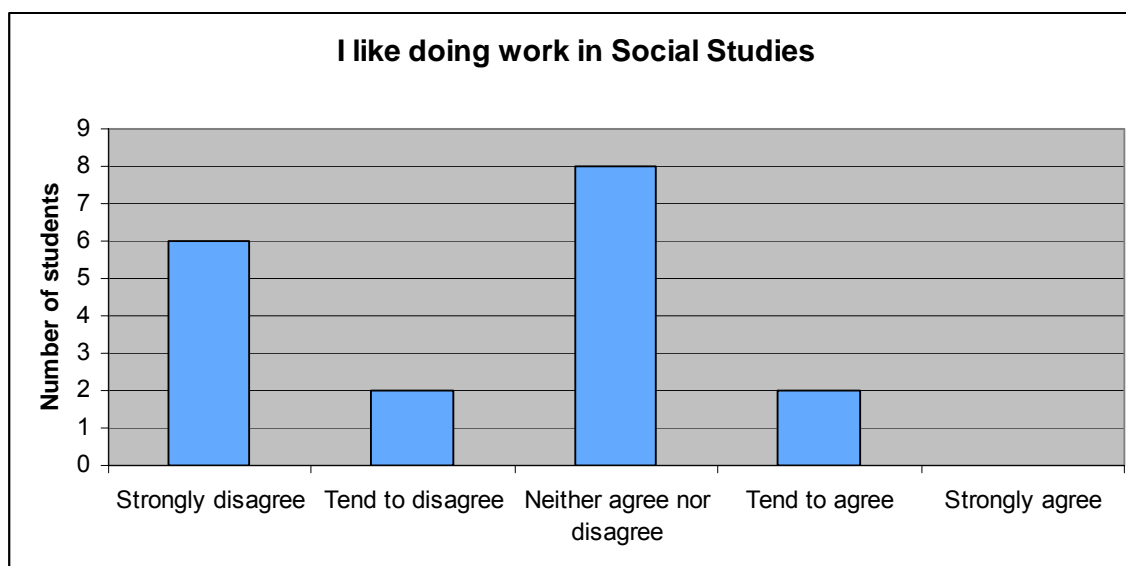


Figure 2 **10 Blue's opinion of work in social studies after the writing interventions**



In her final interview, Jill suggested that while there had been some improvement in the overall writing of drafts and introductions, particularly through the use of rubrics, the project had been time consuming and thus the improvements to the final products had not been significant enough to make the process worthwhile. She also indicated that the project had made her somewhat sceptical of the value of developing a unit of work entirely around students' ideas about what helps them to learn:

I think that it was good to be able to reflect on what the kids say about what helps them to learn. However, I think taking it into account, and then trying to do something that they thought was going to help them to learn, so putting a lot of time and energy into that project that they did, I don't think it worked that well (Jill, interview, 24 October, 2006).

The results of her project led her to the conclusion that rather than focus on what students found personally relevant in terms of content, as her project had sought to do, it may be more useful to design units that were varied in catering to the ways that students learn:

I think it might be more useful to talk about ways in which the students could learn better through the different ways that they learn at school. So whether they learn best by, I don't know, role-playing or reading text or looking at pictures or the best way that they learn for themselves, and then trying to incorporate a range of those different strategies, rather than 'I want to learn about rugby league players', or 'I want to learn about blah blah blah', it's the way that they learn (Jill, interview, 24 October, 2006).

Jill attributed the outcomes of her project to inevitable discrepancies between students' professed and genuine interests, suggesting that a more fruitful approach to curriculum was to enculturate students into a national curriculum. A shared curriculum would compensate for deficiencies in knowledge, and students could then choose their preferred methods for acquiring that knowledge.

However, responses from the students suggested to the university researchers that perhaps something less intrinsic to the students was limiting the success of Jill's interventions. While it was Jill's intention for the project to be meaningful and relevant to the students, students we talked to suggested that some of the teaching practices adopted in the class worked against them and their classmates developing meaningful connections with the content of the unit. Some students were quite cynical about the extent to which the project had potential to genuinely effect change in the school. Several discussed a discrepancy between the intention of the project and its reality that restricted their motivation for the project. As Peter suggested;

I don't think anyone finished and then ... someone in the class found out that the money had already been spent or something ... and we all started laughing. (Peter, interview, 3 November, 2006)

Some students also appeared concerned that there had been no opportunities to discuss the loss of funding in class, thus reinforcing their conviction that issues that genuinely concerned them were not valued within the social studies curriculum despite the best intentions of their teacher. The university researchers suggest that rather than position this project as a failure, analysis reveals the basis for some of its limitations and suggests some means for overcoming them. However, it can be difficult for teachers to see the limits of their own analyses, and perhaps this is the crucial justification for research partnerships that extend the limits of practitioner research. The outside critical eye of an educational researcher may reveal and make sense of the discrepancies between teacher perceptions and student experiences that are common within classrooms (Alton-Lee, Nuthall & Patrick, 1993; Nuthall, 2004; Kaur, Boyask, McPhail & Quinlivan, in press). Jill and the other teacher researchers bravely entered into a process that critically scrutinises their own identities and performance as teachers, because what the university researchers revealed through their data collection were discrepancies between teacher intentions and classroom practice throughout the school. This was highlighted in the case of the physical education classroom, where Gina proposed that her students write in personal journals to encourage writing that was relevant and meaningful. At a class meeting, student resistance to the idea was of such magnitude that Gina had to revise her plan, recognising that this was symptomatic of the resentment revealed in student interviews to anything more than the most cursory amount of writing in physical education. While this finding was destabilising for Gina, she also suggested that finding out more about her students' experiences at school was the singularly most valuable aspect of the project.

The student data I think is the biggest thing, it's straight from our students and it's them telling us about them and how they learn and if they're learning or why they learn ... you learn from Bill Rogers or anything like that, and that's his, but this is from our kids, it's straight from them, who we teach every day and it's them being honest and I think that that has been the key thing (Gina, interview, 9 August 2006).

While the teacher researchers intended that the new writing interventions would be more personally relevant to their students, classroom observations and student interviews indicated that students were not always able to access the curriculum in the way it was intended. The university researchers contend that this discrepancy should not be interpreted simplistically, as a flawed

pedagogy on the part of the teacher (Clark, 2006). Undertaking a wider analysis reveals the complex interaction between teachers' proposed beliefs about the purpose of education and those of their students, and how these beliefs are contested or reproduced within both the microcontext of the classroom and the wider sociopolitical context of schooling. However, the university researchers supported the teachers in their claims that the negative effects of these constraints may be mitigated by listening to and acknowledging the experiences of students, particularly if they consider this information in light of their own beliefs about schooling as teachers, and the wider social context of both themselves and their students.

This possibility presents a way forward for Jill and the other teacher researchers in their quest to understand and improve the writing literacy in their classrooms. Like other teachers we interviewed at Kakariki College, Jill expressed emancipatory beliefs about schooling.

I think that school is for opening up opportunities for students. And I don't think that schooling should always be about getting a job. I think that school is to open up opportunities for students. I think that education has an important purpose as learning. Not just learning to be something. I think that learning is, to introduce students to learning, education for education's sake is important. That's what I believe. (Jill, interview, 24 October, 2006)

Whilst Jill expresses a broadly liberal humanistic vision for schooling, and defines education as more than 'learning to be something', we found that it was common within our four classrooms at Kakariki College to find tensions between teachers' educational vision, and the actual classroom activities. Many of the students in the case study classes were reluctant to write, evident through observations and interviews, thus restricting rather than expanding their opportunities. However, a critical lens provides an explanation for students' reluctance to write, highlighting the predominantly reproductive nature of conventional schooling practices. The university researchers suggest that teachers have to think differently, constantly challenging received norms, for both themselves and their students in order to produce different outcomes. Within the space of curriculum planning and implementation there are possibilities for teachers to create new social outcomes, but this is made particularly difficult in a climate that favours instrumentalist and technicist pedagogical responses to student learning and literacy. Whilst instrumental practices support a neoliberal politics, and are dominant within recent schooling policy (see O'Neill, Clark, & Openshaw, 2004; Olssen, Codd & O'Neill, 2004), social reproduction is further reinforced when the culture of schools is predominantly inward-looking, and teachers largely draw upon their own resources in their development of curriculum and pedagogy.

I think that the beliefs that I have about teaching and learning come from just what I've learnt practically teaching. So, the things that I do, the way I go about teaching and learning is to try out different things, and whatever seems to engage the students and they get the most out of is what I use. (Jill, interview, 24 October, 2006)

Paradoxically, the dominant instrumental culture of schools seems to make it even more difficult for teachers to genuinely reflect upon the responses of their students because their views are

coloured by the cultural mythologies surrounding effective pedagogies, rather than a genuine reflection on the way that their students learn (see Nuthall, 2001; Kaur et.al, in press).

Within this climate it is unsurprising that for some of the teacher researchers, the conflict between the value they attributed to schooling, and that of their students, appeared to strengthen their belief in a pragmatic and instrumental approach to classroom teaching and learning. This was evident when one of the teacher researchers suggested that practical knowledge was most helpful in changing practice to better support writing and achievement in her classroom. In this excerpt from the final interview, Jill indicates that the most valuable professional development is a combination of practical ideas and the time to produce resources that will enable teachers to implement them;

Ruth: OK, if we think a bit about your own practice in the classroom, and think about ways that you might develop your practice. And in particular professional development, however you might get that, or however you might frame that. What are the types of things that help you? To change your practice, or to help you to do it better?

Jill: Practical ideas ... And time to be able to sit down and work through those ideas, and to produce resources that they can use.

Ruth: So that's the main thing?

Jill: Yep, that's what I see most valuable, in terms of professional development. (Ruth interviewing Jill, 12 December, 2005)

However, classroom observations at Kakariki College generally indicated that the implementation of practical strategies promulgated through existing professional development initiatives were ad hoc. While there was evidence in the classrooms of strategies intended to support student literacy, such as strategies introduced to the school through the Ministry of Education's Secondary Schools Literacy Initiative like making learning intentions explicit and using quick 'Do Now' activities to start lessons, the observations indicated that these were either implemented as classroom rituals (Nuthall, 2001), largely devoid of any clear purpose, or that students derived unintended meanings from the activities.

What makes this discrepancy particularly interesting is that in many respects it typifies disparities that occur within schooling between teacher intention and student learning. Teachers at Kakariki College are operating in a schooling context that positions teachers as key interveners in student learning and achievement (Ministry of Education, 2005). Policy specifically related to literacy also advocates for a cause and effect model of teaching and learning, whereby effective literacy practices are recommended to teachers for effecting higher student outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2004). This could be possible if, as Jill suggests in her initial interview, all students are facing the same challenges regardless of their social situation.

I learnt that beyond everything I think kids are the same in most countries. Around the world. Certainly in terms of New Zealand and the UK and probably Australia and, I think that the kids in those sorts of countries are very similar, underneath it all. I think that motivation varies amongst students always. It doesn't matter where you are. And just

because ... you might go from a very wealthy sort of area to a very poor one...that the behaviour of those types of schools will vary according to socioeconomic area. And it doesn't at all. You know, the sort of challenges that you get here are just the same as, you know, what you'd find in a higher decile area. Definitely, I think. (Jill, interview, 12 December, 2005)

However, literature on the social dynamics of schooling makes it apparent that there are structural limitations to achieving successful student outcomes in literacy (Clark, 2006; Nash & Prochnow, 2004). The experiences of teacher and students at Kakariki College are shaped by their location within multiethnic and economic communities whose discourses and knowledge bases may have little or no consonance with school based discourses and knowledge (Moll et.al, 1989; Moje et al., 2001). While we are mindful of problems with normalising Kakariki students as deficient, generalisations about the life experiences and opportunities associated with social disadvantage will apply to many of these students.

The challenge for the school is to find pedagogical strategies that can disrupt the inevitability of limited social outcomes for all of their students (Moje et al., 2004). We would suggest that a means to achieve this may initially be the recognition of the knowledge funds that are specific to being a secondary school student at Kakariki College (Moll et.al, 1989; Moje et al., 2004), as well as building their capacity to be equivalent to students from other schools. The classroom observations suggested the types of strategies being employed may in some cases improve learning for these students. However, we would warn that an instrumental application of such strategies offers little potential for genuinely engaging all students because they do not address the root causes of Kakariki students' disengagement. The university researchers believe that if teachers broaden their knowledge of pedagogy and the connections between classroom learning and the world outside of schooling, they may be in a better position to cater for these students. Deeper understanding of their students' lives, of the culture in which they operate, as well as the nature of general principles of teaching and learning may provide a richer basis from which to purposefully respond to their students' needs (see Boyask, 2006).

If teachers select, develop and employ strategies purposefully, they are less likely to naturalise the causes of observed negative effects, and more likely to intervene in their construction. For example, McPhail and Palincsar (2006) and others (Nuthall, 2001; 2004) warn against naturalising the relationship between participation in schooling and ability:

... classroom signs of engagement are only 'secondary indicators' of learning that can erroneously sustain the cultural myth that ability leads directly to achievement in school (p. 545).

Without a broader understanding of teaching and learning, teachers risk making decisions based wholly upon their own experience, which can be limited and in some cases lead to misunderstandings about the nature of student learning and cause some confusion about the teachers' role in effecting learning. In their interviews, Gina, Jill, and Joanna all mentioned the pressure that secondary teachers face in delivering a national curriculum. While this can be a burden, Jill believed it was important that students have access to a common curriculum. She

claimed that her role as a teacher is to ensure that students have been exposed to the content of the national curriculum:

- Jill: 'Cause like, you have to cover this, this, and this by the end of year 10.
- Ruth: Right.
- Jill: So, that's sort of, and I, I do like that link. I like the link that, that kids, everywhere in the country, at the end of year 10 should be expected to have covered these things. I think that's good. Otherwise what's the point?
- Ruth: So when you talk about, you know, they've covered it, what do you mean by that? What would you regard as a student having covered something? That they've sat in a class where it's been discussed? That they've engaged with it in some way?
- Jill: Yeah, that they've engaged with it in some way. Obviously particular students are gonna have particular moods and abilities, and some will engage much more, and some will not engage at all, but they've been exposed to these things.
- Ruth: So exposure's quite important, in terms of coverage with the curriculum, with students.
- Jill: I think so. (Ruth interviewing Jill, 24 October, 2006)

Whilst a national curriculum is instrument of an egalitarian society, designed to enculturate students into a common set of values and knowledge bases, the social location of Kakariki students prevents them from unproblematically accessing the curriculum to which they have been exposed. If teachers believe from their observations that students can choose their level of engagement with the material they have been exposed to, it suggests that they implicitly believe that some students will inevitably succeed through ability or disposition and others will necessarily fail. This minimises the role of teachers as the architects of learning contexts where negative consequences are either sustained or disrupted (Lingard & Mills, 2002; Hattie, 2002). However, developing their professional knowledge beyond their own experience may enable teachers to look with new eyes at their own practice and the way they interact with their students. In particular, the university researchers suggest that it would be useful for teachers to draw upon an extended professional knowledge of teaching and learning to carefully scrutinise the unintended consequences of their actions (see Hoyle, 1974). With this new knowledge, teachers could return to their observations of student experience, such as that derived through the baseline data collection and ongoing monitoring of the four case studies, and determine what counts as useful knowledge for developing new interventions in student learning.

While the student baseline data and ongoing monitoring of the case study classrooms provided a valuable resource for the teacher researchers, the concerns that have arisen from the classroom interventions suggest that it is initially difficult for teachers to discern the genuinely useful from the cacophony of student voices. Ongoing work in the school may expand teachers' capacity to relate student feedback with empirically or philosophically derived collective knowledge about

the nature of student learning and literacy. In the meantime, the university researchers have attempted to situate feedback from students on the classroom interventions into coherent accounts that connect student experience with pedagogical research. For example, Peter emphasises the importance of making writing meaningful for students when he noted:

All you do is just write. You don't actually learn how to write and do a speech and that, you just write information ... (Peter, interview, 3 November, 2006)

Others suggested that there is little to be learnt from copying diagrams and text or filling in the answers and this is consistent with findings of classroom-based research (cf. Nuthall, 2001; Quinlivan, 2005). Some suggested that if students feel that their teachers demonstrate trust, either by allowing them to develop their own ideas or fully participate in class, the students feel more responsible and are less likely to let their teachers down, another notion supported by research (e.g. Parkhill, Fletcher, & Fa'afoi, 2005). Students also suggested that teacher expectations vary from class to class, and student performance, in part, reflects these expectations. Fono, who was moved from 10 Green into 10 Blue in the middle of the year, describes his ethnic background as Māori/English/German/Tongan and is a student with a physical impairment; his identity shows some of the complexity of his world. In his final interview, he suggested that teachers who are respectful of students' individual circumstances can assist in their learning. He told us about being mystified and dismayed when a teacher 'blew up' at him for not having a pen even though his brothers and sisters stole his stationery. Descriptions of student experiences of pedagogy, such as Fono's, challenge teachers to find new ways of relating to students whose experiences of schooling are complicated by the values and practices of their families, communities and their situation within society.

Case study 2: Rich content provision to support the development of writing literacy

Educational reforms of late 1980s onwards halted the mid-twentieth century's liberalisation of the national curriculum, and made teachers increasingly accountable to a standardised national curriculum (see Ministry of Education, 1993; O'Neill, Clark, Openshaw, 2004). At Kakariki College, the university and teacher researchers discussed the gap between national curriculum requirements and students' interests in writing, and whether this gap could be breached in any or all of their curriculum areas. The project team had intentionally selected the four subject areas for case study because of their diversity, hypothesising that we could examine the effects of the writing interventions upon Year 10 students with a diverse range of subject preferences. The selected subject areas were also core components of the Year 10 programme, and this provided a common variable across the cohort under study. However, in keeping with other research on the significance of the teacher on student learning, it was evident within our data that different teachers affected student interest and consequent engagement with writing, and for many students, this appeared to be foremost in their minds as they declared their preferences for particular subject areas (Lingard & Mills, 2002; Nuthall, 2002). While the researchers discussed and considered the effects of teacher disposition and teacher-student relationships in effecting student learning (cf

Katz & Raths, 1986; Bishop et al., 2003), and some of this is outlined in the following section of these findings, throughout our student interview transcripts we also found many references to the curriculum content developed by their favoured teachers. In the core programme, students talked about science and English teachers who they particularly liked. As they talked about these teachers, it was evident that their positive experiences were not just related to the dispositions of these teachers, it also related to how teachers presented their subject matter. Students noted that teachers they regarded favourably made the content interesting and fun, so that learning was its own reward. Jake suggested that he and his classmates were motivated to write in class by a teacher who helped them to understand science better by including a lot of practical experiments that they could do, and permitted students to make choices about what they wanted to study. Writing was less of a chore when it directly related to their personal experience of a curriculum rich in scientific experimentation and inquiry. Jake even claimed that this kind of class environment made a positive difference to his achievement and motivated him to consider a career in a scientific field when he leaves school.

In common with other school-based literature, Kakariki students' responses indicated that there was a strong relationship between their level of interest, the subject area, and what they thought of their teacher (Moje, 2002). Students' responses suggested that when teachers shared a common interest in a subject area with their students, they were more likely to have a positive relationship. However, even when the content material did not relate directly to the students' own lives, students noted that their interest could be engaged if other kinds of connections were made with the subject matter (Moje, 2002; Moje et al., 2004). An example that Doug noted was an instance when a teacher drew from her own experience to make the content more accessible to students. He explains:

Yeah ... she's been all around the world, and she took photos, and she showed a photo of like the Berlin wall in Germany, and she had a photo of, oh I can't remember what, but you know, somewhere in Egypt and all that? And we had to write the place where this is and the country that it's from. It was pretty cool. (Doug, interview, 17 March, 2006)

While the teacher's own experiences of travel had little in common with the direct experience of her students, by showing her holiday photos she was able to bridge the gap between their experiences and the curriculum content, thus fostering their interest in the curriculum. When students are interested in the subject under study, they become much more motivated (McPhail, Pierson, Freeman, Goodman, & Ayappa, 2000). Students who have very strong interests that relate very clearly to their identity and future aspirations may be more motivated to undertake other kinds of learning if they can see it connected to their interest. While some students suggested learning should be of direct relevance to their existing interests and experiences, others, like Tiresa, recognise that school provides an opportunity to extend them. It appears that some students need assistance in making the connections from the known to the unfamiliar. Some students, such as Edward, see their learning as meaningless if it doesn't obviously relate to their lives outside of school or their future aspirations:

Yeah, we're just learning about stuff. I mean, it's all right. But I don't see what it's got to do with getting a career. (Edward, interview, March, 2006)

Students may have difficulties motivating themselves to do school work when they are not interested in the area under study nor recognise its relevance to their lives. This presents particular problems for core subject teachers, because all students are compelled to attend classes regardless of their interest in the subject area. This was the challenge for Garry in mid-to-low band 10 Green, who were all compelled to take science. Some students could see no reason for science unless you are going to be a scientist, and wonder why it is not an optional subject. Like other disengaged students (Moll et al., 1989), a number of Kakariki students suggested that they did not see the point of what they were doing.

Student interviews and classroom observations indicated that students were having difficulty accessing the science curriculum in Garry's class because they were not making the connections between the theoretical scientific concepts and their experience. For example, some students had difficulty recognising how the diagrams that they drew in the electricity unit related to physical phenomena. Garry initially suggested one thing that distinguished Kakariki students was differences in their existing scientific knowledge and vocabulary and the assumed national norms in the science curriculum. While emancipatory educational discourses recognise that students from low income, multiethnic communities bring different types of knowledge (cf. Gilbert, 2005; Lemke, 1990; Moje et al., 2004), when they are measured against nationally defined norms of scientific knowledge, Kakariki students are found wanting. When asked what might help them to make these connections, the students suggested that they would like more opportunities to undertake written work alongside experimental work. They also suggested that more opportunities to undertake practical work, rather than watch demonstrations, may also assist their understanding.

Moje et al., (2001) suggests that assisting students to make these connections requires microlevel teaching interventions. Whilst observations of Garry's classroom indicated that Garry spent a lot of time explaining concepts to his students, some students still claimed that their teacher spent very little time explaining the content and making it more accessible for them. Others claimed that their teacher equated writing with working, and because students found writing difficult, this expectation was a barrier to their engagement with scientific knowledge, and their learning of the intended content. Students suggested that if they were allowed to *do* more experiments during class, the teacher could provide better explanations by showing how things happen and allowing the students to try them out for themselves, increasing their opportunities for engaging with and retaining theoretical concepts.

Seeking strategies for drawing connections between students' own knowledge and the science curriculum, Garry and the university researchers discussed using more practical activities in the classroom to support students' interest in and learning of scientific concepts. Garry also wanted to explore the use of creative forms of writing in science, to find out whether he could engage the students' interest by allowing them to express their own ideas and knowledge about the subject,

and then work towards curricular goals by increasing the students' use of 'scientific facts' in their writing. These intentions were expressed through the following research question:

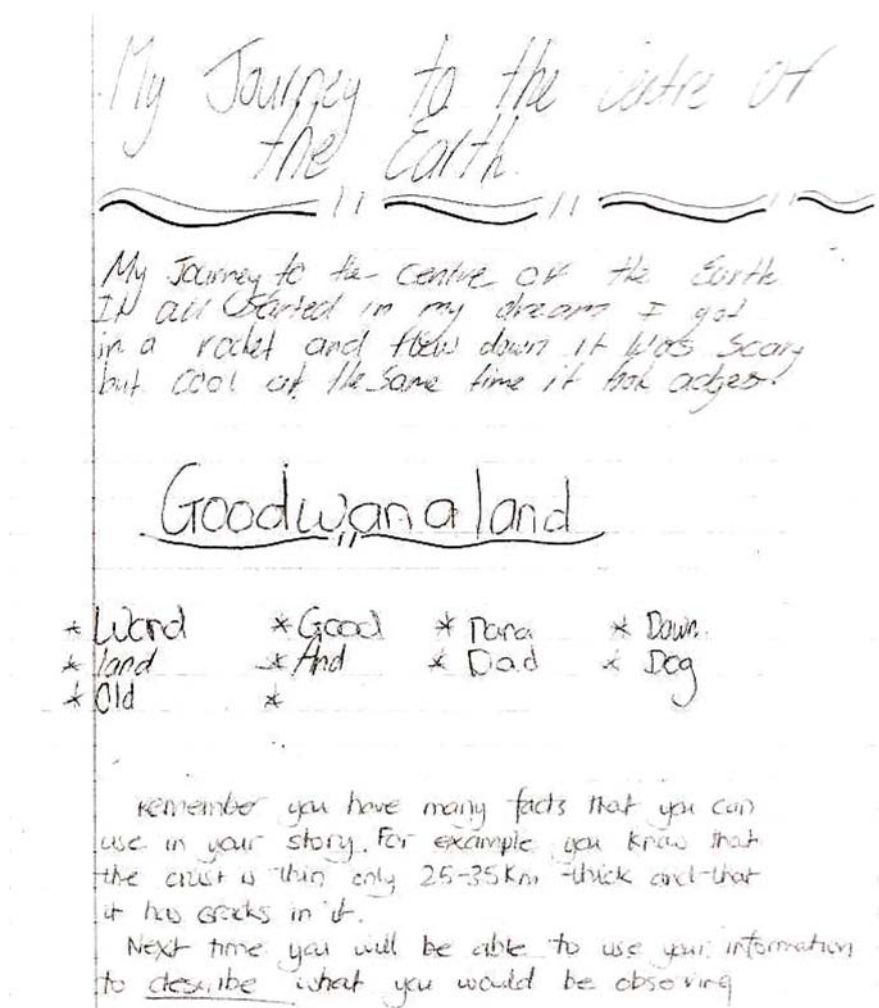
Can students' confidence and ability as scientific writers be improved through engaging in relevant and meaningful scientific learning processes?

Garry made an agreement with the class that he would include more practical work (at least once or twice a week), have writing activities that were directly related to scientific processes, and provide more in-depth feedback on how to improve their writing (see Alton-Lee, 2003, for the benefits of feedback). The students in this class had a learning notebook in which they had to complete various writing exercises, and reflect on their learning and writing. The set writing tasks were about content covered in class. As an example of a writing exercise they were given, they were asked to write a short story about travelling to the centre of the earth. For students this was a chance to be creative in their writing, but they were encouraged to include scientific facts in their story. Some of the other set questions included the following:

- What are our senses and what are they used for?
- Explain what the job of a skeleton is in the human body.
- Explain how bones and muscles join to each other.
- List the joints of the body and describe the areas of the body where we find these joints.
- I am blood and I am made up of ...
- My function as blood is to ...

After some exercises, the students were asked to reflect on their writing by answering the following questions: (a) what could I have done better in my writing? (b) How do I feel about my writing? The three student researchers from the class provided Garry with feedback on the success of his interventions. While at the end of the trial period, students could recall some changes that had been made to the curriculum, some were dissatisfied that they had not experienced a greater amount of practical work in class and had not been involved in more scientific experiments. They did remember watching Garry doing experimental work in class; however, Jake and Roger were critical of the amount of time they spent watching these scientific experiments and suggested that they would have been more engaged had they been able to conduct their own experiments. While it appears students perceived a limited increase in experimental work in class, they did recall doing other kinds of activity associated with the science topics under study. For example, Laura and Iris recalled cutting out and colour coding diagrammatic representations of parts of the body. Once they started to discuss this activity they suggested that the simplicity of the exercises, as well as their interactive nature, did help them to memorise the body parts. Garry appeared to be using a range of other strategies in class that also enabled them to memorise curriculum content. These included repetition of ideas, using the content in different ways, and activities that required students to work out the answers.

Figure 3 Dan's writing sample



While students interviewed at the end of the trial expressed varied levels of motivation for writing in science, and some of them suggested that there was too much writing in science and they found this boring, most of the students suggested that some of the writing activities and accompanying teacher responses during the trial had made an impact on their writing. Jake suggested that his writing improved through practice, as well as through getting feedback and advice from his teacher. Iris also thought the feedback was important because by understanding where she went wrong she could improve next time (See Figure 3 for an example of Garry's feedback to Dan). While the support Garry offered Dan in the form of feedback may have some positive consequence in Dan's future writing, at the end of the trial students like Dan who were less interested in science or school learning were still having difficulties with motivation for writing.

Students from each of the case study classrooms indicated there had been some positive outcomes from the interventions; however, they could also articulate what they thought was missing from the curriculum. In many cases, their suggestions adhere with prevailing ideas in teaching and learning research. Fono, a student interested in the subject but not how it was taught in his class, suggested that when he is actively engaged with the content it improves his level of interest

(Palincsar & Magnusson, 2001). For other students, like Shirley, using approaches to learning that are more active and involve more experimentation (such as inquiry-based approaches) makes learning more accessible, fostering an interest and breaking down barriers to understanding that could arise with a wholly academic or abstract approach. However, any intervention must also entail acknowledgement of the specific challenges of delivering a liberal and resource-rich curriculum for teachers at this school. There were numerous observations made of classes with limited resources, poor equipment, and work spaces that were dull and uninspiring. Teachers reported problems with equipment being vandalised or stolen. Some students recognised that they were given limited opportunities to use specialised equipment because they were not trusted, or, indeed, considered themselves insufficiently trustworthy.

These and other challenges arise as teachers attempt to fit the cultural and social make-up of Kakariki College students within national norms of pedagogy, curriculum and achievement. However, most teachers at the school understandably recognise their students are not competing on a level playing field of achievement. Their everyday encounters with the outcomes of social inequality colours the view the teacher researchers have of their roles. For example, Gina claimed that a significant aspect of her role was presenting a positive and stable role model of adulthood for students who may not have similar examples at home. When discussing his role as a teacher, Garry suggested that in a low decile school, before you can address scientific content knowledge, you need to address kids' basic functioning. His initial interview indicated that he believed it is more important to address the basic needs of students at Kakariki, because otherwise many do not participate and cannot engage with the formal curriculum. He said:

They struggle with reading, or they turn off as far as a task, because they don't like it ... it's easier to shut down than to actually participate in it. (Garry, interview, 2 December, 2005)

This iterates one of the basic tensions for teachers at Kakariki College. Student achievement requires both academic knowledge and the basic skills to access that knowledge. However, Kakariki students' limited success in normative assessments can suggest to teachers that basic skill development is more important than content knowledge. For example, some teachers expressed less concern about the extent of their students' academic knowledge because they believed there were more useful things their students should know in light of their probable work and life trajectories. Garry felt that his background from the private sector was particularly useful within a school like Kakariki, because this provided a more realistic perspective of what his students' needed from school. He suggested that for many students it was most important to provide basic skills or training for work, and that a pragmatic curriculum that responded to the different skills and abilities of the students was one of the strengths of the school. Garry's initial interview suggested that scientific knowledge was a secondary aspect to his curriculum, particularly for lower band classes; for example, he asked:

... is it necessary that a person actually knows that light travels at 300 kilometres per second? (Garry, first interview, December, 2004)

While Garry appeared committed to providing a relevant curriculum that focused on building the skills his students' needed to acquire scientific knowledge, he ran the risk of divorcing skills from curriculum content.

The university researchers suggest this discrepancy is important for teachers at Kakariki College to recognise and address. Supporting student achievement requires engaging student interest. When looking at the unintended consequences of their actions, the university researchers would suggest that teachers examine their intended curriculum and ask themselves how likely it is to stimulate student interest and consequent engagement. Viewing subject knowledge as a secondary aspect of a low decile school's curriculum minimises the possibility of fostering and sustaining student interest in classroom learning, and this was clearly evident in feedback from the student researchers, student participant interviews and classroom observations of curriculum content at Kakariki College.

Case study 3: Building relationships that support writing literacy

Evident in the baseline data was the very significant role that interpersonal relationships played in students' perceptions of schooling, and their commitment to school learning and writing. In-class and external peer relationships appeared particularly significant for either supporting or disrupting students' participation in the authorised curriculum. Peer groups appeared to sustain student interest, and students were better placed for success if their peer group interests were school-related. Otherwise, peer relationships could sustain failure, with peers actively or implicitly discouraging each others' compliant behaviour, fostering interest in activities that were not school-related (such as socialising or shopping), or supporting non-compliant practices such as truancy, avoiding work, and defiant behaviour (cf. Moje et al., 2004; Quinlivan, 2005). As well as peer relationships, students also indicated that their relationships with teachers affected their interest and performance in a subject area.

The case study in the English class (the top band or extension class) was particularly interesting in terms of its peer relationships, with clear examples of peer groups who supported one another with the development of writing because writing was something they did as part of their normal social activity. However, it was evident from talking with students from the other classes that writing was not the preserve of the social life of the extension class. Students from other classes talked about writing letters, keeping diaries, texting, and exchanging handwritten notes among their friends. The difference appeared to be that students in lower-banded classes who were interested in writing did not perceive any similarity between their normal writing practices and their school work. The types of writing students in the extension class were doing outside of class better meshed with the authorised curriculum and blended with the demands of the subject area. In fact, general student perception across the cohort was that in English some teachers made it possible for students to explore their own ideas through writing, and when given this option, students embraced it enthusiastically. In classes where students were enthusiastic about the English curriculum, they also expressed more general enthusiasm for their teacher. Close analysis

of student perceptions of their English teachers revealed, as suggested in the previous section, that a positive disposition alone was not enough to entirely gain their respect. It also appeared that it was deeply important for students to respect the subject specialist knowledge and commitment of their teachers. Thus, in the English case study, there were several clear examples of students who were academically successful and also had positive relationships with their peers and teachers that centred on a shared interest in the curriculum area.

The specific student feedback that Joanna had received from the baseline data indicated that the dynamics between peers were of significant concern to students in her English class. Students indicated that there were different social groups in this class and wider school that conform to more general peer subcultural norms. Students described the groups in their class:

- girls who are into popular media like “Desperate Housewives” and are funny
- gangstas who are try-hards, act staunch, are involved in Eastside/Westside politics, and are mostly Māori and Samoan
- emos
- loners
- anime drawers
- “the guys” who are metal-heads.

These different groups interact in the classroom and outside of it; for example, on the internet. Identifying with one group makes you susceptible to being ‘dissed’ by another group. Within a classroom culture made up of different groups, some students see tensions as inevitable, and expect to be ‘dissed’ by other groups. It is evident in other school-based research that the social dynamics between peer subcultures significantly impact upon learning in the classroom, resulting in debates, putdowns and tensions between students (Alton-Lee, Nuthall & Patrick, 1993; Quinlivan, 2005).

We like to team up on people and diss people. And like, if people try and diss us we’re—how do you say—clever and quick-witted. That’s what I’d say. (Ben, Interview, March 2006)

In response to this feedback, Joanna wanted to intervene in negative inter-peer relationships, and foster positive and productive learning/writing relationships. First, she intended to use cooperative learning strategies to improve learning relationships between students. Secondly, she was also concerned with enhancing her teaching practices to increase students’ sense of being capable, confident and well-motivated writers. These intentions were developed into the following research question for her case study:

To what extent does working in cooperative groups increase students’ self efficacy in and motivation for writing?

However, in response to students’ needs and her own reading throughout the course of the project, Joanna changed her agenda, and cooperative learning groups were not set up within the class. Instead, Joanna focused on learning processes within the class, using student feedback on teaching

and learning as a core resource from which to develop her own pedagogical decisions, she revised her research question to the following:

Is a student's sense of themselves as capable, confident and well-motivated writers increased through developing 'writing buddy' skills in providing high quality peer feedback?

Joanna introduced several innovations in her class as a result of the project. She set up a writing conferencing corner in her class where students could self-select to go when they required help with their writing. Students were also asked to reflect on their lessons both through class discussion and also by writing reflections in their learning journals about the content of their lessons, their teacher, their learning, things they needed help with, and their learning goals. They were given set topics to write about, or questions to answer, such as the following:

- Describe someone who has been important.
- What does the teacher do that helps me learn?
- What does the teacher do that hinders my learning?
- What do I do that helps me learn?
- What do I do that stops me from learning?
- How can we keep groups on task?
- My learning needs are/are not being met because ...

Generally, she did not comment in the journals, but the teacher provided the class with a handout summarising what the students had identified as their learning goals and the things they wanted help with. This handout included the teacher's responses to the students' comments, and her teaching and learning goals.

Responses from students on the value of Joanna's interventions indicated some encouraging results. Some students cited the conferencing corner and feedback they received on their work as largely beneficial, particularly in the light of the pedagogies they experienced in other core subjects. Eve and Anita suggested there was an evident difference between the way Joanna explicitly discussed and scaffolded learning in the class through her feedback, and the implicit expectations of other teachers. Some of the students we talked with found that because they had opportunities to work with different class members and had more opportunities for whole-class conferences, the class had become more cohesive socially. This outcome directly addressed student concerns brought up in the baseline data collection that dynamics between peers were negatively affecting learning. Some of these findings were borne out in some written accounts in the students' learning journals. Rachael noted in a reflection on group work how much she enjoyed working in a group with Gen, and how she hoped she would have the opportunity again.

The learning conversations in general classroom discussions and the institution of learning notebooks, where students were asked to reflect on their own learning in written form, provided opportunities to look deeply and critically at the learning occurring within her class, and this appeared to renew her commitment to learning as the primary function of schooling. Joanna felt that through taking into consideration feedback from her students on their learning and her own

teaching, she was able to focus attention on learning within the class and address issues that directly affected the meaning and purpose students derived from school. It was this aspect of the project that she regarded as a significant benefit to her teaching. Here she discusses how it has helped her to scrutinise her own teaching practice:

I've looked [at my teaching] from a point of view of school improvement programmes that I have been involved in ... that's kind of been like a top down thing, and for me this has been much, much more up bottom up ... my approach had been fuelled a lot more by what so-called experts say ... specialists in my subject area, or in teaching full-stop who have discussed different strategies that are effective in engaging students.... I had tried to import it into the classroom and integrate it in a way that still does not exactly dovetail with what the specific dynamics are in my own classroom. What this project has made me [consider] ... is that interventions that I have started to put into place in my class have come about as a result of being involved in this project at a level with the university researchers and the work that we have been doing, and synthesising that with becoming a much, much more critical practitioner within the classroom. So that the specific set of dynamics that are happening within my classroom, i.e. the group of kids that I have got, which are completely unique and different, and, as they are in any classroom, I have been looking much, much more closely at, than I ever have before, at what is actually happening at that level (Joanna, final interview, 26 October 2006).

However, even with this level of personal scrutiny and reflection upon the classroom, according to some students, the benefits of the interventions were largely dependent upon the relationship they had both with their teacher and the curriculum content.

Some still suggested that they found little of relevance in the curriculum, at least in part, because it did not connect with their personal interests. But perhaps, of even greater significance, students we talked with who had the most negative experience of the new interventions felt that in some cases, their personal beliefs and values were not always respected by the teacher. There were other examples of students throughout the Year 10 cohort of students who were reluctant to participate in the formal curriculum because they felt that their teachers did not respect the values they brought from their homes, peer subcultures, or personal interests. While in one observed case study classroom a teacher made it evident that one set of religious beliefs took precedence over a student's beliefs, this was not often evident in classroom interactions, and generally the teacher researchers worked hard to develop positive individual relationships with their students. However, there remains a structural imbalance of power between students and their teachers that can have both positive and negative consequences for students. This imbalance was inevitably at work in the English case study, and created some challenges for students who were less comfortable in this classroom than others. One student suggested there was a discrepancy between the extent to which the students felt listened to and Joanna's expressed desire to get feedback on her teaching. Another suggested that student feedback had not been acted upon when the decision was made to discontinue a unit of work they found interesting and engaging, and was replaced with a class discussion where very few got to participate. Another student was concerned that not all personal beliefs and values were welcomed within the class, and that it was not always possible to safely and genuinely express concerns in the learning notebooks. Some of the students told us that they

wrote what they thought the teacher wanted to hear, because when their comments were summarised and presented back to the class this was the only way to preserve their anonymity. Several of the students we talked to indicated that these issues were of significant enough concern to have a detrimental effect on their genuine engagement with Joanna's interventions. For example, several suggested that the lack of anonymity and the imbalances of power inherent in the student-teacher relationship meant that it was challenging to give responses regarding Joanna's teaching that were really honest. As Vicky suggested:

Well you can't be honest when she knows who you are, with your name being on it. (Vicky, interview, 1 November 2007)

This presents a particular problem for teachers concerned with accessing and acting upon student voice. Joanna's attempt to reconstruct her own practice in line with her students' learning needs by seeking student feedback on her teaching practices and responding to the voices of her students shows her genuine concern for equity (Bishop et al., 2003). However, Kakariki students are among the most vulnerable of secondary students. Even within the extension class, their experiences of learning are framed by their sociocultural location in a low decile and low achieving school. For example, students from this class indicated that they experienced very high expectations of achievement from the school, and this caused them considerable anguish. Several of the students interviewed from this class felt considerable pressure to achieve good results in external assessments, and felt anxious about their ability to perform to expectations. Some of these anxieties were apparent in the learning journals. Brittany writes in answer to the question 'How have I been finding the draft writing today?'

It's been difficult. I don't really know how to write good essays. When writing essays I need a lot of help. I haven't started the draft because I don't know how to start it and make it flow. Please help.

This kind of feedback provides Joanna with an opportunity to develop an intervention to meet the specific writing needs of her student, but such honesty requires a considerable amount of trust between the student and the teacher. For other students there were evident limits about what they felt comfortable revealing within their learning journals.

While Joanna can continue to work on developing positive and trusting relationships with all her students, within the context of the project her work was evidently limited. Our analyses suggest that Kakariki teachers face particular challenges in building learning relationships because of the high concentration of problems that students present; e.g. Joanna suggested she was confronted with the challenge of building positive learning relationships with some students who were serial truants and suspected drug-takers. However, Joanna's chances for success may be improved by working in a wider school culture that is also committed to improving student teacher relationships. The university researchers point out that while secondary teachers work in comparative isolation within their classrooms, the organisational structure of secondary schooling means that students come into contact with many teachers throughout their day, not all of whom, according to the students, are committed to listening to the opinions of their students. Joanna's

students, who had been recognised as the most able Year 10 students in the school, suggested that in some classes they felt they could not express any kind of opinion nor ask for help. Some students from lower bands suggested they had very poor relationships with some of their teachers. There were also considerable tensions arising for students who regularly came into conflict with school norms of behaviour or achievement. Students interviewed who were identified in school records as disruptive, regularly truant, or defiant had to negotiate often fraught relationships with senior managers, deans, and outside agency workers as well as their multiple classroom teachers. One student indicated that while he respected his English teacher, their relationship became fraught when they came into conflict through the teacher's management role in the school. Students identified with specific learning needs or disabilities also had more complicated relationships with other adults at school (such as learning support staff and teacher aides). Observations in one case study classroom noted that a teacher aide allocated to one student came into conflict with other students in the class, with several observed incidents of arguments and personal putdowns. The teacher researchers were aware that these outside relationships often affected student learning and behaviour, and students suggested that oftentimes their teachers did not even realise the extent to which interpersonal relationships affected their learning and performance.

While it must be recognised that poor interpersonal relationships impact negatively upon the most vulnerable within the school, the university researchers are also mindful that Kakariki College has undergone considerable turbulence in the wake of leadership changes and its subsequent limited financial statutory management. Within this turbulent environment, the university researchers have found obvious factionalism and fragmentation between colleagues, departments, and groups; without clear leadership, solutions to educational dilemmas largely appear to have been small scale and targeted, such as the ad hoc and fragmented literacy interventions the university researchers observed in class. In the absence of a clear overriding management and rationale for classroom interventions, interviews and field observations revealed that disjuncture and instability are reproduced within classrooms. Teachers have attempted to cope with the instability in different ways. In some cases, teachers have been observed using traditional and conservative pedagogies in an attempt to create order and control. In other classes, teachers have been observed using radical pedagogies that encourage students to discuss and act upon the situation within the school. However, all of these attempts appear flawed in light of the school's instability, and the huge challenges teachers face as they attempt to address the social inequalities they confront daily.

While diversity of approach may appear to support teacher autonomy, the university researchers point out that the demands of teaching in an environment that emphasises teacher performativity, where teachers are accountable to efficiency models of education imposed from without the school, are more likely to result in pragmatic responses of compliance rather than a genuine, autonomous, conceptual engagement with the most pressing issues, such as improving the quality of student literacy in relevant and meaningful ways (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2003; Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark, & Warne, 2002). These tensions are evidently intensified in the

turbulent environment of Kakariki College. Joanna made some headway in building positive learning relationships in order to support writing literacy in her class. Building positive learning relationships was much harder in the lower band classes. The university researchers observed an entrenched culture of disrespectful and insulting behaviour between students. In their interviews, students reported similarly offensive behaviour from some teachers. While the teacher researchers were all evidently committed to developing positive and respectful relationships with their students, in at least two classes it was apparent that tensions arose in response to the chaos resulting from this culture.

These findings suggest that we need to look beyond the confines of individual classrooms in order to understand how to foster teacher–student relationships that support student literacy, founded on a mutual respect for each others’ subject knowledge and practices. While this finding is significant to individual teachers, it also has implications for school structure and organisation. Students throughout the cohort suggested they found classes they had opted into much more enjoyable than core classes, and thought they were also more likely to achieve better results in these classes. They also suggested that they were more likely to respect and listen to their teacher in optional and personally relevant subjects. While we recognise that the four subjects we studied are core parts of the national curriculum at this level, possibilities do exist for restructuring core programmes around student interests. Such possibilities may include core teachers working directly with option teachers, student selection of teachers, as well as more conventional interest-based curriculum modifications within subject area schemes. Interventions at the structural level of the school may also address some of the issues regarding supporting cohesive practices for teaching and learning that have emerged, and are identified in the remaining sections of this report.

Case study 4: The demands of writing in a non-traditional subject

Changes to the national qualification system prompted teachers to initiate this project. The changes meant that student achievement was more closely allied with writing literacy than had previously been the case. This was of particular significance in physical education, where the nature of the subject had changed to make it comparable with academic subjects. Gina told us that these changes were strategic, attempting to improve the standing of the subject area and enhance recognition for students’ achievement in a non-traditional subject; however, these changes were also problematic for students who had low literacy skills, yet were otherwise successful in physical education. The changes opened the possibility for students to achieve a qualification where otherwise they may not, yet the enactment of the policy resulted in further disenfranchisement for Kakariki students who loved physical education yet hated writing. In light of the SATIS, administered in Terms 3 and 4, this was particularly problematic at Kakariki College because the results suggested that physical education was the most popular subject with the Year 10 cohort (see Appendix D). Within our four case study classrooms, more students liked doing the work in physical education than in any of their other core subjects. However, when questioned about the nature of the work they did in physical education, they unanimously thought

that the enjoyable part of physical education was sport and physical activity. There was a very vocal and resolute contingent who decried any attempt to introduce writing into the physical education curriculum.

However, as the other sections of this report on the case studies indicate, subject area had a significant effect on student motivation for writing. Students very clearly expressed preferences for particular subject areas, and in some subject areas (i.e. English and science), they suggested that they recognised a distinct improvement in their writing when they were interested in the subject content, and there was some 'fit' between their self-identity and the subject area (Gee, 2004). These findings, and Gina's own experience as someone whose learning and literacy had centred on her love of sport, meant that she wanted to support her students' writing literacy through their interest in physical activity. Originally, she developed the following question for her class;

Exploring the use of personal journal writing as a strategy to encourage writing that is relevant and meaningful to students in PE

Like the other teacher researchers, she wanted to help her students find personal relevance for building their literacy skills. Discussions with her students in the light of the baseline data made her aware of the depth of her students' resistance to writing. In light of her students' reluctance to write in physical education, and through discussion with the university researchers, she decided that a more fundamental question needed to be asked; she revised her investigation so that the students' writing journals featured less prominently, and reframed her research question to: 'What does it mean to be a writer in physical education?'

The proposed research agenda was introduced at a class meeting, with Kathleen and Gina telling the students that they wanted to find out: 'What does it mean to be a writer in physical education?' by the following means:

1. making clear what we are working towards in Year 11 in physical education
2. making clear what it means to be a writer in physical education
3. working towards developing those writing skills by using personal physical education writing journals
4. working in writing pairs or groups to help develop and improve writing skills in physical education through feedback
5. getting feedback on progress through student researchers.

The class discussion resulted in considerable verbal resistance to introducing more writing in physical education. This was also reflected in the written comments students made on the feedback sheets that had been handed around the class, and as can be seen in researcher field notes:

The students were adamant about the fact that they didn't come to PE to write, but to have exercise. They told both Gina and me that many of them actually hated writing, and that PE offered them a break from it! (Researcher field notes, 7 June, 2006)

After some discussion, an agreement was reached that Gina and the students would look more closely at the requirements for physical education in Year 11, and the students would be introduced to the types of activities that NCEA would require. Gina made it apparent that one of her biggest concerns was to better prepare her students at Year 10 for the large required amount of writing at Year 11.

Gina introduced an NCEA written assessment exercise on 'Well-being/Hauora' during a volleyball lesson observed by Kathleen and Ruth in one of the gymnasias. The lesson alternated between volleyball practice on the courts, class discussion at the white board in the corner, and small group writing activities done on the floor. Again, there was considerable resistance to the writing activities. At a subsequent lesson, which was not observed by the researchers, Gina talked about this resistance with her students. As a result of these discussions Gina decided that she needed to rethink her strategy and introduce writing interventions much more slowly, and withdrew her class from some of the data collection. She says;

I was hoping to find a way of introducing writing into physical education and I found some ways, but at the same time, I came across quite a bit of hostility from my class. (Gina, final interview, 9 August 2006)

While it was in Gina's class that the project experienced the most overt student resistance to the new writing literacy interventions, the student perspectives from this class provided significant insights on writing across the curriculum. When talking with students, it appeared they were largely resistant to writing in physical education because it meant there was less opportunity to do the physical activity and team sports that they enjoyed. Several suggested that they regarded physical education as a pleasurable break from sitting at desks in a classroom, and they were concerned that the writing activities introduced by Gina were making physical education more like their other, less pleasurable, subjects, especially since students were only timetabled to have physical education twice a week. Several of the girls complained that writing was physically hard and that it hurt their hands. However, more in-depth questioning revealed that writing was also mentally challenging. All of the students we spoke to also indicated that the challenges associated with writing contributed to personal feelings of failure. They recognised that in their other core subjects, writing contributed to their achievement. If they were not good at writing they did not achieve and therefore they felt like failures. Up until now, this had been different in physical education because they were able to feel successful without having to write. Shane explained that in physical education she still felt that physical activity should be recognised as valuable learning, and was concerned that school attributed so much value to writing. Talking about the physical aspects of physical education, she says:

We're still learning other stuff as well. We don't have to write to learn ... we don't like listening to our teachers much either, but in PE you don't have to, you can learn by playing games and by listening to [Gina] because she doesn't make it go on and on forever. (Shane, final Interview, 22 August 2006)

Petra was interviewed with another two girls, all New Zealand European, who maintained that they were resistant to writing during physical education. However, their opinions also appeared

influenced by their experiences of writing both in other classes and at home. A particular concern of theirs was that they felt the teaching they experienced in English was compounding their feelings of inadequacy about their writing. They suggested that English was the natural home for developing their writing; however, they claimed they were not receiving explicit instruction in the writing skills and processes that they needed to be successful in their assessments within the subject area. Their resistance to writing in physical education appeared to be related to what they perceived as a restriction of their opportunities to engage in activities they enjoyed, as well as a compulsion to engage in activity they explicitly disliked, largely because they did not have the skills to satisfactorily carry it out.

For this group, and a group of three Samoan girls also interviewed, the trouble appeared compounded by the English writing resources they had to draw from at home. Shane, Fiona, and Marilyn told us that their parents had all left school as soon as they could. Fiona said her mother regarded her daughter's literacy skills as superior to her own, and asked Fiona to check writing she had to do for work. While all of the Samoan girls suggested that their parents had high expectations for their schooling and their achievement, the amount of practical support they had with their skill development was variable. Maria said her family did not help her much with writing and that her father was fluent in Samoan but not English. Kate suggested that her parents were too busy working to directly support her with literacy or learning. However, the high parental expectations did mean that Maria, Salofa, and Kate had a different orientation to the writing project than the other three students. While they had initially been resistant to the writing activities in physical education, on reflection they could see the value of them. They claimed that achievement in NCEA was very important to them and to their families. They recognised that the writing activities could help them develop the skills to be successful in their assessments. Salofa also said that while the class had complained about the activities, she thought it was up to the teacher to decide what the students needed to achieve, and how best to support them.

Their feedback shows how their literacy is inseparable from social location, in terms of family, the school, economic circumstances, ethnicity, and so on (Jones, 1991). While not all of these social locations should be positioned as problems to be overcome (i.e. poverty compared with ethnicity), they do result in very specific sets of circumstances for each student that makes the problem of intervention especially difficult for a classroom teacher with up to 30 students.

While Gina initially thought that she had a firm basis from which to understand the learning needs of her students—that is, an ability to relate to them through her youth, her interest in physical activity, and by drawing upon the challenges she had faced as a learner—her second interview revealed that through the project she had been confronted with her own limitations. In Gina's second interview, she started to unpack the implications of her students' positioning within society and how this intersected with her own positioning as a teacher. She acknowledged the changing social demands placed upon her students, evident through the NCEA assessment of physical education, that attempts to make a previously practical and physical subject more like other subjects, with a high level of writing literacy required for success. Gina appeared torn between wanting physical education to have higher status within secondary schooling by making

it more academic, providing greater recognition for physical education students' achievements, and the realisation that for many of her students these expectations made it considerably more difficult for them to be successful in the subject.

Initially she had hoped that increasing the amount of writing in physical education would be of benefit to the overall achievement of students who were engaged in the subject, because this is what had enabled her to be successful in schooling. Her intentions are supported by literature that suggests that overall learning can be enhanced through engaging the knowledge funds and interest of learners (McPhail et al., 2000; Moll et al., 1989; McCarthy & Moje, 2002). However, through the project she became aware of the difficulty of supporting interest-based literacy when she was constrained by the conventions of a traditionally structured secondary school. For example, with only two hours of physical education a week, her class was resistant to an increase in writing during class, not least because it meant a subsequent decrease in physical activity. Gina's students responded to the immediate negative consequences of her learning innovations, which were not offset for them by the long-term and positive advantages of accreditation, illustrating the differences in values between Gina as a teacher and her students in a low-band, low decile school. However, Gina's recognition of this difference did not deter her from continuing to consider possible approaches for improving her students' writing. If she returns to her student data as she searches for new approaches, she may agree with the university researchers that Shane's voice appears one of the most compelling. Shane's solution to the dilemma was to recommend that their English teacher work directly with their physical education teacher to support them with the writing skills they lacked, and base their curriculum on a subject they enjoyed. This would enable them to have a full two periods a week devoted to physical activity, and she felt their engagement may be sustained better through an interesting and relevant English curriculum. In light of the high level of motivation associated with student interest, perhaps school organisation could take greater cognisance of students' subject preferences when supporting their basic skills or core competency development.

Overall conclusions from the case studies

In our case studies, we found early indications of positive effects on the teacher researchers' own learning or, through their classroom interventions, the writing literacy of some students. While the effects were inevitably limited by the time allowed for the project, even more significant to the results was the project's situation within a very complex, politically-charged, ethnically diverse, low decile secondary school. What the case studies reveal is the extent to which learning and literacy was shaped by the dynamics of the school and its community, beyond the scope of individual teachers and classrooms. We found that to a large extent the turbulent political environment of Kakariki College was mirrored within classrooms and departments. This turbulence partly accounted for the teachers' limited effects on the entrenched norms of behaviour, literacy, and learning. The university researchers contend that it is also impossible to divorce the overall aim of the project, which fundamentally sought a means to raise the writing

literacy and achievement of Kakariki students, from the complex political realms of the public schooling sector, and its intersections with wider social issues and agendas (such as economic globalism, see Olssen et al., 2004). As the teachers at Kakariki know, opportunities for achievement and mobility through schooling are limited by their students' cultural, social, and economic location. Radical structural change or political intervention could overturn the inevitability of most Kakariki students remaining within their social milieu, and failing to attain the same qualifications as students from wealthier neighbourhoods; however, this possibility is unlikely to occur soon, and is certainly no compensation for the immediate needs of Kakariki students and the teachers who want to support them.

While the teacher researchers made only limited progress in overturning the negative consequences of the social practices of the school and wider community on writing literacy, it must be recognised that they did achieve some success in connecting students' interests (in terms of content as well as their best interest) and identities to the authorised curriculum. This occurred through the combination of (a) reflecting upon empirical research evidence, (b) deepening their knowledge of learning and literacy, (c) undertaking a theoretical analysis of the findings, and (d) developing purposeful interventions. These findings suggest to the university researchers that continuing to support teachers and school leaders with an overtly theoretically informed analysis of the issues faced by the school may enable progress to be made in addressing student literacy levels.

When student failure at Kakariki College is placed within this wider context, the sole responsibility to overturn student underachievement is taken out of the hands of teachers, and more rightly recognised as a public responsibility. The informed reflection of individual teachers upon learning and literacy within specific classrooms creates some opportunities to make a difference for some students. Teachers can intervene in their own relationships with students, assist in improving inter-peer relationships, and create opportunities for better relationships with curriculum content; however, it is also apparent from our case study findings that influences on student achievement largely extend beyond the work of individual teachers (Nash & Prochnow, 2004; Clark, 2006).

Negotiating the challenges

This section discusses the challenges of addressing student writing in the context of wider professional development programmes within the school.

A key feature of the research design of the study was to facilitate the crossover from the classroom-based research projects to the wider school-based professional development programme within the school. It was envisaged that the research undertaken in the classroom could feed directly into the school's staff development programme, with the research evidence forming the basis for professional development sessions held at key points during 2006. Given that the relationship between teacher professional knowledge and student outcomes is a

recognised research gap (Mitchell & Cubey, 2003; Timperley, 2003), it was intended that the crossover between the classroom-based research projects and whole-school professional development would provide data that explored the nexus between research evidence, professional development, and programme development. The iterative research design drew upon existing expertise and mechanisms within the school to build research and teaching capacity consonant with literature on sustainable school reform (Miller, 1996; Tyack & Cuban, 1998; Lingard, 2003). While the university researchers acknowledged the accountabilities and constraints faced by teachers in effecting change, as well as their capacity to undertake research and improve teaching (Quinlivan, 2005), it was not anticipated to what extent these constraints would limit the agency of the project within the school. To that end the constraints and limitations that characterised the research project have formed an integral part of the data analysis. The crossover from the classroom-based research projects to the wider school-based professional development programme within the school proved to be the most challenging aspect of the project, despite considerable thought, discussion, and consultation throughout its development. This section focuses on exploring the reasons for the difficulties, and explores the ways in which the researchers and project team members attempted to negotiate the challenges that presented themselves. It relates the individual findings of the project to wider concerns about the limitations of affecting the outcomes of diverse learners within environments of social instability.

The changing nature of professional development within a transitioning school culture

The TLRI project occurred at a time when the school was in a state of transition, and as such, the professional development focus within the school was also in a state of flux. Several participants acknowledged that in the past, professional development within the school was somewhat on the back burner, given the absence of school leadership. As Joseph explains:

[We have] had a vacuum in terms of leadership, during the period of the last principal and after his departure, PD has fallen into that vacuum. (Joseph, interview, 2 December, 2005)

It also proved challenging to get a high level of staff involvement in professional development because of staff perceptions of programmes on offer as short term and disconnected. Heather suggests that this has resulted in some cynicism amongst the staff:

It is difficult to get initial buy in for a new PD programme because staff are so cynical about the short-termism of PD initiatives in the school. (Heather, interview, 18 August, 2006)

A number of initiatives and approaches were initiated by the school in order to address these issues. The most recent was the development of the professional development 'What Works' initiative in 2005. The 'What Works' programme was driven in the school by the expert group, an existing, flexible, and voluntary grouping of teachers supported by the Secondary Schools Literacy Initiative, who worked with the wider staff through subject departments to develop and trial evidence-based strategies for enhancing student literacy learning.

Initially attempts to create links between the expert group and the TLRI classroom-based research projects seemed to work well. The university researchers consulted with school personnel and the Teacher Support Services advisor working with the expert group on the teacher researcher professional learning programme and its development. Heather, the Specialist Classroom Teacher, literacy leader, and project team member, felt that the TLRI work that has been done with the teacher researchers dovetailed well with the intentions of ‘What Works’:

... from the outside it looks as though it is a positive experience for them, and they do feel empowered by what they’re doing. (Heather, interview, 18 August, 2006)

However, differences emerged when, from the researcher’s perspective, there appeared to be disjuncture between the intentions of the Ministry of Education initiative and its enactment in classrooms (see Kaur, et al., in press, on disjuncture between the intentions of state policy and how it is implemented). The researchers observed in the classroom the instrumental enactment of literacy strategies as cultural rituals, rather than authentically engaging learning experiences (Limbrick & Aikman, 2005; Nuthall, 2001). Attempts to discuss the contested nature of approaches to addressing student literacy with the school advisory service proved challenging. While both groups appeared to have a common interest in addressing the learning of students who were socially disadvantaged through drawing on critical literacy and multi-literacy approaches (Comber, 2001; New London Group, 2000; Moje et al., 2001; Moje & Sutherland, 2003), the university researchers seemed more committed to using this as an approach, not least because it spoke more directly to the concerns that emerged from the students’ baseline data. Such tensions revealed a disjuncture between the two initiatives. Heather’s resignation from the project team also made it challenging to maintain links between the project and the wider school professional development initiative that she co-facilitated in her positions of specialist classroom teacher and literacy leader within the school. While attempts were made by the university researchers to rebuild the relationships, and goodwill was re-established to a degree, any connection between the initiatives was effectively severed.

The wider professional development programme within the school was also in a state of transition. After the conflict between the project and school professional development, a review of professional development was undertaken. As a result, a new professional development committee assumed responsibility for prioritising, planning and implementing the school’s professional development programme in line with the school’s strategic and annual goals. In his final interview, the principal hoped that this initiative would enable the development of a stronger connection between school leadership and student learning than there had been in the past:

... What [Kakariki] has been doing is trying to align the kind of structures of leadership in the school with student learning needs, and that hasn’t really been the case here. (Phillip, interview, 3 November, 2006)

The principal alerts us to another factor that has perhaps limited the possibilities of creating links between the classroom research projects and professional development. In the following section, we examine the contested role of senior manager that became evident through assistant principal

Joseph's roles as project team member and school leader for professional development within the school.

Contested senior management roles and the responsibilities of professional development within the school

Conflicting tensions in the ways that the assistant principal's job was configured made taking responsibility for professional development within the school a challenging undertaking. Joseph acknowledged that juggling the immediacies of daily troubleshooting left him little time to undertake bigger picture thinking required for leading the schools' professional development programme within the school, or to build capacity for undertaking such work within the school. He explains:

Every period there are another 25 immediacies coming in the door. I find it very, very hard to disengage myself from immediacies and become strategic; it's a constant tension in my job ... [with] the big picture stuff and improving the kids writing ... freeing space to think is very hard ... When you're up to your neck, it's hard to remember that you're meant to be draining the swamp ... we are so busy doing the short term things that we never get to draining the swamp. (Joseph, interview, 22 November 2006)

The tensions experienced by Joseph in terms of how he frames his role as a senior manager can be seen to reflect a wider shift in the role of senior leaders from a narrow focus on administration, arising from educational reforms of the 1980s, to the more contemporary construction of school leaders as leaders of learning in their school (Lingard & Mills, 2002; Wright, 2005). However, the immediacy of 'wrestling with alligators' in terms of daily troubleshooting, as Joseph described it, resulted in tensions which made it challenging for him as a senior manager to frame his role as that of a leader of learning (Lingard, 2003). The university researchers would suggest that if school leaders frame their job as steerage and administration, the thinking required for a professional development programme that encourages extended professionalism among others appears unlikely to occur. The tensions inherent in juggling daily school steerage and administration as well as leading professional development within the school appeared to spill over into a lack of clarity around whose role it was among the school members of the project team to take leadership for the crossover to wider professional development with the project. Joseph also framed his role in the project team as primarily administrative rather than visionary.

The issue of who was going to take leadership for the project, and drive it within the school emerged as an issue early on in the project. Sue, as initiator of the project, member of the project team, and a curriculum leader within the school suggests that she was comfortable with taking on a leadership role; however she felt that there was no mandate from the school management for her to take a project leadership role. Once the school decided not to proceed with the longitudinal project, and the senior management leadership essential to any school reform effort was effectively withdrawn, she notes:

I found the leadership aspect of the project really frustrating ... it seemed to me that there was a blurring of roles in this regard ... While I've had a lot of experience at leading whole-school initiatives and feel very comfortable with leadership per se, I never really felt that I had a strong mandate to actively lead the project in its early stages. After the school pulled out of the longitudinal opportunity, it was apparent to me that any remaining prospect of internal project leadership was not going to receive the degree of active support that is crucial for school reform of any type (Sue, report draft feedback, 18 April, 2007)

This situation was exacerbated by the transitional nature of principal leadership, and to a lesser extent financial management, within the school.

We would also suggest that the lack of senior management leadership that characterised the project reflected historical divisions between senior management and curriculum leadership that had previously characterised the school, and emerged again over the course of the research project in terms of the leadership of the project within the school. In her initial interview Sue noted the historical tensions between curriculum leaders and school management, and the extent to which these divisions had previously affected the culture of the staff and its relationship with the previous principal of the school:

I think that when one group of staff and [the] senior management staff go in two different directions ... that it's a recipe for disaster. And unfortunately ... middle management developed along a different line from senior management ... it was thoroughly toxic ... I don't believe that that situation would have ever resolved itself (Sue, initial interview, 2 December, 2005)

Such issues, we suggest, made it challenging for the school management and curriculum leaders within the project team to support the teacher researchers and the research project within the school, and create a connection between the classroom-based research projects and wider school professional development. As Sue suggests:

... I think that there was a lack of clarity ... about leadership roles in the [project team in the] first term. And I don't think that we ever really recovered from that ... maybe because the school was ... at the kind of stage ... we were in ... all of this year, it's been a very difficult year, because of all of the financial constraints and changes in personnel. (Sue, initial interview, 2 December, 2005)

One of the key changes in personnel that Sue refers to is the appointment of a new principal to the school. Given the significance that research attributes to the role of principals and senior managers in supporting school initiatives for addressing student learning (Hill, Hawk & Taylor, 2002; Timperley & Robinson, 2000; Wright, 2005), and the increasingly limited role that the senior manager played in the project team, the principal's lack of involvement was especially unfortunate. Phillip acknowledges that the circumstances were regrettable:

I regret that I haven't had as much direct contact with the project, I would have liked, and I guess there are a whole lot of reasons ... (Phillip, interview, 3 November, 2006)

Although the principal does not elaborate, we suggest that perhaps one of the most pressing reasons would have been the vulnerable transitional state of the school. After having had no

principal for some months, the leadership demands he faced within the school would have been considerable. Perhaps it was also significant that the principal was not part of the initial development of the research proposal within the school, and had not taken up his appointment until after the research project had begun. Despite these constraints, in a later interview, Phillip indicated an ongoing willingness to familiarise himself with students' responses to the classroom research projects:

I would like to explore with some of the students who have been involved what kind of impact ... the project's had ... I'd really like to hear for myself what it has meant to [students] ... (Phillip, interview, 3 November, 2006)

Discussions held during participant feedback on the final report were fruitful in terms of exploring the possibilities of using the research data to build the capacity of the school to address student learning. Since that time the researchers have had ongoing discussions with the principal, and the opportunity to speak to the newly appointed distributed leadership team within the school. As a result of these meetings, a voluntary group of school leaders and curriculum leaders have been formed to explore the usefulness of the project's findings to address the quality of students' learning within the school, in collaboration with the teacher and university researchers.

Disjuncture between school and university researchers' approaches to addressing students' writing achievement

The school participants and university researcher's different positions within the differing cultures of university and school also had a significant impact on addressing the full aims and objectives of the project. Tensions arose in the course of the project between the school participants and university researchers differing approaches to addressing students' learning in relation to writing achievement. The school's approach to raising student achievement was framed within Ministry of Education requirements that, shaped by dominant neo-liberal discourses, unsurprisingly leant towards privileging efficiency and instrumental practice. In this vein, generic literacy strategies that appeared to be largely disconnected from engaging in any depth with the knowledge domains of subjects and characterised by disjuncture between intentions and their enactment in practice (Kaur et al., in press), were trialled in the school (Ministry of Education, 2004).

While the university researchers recognised that the expert group was attempting to raise awareness of generic literacy strategies to build the capacity of teachers for addressing literacy at the school, they were also aware of limitations of such an approach. The New London Group (2000) and others (in particular Moje et.al, 2004) draw attention to the limitations of generic literacy approaches for enabling content literacy in specific subject areas. In response to the baseline data, the university researchers became interested in drawing upon current multiliteracy approaches that aim to address issues of educational inequality by developing students' content literacy. These approaches suggested the place to start was acknowledging the funds of knowledge and identities that students brought to school (Gee, 2004), and building bridges between the student and the authorised curriculum (as it relates to writing) in order to raise achievement (Bishop & Glynn, 2003; McNaughton, 2002; McCarthy & Moje, 2002; Moll et al.,

1989; New London Group, 2002). The epistemological bases of both school and university partners have clashed several times over the course of the research partnership in regard to these issues. As Sue suggested:

... challenges arose because of the different perceptions, different understandings of the school and the university ... The school felt really, really strongly that this project would ... have ... a singular focus on the act of writing ... (Sue, interview. 26 October, 2006)

What Sue meant by a singular focus on the act of writing at the beginning of the project was the development, trial, and evaluation of instrumental strategies that would help teachers improve struggling writer's expertise. She explained:

... my perception absolutely was, at the beginning, that, this would be a project that would help us in a pragmatic way ... to be much more effective in the way that we taught and supported the learning of kids who struggled with writing in particular. Now, you can understand that those discussions, where we have got a big percentage of kids who are struggling with writing and that kind of thing ... those ... much more technical approaches of ... practices with regards to building expertise in writing [are useful]. (Sue, second interview, 26 October, 2006)

Joseph's approach to raising student achievement in relation to writing at the beginning of the project illustrates a similar instrumental and strategy-based approach that he envisaged would be trialled with the teacher researchers and then be picked up by the wider staff. He outlined how he originally saw raising achievement in relation to student writing as a short-term undertaking that would draw on generic skill based strategies in order to raise student achievement:

I just wanted to raise the student achievement thing – the more achievable short term measure. I was prepared to have a more short term model ... If a writing frame can be devised which kids can understand that will improve their writing. If you can show kids how to answer a particular question because we know that our kids have the ideas but they don't seem able to get into merit and excellence on paper, or if you can devise some structure so that they paint by numbers their answer, then that is going to improve their achievement through writing. A practical example was the first time I was ever shown how to teach paragraph writing through statement, explanation, example. My kids did better; it meant that they went from 9/20 to 14/20. When Sue came up with the project that was the level I was working at. (Joseph, interview, 22 November, 2006)

The school project team members' desires for the project were for a pragmatic solution that would allow them to better negotiate the daily complexities of working and teaching in an environment of considerable social inequality. However, the researcher's theoretical orientation and analysis of the issues meant their perspectives on how to address the issues were very different from their school partners' perspectives. It is helpful to make explicit the differing perspectives of the school and university project team, in order to understand the nature of the disjuncture.

As a university researcher, Ruth explains that she positions herself as an academic who is committed to drawing on critical theory in order to shift outcomes for socially disadvantaged students:

New Zealand has a rich body of critical theorising about the limits and possibilities of public education in effecting social opportunity (theorists such as John Codd, Ivan Snook, Liz Gordon, Michael Peters, and Martin Thrupp). This is the body of literature that has informed my understanding of education, initially as a secondary teacher and now working within the university sector. What concerns me is that it does not appear to be common-place to use these theories in policy or practice to intervene in the learning of students who are socially disadvantaged. In recent years, even the notion of social disadvantage has been challenged as educationalists in universities and schools work against the construction of particular groups as deficient and focus on diversity as intrinsic to individuals. Whilst categories such as class, race and gender are undoubtedly complex and fluid, I think that obscuring social diversities obscures their tangible effects, evident within schools such as Kakariki College. Original discussions with teachers and managers at Kakariki indicated that they thought their students were different from students at other schools, made all the more evident through national assessments. It was the students' social difference that prompted the teachers to intervene in their writing literacy. It was a combination of the other project team members' commitment to social justice and my desire to use what I had learnt from critical theory to attempt to intervene in student outcomes that led to my involvement in the project. (Ruth, follow-up written feedback on the draft report, September 20, 2007)

From her perspective as a university researcher, Kathleen also expressed an interest in exploring the extent to which post-critical theoretical frameworks that inform her research, writing, and teaching, in relation to framing and addressing student difference/diversity would be helpful in understanding, and addressing, the writing issues that teachers and students face at Kakariki High School:

Given that my research interests primarily consist of moving across university and secondary schooling contexts to address issues of student difference/diversity and teaching and learning, the Kakariki research project held interest in that the project was situated within a school context that both reflected, and appeared committed to addressing a range of student diversities in relation to student writing. At the beginning of the project, there appeared to be support from a wide range of stakeholders within the school to gain a crossover between teacher and student learning in the classroom, and wider teacher professional development within the school, in order to benefit the diverse range of students who attend the school. The staff who volunteered to participate appeared initially to include a wide range of 'stakeholders' within the school, including the school leadership. Such features had been absent in previous school and university research partnerships I had been involved with, and I was interested to explore the potential crossovers that could result.

My interest in writing as a vehicle for learning reflects my previous life as a secondary school English teacher. I was particularly interested in the potential that multi-literacies and new literacies frameworks held in terms of moving beyond critical literacy work in exploring ways that students' multiple identities can mesh within these literacy frameworks. These interests reflect my on-going research into the usefulness of post-critical theoretical frameworks and pedagogies in addressing student difference and diversity as part of teaching and learning in secondary school contexts. (Kathleen, follow-up written feedback on the draft report, September 23 2007)

So while the university researchers acknowledged that there was a place for the use of skill-based strategies to improve student writing (McDonald & Thornley, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2004), they were also concerned that without considered analysis and action, well intentioned pragmatic solutions can reproduce existing social inequalities adding to the problems of low student achievement. While the university researchers and some school partners, such as Heather, did not see the two positions as mutually exclusive, within such a challenging environment our differences became more important than what we had in common. These tensions were exacerbated in light of the school's instability and the extensive pressures that the school was under due to recent negative publicity. These situations predisposed the school towards feeling fearful of being 'evaluated' and found wanting by an external body such as the university. The gulf between the school's perspective and the perspectives of the university researchers widened, speaking profoundly to the theory and practice gap that characterised the project, and we suggest, despite the current rhetoric, makes a university and school partnership a challenging undertaking (Avis, 2005; Quinlivan, Boyask and Carswell, 2006; Davies, Edwards, Gannon & Laws, 2007; Stronach & McNamara, 2002). We would suggest such concerns are further fuelled, within the cultural context of a post-colonial country such as New Zealand, where pragmatism and action can be valorised at the expense of critically and theoretically informed analysis and thoughtful action. In this environment theory and practices are commonly artificially constructed as in opposition to each other (Brown, 2005; Horrocks, 2007; Simmons, 2007).

Despite the challenges in this regard, opportunities did arise over the course of the research project to better understand and interrogate the differing understandings of the school and the university. Sue's involvement as both project team member and classroom-based teacher researcher has led her to reconsider what she now sees as the limited conceptual and theoretical scope of the schools' initial proposal. Sue suggests that she is now clearer about the significance of providing learning environments that enable students to improve their writing through the provision of relevant, content rich, interesting and high quality learning processes in the classroom:

... I think [now] that we still need to do [what the school intended at the start of the project] ... but within the context of understanding writing in relation to the learning processes ... I have a much broader view now about the act of writing than what I did prior to the project beginning ... It has been singularly revealing to me that, as a classroom teacher, I hadn't been giving as much attention to the kinds of learning in relation to writing. (Sue, interview 26 October, 2006)

Unfortunately the tensions inherent in Joseph's role as senior manager, and the way he conceptualised his role in the project team as largely administrative, meant that he was unable to engage in the conceptual and practical work that the teacher researchers were undertaking in their classroom-based research projects. As a result of the epistemological and role conflicts, as well as personality tensions (including Heather's withdrawal from the project team), Joseph's role within the project team become increasingly limited. Such events made it very challenging to connect the classroom research projects with wider professional development plans and initiatives that Joseph

was coordinating within the school. His withdrawal from active involvement in the project also meant that he was not supporting the teacher researchers in their research projects in his role as a school leader. Sue suggests that, as a result, the classroom research projects became further isolated from both the school leadership and wider professional development initiatives:

because of the earlier difficulties that the project faced ... the project kind of went underground ... I felt quite isolated in so far as the project is concerned, because it seemed to me that it has not integrated itself with some of the essential aspects of the schools focus on teaching and learning ... it's kind of sat outside. (Sue, interview 26 October, 2006)

Once the decision was made by the senior management to drop the proposal for the wider longitudinal study, the tenuous connection between the classroom-based research projects, school leadership, and wider professional development within the school was effectively severed. According to Sue, these events left the teacher researchers disheartened and working in isolation with what they perceived as little support from the school leadership:

I think that it, that the withdrawal of the school from looking at the longitudinal opportunity, had a hugely depressing effect on the teacher-researchers ... there didn't seem to be any willingness, or incentive from anybody within the school to touch base with the teacher-researchers about the impact that that might have. There was nobody, really, who kept a handle on the project on a continuous basis within the school. (Sue, interview, 26 October, 2006)

Negotiating the challenges that presented themselves in trying to address student writing within the context of the wider school development programme was challenging. To a great extent, issues that emerged reflected the disjuncture between university researchers' knowledge and expertise, and practitioners' school-based knowledge and skills (McPhail, 2006; Raudenbush, 2005), and the differing exchange value of school and university knowledge (Quinlivan, Boyask, & Carswell, 2006). In retrospect, given the gaps in practitioners' knowledge about using research and its literature as a resource, evaluating the effectiveness of practices and how to coordinate these into a professional development programme, it is perhaps not surprising that such tensions would emerge (Raudenbush, 2005). However, the transitional nature of the school climate, its feelings of defensiveness in relation to what it perceived as critique, and role and personality conflicts within the school perhaps played a role in the shutting down of dialogue in relation to the tensions. Whereas an open and robust exploration of the implications of differing approaches to addressing Kakariki College students' writing literacy would have enabled us to find a way forward.

We would suggest that the theoretical and conceptual disjuncture that emerged in relation to issues of addressing student writing and literacy approaches occurred within a previously crisis driven and transitioning school culture that made it challenging to pick up and address issues of student underachievement in any critically informed way. Given the circumstances, the critical engagement with issues of student learning and the challenges facing schools to deliver that learning, which is fundamental to educational academic's work, can be seen by a school currently in transition as challenging and perhaps even destabilising (Davies et al., 2007).

Over the course of the project, members of the project team have endeavoured to find ways to value both school and researcher expertise. However, given the differing exchange value of practitioner and academic research knowledge (Quinlivan, Boyask, & Carswell, 2006), this has been a challenging undertaking. The university researchers attempted to address the challenges by collecting data from a wide range of participants in order to understand as fully as was possible the issues from a range of perspectives within the school. We endeavoured to keep the lines of communication open and express our willingness to understand the complexity of the issues as a range of school participants and school advisors saw them. What has been challenging in regard to finding some common ground between the school and researcher academic knowledge has been what Piggot-Irvine (2001) refers to as the unsaid and the 'undiscussable'; the unacknowledged personality conflicts between participants within and between a range of different contexts within the project, the historical tensions that appear to have affected relationships between curriculum leaders and school management, the expunging of writing acknowledging conflict and tension over significant issues from official reports, unacknowledged reasons for participants refusing to participate in interviews, behind the scenes meetings that members of the project team were excluded from, unexplained reasons for the withdrawal of participants and absences from meetings, and the challenges inherent in building bridges between academic and schooling knowledge within the pragmatic culture of schools.

An initiative was undertaken to attempt to explore the complexity of the partnership issues that emerged over the project. Sue, a member of the project team, joined with the university researchers in writing a paper that attempted to come to a more complex understanding of the power dynamics that underlie school and university partnerships (Quinlivan, Boyask, & Carswell, 2006). Our experience of collaboration led us to consider the possibilities and challenges of research partnerships in the light of wider literature on school change. Our paper claimed that currently there appears to be a largely unproblematic emphasis on the benefits rather than the challenges of school and university partnerships. While the rhetoric surrounding such partnerships suggests their value lies in mutual benefit, we decided that attempts of teachers and researchers to address issues of social justice are complicated by their location within economies of knowledge, which, in the current neo-liberal era, attributes greater value to knowledge of efficiency than has traditionally been the case within the field of education (Olssen et al., 2004). Within this environment, it is risky for researchers and teachers to enter into an exchange of knowledge beyond instrumental strategies for school improvement. The critical knowledge of the university researchers is particularly risky because its rationale meshes with neo-liberalism less easily than the pragmatic knowledge of schools. The dominance of this economic relationship in partnerships between universities and schools can result in compromises that work against critical engagement with the challenges of school reform. The more humane efforts of teachers and researchers to address inequalities may be dismissed as expensive or wasteful within a market model of education because of their apparent distance from quantifiable learning outcomes. However, the university researchers contend that instrumental approaches to research partnerships limit their

possibilities for addressing educational inequalities in schools because they do not address the root causes of inequalities.³ This finding is of critical importance within New Zealand where the response to the global politics of public schooling has been the proliferation of university/school research partnerships as a modus operandi for reducing educational inequalities and addressing student diversity in learning and teaching. The notions of collaboration, trust, respect, and power sharing that are highlighted in studies that address social justice issues provide little assistance in negotiating these complexities (see Bishop et al., 2003, McNaughton et al., 2004; Oliver, 2006; Robinson & Lai, 2006; Timperley & Robinson, 2002).

Through the process of writing the paper, the school and university researcher writers gained a deeper and richer understanding of the complex and challenging issues that face low decile schools, the exchange values of school and university knowledge, and the challenges in developing and maintaining a school and university research partnership. The writing process enabled the writers to understand more fully what the potentialities of such a partnership could be, and help us find a way to see the project to its conclusion. Sue suggests that:

Writing the paper was absolutely awesome ... it was a fantastic way to start to make some sense of those things, and writing that paper has really helped me to move on. Because I thought I was crushed, eh (Laughs) ... that was absolutely fantastic ... (Sue, interview 26 October, 2006)

Unfortunately other members of the project team and the school management chose not to participate in the writing process and so their perspectives are not represented in the paper. However, the principal and senior manager involved in the project team, met along with remaining project team members with an advisory group comprising university researchers and a member of the School Advisory Service from the College of Education. The meetings provided a useful forum to work towards exploring the issues that had emerged and find ways to steer the project towards completion.

The principal and project team members also took up the opportunity to meet with the researchers over the draft of the report findings and expressed a willingness to engage with the implications of the project's findings for the current and future direction of the school. As a result of those discussions, a group has been formed of voluntary

curriculum leaders, school leaders to work with the university researchers and teacher researchers to explore ways in which the research findings can be useful in informing the improvement of teaching and learning practices in classrooms at Kakariki College. The university and teacher researchers hope that this exchange will extend the successes of the case studies, and intervene in discourses that promote expediency at the expense of purposeful and considered engagement with the issues of student writing literacy at Kakariki College.

³ For differing perspectives see: Stronach & MacNamara, 2002; Davies et.al, 2007; and Robinson & Lai, 2006.

4. Building capability and capacity

The intention of the project was to use existing mechanisms within the school, enriching them through research understandings, in order that changes were responsive to the needs and interests of teachers and students and sustainable within the culture of the school. This required developing a comprehensive understanding of professional learning within the school, as well as how it interacts with school management and classroom practice. Any school-wide initiative needed to be cognisant of the particular administrative and sociocultural context of this school (that is, in the process of shifting from board of trustees-initiated limited statutory management to the leadership of a new principal) as well as the particular cultural and socioeconomic mix of its student population. The project and its design continued to be shaped and refined by this work, as the researchers took up the opportunity to engage with other school professional development initiatives in various ways, and negotiate both external and internal social dynamics operating on school professional development activity.

In the early stages of the project, the link between the teacher researchers and the existing school programme, 'What Works', was severed, and the case studies with accompanying teacher professional development through classroom-based research became the central work of the university researchers. However, feedback from the teacher researchers indicates that involvement in the project was a very powerful learning experience. In their initial interviews, Garry and Joanna exhibited conflicted views over the purpose of schooling and their roles as teachers. In their final interviews, both indicated that the project refocused their attention on the importance of learning within the classroom. Joanna found that the project enabled her to think more deeply about how her teaching affected student learning, and the complex relationship between writing and learning. While Garry was mindful of constraints and demands that inhibited him from continually attending to the learning needs of his students, he also found the project refocused his attention on learning, and led him to think more carefully about which strategies would best support student learning and writing. In both cases, student data indicated some positive changes to the classroom climate and student writing outcomes. We believe that if these teachers continued to develop their teaching in response to evidence from their own classrooms, there could be demonstrable shifts in student outcomes. Considered decision making is a critical aspect for teachers in their professional practice, and cannot be achieved solely through introducing teachers to a plethora of instrumental pedagogical strategies (McGee & Fraser, 2001). Gina also suggested the project enabled her to think more deeply about her teaching practice, particularly regarding the nature of writing in physical education. She thought the feedback from students about their experience of school, and especially her classroom, provided the most compelling evidence for reflecting upon and changing her practice. While Jill was less enthusiastic about her involvement in the project than the other three teacher researchers, she did suggest that having

some time set aside to think about her work was beneficial, and also thought that she could use the strategies she had developed for teaching the structure of writing to good effect.

While the project was unable to achieve a formal connection between the work undertaken with the teacher researchers and wider professional development at the school, data collected from the teacher researchers and other school participants provide valuable insights on the nature of professional learning at the school that could be of benefit to ongoing teacher development in relation to student learning. Teacher comments indicate that while professional development initiatives were prevalent within the school, the climate of change and uncertainty, as well as limited reference to a clear guiding philosophy of professional development, meant that they were unlikely to be supported and maintained within the school. However, during the course of the project, and perhaps in response to the project's findings, a professional development committee was established within the school charged with reflecting on professional development and making decisions about its provision within the school. There was a link to this committee and the project through project team member Joseph, who facilitated the committee within the school. However, some feedback from school personnel suggested that this committee did not yet have the capacity to sufficiently address the inherited limitations of professional development within the school.

Other capacity building activities that occurred as a result of the project were ongoing meetings with senior management within the school where project findings on student learning and writing within the school were summarised and discussed (for an example see Appendix E). The university researchers and the school project leader wrote a collaborative paper on the dynamics of research partnerships (Quinlivan, Boyask, and Carswell, 2006). The teacher researchers participated in professional development days where they discussed the following:

- the nature of teaching and learning
- curriculum decision-making
- the social context of Kakariki College
- student data findings
- the nature of writing within their subject area
- developing a research agenda
- developing strategies for student writing.

Overall the findings of this pilot study indicate that the teacher development that transpired through the project was a significant base from which to establish the longitudinal project, had that proceeded. In its absence, the researchers are mindful that this project runs the risk of being superseded in response to the next opportunity that presents itself to the school.

However, we would suggest that the opportunity to work towards improving students' literacy learning outcomes still exists. There are strong connections between the findings of the project in terms of making learning more relevant and meaningful for students by actively valuing the home and community knowledge that students bring to school (Moje et.al, 2004), and the strategic goal that the school is working on to build stronger home and school partnerships. The extensive base

of student data that has been generated by the project, and the understandings gained by the teacher researchers, can be put to good use in creating deep understandings of the reasons that learning at school is a challenging prospect for many Kakariki students (see Appendix E for just one example of how these findings might inform future practice). The student data findings can then build on such an analysis to develop high quality and relevant teacher professional learning initiatives that could be directly connected to building on and developing subject rich, relevant and meaningful learning for students within their subject classrooms, in ways that reflect teachers' own interests and enthusiasms (Eraut, 1994).

Discussions held with the principal and project team members over the draft of the report findings were fruitful in terms of the school's willingness to engage with the implications of the project's findings for the current and future direction of the school. The ongoing willingness of the curriculum leaders, school leadership, teacher researchers, and university partners to build on the research we have undertaken to date still has the potential to improve student learning within the school.

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Appendices

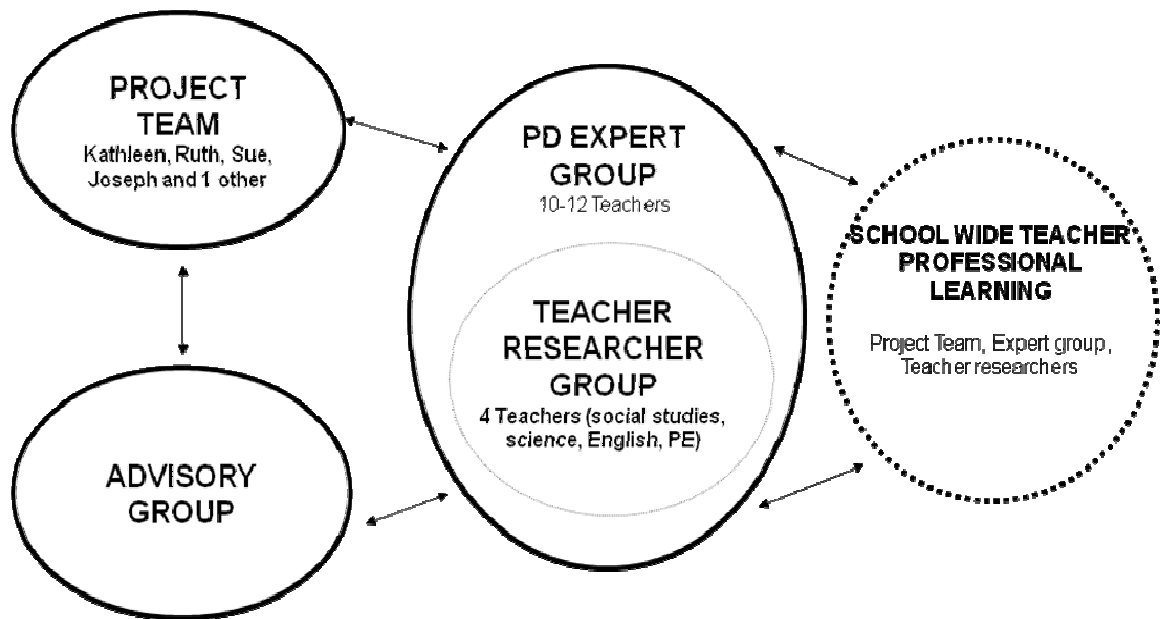
Appendix A: Pilot study situated within longitudinal project

2005	2006		2007	2008	2009	2010
<p>Preliminary PD with whole-staff and selection of TRs</p> <p>Collect exemplar and test data for Cohort 1 Yr 9</p>	<p>Pilot Study: Literature review</p> <p>Project Team & SRs* PD on subject-specific writing.</p> <p>Yr 10 SRs in-depth field research</p> <p>Data analysis</p> <p>Mid-way report to whole staff</p> <p>Final analysis of data</p> <p>Report on pilot study to inform 2007 Programme</p>	<p>Whole-school PD writing programme informed by pilot study research</p>	<p>Whole-school PD writing programme based on research from 2006</p>	<p>Whole-school PD writing programme</p>	<p>Whole-school PD writing programme</p>	<p>Final Data analysis</p>
		<p>Design of whole-school writing programme for 2007</p> <p>Collect exemplar and test data for Cohort 1 Yr 10, and Cohort 2 Yr 8</p>	<p>Collect exemplar and test data for Cohort 1 Yr 11 (NCEA L1) and Cohort 2 Yr 9</p>	<p>Collect exemplar and test data for Cohort 1 Yr 12 (NCEA L2) and Cohort 2 Yr 10</p>	<p>Collect exemplar and test data for Cohort 1 Yr 13 (NCEA L3) & Cohort 2 Yr 11 (NCEA L1)</p>	<p>Final report and dissemination</p>

*School researchers, i.e. teacher and student researchers.

Appendix B: Project structure

STRUCTURE OF THE PROJECT



Appendix C: Interventions in student learning and achievement

Write-on! Interventions in student learning and achievement

In 2006 Year 10 students at Kakariki College have the opportunity to take part in a research project that is designed to help teachers from different subject areas improve the way they teach writing. Your teacher for this class is one of four teacher researchers who are working closely with researchers from the University of Canterbury. Over the next few weeks your teacher will be involved in learning and testing new ideas about writing. Before this begins, we would like to ask you some questions to find out about your learning and writing, and what might help you to do better.

Name

Learning

(Tick the box with your answer)

1. This class is a good place to learn.

Agree	Sort of	Disagree

2. The students in this class help me to learn.

Agree	Sort of	Disagree

3. Some students do things that make it hard for me to learn.

Agree	Sort of	Disagree

4. My teachers at school help me to learn.

Agree	Sort of	Disagree

5. Some things my teachers do make it hard for me to learn.

Agree	Sort of	Disagree

6. I am a good learner in this subject.

Agree	Sort of	Disagree

7. My teacher in this subject thinks I am a good learner.

Agree	Sort of	Disagree

8. Other students in this subject think I am a good learner.

Agree	Sort of	Disagree

9. My family helps me to learn.

Agree	Sort of	Disagree

10. My family thinks my learning at school is important.

Agree	Sort of	Disagree

11. If there are other places where you are a good learner (at the weekend, after school or in the holidays) list them here:

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

12. If there are any other people who help you to learn list them here:

.....
.....

Writing

13. I am a good writer.

Agree	Sort of	Disagree

14. I enjoy writing.

Agree	Sort of	Disagree

15. I am good at writing in this subject.

Agree	Sort of	Disagree

16. I am better at writing in other subjects than this one.

Agree	Sort of	Disagree

17. If there are any kinds of writing that you enjoy list them here:

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

18. If there are any other subjects where you enjoy writing list them here:

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

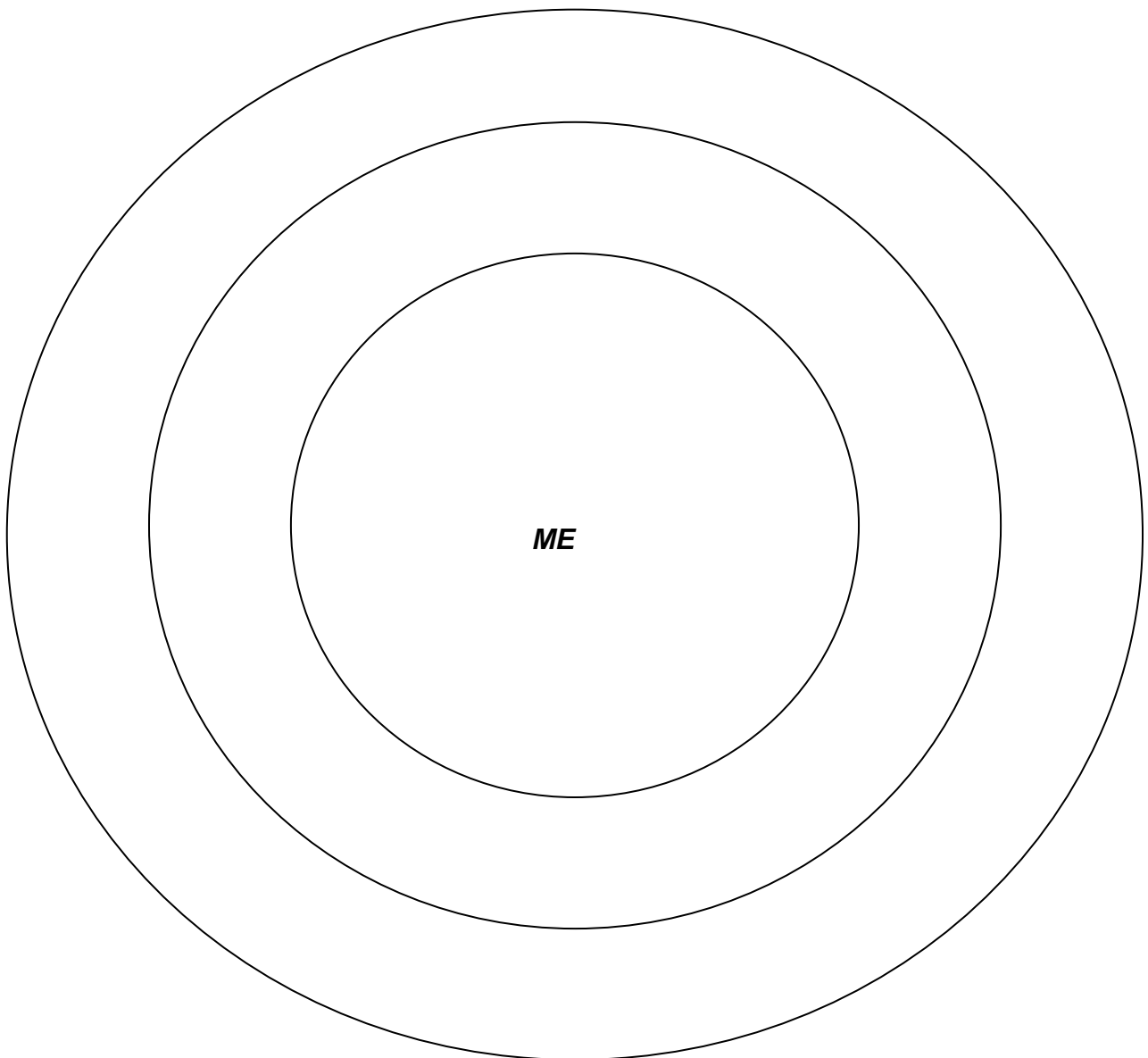
19. List any writing activities that you do outside of school:

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

Name.....

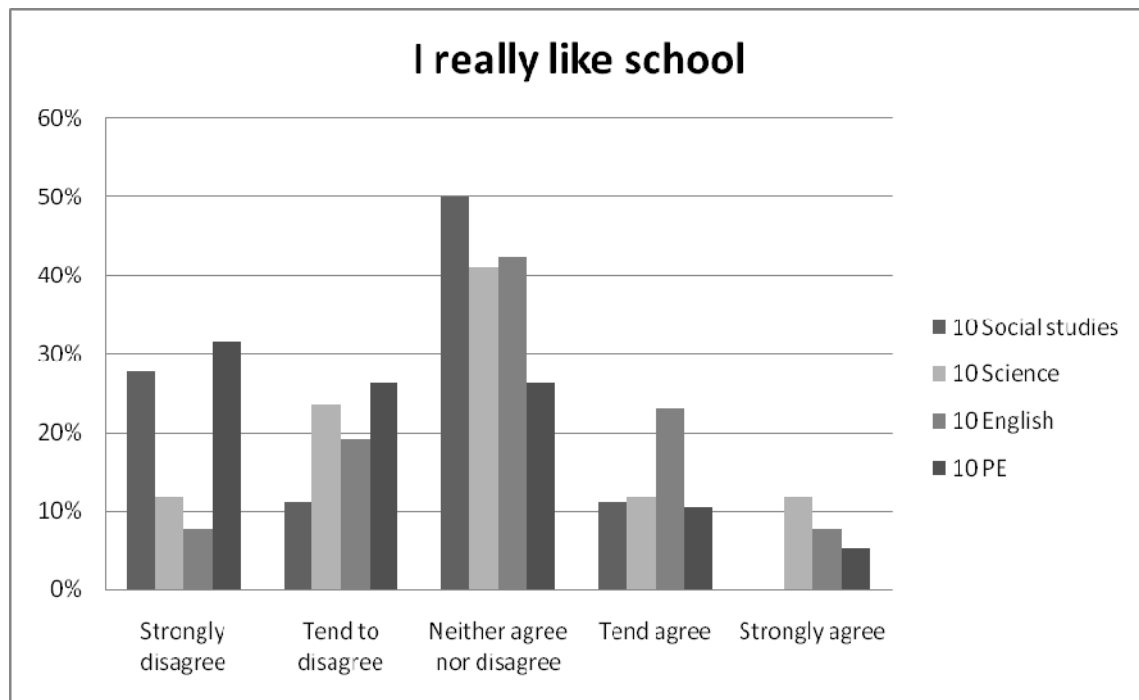
Who helps you to learn best in this class?

Thinking about all the people in your class, including your teacher, show who you learn the best with. Put the people you learn best with closer to you, and the ones that you learn least well with further away from you.

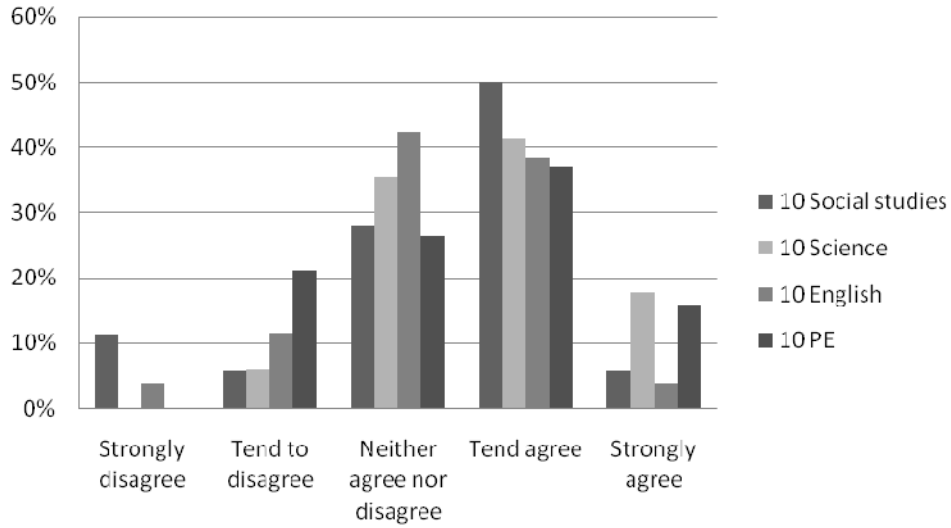


Appendix D: Responses

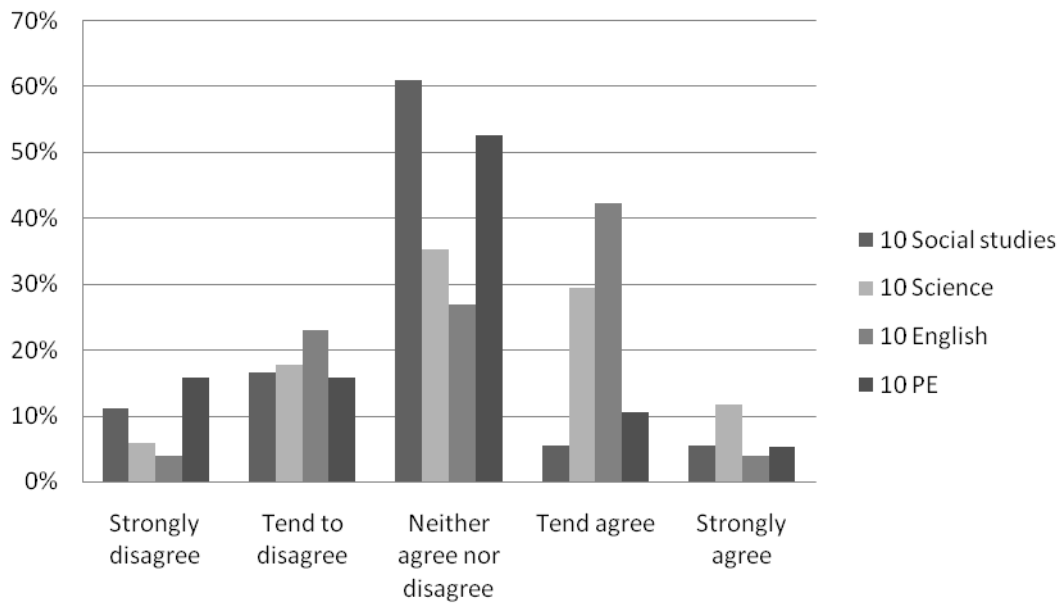
Selected results comparing responses from the 4 case study classes to the Centre for Educational Measurement's attitudinal test, SATIS, administered in Term 4, 2006.



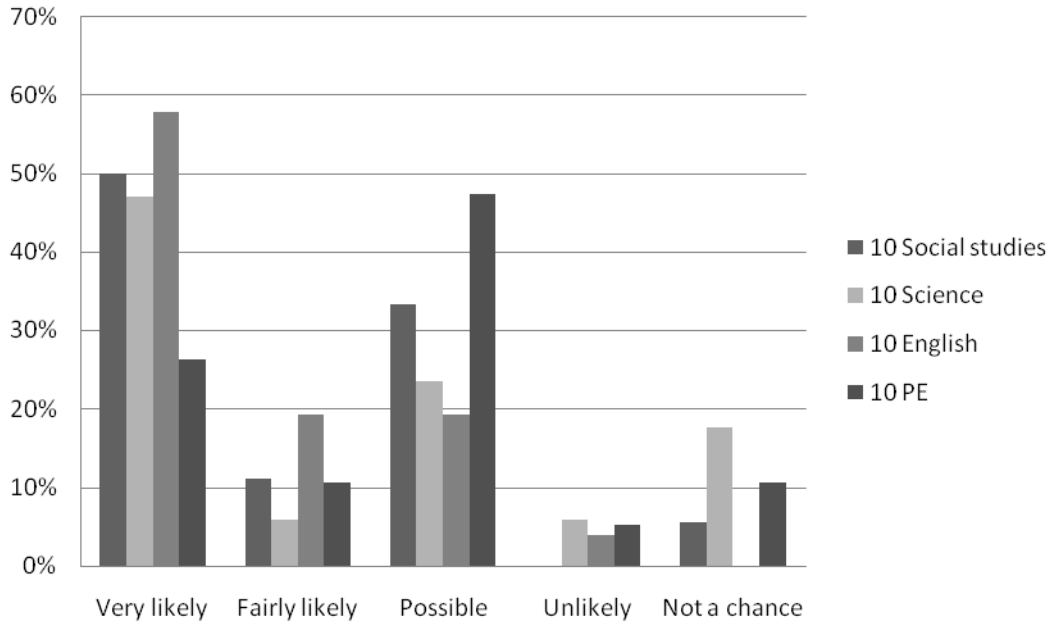
I feel that I can go to the teachers if I don't understand the work



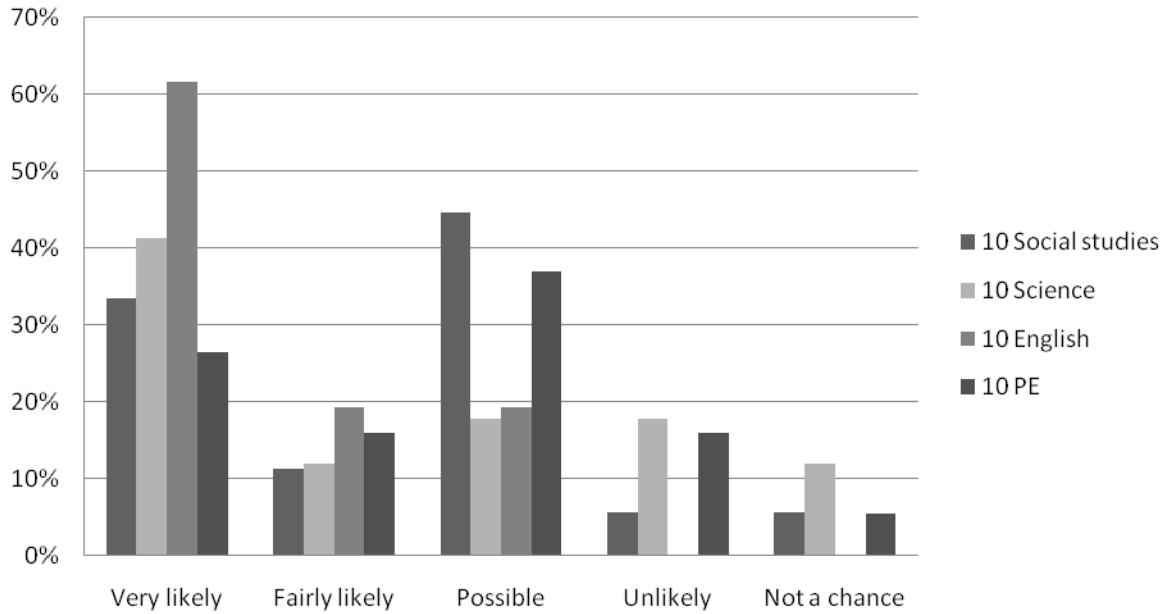
I feel that I belong in this school



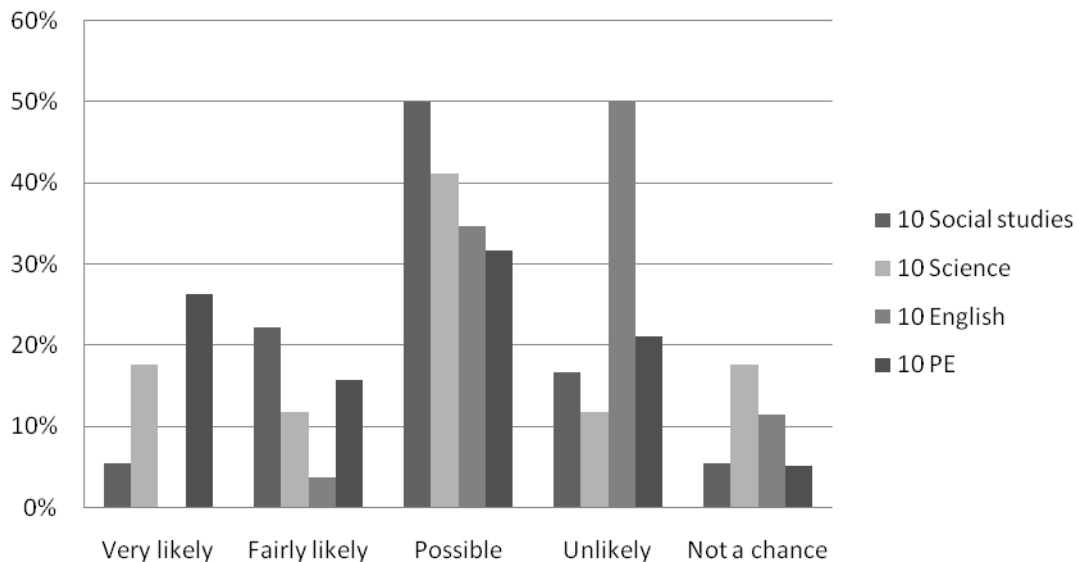
After Year 11, how likely is it that I will stay on at school



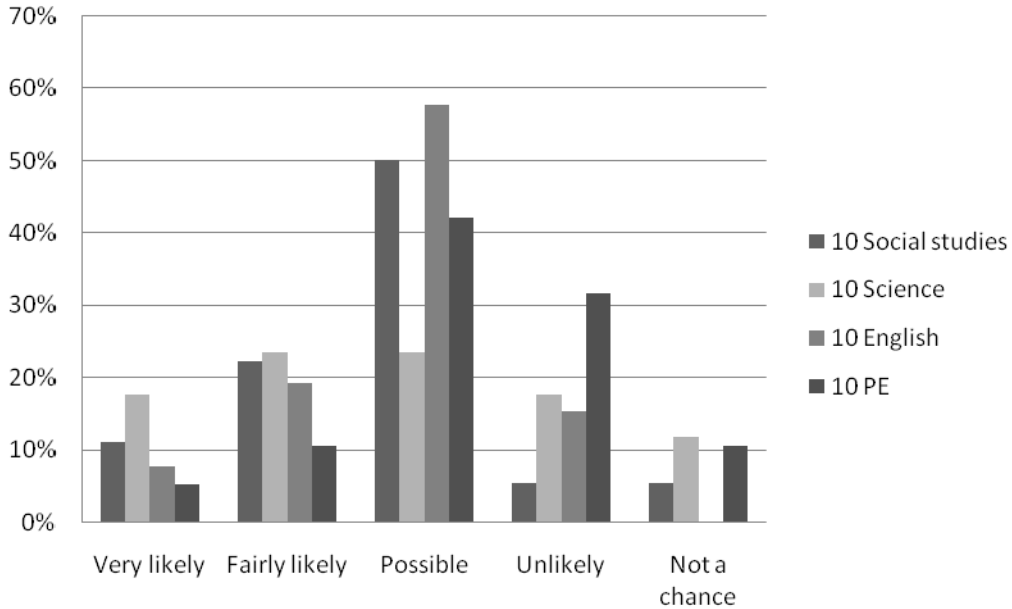
After Year 11, how likely is it that I will continue at school to get higher qualifications



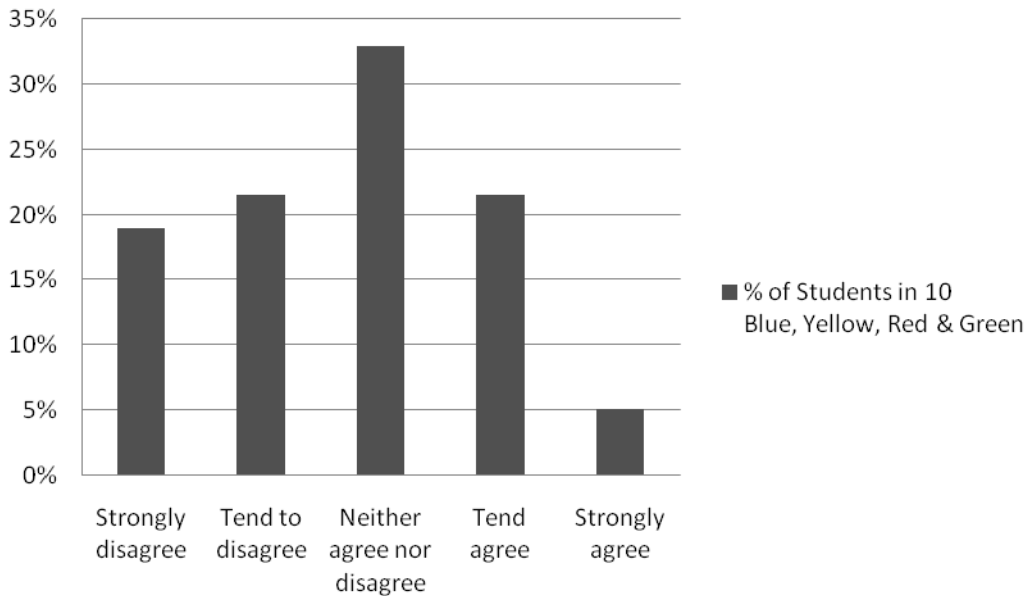
After Year 11, how likely is it that I will leave school to try to get a job

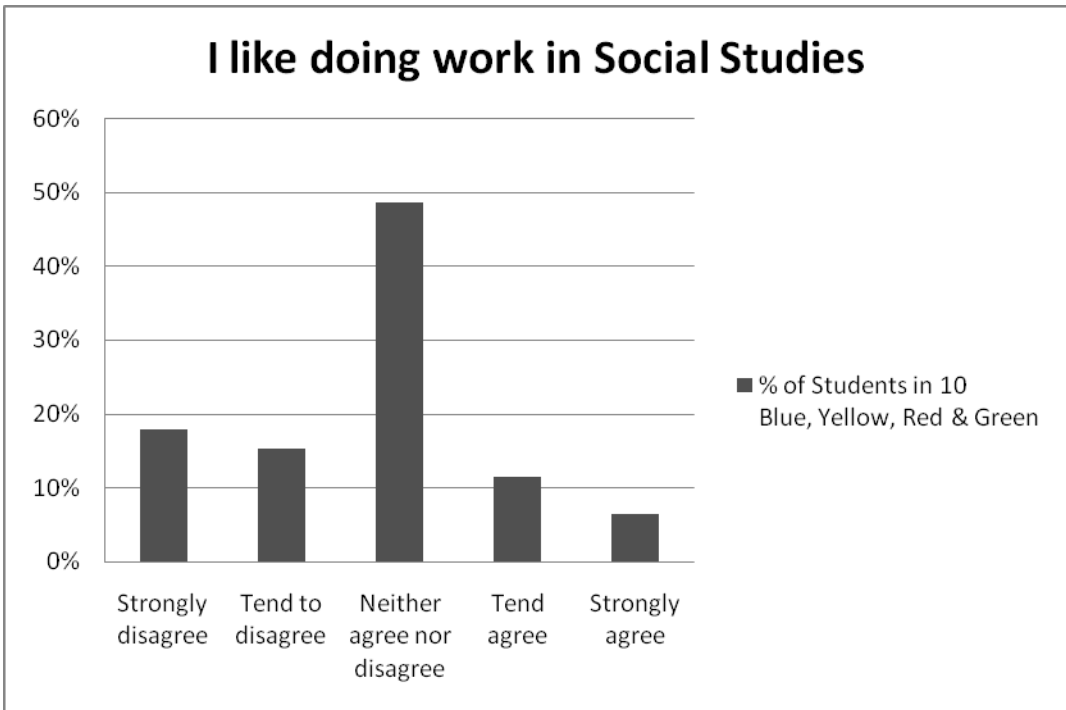
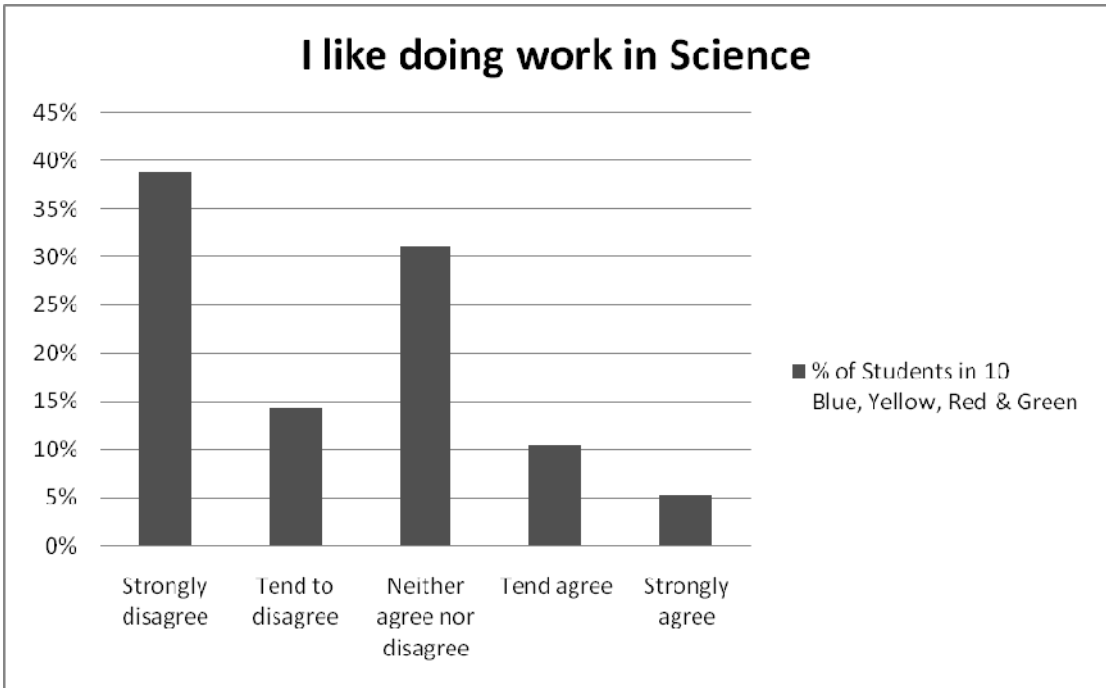


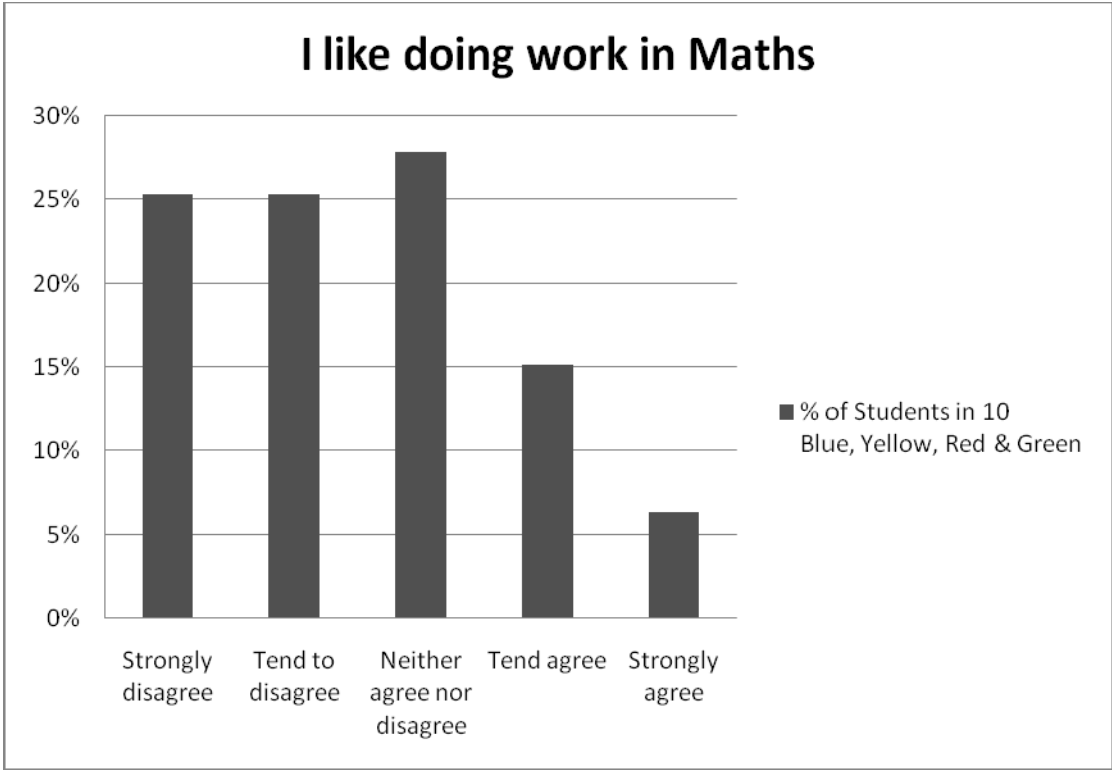
After Year 11, how likely is it that I intend to study at tertiary level?



I like doing work in English







Appendix E: Exchange of strategies

Making use of the research findings to address student writing literacy: An exchange of strategies.

This diagram was developed as a tool to provide an example of how the research findings might inform future practices within the school.

