How do Learning Support Centres support us? Student voices from a secondary school.

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Ria Jacobs

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Abstract

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has identified article 12 as one of the four general principles of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and the right under Article 12 of all children to be heard and taken seriously as one of the fundamental values of the Convention. Since the adoption of the Convention in 1989, considerable progress has been made at national and global levels in the development of legislation, policies and methodologies to promote the implementation of Article 12 in educational systems. However, the implementation of the child's right to express their view on a wide range of issues that affect them continues to be impeded by many long-standing practices, attitudes, political and economic barriers in most societies.

This qualitative research project was aimed at the perceptions and experiences of six secondary school students ranging from year 9 – year 13 at a multicultural school in New Zealand who received support at a Learning Support Centre (LSC). The methodology centred on exploring the perspectives and attitudes of the students who attended the LSC and whether they had the opportunity to express their views in regards to their learning in the LSC as specified in Article 12 of UNCRC. Semi-structured interviews focused on the students' assessment of their learning in the LSC and compared the learning assistance in the LSC to the support they received in their regular classroom.

The interview results indicated that students were very supportive and appreciative of the values that the school was promoting and they felt proud to be students of the school. They appreciated the support and encouragement received in the LSC which helped them to learn in regular classes and enhanced their confidence to achieve. Students made progress in their reading and comprehension of subject information in their regular subjects as well applying the skills learnt in the LSC to other areas.

However, the results also indicated that students were not always able to express their views on issues that affected their learning. Students did not always have the right to make decisions. At times students' decisions were less likely to be considered than those of parents and teachers, and the curriculum could also impose restrictions on students' autonomy.

Acknowledgements

'There are no extra pieces in the universe.

Everyone is here because he or she

Has a place to fill,

And every piece must fit itself

Into the big jigsaw puzzle.'

Deepak Chopra

This view of life has always been my belief for our existence here on earth. Everybody plays a part in the big picture. The big puzzle of life cannot be completed if one piece is missing. Every piece is unique and adds its own colour, shape and presence. Every human - every child - has their place, and without each person's contribution, the puzzle will stay incomplete.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an inclusive human rights treaty that upholds the specific rights of all children. Specifically, Article 12 points out the fundamental right of all children to have their voices heard on issues that affect them. This Article is particularly important and relevant universally to educational systems, as Article 12 asserts that when adults make decisions that affect children, children have the right to express their opinion in matters that concern them. It clearly states that:

1. Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

New Zealand ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1993, signifying the NZ Government's agreement that the best interest of the child must come first in decisions, laws or services involving children (Human Rights in New Zealand, 2010). The acceptance of the UNCRC treaty made New Zealanders

accountable to this legal document, with an expectation that all children in New Zealand will experience the rights stipulated in the document.

Research has shown that some countries have embraced Article 12, whilst some countries have not, as it is seen as having the potential to undermine adult authority (Lundy, 2007); and a belief that not all children have the maturity to express their opinions or be listened to in issues that concern their health, family, education, youth justice and policing (Kilkelly, et al., 2005; Lundy, 2007). Freeman (1996) has remarked that the content of Article 12 is of immense significance to governments, as it not only acknowledges the child as a respected human being, but also that children have integrity and power in society. Lundy (2007) supports this stance, arguing that Article 12 is the most commonly misunderstood provision of UNCRC, and that educators need to realise that it is a legal binding document that should be applied to "all educational decision-making processes (p.930)"'.

However, the majority of students still do not have the benefits of being heard in educational decisions that concern them (Lundy, 2007), are still treated with little dignity and respect, and are seldom consulted in everyday issues concerning them (Morrow,1999; Lundy, 2007). Lundy (2007) comes to the conclusion that adults who are still reluctant to comply with Article 12 are questioning the child's ability to make meaningful decisions in matters that concern them, and believes that by giving the child more control over what happens for them at school will undermine authority and destabilise the school environment. She also states that the implementation of Article 12 still depends on the commitment of adults to support it or not.

Background and rationale of this study

Assessment affects many aspects of education, including student grades, placement, progress, the curriculum, instructional needs, and school funding. Assessment is vital to the education process; secondary students' academic progress in their subjects are constantly measured and monitored by their teachers using summative assessments, to determine whether they comply to the regulated standards of the NZ Curriculum (ERO, 2016). Summative assessments are a mandatory requirement in secondary school to measure whether a student has met the required standards to earn a certificate for school completion, enter an occupation, or an entry for further education. Summative assessments are used by Ministry of Education to hold publicly funded schools accountable for providing quality education. Standards have been set to clarify national expectations and identify and support students who are not on track for success. In New Zealand, the National Certificates of Education Achievement (NCEA) was introduced in 2002 for senior secondary school students. Students of all abilities and learning areas have to gain credits and grades for different skills and knowledge. Credits gained from both traditional school curriculum areas and alternative programmes are used as benchmarks for selection by universities and polytechnics, as well as employers (NZQA, 2013).

To improve the skills and employment of secondary students, the New Zealand government has set a target for 85% of all 18-year-old students to achieve their National Certificate of Educational (Ministry of Education, 2013). To achieve the target of 85% of 18-year-olds achieving NCEA Level 2 or equivalent by 2017, the MoE introduced the Achievement Retention Transitions (ART 2013-17). Together with the Government's Better Public Services initiative, they work in partnership with secondary schools to identify young people at risk of not achieving NCEA Level 2. These initiatives supported the pilot programme that was establish in 2012 that led to a significant improvement in

the numbers of students achieving NCEA Level 2. The MoE also supports the education providers to identify the students who are at risks of not achieving NCEA Level 2 or equivalent and encourages them to implement appropriate tailored initiatives to suit each student (Youth Guarantee, 2013). Learning Support Centres (LSCs) is such an initiative in secondary schools for students who are at risk of not performing at the expected curriculum cohort level in the mainstream classroom due to disengagement in their learning, which can be linked to certain kinds of learning difficulties, or language barriers. Such students are withdrawn for specific periods taking into consideration to not disrupt their core learning, e.g. English, mathematics, science and social studies, and given extra tuition to improve the skills needed to complete their secondary education successfully.

Learning Support Centre initiatives

All primary, intermediate and secondary schools in New Zealand receive an annual Special Education Grant (SEG) to support students who are at risk of not achieving at their expected curriculum level. These students who are at risk include students who may find learning challenging, the content of the curriculum levels arduous; the pace of mainstream learning too demanding or the content and pedagogy of the school curriculum indifferent to their preferred learning style (Ministry of Education, 2000). The use and distribution of the grant to support these at-risk students are entirely decided by the school community, and the management of the grant can be either the responsibility of the school's principal or the Board of Trustees (Ministry of Education, 2000). These grants can be used by schools to provide resources needed to support the learning of these students, employ teacher aides to support these students in class, as well as the withdrawal of students for a specific portion of time per day or per week as decided by the school, to

give additional teaching support to the students outside of their regular classroom (Ministry of Education, 2000).

Secondary schools in NZ often identify students who find learning difficult, are disengaged and unmotivated due to a range of impediments such as language barriers, learning disabilities and social difficulties – the students who are at risk of not completing or not achieving NCEA credits (Ministry of Education, 2017a). Some secondary schools have taken the initiative by using the Special Education Grant to set up Learning Support Centres (LSCs) to support the year 9 and year 10 students who are at risk, to receive additional tuition in their core subjects (English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies) to prepare the students for year 11 when they commence with their National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA). However, there are schools who offer this opportunity up to year 13 students, where students are withdrawn for specific portions of times per day and receive additional teaching support to enable them to achieve their NCEA credits in their selected subjects (Educational Review Office (ERO), 2015). The withdrawal option of at-risk students from mainstream teaching is not unique to NZ, but has also become a common approach in Ireland (Shevlin, Kenny & Loxley, 2008) with positive results.

From my experience as a secondary teacher and Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), I encounter the disappointment of failing, disengaged and unmotivated students on a daily basis. Some students find it difficult to conform to the expectations of NCEA and believe that the educational system as well as their pedagogical experiences at school fail them as there is little connection between their learning experiences at school and the reality of their everyday life (Erickson,1987). As we all experience the process of learning uniquely, education systems and classroom pedagogies that are not designed for all, may contribute to teachers feeling incapable of

teaching a diverse range of students in their class. It is important for all students to experience success and to have the right to express their views on their learning. This includes students who attend LSCs as they are the identified students who are at at-risk of not achieving at their appropriate curriculum level. It is not only primarily good pedagogical practice to respect students' views, but also a legal obligation (Youth Law Aotearoa, 2017) and it applies to all educational decision making.

This study aimed to explore what learning meant to the students who attended a LSC in a secondary school in an urban city in North Island, New Zealand; how the Learning Centre helped them with their learning; in what ways they found learning in the centre different to learning in the classroom; their preferred way of learning and the extent and nature of input they had in being part of the LSC. The focus of this study was to investigate the extent to which the content of Article 12 of UNCRC in terms of student voice was acknowledged and adhered to in relation to these students being identified for receiving learning support.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I define student voice and how it links with the requirement of Article 12 of UNCRC. Literature is reviewed around the importance of acknowledging student voice in education in general, followed by the initiative of establishing LSCs in secondary schools in Aotearoa and the role of learning centres in secondary schools to support students who find learning challenging. I then discuss the importance of government legislation to direct the leadership teams of schools to change school policies, change in curricula and classroom pedagogy to include student voice and advocate Article 12 which promote students as co-constructors of their learning. Student voice in the education system of New Zealand is then compared to the innovations in other countries.

Student voice defined

"Student voice" is a metaphor for student engagement and participation in matters that affect them, this includes their learning (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013) and refers to the educational and pedagogical approaches and techniques in schools that take students' passions, ambitions, interests and choices into account based upon the individual student's values, beliefs, perspectives, opinions and cultural background (Cook-Sather, 2006). Giving students a voice in their learning can be regarded as a replacement of the traditional form of education where teachers had the autonomous power over the instruction and content and the students had little or no input in their learning (Cook-Sather, 2006). A democratic education is a system where 'student voice' leads to authentic contributions and involvement of students in their education, giving them the opportunity to have a say in decisions at school that affect them (Cook-Sather, 2006). It entails that students play an active role in their learning and schooling and as a

result become more attentive, responsive co-owners of their learning in sustained and routine ways (Hargreaves 2004).

Student voice in New Zealand Education

ERO (2015) suggests that the purpose of student voice should be to promote student teams working in leadership roles and contribute to the design of learning experiences that affect their wellbeing. Their report on student voice states that some schools do experiment with the terminology and are in the process of exploring student voice where teachers and leaders collect student and parent perspectives. Nonetheless, schools remain largely uncertain about what student voice intend to promote, how to respond to and are uncertain of the expectations. ERO (2015) also mentions that article 12 is interpreted by schools in different ways. They report that most schools use surveys to hear students' views for different purposes: some are done to increase students' self-awareness; competencies and knowledge; classroom discussions that enable teachers to respond with learning opportunities that build students' strengths. ERO (2015) also reported that schools with an extensive approach to student wellbeing promote students' contribution to many daily decisions, e.g. what and how they learn, who they interact with and how they engage to learning. Students are expected to develop and use skills in leadership positions at school and control many of their school experiences. Students are seen as inherently capable, despite any barriers or challenges they face. Their recommendation is that teachers and leaders should provide time and space for student voice to happen.

Even though the Ministry of Education (MoE) supports the implementation of Article 12 through student voice in schools, guidelines for schools are not actively promoted and no proper legislation or guidelines are in place for schools to adhere to (ERO, 2014).

Literature on the importance of student voice in education

Article 12 deals specifically with children's participation rights to express their views freely in all matters that affect them in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (Alderson, 2000). The participation rights of children imply that children and young people should have a greater say in how their schools are run and governed. Student participation also challenges adults and professionals to best facilitate children and young people's participation in their learning in a whole range of settings and circumstances (Morrow, 1999). Woodhead (2006) and Rogoff (1990) acknowledge the importance of social interaction for learning and emphasise that the development and progression of a child's cognitive strategies, abilities, identities as well as cultural competencies can only be acquired through interactions and involvement in a range of social settings: relationships, activities and skills building. The active involvement of students in decision making should not be perceived as an option or a gift from adults, but as a legal right of the child (Lundy, 2007).

Lundy (2007) explains that Article 12 has two important key elements: (i) the right of a child to express a view, and (ii) the right to have their view given due weight. Lundy (2007) however, proposes a new model of Article 12 which identifies four separate factors to explain the full implication of the legal obligation that adults have toward children: Space, Voice, Audience and Influence. Lundy (2007, p.937) specifies 'space' as the opportunity to give children the opportunity to express their views; 'voice' as the enablement of children to express their views; adults as the 'audience' to listening to the children's views and 'influence' meaning that the children's views are given due weight in accordance to their age and capacity. This model proposed by Lundy (2007) indicates that the factors are interrelated and that Article 12 has an explicit chronology. Lundy

(2007) also suggests that Article 12 should be interpreted in conjunction with Article 5 of UNCRC which states adults' right to provide 'appropriate direction and guidance' to the child in 'a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child'. As the child matures, the adults' rights will lessen and eventually stop.

Lundy's (2007) argument of the importance of adult guidance and direction supports Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory and states that collaboration between adult and child will enhance skilful development of a child. Vygotsky (1978) justifies the importance of children's participation in their own learning and explains the importance of social interaction and social processes with an adult in the acquisition of knowledge by means of the "Zone of proximal development" (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) explains that a child learns within his/her readiness when given a task and ZPD refers to a point of required skill and knowledge where the child cannot successfully function alone to complete the task, but is able to succeed with scaffolding and collaboration with a teacher, an adult, siblings or their peers. A prerequisite for meaningful engagement of a child is the opportunity to be involved and express their views (Lundy, 2007). With the support of a teacher, the child can be guided and coached into his/her zone of proximal development with a task slightly more complex than the child can manage alone, and therefore be pushed forward to the zone of independence. The views of the child should be appreciated as part of the learning discourse and in that scope, new learning will take place (Lundy, 2007). Rogoff (1990), known as the Neo-Vygotskian, also supports the ideas of Vygotsky believing that the development of the child is a natural, social and cultural process and that a 'child's cognitive development is an apprenticeship which occurs through guided participation in social activities with companions supporting and stretching their understanding of and skills in using the tools of culture' (p.1).

It is within this cycle of collaboration that learners grasp new ideas, master new skills, and become increasingly independent thinkers and problem solvers (Howard, 1994; Sousa, 2001; Wolfe, 2001; Jensen, 2005). All cognitive functions and learning are reliant on the quality of collaboration within an educational community, including interactions between teachers, peers and family (McInerney & McInerney, 2002; Schunk, 2012). In relation to Article 12 it can be argued that an adult working conjointly with a child and scaffolding the child's views and competencies, will inspire the child to express their views as a participant and not a spectator (Smyth, 2006). It is therefore important that adults provide the context and opportunity for students to speak their mind in regards to their learning, be heard and counted by adults and have an influence on the outcomes of their learning (Ruddick & Flutter, 2004). When children realise they can have an impact on things that matter to them at school, they will experience self-worth and respect and be better equipped to manage their own process of learning. As Shannon (1993) puts it, "Voice and choice are the tools by which we make ourselves known, name our experience, and participate in decisions that affect our lives" (p.109).

Donini (2015) performed a qualitative case study in eleven upper elementary classrooms in one school, exploring the opportunities for voice and choice as learners engage with educators to co-create a more personalized educational pathway through standards of competency. Insights gained from interviews with teachers, student focus groups and observations describe how students experience voice and choice, and provide an understanding of how voice and choice contribute to reshaping the learning environment and the experience of the learner. The results of this study helped educators understand how voice and choice support a collaborative classroom culture and increase engagement with learning standards. This study also indicated how the young learners gained insights and perspective of themselves as learners and how voice and choice

connected with core values of respect, pride and freedom. Examining competency reform at this one school provided practical insights into the structural supports, roles of the teacher and students, use of tools, and specific factors that sustain and challenge the transformation. Donini (2015) concluded that the enabling of students through voice and choice is a powerful way to engage with learners as stakeholders who may play an important role in developing and sustaining learner-centred competency reforms.

The impact of 'voice' and 'choice' have also been experienced during a Teaching and Learning Together project (TLT) at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges, two selective colleges in the north-eastern USA. Pre-service teachers were encouraged to take on a paradoxical model of leadership: pre-service teachers were taught to listen to secondary students and secondary students were encouraged to speak and take action within their school lives. The students were in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades of their high school and were selected and recommended by their teachers according to their interest, engagement, willingness to speak their minds and not based on their academic performance. Several pre-service teachers explained how they learned to listen with open hearts and minds and began to shift their relationships and ways of thinking about student learning when they realised that learning to listen to students means learning not to speak for them but to speak to them. One of the TLT students stated that the best way to master the art of teaching is to listen to what students have to say, and the feedback they give about their learning and then make changes based on their views (Cook-Sather, 2006).

TLT encourages students to be transformers of their own learning and perceive students not only as having legitimate authority to express their voice in issues that affect their learning, but should also have the right to participate in the preparation of their learning content (Angus, 2006). Education is not a one-way process where information is transferred from teacher to student with the ultimate goal to achieve a rigorous

assessment, but rather a mutually dynamic relationship (Vygotsky, 1978; Cook-Sather, 2006).

Beattie (2012), founder of Youth and Adults Transforming Together (YATST) education programme promotes teaching programmes at schools that are based on student/adult partnership where students are no longer passive receivers of information, but active partners in their learning.

The role of Learning Support Centres in New Zealand

Smyth (2004) states that one of the main reasons why students lose interest in school and education is because they feel excluded and isolated in their learning environment; most students are not able to perform and achieve to the required academic year level expectations and feel frustrated, incompetent, discouraged, and develop a low self-esteem (Smyth, 2004). Disengagement of young adolescents in school can be linked to the unsympathetic school systems which distance the school curriculum from their lives, culture and aspirations (Smyth, 2004). School can therefore become a hostile place for some students where the emphasis is on accountability, standards and measures with no connection to psychological motivation (Smyth, 2004). Inclusion of the students in their education will create a sense of belonging in various ways which will not only connect them with their learning at school but also to a larger social context (Almqvist & Christopherson, 2017). Lundy (2006) endorses successful implementation of student voice in education systems which can only happen when governments acknowledge the content of Article 12 of UNCRC in education and promote school policies, education curricula and classroom pedagogy (McNaughton, 2003).

Leaving school without a qualification is not an instantaneous decision that only happens at secondary school, but could be a process that begins years before the final decision (Allensworth, 2005). It has become crucial that the ethos and perspective of education in schools change as disengagement in school can ultimately lead to students leaving school without any qualification (Allensworth, 2005). Schools therefore need to support these students and change their perception of education to a different kind of culture that will promote the influence of student voice in education as students who are involved, will feel they are respected as individuals and part of a social group (Ruddock & Flutter, 2004).

To support and encourage students to complete their education and not dropping out of school or being stood down, suspended, or fully excluded, schools set up in-school systems in the form of Learning Support Centres (LSC). Students in the LSCs are provided with extra tutoring to improve their learning, as the goal of these LSCs is to support the students to achieve either NCEA credits, or an equivalent qualification (Education Counts, 2016). The teachers in the LSC support the subject teachers to be inclusive in their professional practice by recognising and addressing the diversity of students and their learning needs which will enable the students to access the subject content; fully participate in learning activities and demonstrate their knowledge and strengths at assessment (MoE:TKI (2016). Under the requirements of Article 12, we it is our responsibility to enable students express their views, be listened to and act upon in the LSCs.

The objectives of LSCs are firmly grounded on the key ideas promoted by the Educational Council of Aotearoa New Zealand (Education Council, 2014): to improve student voice in education and encourage and support students to complete their schooling. These key ideas support the expectations of Article 12 of UNCRC and perceive

students and teachers both as stakeholders in education; to participate in decision making; given the right to offer their insights, knowledge or opinions; the opportunity to contribute to change for improvement; their views to complement rather than replace or surpass the teachers' knowledge (Education Council, 2014).

The Education Council (2014) also encourages the discussing and collaboration in planning, learning objectives and success criteria with students; is in favour of setting and evaluating students' progress towards achieving goals and making them 'curriculum insiders'. The Education Council (2014) states that students need to expand their knowledge about their learning, enhance their ability to contribute their views. The Education Council (2014) agrees that students know they have limited power and that they will likely be more engaged in meaningful dialogue when they know that what they say will be acknowledged through positive discussion and visible change as students' perceptions about their schooling have shown positive outcomes for academic success.

Student voice and school policy development

Students must be viewed and treated as citizens with a voice and a right to participate in policy changes (GOV.UK: 2015) and Flutter & Ruddock (2004) state that it will be beneficial for educational shareholders to include children in the decision-making about their schooling and giving them greater democracy to develop their skills and empower their self-esteem.

'Education reform can only be effective if policies are well implemented. To be introduced successfully, innovations in the learning environment must concretely address specific teaching and learning issues. To improve the quality of the education that schools provide, policies must focus on changing classroom

practices, balancing external pressure and support, and developing and pursuing long-term objectives' (OECD, 2015, p5).

Analysis of selected education reforms shows that the most effective policies are those that are designed around students and their learning, building teachers' competencies and engage all stakeholders (OECD, 2015).

To develop the most effective, practical and successful education policies will mean that policies should be measured more rigorously and consistently to keep up with the country's economic demands (Education Policy Outlook 2015). Sahlberg (2007) states that a country's education and skills are the key factors for economic growth and social well-being. In today's knowledge-driven economies, access to quality education and the chances for development of the nation are two sides of the same coin. That is why we must set targets for education, while improving quality and learning outcomes at all levels. A case study research on Finland's educational policies indicated that Finland has developed from a remote industrial state to a model knowledge economy using education as the key to economic change and social development. Education policies of Finland focus on raising students' achievement by giving students the opportunity to express their views about their education. Students are given choices about their learning and through sustainable leadership that places strong emphasis on teaching and learning, encourages schools to craft optimal learning environments and implement educational content that best helps their students reach the general goals of schooling. Teachers are facilitators of the students' learning (Sinclair, 2004) and students are included in the design, instruction and course expectations which give them greater ownership and meaning for their learning (Osberg, Pope & Galloway, 2006; Kallo & Semchenko, 2016).

Fielding (2001) argues that students can act as facilitators for changes in schools which can lead to the improvement in teaching, the curriculum and student–teacher relationships. Policy-makers can benefit by accessing the specialist 'untapped' knowledge that learners have about their schools.

An ethnographic case study (Angus & Brown, 1997) examined how members of a teaching organisation had the power to influence educational norms, practices and structure, and influenced strongly established professional expectations within the organizations. Over a period of two decades' teachers at Grandridge Secondary School in Melbourne Australia were at the forefront of educational thinking and educational crusading and aimed to change the education system for Australia. The school's emphasis was on student centred pedagogy and a belief that curriculum reform could contribute to social and educational reform, allowing student voice in education. The ideal was to change and reform the educational bureaucratic system that control and regulate the education system and teachers. A well-functioning teaching and learning environment was established at the school and other schools adapted the system. However, with the change-over of government in the 1992 election (the Liberal-National Coalition), the education policy 'Schools of the future" (SotF) curtailed the 'social engineering' influence of 'radical' teachers and teacher unions and returned to the control of education. The so called, 'Quality' education was to be replaced by the adoption of 'world's best practice' in the management of schools. Even though the initial project of a student-centred education system was a step forward in creating a change in the educational system of Australia, the new government introduced a hostile policy and reformed school education with the title 'Schools of the Future' (SotF) which put an end to the ideal of a student- centred education policy for Australia.

However, some schools do provide opportunities for students to serve on student councils or student-led organisations where they can share their opinions and views on their education, and are allowed to make valued contributions in regards to the improvement of the school's policies to benefit the students (School Councils UK, 2007). Research commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (The Department for Children, Schools and Families for England and Wales, 2007) aimed to support the updating and revision of the national guidance on pupil participation in school decision making. This research included a review of the literature, national surveys of pupils and teachers and a series of school case studies. The four key factors that outlined the research were children's rights, active citizenship, school improvement and personalisation. The key findings of the research indicated that 95% of schools in England and Wales have school councils where students are involved with issues related to the improvement of their school's policies and decisions about teaching and learning. A number of teaching unions have indicated that they strongly support student involvement in school decision making (The Department for Children, Schools and Families for England and Wales, 2007). It is important to note that most schools who have a clear rationale for introducing student voice and support from teachers in their education have great success and they feel strongly that the government should continue to encourage student voice through mechanisms such as guidance and curriculum and self-evaluation frameworks (Fielding, 2004; Osterman, 2000). Research on the importance and values of school policies has shown that policies need to regard learning as an active process where students learn to discover principles, concepts and facts for themselves and not a place where teachers transfer knowledge into passive students (Angus & Brown, 2001).

Unfortunately, research in the education systems of various countries indicated that decentralisation of education systems seldom occurs, and decision-making and

control of educational planning by the government are favoured by considerations of equity, national unity and management efficiency (Lyons, 1987; Weiler, 1990; Hill, et.al. 1998; Bredeson, 2000; Karlsen, 2000; Vidoni & Grassetti, 2003). The statistics of a research report on school leavers in Scotland without a proper qualification (Lynn, 1994) indicated an urgent need for the re-evaluation, and restructuring of schools' policies (Kohl, 1994; Levin, 2000). Levin (2005) believes that culture and practice in schools can be changed when school policies and curricula acknowledge students as co-owners of their education and given a voice to express their views and speaking out on their own behalf (Ellsworth, 1992; Lundy, 2007; Fielding, 2004) as required in Article 12.

Stressed-Out-Students (SOS) is an intervention programme that helps and supports school leaders to change their school's education policies and education practices and provide them with tools to reduce the academic stress of student, promote student health and encourage student engagement in their learning as well as academic integrity (Osberg, Pope & Galloway, 2006). Data that was collected from a research done by Osberg, Pope & Galloway (2006) from three case study schools at a medium-sized comprehensive high school, located in an affluent California (USA) suburb. Fairview School was ranked as one of the highest performing schools in the state based on their standardized test scores. The SOS committee surveyed all of the students, using a survey instrument developed by a Stanford coach. Survey questions on students' perceptions of the school's culture, students' mental health, and their experiences in their core academic classes, indicated that most students found the homework load as unrealistic and their lives as completely programmed. Students experienced pressure about grades and pressure from their parents and teachers. The SOS committee focused on the implementation of different strategies which involved students in the reform process of the school as the data indicated that student involvement in school practices affects how students perceive themselves, their

school and their learning. The data also revealed the importance for students to be treated as people whose ideas and opinions about their educational matter. Indicative was respectful treating of students which makes a difference not only to the students, but also to the reforming of a school's culture. This study supports Lundy's (2007) statement that schools' policies that value and respect children's views and perceived them as essential stakeholders in the decision-making process of the school, can bring changes in the implementation of teaching practices and will raise awareness and training of teachers which will eventually lead to change in schools. Not only will the students prosper, (Education Policy Outlook: Finland, OECD, 2013), but it will also bring change in the practice of leadership in taking student voice seriously (Fielding, 2004).

Leadership and student voice

There is a quest in many education circles for innovative leadership in schools that values the diverse voices of students and is open minded to mentor new leaders to express their views (McCray & Beachum, 2014). Effective leadership, that has the vision to foster and appreciate collaborative education will promote a consultative and cooperative school environment that empower students and teachers (Mulholland & O'Conner, 2016). As collaborative and inclusive education is a worldwide philosophy and basic human right (UNESCO, 2009), effective leadership will prioritise the professional development of teachers in preparing them to oversee collaborative teaching and inclusive practice in the classroom (Scul, 2011; Gaitas & Martis, 2017). Smyth (2006) suggests that school leadership should construct their views around student voice by giving students ownership of their learning; handing some control over to students; creating an environment of mutual respect and trust; pursuing a curriculum that is relevant and connected to students' lives; authorise authentic assessment and reporting; nurture an

atmosphere of care built around positive relationships; encourage a flexible pedagogy that accommodates the complexity of students' lives and support student diversity.

These suggestions by Smyth (2006) pose a challenge to educational leaders to construct spaces where students will get the opportunity to be part of their learning. Cook-Sather (2002) stresses the importance of changing the structures in the educational leadership to promote changes in school policies that are being used to control schools, teachers and students. Students should be asked how the school is supporting and preparing them for their future (Smyth, 2006) as schools can create inspiring places where students get the opportunity to participate as co-producers in the decision making of their learning and have their voices heard (Osberg, Pope & Galloway 2006).

Pedagogical practices that enhance student voice

Studies have recognised that children are not just empty vessels whose development is determined by biological and psychological processes, but part of a social construction (James & James, 2008) who need guidance and direction in their evolving capacity (Vygotsky, 1979; Rogoff, 1990; Alderson, 2001; Smith, 2002; Lundy, 2006; Woodhead, 2009).

Mutual respect between students and teachers is important. Not only will the learning environment be positive, but informal and friendly relationships between teachers and pupils will have a positive impact on unacceptable behaviour in school; students will be accountable for their own behaviour (Education International, 2010). Six high school students from a secondary school in the London Borough of Havering, in collaboration with a local university (University of East London), visited schools in Finland with the research focus on their experiences of 'student voice' in Finnish schools and to implement change within their school through a variety of student voice initiatives

(Education International, 2010). Data from this case study with the Finnish students indicated that the Finnish curriculum, school structure and student-teacher relationship provided a very different learning experience compared to the pressurised school environment in England. Students in Finland appeared to be more motivated and excited about their subjects and learning was not dull as they were inspired and ready to learn due to the student-centred learning environment (Education International, 2010).

A research study on inclusive teaching at Davison School for Girls revealed that appreciation of membership and community between teaching staff and students at school made a significant difference in the academic performance of students. The school's learning culture used to be underdeveloped and the students had serious negative learning attitudes. Students felt distant from their learning and could not see any relationship to their future. There was a sense of complacency among staff and a school culture of irrelevance was across the whole school. Under the effective leadership of the principal and in collaboration with her staff, a series of strategies were introduced: students were treated in an adult way; their voices and opinions in regards to their education were respected and accepted; student's views on various aspects of their learning were sought and acted on. The development of student consultation and participation showed the students that they were valued and their academic performance raised significantly; within a few years the percentage of pupils who achieved five or more A-C grades at GCSE moved from 30% - 71%. The school achieved one of the highest value-added scores in the West Sussex (England) education authority and signified the importance of creating opportunities for student perspective to drive school policies and practices (Flutter & Ruddock 2004).

Humans are social entities and they feel valued and appreciated when they can work as partners in a meaningful relationship towards a common goal: 'Partnership fosters

ownership and ownership sparks motivation and motivation drives learning' (Beattie, 2012, p1). In reference to Article 12, adolescence is the time when students' voice is important as it is a stage where they need to define their identity and their values of the world as this is not a time for them to be quiet, passive and obedient followers of rigid school structures and compartmentalised learning (Beattie, 2012). Kuhn (1977) emphasised with his 'Shared Paradigm' the importance of communities (not individuals) as the basic agents of learning experience and he observed that communities must be characterized by the specific cognitive values to which they are committed. In a social constructivists classroom setting, learning is the shared responsibility of the learner and the teacher whilst the teacher, as facilitator guides, directs and promotes new patterns of thinking for the learner (Bauersfeld, 1995; Von Glaserfeld, 1998). Prout (2001) argues that listening to young children starts with the belief system what individual practitioners bring to their practice: children's experience in the classroom as social beings and not social 'becomings' are shaped by the values, beliefs and skills of the educators who are in a power position in relation to young children. If classrooms become places where students have a voice and get involved in the curriculum and pedagogy, experience participation in decision making that effects their lives, then they will take charge of their learning (Shannon,1993; Oldfather, West, White & Wilmart, 1999).

Significant findings in research on student voice indicate that students are more involved with school in general when they are given the opportunity to communicate their views and then acted upon. Noticeable is that teachers become more engaged in the students' learning by gaining insight in their views. To support the students' learning positive and collaborative relationships between teachers and students improve student engagement and learning (UK: ESRC: Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning Project (2000- 2008/9); Fielding & Bragg 2003; Bland, & Atweh, 2007).

A single case research study (Gilinsky, 2014) explored the affective domain of teacher-student relationships and produced a synthesis of information that guided a classroom teacher in the development and maintenance of her relationships with her students. The prominent outcome of the study was the use of scanning, monitoring and active listening to students to engage them in their learning and to motivate them. The teacher created learning opportunities that captivated students' interests and she let the students know she was actively engaged and supportive of their learning process. This collaborative engagement throughout the learning environment allowed the teacher to understand how particular learners acquired knowledge and addressed the need of the learners in a more purposeful way. Fosnot (2005), states that the way a teacher listens and talks to children helps them become learners who think critically and creatively.

Erickson (1987) affirms that the relationship between teachers and students should be grounded on mutual trust, respect and honesty, as misconceptions can lead to miscommunication between students that will jeopardise the relationship between the student and teacher, resulting in the student becoming less interested in learning at school.

An ethnographic case study conducted by Sandberg (2016) aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how different children perceive their learning environment in the first grade of primary school, with regards to social as well as academic well-being. The reported results were based on interviews with 16 children and observed teaching situations during the first year of primary school. The results from the case study showed that a positive learning environment for all children is one that is characterised by the inclusion of children in their learning; that children should be listened to and their voices should be taken into account to foster their education. Several other studies also concluded that relationships and the feeling of belonging are very important to children's perspectives of life at school (Dockett & Perry 2004; Peters & Kelley, 2010). Using a

range of case studies in their research support, Lancaster and Kirby (2014) emphasise the importance of listening to young children and stress the need to develop ethical relationships with children. They underpin mutual participation and challenge educators to listen and respond to young children, offering them opportunities to communicate their experiences, views, concerns and aspirations.

Differentiation in the Curriculum and student voice

Positive changes in students' achievement has shown that differentiation which includes student voice is an effective principle of learning in mixed ability classrooms as it relies on communication and strong teacher-student relationship. Stravroula, Leonidas & Mary (2011) confirmed the views of Vygotsky's ZPD (1978) and other researchers that differentiation can be effective for all students regardless of their readiness level, their gender or their socio-economic status with a quantitative study performed with twenty-four elementary Cypriot classes. Students were divided into an experimental group and a control group. The results of the experimental group that had received differentiated teaching were compared with the results of the control group that had not received differentiated teaching. Data indicated statistically significant difference between students' achievement taught by differentiated learning and those students who did not received differentiated learning. Not only did the study concluded the effectiveness of differentiated child-centred teaching in mixed ability classrooms but also defined the characteristics of effective differentiated child-centred teaching.

A study done by McAdamis (2001) on the use of differentiated child-centred teaching in the Rockwood School District (Missouri) reported significant improvement in the test scores of low-achieving students. Over a period of five years, principals,

teachers and school authorities were involved in professional development, mentoring and intensive planning on developing differentiated child-centred teaching. Even though the teachers were initially reluctant to change, strategies like peer coaching, action research, study groups and workshops offered on-going support and feedback. They were finally convinced of the benefits of differentiation and were positive to continue with differentiated teaching in the following year (McAdamis, 2001). Noticeable was not only a change in the schools' ethos which promoted differentiated teaching but the students were more motivated and encouraged in their learning (McAdamis, 2001). The change to a differentiated child-centred programme was only possible with the full cooperation of the whole school and all the participants (McAdamis, 2001). Other research studies concluded that the learning process for teachers and students seemed to be aligned with social constructivist theories of learning (McAdamis, 2001). They both need an environment where they could express their thinking and listen to each other's understandings to compare with their own (Irvin, 2006).

Research has provided insights into the importance of a child-centred curriculum in which adults respond to the child's learning, providing support and resourcing (Sylva, Melhuish & Sammons et al., 2004). The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE 2004) project report emphasises the importance of scaffolding children's learning and describes the interaction when practitioners and children work together to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate an activity or extend a narrative as 'sustained shared thinking'. Students have diverse learning needs which should be provided for to give them the best possible learning opportunity and teachers need to adapt their pedagogy to support the needs of all the students (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Differentiated child-centred learning in the classroom has been recognised as the learning strategy that not only accommodates a wide variety of students with different

learning and scaffolding needs, but is a learner-centred approach (Gaitas & Martins, 2017). Learning should always be to advance the child's current level of mastery and teachers should therefore teach within a child's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky,1978). A higher level of activating interest is to have students propose their own ideas for products and activities. If material is presented below the child's mastery level and not within their choice, there will be no growth. Also, if the material is well above the zone and not of their choice, the child will be frustrated. (Byrnes, 1996). Learning occur when students are given the space for voice to participate when they encounter tasks at moderate levels of difficulty and they will be more likely to sustain efforts to learn if the tasks get more difficult (Lundy, 2006; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).

Democratic education in schools to adhere to Article 12

Since the acceptance of Article12, many countries around the world have had a mind shift towards a more democratic education system to address the benefits of consulting with children (Flutter & Roderick, 2004; Osler & Starkey, 2005; Cook-Sather, 2006).The choice of a democratic education embraces learning as a social collaborative process between adults and children in matters that will not only benefit the education of the child but will assure a mutual decision making process between adults and children As a collaborative learner-centred approach is associated with the development of self-regulation, an important ability significant for all stages of learning and a motivator for educational achievement (Flutter, 2007), all students, including the ones who find learning difficult will benefit within an educational community (Vygotsky,1962; Karpov, 2005; Bennet-Woodhouse, 2004, McInerney & McInerney, 2002; Schunk, 2012).

Conclusion

Collaboration between the staff of the LSCs and classroom teachers is necessary to support, listen and respond to students' voice and give them the opportunity to make decisions about their learning content, product and process in the classroom (Education Amended Act, 2017). Collaborative between the different stakeholders will assure the students to fulfil their maximum potential at present and future (Better Outcomes, Brighter Future, 2017).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research used semi-structure interviews with six students who were supported by a LSC in a secondary school. An in-depth interview method was used to gather information from six students attending a secondary school in New Zealand. This chapter discusses the research design, research paradigm, the methodology used as well as the methods used to achieve the aim of the study.

Research paradigm

The research paradigm of this study was Vygotsky's social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978) which states that social interaction and collaboration plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development of a child and that social learning precedes development. Guba & Lincoln (1994) explain a paradigm as a basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator not only in choice of method but in ontology and epistemologically ways.

Epistemology is about 'how we know what we know' (Crotty,1998: p.8), 'the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known' (Guba & Lincoln (1998: p.201). As epistemology provides philosophical grounding when deciding what kind of knowledge is possible and how we can ensure that the knowledge is adequate and legitimate (Maynard, 1994). The aim of the research was to gain insights into the effectiveness of the LSC in supporting the students. Students attending the LSC receive additional support from learning assistants in the different learning areas. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the support the students receive, it was necessary to include Ontology, as it is the assumption about the nature of social reality (Dillon & Wals, 2006; Ramey & Grubb, 2009; Crotty,1998), the kind of things

that exist, the conditions of their existence and the relationships between these things (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As relativism believes that truth is created by meanings and experiences, and in order to understand someone's experiences in a context that shaped it, the researcher interviewed the students to in the study to gain knowledge about their experiences in the LSC (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). An emic perspective is the insider's view of reality and one of the principle concepts of qualitative research (Olive, 2014). It was fundamental in the understandings of how the students perceive and comprehend the world around them.

This study lent itself to a relativist ontological research design as the focus was on the experience of students in the LSC and how that related to the content of Article 12 in their learning. As a relativist ontology study, it was important to form an in-depth understanding of the students' perception of learning, and how they perceived learning as a social interaction among students and between students and teachers. An emic approach (Willis, 2007) also allowed the researcher to interact with the participants to find out what learning meant to them and to get an in-depth understanding of what was happening in their learning in the LSCs. The ontological beliefs dictated the epistemology (Soini, Kronqvist & Huber, 2011), as it dealt with the relationship the researcher had with the research and how the researcher got the knowledge to discover new information.

These ontological and epistemological perspectives drove a phenomenological approach to the collection and analysis of the data in order to explore the lived experiences of the students in the LSCs, with in-depth interviews chosen as a method for understanding these experiences. Social constructivists believe that language precedes thoughts and provides methods of structuring the way the world is experienced; knowledge is created by the interactions of individuals within society (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). As the interviewer, my role was to understand, analyse and

interpret the students' perspective on their learning in the LSC and to discover the underlying meaning of their perceptions of their learning (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Successful qualitative research requires careful consideration and planning as it should be fairly informal, and participants should feel as if they are in a conversation, rather than a formal interview session of questions and answers (Kumar, 2011). It was important in this study to create a conversational environment (Denscombe, 2007), where students felt safe to voice their perspectives of learning. The reality of qualitative study is its subjectivity, as the information is seen through the eyes of the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) and objectivity and bias will always be a questionable concept (Berg & Lune, 2017).

Research Design

Crotty (1998) explains that research methodology is an extensive strategy that outlines the choice of specific methods used which connect them to the expected outcomes. Research methodology is the study of how research is done, how we find out about things, and how knowledge is gained (Camic, Rhodes & Yardley, 2003). In other words, methodology is about the principles that guide our research practices and explains how, why and what methods, or tools we use in our research (Kumar, 2011). The features of this study guided the choice of research methodology used (Noor, 2008) and a qualitative approach was chosen.

Qualitative research is a study of people in their own territory within naturally occurring settings, such as schools and homes. Researchers adopting qualitative approaches are interested in how people make sense of the world they live in and how they experience events in their lives (Punch & Qancea, 2014; Miles, Huberman &

Saldana, 2013; Ratvitch & Carl, 2016) The objective of qualitative research is to describe and possibly explain the events and the experiences of people, but never to predict the outcome of the research (Willig, 2013). Qualitative research is generated through in-depth communication with participants, for example, interviews, followed by the analysis and interpretation of the data (Smith & Eatough, 2006). The interpretation of the data will shape the experiences and   perceptions of the events which could lead to possible change (Atkins & Wallace, 2012).

Methods

This research wanted to give meaning to the tangible personal experiences of how things were and how things really worked for six students in the LSC and was focused on students' perspectives on their learning. Semi-structured interview questions were used to collect information verbally in order to understand the underlying perspectives and perceptions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), of the students in the LSC.

Interviewing is the most common method of gathering qualitative data where practices can be recorded and challenged (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Denscombe, 2007). Semi-structured interviews are regarded as a reliable comparable qualitative data collection (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). It is a format used for individuals or even groups. Semi-structured in-depth interviews are open-ended questions and based on the areas that the researcher wants to cover and allows the interviewer and the participant to discuss some questions in more detail (Denscombe, 2007). The benefit of semi-structured interviews is that the interviewer can probe the participant for more information, or follow a new line of inquiry (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Interviewing teenagers needs to be semi-structured, conversational and informal as they need to be at ease and comfortable

with the situation. Informal in-depth interviewing enriches the information collected (Kumar, 2011).

A semi-structured informal conversation was used based on semi-planned questions that were generated spontaneously during the interview (Grey, 2009). As semi-structured interviews are based on an interview guide which needs to be developed by the interviewer, the researcher set a list of broad questions as conversation starters in the area of their learning in the LSC. The researcher followed the guide but was also flexible to adapt and probe as the conversation warranted. A relaxed atmosphere was created to encourage the students to talk about their involvement and learning experiences at school.

Participant recruitment

As the Head of the LSC was familiar with the students attending the learning centre, it was decided by the researcher and with the approval of the principal and BOT of the school, that she would select the students to participate in the study. Students identified by the Head of the LSC met with the researcher where the study was discussed and explained. Willing students under the age of 16 years received an information form to be given to their parents (Appendix1), and students aged 16 and over received an information form to be read and considered by the participant self (Appendix 4).

Participant sample

The most important part of the study design is to find the appropriate participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Selecting participants in qualitative research must be purposeful as the selected participants must be able to best inform the questions and understand the phenomena of the research (Creswell, 2009). Students who would be able

to comprehend the research question (Creswell, 2009) and able to verbalise their perspectives on learning in the LSC were selected. The researcher met with the possible participants individually to explain the research verbally. A thorough selection discussion with the Head of the LSC lead to the following participant criteria: (See Appendix 10).

1. Six students who access the LSC at least three times a week.

2. Students ranging from year level 9-13 (age range under 16, and 16 and above)

3. A mix of gender and ethnicities

4. As Creswell (2009) noted, students who would be able to comprehend the research question.

Qualitative data collection

Potential semi-structured open-ended, in-depth interview questions were developed based on the researcher's professional knowledge as an HOD of Learning support and SENCO, as well as literature related to semi-structured interviews (Denscombe, 2007). These questions were refined and used as guidelines for the researcher (See appendix 11).

Semi-structured interviews of approximately up to 45 minutes with each individual student were conducted over a period of two days. One-to-one interviews were conducted with the students as it was important to hear each student's perception of learning in the LSC. All the interviews were held in a venue pre-arranged with the school and the Head of the LSC. The students were interviewed during a negotiated time with the students and the school that caused the least disruption to their learning.

Data Analysis

The verbatim transcripts were given to the participants to check for correctness to assure the validity of the collected data (Denscombe, 2007). Participants were given the opportunity to read the transcripts of their interviews, correct mistakes, clarify misinterpretations and ambiguities (Denscombe, 2007), where upon the necessary corrections were made.

It was important to become familiarised with the data by reading and re-reading through the entire set of the verbatim transcriptions of the interview recordings collected from each individual student and writing down any impressions of the data, considering the quality of the data that added value. By looking for key words, trends and ideas related to the research questions (Denscombe, 2007), irrelevant information, not related to the research questions, were removed and copies were made of the edited interviewed transcripts.

The analysis of collected data can be described as 'the systematic search for meaning' in order to communicate the results of the data to others (Hatch, 2002). The analysis of gathered data asks the researcher to organise the data into patterns and themes, see relationships between data; explain, interpret, critique and create theories that would give meaning to the collected data (Hatch,2002). The reduction of data was a process that continued throughout the study and involved selection, simplification, abstraction and transformation of the raw data (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). It was a process which combined pieces of information into different themes (Kolb, 2012).

Six phase thematic data analysis method

Given that qualitative research methods are very different, complicated and distinct (Willis, 2007), Braun & Clark's (2006), six phase thematic analysis was used as the

foundational method to analyse the qualitative data as it provides useful core skills for conducting any qualitative analysis.

Willis (2007) value thematic analysis as one of a few shared generic skills across qualitative analysis and explain that thematic methods are not attached to theory and epistemology and can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches. It is compatible with both essentialist and constructionist paradigms within psychology. Due to the theoretical freedom, thematic analysis is established as a flexible and useful tool to provide rich, complex and a detailed account of the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). Braun & Clark (2006) explain that a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. A theme might be given considerable space in some data items or appear in relatively little of the data set. The researcher's judgement is necessary to determine what a theme is and needs to retain some flexibility as rigid rules do not work. A theme is not dependent on quantifiable measures but whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question.

The six phase thematic analysis identified the patterns of meaning across the set of data collected that provided answers to the research question. Even though the phases were sequential, the analysis was a recursive process moving back and forth between the different phases. This flexible analysis method was suitable for the questions related to the students' experiences, views and perceptions on their learning.

Table 1: The six phase thematic analysis process (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Phase:	Description of the process
1. Familiarising with the data:	The data that was transcribed for the researcher was checked by the latter against the original audio recordings for accuracy (Braun & Clark, 2006). A spreadsheet with the different interview question was created and each individual response to the question was added. Repeated reading of the data was necessary to become fully immersed and intimately familiar with the data (Braun & Clark, 2006).
2. Generating initial codes:	Answers to the questions were grouped and different perspectives on central issues were analysed (Goetz & Le Compte, 1981; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Colour codes were attached to chunks of varying-sized words, phrases, sentences and whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific interview question using simultaneous comparisons (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Succinct codes were then generated to identified important patterns, themes and categories of the data that were relevant to answering the research question (Seidel, 1998; Boyatzis, 1998). The codes were collated as well as all the relevant data extracts for later stages of analysis (Tuckett 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Miles,

	Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Careful considered judgement of relevant and irrelevant data was necessary (Dey, 1993).
3. Searching for themes:	Codes were examined, collated and combined into potential themes. A thematic map was put together indicating each potential theme. Data relevant to each potential theme was collected to review the viability of each potential theme. Some codes became main themes, others formed sub-themes and irrelevant codes were discarded. Individual themes and extracts were also identified (Denscombe, 2007). Notes were made on the side of the thematic map to clarify uncertainties and data that did not fit in with any of the themes.
4. Reviewing themes:	This phase involved checking the potential themes against the dataset to determine whether the themes represented the data and answered the research question. A constant comparative analysis method was used to refine the themes by splitting, combining and discarding of some themes (Merriam, 2000) well as the accuracy of the thematic map.
5. Defining and naming themes:	The researcher collected the data through interactive means and therefore came to the analysis with some prior knowledge of the data and some initial analytical thoughts. A detailed analysis of each theme was made by working out the scope and focus of each theme as well as

	determining the content of each theme (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Informative titles for each theme were given.
6. Producing the report:	The final stage involved weaving the analytical narrative and the data extracts together and contextualise the analysis producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Ethics

Any research where the collection of data involves human participants needs ethic approval to benefit the research, minimise risk and protects the participants from harm (Denscombe, 2007). Ethics is required moral fundamental principles which are essential standards and values in how to treat those people involved in the research, with dignity and humanity (Oliver, 2010). As this study involved human beings, full ethics approval was required from Massey University, which was granted in June, 2017 (Appendix 15).

Following discussions with the principal of the secondary school involved in the study, written information regarding the study was given to the principal and the Board of Trustees (BOT) (Appendix 6) where upon permission was sought and granted by the principal and BOT to conduct the study at the school. Permission was also sought and consent was given by the Head of the LSC as she would be involved in the selection of the students (Appendix 8).

Informed consent

Informed Consent is one of the key principles in the guidelines for professional research. It provides the participants with clear information of what they can expect if they wish to participate in a study and it gives them the opportunity to decide whether they would like to be involved in the study or not (Wiles, 2013). Before giving their consent, participants must be well-informed about the purpose of the study, the duration of the study, the risks as well as the benefits of the study. They must also be informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time if they change their mind about participating, and that there will be   no consequences involved (Wiles, 2012).

As some the participants were students under the age of 16, informed consent was asked of the parents/guardians of these students (Appendix 1). Consent was also asked from each individual student under the age of 16 (Appendix 13). Informed consent was also asked of the students 16 years and older (Appendix 4) individually. Participants were introduced to the researcher and the consent information were repeated and the process of the research was thoroughly explained with the participants individually before enrolling them.

Consent forms were stored in locked cupboards in the researcher's office. Anonymity of the school and students were protected using pseudonyms in the written report. All data gathered from student interviews were anonymous and were stored in password protected electronic devices. Full transcripts of student interviews remained confidential to the researcher and supervisors.

Reliability and validity of data

All research studies must address validity and reliability. There is no expectation of replication of a study in a qualitative study (Denscombe, 2007), but it is common to have

the terms quality, rigor or trustworthiness instead of validity, and dependability instead of reliability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). There were different approaches to address validity (quality/rigor/trustworthiness) and reliability (dependability). Guba & Lincoln (1994) suggest four categories to determine reliability and validity of both quantitative and qualitative studies: truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. As perhaps the most important criterion, truth value in this qualitative research was obtained through the discovery of the participants experiences as they were lived and perceived by them; and how confident the researcher was with the truth of the findings based on the research design, participants and the context of the research. Trustworthiness was established when the researcher shared the interview transcription with the participants and received their approval. Applicability was determined by the degree of similarities when the findings fitted into contexts outside the research situation. Important for applicability was the sufficient description of data by the researcher to allow comparison (Lincoln & Guba, 1994)

Consistency in qualitative research was determined by the researcher and the participants. Vital for qualitative research was to learn from the participants and not to control them. As qualitative research emphasises the uniqueness of situations, variation in the situation was sought and not identical repetition (Morse, 1994). This qualitative research therefore was interested in a range of experiences of the participants rather than the average of experiences. A-typical and non-normative situations were important to the findings (Lincoln & Guba,1994). Neutrality, which refers to the exemption from bias in the research and results (Sandelowski, 1986) was maintained as the sole findings of the participants and conditions of the research were sought and any biases and other perspectives were ignored (Guba, 1981). The emphasis was on the neutrality of the data and not the neutrality of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1994).

Context of the students involved in the research study

Students are selected to attend the LSC based on their Progressive Achievement Test (PAT) results. As English was the second language of all the participating students, the PAT test results were important indicators of their proficiency of the English language as all teaching in their subject areas were delivered in English. PAT test are performed at the beginning and end of an academic year, starting from year level 4-10. These multiple-choice tests were designed by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) to help teachers ascertain the achievement levels of students in Mathematics, Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary, and Listening Comprehension. The test results help teachers decide what kinds of teaching materials are needed and which methods or programmes are most suitable for their students. PATs are also important because they identify the progress a student is making from year to year (NZCER, 1987). Students who achieve a low PAT score are selected and withdrawn from and option subject to attend the LSC and receive extra support in their area of weakness.

Table 2: Participants in the study who received learning support

Pseudo name	gender	age	year level	Ethnicity	LS Subjects
Toby	male	13	9	Maori	Reading and comprehension
Ester	female	13	9	Samoan	Reading and comprehension

Ben	male	14	10	Samoan	Reading and comprehension
Priya	female	14	10	Indian	Mathematics & Reading & comprehension
Jack	male	15	11	Vietnamese	Reading & comprehension
Noah	male	17	13	Maori	Mathematics & reading & comprehension

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Findings from the thematic analyses of the students' responses centred around the perception of their school and themselves in relation to their learning; their willingness to get involved in school life; the extent of involvement with their learning; how they feel about being supported by LSC; the students' preferred ways of learning, changes they wanted to the ways in which support was offered through the LSC and a representation of their voice.

The students' perception of their school and themselves in relation to their learning

The students enjoyed being part of the school community and were very proud when they shared the values of the school:

> *Ester: I like the values and what they represent – like being a learner, being respectful and being a student and I like the teachers as well.*

Ben also shared his appreciation for the values of the school and felt *"…it is a great school for kids to learn at"* as some other schools' *"expectations are not up to standard"*.

> *Toby: I like the teachers and some of the students, we have fun.*

It was important for Priya that there was no race discrimination at the school as it made her felt safe and good about her ethnicity.

> *Priya: I like this school is how it is not like … people are not really mean; they don't judge you. Some people are like, you are Indian, but I don't think that it is like that in this school, because there are mainly Indians here now.*

Education was a priority for Priya and she mentioned that some students preferred not to attend school regularly and did not take their learning seriously. She felt that those

students had lost interest and passion for learning, and did not like to be at school anymore.

The students were very appreciative of the school, the values, the encouragement and what the school offered to the students. The students mentioned the values of respect, responsibility and being a learner that the school was advocating, which was very encouraging and positive. This was indicative of the importance of the school's values on the lives of the students.

Extent of willingness to get involved in school life

Most of the students did not make use of the opportunity to be involved in the cultural and sports activities that were offered at the school, even though they were aware of the variety of activities. Noah's interest was in sport activities that were not part of the school's programme.

> *Noah: I don't play sports for the school because I am doing sports out of school. I'm enjoying sports out of school because you get to meet other people outside. I already have commitments outside with my other sports.*

Neither Ben, nor Priya were committed to any school activities as they did not have any passion to be involved with school activities:

> *Ben: I don't do any sports or cultural activities.*

> *Priya: I don't play any sport but I used to be in an Indian dance group.*

Jack preferred not to do any sport at school as he did not see himself as a sport person, but rather being part of organisations that could bring change to the community and school life. Jack showed a heart for helping people in need and was very enthusiastic about his membership with the Youth Health Council.

> *Jack: I am not really that person that does sports because I prefer, I don't*
>
> *know, being smarter I guess, so I am in Youth Health Council.*

Toby and Ester, both year 9 students, participated in the school sport and enjoyed
the activities:

> *Toby: I took part in the cross country and rugby.*
>
> *Ester: I play netball, touch rugby and volleyball but no cultural*
>
> *activities.*

The students, apart from Toby, Ester and Jack preferred not to be involved in any cultural activities, even though opportunities were given to them to be part of cultural practices. The school is known as a multicultural school that acknowledges and encourages the diversity of the students and gives them the opportunity to express their cultural heritage. The two year 9 students who were involved in sport activities, enjoyed their involvement and being part of a school team, although the older students who were not engaged in school sports got involved in wider community activities.

Extent of involvement with their learning

The students' perception and connection with their learning were important indicators of their willingness to get involved with their learning, and demonstrated their awareness of their capability to be successful in their learning. Toby, a year 9 student who attended the LSC, could not decide whether he was satisfied with his learning at school. He was very conscious when answering the question as if he was not sure what to answer and did not want to say anything negative about his learning at school. His hesitance could have been an indication that he was struggling with his learning but did not want to admit it to the researcher.

> *Toby: My learning is good… I think.*

The other participants who attended the LSC admitted undoubtedly that learning in the classroom was a challenging experience for them. Jack felt confident about his learning, but admitted that learning could be arduous at times:

> *Jack: Learning can be difficult but it depends on understanding how it's done, what to do, how you do it and that.*

Ben admitted that learning was a challenge for him as he tended to get easily distracted in the regular class and also distracted his friends. He realised that his distractions had a negative effect on his grades. Even though he was trying to stay focused he could not control his behaviour. Ben's behaviour in the classroom clearly indicated that he needed a different teaching style to stimulate his learning process in the classroom.

> *Ben: My learning … I haven't really tried in my subjects and I am always doing something else besides my learning. So I am trying to start learning on my subjects instead of doing something else. I try to get my grades up high but I am always distracting somebody.*

Priya felt more confident with her learning overall, but struggled with mathematics. She felt devastated that she could not achieve in maths and eventually asked the school counsellor to refer her to the LSC. It was admirable of Priya to acknowledge that she struggled with mathematics and took the initiative to seek for support. The counsellor arranged for her to attend the LSC and since being in the LSC her understanding had improved which was reflected in her grades. Her gratitude towards the LSC was shown when she explained how her understanding of mathematics has improved.

> *Priya: My learning is okay I would say. I struggle in maths. I don't know, maths seems to be hard for me. I take Learning Support Centre and they help me to practice what I have learnt in class and they explain it to me more so I understand*

it better.

Ester had mixed feelings about her learning. She realised that she needed help with mathematics as she experienced difficulty with mathematics, but she also would have liked support in the other subjects as well.

> *Ester: I feel on and off track. Learning is sometimes complicated. Because*
>
> *sometimes I don't understand the Math equation. Learning support doesn't really*
>
> *help in science and social studies.*

Most of the students mentioned that they were not satisfied with their learning in the regular class. They were very aware of their struggle with learning in certain areas of the curriculum. It was not only around the curriculum content but they found it difficult to stay focused in class; they were easily distracted and therefore distracted other students.

How learning in the LSC is different to learning in the mainstream classroom

When comparing the effectiveness of the LSC to regular class teaching, students commented that they did not always have the confidence to ask the subject teachers for further explanation, as they felt they might be judged by the teachers as incompetent.

> *Ester: Sometimes I am like scared to ask but I know I have to ask. But I don't*
>
> *ask because I am scared. Because what they may think of me and they might*
>
> *judge me and all that.*

They also acknowledged that the subject teachers were restricted by time as they were pressured to complete the planned topics for the year, despite the fact that some students did not grasp the content fully. As for the LSC, students had the confidence to ask for

clarification of concepts they did not understand and they agreed that the pace in the LSC was not hurried and they were given the time to process information.

> *Ester: Because for me and other students that don't understand, the teachers will carry on to another topic but some people are still stuck on that one. In the LSC I have the confidence to ask the teacher a question that I don't understand about the story.*

Noah was more outspoken about his learning in the regular classroom compared with his learning experience in the LSC. He mentioned that the teachers' approach in the regular classroom played a major role in the enthusiasm of the students towards the subject. For one of them, it was lack of confidence to approach the teachers in the regular class that slowed his pace of learning. Another described his experience in the LSC as pleasant and he could therefore make progress in his learning.

> *Noah: It depends on the teacher. I have been down the … like everyone in my class is either too afraid to go up and ask for help because she will either put us down. Teachers may screw the rest of my year. The difference between learning support and learning in the classroom is that you honestly get help. They make learning fun and that is what I like. I will get things done better and they allowed you to do that as long as you are doing your work and I think that really helped out my learning.*

Priya also felt there were times in the regular class that she did not understand the content of a subject especially when it was whole class teaching. Even though she did not

understand, she did not have the confidence to as ask for clarification. It is only when she received support in the LSC, that she fully understood the content:

> *Priya: Sometimes I don't understand the teacher in my classroom and what she says, like when the teacher is talking to everyone in the classroom. I don't ask as I get shy. When I come to the LSC and then go back to the classroom it is like I learnt something and I can do it.*

Ben described his learning in the classroom as copying work from the whiteboard:

> *Ben: In the classroom there is ... learning is just look at the board, copy what is on there.*

Students were aware that there were more than thirty students in a regular class and that subject teachers could not attend to each individual student's needs. Noah acknowledged the problem and therefore appreciated the small size classes in the LSC:

> *Noah: It is a small class in Learning Support and that means you get help a bit quicker.*

Ben also showed understanding for the teachers who had to teach and support more than thirty students in a class, and he therefore appreciated the small class sizes of the LSC where he could get individual attention and his learning could be scaffolded.

> *Ben: Learning in the classroom, there is about 30+ students and one teacher and in the Learning Centre there are three students and three teachers, so each student gets a teacher each and it is easier for the teacher to teach you-instead of teaching 30 students at the same time when there could be one-on-one with the student and the teacher and the other 29 students are still trying to figure out what to do.*

> *Ester: I don't really get support in the class because there is only one teacher and there are other students.*

Jack and Priya both appreciated the smaller group teaching in the LSC and explained that one-on-one teaching was more beneficial than large group teaching but realised that it was impossible in a regular class. Jack explained that there were students who did need further clarification of concepts discussed, but they either did not want to ask questions in front of the whole class as they might be the only one who did not understand or there was no time available to ask questions.

> *Jack: If it is one- on- one I learn much better compared to where the teachers explain to the whole class. You don't want to ask questions because everyone kind of gets it and you feel you are the one left out because you don't understand it. In a classroom the teacher can't go all around at once and help you.*
>
> *There are less people in Learning Support, you get more time with the teachers and they help you individually. In Learning Support the teacher come and help you and they have time to explain to you because there are only like five students in Learning Support, whereas there is like 30 or 29 etc.in the classroom. I guess that is more helpful than in the classroom.*
>
> *Priya: In the classroom there are heaps of children and here it is just 4 or 5. I am understanding here in the LSC more than before. The things that I learn here, when I go back to the classroom I know actually what to do even if the teacher explains me what to do because I have learnt it. I talk a bit more to these teachers more than my class teachers. I feel comfortable with them more than my real teachers.*

How did the students feel about being supported by LSC?

The students also had mixed feelings about attending the LSC. The boys were more composed about their attendance and were just focused on the improvement in their subjects.

Jack: It is really relaxing and somewhere where you can take your mind off things

and do work. I find it more comfortable in Learning Support because it is ... more

peaceful I guess. It is so beneficial and will help you in the long run. If you need

help they are there to help you and they will always check if you need help. They

have helped a lot of students with their reading. They explain things very clearly

and in a simpler way.

Toby was very appreciative as his reading level has improved:

"*It helps me more and encourages me to improve on my reading.*"

The students were very pleased with the way that the LSC was operating and the general feeling was that more students should get the opportunity to be supported by the LSC. Noah and Toby supported the way the LSC was operating. The general feeling of the students was that it was a place where they felt relaxed, supported and understood.

The girls were more outspoken and said it was embarrassing to attend the LSC.

Ester: To be honest, it is embarrassing. Sometimes I just want to come late but I

end up being on time. When I come here, other kids look at me and say, oh look

– she needs learning support. What a stupid – you know.

Priya: Sometimes, I don't really want to come. Sometimes I feel a bit of shame

because some people say to me do you go to Learning Support and I am like yeah

and this girl said to me – oh, you must be dumb.

Both girls admitted that they needed support with their learning.

> *Ester: Sometimes I feel good coming here because it is good and I learn and I get better but sometimes I don't because there are people thinking that I am not good. I would much rather go back to my subject that I got taken out of than coming to the Learning Support.*

Both the girls agreed and felt that they needed the support, but the negative comments made by the other students, influenced their confidence.

Perceived advantages of LSC.

The students spoke favourably of the support they received from the teachers at the LSC; how the teaching they received improved their grades in all of their subjects. As their reading and comprehension improved, so did their understanding of text in other subjects. The participants who attended the LSC were appreciative of the learning support they received in improving their literacy and numeracy skills. Noah felt that the LSC definitely benefitted his learning:

> *Noah: Learning support helps me a lot. It helps me understand the work a bit faster and what we are doing. Just the help that they are giving and they will go through the work with you. Because when I am here they ask what are you working on and they would help.*

Ben was not making any progress in his subjects earlier, but since he attended the LSC, he experienced a change in his grades:

Ben: Learning Support showed me that I was falling back on my learning and they helped me to move up my grades and learning. I come to Learning Centre for reading and writing. I feel that it helps me with my learning.

The students mentioned that their written work, reading and comprehension skills in their mainstream subjects had improved. All the students received support to improve their literacy skills whilst two of the students received support in both literacy and numeracy. Noah spoke highly of the support that he received. He also mentioned that the teacher who supported him with his mathematics was on leave for a year and he could not make any progress. Priya also received support in mathematics:

Noah: I get support in different subjects especially maths. I just don't… it takes me longer to understand the subject. They help with Maths, English, drama – all of those things. And so they pretty much try to help out with every subject that you need help with. Because in reading my grades were down, they were bad and then ever since I came to learning support my grades started going up. I usually come to Mr **** for help in math. But since he was off for a year I couldn't ask for his help, so I have been crawling trying to do my best in that.

Priya: I use a different maths book here and so I tell them what I am struggling with and they help me with that. I tell them if I am struggling with angles and they tell me how to do it.

Ester admitted that she needed to attend the LSC as she realised that it was a place where she could receive support in the areas she lacked to be successful in their learning*:*

Ester: To come to improve my reading and writing because I moved two levels up (in reading) and where I am meant to be right now and I love reading now. I have the confidence to ask the teacher a question that I don't understand about the story.

Toby felt that he needed to attend the LSC: "*Yeah, I think I should come to catch up on my reading because I don't like reading a little bit*". Jack also admitted that his reading and comprehension skills had improved since he started attending the LSC. Ben struggled with his written work, punctuation and parts of speech. Since attending the LSC, he experienced a huge improvement in his writing.

> *Jack: My reading comprehension score was quite low so I had to come and get some help with my reading comprehension. After going through the levels I got re-tested and my level had increased.*

> *Ben: It has helped my understanding of punctuation, reading and writing. Big words like preposition words and plurals, prefix, adjectives, verbs and all those kinds of things. They help me with my writing. The reading and comprehension gives you questions about the story and your answers are from the story that you read.*

The students spoke openly about their learning issues and low grades at school before they started attending the LSC. They were very positive when discussing the support that they received. Students felt confident to ask for help and felt they were not judged. They received support mainly to improve their literacy skills as well as numeracy skills. However, students also asked for support in other subjects which they found difficult.

The students' preferred way of learning

When asking the students about their preferred way of learning, they described a range of learning preferences. Even though Toby was indecisive about his preferred way of learning, "*I'm not sure*", the other students were very specific about their way. Priya and Toby both preferred written notes on the whiteboard so that they could copy the

information down to revise later. Ben preferred to work alone but would like the teacher to do one-on-one teaching with him. Jack also favoured one-on-one support from the teacher:

> *Priya: I prefer written notes on the board. When I read it myself, I can understand better.*

> *Toby: I learn when the teacher writes on the whiteboard. I copy it down into my book. I leave it and then when I want to review it I can read through it again to understand better.*
>
> *Jack: I prefer one-on-one. I learn much better compared to in the classroom where the teachers explain to the whole class.*

> *Ben: I prefer to learn alone. I want teachers to explain how it is done and what to do instead of telling me what is on the board. I want them to show me what to do and how it is done and then I will end up doing it in the right way.*

The students were also in favour of group work where they could work together in small groups; have the opportunity to discuss the content with their group members; learn from each other; are confident to ask questions and also discuss their opinions without being judged. The students indicated that some subject teachers allowed group learning and the students appreciated it. Some teachers in the regular classes allowed students to choose their own groups or they were put in groups.

> *Noah: The teachers will show you how to do this and then they will let you do it in group work. I like group work a lot. That seems to help me enjoy learning.*
>
> *Ben: Group work helps others that are stuck and struggling and trying to ask questions and they can get help.*

Jack: If you are in a group someone can clarify some things because they might have asked questions that you want to ask.

Ester: I prefer the teacher giving us more activities to do, like stuff to do outside of class. I like group work. because… I am hearing other people's opinions on the topic.

Jack commented on teacher-student relationships in regards to punishment and referred to a teacher-student 'punishment' situation that occurred at school. He spoke out about his perception of the treatment.

Jack: Some teachers are strict but they are overly too strict. I had a science teacher where if you didn't do homework he would make you stand outside. I do a youth health council group where it tells you that teachers can't degrade your treatment which is about your education because you always have a right to get education. So basically he makes you stand outside so that is pretty much degrading treatment because you can't learn outside. He lets you stand there in the cold. There is really nothing you can do about it because he is a teacher and you are a student and you can't really do much about it, unless you talk to a Dean about the teacher. Asides that there is nothing you can do about it.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study was aimed at understanding the perceptions and experiences of six secondary school students who received support at a LSC. The methodology centred on exploring the perspectives and attitudes of the students who attended the LSC. The findings revealed important and interesting accounts of the students' perceptions of their schooling and their learning in the LSC. It was clear that the students who attended the LSC appreciated the support that they received and spoke highly of the difference the support made to their learning in class. The valuable support and acknowledgement that these students received in the LSCs to improve their learning, revealed the school's positive commitment to assist the students and respect their individual needs. Although these students were positively motivated and equipped to achieve with the support they received in the LSC, they could also identify the stigma it carried among peers and an underlying message that regular classrooms would be their preferred place of learning if it could accommodate their learning requirements. This chapter is framed around the overarching research questions for this project.

The students' perception of their school and themselves in relation to their learning

This research revealed that the students were proud of the school they were attending and supportive of the values the school was promoting. The students spoke freely about the values of respect, being respectful and what a good learner is. Noticeable was the students' ability and enthusiasm to share their views and endorse the values of the school in matters that affected them. Despite these values, the students did not see these values being played out in practice in the classroom. In relation to inclusive

education the notion of school values is important as it is what underpins everything that is said and done in a school. The students indicated that the school has some way to go in order to be seen as inclusive.

> *"I learn much better in the LSC compared to where the teachers*
> *explain to the whole class. You don't want to ask questions because*
> *everyone kind of gets it and you feel you are the one left out because*
> *you don't understand it. In a classroom the teacher can't go all around*
> *at once and help you".*

Extent of willingness to get involved in school life

As affirmed by Vygotsky (1979), Rogoff (1990) & Lundy (2006), the teachers worked collaboratively with the students to develop appreciation for other cultures and social relationships. The social relationships with teachers as supported by Beattie (2012) Bauersfeld (1995), Von Glaserfeld (1998) & Prout (2001), played an important role in the contentment of students at school and effected the students' enthusiasm and motivation for their learning and participation in activities. These students felt appreciated as their cultural diversity was recognised and valued.

Students' commitment and enthusiasm in wider school life could be an indication of their commitment and enthusiasm to learning (Cowan, 2005). Students were given the choice to participate in extra-curricular activities and could decide whether they would like to join any of the offered activities. Students could use their voice in decisions that affect their lives (Rogoff, 1990) and as students grow older and mature, they are given more responsibility and their voice in decision making in matters that affect them should weigh more (Alderson, 2000; Lundy 2006). Noticeable was the junior secondary (year 9) students' involvement and enthusiasm in extra-curricular activities. Year 9 students

usually continued with the intermediate school culture of team sport and group play. They enjoyed participating in sport activities and being part of a team sport, whilst the older students expressed that they have lost interest in participating in school activities and preferred to socialise with their friends instead.

In certain cultures, parents still carry weight in the decision making of their children lives. Some parents used their authority to make decisions in regards to their children's participation in extracurricular activities as well as subject choices. According to Article 12, children should be given participation rights to express their views freely in matters that affect them in accordance with their age and maturity (Alderson, 2000). Hargreaves (2004) emphasises that students should play an active role in in their learning and schooling as their voice and choice will encourage them to become more co-owners of their learning.

Extent of involvement with their learning

Flutter & Ruddock (2004) & Hargreaves (2004) emphasised that students need to have a voice in their learning as this creates a feeling of membership and a positive attitude towards themselves and their learning. Students who are given the opportunity to have a say in decisions at school that affect them will become more attentive and responsive of their learning (Hargreaves, 2004) and adults have the legal obligation to give students the space and voice to express their views, listen to their views and give their views due weight (Lundy, 2006).

The difficulties the students experienced with their learning suggested a need for democratic education where students' voice should lead to authentic contributions and involvement in their education (Elwood, 2013). The students expressed their desire to improve their learning, but were unaware that they had a voice in matters that concern

them (Elwood, 2013). They explained the difficulty they experienced to grasp information taught in a regular whole class teaching situation where it was the norm to teach to the whole class, rather than taking into consideration the individual strengths and needs of students. The students admitted that they felt lost at times in their learning as individualised, one-to-one contact between teacher and learner was not happening. The students expressed that they had their preferred teaching and learning styles that will optimise their learning, but felt it was impossible to request that in a whole class teaching situation. Whole class teaching could be challenging for both teacher and students (Scager, Akkerman, Pilot & Wubbels, 2017). However, adult guidance and support, according to Lundy (2006) and Vygotsky (1979), will enhance skilful development of the child. Social interaction with an adult provides the opportunity for a *zone of proximal development*. Small group learning in the regular classrooms enhances collaboration between teachers and students and give an opportunity for learners to become increasingly independent thinkers and problem solvers (Howard,1994; Jensen, 1998; Sousa, 2001; Wolfe, 2001).

The students felt that they were left behind in their learning as the teachers in the regular class teaching 'rushed' through the curriculum content they had to deliver within the time frame allocated for each curriculum strand. They commented that some students were able to keep up with the speed and the content information, while other students struggled as certain content information was too difficult to comprehend within the time frame. Some students, due to their difficulties they experienced with their learning, needed more time to comprehend the content information. Differentiation in curriculum content will enable all students to perform at their appropriate level and personal best. Differentiated learning in the regular classroom has been recognised as the learning

strategy that not only accommodates a wide variety of students with different learning and scaffolding needs, but is a learner-centred approach (Gaitas & Martins, 2017).

Learning should always be to advance the child's current level of mastery and teachers should therefore teach within the child's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky,1978) and will more likely sustain effort to learn if tasks get more difficult (Lundy, 2006; Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000). The students valued the support they received in the LSC as the learning content and speed were adjusted to their level and individualised support was given when needed. Students felt confident and respected as they progressively improved and moved up in levels of achievement.

Being successful in their learning was prioritised by the students. The students were genuinely concerned about their learning and expressed their concern about the difficulties that they experience. They disclosed that they did not always have the confidence to approach the regular subject teachers for clarification of subject matter as they feared to be belittled or be perceived as unintelligent. And in fact they said that other students referred to them as dumb because they attended the LSC, implicating that the structures in the school not only meant that students did not have a voice, they also experienced exclusion. One year 9 student pointed out that he easily lost focus in class and then tended to distract other students. Students blame themselves for being 'disruptive' in class and might see this as their problem. Important to consider is that the problem might lie with the teacher and classroom and that work needs to be done in order to change the approach for teaching to be inclusive of all students. For a child to be meaningful engaged in their learning, it is necessary to give them the opportunity to express their views about their learning (Lundy, 2006). The classroom should be a sheltered environment for students where students feel safe and supported and have the

confidence to discuss difficulties they experience with the content of the subject. Students mentioned that they would rather ask their peers for clarification of difficult concepts as they did not have the confidence to approach the teacher for further explanation fearing to be judged as stupid or blamed for being distracted. Cook-Sather (2006) states that the best way of mastering the art of teaching is to listen to what students have to say, the feedback they give about their learning and to make changes based on their views.

One participant mentioned strict teachers in regular classrooms could ruin a student's self-image with put-downs and degrading of students, resulting in a change of the student's attitude towards their learning of the subject. Jack made a strong comment that students did not have a voice to express themselves when treated unfairly for homework not done. It is important to recognise that children's relationship with the educator who are in a power position, as well as the students' experiences in the classroom as social beings and not social becomings, shape the students' values, beliefs and skills and effect their future plans (Prout, 2001).

How learning in the LSC is different to learning in the mainstream classroom

The small group sizes in the LSC was a positive encouragement for the students as there were at the most 4-5 students at a time in the LSC. Individual attention created a relationship of trust between the students and the LAs. The students received more individual attention with their learning and the LAs spent time scaffolding difficult concepts to the students making sure that they understood the content (Vygotsky, 1978). In contrast, students felt that they experienced failure in their learning in the regular classrooms of 30+ students.

How did the students feel about being supported by LSC?

The key elements of Article 12, according to Lundy (2006) are students' right to express their views and the right to have their view given due weight. All but one of the students were told by their home room teachers to attended the LSC based on their Progressive Achievement Test (PAT) results. Only one student requested to attend the LSC based on the difficulty she experienced with mathematics. Some students didn't have a chance to say that they didn't really want to be in the LSC or to have their preferences addressed in this regard; some had a terrible time in the regular classroom, but they had no opportunity to talk about this or for the situation to be fixed. Students liked learning in groups yet this did not seem to be understood by some teachers who took a "whole class" approach.

The six students who accessed the learning support had definitive perceptions of pros and cons of being part of the LSC. Despite perceiving advantages, there were also some disadvantages that could impact the self-esteem of students. The female students, were very sensitive about going the LSC, whilst the male students did not have any reservations in attending the LSC. The male students who attended the LSC did not experience any put downs from their fellow male students whilst the female students felt embarrassed and self-conscious as they were verbally put down with unpleasant remarks by their peers for attending the LSC. They were seen as 'stupid' and worthless probing whether the stigma associated with students who learn differently and find leaning difficult still exists within the school culture and structure leading to the exclusion of students who attend the LSC. In effect, does an existing, separate structure like a LSC simply reinforces "us and them" culture that works against student belonging and learning? The professional challenge for teachers might be to adopt pedagogies where the primary focus of teaching is the enhancement of students learning capacity, not the

limitation (Hart, et al, 2004); differentiated learning (Tomlinson, & Imbeau, 2010; Tomlinson, 2014); *Universal Design for Learning* (UDL) to improve and optimize learning experiences for all learners (Meyer, Gordon & Rosenthal, 2014) and inclusive pedagogies (Corbett, 2001) that will allow them to respond to the diverse range of learners in their classrooms. (Silver, Strong & Perini, 2000).)

One of the female students admitted that she would much rather be in her general class with her friends than attending the LSC. From this student's perspective it is vital that the class teachers become capable at teaching all students as it is a terrible compromise for this student to be withdrawn from her class group and her friends. Research has shown that differentiated child-centred teaching in mixed ability classrooms can be effective for all students regardless of their gender or socio-economic status (Vygotsky, 1978; McAdams, 2001) and student's passions, ambitions, interest and choices should be taken into account based upon their individual needs, values, beliefs, opinions and cultural backgrounds (Education Reform, 2013). When students realise that they have an impact on their learning and what mattered to them, they will experience self-worth and respect and will be better equipped to manage their own process of learning (Shannon, 1993). It is therefore important for students to have a voice in educational and pedagogical approaches; for schools to have a curriculum that is child-centred and adults who respond to their learning, provide support and resources and share responsibility.

Perceived advantages of LSC.

The students who attended the LSC appreciated the Learning Assistants' (LAs) patience and dedication to explain difficult concepts to them. Ester acknowledged the LAs fairness in treating all the students the same and that the students could work at their

own pace in a relaxed atmosphere. Priya affirmed that the LAs helped her to practice what she had learnt in the regular class and they explained the content to her so she could have a better understanding. Noah explicitly praised the LAs for the support he received in the LSC as he genuinely received assistance and encouragement with his learning. As humans are social entities who feel valued when they can work as partners in a meaningful relationship towards a common goal, it is important that students should be given the space and the audience (adults) to support them. Such partnerships fosters ownership which will spark motivation and drives learning (Beattie ,2012). Rogoff (1990) explained that the development of a child's natural, social and cognitive process is an apprenticeship which occurs through guided participation and support of adults, stretching their understanding of skills.

The SENCO of the school, who was also the supervisor of the LAs, assisted the students who needed support with mathematics, worked collaboratively with TAs (McInnery & McInnery, 2002), to guide and support the students.

Online mathematic programmes, supported with extra exercises were given to students to improve their skills and confidence. Vygotsky, (1978) and Lundy (2007) explained that with the support of a teacher, the child can be guided, coached and pushed to the zone of independence as new learning took place. With the scaffolding that the students received in the LCS students felt that their levels of comprehension of subject matter and written expressions had improved. Students also experienced a positive difference in their subject outcomes as result of support received.

These students appreciated the one-on-one teaching they received in the LSC as it built a strong positive relationship between the students and the LAs in the LSC. Students felt valued and as they participated in their learning and received acknowledgement for

their achievements. Well-developed structures in schools that promote the inclusive practices to teaching and learning of students will encourage the class teacher to be the facilitator who guides, directs, scaffolds and promotes new patterns of thinking for the learner and will not only encourage the learner to take responsibility for his own learning but also the confidence to take risks with his learning (Bauersfeld,1995; Von Glaserfeld,1998; Vygotsky, 1978). When students realise that they can have an impact on the things that matter to them, they will experience self-worth and respect and will be better equipped to manage their own learning processes (Flutter & Ruddick, 2004). Changes to the school's structures and culture will encourage the students to prefer learning in the classroom to learning in the LSC where group learning with their peers can be the norm.

Limitations:

Other than English language proficiency of the participants as mentioned in the Methodology chapter, time constraint was a major limitation of this research.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The students spoke highly of the school and felt privileged to be a student at the school. They described the school environment as supportive and they were very respectful of the values the school promoted.

The year 9 students participated in sport activities but had no interest in getting involved with cultural activities. The year 10 -13 students acknowledged and appreciated the schools' support, commitment and respect for their cultural diversity as well as the efforts to promote and keep their cultural identity active at school but had lost interest in all sport and cultural activities provided at the school and were not interested in representing the school in any of those activities. The students also appreciated that they were given a choice to participate in extra-curricular. As these students were in their teenage stage in quest for their identity, they preferred socialising with friends to cultural or sport involvement at school.

The New Zealand Curriculum and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa direct the student learning and provide guidance for schools. Eight learning areas are specified in the National Curriculum and English, mathematics, Science and social studies are considered to be core subjects in the students' learning. All the year 9 & 10 students had to study their core subjects and were not given the choice to choose their core subjects. They could choose two/three optional subjects. All the students who attended the LSC found the core subjects arduous, but could unfortunately only receive learning support in English (reading and comprehension) as well as mathematics. The LSC students received no support for science and social studies even though the students identified the need for support in those areas as high. The optional subjects (e.g. music, drama, art) were enjoyable as they had a choice in selecting those subjects; unfortunately, some of the LS students had to scarify their optional subjects to attend the LSC.

The students were not satisfied with their personal learning in the regular classroom and admitted that they needed support. They described the classwork as very challenging and they struggled most of the time with the content. There was no differentiation in the learning content and class activities. One of the students mentioned that there were some teachers who were really interested in the students' wellbeing and wanted them to do well and others who were not supportive and causing them to lose interest in the subject.

All but one of the students were told to attend the LSC. Even though they were very appreciative of the support they were given and recognised that their literacy and numeracy skills had improved, they felt that they never had a voice in the decision making of their learning. The students expressed that they would have liked to receive learning support in other subject areas as well and not just in reading and comprehension. Only one of the students who attended the LSC indicated that she specifically asked to attend the LSC to improve her mathematics skills, which was granted.

This research revealed that student voice in the regular classrooms was limited and teachers were still the authoritative person in the classroom. Students in the regular classroom were passive learners who did not have a voice in how they would have preferred to be taught and they had no input in the content of their learning. The discipline in some of the regular classes were very rigid and students were too scared to ask questions or further explanations. Students did not have the courage to approach the teacher for support. Student did not feel confident to ask for clarification if uncertain of concepts.

Compared to their learning in the regular classroom, students who attended the LSC could work at their own pace while completing the set tasks. They appreciated the one-on-one scaffolding in their learning that they received from the teacher aides. The teacher

aides were very patient when support and explaining the content and used a variety of tutoring strategies.

The preferred way of learning varied amongst the students. Some students indicated that they were either hands-on learners, auditory learners or visual learners. Students explained that they preferred one-on-one collaboration time with their regular class teacher, but realised that it was impossible with 30+ students in the class as well as a time restriction getting through the subject content planned for the year. Therefore, students preferred group work learning to whole class teaching. Students explained that they could learn from each other by discussing and explaining the work to each other. They suggested that a group leader, who was well equipped with the content of the subject should lead the group discussions and explanations. Some teachers do allow group work in the regular classrooms, but for the majority of regular class teaching, the teacher is still in control.

Practical recommendations

To accomplish the goal set by the NZ government that 85% of all 18-year old students should achieve their NCEA Level 2 or equivalent by 2017, students need to be motivated and inspired to complete their secondary schooling. Research has shown that the academic achievement of students will improve if the students have a voice in how their learning is conducted and how it is concluded (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Student motivation will rise if they feel they have a choice, control, challenges and opportunities for collaboration in their learning (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). It is important for adolescents, who are developing their sense of identity and complex thinking, to have the opportunity to influence decision-making that affects them. Student-centred learning will enhance self-determination and increase motivation for academic achievement. Giving

students a voice in their education may elevate marginalised student achievement, improve classroom participation and self-reflection, decrease behaviour problems and improve the learning of students who are at risk of not achieving.

For education to be effective, policies that address specific teaching and learning issues should be well implemented. Policies should focus on the changing of classroom practices, building teachers' competencies and the engagement of all stake holders.

Limitations

A significant limitation of this study was the small number of participants and the fact that the focus was on one particular school who has a LSC for students ranging from year 9 – 13. This along with the qualitative nature of the study made it difficult to generalise the outcome of the study (Patton, 2002). Another limitation was that the students were all from the same school and the school was located in a large urban city. Nevertheless, as an exploratory study, it has highlighted issues around students' perceptions of their voices being heard in the spirit of Article 12 that needs further investigation.

The aim of this research was to get students from all year levels at the school involved, i.e. levels 9-13, but had more participants from the junior secondary section. Due to the small sample size, these findings were merely focused on a rich understanding of a specific situation that involved students who attended a LSC that supported their learning at school. This study has highlighted the need for more research into student voice in education and the need for legislation, policies and curriculum development to implement Article 12 for an equitable education system and lends itself for replication.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

INFORMATION SHEET for PARENTS/ CAREGIVERS/ GUARDIAN of STUDENTS UNDER 16 YEARS OF AGE.

Project Title:

How do Learning Support Centres support us? Student voices from a secondary school.

I am a post-graduate student at Massey University studying towards the completion of my Master's Degree in Educational Psychology. My two supervisors in this study are Dr. Vijaya Dharan and Dr. Jude MacArthur. I am undertaking a study of student perspectives and experiences of their learning in the Learning Support Centre (LSC). I am a secondary teacher myself and I have experience working in in Learning Support Centres. I would like to invite your son/daughter to be one of the participants to be involved in my study as he/she is receiving learning support through the LSC in the school.

What am I planning to do?

In this study I want to know what learning means to your son/daughter and how learning is for them in the LSC. I will ask how learning in the LSC is different to their learning in the classroom and what they would like to change about their learning in the LSC. In short, I want to hear their perceptions and experiences of the LSC at the school.

The summary of findings from my study will be shared with the school and with you after my thesis has been submitted and marked. In this study, your son/daughter's name

will not be mentioned and a pseudonym will be used to protect their anonymity at all times.

Each student will be provided with a summary of the key findings in a format that is accessible to them.

Who will be involved in the study?

I will interview 6 students who receive learning support. If you give consent for your son/daughter to participate, he/she will be one of these 6 students.

What will it mean for your child?

I will ask your child about his/her learning in the LSC. This will be an informal semi-structured interview. I will have questions prepared and your son/daughter will have an opportunity to tell me about their perception of learning in the LSC. The interview will take up to 45 minutes. I will talk with your son/daughter at a time that is convenient for them and does not interfere with their learning time. I will record our conversation on my mobile phone and the recordings will be typed up. I will share these typed transcripts with your son/daughter to make sure they agree with the accuracy of the transcript.

 What are your son's/daughter's rights?

If you consent for your son/daughter to be involved in the study they can:

- decline to answer any particular question;

- withdraw from the study two days after the interview transcripts have been shared with your child.

- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;

- ask for the cell phone recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview

- provide information on the understanding that their names will not be mentioned in the study and a pseudonym can be chosen by your child.

- the right to review the transcripts.

They will be provided with a consent form to sign after the researcher has explained the study to them. All the interview information will be confidential and your son's/daughter's name will not be mentioned in the project report, or any written materials. All data gathered from the interviews will be stored in password protected electronic devices. Full transcripts of student interviews will remain confidential to the researcher and the two supervisors.

Parents/caregivers/guardians will receive the recording of their child's interview if they should wish to.

Sometimes a child might say something in the interview that I think the school counsellor might need to know about. For example, something bad may have happened at school, or the child might feel they need some help with people bullying him/her, I will only let the counsellor know what they said if they agree. If I feel that the child is at risk of any harm (physically or emotionally), I will have to inform the school counsellor without the child's or parent's permission to ensure that the child is safe at school.

If you agree to your son/daughter being in the study, please sign the attached Consent Form and return it to the school office to be collected by me, the researcher. Should you have any questions regarding the study please do not hesitate to contact me at any stage of the project.

Researcher:

1.Ria Jacobs

M.Ed. Psychology post graduate student

Massey University

riaja@elim.school.nz

Tel: 027 533 0880

Supervisors:

  1.Dr. Vijaya M.Dharan

Senior Lecturer

Institute of Education

Massey University

Tel: 06-3569099 ext. 84315

E-mail:

v.m.dharan@massey.ac.nz

2.Dr. Jude MacArthur

Senior Lecturer

Institute of Education

Massey University

Phone: 0277415413

Email: J.A.MacArthur@massey.ac.nz

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application NOR 17/26. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Ralph Bathurst, Acting Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, email: humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz

INFORMATION SHEET for STUDENTS 16 YEARS OF AGE & ABOVE.

Project Title:

How do Learning Support Centres support us? Student voices from a secondary school.

My name is Ria Jacobs. I am a post-graduate student at Massey University studying towards the completion of my Master's Degree in Educational Psychology. My two supervisors in this study are Dr. Vijaya Dharan and Dr. Jude MacArthur. I am a secondary teacher myself and I have experience working in in Learning Support Centres. I am doing a study to understand how students, who get support in the Learning Support Centre (LSC), learn. I would like to invite you to participate in the above study.

What am I planning to do?

In this study I want to know what learning means to you and how learning is for you in the LSC. I will ask you how learning in the LSC is different to your learning in the classroom. I would like to ask you what you like about going to the LSC and what you don't like. I want to know what you would like to change about your learning in the LSC (if there is anything you would like to change).

I will ask you to choose a time for our discussion that suits you. I will record the discussion I have with you and the things you tell me about your learning in the LSC. I will talk with you up to 45 minutes at the beginning of the study. I will record the interview on my cell phone and I will type up the interview. I will then go through it with you to make sure that you are happy with what you have said. Your name will be

confidential in the study as well as when I write about the study. You can choose a pseudonym for yourself in the study if you want to.

Sometimes you might say something in the interview that I think your school counsellor might need to know about. For example, something bad may have happened at school, or you might feel you need some help with people bullying you, I will only let the school counsellor know what you said if you agree. If I feel you are at risk of any harm (physical or emotional), I will have to inform the school counsellor without your permission to ensure that you are safe at school.

Who will be involved in the study?

I will be talking with 6 students who receive learning support. If you agree to be in the study, you will be one of them.

What will it mean for you?

This study is to find out what learning means to you and how you would like to lean in the LSC. What will motivate you to learn and improve your learning and your results.

What are your rights?

If you agree (give your consent) to be involved in the study, you can:

- tell me if you do not want to answer a certain question

- withdraw from the study within two days after the interview transcripts have been shared with you.

- ask me any questions at anything time about the study

- ask me at any time to turn off the phone recorder when we are talking.

- talk to me knowing that your name will not be mentioned or used (unless you give permission to me).

If you want to be part of the study, please sign the Consent Form and give it to (name of person) at the reception office to give it to me (Ria).

Researcher:

1.Ria Jacobs

M.Ed. Psychology post graduate student

Massey University

riaja@elim.school.nz

Tel: 027 533 0880

  Supervisors:

1.Dr. Vijaya M.Dharan

Senior Lecturer

Institute of Education

Massey University

Tel: 06-3569099 ext. 84315

E-mail:

v.m.dharan@massey.ac.nz

  2.Dr. Jude MacArthur

Senior Lecturer

Institute of Education

Massey University

Phone: 0277415413

Email: J.A.MacArthur@massey.ac.nz

  This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics

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conduct of this research, please contact Dr Ralph Bathurst, Acting Chair, Massey

University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz

APPENDIX 6

INFORMATION SHEET for PRINCIPAL AND BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Project Title:

How do Learning Support Centres support us? Student voices from a secondary school.

Introduction and Invitation:

I am a post-graduate student at Massey University studying towards the completion of my Master's Degree in Educational Psychology. My two supervisors in this study are Dr. Vijaya Dharan and Dr. Jude MacArthur. I would like to undertake a study in your school to understand students' perspectives and experiences in the Learning Support Centre (LSC), and I would like to invite your school to participate in this study. I am a secondary teacher myself and I have experience working in in Learning Support Centres.

Project Description

There has been no study done to date in New Zealand about the ways in which Learning Support Centres (LSC) in secondary schools work. Since there are students with a range of learning difficulties who are supported by learning centres, it is vital that we hear the voices of these students regarding the nature and effectiveness of the support they receive in the LSCs. This study aims to understand what learning means to the students who access the LSC. In particular, the study aims to find out their perspectives and experiences of the LSC. This study is contextualised within The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Article 12 which encourages

adults to listen to the opinions of children and involve them when decisions are being made concerning them.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

The key participants for this study will be 6 students, who attend the LSC, identified by the Head of Learning Support. This could include students who receive ORS funding; students who experience learning and behaviour challenges; students who have literacy support, and so on. Criteria for participant selection include:

- Students in Years 9-13.

- Students who access the LSC at least three times a week.

- A mixed gender and ethnicity.

- Range of curriculum areas for which they receive learning support.

- Students who are able to communicate in English.

 Project Procedures

Information sheets and corresponding consent forms will be given to the Head of Learning Support, students, and parents of students under 16 years of age. I will talk with students initially to explain the study to them and to ensure that they understand what their participation involves.

Following consent from the Head of Learning Support, students, and parents, I will use an informal and conversational interview format to explore students' perspectives on the learning supports they receive, including the places, spaces and people involved in that support. This means that I will have some questions to ask the students, but there will be opportunities for students to also talk about what is important to them when it comes to learning support. Student interviews will be up to 45 minutes. A time will be negotiated with the student and LSC staff to ensure there is no disruption to their learning time.

Students might feel uncomfortable and hesitant to discuss their honest perspectives and experiences of learning in the LSC, however, should students experience any distress as a result of the study, I will work with the school's principal and pastoral care staff on processes to address the effects of any discomfort.

Sometimes a child might say something in the interview that I think the school counsellor might need to know about. For example, something bad may have happened at school, or the child might feel they need some help with people bullying him/her, I will only let the counsellor know what they said if they agree. If I feel that the child is at risk of any harm (physically or emotionally), I might have to inform the school counsellor without the child's or parent's permission to ensure that the child is safe at school.

Data Management

Consent forms will be stored in locked cupboards in my office. Confidentiality of the school and students will be protected using pseudonyms in the written report. All data gathered from student interviews will be confidential and will be stored in password protected electronic devices. Full transcripts of student interviews will remain confidential to myself and my supervisors. A summary of the final report will be provided to the school. All raw data will be stored for a period of five years following the completion of the project and will be disposed of by my supervisors.

Each student will be provided with a summary of the key findings in a format that is accessible to them.

Participating students have the following rights:

- They will be under no obligation to accept this invitation. If they decide to participate, they will have the right to:
- decline to answer any particular question;

- students can withdraw from the study two days after the interview transcripts have been shared with them.

- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;

- student participants can ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview

- provide information on the understanding that their names will be confidential and not be used unless given permission to the researcher;

- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

Researcher:

Ria Jacobs

M.Ed. Psychology post graduate student

Massey University

riaja@elim.school.nz

Tel: 027 533 0880

Supervisors:

1.Dr. Vijaya M.Dharan

Senior Lecturer

Institute of Education

Massey University

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E-mail:

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humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz

APPENDIX 8

INFORMATION SHEET FOR THE HEAD OF LEARNING SUPPORT

Project Title:

How do Learning Support Centres support us? Student voices from a secondary school.

Introduction and Invitation:

I am a post-graduate student at Massey University studying towards the completion of my Master's Degree in Educational Psychology. My two supervisors in this study are Dr. Vijaya Dharan and Dr. Jude MacArthur. I would like to undertake a study in your school to understand students' perspectives and experiences in the Learning Support Centre (LSC), and I would like to invite you to participate in this study. I am a secondary teacher myself and I have experience working in in Learning Support Centres.

Project Description

There has been no study done to date in New Zealand about the ways in which Learning Support Centres (LSC) in secondary schools work. Since there are students with a range of learning difficulties who are supported by learning centres, it is vital that we hear the voices of these students regarding the nature and effectiveness of the support they receive in the LSCs. This study aims to understand what learning means to the students who access the LSC. In particular, the study aims to find out their perspectives and experiences of the LSC. This study is contextualised within The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Article 12, which encourages

adults to listen to the opinions of children and involve them when decisions are being made which involve them.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

The key participants for this study will be approximately 6 students, who attend the LSC. This could include students who receive ORS funding; students who experience learning and behaviour challenges; students who have literacy support, and so on. The selected students should meet the following criteria:

☐ Students in Years 9-13.

☐ Students who access the LSC at least three times a week.

☐ A mixed gender and ethnicity.

☐ Range of curriculum areas for which they receive learning support.

☐ Students who are able to communicate in English.

Project Procedures

Information sheets and corresponding consent forms will be given to the Head of Learning Support, students, and parents of students under 16 years of age. I will talk with students initially to explain the study to them and to ensure that they understand what their participation involves.

Following consent from the Head of Learning Support, students, and parents, I will use an informal and conversational interview format to explore students' perspectives on the learning supports they receive, including the places, spaces and people involved in that support. This means that I will have some questions to ask the students, but there will be opportunities for students to also talk about what is important to them when it comes to

learning support. Student interviews will be up to 45 minutes. A time will be negotiated with the student and LSC staff to ensure there is no disruption to their learning time.

Students might feel uncomfortable and hesitant to discuss their honest perspectives and experiences of learning in the LSC, however, should students experience any distress as a result of the study, I will work with the school's principal and pastoral care staff on processes to address the effects of any discomfort.

 Sometimes a child might say something in the interview that I think the school counsellor might need to know about. For example, something bad may have happened at school, or the child might feel they need some help with people bullying him/her, I will only let the counsellor know what they said if they agree. If I feel that the child is at risk of any harm (physically or emotionally), I might have to inform the school counsellor without the child's or parent's permission to ensure that the child is safe.

 Data Management

Consent forms will be stored in locked cupboards in my office. Confidentiality of the school, students will be protected using pseudonyms in the written report. All data gathered from student interviews will be confidential and will be stored in password protected electronic devices. Full transcripts of student interviews will remain confidential to myself and my supervisors. A summary of the final report will be provided to the school. All raw data will be stored for a period of five years following the completion of the project and will be disposed of by me and my supervisors.

Each student will be provided with a summary of the key findings in a format that is accessible to them.

Participating students have the following rights:

- They will be under no obligation to accept this invitation. If they decide to participate, they will have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;

- students can withdraw from the study two days after the interview transcripts have been shared with them.

- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;

- student participants can ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview

- provide information on the understanding that their names will be confidential.

- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

Researcher:

1.Ria Jacobs

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APPENDIX 10

Project Title:

How do Learning Support Centres support us? Student voices from a secondary school.

Criteria for the selection of the students to be interviewed:

The Head of Learning Support will identify students who meet the following criteria:

- Students in Years 9-13.

- Students who access the LSC at least three times a week.

- A mixed gender and ethnicity.

- Range of curriculum areas for which they receive learning support.

- Students who are able to communicate in English.

The interviewer will not make use of a third person in the interview room, e.g. an interpreter to be involved with the interviews, as it will be difficult to find suitable interpreters for the different students. This will also make the study more complicated as students might be misunderstood by the interpreter and the authenticity of the answers might get lost.

 The language of communication will be English and the students selected should therefore be able to understand and interpret the questions as well as respond verbally in English.

No written responses will be accepted as the interview questions will be recorded to be transcribed. Written responses will be too time consuming and legibility of handwritten responses might be an issue.

APPENDIX 11

Project Title:

How do Learning Support Centres support us? Student voices from a secondary school.

Interview guide:

Semi-structured informal qualitative interviews question will be the focus of these interviews with the individual students. The interviews will be informal as to create a relaxed atmosphere where the students will feel safe to speak openly about their experiences and perceptions of the LSC and changes they would like to happen. This guide will provide an indication of the direction of the question areas the researcher will be pursuing, but there might be opportunities to go off track and ask other related questions that were not anticipated, to the students.

Semi-structured interview questions:

1. Tell me about yourself.

   A probe that might follow will ask the student to talk about school, what they like about school and dislike about school to get information about their attitude towards school.

2. Tell me about your involvement in school life.

   The situation will determine the probes as the interviewer would like to gain in-depth information regarding the student's commitment to school and learning.

3. How is learning in the LSC different to learning in the classroom?

   Probes might follow to their response, e.g. whether they do group work in class and whether they have to work by themselves and how often they get

teacher and teacher aid support in the class

4. What do you like about the LSC?

5. What don't you like about the LSC?

6. How does the LSC help you with your learning?

APPENDIX 13

INFORMATION SHEET for STUDENTS UNDER 16 YEARS OF AGE.

Project Title:

How do Learning Support Centres support us? Student voices from a secondary school.

 My name is Ria Jacobs. I am a student at Massey University studying towards the completion of my Master's Degree in Educational Psychology. My two supervisors in this study are Dr. Vijaya Dharan and Dr. Jude MacArthur. I am doing a study to understand how students are supported to learn in the Learning Support Centre (LSC), and I would like to invite you to participate in my study. I am a secondary teacher myself and I have experience working in in Learning Support Centres.

What am I planning to do?

I want to know what learning means to you and how you learn in the LSC. So, I will ask you questions like how learning in the LSC is different to your learning in the classroom, what you like about learning in the LSC and things you may not like.

 I will talk to you at school at a time the teacher thinks will not disturb your learning. I will be recording our conversation on my cell phone. This can take up to 45 minutes. I will type our conversation and share it with you. I will then go through it with you to make sure that you are happy with what you have said to me. I will not use your name in my study, or even later when I write about the study or present in conferences. You can choose a different name for yourself that you want me to use in the study. I will

give you a summary of what I find out in my study so that you can read it in your own time.

Sometimes you might say something in the interview that I think your school counsellor might need to know about. For example, something bad may have happened at school, or you might feel you need some help with people bullying you, I will only let the school counsellor know what you said if you agree. If I feel that you are at risk of getting harmed (physically or emotionally), I will have to inform your school counsellor without your permission or your parent's permission to ensure that you are safe at school.

Who will be involved in the study?

I will be talking with 6 students who come to the Learning Support Centre for getting help with their learning. If you agree to be in the study, you will be one of them.

What are your rights?

If you agree (give your consent) to be involved in the study, you can:

- tell me if you do not want to answer a certain question.
- withdraw from the study two days after the interview transcripts have been shared with you.
- ask me any questions at any time about the study.
- ask me at any time to turn off the phone recorder when we are talking.
- Talk to me knowing that your name will be confidential and not be mentioned or used.

If you want to be part of the study, please sign the Consent Form and give it to (name of person) at the reception office to give it to me (Ria).

Researcher:

1.Ria Jacobs

M.Ed. Psychology post graduate student

Massey University

riaja@elim.school.nz

Tel: 027 533 0880

Supervisors:

 1.Dr. Vijaya M.Dharan

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University Human Ethics Committee: Northern,

email: humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz

APPENDIX 15

Researcher: Ria Jacobs

Title: How do Learning Support Centres support us?: Student voices from a secondary school.

 Dear Maria

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Human Ethics Northern Committee at their meeting held on 07/06/2017.

On behalf of the Committee I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are approved.

Approval is for three years.   If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

If you wish to print an official copy of this letter, Please logon to RIMS (http://rims.massey.ac.nz) , and under the Reporting section, View Reports you will find a link to run the Ethics Committee Report.

Yours sincerely

Dr Brian Finch, Chair

Massey University Human Ethics Committee

Appendix 16: Spread sheet of interviews with participants (main themes, sub-categories and responses)

Questions	Main theme	Sub-theme	Participants responses
1.Tell me about your school.	Affection for the school	Positive appreciation of the school	*Priya: Things I like about this school is how it is not like ... people are not really mean; they don't judge you. Some people are like, you are Indian, but I don't think that it is like that in this school because there are mainly Indians here now.* *Ben: I do enjoy coming to school and enjoy learning. I like this school just because it is a great school for kids to learn at. Some schools, their expectations are not up to standard but expectation in this school is to respect, to be responsible and to be a learner and I think most kids in the school are learners.* *Ester: I like the values and what they represent – like being a learner, being respectful and being a student and I like the teachers as well. I like the subjects, yeah.* *Jack: I like how the teachers are not too harsh on you but at points they are strict because if the teachers aren't strict then there is no point. Teachers are meant to be there to help you so if they are not strict on rules then they are basically going to let you do whatever in the classroom and therefore you are not going to learn anything.*
		Negatives about school	*Ben: Kids have too many fights that wear our uniform and go and fight somewhere else and they are representing our school.* *Priya: I don't like some students that think coming to school is not really studying, it is like coming to have fun. Some people they wag school, they come but they don't attend somehow, they go. I don't know how. Maybe because they don't like attending that specific class or maybe they just don't like coming to school, they don't like studying. Their passion is not in there.* *Jack: I can say some teachers are strict but they are overly too strict. I had a science teacher where if you didn't do homework he would make you stand outside, and I do a youth health council group where it tells you that teachers can't degrade your treatment which is about your education because you always have a right to get education. And so basically he makes you stand outside so that is pretty much degrading treatment because you can't learn outside. He lets you stand there in the cold. There is really nothing you can do about it because he is a teacher and you are a student and you can't really do much about it, unless you talk to a Dean about the teacher. Asides that there is nothing you can do about it.*
2.Tell me about your involvement in activities at school	Connection with school life.	Engagement in school activities	*Noah: I don't play sports for the school because I am doing sports out of school. I'm enjoying sports out of school because you get to meet other people outside. I haven't done anything as part of the school since last year for athletics and I only just did it for the house points. The last time that I actually joined in a sports team was in Year 6 when I joined in for the rugby team which I made it into and we did well.* *Jack: I am not really that person that does sports because I prefer, I don't know, being smarter I guess. So if I have more knowledge then it will help me later on in the future with my jobs and that. So I am in Youth Health Council which is one of them and I was thinking of joining other stuff but I just haven't had any ideas on them at the moment. The Youth Health Council holds events to help support people. So for example we did a mufti day to fundraise for the Women's Refuge, so that is about*

			in Wellington where women are physically abused by their boyfriends and husbands and they would go to this place in Wellington where they would get help. But in Wellington recently they were about to shut it down so we were fundraising to keep it open in Wellington. We try to help people, so we talk about things that relate to laws and what you can do and ways to help people basically. It can kind of relate to school because when I talked about the youth law that came in to talk to us, that was kind of related to school because it showed us what we have at school. So things that you can do, for example how I talked about how the teacher can't degrade the treatment. So you have the right to have education and teachers can't stop you from doing that because you come to school for a reason and that is why. *Ben: I am too shy to perform in front of an audience.* *Ester: Netball, touch rugby and volleyball.* *Priya: It was an Indian dance group. I stopped because of my* *parents. I don't know, my dad just said no.*
3. Tell me about you learning at school.	Connection with learning	Perception about learning	*Jack: Learning can be difficult but it depends on understanding how it's done, what to do, why you do it and that.* *Ben: My learning … I haven't really tried in my subjects and I am always doing something else besides my learning. So I am trying to start learning on my subjects instead of doing something else. I am not really happy with my learning. I try to get my grades up high but I am always distracting somebody or am not trying hard enough or if I get a question I am either guessing it or getting it wrong.* *Priya: My learning is okay I would say. I think I am struggling in maths. I don't know, maths seems to be hard for me. I take Learning Support Centre and they help me to practice what I have learnt in class and they explain it to me more so I understand it better.* *Ester: Learning is sometimes complicated. Because sometimes I don't understand the Math equation. Learning Support doesn't really help in maths and science and social studies. I prefer maths instead of just reading. I would much rather go back to my subject that I got taken out of than coming to the Learning Support.*
4. Tell me how you feel about coming to the LSC.	Personal experience to attend the LSC	Willingness to attend the LSC	*Jack: It is really relaxing and somewhere where you can take your mind off things and do some work. I think I find more comfortable in Learning Support because it is … I don't know it is more peaceful I guess.* *Ester: To be honest, embarrassing. Sometimes I just want to come late but I end up being on time. Because when I come there are other kids that look at me and says, oh look – she needs learning support. What a stupid – you know. Yeah. Sometimes I feel good coming here because it is good and I learn and I get better but then sometimes I don't because there are people thinking that I am not good at this.* *Priya: Sometimes, not really. Sometimes I feel a bit of shame because some people say to me do you go to Learning Support and I am like yeah and this girl said to me – oh, you must be dumb.*

5. Tell me how the LSC is helping you with your learning.	Acceptance of learning need and recognition of support given in the LSC.	Effectiveness of the LSC	*Noah: It helps me a lot. It helps me understand the work a bit faster and what we were doing. Just the help that they are giving and they will go through the work with you. Different subjects. Maths. I just don't... it takes me longer to understand the subject and others and it is one of the main reasons why I came was for my maths. Even though they were focussing on my reading, my maths was a big problem. They help with Maths, English, drama – all of those things. And so they pretty much try to help out with every subject that you need help with. Because in reading my grades were done, they were bad and then ever since I came to learning support my grades started going up. I usually come to Mr **** for help (in mathematics). But since he was off for a year I couldn't ask for his help, so I have been crawling trying to do my best in that. I have the confidence to ask the teacher a question that I don't understand about the story.* *Ester: To improve in my reading and writing because I moved two levels up (in reading) and where I am meant to be right now and I love reading now. Before I never read books until now and now I can go into the library reading books, getting one each day. I have the confidence to ask the teacher a question that I don't understand about the story. The learning support doesn't help me in the other subjects because we are just learning one thing that is reading and that is only helping me in one subject but not the other subjects. Just reading and answering questions.* *Toby: Yeah. I think (I should come). To catch up on my reading because I don't like reading a little bit.* *Jack: It was when I did the reading test where my reading comprehension score was quite low so I had to come in and get some help with my reading comprehension so after going through the levels I got re-tested again and my level had increased. When I saw my comprehension results it was kind of shocking actually. When I joined Learning Support it helped me a lot with my reading comprehension in classes and I could understand passages and text and reading is much better. The focus was mainly English, reading and comprehension because that is what I mainly came for because when I did a reading test of reading a passage and then answering questions I did very well, so I got 100% in my reading. But in my comprehension I struggled along the way. Inferencing. So thinking about what the passage is trying to tell you and also just reading between the lines. So for example some questions might be trick questions but you have to read between the lines about what it actually is.* *Ben: It has helped me by understanding punctuation, reading and writing. Big words like preposition words and plurals, prefix, adjectives, verbs and all those kinds of things. They (Learning support teachers) help me with my writing. The comprehension reading gives you questions about the story and your answers are from the story that you read. If you are given a book to read in class, you can read the story and then if you are given questions about it, it will ask you questions and give you a page on what the answer is on. Or you have to write a summary about it.* *Priya: They have given me a different maths book and so I tell them what I am struggling with and they help me with that. They give us a book so there are heaps of questions and stuff in that book, so I tell them if I am struggling with angles, I tell them and we open that book that has angles in it. they ask me if I can do it myself and if I can't they tell me how to do it. They explain it and they write it too. Sometimes I don't understand the teacher in my classroom and what she says but someone talking to me, like when the teacher is talking to everyone in the classroom I don't*

			understand, but when she comes to me and talks – then I get what she means.
6. Tell me how your learning in the LSC is different to the learning in the mainstream classroom	LSC support vs mainstream support.	Learning engagement in LSC compared to Mainstream	*Noah: It depends on the teacher as well and what type of year I am having, a bad or a good. It depends if he or she helps out a lot. I have been stuck with the same maths teacher for the past three years and she has been alright. I aced the first year in Year 11 for maths but ever since then I have been down the … like everyone in my class is either too afraid to go up and ask her for help because she will either put us down which is what they say or she will start saying that you guys don't ask for help and that is why you guys aren't getting the work done and that. I don't see any problems with that but other teachers in other subjects; depends what it is and may screw the rest of my year. That is what happened in Year 11.*
			Ben: Learning in the classroom, there is about 30+ students and one teacher and in the Learning Centre there are three students and three teachers, so each student gets a teacher each and it is easier for the teacher to teach you-instead of teaching 30 students at the same time when there could be one-on-one with the student and the teacher and the other 29 students are still trying to figure out what to do. I prefer to learn alone and not around my friends and that. For teachers to describe how it is done and what to do instead of telling me what is off the board. I want them to show me what to do and how it is done and then I will end up doing it in the right way.
			Jack: So, because there are less people in Learning Support, you get more time with the teachers and they help you more individually rather than in a classroom where the teacher can't go all around at once and help you. In Learning Support if you are working the teacher can come and help you and they have time to explain to you because there are only like five students in Learning Support, whereas there is like 30 or 29 etc. I guess that is more helpful than in the classroom. If you are in a classroom student might be at different levels etc. so you can't really understand what they are trying to teach you.
			Ester: Because for me and other students that don't understand, the teachers will carry on another topic but some people are still stuck on that one. But other students that get it and know the answers and know how to explain it but the teacher is rushing trying to finish the work. I don't really get support in the class because there is only one teacher and there are other students. I just ask a mate, one of my classmates, not really the teacher. Sometimes I am like scared to ask but I know I have to ask, but I don't ask because I am scared. Because what they may think of me and they might judge me and all that.
			Priya: In the classroom there are heaps of children and here it is just 4 or 5. I am understanding more than before. The things that I learn here, when I go back to the classroom I know actually what to do even if the teacher explains me what to do because I have learnt it. I talk a bit more to these teachers more than my class teachers. I feel comfortable with them more than my real teachers. Because when the teacher is with me he gives me work so I do it and if I don't understand it, then I ask him questions.
7. Tell me how you prefer to learn information**.**	Individual preference in learning style	Individual learning preference**.**	*Jack: Usually if someone tries to teach me something it takes me quite some time to actually understand it. So usually if it is one-on-one I think I learn much better compared to in the classroom where the teachers explain to the whole class but sometimes you don't want to ask questions because everyone kind of gets it and you feel like you are the one left out because you don't understand it. Maybe individually sometimes. It is still fine to be taught in a large classroom but at some point the teacher should*

			go over the things that we have learnt just in case we have forgotten them or don't understand and to just clarify some things. Usually I would either ask my friends that are around me if they understood because if they did I wouldn't need to go to the teacher, otherwise I would go to the teacher. My preferred way is when teachers write it on the board, because I usually copy down everything and so I can go over it and remember it. I kind of struggle listening and then remembering with what the teacher says. If you are in a group someone can clarify some things because they might have asked questions that you want to ask. They might answer your questions. Group work is better because it is still less people and I guess you have more time to ask questions. We usually choose our groups or the teacher will put us into groups. *Ester: I prefer the teacher giving us more activities to do, like stuff to do outside of class. I like group work. because... I am hearing other people's opinions on the topic.* *Priya: I think maybe writing notes on the board. I think then maybe when I read it myself I can understand better. When they talk and then they write it down. When I listen to them and see it, I get it.*
8. How would you like your work / knowledge to be assessed?	Individual preference on assessment.	Preferred way of assessment	*Jack: Maybe through the work I have done and not just the tests. Maybe from the projects, yeah. I just prefer projects because you can show the capability of you whereas you can't show that in a test.* *Other students: Happy with the way it is done.*
9. What changes would like to see in the way the LSC is running?	Changes to fit individual needs.	Changes to LSC	*Jack: I don't see any need to make any changes, it is pretty good the way it is now. It is so beneficial and will help you in the long run. The way they taught me was completely fine, where if you needed help they were there to help you and they would always check if you needed help. They have helped a lot of students with these readings so they basically know it off by heart so they can explain things very clearly and in a simpler way. They didn't write it but I could just understand from them because they explained it in the simplest way they could so it was very easy to understand.* *Ben: Instead of having comprehension cards over and over and over again, maybe have a class discussion or make a brain teaser game or something to do as a group in the Learning Centre.* *Ester: I don't know. It's okay. I would have more teachers, not just three teachers and I would add more subjects and yeah... They treat us all the same. They are not strict.* *Priya: I think everyone should come in to learn. Because I have seen people who really need help with things. But I think that everyone should be welcome.* **When asking the students what changes they would make to the LSC if they happen to be the principal of the school, their responses were:** *Ben: I would always represent the Learning Centre, even though it is on the side of the school. I would offer kids that if they have a problem with their learning or they do not want to learn – then I would probably put them in the Learning Centre and if it is not interesting they can just continue on with their normal classes.*

			Jack:I think I would like a more recognised space so maybe a bigger room so that people can see the things inside. To make it more recognised for people that have been in there. Some of them, for example when they do the reading test they might be guessing the answers or they might just be lucky and they might not even know the answers.
			Priya: I think what I would say is students that come here should be motivated when they go out and whatever their dream is or whatever they want to do in the future, they shouldn't be thinking that they can't do that because they are not good at it. They should think that they are going to get better and I can do this.
10. Tell me how you as students are represented at school to discuss things you would like to change at school	Student voice at school.	Student voice representation	None of the students were aware of any representation, student counsels or class representation for students, only the one student who represents the students on the BOT.