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Student voice matters

An exploration of teachers’ perceptions of risk when engaging with student voice for improving classroom practices

Cristina Iustina Casey-Schöner

Abstract

‘Student voice’ can be defined as having a say in decision-making that results in students having positive learning experiences and taking ownership and responsibility for their learning. Having a voice in the classroom equates to students sharing their ideas and perspectives on education. Research suggests when students know that their voice matters, they feel valued as individuals and empowered in their learning.

This research examined how teachers engage with student voice to inquire into their teaching practices and explored the risk teachers perceived when considering student voice. The role of risk when considering student voice was investigated in this research in terms of being driven by both facts and values, containing objective and subjective dimensions, and involving cognitive and emotional biases.

The researcher employed a qualitative, purposive, sequential design. Initial qualitative data were collected from a sample of 25 participants via a questionnaire. Interviews with five teachers across two schools further explored the initial, emerging findings. The interviews focused on unpacking teachers’ perceptions of risk in relation to engagement with different components of student voice: its collection, interpretation and how to act on it.

Findings revealed teachers were willing to engage with student voice and they saw value in considering it. Teachers’ perceived risk related to their professional identity, loss of control in the classroom, dissonant student views and sharing student voice in a public forum. Teachers’ perceptions of risk involved uncertainty around students’ outcomes and evoked feelings of loss around their role as the ‘expert’ in the classroom.

Implications for leadership include the need to be aware of how school culture influences teachers’ engagement with student voice and related perceptions of risk. School leaders have a pivotal role in leading intentional, professional learning, where student voice is visible, and teachers’ perceptions of risk acknowledged. School leaders have an important role in helping teachers to navigate their perceptions of risk. They also have a key role in modelling with student voice if they expect teachers to engage with student voice despite perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability.
Acknowledgements

The experience of writing this thesis has been a challenging one. It has taught me so much, not only about student voice and teachers’ perceptions of risk, but also about the demands and importance of academic research. It has not been a single endeavour, but the collective work of many, as I have navigated the space between writing, seeking feedback, questioning my own understanding and feeling uncertain. Thank you all for being great companions at the edge of my learning.

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Secondly, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the teachers who participated in this study and who gave their time to talk to me of their experiences and invited me into their thinking, beliefs and practices around student voice and perceptions of risk. Thank you!

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Chapter One: Introduction

Student voice has long been seen as having a valuable role in shaping and informing teachers’ practices in the classroom and has become increasingly popular as an exploration focus for both researchers and practitioners (Fielding 2001a, 2010; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006; Thomson, 2010). Student voice signals presence, involvement, contribution, and commitment (Bourke & Loveridge, 2016; Cook-Sather, 2006b; Keddie, 2015; Rudduck, 2007); it represents an youth-adult partnership that values students’ collaboration and shares decision-making (Bolstead, 2010; Fielding, 2001b, 2004a, 2009; Mitra, 2008, 2009a); and it develops students as critical citizens in charge of their learning by “forcing teachers to confront the present realities and future aspirations of those for whom the system of formal schooling exists” (Fielding & McGregor, 2005, p. 12).

Engagement with student voice continues to grow and be the focus of many school initiatives. This growth is driven by research identified in the literature review that stresses the importance of creating spaces for learning encounters to occur between teachers and students with a view to engaging with students’ unique perspectives (Bragg, 2007a; Fielding 2001b, 2004b, 2010; Thomson, 2011). It is also driven by practitioners who understand that traditional roles, where students are seen as passive recipients, need to be changed and challenged and that teachers benefit from using a learners’ lens to inquire into their practice (Charteris & Thomas, 2017; Kane & Chimwayange, 2014; Keddie, 2015).

Research to date has focused predominantly on the value of student voice and advocates strongly for student voice as a prerequisite to building students’ agency in their learning, improving their engagement and motivation to learn, and making students feel they are equal partners (Fielding, 2010; Messiou & Ainscow, 2015).

Student voice discussed in this research encompasses many dimensions. It reflects the idea that students need to have a say in their own learning (Bragg, 2007a; Charteris & Thomas, 2017); it denotes respect and value for what students have to say and acknowledges students’ unique perspectives (Keddie 2015; Mitra 2009b); it can be a political and social justice act (Fielding & McGregor, 2005; Lundy, 2007); and it empowers, motivates and engages students in their learning by authorising their perspectives (Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding 2001b; Rudduck, 2007).

Student voice has potential to transform both the way teachers teach and the way students see themselves as learners, as Bolstead (2010) explains:
Students quickly reach new and deep insights about themselves, their peers and their schooling experiences when they are supported to investigate big questions about teaching, learning and curriculum, and to consider how they might have more input into shaping decisions that affect them (p. 9).

Research to date identifies that challenging, hard-to-hear and unwelcome student voice can be unsettling for teachers and often teachers tend to discard voice that is dissonant with their pedagogical views and voice that does not support the dominant narrative of a school (Bourke & MacDonald, 2016; Bragg, 2001; Charteris & Thomas, 2017).

Limited attention, however, has been given to the potential impact of teachers’ perceived risks of changing pedagogy, particularly when engaging with student voice as a catalyst for changing practice. Therefore, it seems valuable to explore and gain a better understanding of teachers’ perceptions of risk in relation to student voice.

This research explores the complex relationship between teachers’ engagement with student voice and the perceptions of risk, to gain an understanding of how teachers form those perceptions of risk, and how these perceptions influence their decisions and actions of engaging with student voice.

Background and Rationale

This research was prompted by my own experience as a classroom teacher and a senior leader in an innovative school with an innovative curriculum, where the value of student voice, both in curriculum delivery and individual, professional inquiry focused on priority learners, was undisputed. I have been part of many professional learning sessions, where we discussed and interpreted student voice, sought to identify and interpret patterns of student voice and explored new ways of engaging with it. I came to realise that, while student voice was considered worthwhile, there were patterns in teachers’ way of sharing that censored certain voice or discarded it as irrelevant (Messiou & Ainscow, 2015). Later on, as part of my job responsibility as a specialist classroom teacher, I was present in many classrooms observing teachers teach. I became interested in hearing students’ views of the way that their teachers taught and found that while teachers were keen to let me observe them, they were not as keen to let student voice be part of the process. Further educational leadership studies led me to consider the role of teachers’ resistance and possible perceptions of risk when engaging with student voice (Le Fevre, 2014).

Teacher-student relationships are traditionally built on a power imbalance, and in those power relationships, there is not tolerance for actively listening, as it would involve having
to respond or act upon what is being heard (Cook-Sather, 2002). This is a risk that we might not want to take, as it presents challenges that some may not be willing to face, particularly listening to things we do not want to hear. It is very difficult to learn from voices we do not want to hear (Bragg, 2001; Cook-Sather 2006b). If perceptions of risk are at play when engaging with student voice, we need to acknowledge their importance as barriers to establishing a partnership with our students and find ways to mitigate them (Hall, 2017), so that we can enter into a dialogue with our students that is respectful, bi-directional and focuses on learning (Fielding, 2001b).

Since student voice is a potentially powerful element in shaping teachers' practices, the rationale for consulting and involving young people in decision-making about curriculum and pedagogy is essential. When students are listened to, they have a sense of inclusion and added responsivity, they experience increased confidence and engagement (Bolstead, 2010). Students experience collaboration, they are involved in their own learning and supported to become life-long learners (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Therefore, understanding how perceptions of risk might influence teachers’ decision-making can contribute to our knowledge of effective professional learning practices and may have the potential to increase the likelihood of teachers changing their practices, thereby improving outcomes for their students.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers’ perceptions of risk when engaging with student voice, with a view to reflecting upon their own teaching practices and consider changing them.

This research is guided by the following questions:

1. Why do teachers engage with student voice?
2. What approaches do teachers take when engaging with student voice to inquire into their own practice?
3. What perceptions of risk do teachers identify when engaging with student voice to inquire into their own practice?

Overview of Thesis

Chapter Two will examine the literature from New Zealand and overseas defining and describing ‘student voice’ and will consider the implications of student voice on student
learning. It explores the challenges of taking notice of students’ views (student voice) and teachers’ perceptions of risk when considering their own teaching and learning practices.

Chapter Three provides the research design and approach, and outlines the methodology and data collection methods chosen for this study. The validity and reliability of the study and how any ethical issues were addressed are also presented in this chapter.

Chapter Four presents the research study findings from the questionnaire and the individual interviews. The findings are categorised according to emergent themes from the data.

Chapter Five provides a discussion and interpretation of the research findings.

Finally, Chapter Six draws on the analysis of the findings to inform conclusions, implications and recommendations for current practice and future research.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The intersection between engaging with student voice and teachers’ perceptions of risk is the focus of this literature review, which is structured into two distinct sections. The first section describes student voice and considers complex issues related to the value and use of student voice. The second section focuses on exploring risk and perceptions of risk within the realms of teachers’ practices and engagement with student voice.

Research strongly suggests that engaging with student voice to consider different approaches to teaching is valuable and worth pursuing in the classroom. Teachers need to analyse how student voices are created and encouraged in particular pedagogical contexts, and how they respond to student voice to encourage discussions:

The need to create opportunities to use student voice and their specific understandings around the importance of learning can become a pedagogical and transformative tool, and used as a learning framework so that student voice and teaching practices have common understandings and joint agency. By listening to the student voice(s) and their conceptions of the importance of learning, it is feasible to broaden understandings beyond the official language of learning. (Bourke & Loveridge, 2016, p. 66)

Student Voice

Student voice is not only ‘having a say’, but also refers to the language, emotional components, and non-verbal means used to express opinion (Thomson, 2010). Student voice also involves students taking ownership of, and responsibility for, their own learning and articulating perspectives on education in the classroom, which in turn can influence classroom programmes and delivery (Parry, 2014). Yet, teachers, educators, researchers, parents, and adults in general speak on behalf of young people whose perspectives are often misunderstood and sometimes disregarded or misinterpreted. Fielding (2001b) comments that often student voice needs to be considered because of:

insistent imperatives of accountability rather than enduring commitments to a democratic agency and that the value of student voice has often being posited in its capacity of alerting schools to shortcomings of their current performance and possible ways of addressing the deficiencies. (p. 123)

Student voice and student initiatives can be mired in surface compliance where schools superficially engage with students' views (Arnot & Reay, 2007; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006) or conform to the performance demands of the audit culture (Keddie, 2015).
However, student voice has recently been sought with a sense of urgency never experienced before. Fielding (2010) argues for “the importance of creating spaces for restless encounters between adults and young people in which they are able to re-see and re-engage with each other in creative, holistic and potentially transformational ways” (p. 61) to develop partnerships between adults and young people, while Thomson (2010) advocates that “children and young people are ‘expert witnesses’ to their lives and can provide unique perspectives on and reasons for, and modes of, educational change” (p. 810). Rapid changes in education and new pedagogies being implemented warrant far ‘richer’ and ‘deeper’ consideration of student voice, which needs to be recognised as an essential tool in, and a significant resource for, shifting teachers’ practices (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006).

Keddie (2015) supports this view and argues that serious consideration of student voice brings substantial benefits to schools, teachers and students with the idea that schools are democratic communities where all collaborate with each other to improve the quality of schooling:

In these communities, conditions of learning are enhanced through students feeling a greater sense of inclusion, validation and agency, which increases their learning engagement and confidence and improves their skills of cooperation and negotiation while teachers and other school staff gain insight and awareness into schools and schooling from the perspectives of students. (p. 227)

**The Value of Student Voice**

Student voice has been defined as entering a public space where adults and young people can take shared responsibility and delight in making meaning out of their work and lives together (Fielding, 2001a, 2010). It comes out of a necessity to respond to an increased variance in students' learning needs (Messiou & Ainscow, 2015; Thomson, 2010); positions students as possessing unique views and perspectives about their learning that adults cannot fully understand (Mitra, 2008); and provides further information in the form of a ‘learner lens’ for teachers to reflect on and take pedagogic action (Charteris & Thomas, 2017).

When students speak out on their own behalf, and when what they say matters—indeed, shapes action—student voice becomes an initiating force for teachers to inquire into their practice and enables students to be equal partners in learning rather than keeping students in the role of recipients. (Cook-Sather, 2006b, p. 8)

From a wider perspective, voice functions as a political marker to refer to the perspectives of a particular social group (Thomson, 2011); it comes from political
traditions in which oppressed or marginalised groups of people have struggled to get their stories across and have their experiences recognised (Thomson, 2010); and it implies a worldview, stance, or stand-out point that is unique to a certain group.

Within an educational context, listening to student voice is fundamental for educators to make good decisions and implement sustainable, pedagogical and systemic changes. Listening to student voice also teaches students important personal, social, and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Thomson, 2010). It is imperative in guarding against traditional teacher-student power relations (Keddie, 2015). Furthermore, the legal rationale for giving young people ‘a voice’ can be found in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). Article 12 urges nations to “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” (United Nations, 1989). This underlies the importance of student voice as part of social justice. Respecting children’s perspectives moves beyond models of good pedagogical practice (or policy-making) to a legally binding obligation (Lundy, 2007).

**Pioneering research on student voice**

Jean Rudduck championed the concept of student voice in the 1990s. Her research shows a deep understanding and commitment to the idea that for teachers to engage with students in new learning contexts, it is first necessary for them to gain a ‘genuine’ understanding of their students’ perceptions (Fielding, 2007). Through this process, both teacher and student enter into and develop a ‘learning partnership’, which helps to facilitate a more productive and potentially successful learning outcome. Rudduck (2007) also believed in the value of students contributing their ideas and thoughts as a basis for developing a practical agenda for enhanced learning. She noted that students’ active involvement helps develop and transform teachers’ knowledge of students, as it gives them reflections and suggestions for improving student learning opportunities. In her research, Rudduck (2007) considered student self-esteem as an important part of optimum student learning, and highlighted student consultation as an effective way to build positive teacher-student partnerships. When students feel listened to and valued, their commitment to learning will strengthen. To be an effective change agent for learning, schools need to put the learner at the heart of the process and listen to them (Rudduck, 2007).
Offering unique perspectives

Age should not be seen as a barrier to the capacity to analyse social problems and articulate solutions. Quite the contrary, children and young people are, by virtue of their age and social position, seen to have experiences and viewpoints that are not only particular and distinctive, but also sufficiently different from those of adults to warrant their active participation in consultation, debate, and decision-making (Bourke & Loveridge, 2014; Bragg, 2007a, 2007b; Fielding, 2001a, 2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2010; Thompson, 2010). Students see different issues and see issues differently, and therefore 21st-century pedagogical practices “must incorporate a much more overt openness and reciprocity indicative of a much more flexible, dialogic form of democratic practice” (Fielding, 2001b, p. 130). Fielding explains that “contemporary teacher professionalism needs to incorporate an expectation that teacher learning is both enabled and enhanced by dialogic encounters with their students in which the interdependent nature of teaching and learning and the shared responsibility for its success is made explicit” (p. 130), and that teachers learn not only with and from each other, parents, and the wider community, but also, most importantly, from their students. Student voice and views can help teachers be more sensitive to issues of diversity in a way that can enable new learning. However, teachers need to learn how to gather and engage with such views and be prepared to consider responses that challenge their established ways of thinking and acting (Messiou & Ainscow, 2015).

Establishing learning partnerships

In an educational landscape where identity and student agency feature prominently in schools’ strategic planning, there is a “growing prominence, both amongst teachers and academics, of an active partnership between young people and adults that goes beyond consultation to embrace a participatory mode in which young people’s voices are part of a more dialogic, reciprocal way of working” (Fielding, 2010, p. 62). For teachers to develop new ways of supporting learning, “they must gain access to student perspectives on learning and teaching and establish genuine partnerships with young people” (Kane & Chimwayange, 2014, p. 54), hence activating learner agency and involvement in their own learning. For students to feel confident and empowered to share their own views, they must witness a willingness from their own teachers to be influenced by their feedback, so that they can become increasingly forthcoming and move beyond describing what is happening in the classroom, to talking about the impact that teaching has on their learning. Initiatives that incorporate student voice through “students as researchers” and
“students as evaluators” (discussed in detail later in this literature review), can lead to the emergence of new organisational structures that incorporate students as equal partners in the process of curriculum renewal. When teachers and students are working in partnership, issues of power and hierarchy are more transparent. Relationships are more likely to be based on mutual trust and respect and have a double significance as they “transform the mechanics of consultation and the interstices of power through which young voices are heard, dialogue enacted, and action taken... and articulate and underscore the key aspirations of a democratic way of life” (Fielding, 2010, p. 66). The need to engage with student voice to explore students’ perspectives can lead, in many instances, not only to respectful and positive encounters and new understandings, but also to mutual advocacy and meaningful intergenerational working. Students articulating their learning needs and preferences constitute valuable data for crafting learning experiences that meet their personal needs and deepen their teachers’ understanding of them as learners.

Ultimately, the value of engaging with student voice rests on the fact that young people’s perspectives are sometimes significantly and interestingly different from those of teachers. Accessing those differences involves young people in research processes that give space, support, and motivation to engaging with issues that interest and matter to them. Reciprocal engagement with those differences may turn out to be mutually enlightening and productive for all involved (Fielding, 2010). Teachers and students coming together to make meaning out of their work together, reflect on it, hold each other to account, and make plans for a future in which all take a shared responsibility creates conditions that enable ongoing, deep learning for all involved. Engaging with student voice in ways that are rigorous, respectful, challenging and caring creates opportunities for teachers to progress their professional learning with a direct impact on their teaching practices, as student voice can act as a catalyst for a powerful change of practice and beliefs (Messiou & Ainscow, 2015).

Deepening the concept of learning partnerships happens “through preserving classroom time for dialogue about teaching and learning, and when teachers share ownership of classroom practice with their students with a focus on who they are teaching and how their teaching is supporting learning” (Kane & Chimwayange, 2014, p. 62). To establish and maintain genuine partnerships where student voice and perspective are integrated into an ongoing classroom dialogue, there is a need for safe spaces. Safe spaces for student voice “imply student/teacher relationships where teachers are open to student
perspectives and are willing to learn from, rather than filter, student experiences of learning, schooling and conditions for engagement” (Nelson, 2014, p. 49). At its most progressive, student voice can impel a real shift that opens up spaces and minds for collaboration and being part of a community where everyone is a learner, and everyone benefits.

**Creating deep learning experiences**

When students are active participants in their learning by having a voice, then deep learning can happen and the partnership with their teacher is truly collaborative and co-constructive. For teachers to understand that the way in which they practice influences student learning, they need to invite and listen to students’ accounts of their learning experiences (Kane & Chimwayange, 2014). Kane and Chimwayange’s (2014) research brought a critical gaze to the importance of engaging with student voice as their research, challenged teachers to move beyond taken for granted conceptions of teaching, learning, and roles of students, to engage in learning-centered dialogue with their students and through this, transform classroom practice… so that teachers and students gain a sense of empowerment as they deepen their relationship and negotiate new roles as partners and co-researchers making sense of learning in their classrooms. (p. 52)

Fielding’s (2001b) study supports this view and highlights that “the sophistication and insight of the students were substantial, that their concerns and aspirations mirrored those expressed by staff and that the issues they wished to explore included matters of profound significance, both to themselves and to their teachers” (p. 126). Student voice offers a further opportunity to explore intentions, establish priorities and, most important of all, work towards a shared understanding of the principles and values that underpin the common teaching and learning taking place in the classroom.

**Approaches to Student Voice**

Approaches to engage with student voice vary depending on the intent and desired course of action, and they need to consider students’ identity, the context of teaching and learning and existing power structures.

Traditional student feedback mechanisms tend to be teacher-centred in design and limited in their value because of their absence of transparent follow-up actions (O’Neil & McMahon, 2012). For example, traditionally, student voice has been collected and acted upon via student councils, focus groups, student-led action teams trained in peer counselling, student curriculum evaluations, and end-of-semester questionnaires, all of
which draw some criticism for their limited content validity and often teacher-centred questions (Bragg, 2007a; Cook-Sather, 2002, 2007; Fielding, 2001b, 2009, 2010). These can include practices that see young people in a largely passive mode with student voice only audible through the products of past performance (Fielding, 2005). Traditional approaches have seen the collection of student voice for providing feedback on school initiatives/career programmes, or cafeteria use (Fielding, 2001a), focusing on life skills and developing future citizenship rather than academic improvement (Bourke & Loveridge, 2016) or current learning (Nelson, 2014). One reason for limited impact on understanding students as learners may be that many student-voice, school-based, research initiatives occur peripherally to the classroom and focus only indirectly on pedagogy to support student learning (Thomson, 2012). For example, students might participate in school councils to improve aspects of school culture and conditions for learning, but students and their perspectives have been under-utilised in the design of educational programmes, development of teacher-student relationships, learning environments, and conditions for students’ engagement that address their learning needs and aspirations (Cook-Sather, 2002). Student voice literature includes little research into students’ perspectives on the development of individual teacher’s practice and/or whole-school learning and teaching policies (Frost & Roberts, 2011). Such research is necessary if counter-positioning students and raising their status as governance partners with teachers is to succeed (Nelson, 2014; Thomson, 2011).

**Students as researchers**

The approaches mentioned, while worth pursuing, offer a traditional, unidirectional collection of information and educators are realising that this is not sufficient anymore. There is a need to consider other approaches where student voice is used to articulate puzzles and problems as well as delights (Fielding, 2001b, 2004a; MacBeath, Myers, & Demetriou, 2001). Bragg’s (2007a) research suggests that, alongside traditional ways of including student voice, there is an array of current methods used to consult with students, including surveys and questionnaires, various ways of interviewing students, observations of teachers, suggestions boxes, exit cards, and ideas booths. New techniques, such as photography, drawing, collages, multimedia approaches, and audio recording, reflect the energy and optimism that comes from engaging with student voice (Bragg, 2007a). The strengths of these methods come from their diversity, and their ability to tap into students’ modes of living. Challenges arise, however, from what type of voice is sought out and whether these strategies support more than a consultation
approach to student voice. A shift from consulting students to looking for ways to build dialogical student-teacher conversations around pedagogy is paramount to shifting from student voice to student agency.

In his project, ‘Students as researchers’ at Sharnbrook Upper School in the UK, Fielding (2001a) posits the benefits of moving student voice from ‘data collection’ to ‘students as researchers’. Fielding suggests a four-level model that distinguishes between students as data sources, active respondents, co-researchers or researchers (see Figure 1).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students as DATA SOURCE</th>
<th>Students as ACTIVE RESPONDENTS</th>
<th>Students as CO-RESEARCHERS</th>
<th>Students as RESEARCHERS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>(a) rationale &amp; engagement</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rationale</strong></td>
<td>Teachers need to know about students’ prior learning / perceptions of their learning in order to teach effectively.</td>
<td>Teachers need to engage students in order to fully enhance both teaching and learning.</td>
<td>Teachers need to engage students as partners in learning in order to deepen understanding and learning.</td>
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<td><strong>How Meaning is Made Dissemination</strong></td>
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<td>Discussion</td>
<td>Dialogue (teacher led)</td>
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<td><strong>(b) Classroom (pedagogy), Department / Team, School</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Classroom</strong> e.g.</td>
<td>data about student past performance</td>
<td>data about student past performance</td>
<td>data about student past performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>shared lesson objectives</td>
<td>feedback techniques on pedagogy (teacher led)</td>
<td>feedback techniques on pedagogy (student led)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>explicit assessment criteria</td>
<td>developing metacognition</td>
<td>developing metacognition &amp; shared responsibility for learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Department / Team</strong> e.g.</td>
<td>looking at samples of student work</td>
<td>department agenda based on student perception data / suggested by pupils</td>
<td>students run session for staff on how to engage with particular learning styles</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Figure 1. Levels of student (pupil) involvement in school self-review and school improvement (Fielding, 2001b, p. 136). Permission to reproduce granted by the publisher.*
The strength of Fielding’s (2001a) model lies with the power of student voice being channelled through the movement to ‘Students as co-researchers’, which involves, teachers identifying issues they wish to explore and seeking the active support of young people, not only in carrying out the research, but also in helping to reflect on its processes, and make meaning from the data gathered so that recommendations for change and future action can be made. (Fielding, 2010, p. 63)

The next level is ‘Students as researchers’ which sees the students being agentic in identifying the issues, designing and carrying out the research with the help of teachers, and seeing through the stages of making meaning, recommendations, and dialogue with those in a position of power. In both models, teachers and students work in partnership in genuinely exploratory ways. Fielding (2010) notes that each level and mode of student voice will have value and be appropriate at different times and in different contexts, yet it is inevitable that the mode of ‘Students as researchers’ is linked to active student voices that are preferable to the other modes. As Fielding (2010) explains, “students as researchers valorises and extends a transformative notion of education, at the heart of which lies the commitment to teaching and learning as a genuinely shared responsibility” (p. 137). Initiatives involving ‘students as researchers’ support students to develop research skills to investigate their own concerns with particular aspects of their schooling, to disseminate findings, and to implement a plan of action for improvement that allows students to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the teachers, teaching, and learning processes. Furthermore, it creates a context where students and teachers can work in partnership to develop new understandings and influence teachers’ practice in a positive way. For teachers, it can support a more dialogic and reflective model of professionalism that improves the quality of pedagogy, learning, and teacher-student relations (Bragg, 2007a; Keddie, 2015).

Fielding’s framework of eliciting student voice through ‘Student as researchers’ is aligned with Kane, Maw, and Chimwayange’s (2006) research. The students in Kane and colleagues’ (2006) research were originally positioned as active respondents being consulted on the teaching and learning process. During the research, their position shifted to that of co-researchers actively engaged in dialogue with teachers and researchers. In one school in particular, students took this opportunity to become researchers in their own right, establishing the Student Voice for Learning group. Findings from the research demonstrated that, by being involved in a learning group, students became more aware of the importance of learning partnership in the classroom.
and willing to be co-constructors in their own learning experience in the classroom. Also, by sharing with teachers their own reflections on learning, they were able to assist teachers in creating a learning environment and teaching styles that suited them. Although the final decision-making about teaching rested with the teachers, teachers were more inclined to give “thoughtful attention to the feedback from the students and took their suggestions seriously” (Kane et al., 2006, p. 40). Study undertaken by Bolstead (2010), where students acted as researchers, also highlighted that students reached new and deep insights about themselves as learners, valued peer collaboration and had more input into shaping decisions that affected them.

**Students as learning partners**

A different way of engaging with student voice was explored in Keddie’s (2015) case study of an initiative at an English secondary school. This initiative valued worthwhile learning and students as central in its focus on students’ evaluation of the scope of quality teaching and learning. Students were trained to work as lesson observers who provided feedback to teachers about their teaching, with a view to enhancing students’ own understanding and appreciation of teachers, supporting students to work on a partnership with teachers to improve pedagogy and relationships, and to develop students’ own agency and positive self-image as learners. The credibility of engagement with genuine student voice lies in three key imperatives: authenticity, inclusion, and power (Keddie, 2015; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006).

Keddie (2015) notes that authenticity in a teacher-student interchange or consultation is evident when students are included in determining the focus or agenda of the consultation. It occurs when students feel listened to and when what they are saying is responded to in genuine rather than contrived ways. When students’ suggestions are taken seriously and are included in terms of feedback and discussion, then authentic engagement with student voice is achieved. She concludes that, “Student voice initiatives that consider these matters of authenticity and inclusion necessitate a decentring of traditional teacher-student power relations. Existing power structures in schools reflect students’ deference to adult authority and position teachers, not students, as the gatekeepers of knowledge” (p. 229).

‘Students as learning partners’ is also discussed by Fielding (2010). He comments that in its most common variant, students as learning partners involves teachers inviting students whom they teach to work with them and observe aspects of their practice. In the
first phase of the process, the students receive formal training, either from an external person or from colleagues who have experience of this kind of student voice work within the school, not just in observation techniques, but also how to develop a climate of trust with the teacher. Considerable emphasis is placed on the focus being on learning rather than teaching, on the kind of language students might helpfully use when discussing observation data with the teacher, and on the absolute necessity of confidentiality. Several observations and dialogues are undertaken, and in the second phase of the process, further observations focus on the new strategies agreed within the partnership.

Cook-Sather (2002) developed a programme called *Teaching and Learning Together*. The programme is based on the premise that students should be positioned as experts on learning, and that by “positioning a diverse group of high school students as teacher educators both with preservice teachers and in conversation with one another we could enact and model a different approach to teacher preparation” (Cook-Sather, 2010, p. 111).

Teachers and schools who have enacted student voice beyond surveys and one-off consultations and embraced student voice in their teaching and learning, found that,

> engaging with student voice in teaching inquiry promotes trust and a sense of meaningful relationship between teachers and students and offers a diversity of viewpoints in ways that challenges assumptions that students are a homogenous group and direct attention to students’ heterogeneity which provide students with a sense of agency. (Davidson, Sinnema, Taylor, & Mitchell, 2016, p. 39)

These new waves of student voice researchers and practices focus on consulting with students to elicit and authorise their unique perspectives for the purpose of deepening their learning in the classroom and involve the willingness of teachers to allow and work with students’ perspectives. This moves this literature review into a different dimension that explores teachers’ engagement with student voice and possible constraints and challenges.

**Teachers’ Engagement with Student Voice**

Teachers’ engagement with student voice further unpacks the challenges of various approaches discussed above.
Authorising students’ views

As discussed previously, to move toward more fully authorising the perspectives of students is not simply to include them in existing conversations within existing power structures. As Cook-Sather (2002) notes,

Authorizing student perspectives means ensuring that there are legitimate and valued spaces within which students can speak, re-tuning our ears so that we can hear what they say, and redirecting our actions in response to what we hear. The twin challenges of authorizing student perspectives are (a) changing the structures in our minds that have rendered us disinclined to elicit and attend to students’ voices and (b) changing the structures in educational relationships and institutions that have supported and been supported by this disinclination. (p. 4)

It also means calling on “teachers to view their teaching practice from multiple (often contradictory) perspectives and to consider carefully what meaning they were finding in their own and the student’s reflections” (Kane & Chimwayange, 2014, p. 60). Cook-Sather (2014) argues that “inviting students to be participants and agents in research on educational practices challenges deep-seated social and cultural assumptions about the capacity of young people and children to discern and analyse effective approaches to teaching and learning” (p. 133).

Routine collection of student feedback and evaluations leads to limited improvement in the quality of teaching unless teachers use the data to inform their own practice, as a mirror in which to look for previously unknown weaknesses and misconceptions. Scott and Dixon (2009) argue that before teachers even start surveying students, teachers need to come to an understanding that the processes of carrying out and reflecting on student feedback may well be useful and advantageous, both for themselves as professionals and for the students they teach and the organisation they work for. Through authorising student voice, teachers can break through old, established ways of knowing, and challenge their belief that students cannot be authorities on teaching and learning. Student voice should serve as a catalyst for emerging dialogues and for negotiating new relationships with students to help reframe teacher practice.

The problem of teacher biases

Research conducted in New Zealand by Bourke and Loveridge (2016) identified that teachers’ initial responses to student voice were to use their own frames of curriculum reference to interpret student views. In this research, teachers used pedagogical and curriculum developments in their own schools to interpret student voice, which could become an ‘unintended barrier’ to understanding students’ points of view. There is no
doubt that engaging with student voice and acting upon it can be very powerful and a major change agent in any school setting. Even so, this research reported a tendency to focus only on what could be changed and not on what was dissonant with existing practices, especially when student feedback was challenging (Bourke & Loveridge, 2016). Bourke and Loveridge (2016) found that teachers were more likely to engage with student voice when it echoed their own frames of reference, and that,

these reference points tended to be curriculum orientated, rather than around learning theories or their own views about learning. In addition, rather than engaging in the students’ ideas as a means to challenge their own views of learning, the teachers tended to examine whether the students’ views were consistent with either the New Zealand Curriculum or with their schools’ focus on learning (p. 62).

Their findings underlined the idea that teachers directed their thinking back to predetermined key competencies within the curriculum and existing teacher practices to teach those skills, and that they explored student voice responses in relation to their own understanding of the New Zealand Curriculum frameworks, not necessarily from a student frame of reference.

Bourke and Loveridge’s (2016) study found that,

teachers were very committed to the pedagogical approach they were developing as a school and it subsequently seemed difficult for some of these teachers to engage with the ideas of the students without re-interpreting them or critiquing them through their own pedagogical lens. (p. 63)

The natural response from teachers to re-orientate the focus back towards curriculum and key competencies suggests that “an unintended consequence of a structured curriculum might be its influence on teachers to ‘institutionalise’ their own notions of learning, and therefore not readily hear the student voice about learning” (Bourke & Loveridge, 2016, p. 65). However, when there was consistency between the curriculum and the student voice, teachers made comments such as “students are getting the message” (Bourke & Loveridge, 2016, p. 65).

Engaging with unwelcome truths

Freedom of student voice is regulated and acknowledged when learners operate within the parameters set by the teachers and when student voice aligns to the dominant discourse of teachers’ pedagogical beliefs (Charteris & Thomas, 2017). Charteris and Thomas put forward the idea that student voice reveals ‘unwelcome truths’ that can be unsettling for teachers but can provide a catalyst for teacher reflection on student
positioning in learning relationships. They explain that the telling of unwelcome truths can be seen as an important element of instructional change, enabling the development of a wider professional knowledge base and iterative reflection practices that form a growing professional identity. Additional research strongly suggests that student voice that does not correspond with existing arrangements, or does not endorse the dominant narrative, comes to be regarded as ‘hidden voice’ and is often discarded, disregarded and ignored (Messiou & Ainscow, 2015; Thomson, 2010). Some voices are harder to hear than others, and adults may be challenged by the words that come from the mouths of children and young people. Bourke and MacDonald (2016), Bragg (2001) and Thomson (2010, 2011) all caution that a commitment is needed to hear all voices and to not censor particular views and modes of expression. Cook-Sather (2002) also warns of the dangers of preserving the status quo of teacher-student power relationships where there is no place for active listening:

Most power relationships have no place for listening and actively do not tolerate it because it is very inconvenient: to really listen means to have to respond. Listening does not always mean doing exactly what we are told, but it does mean being open to the possibility of revision, both of thought and action. At a minimum, it means being willing to negotiate. Old assumptions and patterns of interaction are so well established that even those trying to break out of them must continue to struggle. And understanding that is part of what it means to listen. (p. 8)

Capturing diverse views

Fielding (2004b) asserts that student voice is often represented in undifferentiated ways, with this presumed homogeneity privileging and valuing some (already privileged) students over others. Keddie (2015) and Rudduck (2007) comment that voices ‘we wish to hear’ are the palatable voices of ‘good’ students who can speak a ‘sanctioned’ school language. These students tend to be the ones who are already best served by the current set-up of the school—they tend to be class- and race-privileged and are perhaps not in the best position to represent the interests of other, less privileged, less confident, and less engaged students. Young people may feel that they have a lot to contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning, but they are uncertain how to proceed and tend to remain silent. The idea of students and teachers discussing their work together can generate a lot of anxiety for both parties. Initially, teachers are likely to be anxious about what students might say about them. Students can also be anxious; younger students can be concerned because commenting on what teachers do could be seen as ‘rude’ or ‘wrong’; older students, however, are more inclined to be anxious because they fear retaliation (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006).
Within the New Zealand context, diverse student voice has been defined by Bishop and Berryman (2006) and Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, and Teddy (2009), as a culturally responsive way of understanding the major influences on Māori students’ educational achievement within the classroom, the school, and in the wider contexts of whānau and community. Teachers listen to students talk about their schooling experiences and offer encouragement to share their thoughts and ideas about what improvements could be made at school to help them learn. Bishop and Berryman (2006) and Bishop et al. (2009) see student voice as a way for teachers to build relationships with their students that will ultimately empower and motivate the students to learn and allow teachers to be culturally responsive to the students in front of them. The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) affirms the findings of Bishop et al. (2009) as it unpacks the pedagogical strategies that encourage teachers:

To look for opportunities to involve students directly in decisions relating to their own learning, which encourages them to see what they are doing as relevant and to take granted ownership of their own learning….as students learn best when they feel accepted, when they enjoy positive relationships with their fellow students and teachers, and when they are able to be active, visible members of the learning community. (p. 34)

For student voice to capture the diversity of its owner’s thinking, cultural beliefs, and assumptions, it is imperative to capture the diversity of voice across ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic status. In this way, there is a greater chance of ensuring there is a representation of voice (Cook-Sather, 2006a). Diversity of voice is also important to recognise even within one student, given that the way students represent their own views and how they think about their experiences within an evaluation process can at once change and be changed (Bourke & MacDonald, 2016). Fielding (2010) develops the idea that for student voice to be truly useful and inclusive of the unwelcome truths, teachers need to enter a space of ‘restless encounters’, where they stop using student voice to confirm what they are trying to do. Resisting the urge to be invested in their own interests and openness to questioning their impulse to control are valuable qualities for engaging with student voice. Teachers need to inquire into their practice, acknowledge their own discourse and the criticality of being open to criticism, and understand the dangers of unwitting disempowerment. Entering a real dialogic partnership, where both perspectives are considered and valued, comes within the realm of risk-taking. Enabling students to be co-researchers and giving space to student voice means that the location of power, perspective, and dynamic rests primarily with the collective control of students themselves. When exploring student voice on analysing their own learning or teachers’ teaching
strategies, teachers will enter a space of uncertainty, where the locus of control is shifted to students and comes with the perception that teachers see engagement with student voice as a risky endeavour.

**Perceptions of Risk**

The concept of risk in relation to educational change is currently gaining more attention. Teaching has been described as a risky business (Fullan, 2007), with an understanding that change, creativity, and innovation are not possible without taking risks (Howard, 2011), as risk-taking is an inseparable aspect of educational change (Reio, 2005; Reio & Lasky, 2007). Le Fevre (2014) posits that “risk-taking is an inevitable behaviour in any environment that changes and thereby presents some degree of uncertainty about the future” (p. 57).

Research suggests that when teachers consider engagement with student voice and are faced with the possibility of having to change their practice, they might experience feelings of nervousness, uncertainty and high emotional and cognitive responses (Le Fevre, 2014), which are all underpinned by seeing such endeavours as risky. Risk, as a concept, involves feelings of loss about what matters to us, as “risk involves uncertainty around an event and its consequences, with perception of risk being a person’s judgement about this risk. Implicit in both risk and risk perception is that it is about something that matters to the person” (Twyford, 2016, p. 22) and that it involves emotional and cognitive biases (Slovic, 2010). Ponticell (2003) shares this view and explains that loss, the significance of that loss and uncertainty are foundational to risk-taking. If teachers see engagement with student voice as involving a degree of risk, rather than believing it to be an essential ingredient for teacher growth, then they are less likely to pursue student voice and less willing to be professionally vulnerable (Howard, 2009; Lasky, 2005; Taylor, 2010). Therefore, teachers’ engagement with student voice in a way that moves beyond data collection, feedback about existing systems, and support of the dominant school narrative brings about discussions around shifting the locus of control to the students. With this comes possibilities of resistance, perceptions of risk-taking, and feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty for teachers (Aven & Renn, 2009).

Risk and perceptions of risk are complex processes that are individually conceptualised yet a product of social and cultural processes. Underpinning risk is the constant interaction between emotion and cognition, therefore creating multiple levels of complexity. The findings from the literature review examined in this section alert
educators of the potential impact of perceived risk on teachers’ learning, with a focus on the negative impact for those teachers who hold perceptions of high risk and experience strong feelings of uncertainty.

**Resistance**

Changing the way that teachers teach and learn, reflect on their pedagogy, and consider new ways of involving their students presents its challenges, as achieving sustained and ongoing change in teachers’ practice is difficult (Fullan, 2007). Le Fevre (2014) identifies difficulties in changing beliefs, negative effects of overload, and a variance in relational trust as factors that limit teachers’ engagement with change, while Lasky (2005) and Howard (2009) assert that change at a systemic and individual classroom level can affect teacher identity, teacher agency, and teacher willingness to be professionally vulnerable. When confronted with the ambiguity and uncertainty of change, teachers’ emotional reactions influence their ability to take risks, their learning and development, and their identity formation, which in turn impacts on their teaching and learning practices (Hargreaves, 2004). Fink and Stoll (2005) suggest that “resistance is a natural and predictable response” (p. 19) to change, and resistance is also described by Hargreaves (2005) as a symptom of a generalised fear of change. Resistance as a defence mechanism stems from teachers feeling like change has been imposed on them as opposed to a process in which they have been engaged. Fink and Stoll (2005) argue that resistance in itself is not an inherent characteristic of teachers but is brought about by a lack of involvement in decision-making about change.

**Resistance in relation to perceptions of risk**

There have been few studies that specifically consider teachers’ resistance through the lens of risk and perceptions of risk (Le Fevre, 2014, Ponticell, 2003; Twyford, 2016; Twyford, Le Fevre, & Timperley, 2017). Ponticell (2003) explains that loss, the significance of loss, and uncertainty are foundational to risk-taking and that:

> if the outcomes of an action and the potential losses associated with those outcomes are assured, there is no risk. Risk requires uncertainty. Uncertainty resides both in the probability of outcomes and losses occurring and in the perception of their value. The greater the chance of a loss happening and the greater the significance that one attaches to the possible consequences of a loss, the greater the risk. (p. 7)

This view is shared by Le Fevre (2014) who identifies “perceptions of high levels of risk, together with the reluctance to take risks, as a major barrier to change” (p. 56). Le Fevre details that the reluctance to engage with what are perceived to be high-risk activities is
human nature. If people see risk-taking involving a possible outcome that might be at odds with something they deeply value or believe in, or that might result in loss, then it is likely they will not engage with it. Teachers are reluctant to take risks or expose themselves to situations where there is uncertainty in both the process and the outcomes of change. The fear of public failure adds to the unwillingness to take risks, even though they might see value in doing so.

Recent research by Twyford (2016) explored how perceptions of risk influenced teachers’ sensemaking and actions during a professional learning and development (PLD) programme. This study challenged the concept of teachers’ resistance, and instead considered the role that perceptions of risk have in influencing engagement with new PLD initiatives. Furthermore, Twyford et al. (2017) proposed a new lens for looking at teachers’ resistance and urged consideration of perceptions of risk as one of the underlying causes of resistance:

A risk lens directs attention to exploring uncertainty as an aspect of change, which is a new approach to understanding why teachers may appear reluctant to change their practices. It has the potential to uncover different factors that may be obscured or unnoticed when perceived through the dominant resistance to change lens (p. 86) … risk and uncertainty are inherent in learning, and can, therefore, create discomfort and apparent reluctance to engage as new learning replaces previously comfortable practices. (p. 97)

Considering risk when looking at teachers’ unease about possible change is also advocated by Howard (2013), who, through her research analysing teachers’ resistance to integrating technology, found that technology integration was not necessarily based on resistance to the integration itself but that “resistance to technology may, in fact, be risk perception and uncertainty which can limit teachers’ ability to make full evaluations of technology integration” (Howard, 2013, p. 368). One teacher involved in the study “consistently defined risk-taking in teaching as trying something you are either not comfortable with or familiar with, and doing something different to what you would normally do” (p. 367).

**Emotion**

Change in teachers’ practices is often discussed in terms of a rational, cognitive process that involves schoolwide strategies for implementation, goal planning, curriculum planning, and innovative pedagogical approaches in individual classrooms. Yet change and both positive and negative emotions are inseparable, as discussed by Hargreaves (2005), who advocates that “emotions are at the heart of teaching” (p. 278), and Ponticell
(2003) who found that “emotions that are individual experiences in association with a loss may be positive (e.g., enhanced self-esteem) or negative (e.g., frustration, fear of failure, or surprise if one feels blindsided). Positive emotions enhance risk-taking; negative emotions inhibit risk-taking” (p. 19). Twyford (2016) asserts that there is “a relative balance of emotion and cognition seemingly playing a role in the action teachers take” (p. 145). Lasky’s (2005) research links teachers’ nervousness to a feeling of vulnerability which represents the emotional component of perceived risk. Teachers are most likely to experience open vulnerability when they feel safe enough to risk opening themselves to the possibility of embarrassment and emotional stress for the sake of relationship-building and student learning. Likewise, they are most likely to experience inefficacious vulnerability when they feel defenceless, fearful, and highly anxious. In such contexts, they are less likely to take risks that build student trust and learning.

Vulnerability

Changes in teacher practices can leave teachers feeling threatened about their expertise (Kane & Chimwayange, 2014; Twyford, 2016; Zimmerman, 2006); threatened by the prospect of a change in learning relationships with their colleagues (Annan, Lai, & Robinson, 2003); threatened by the prospect of uncertainty and feeling vulnerable in their workspace (Twyford et al., 2017); and threatened by the possibility of relinquishing control and allowing risk-taking to be part of their classroom practices (Cook-Sather, 2014; Howard, 2009, 2011, 2013). These connections of change to threatened expertise, uncertainty, and professional relationships relate change directly to negative emotional and cognitive implications, and challenge teachers’ existing mental models. This highlights that, at classroom level, teachers’ perceptions of risk impact on their decision-making in relation to curriculum planning, engaging with student voice, implementing new initiatives, and participating in professional development opportunities (Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves, 2005; Le Fevre, 2014; Twyford, 2016).

Teachers’ engagement with student voice in Kane and Chimwayange’s (2014) research draws on the “intersecting theories and practices of action research, student voice and collaborative self-study of teaching” (p. 65). Through their research, feelings of fear and vulnerability were explored, and findings pointed out that “while teachers agreed to look to their students as a way of examining their own practice, the reality of listening to students’ feedback on their lessons was initially somewhat threatening to some” (Kane & Chimwayange, 2014, p. 58). One teacher expressed a fear of what students would say
about them and others were reluctant to accept that the students’ feedback was worthy of serious consideration. Another teacher commented that,

I know we talked about students giving us feedback but do they really know anything about the technicalities of teaching – I mean, you [researcher] would be better placed to tell me what you thought of the lesson and where there are things to improve (Kane & Chimwayange, 2014, p. 58).

Furthermore, while teachers were keen to participate in the research, findings were that “contrary to their initial commitment to student voice, there was resistance to accepting students as authorities on teaching. Teachers expressed nervous, at times dismissive comments about the insights from students and they looked to the researchers for feedback on their teaching practice” (Kane & Chimwayange, 2014, p. 58).

Feelings of vulnerability are connected to how teachers view themselves as people and as teachers, and involve their identity, beliefs, values, and perceptions of their own competence (Lasky, 2005). Similarly, Hargreaves (1998) and Hansson (2010) warn that risk can generate self-doubt and negative emotions such as anxiety and worry about losing face. Twyford (2016) found that strong feelings of vulnerability and the associated negative emotions impeded teachers’ ability to learn and consider different pedagogies—including engaging with student voice in their classroom. Furthermore, Twyford (2016) notes,

teachers’ perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability impacted on their emotional responses... on the one hand, teachers experienced emotion as a result of their perceptions of risk, with this emotion impacting on their actions, prior to and during the event. On the other hand, this emotion quickly became part of existing uncertainty and thus informed future perceptions of risk and actions (p. 149).

Uncertainty

Twyford et al. (2017) note that “risk and uncertainty are inherent in learning, and can, therefore, create discomfort and apparent reluctance to engage as new learning replaces previously comfortable practices” (p. 97). New practices such as intentionally inviting student voice is likely to create inherent uncertainty, and many teachers may not be prepared or willing to let this happen. Twyford et al. (2017) argue that individuals judge possible risks based on their ongoing assessment and evaluation of uncertainty, then they respond to any resultant perceptions of risk. In turn, those responses impact on decision-making, actions and learning. Since perceptions of risk focus on the uncertainty brought on by imagining a future event, they are mental constructions by the individual, based on past experiences, values and beliefs, thoughts and emotions. Twyford et al.
(2017) pointed out that teachers brought their ‘bucket’ of uncertainty to future possible events as a source of risk perception. Their research work highlights both existing uncertainty, which came from previous experience within the context of professional learning and expected ways to respond to change, alongside uncertainty connected to the imagined consequences of future events, such as outcomes for themselves and others, specifically “concerns about … the impact on learning for students which is paramount for teachers” (p. 93).

**Perceptions of loss**

Le Fevre (2014) found that teachers’ risk-taking behaviour during a literacy change case study was also influenced by uncertainty, fear of public failure and perceptions of loss despite the optimism around new opportunities and practice improvement. Her research, within a schoolwide literacy change initiative, focused on the question of what teachers perceive as risks when engaging with educational change. From the interviews, three areas perceived as high-risk by the teachers participating in the study emerged: 1) deprivatizing their practice 2) reducing their pedagogical dependence on textbooks and 3) increasing student voice in the classroom. Increasing student voice in the classroom was an important factor identified as a perceived high-risk action and it linked to the idea of losing control in the classroom. Engaging with student voice involves shifting teachers’ mental models from one of ‘I am the expert and know what I am doing’ to one where there is a partnership between teachers and students, and where students are given the opportunity to contribute to advance their own learning. Allowing for student voice in the classroom and an active involvement in their own learning comes with the possibility of future loss for teachers. If teachers see increasing student voice in their classrooms as a potential unknown change to teaching and learning outcomes, then the willingness to engage with student voice is limited.

Increased student participation in classroom pedagogical decision-making involves issues of shifting control. Le Fevre (2014) noticed that teachers viewed student voice as a possible positive action but were unsure of how it would fit with their perception of being in control of the teaching. Her research pointed to teachers’ feeling of losing control being exacerbated by the fear of having chaos in the classroom. One teacher in her study expressed worry about not knowing how to mediate between “trying to keep them seated and quiet” and “change too much” (p. 61), while another teacher talked openly about the consequence of increasing student voice in her classroom: “I am afraid of the uncertainty….it’s the uncertainty, not knowing where it (increasing student voice) is going”
Argyris (1991) and Argyris and Schön (1974) discussed the governing values from which humans tend to construct their theories in use, and the first is to maintain unilateral control. The need to remain in control at all times is disrupted by inviting in student voice and increases risks perceived from doing so. Schön’s (1987) description of the interpersonal value of ‘maximise winning and minimising losing’ of close to learning model can impact on teachers’ intent of engaging with student voice at the expense of maintaining the winning attitude.

Alongside the perception of losing control of the classroom existed the ideas of losing control of time and wasting time. Perceptions of lack of sufficient time was another factor making situations high-risk, as stated by another teacher, “If you tried something new you would be eating up even more of it… it’s a risk that it might not work, and then I have to go back and I’ve lost time” (p. 62). While perceptions of high risk are linked to increased student voice in the classroom as a possible future loss in terms of both processes and outcomes, “teachers were more likely to accept risk-taking in changing their practice if they thought it would benefit their students” (Twyford, 2016, p. 95).

**Influence on relationships**

Teaching is a social endeavour and teachers’ behaviours are continually evaluated socially, by students, parents, other teachers, and senior leaders, so the risks teachers take involve significant social uncertainty. Twyford and colleagues’ (2017) research supports this view, emphasising that teacher risk-taking is influenced not only by individual mental constructs, but also collective and social factors. Their study highlighted that “uncertainty connected to relationships and knowledge appear to be most powerful in escalating perceptions of risk” (p. 93), which represents the foundation on which teachers invite, accept, and act upon student voice. Furthermore, Twyford (2016), through her thesis, uncovered that exposure to new practices, whether in the classroom or mandated by school through professional learning and development programmes, brought about heightened perceptions of risk, which aligns with Le Fevre’s (2014) idea that “consequences of risk-taking are not neutral, but have positive or negative outcomes in which people have a stake. Outcomes might be favourable or not, but there is no certainty over them” (p. 57). Changing teaching practices through exploring student voice becomes highly personal.
**Existing beliefs about quality teaching**

The work by Howard and Gigliotti (2016) that explored teachers’ risk-taking in technology integration suggests that coping strategies can increase confidence in taking risks, and that positive beliefs about change in teaching support risk-taking. They conclude that teacher change and engagement with risk-taking are motivated by beliefs about learning and conceptions of what quality teaching is, rather than specific initiatives, and that teachers still held to their role as professionals to act as final decision-makers in the classroom. Moving forward, their work suggests that by “encouraging risk-taking as a group, positive feelings about risk-taking would be increased and perception of risk would be decreased” (p. 1364). This is congruent with the idea that developing a culture of risk-taking is paramount if teachers are to engage in what they perceive to be a risky business (Fullan, 2005), and that the presence of trust is essential to moderate uncertainty and vulnerability (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, literature concerning student voice, risk, and perceptions of risk was reviewed. The literature revealed how highly desirable it is to engage with student voice and explored the reasons behind risk and teachers’ actions associated with risk. Risk-taking and perceptions of risk when entering a space of uncertainty have been explored in depth, yet there is a paucity of research when it comes to linking teachers’ perceptions of risk to student voice. It is against this backdrop that this research focuses on the relationship between teachers’ perceptions of risk and student voice when inquiring into their own classroom teaching and learning practices.
Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter examines the qualitative methodology framework and research process used in this study. The chapter will begin with a discussion of the rationale for using a qualitative approach which was informed by the nature of the research questions, followed by a description of the specific research design used. The participants, data collection processes, and data analysis and interpretation processes for the two qualitative stages of the research are then described. This chapter concludes with a discussion of issues of validity, reliability and ethical considerations.

Student voice was described by the researcher to participants as student engagement in collective and individual decision-making processes, and feedback and consultation within classroom teachers’ practices, that included dialogue between students and their teachers (Cook-Sather, 2007; Fielding, 2010; Kane & Chimwayange, 2014). It was broken down in three components: student voice collection, student voice interpretation and student voice being acted upon. Risk was explained as involving uncertainty around seeking student voice and involving negative and positive emotion (Le Fevre, 2014; Ponticelli, 2013). Perceptions of risk were described to participants as their judgement on the risk they felt when engaging with student voice (Twyford et al., 2017).

Research Questions

1. Why do teachers engage with student voice?
2. What approaches do teachers take when engaging with student voice to inquire into their own practice?
3. What perceptions of risk do teachers identify when engaging with student voice to inquire into their own practice?

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this research was to explore teachers’ engagement with student voice and their perceptions of risk when doing so. Therefore, a qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate to be able to probe participants’ responses and explore their ideas in depth. The generation of descriptive data, through questionnaires and interviews, could illustrate and substantiate the perspective of the participants while at the same time providing a rich and detailed description for the reader (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, the qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because it was more suited
to a small sample of participants (Merriam, 2009; Sarantokos, 2012). The design of the questionnaire could lend itself to a mixed methods approach; however, its intended use does not warrant the definition of a quantitative method. Quantitative methods lead to the generation of numerical data (Punch, 2014), whereas the questionnaire data analysis did not move beyond calculating descriptive statistics, nor was the intent of this stage to generalise from the collected data. Conducting educational research involves designing and writing the research in one of the two major tracks: quantitative and qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research has, at its core, the premise that it allows the researcher to explore multiple views and perspectives, and search for meaning, as “qualitative research studies appear as broad, panoramic views, rather than micro-analysis” (Creswell, 2003, p. 182). It “begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37) and involves complex processes of examining and interpreting data to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

This study takes a constructivist approach. Constructivism, as a worldview, is typically associated with qualitative method research. It has a focus on individuals who can share their views, it is a belief that humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives and diverse meanings (Crotty, 1998). Creswell (2014) describes the constructivist approach as:

Leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied. The questions become broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation, typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons. The more open ended the questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life settings. (p. 31)

A constructivist worldview was employed in this research as I sought a) to understand teachers’ perceptions of risk and how they inform the way teachers engage with student voice, and b) to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of teachers’ perceptions of risk. The intention of the research was to gather data about teachers’ approaches to student voice, and to make sense of or interpret the meaning that the teachers expressed of what they believe are the risks associated with it. The interpretive constructivist paradigm values how people view an object or situation and the meaning that they attribute to it (Rubin & Rubin, 2004) and “the inquirer is typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants” (Creswell, 2014, p. 178). While a constructionist view informed the
research design, it was not totally an inductive process—it was also deductive, as I drew on existing theories of risk and the student voice literature review informed the questionnaire and interviews.

**Research Design**

Selecting the research design to answer the research questions is a critical step, as it dictates the shape, the validity and the reliability of the research and its findings. This study employed a qualitative, sequential research design with two phases. Phase one consisted of a questionnaire, followed by phase two of semi-structured and critical incidents interviews. Purposive sampling was used to identify participants for the interviews.

In this study, the initial questionnaire data (phase one) were collected in order to identify a range of views and current practices regarding student voice and risks associated with collecting, interpreting and acting upon it. This phase informed the purposive selection of participants for the second phase, which focused on qualitative, semi-structured and critical incidents interviews to collect detailed opinions from participants to help explain responses to the initial questionnaire (Creswell, 2014; Lewis, 2015). Using a sequential design, the examination of the responses of the participants in the second phase allowed the study to expand on the data from the first phase. In the second phase, a rich and detailed understanding of the perceptions of risk associated with engagement in student voice within the two schools was established and this knowledge was then used to answer the three research questions.

**Rationale for design**

The aim of using a questionnaire for phase one was to allow participants to reflect on current practices with regards to student voice and to self-assess their perceived risk when engaging with student voice, with the aim of providing data for selection of a purposive sample for the interview phase. The data obtained from the questionnaire was used to identify teachers who had high engagement with student voice and proportionate risk perceptions when engaging with student voice, to further explore and investigate their experiences and subsequent decision-making on their teaching practices. I was not intending to make any major inferences from the data gained from the questionnaires but rather gain an overall picture and gather supporting evidence for themes that emerged from the interviews.
Questionnaires can generate a large amount of data in a relatively cost-effective and unobtrusive way and allow generalisations to be made with a degree of confidence (Cohen, Morrison, Manion, & Bell, 2011). In comparison to administering interviews, the use of a questionnaire offers the advantage of efficiency of data collection as it can be administered without the need for the researcher to be present (Robinson & Lai, 2006). Questionnaires have a limited scope of responses that can be collected, and therefore they have a limited ability to describe the specifics of the situation, the complex nature of contexts or to provide explanations for people’s behaviour (Cohen et al., 2011) and they provide most value when used in tandem with other methods (Gillham, 2004), which is why questionnaires were used as a precursor to my interviews. For this research, a questionnaire was well suited to explore my action question and constraints question (namely, the extent to which teachers engaged with student voice and the perceptions of risk that influenced the extent to which teachers engaged with student voice), in order to see if there was a relation between the two components.

The aim of using interviews was to allow participants to speak candidly about their practices when seeking student voice and what risks they saw associated with specific practices, in a way that allowed for depth of understanding. The research design focused on developing semi-structured and critical incidents interviews with a focus on unpacking teachers’ beliefs, values and preferences about collecting student voice, interpreting it and acting upon it, which aligned with the research questions’ intent.

Semi-structured interviews lend themselves well to responding to the research questions, due to their exploratory nature as they are “designed to be essentially heuristic and seek to develop hypothesis rather than collect facts and numbers” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 412), and their ability to capture not only facts, but also impressions of how the participants view situations (Bryman, 2012). Semi-structured interviews give the opportunity to ask specific questions and follow up on ideas that seem important, given the objectives of the interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to prompt participants for elaborations and examples as they undertake the interview and interpretations of what participants said can be checked by paraphrasing and summarising their responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2004). An interview guide with fairly specific, open-ended questions to steer the conversation allows participants the opportunity to express their views on what they consider risky and what approaches they take when considering student voice and allow for some space to be flexible in how they want to respond (Cohen et al., 2011). The researcher needs to be mindful, however, that a relationship with the
participant needs to be established first, as the challenge of engaging in exploratory interviews is that they can elicit feelings, reasoning and emotions as the participants can talk freely and honestly about their experiences (Cohen et al., 2011). The data gathered from the semi-structured interviews includes theories that the teachers espouse as they describe how they collect, interpret and act upon student voice and the reasoning they give for their actions. Therefore, it is imperative to pinpoint specific instances of when action on student voice happens, hence the inclusion of a critical incident interview component.

The use of critical incidents interviews is beneficial to unpack what the actual practices look like. Interviews that focus on critical incidents give specifics regarding teachers’ actions as they were asked to recall a particular incident to describe their action. The critical incident technique is “a procedure for gathering certain important facts concerning behaviours in defined situations” (Flanagan, 1954, p. 335) and allows the researcher to dig deeper into espoused theories elicited through the semi-structured interviews. Obtaining data from critical incidents allows focus on learning the meaning that the teachers hold about the actions undertaken, not the meaning that I might bring to the action through my own lens (Creswell, 2014), and reveal what is on the interviewee’s mind as opposed to what the interviewer suspects is on the interviewee’s mind (Krueger, 2009).

Participants

This research involved two secondary schools, 25 questionnaire participants, of whom 5 participants were selected for the interview phase.

Participant recruitment process

Two schools were approached to participate in this research and they were selected based on their reputation for valuing student voice in informing teachers’ classroom practices. Additionally, the specific schools selected for this research were chosen for being relatively similar, with both being co-educational, state schools, and new schools in terms of longevity of operation (under 15 years). I approached the principals of the schools and sought their permission to invite the teachers employed at their school to complete the phase one questionnaire. Once the principals had expressed interest in taking part in the study, participant information sheets (Appendix A) and consent forms (Appendix B) were given (via email) to the principal and board of trustees (BOT). The invitation to participate, participant information sheet and consent form documents identified me, gave them information about the research, outlined expectations of participants’ contributions, explained the right to withdraw consent and gave assurances about the confidentiality and
security of data. Both principals had the study described to them and gave their informed consent for me to present my research to their staff in a morning briefing, with a view to inviting teachers to participate in the research.

Upon completion of the online questionnaire, teachers who had signalled that they were willing to complete the interview stage, were identified. Five interview participants were selected from the volunteers using purposeful sampling based on the questionnaire responses (detailed reasoning on how they were selected is explained in the initial questionnaire data analysis later in this chapter). This sample size was manageable given the framework available for a master’s level project and the premise supported by Creswell (2014), who affirms that the intent of qualitative research is to study a few areas in detail rather than a greater number of participants which may only elicit more generalised information.

**Profile of participants**

Table 1

**Profile of participating schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School code with decile¹</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Upper North Island</td>
<td>Upper North Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School roll 2015</td>
<td>792</td>
<td>1,246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School type</td>
<td>Secondary Year 11–13</td>
<td>Secondary Year 7–10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School gender</td>
<td>Co-educational</td>
<td>Co-educational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School authority</td>
<td>State – not integrated</td>
<td>State – not integrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pākehā</td>
<td>64.0%</td>
<td>Pākehā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>Māori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasifika</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>Pasifika</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MELAA</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>MELAA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. As of June 2018.

Table 2

**Profile of participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

¹ School deciles range from 1 to 10. Decile 1 schools draw students from low socioeconomic communities and at the other end of the range, decile 10 schools draw their students from high socioeconomic communities. Deciles are used to provide funding to state and state-integrated schools. The lower the school’s decile, the more funding it receives. A school’s decile is in no way linked to the quality of education it provides.
Participant sampling

Given the purpose of my research, a purposeful sampling approach was appropriate as the study design involved an in-depth account of the experiences of a small number of participants (Sarantakos, 2012). In purposive sampling, the researcher has “deliberately – purposely – selected a particular section of the wider population to include in or exclude from the sample” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 110), which is frequently the case in small-scale research, for example, one or two schools. Creswell (2014) describes this approach as one that assists the researcher to make decisions as to what participants to interview, the type of sampling that will provide the necessary data and the size of the sample needed. Purposive sampling allowed for selection of participants based on certain inclusion and exclusion criteria (Cohen et al., 2011), which were pre-established with the intent to access a variety of views and perspectives about the engagement with student voice and teachers’ associated perceptions of risk, and it supported my intent to address the research questions (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Jiao, 2007).

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedures for phase one, then phase two, are described.

Questionnaire

Phase one involved administering a questionnaire to teaching staff in two secondary schools whose leaders had agreed that their staff could participate. The questionnaires were used to collect information on teachers’ current practices concerning engagement with student voice and to gain insights into the extent to which they perceived specific practices as a risk.

A questionnaire with 14 questions was developed (Appendix C). I used the existing theories that connect student voice to risk to write each item in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered online rather than on paper to ensure rigour and accuracy when collecting the results. The questionnaire was used to elicit information on how participants rated their engagement with student voice and it had the following foci: how useful they consider student voice to be, how they record student voice, if they consider all student
voice, how they interpret student voice, how they discuss student voice with their colleagues and how student voice informs any changes in their practice.

The first 13 questions contained a 6-point scale, while Question 14 invited further comments on school culture relating to student voice. A 6-point scale was used to ensure that there was no midpoint or neutral responses, as balanced-response formats can often elicit inadequate information (Brown, 2004). An ‘undecided’ option (e.g., number 3 on a 5-point Likert scale) would have been of little use to the research, as I was eager to continue to the interview stage with participants who were on opposite sides on the fence, not on it. Across all foci, participants were asked to consider two aspects: a) the willingness with which they would consider doing it, and b) the extent to which they perceive doing it as a risk. For both dimensions of the question, a value scale was used (not at all, very low, low, moderate, high and extremely).

For each statement, rate by CIRCLING ONE number from 1-6 that addresses:

1. The extent to which you are willing to do this
2. The extent to which you perceive this as a risk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATEMENTS</th>
<th>Extent to which I am willing to do this</th>
<th>Extent to which I perceive this as a risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Initial response options from questionnaire.

The initial questionnaire was delivered online and the subsequent interviews with participants took place at the school, where participants were able to select an appropriate time and space for their interview of approximately 45 minutes in duration.

**Piloting of questionnaire**

In order to refine the initial questionnaire, a pilot test was undertaken with two of my colleagues who did not participate in the study. This trial was carried out to ensure the questions were clear and not open to misinterpretation and to check that the questionnaire would yield the appropriate data to inform the research questions. I asked the testers to
write on their questionnaire any suggestions that would help future participants when completing the questionnaire.

As a result of the pilot test, one consistent change was made to the questionnaire across all questions (Figure 3) and concerned the aspect named a): ‘the extent to which you are willing to do this’. Both trialists found that they elected 5 or 6 on the scale, as they were willing to engage with student voice, collection, interpreting and acting upon student voice, yet it only accessed their espoused theories not their theories in practice (Argyris & Schön, 1974). As a result, the change was made from ‘the extent to which you are willing to do this’ to ‘the extent to which you are doing this’ across all questions. The Likert scale was also changed to reflect the change in the question (the extent to which you are doing this) and frequency descriptors (never, very rarely, rarely, occasionally, frequently and very frequently) were used to answer this question. For the second aspect (the extent to which I perceive this as a risk), a value scale was retained for use (not at all, very low, low, moderate, high and very high).

For each statement, rate by CIRCLING ONE number from 1-6 that addresses:

1. The extent to which you are doing this
2. The extent to which you perceive this as a risk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATEMENTS</th>
<th>Extent to which I am doing this</th>
<th>Extent to which I perceive this as a risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very frequently</td>
<td>Extremely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3. Final response options from questionnaire.*

Further refinement of the questionnaire was then thought out, once the digital version was finalised. Trials of the online version of the questionnaire looked at clarity of statements, timing of completing the questionnaire, if it was user friendly and if it explicitly allowed for a variety of responses (Thomas, 2004).

**Interviews**

Phase two of the research involved administering interviews to the participants identified through the questionnaire phase. These interviews involved “unstructured and generally
open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants” (Creswell, 2014, p. 239). The semi-structured part of the interview was intertwined with critical incidents questioning techniques, to mitigate the fact that the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews would be espoused theories, derived from teachers’ descriptions on how they engage with student voice and the explanations they give for their actions. Identifying the constraints that influenced these actions in a way that satisfies those constraints could be determined through examples of critical incidents, giving me a synthesis of the theories of action of the teachers interviewed.

The interviews allowed me to follow up on ideas and probe responses to obtain more information to answer the research questions, whilst still maintaining consistency in the concepts that were discussed with each participant (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I was aware of possible subjective techniques and bias (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) and that interview dialogue is based on the agenda of the researcher and can lead to an overemphasis on researcher’s interpretations (Creswell, 2014). To mitigate the risk of subjective bias, I sent the interview schedule to the participants in advance of the interview, endeavoured to be non-reactive and non-directive during the interview, and sent the interview transcripts to the participants to check for accuracy and to add further content.

The five 45-minute interviews were conducted between July and August 2018. During the interviews, prompts were used to clarify questions or topics, promoting further discussion through extension or elaboration of ideas. These aimed to elicit feelings, reasoning and emotions, such as asking why the teachers think the way they do, or why they prefer a particular course of action over others. I also needed to be mindful, however, that a relationship with the participant had to be established (Mutch, 2005) during the interview to allow for disclosure of genuine information and perspectives.

The interview questions (Appendix D) were divided into three sections and framed around engagement with student voice. Section A asked the participants to explain how they collect student voice and to comment on its usefulness, and to think and give examples of how practices of collecting student voice had changed over the course of their teaching careers. Section B delved into the participants’ experience with interpreting student voice, the tools that they use when interpreting student voice and what collaboration practices (if any) exist to discuss student voice with colleagues. Section C explored the dimension of acting upon student voice and probed to find out what type of student voice is acted upon and what teaching practice changes have likely occurred as a result. For each question in the
interview that explored engagement with student voice, participants were also asked of their perceived risk associated with particular actions.

**Piloting of interviews**

A pilot interview was undertaken to help refine the data collection plans with respect to both the interview questions and the procedures. The interview was piloted with a colleague of mine to gather feedback on the following:

- if questions were open to misinterpretation or were unclear
- how respondents interpreted each question
- whether the research questions were answered during the interview
- the interview technique I used
- testing the logistical aspects of recording data on a mobile phone voice-recorder application
- the length of time taken to complete the interview.

The main concern unearthed by the pilot was that the questions were long and that some questions contained more than one idea. As a consequence of the pilot, protocols were revised and the following changes were warranted: breaking up questions with multiple ideas into a concise question on the main idea (with the other ideas to be used as probing to unpack the main question); reconsidering the language of questions so that it allowed for more simple and clear language; and removing questions that were not so relevant, were repetitive or unclear.

**Data Analysis**

The goal of data analysis is to provide trustworthy answers to the research questions. “The ethics of qualitative research demand that a researcher not jump to conclusions about meaning and that every attempt is made to explore all possibilities and then to check these out against data or with participants” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 102). Concurrent analysis of questionnaires and interview responses was carried out to identify important or recurring themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Data from different sources (data from questionnaires including both numerical and language-rich answers, data from interview answers and research knowledge from the literature and research context) were triangulated and used to build a justification for recurring themes. Triangulation is defined as the “use of two or more methods of data collection into the study of some human behaviour” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 195) and supports qualitative research to be more credible.
**Initial analysis to identify participants for the interviews**

In order to proceed with the interview phase of the study, firstly the questionnaire data (which was collected online via Qualtrics application) was exported into an Excel spreadsheet. Total scores for both dimensions of a) engagement and b) perceptions of risk for each participant were created by summing the scores on the 13 questions asked and sorted by ascending order (Appendix E).

Once the engagement and risk scores were established, the participants who had indicated in the questionnaire that they were willing to be interviewed were then identified. The data from only those participants (10) were sorted by ascending order for both engagement and risk (Appendix F).

Two criteria were set for potential participants to interview: active engagement with student voice and presence of perceptions of risk. I went through the 10 participants and their scores to highlight discrepancies between what people were doing (engagement) and how they felt about it (risk), as I had a hunch that there might be an inverse relationship between the level of engagement and the level of perceived risk. As a result, five teachers were selected for interviews (Appendix G). Teacher A and Teacher X had maximum variation between engagement and risk (lowest engagement/highest risk and highest engagement/lowest risk) and Teacher F, L and O displayed comparable levels of engagement and risk.

Additionally, the teachers selected covered a range of teacher experience from a beginner teacher to a very experienced teacher. They all teach different year levels and hold different (if any) leadership positions within their school. The teachers interviewed engaged with student voice and saw risks associated with doing so, as the focus of the investigation was to examine the correlation between engagement with student voice and associated perceptions of risk, in the collection, interpretation and acting upon student voice.

**Coding**

Coding refers to attaching meaning labels to segments of data and it needs to be a systematic process to ensure the data are treated equally (Beekhuyzen, Nielsen, & von Hellens, 2010). Through coding, the researcher explains what is occurring in the data by de-constructing and reconstructing it into themes. Attaching meaning labels to segments of data facilitates comparison between and within themes to aid in the development of further theories. The data were explored through the lens of the research questions.
(Appendix H) and coded using a combination of emerging and predetermined themes (Creswell, 2014).

**Questionnaire**

Firstly, total scores from the questionnaire were calculated question by question (13 items), for both engagement with student voice and risk, then sorted in descending order, to identify central themes that were prevalent in engagement (Appendix I) and risk (Appendix J). Secondly, all questionnaire comments were collated, which formed the basis for initial data coding for emergent themes. Qualitative comments from the anonymous questionnaire are included in the findings when they illustrate themes identified as essential.

**Interviews**

Initially, I read sections of the interview data and highlighted statements that best represented the essence of various ideas. Before beginning to code, the entire interviews were read, resisting the urge to do any analysis but rather to enter vicariously in the life of participants, feel what they are experiencing and listen to what they are saying though their words (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Once this had been carried out for all interviews, searching for common themes, that could group the ideas represented by these statements, began. The coding process focused on identifying, labelling and categorising what was in the transcribed interviews and questionnaire comments to prepare them for subsequent analysis. The data were constantly compared and reviewed by searching for similar ideas, patterns and relationships which generated emerging themes and patterns that were relevant to the research questions. “Comparisons were made as this is essential because comparisons allow researchers to reduce data to concepts, to develop concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions and to differentiate one concept from another” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 94).

This inductive process involved going back and forth between themes and the data until a comprehensive set of themes was established, as seen in Table 3 below. While the process began inductively (by establishing key themes from the data), deductive thinking also played an important role as the analysis moved forward. For example, I had a sense of potential perceived risks in relation to student voice from the literature and this influenced my awareness of particular themes. At all times, I was aware that “analysts and research participants bring to the investigation their biases, beliefs and assumptions” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 98), and it was therefore important to acknowledge when this happened.
and to remain alert looking for instances when biases, assumptions or beliefs were intruding into the analysis.

Table 3
*Initial coding framework*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial coding framework developed from literature and data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why do teachers engage with student voice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Purpose/usefulness of student voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What approaches do teachers take when engaging with student voice to inquire into their own practice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Collection of formal/informal student voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consideration of all student voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student voice as data sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What perceptions of risk do teachers identify when engaging with student voice to inquire into their own practice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Curriculum and assessment demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Diversity of student voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sharing of student voice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical planning is integral to the process of research design, as qualitative research approaches involve human participants and therefore present a challenge of balancing research processes and outcomes with the rights of the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). For this reason, ethical principles have been developed to guide research practice. Before this research was undertaken, ethical approval was obtained from The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC) on 9 April 2018 for three years, reference number 020777. Fundamental to the approval of this application was addressing the ethical issues including conflict of interest, voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity. I needed to ensure that the conflict of interest was addressed and declare anything that could be perceived as such. I did conduct part of the research at the school where I was employed and therefore the conflict of interest that existed had to be submitted as part of the code of ethics to the ethics committee.
**Informed consent**

The term ‘informed consent’ implies that participants are aware, from the outset of the research, of the risks and benefits of participating in the research. It arises from the subject’s right to freedom and self-determination. Participants must understand that taking part in the research is completely voluntary as “voluntarism entails applying the principle of informed consent and thus ensuring that participants freely choose to take part (or not) in the research and guarantees that exposure to risks is undertaken knowingly and voluntarily” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 52). Participation in this study was voluntary and written informed consent was obtained from the principals of the schools, and the teachers who participated in the research.

**Confidentiality and anonymity**

Ensuring that safeguards exist to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of research participants is paramount in carrying out research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), therefore several steps were put in place to ensure that all participants fully understood the issues of confidentiality and anonymity. The PIS included the point that, “Statements from participants that are published do have a risk of being identifiable if the participants work at the researcher’s place of work. The participants were encouraged to edit their interview transcript with this in mind” (Appendix K).

The employed transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement so that the identities of the schools and participants remained confidential (see Appendix L). All interviews and documentation gathered in this study were treated as confidential and the files stored in a secure manner, as per UAHPEC’s requirements.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthy research has been described by Yin (2011) as research “that has properly collected and interpreted its data so that the conclusions represent the real world” (p. 78). The concept of ‘trustworthiness’ serves the purpose of checking on the quality of the data and the results. There are problems with trustworthiness that arise specifically from methodologies that are qualitative in design (Yin, 2011) and potential threats to validity need to be considered at the data collection, data analysis and data interpretation phases (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

To mitigate potential threats in the data collection stage, the questionnaire and the interviews were designed and pre-tested as a measure to ensure validity. Another potential
threat to validity at the data collection stage includes the bias in the selection of participants. A purposive sampling process was used to select which participants were invited to the phase two, semi-structured interviews and, while there were specific criteria in place, willingness to participate was a factor in participants’ selection. During the data analysis stage, my academic supervisor served as a critic of the analysis and later the interpretation. This critique helped to ensure that I was interpreting the findings in a way that could be justified and explained in direct relation to the data and was not bringing in any undue bias to the interpretation.

Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) argue that validity in qualitative research can be achieved through “honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data” (p. 133) and that validity “should be seen as a matter of degree rather than as an absolute state” (p. 133). For this study, honesty was achieved through ensuring that a valid interpretation of the data was made by constantly being mindful of the emergence of my assumptions during interpreting the responses. I adopted a critical stance and continuously questioned how well the data collection methods actually captured the essence of the research questions. Depth was achieved in the interview stages, as I checked for accuracy with participants, checked for understanding by paraphrasing their answers and allowed them to clarify their response if they felt it had been misconstrued. Participants were provided transcripts of their interviews for them to check the accuracy and they were asked to make changes to content if necessary, which was a way to limit the bias through verification.

Reliability

Reliable research means that responses are consistent and stable over time (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) and that research carried out is viewed as having research rigour (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). For the purpose of this research, the question of reliability is considered in terms of whether another researcher following the same method would uncover similar data and if the research was to be repeated it would yield similar findings and conclusions.

Reliability has been assured by following clear processes and protocols of research. In phase one, the data that were collected via an online questionnaire and responses were then collated digitally. In phase two, in order to strengthen the reliability of the interviews, the set-up of the interviews was designed and scheduled to eliminate the effect of possible researcher’s bias. Interviews occurred at a time and place of the participant’s choosing to reduce any feeling of intimidation or discomfort. The interviews were similar in nature and
the same prompts were used in each interview. The interviews were transcribed, and recordings were played in their entirety to ensure that completed transcripts did not contain errors. The transcripts were provided to the participants and two weeks were given for them to provide feedback.

**Researcher 'Bias'**

Researchers' background, beliefs, values and assumptions can shape the direction of the study and the analysis of data, and therefore must be carefully considered (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2014). It is vital that, at all times, researchers check for signs of bias and assumptions throughout the stages of the research process and try to mitigate them. I had a hunch, based on long-term experience, that student voice unearthed teachers' perceptions of risk and that having an awareness of those beliefs for teachers was important. From a constructivist approach, I needed to be mindful that my 'constructions' did not interfere with those of participants. This hunch influenced the conceptual frame used to inform the design of the questionnaire and interview questions. To reduce the influence of possible research bias, I constantly searched for non-confirming evidence and ensured that data were not used to prove existing constructions of 'reality' but to generate new, research-based ideas and understandings.
Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter presents the analysis of data gathered from the questionnaire completed by 25 participants and the interviews (semi-structured and critical incidents) with 5 of these participants in two New Zealand secondary schools. Findings are presented by outlining the reasons teachers gave for engaging with student voice and how they do it, followed by examining teachers’ perceptions of risk in relation to teachers’ efficacy, legitimacy of student voice and making student voice public.

Throughout the findings and discussion chapters, any comments teachers made on the questionnaire are shown by a small q next to the teacher code, i.e., Teacher Sq means Teacher S made the comment on the questionnaire. If the comment had been made during the interview, then Teacher S is used.

Why Do Teachers Engage with Student Voice?

Teachers viewed student voice as pivotal in informing planning of lessons and as a tool when reflecting on current practices. Teacher F’s statement is representative of a majority of teachers’ perspectives on the purpose of student voice:

I don’t think I can overstate how important I think student voice is. I think it is central to everything because you have got to be responsive to the students in front of you, to the students in your class and if you are not responding to them, then they are not going to be picking up what you are putting down, basically.

Informing the students why student voice is collected also featured in the teachers’ priorities: “Telling the learners why their voice is important encourages authentic feedback. Especially when you make the collecting of learners’ voice confidential and it is being used to improve teacher practice” (Teacher Gq). Sharing the ‘why’ of collecting student voice supports the ongoing development of their teaching craft, as Teacher A explained:

As I am relatively new to the profession, I feel that student voice is really important for me. I am still finding my own best practice and I believe having input from the people it affects the most is the best way to do this.

Teachers identified that student feedback is the most thorough form of data that teachers can use to improve their teaching in a rapidly changing educational world: “We may not need to do it too often, but when we do, it is vital that we take what students perceive and apply it to the way we teach, particularly because teaching is changing so we cannot remain stagnant” (Teacher Eq).
While teachers’ priority when engaging with student voice had a learning focus, many were quick to point out that it was crucial for them “to understand why students voice things, not only concerning their learning. I have a holistic approach where academic achievement is only possible if the whole child is taken care of” (Teacher Vq).

Teachers believe that transparency, dignity and respect is needed when engaging with student voice and for students to feel like they are valued as equal partners in teaching and learning. “I feel transparency is important when collecting data from students. They also need to know that it is safe to say how they feel and that it will be anonymous” (Teacher Cq). “When students become intrinsically motivated because you listened to student voice and provide evidence where the student can see you have acted upon it, it encourages learners to feel important and respected” (Teacher Gq).

The value of student voice was clearly articulated by all teachers, yet some expressed their reluctance to explore student voice. There was more likelihood to seek out student voice when they co-opted it into their existing frames of thinking, and more reluctance to do so when student voice gave scope to exploring uncharted territory with regards to their teaching practice. Teachers discussed the tension between their willingness to engage with student voice and actually making room for students to participate as pedagogical decision-makers in the classroom. Teachers identified that the shift in teaching and learning from teacher-led practices to student-led practices is a shift that they struggle with “Should it be teacher-led or student-led and that is where the students must lead the whole teaching learning and I struggle to do that. The whole thing now is moving more from teacher focus to learner focus and I still find it quite tricky” (Teacher O).

**Student Voice Approaches**

Teacher engagement with student voice covered many facets, from student voice on teachers as people, student voice on curriculum content and delivery and student voice on the culture of the classrooms, as Teacher O explains:

> I have surveys with strengths, weaknesses and suggestions. So the students need to give me as a person the strengths, the weaknesses and suggestions. Then the content of the learning - they have to give me strengths, weaknesses, suggestions and then as a class - the feeling, the atmosphere of the class as a whole - weaknesses, the strengths and the suggestions.

Student voice considered as a source of data collection was a common approach for many teachers in the study. Teachers considered it was important to collect voice about themselves as teachers: “I ask students what they think about me as a teacher” (Teacher
Fq); “asking about what the kids think about my teaching style is important to me” (Teacher O). They also ask what students think of specific activities delivered in class: “I ask them if they enjoyed what activities I had prepared for them” (Teacher Jq) and to elicit some ideas about teaching practices: “I get student voice as it can give me some good ideas for my teaching practice” (Teacher L). On the other hand, student voice as a data source could be gathered through collective channels and teachers felt a disconnect between this way of collecting student voice and the more organic approach of ‘in the flow’ conversations, as explained by Teacher Vq:

   At the end of each term, students complete an appraisal connector feedback report, however I rarely encourage students to share their views in my class. And if they do, it’s not planned or structured and it had not been on my radar to encourage this.

While teachers felt comfortable using student voice that gave them feedback on specific delivery of lessons or particular activities, they agreed that moving beyond such data collection is yet to happen, and they were less likely to consider students’ perspectives on what they thought of themselves as learners: “I have never thought to ask students how they learn, I rely on my experience with each individual student, but I do ask them what they think about what we cover in class” (Teacher Bq). Others said: “Although I have many individual conversations with students, I have not thought of identifying patterns of their voice” (Teacher Vq); and “I collect a lot of voice through conversations one on one, but not voice that supports constructing of units and assessments” (Teacher Wq).

When students have contributed specifically to discussions about how they learn best and how they want the teacher to teach them, it was believed to provide a positive impact on student learning and increased motivation, especially when teachers acted upon it:

   This (collecting student voice) has transformed the way that my class is working this year. Students have been co-constructing the lessons, units of work and assessments. They have had deeper learning experiences. Their voice is often connected to making decisions about their learning and being provided with choice - this results in students having more ownership over their learning. (Teacher Gq)

**Degree of formality**

Teachers spoke of collecting student voice in different ways to suit their context, the reasons for collecting it, and the action that they hoped to undertake as a result. Variation in the degree of formality, from informal conversations to formal surveys, was signalled by Teacher X, and it was dependent on and informed by what was hoped to be achieved:

   This occurs on a one-on-one situation with learners getting to know how they would like to approach an assessment in a way that works best for them - what assessment
mode and what content would work best for them. This also occurs on a class level—asking students if they felt the learning in the task was valuable—do they need more of this type of learning task? What would they like to do tomorrow in terms of learning tasks to move them to the next stage?

Teachers’ ways of collecting student voice ranged from one-on-one conversations, and discussions with groups of students, to ‘what do you think’ informal conversations and administering “surveys, class discussions, feedback forms, class brainstorms, student-directed, project-based learning” (Teacher Mq), and “using post-it notes before they leave with the class and at the end of a unit to assess what went well for the learner, what did not go so well for the learner, and what the teacher could include or improve upon next time” (Teacher Gq).

A key finding was that teachers saw it as essential to intentionally record student voice so that it did not get lost or forgotten, as Teacher Pq explains:

I record and have systems in place as I will forget key points if I do not do this. However, ‘intentionally’ to me is proactively recording activities, whereas I feel I am reactive to conversations I have. I do not disagree with intentionally designing tasks and recording them—now that I think about it, it is probably a tool I am yet to master. My training prior to teaching was youth at risk work, so conversation is my comfort zone, so I need to remind myself that taking notes of some kind will help me later.

Teacher F explains that there is a need for both formal and informal student voice, depending on what they hope to achieve with the student voice. While conversations with students ‘on the go’ give teachers some valuable information, there is a need for formal ‘pit-stops’ to allow teachers to have a record of student voice, so they can later on refer to it, as opposed to trying to remember it.

The way I have collected student voice has changed over time. When I started teaching as a beginner teacher, I was really formal about the way I collected student voice surveys, exit slips, those sorts of things and then as I became a more experienced teacher, I got less and less formal with the way that I collected student voice until it was almost entirely informal. And then I got more formal again, because if you are not recording somewhere, it means that I have to spend time almost immediately after the lesson writing down in my journal. If you don’t record it in some way, you are losing the opportunity to interpret it.

Teacher X talks about the perils of relying on memory and discusses the merits of using tools that allow teachers to record the information to be accessed later. They explain that there is an intentional move from capturing student voice as a barometer of what is happening in the classroom at one point to a more complex way of gathering student voice that can be accessed later on, to inform real change in the classroom.
The record is often in my head rather than recording information on paper/online etc. The information more likely comes from a conversation that I then remember. However, this year I have been getting students to be more intentional with their student voice and they are recording their voice and how they learn best in a variety of different ways - in a film clip, written on physical paper that I pdf and keep online, completing an online document or google form. This is an area that I am working on more - from moving it from conversations and thumbs up, thumbs in the middle, thumbs down, to show understanding or learning, to capturing this in a physical format to be kept.

**Anonymity**

A common trend around how student voice is gathered shows a strong tendency to collect student voice anonymously, as Teacher Kq describes:

> I find that it needs to be anonymous as you get a better answer. Students at this age tend to not want you to know what they feel, especially when you are looking at your own teaching practice. By doing anonymous surveys or post-it notes, I get a better understanding of how the students feel.

Being anonymous and/or not making it explicit that teachers are collecting student voice allows for students to say what they really think, as Teacher L comments: “Sometimes it is sneaky, and they don’t know that I’m collecting student voice. Then they are responding to questions without it being as much pressure on them”, whereas when students are identified, “they don’t always respond honestly, sometimes they are saying what they think you want to hear”.

Teachers commented on the value of student voice being anonymous in light of preserving students’ dignity and allowing for meaningful, honest voice, although the drawback is that this kind of voice is harder to then follow up to unpack students’ thinking:

> There is a balance sometimes between whether you are wanting to get anonymous student voice because sometimes they might be more honest if it is anonymous, but then you can’t follow that up or know the context around it and getting student voice that is personal and named and potentially not as honest, potentially not as critical. (Teacher F)

Anonymity plays an important part when considering engagement with student voice. The tension between getting information that is valuable to consider, and being able to follow it up and address it with individual students, potentially at the expense of preserving students’ mana, was often present in teachers’ comments throughout this study.
Perceptions of Risk Identified When Engaging with Student Voice

The risks identified by teachers in this study fall under three themes: teacher efficacy, student voice legitimacy and sharing student voice on a public forum, be it with the student body or colleagues.

Teacher efficacy

A teacher’s own perceptions of risk and negative emotional experiences when engaging with student voice create increased uncertainty and it becomes a risky affair, as Teacher L explains:

There are so many feelings of vulnerability…do they not like me as a person, do I really want to know? Do I really want to ask them? Because do I really want to know that I have done something wrong or haven’t done the best that I could? It’s an emotional thing, teaching.

Lack of experience and limited confidence and self-belief in young teachers developing their craft appear to play important roles in how they engage with student voice. As their confidence in their ability to teach increases, the risk becomes less. More confident teachers are less likely to consider student voice on a personal level, and more likely to assign it to their professional practice, as Teacher A, who has taught for 3 years, observes:

I was very unsure of myself when I first started teaching and I think I was very reluctant to gather that student voice because I was worried about the answers that would come through since I had only just started, and I didn’t have the experience. And I think as I collect more student voice, I realised that you can take what you need out of it and ignore the stuff that is not as important. My confidence has increased, so I can use student voice more than what I did at the start when I focused on what I needed to teach rather than focusing as much on what the kids needed individually. I now think it’s ok to get bad feedback because it means there is something specific for me to work on. So, I think my teaching practice is improving and the idea of collecting student voice is not as scary and risky as it used to be.

Teacher L, who has taught for 13 years, agrees that self-esteem and risk are linked and often depend on building up confidence as a teacher and understanding that student voice is a tool for ongoing improvement, not a judgement of character or professional competence.

I think the risk that you perceive changes through your career. When I was [in my] first few years of teaching, I really resisted collecting student voice. I really didn’t want to. I was like, what is this going to say about me or, you know, I guess your self-esteem is still on the line. Now I care less about students saying something that is not going right or that they are not liking. It doesn’t attack my personal self-esteem as much as before.
Feelings of being vulnerable when engaging with student voice may also be influenced by cultural and language differences, for example teachers who are not native English speakers. Teacher Yq described the fact that having English as their second language comes with insecurities and went on to explain that student voice is often externalised in terms of, “I can’t understand your accent, and I can’t understand what you are teaching me, and this can be really threatening because I can’t do anything about it”.

**Imbalance of power**

Engagement with student voice raised challenging questions about the imbalance of power and responsibility between adults and students within a school.

When engaging with student voice as a mechanism to enable change in teaching practices, teachers brought in existing personal values, beliefs, thoughts and prior experiences to be able to consider such engagement and at times expressed disdain about student voice: “I am not overly convinced that this (student voice) works all the time. Having taught for so many years I know what has worked in the past and what hasn't” (Teacher Hq).

While teachers expressed interest and considered student voice when it came to decision-making, they also discussed it in terms of being linked to students’ personal likes and dislikes and only considered such voice within existing parameters of their own teaching practice and existing expectations.

So, to me it is just a bit of a game - the student voice of what they want to do, it is what they like because it is their environment, and they love to work on devices. That student voice is, ‘We want to work on devices’. They know (what I want) because of my history, they know already if you go to my class, you don’t talk in that class, you work, you don’t ask somebody for a ruler. You must have your own ruler there. But you are allowed to put up your hand and ask questions, so they know. (Teacher O)

Teachers also pointed out that student voice is part of a much bigger picture when it came to changing their own practice, as Teacher Xq explains: “Often when seeking feedback, students will only give little feedback that I am unaware of. Student voice is only one aspect or reason when developing my practice.” Teacher O identified that there needs to be a balance when taking student voice into consideration: “I find students are more successful if there is a clear process for them to follow through, so it is about balance”. Teacher Jq speaks of changing practice, following student voice, only if there is proven evidence that students will have successful outcomes and asserts a conviction that they know what effective teaching styles work for students:
I will change my methods if I see my students are not successful, but till this point students latch on to my teaching style and they are successful. Motivation is key, especially to students who struggle in the subject, not so much student voice in that respect.

Student voice was described by teachers as giving choice over what topics students study, and it comes at a risk for some of the teachers in the research. It often equated with a loss of control in the classroom and the risk of wasting time, being irrelevant or resulting in negative learning experiences for students. Teacher O talks about this loss of power and handing over the choice as a real risk:

I have said to my kids before we did research, I leave it over to you. You decide on what do you want to do your research on. They all decided, and I said, ‘Right, you go do research for me’. So, you have made the selection, I’m not choosing for you. They all came back saying, ‘Oh, this is actually boring’. And I said, ‘But you selected these’, so I have given it over to student voice. It was a risk to allow them to do what they wanted for their research and then they came back saying it didn’t even work.

Feelings of relinquishing control of topics come with feelings of uncertainty, as relying on students to make choices can be seen as a pointless exercise, since students might not rise to the challenge and want to revert to the teacher being in control.

For many centuries, curriculum decision-making laid with teachers, so allowing students to take this over is deemed a risky business, as Teacher A suggests: “I’m concerned about what kids want to do and if we get to the point where students have to decide on the content and what we need to cover in class, this is where it is risky to me”. They go on to explain that risk also is concerned with the validity of choice students make and the risk they pose to themselves, as some choices are inappropriate.

**Curriculum constraints**

Evidence from data suggests that an area of concern and perceived risk when engaging with student voice is related to perceptions of effectiveness in delivery of the curriculum. Teacher Cq comments: “I am always concerned about covering the curriculum and practical skills and I need to make sure the curriculum and necessary skills are covered”, a view echoed by Teacher Dq: “As long as curriculum is covered, I am all for student voice”. Teacher Dq identifies the challenge that student voice presents when it does not align with curriculum coverage: “I am still working on this (engaging student voice) as it becomes a new way of teaching. This has some challenges and it is a risk as student’s voice does not always matches up with the curriculum. What happens then?".
The idea that, if student voice is not in agreement with the curriculum requirements, it is then not worth engaging with, is concerning, as it may have the effect that only student voice that supports current, existing practices in delivery of curriculum is considered and this potentially can narrow the type of student voice that is deemed worthy of inclusion. Teachers expressed the belief that curriculum coverage and delivery is constrained by school systems and therefore it was not up for discussion, as Teacher Tq explains: “I don’t have much say on what we need to cover, so we get on with the learning, it’s not something that I can involve my students in”.

**Assessment constraints**

A number of teachers perceived limitations when engaging with student voice within the assessment framework for their subjects. They saw this as an area that teachers had little control of, as it was decided by the wider department policies on assessment: “I don't have control over what and how we assess. That comes from the Head of Learning Area” (Teacher Bq). When asked what input student voice has in co-constructing assessments, Teacher Cq commented on the risk that having good grades for their students has on involving their voice: “We are asked to use common assessment tasks. We need to regularly report grades/levels which must be robustly assessed. We need to be consistent when assessing”. Both teachers suggest that ‘student voice’ is given no consideration within the realms of assessment as it is considered a risky action if students grades are at stake.

The wider assessment framework provided by NCEA is seen to inform department assessment practices, which do not allow for student voice, as Teacher Bq discusses: “NCEA has significant constraints with regard to assessment so this is an area that student voice does not impact”. The belief that “assessments have to be within the framework, we can’t afford to be flexible with that” (Teacher Rq) suggests that the opportunity to engage student voice is rarely considered when assessing and instead teachers feel they must assess in a way that is mainstreamed and dictated by external factors—that is the only ‘safe’ option.

With regards to allowing students to have a say in how assessments are delivered, such as the mode of the assessment or its content, Teacher Fq writes: “I ask for this (student voice) only occasionally as the rest of the time we are engaged in activities that result in credits. When I teach juniors, the time for discussion increases, as we have the luxury of
time”. Teaching intentionally for assessment that results in credits is important for teachers, and student voice becomes a luxury only available to younger students.

It appears that engagement with student voice through discussions and dialogue, and assessment preparation are seen by teachers as being mutually exclusive. With assessment concerns around already having a lack of teacher decision-making power (external authorities drive assessment) and assessment results a priority for all teachers, the heightened perceptions of risk were that by allowing student voice, there’s a potential loss of rigour in assessing students, which in turn may limit student opportunity for success. Teachers viewed it as their responsibility and felt accountable to prepare students to succeed, and a measure of success was gaining NCEA credits.

Functioning within a department meant that teachers felt a responsibility to uphold collective decisions made by the whole team, as Teacher F states:

It depends on which department I am in. In one of my teaching areas, it is not just me, it is six other people who have all been involved in structuring that course and due to the nature of the assessments, we all have to do things at the same time and we all come together to develop different unit plans. It is really important that any changes we make are changes that we agree as a team. I can’t just ride roughshod over the others and say, ‘Right, I don’t care about you guys, I am going to do this in my class, based on my own students’ feedback’.

Student voice in assessment was perceived as a high or moderate risk (17/25 teachers); however, statements from teachers suggest that some view it as allowing students to become more involved in their learning. As Teacher Gq points out, “Making significant changes to an assessment where student voice has been used increases student engagement. But it’s not the reality of what is happening at my school”. The value of students having a voice when it comes to assessments is acknowledged by Teacher Lq: “Students usually have very relevant comments to make about assessments, how and when they occur. This semester I have changed the assessments after the feedback from the semester before”. Teacher Lq highlights the importance of student feedback with regards to assessments and being able to act upon it, but this view seems to be singular and does not appear to be supported by other teachers’ current perspectives.

It would seem, therefore, that NCEA assessments and students’ expectations to achieve well academically are a major influence on teachers’ decision to engage with student voice and it is an area better left to the expertise of teachers.
**Professional identity**

A further source of risk is related to teachers’ professional identity. Most teachers believed that they had a professional image to uphold in front of their classes, and that by allowing students to challenge that image, it could potentially bring into question their suitability as a teacher and would challenge their professional credentials, as Teacher A points out:

> It is our online appraisal system and there is a system on there where you can get feedback and then there’s sections down the bottom for comments and you can add questions and all the questions relate specifically to the teaching criteria. So, they get to give you a grade and select what they want you to then work on related to that criteria...so something that I am doing well and something that they (students) feel that I might need to work on for them.

Some teachers believed that collection of student voice equalled entering a vulnerable territory, as they had linked it directly to prior professional judgements and appraisal. As justification for their current perceived risks, they recalled prior experience of collecting student voice that had been used as a factor in their appraisal process. Teacher A’s comments are indicative of others: “I do believe there are still many teachers who are reluctant to do this (engage with student voice) in fear of being reprimanded for ‘bad feedback’ from students, or for fear of being looked down upon by other staff or when they are been appraised.” The culture of being judged if student voice was less than complimentary with regards to one’s practice was highlighted by Teacher Cq and Teacher A, respectively:

> Other teachers have spoken to me about the fact that feedback is not something they really want to do because they are so worried about what other people are going to think about them and how it is going to affect them and are they going to get in trouble?

> It’s a personal feeling of that judgement, and people thinking that I am good at what I do, but then looking at that (student feedback) and it’s coming across that I am not. I need to protect what I am doing because I want to be a good teacher.

**Changing classroom practices**

When considering student voice with a view to changing one’s own practice, many factors are in play. There are risks connected to what to do next, how proposed change will fit in with current teaching practices and how to prioritise what changes are more important than others. Furthermore, a genuine desire to act upon student voice that requires changes constitutes a commitment to making those changes and teachers feel under pressure to honour the student voice that they invited in, as Teacher F indicates:
If it is not just, ‘Everything is all good, keep doing what you are doing’, then because you asked for it (student voice), you have to enact it. I wouldn’t ask if I didn’t want to know, but it is also, ‘Now I need to go and do something different, now I have to change what I do’. Now I can’t just roll with the previous plan, now I need to make some adjustments…. be it pace, it is too fast, there is not enough time to absorb, there is not enough time to discuss, the curriculum is tight, how are we going to manage that and then you have go to make hard decisions about what are you going to drop or adjust or whatever to fit in extra time.

Teacher F’s comments highlight the constraints that real consideration of student voice bring about and the role of those constraints in either maintaining the status quo or disrupting their practice and allowing for uncertainty and therefore risk.

Risk is less evident when student voice is collected to inform already decided avenues, as Teacher F suggests: “Sometimes, what voice I am gathering is more about choices that I was intending to offer anyway. So, I am enacting what students say but it is not necessarily a change of practice.”

Teachers agreed that changing one’s practice is challenging and involves risk, even if there is a willingness to change pedagogy. Risk around deep change and the importance of a supportive environment were seen as the governing concerns, as suggested by both Teacher L and Teacher Pq:

That is the bit that we struggle with. I think that changing your practice overall is quite a challenge. I think sometimes you might tweak a few things whereas if somebody wanted to do things quite differently, like if the feedback was ‘Stop talking, give us more time to work,’ that is actually quite hard to change, that is something I find really difficult to change.

I have given these (changes to teaching) a go when support from department and other variables have aligned to make sure I can do them justice. Risk is in trying new things, it’s never flawless, so the potential to offer less to the student is there.

The risk becomes evident in the tension between considering student voice and enacting it in practice: “I wouldn’t ask if I didn’t want to know the answers, so I can change my practice based on the feedback” (Teacher F); but “then realising that you are not in a position to have the energy to change, [which] makes you feel like a bad teacher, like you go home and think, ‘I am doing such a crap job of this’, and this is not healthy” (Teacher L).

Alongside the risk related to having to actually act upon student voice within the realms of changing practice is the fear of being able to manage the change and the risk it brings upon balancing work and life, as Teacher L suggests: “How could I change my practice based
on what my students say without it affecting my work life balance or my energy level and that is where the risk comes in”.

When considering practice changes, risks exist at different levels. For example, “it is less risk to change activities and resources, than it is to change the actual way I deliver the curriculum” (Teacher L), a view supported by Teacher Pq: “I do change what I do when I receive feedback that indicates that it would work better for the student if I did. On most occasions, these are small changes hence why the risk is low”. By contrast, when discussing substantial changes to practice, teachers identified it as higher risk. “To actually change the way I teach is the tricky thing and I think that is where we sometimes just let the student voice be ignored and not turned into action” (Teacher Dq).

The risk of not changing teaching practices is sometimes twofold, as described by Teacher F:

It is that whole arduous [balance] and showing defensive and non-defensive practice and you learn more when you are genuinely motivated by considering your practice. When your motivation is about genuinely improving practice and not just being seen to have good practice, then you have got a lower perception of risk because the risk would be the other way around: the risk that you don’t actually improve.

A risk identified by many teachers when considering a change in practice is related to the wider department’s agreed vision of teaching and learning pedagogy and strategies to achieve this vision. When individual teachers (through engaging student voice) will deviate from the collective strategic plan, they feel as though they are letting their colleagues down and relationships might break down, therefore making it not worth the risk in many cases.

Teacher O identified an initiative of reading books out loud to students and the risk that accompanied that decision. They explained that student voice was strongly suggesting that reading aloud was not an effective teaching practice: “This student came to me and said, ‘Do you realise that this is the most boring thing in the whole world, if we have to sit and we read with you every word that you read. We can actually fall asleep.’” The teacher then questioned her practice in terms of students’ engagement:

And I thought, ‘Oh my goodness... is it me, is it the book, don’t I read it with voices or the passion ....’ Then I realised how would I focus if somebody else is reading a book to me? I’m a visual person, there is no way I would be focused at all if somebody is reading a book to me. So that changed immediately, I decided there and then.

The decision to listen to student voice came with the risk of not adhering to departmental practice. “It was a huge risk because they (other teachers) can say, ‘Listen, this is what we
decided, all teachers read the book in class to the students from the start’. It was tricky for me not to do what we (department) decided to do”. When asked what made them stick to their decision, Teacher O responded, “Because of the students. I have 30 students at the time in my class, so 30 students are negative, it’s not going to work”. Reflecting on what student voice meant in this instance, Teacher O commented, “So, just little things like that, but if that student didn’t come up to me, I would have carried on droning on, you know, and maybe never change.”

**Student voice legitimacy**

Teachers’ perceptions of the legitimacy of student voice influence their engagement with it. Students’ academic ability, behaviour, emotional output and ‘hard to hear’ feedback were all identified as being issues that might reduce teachers’ willingness to engage with student voice. Furthermore, there were several risks associated with engaging with students articulating their voice, namely when their voice diverged from teachers’ practices and beliefs or when teachers were afraid that the outcome of hearing voice was dissonant with what was already happening in the classroom.

**Students’ cognitive ability**

An important risk factor when engaging with student voice was students’ perceived capabilities to know what their needs are and how much they understand themselves as learners in order to be able to contribute their voice. Many teachers expressed concern around the physical age of students and how that would affect their ability to make sound comments to affect decision-making in teachers’ practice, as Teacher Nq comments: “The year level is another important factor. Secondary school students will be more mature in the decision-making process”; while Teacher Vq questions students’ ability to explain their learning needs: “Many of my students would struggle to articulate their needs”. Teacher Dq suggests that sometimes students do not know what their needs are or what they think they need and what they actually need fail to converge:

There is a problem with students not knowing what they want as they don’t know what they want. Sometimes student voice is contradictory as they sometimes say one thing but when they get it they realise they want something else. The risk is that if you listen to those, you won’t follow the curriculum or what is needed to teach to succeed in subjects.

The potential risk articulated by these teachers is the lack of trust in student capabilities to express what they really need and, consequently, for teachers not to be able to meet those demands. Teacher Hq considers such student voice in light of attending to individual needs:
“The question really is: ‘How do you cater for every single student in your class who has a different learning style and wants to learn what they think is good for them?’”. Teacher Hq’s assumption is that every single student has a different learning style and whether what they think it is for them is indeed the right way to teach them. A lack of belief in students’ capabilities to express the way that they learn, and what they need to ensure learning, is a risk factor that some teachers are unwilling to explore, yet other teachers, such as Teacher Sq, suggest that, “Over the years it has been a realisation that students are learning better when we have a common understanding of their needs and the things that don’t work for them”.

**Students’ behaviour and academic achievement**

Teachers appear to make sense of and interpret student voice through their personal experience, based on behaviour and perceptions of student academic ability, as Teacher Rq explains:

Most of the time, I have seen that students who have low level of motivation and high level of distraction are the ones who find the lessons difficult and do not have a deep understanding of the concepts. If their behaviour is poor, how can I take what they say seriously?

Such student voice might still be considered but not to the same extent as more rigorous student voice. “I consider it, but to be honest sometimes excuse their comments based on their own lack of effort/ability rather than truly self-analysing my own teaching” (Teacher Dq), a view shared by Teacher L, who also acknowledges the limitations of not being open to engaging with feedback given by behaviourally challenging students:

It’s hard not to do that (discarding student feedback) if you know the kid is really lazy and has put no effort and then they say that they don’t understand what you have taught...you take it sometimes, just take it with a grain of salt and think, ‘They just don’t like me and so I’m not going to let that attack me personally’. But then I guess that is the challenge and the risk of not listening to what they say because maybe they haven’t succeeded because of the way you have taught it and maybe you could have done different things. Maybe you could have personalised it to them.

Many of the teachers interviewed commented that student academic ability would affect the seriousness with which they engage with student voice and allow that student voice to guide their teaching practice:

With some classes, student voice is very strong and intentional. I base conversations around why we are doing what we are doing, and they are in control of getting to the end point with my guidance, but they take ownership. In these classes, they do quite a bit of designing of content delivery. In other classes, I can see that this ownership confuses them and for some individuals they have seen this
as lack of understanding or ability to give direction as a teacher. With these students, which often are in the low ability class, I probably end up being less explicit so as to remove the conversation/battle that ensues from their perception. (Teacher Pq)

The perceived risk for Teacher Pq is in direct relation to the ability of the students to direct their learning. Teacher F agrees with Teacher Pq and explains that the risk expands, based on the subject taught: “Engagement with student voice is different for my two teaching areas. In social sciences, very frequent student voice and low perceived risk. In maths, occasional student voice and higher perceived risk (Yes, I imagine these are linked)”. Teacher F’s comment highlights that the specific curriculum design for different subjects allows for different engagement with student voice. Traditional subjects, which see a more directive approach to teaching and learning, are not as conducive to allowing student voice, while language-rich subjects, where dialogue and sharing perspectives is valued, carry with them higher levels of engagement with student voice.

**Emotional, critical and dissonant student voice**

Another limiting factor when engaging with student voice was the type of voice and feedback they shared with their teachers, namely ‘whiney’ feedback, feedback that was hard to hear and dissonant with what the teachers thought of their practices. Student voice deemed as emotive or not related directly to learning was also perceived as a risk factor when considering it in terms of changing teaching practices.

Teacher Nq wondered about the likelihood of only a specific group of students voicing their opinions, and worried about the ‘unheard’ voice of the rest of students: “Students most likely to share are often outgoing, gregarious students and can tip the balance of teaching styles away from what suits introverted learners, and those who struggle to express themselves”, while Teacher Mq muses about students who are outgoing and will take it too far when it comes to expressing their opinions: “I feel like there are some kids that take it a little bit too far sometimes. For example, they had issues with a teacher. So, we did ‘I feel … when you …’ statements and I passed them on to the teacher. But I censored it all and made sure it was not going to be emotional in any way”.

Emotional student voice, which was explained by teachers as voice that carries high emotive language, is seen as having little impact on changing teachers’ practices. Instead, teachers discussed the merit of setting parameters around what student voice is useful to inform teaching practices, as Teacher A suggests: “So I explained to them that if you put it in there that the emotion comes across, that you are angry or upset, sometimes the
feedback can’t be taken on properly by the person that is receiving it.” Also, feedback that teachers can do something about it is seen as useful while discarding the emotional aspect of it, as Teacher L explains:

So, I try to focus on comments that are more specific to my teaching practice and to the learning style rather than emotions. The risk is that you give the students the power of using their voice, but they are not at a stage where they can moderate it or not moderate it. So, it can come across in a way that can be a little bit hurtful or offensive when you want it to be productive. Yeah, they haven’t quite got that filter process where this (feedback) is an emotion - I need to separate that and concentrate on the action.

‘Difficult to hear’ student voice was a focus of many teachers’ comments, and a risk factor when engaging with it, even for teachers who have experience in the teaching profession:

I don't perceive this as a risk anymore, but I used to a lot when I was a less experienced teacher. Sometimes, I still do have concerns that asking them for feedback on their learning may initiate a grumbling session, or negativity if they haven't understood the topic. (Teacher Dq)

When teachers are genuinely willing to listen to ‘hard to hear’ voices, the internal struggle between acting upon the voice or ignoring it becomes real:

It is especially difficult to hear feedback that I am interested in. I believe that I have managed to develop the ability not to take things personally while trying to process them constructively, but I worry of what I need to change and if I can do it. (Teacher Vq)

Even when teachers acknowledge that it is of benefit to listen to the difficult student feedback, the risk remains and navigating it is a source of uncertainty for both teacher and student outcomes, as Teacher Pq details:

I have seen my growth as a practitioner because of my ability to take on feedback, including the difficult-to-hear parts. I feel the reward outweighs the risk, but that does not mean there is no risk. Risk is present as not all voice comes across to be critical and they can be said to manipulate a desired outcome for the source of feedback which is not in line with the outcomes wanted by the teacher.

Letting students down is a fear that teachers highlighted, and often this is done through hearing difficult feedback, or feedback that does not coincide with teachers’ intention of delivering positive learning outcomes for their students, as Teacher A and Teacher O indicate, respectively:

I think hearing and getting the feedback when they (students) put in no harsh comments necessarily, but comments where you feel like you were trying to do that, and you haven’t quite done it. So I guess it is more I feel like I am letting my students down when I feel like I am doing something and then it comes across from their perspective that I’m not and I think that is the biggest concern for me when it comes
to that. It’s a fear of failure, and fear of hearing that you are not doing what you had hoped or doing something that is effective for them.

I think when I get that information (difficult student feedback), I feel sad when it is about me and you (as a student) see a weakness in me. I think we are human beings and you think, ‘Oh my goodness, what did I do there?’ I need to see it all as positive feedback. If you see this criticism, negative criticism, you are going to struggle.

Student voice that bring up feelings of inadequacy for teachers are the ones that are the riskiest, as indicated by Teacher L:

This particular student voice that I have just collected this week was actually in response to a student complaint and I was like, ‘What? This is a lovely student. Why are they complaining? What has gone wrong?’ I thought we were doing the best we could for her… I thought…this is a complaint; do I really want to ask her about my teaching? Do I really want to know? This is too risky for me.

When asked what made Teacher L still seek that difficult student voice, they explained that they wanted to know if it was indeed their problem or another teacher’s, and if the voice pertained to just one student or if it was common amongst other students. They explained the risk in terms of possibly having to change what they thought were sound teaching practices that they deemed previously successful in meeting that particular student’s needs.

Teachers agreed that challenging student voice is hard to consider and act upon, and that it is often discarded at the expense of student voice that affirms what they have done.

Being honest with yourself as to whether you are actually wanting to change because quite often you get back some feedback that affirms what you’ve done and some feedback that says maybe you could have done better and is very easy to look at the positive feedback and say, ‘Oh yeah, I’ve done a good enough job, you know, okay, a couple of students didn’t like what I did, but who cares’. (Teacher L)

However, teachers acknowledge the importance of considering all student voice, if it is to make a genuine impact on changing practices, as Teacher L indicates:

It is very easy to take the positive and just ignore the negative, but I think, if you are getting student voice, then there is no point if you are just going to pick the positive because you don’t just need affirming, although sometimes it is nice. I also think that it is easier to take note of the critique from students that you like or care about. I mean, I’m not saying you dislike any kid, but some kids are harder to like, and it is easier to take the critique from the students that you feel like you have done a good job trying with or you enjoy teaching.

When feedback is at odds with what teachers believe to be effective practices in their classrooms, they are more likely to discard it, as Teacher O reflects:
It is all really good points that the kids raise. But I tell them all the time, ‘Don’t say things to me like we want to do listen to music, can we use earphones in class and listen to music?’ I say, ‘Don’t even go there.’ So it is all about the teaching and the learning in our class and sort of the ambience in class.

Teacher A comments, “Feedback which directly affects them is something that I like to focus on rather than ‘I don’t have time for homework, can you not give me homework?’, so I try to focus on feedback that is more specific to my teaching practice”.

While teachers expressed that they consider specific feedback about their teaching practices, what they might not consider is that feedback, like that above, might provide avenues of inquiry into current teaching practices that might need to change to meet the concerns raised in the feedback. A consideration of giving less homework might unearth different strategies of teaching during class time. Using music as background might unearth students’ specific needs of mode, delivery, and atmosphere when learning in the classroom, something that was not explored by the teachers involved in the research.

**Making student voice public**

Questions about sharing student voice with other students and colleagues uncovered strong feelings of uncertainty, volatility and a desire to limit student voice to certain aspects only. The risks identified when sharing student voice ranged from unsettling students, losing face, exposing competence in a public arena and damaging existing learning and professional relationships.

Teacher L discusses the value of establishing relationships with students first, if they are to mitigate the risk of sharing student voice as a collective activity: “The risk is different based on the relationship you have with them (students). Like if you have a class you really, you have gelled with and the environment is positive and relaxed, there is less risk, because there is less uncertainty of what they will say.” Teacher Kq explains why they see sharing student voice as having a risk associated with it:

I don’t like sharing student voice in a public space like a class, as it can unsettle students. It is a risk, not to me but to the students whose voice I share, they can stand out for all the wrong reasons, so I don’t do it, unless I know they won’t be identified.

Disclosing student feedback to colleagues is also deemed to be a risky endeavour. The belief that sharing student voice with colleagues comes with a risk alters the way that student voice and feedback are communicated, as Teacher L points out:
I guess you don’t want to look like you are doing a bad job and find your peers are better teachers. So sometimes we do that confirmation bias with the way we share our student voice. You don’t tell them necessarily always the feedback that critiques you, you tell them the feedback that confirms what you think the student’s issue is.

Teacher Rq considers who the sharing is happening with and brings about the idea of establishing mutual trust and respect if the sharing is to be honest and uncensored:

I think it is harder to be honest and I think you only do it with colleagues you really trust. So maybe friends who are colleagues and maybe your appraiser, but it depends on your relationship with your appraiser as to whether you would really be honest about it.

When sharing challenging student voice within a public environment and involving colleagues, teachers feel at risk if they are faced with seriously contemplating changing practice. Teacher L commented on the fact that genuine sharing of student feedback with fellow colleagues makes it high stakes if the desired action is changing practice, as it commits the teacher to doing it.

If student feedback is that you could do things differently and you told your colleagues about it, then you need to think how you do it differently, it takes more work to think how are you actually going to change your practice, and whether we actually have the energy and there is a risk if you don’t follow up and everyone knows.

Teachers seeing sharing of student voice as involving potential changes to their practice makes them reluctant to do so, as Teacher Pq suggests:

I feel do not share much at all. Voice around designing the way they have the content of their learning is shared occasionally – frequently, but voice around classroom teaching I feel is rare, which is the feeling of risk around this.

Despite comments that identify sharing of student voice as a risk-taking action, teachers do see the value in doing so. Teacher Gq explains that sharing student voice with colleagues enables the discussions to go further and move towards improved practice for all teachers, in terms of assessment, strategies for planning and delivery of curriculum.

It’s the beginning of a discussion on what the learners perceive as important in the teaching of a standard or not. What affected their learning as they studied the standard? Learning from our learners is also an added incentive to make us consider things we may not be thinking about within our planning.

Problematic student feedback voiced or discovered when sharing with colleagues conjured high levels of risk. Explaining a situation where two colleagues became privy to such problematic student voice, Teacher L reflected on how it made them feel.
A student complained to another teacher about her experience in my class. That was challenging because it came from a colleague to me not from the student to me. If it came from the student to me, I would kind of respond in a different way. Because it came actually through two colleagues and they both were in my department, I was like 'Hang on, this feels like it is attacking me'. So, then I went to the student to have a chat to her in person, but that did feel quite risky as well. It did feel like a critique on me by my colleagues. So that did get my back up a bit. When you dig deeper, you realise that it is not necessarily about you, but the student hasn’t experienced things the way that they needed to.

Perceptions of risk, explained in terms of feeling like personal attack, is also shared by Teacher F who talks about their experience as a beginning teacher and feeling inadequate in their teaching practices:

As a beginner teacher, if I compare myself to when I was a newbie with supervising teachers, that stuff (sharing difficult feedback) is hard because you are seeing challenge as a personal affront almost, you know, it is not something I can learn from because I suck as a teacher.

Having strong professional relationships with colleagues impacted on the level of risk identified. “I would say however that not all colleagues are equal in this ability and that this year to last year I feel the risk has shifted for no other reason but the combination of teachers I work with closely to what I had” (Teacher Pq). High levels of trust and respect play a crucial role in determining perceptions of risk attached to sharing student voice, as Teacher Rq suggests: “It can be risky if the colleagues would go and talk to other students and teachers crossing professional boundaries. Depends on how much I trust my colleagues”. Likewise, fear of being compared plays a role in determining who teachers share their reflections on student feedback with:

I share all my reflections about the student voice I get in my class with other people, but there is a fear of them reading it and seeing what I am not doing, rather than what I am doing. Some things you don’t want to be looked on like you are not doing something and someone else is doing something.

From a leader's perspective, maintaining teachers’ professional dignity intact is paramount and often comes with high degrees of risk, as Teacher X discusses:

This is a high risk (discussing feedback) because it could potentially be upsetting for some teachers to talk about the type of feedback that they get from students . . . the specific nature of the feedback etc. I (as a leader) don't want to make them feel like they are not doing a good job.

A view that leaders use student voice as a tool for issuing professional judgement carries with it high levels of risk and makes teachers express feelings of uncertainty:
We have a system where the leaders are going through classes and checking in on lessons. Once I did get quite emotional about being told that the sequence of what I planned wasn’t as good as I thought. So this is when that risk of being judged comes when you may be willing to share student voice or feedback, but not knowing the outcome. (Teacher A)

Perceptions of risk linked to sharing student voice with others limited the way in which sharing happens, making it more often informally and in passing, as Teacher A explains:

It is not formally that we talk and say, ‘Listen, you have done surveys, I have done surveys, let us have a look, it’s the same class. What do they say to you and what do they say to me?’ That would be the right thing to do. So if we teach the same group we can actually talk about those kids and how they experience your class and how they experience my class, but it is not happening. Instead, we just sit and talk about what is happening next and what we are doing next. No, we have never discussed it (student voice), definitely not.

When asked what risk these discussions might pose, teachers commented on the fact that they could ‘open a can of worms’, that each teacher would be busy justifying student voice rather than looking at it and that the risks of arguing with colleagues about what the student voice means is not worth the relationship damage it could cause.
Chapter Five: Discussion

This study explored teachers' perceptions of risk when engaging with student voice. The discussion covers the three research questions and data themes that emerged from data analysis and findings. When the relationships between engagement with student voice and perceptions of risk are considered in the light of the literature reviewed in this research, there are several possible explanations for the type of engagement with student voice, associated perceptions of risk and thinking of the teachers in the data examined.

A willingness to take risks for their students was espoused by the majority of the teachers in this research and confirms Howard's (2009, 2011) finding that teachers consider benefits to student learning in their risk judgements.

Engagement with Student Voice

Why do teachers engage with student voice?

On initial examination, teachers agreed that engagement with student voice is a powerful way to investigate their own teaching practices and consider pedagogical changes that lead to improvement. They considered student voice worthwhile to understand students as whole individuals, not just through a learning lens. Teachers commented on the importance of inviting student voice to establish real learning partnerships in the classroom. The teachers’ views on the importance of student voice are reflected in the work of Bourke and Loveridge (2016) and Fielding (2001b), who advise that it is important that teachers firstly understand the importance of learning from students to broaden their understanding beyond the official language of learning; and, secondly, are willing to engage in a dialogic encounter with students with a focus on learning.

Teachers believed that by engaging with student voice, students felt valued and respected as learners, which in turn increased their intrinsic motivation and engagement. Rudduck (2007) makes the point that when students are listened to, they feel valued and their commitment to learning will strengthen, while Thomson (2010), Mitra (2008) and Charteris and Thomas (2017) advocate that when students, as ‘expert witness to their lives’, are invited to articulate their perspectives, thoughts and ideas on education in the classroom, they bring in unique perspectives and reasons for pedagogical change. This, Thomson (2010) asserts, increases motivation, allows students to take ownership of their learning and have more control over curriculum delivery.
While teachers could clearly articulate the value of engaging with student voice, some also expressed reluctance about doing so, which would suggest, for whatever reason, that there is a considerable gap between what teachers think and what they actually do. The tension between the value of why and the constraint of how (that is, espoused theories versus theories in use), highlighted by the findings in this research, is validated by the work of Agryris and Schön (1974) who explain that the relationship between values and behaviours is complex and that often there is a mismatch between what people think and what they do.

**Student Voice Approaches**

*What approaches do teachers take when engaging with student voice to inquire into their own practice?*

The first, most obvious, finding is that the most common ways of engaging with student voice were via surveys, questionnaires and individual conversations. In doing so, teachers were exploring student voice through students being data sources (data about student past performances, prior knowledge, teachers acknowledging students’ voices) and through students being active respondents (knowing how students learn, though discussions, and hearing students’ voices) (Fielding, 2001b). The literature supports these findings to an extent, as it explains this type of student voice as a mechanism that tends to be teacher-centred (Bragg, 2007a), describing teacher practices as involving young people in a passive, voice-collection cycle with little follow-up (Fielding, 2001b, 2009) and often using a tool that is unidirectional, with limited opportunities for students to articulate their views beyond surveys and questionnaires (Bragg, 2007a; Fielding 2004a; MacBeath et al., 2001).

While findings showed that teachers viewed student voice as a source of data collection, the data collected (as articulated by the teachers in this study) focused on feedback on teaching practices, teachers as people and teaching activities carried out in class, which transcends the parameters described by the research mentioned above and moves into an evaluative, valuable space. This raises a point of difference between the data in the findings and the literature explored. Teachers used student voice as a source of initial data, which was almost always linked to learning, while the literature connected students as data sources to areas that are peripheral to pedagogy and learning (Thomson, 2012), use student voice to inform school initiatives (Fielding, 2001a or are more likely to focus on developing citizenship (Bourke & Loveridge, 2016) rather than current learning (Nelson, 2014).
It is surprising that, although a majority of teachers identified student voice as the most useful component in co-constructing learning with students and crucial to improving teaching practices, they communicated that student voice is yet to be fully explored beyond the level of a data source and that they were less comfortable considering students’ perspectives on how they learn and identifying any learning patterns. This view is shared by Cook-Sather (2002, 2006b) who explains that student voice and perspectives have been under-utilised in the design of educational programmes, and that conditions for students’ engagement that address their learning needs and aspirations must sit at the forefront of all teachers’ decision-making. These findings are also congruent with New Zealand research into student voice which posits students as researchers. Such research found that “it has been a struggle to move beyond the ‘consultation’ model in which different groups are asked to present their views and move towards real-time problem solving and shared decision making in the classrooms” (Bolstead, 2010, p. 10).

There needs to be a mind-shift for many teachers to take the understanding of student voice beyond decision-making that is peripheral to curriculum and class pedagogy and beyond student voice as only a data source, into a space where student voice actively contributes to deeper learning. The teachers in the study agreed that, although engaging with student voice as a source of data is worthwhile, it is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of engaging with student voice. They wanted to be less controlling in the classroom and to lead conversations with students in a way that allowed students to become equal partners through processes of consultation, negotiation and collaboration of many aspects of their learning. This sentiment is shared by Fielding (2001, 2006) who argues relentlessly that there are many ways of engaging with student voice to permit students to be designing their learning, being decision-makers, being co-teachers and researchers of learning.

Key findings also included the importance of diverse ways in which teachers engaged with student voice—from formal to informal, from individual conversations to group discussions, and from students representing a range of views, capabilities and experiences—all this variety of interactions dependent on and informed by what was hoped to be achieved by collection of such voice. No matter the way in which student voice was gathered, teachers strongly agreed that such data, to have any leverage on teachers’ practices, needed to be recorded intentionally and shared with students. Being able to reflect in an intentional way (in part) rested with teachers’ ability to create conditions that capture student voice, so they are not losing the opportunity of interpreting it. Bragg (2007a, 2007b) concurs with these findings as she speaks of an array of techniques (photography, audio recordings, collages,
multimedia) to capture student voice that shift from only conversing with students to looking for ways to build dialogical student-teacher’s conversations with intentional purpose.

When teachers discussed approaches to student voice engagement, they strongly agreed that anonymity of voice was a discerning way of doing it. They believed anonymity invoked less pressure, with students feeling safe in sharing opinions, giving scope to honest and possible critical voice collection. However, anonymity brought up the existing tension between getting information that is authentic at the expense of not being able to follow it up in a responsive and individual way or to confirm with students the interpretations of their voice.

An explanation for teachers’ plea for anonymity could be that they have not yet reached a point with their students where safe spaces are created, so that students feel safe to disclose all views. This concept is discussed by Nelson (2014) and Kane and Chimwayange (2014) who comment that to establish and maintain genuine partnerships where student voice and perspective are aired, there is a real need for safe spaces, where teachers are open to student perspective and are willing to learn from rather than filter student experiences of learning.

An essential finding underpinning all approaches is that the vast majority of the teachers said that that relationships are the most important thing in developing trust, a prerequisite for students to become confident to speak up and contribute their perspectives, while also increasing their motivation to engage with learning. These findings are consistent with the work of Bishop and Berryman (2006), Fielding (2010) and Nelson (2014), who found evidence of a link between students’ self-increased efficacy, greater student motivation for learning and a willingness to share their opinions, when strong learning relationships were already established. However, it is interesting to note that, for some teachers, personal relationships took precedence over learning relationships, as teachers talked about the value of knowing students as people, not necessarily using their voice to change what they do in the classroom. This emphasises that the development of relationships between teachers and students based on personal attributes is unlikely to make an impact on teachers’ teaching practices, unless effort is made to develop learning relationships alongside the personal relationships.
Teachers’ Perceptions of Risk

What perceptions of risk do teachers identify when engaging with student voice to inquire into their own practice?

It is interesting to pinpoint that teachers did not link risk directly to engagement with student voice (hence their willingness to do so), but the perceived uncertainty and vulnerability were connected with the type of voice and future outcomes. This finding is mirrored in the research by Twyford (2016), who also found that teachers’ perceptions of risk were not linked directly to the professional learning events themselves (in which they saw value), but the perceived uncertainty which was connected to those events.

Loss of control and perceptions of risk

Findings from this research align with previous research suggesting that engaging with student voice involves cognitive and emotional processes, and that teachers’ existing beliefs, values and prior experiences affect their perceptions of risk and increased vulnerability (Hargreaves, 1998; Lasky, 2005; Twyford, 2016; Twyford et al., 2017).

Teachers in the research tended to communicate a preoccupation with portraying a certain image in front of their students and revealed that being the expert in the room and being responsible for the teaching and success of their students held high importance for them. They said that by inviting student voice in, they show that they are prepared to challenge their expertise, prepared to admit that they might be wrong, and many were not willing to let this happen. This attitude is also found in the research undertaken by Kane and Chimwayange (2014), who found that teachers feared acceptance of students as authorities in teaching and instead looked to researchers to gain feedback on their teaching practices. There was general concern that by inviting student voice in, teachers gave more control to students, with the possibility of undermining existing authority and destabilising the school environment.

An essential finding is that teachers worried that engagement with student voice might mean losing control, not being agentic in their classroom and handing over too much power to students, which in turn conveyed feelings of uncertainty and risk. The notion of holding or relinquishing power was described by teachers in ways that relate to binary theories, whereby teachers saw that one party had to lose for the other to gain, and the possibility of the students gaining through voicing their perspectives carried perceptions of high risk. Those risks were described by teachers as uncertainty about not being able to steer the direction of the learning, as losing something of value that had existing success (teaching
strategies) and, most importantly, as being challenged by the role of students as equal contributors to designing teaching and learning opportunities. Loss of power in the classroom resonates with Le Fevre’s (2014) research, when she makes the point that “an action or event is considered to be a risk for people involved if they perceive a potential for the loss of something of value they believe they have. The greater the perceived significance of the loss, the greater the perceived risk” (p. 57). Ponticell (2003) adds strength to these findings as he comments that the greater the chance of a loss happening and the greater the significance attached to it, the greater the risk. Teachers saw their fundamental role as being one that directs deep learning, makes considered decisions around teaching and learning, and holds the ultimate authority in the classroom and engaging student voice in matters of pedagogy threatened the core of these beliefs. The constraints of those beliefs materialised in actions that involved high levels of risk if they carried out these actions (engaging with student voice and making changes based on it) or not considering student voice at its potential and could always be interpreted as motivated by a desire for students to succeed in existing school structures.

Teachers in this research were more likely to share control with students when it fitted within the existing norms and practices. These findings align with the research work of Bourke and Loveridge (2016) which found that teachers are more likely to engage with student voice when it echoes their own frames of reference. Howard’s (2009, 2011) research also supports this, outlining that the threat of relinquishing control in the classroom through engaging with student voice is a reality for many teachers and that sharing locus of control when the outcome is uncertain (often linked to student achievement) becomes a commodity. Teachers in this study commented that they are more inclined to shift their locus of control by inviting student voice in, if there are voices that affirm their practices, values and beliefs as ‘good’. However, if only such voice is given a platform, then student voice becomes tokenistic and many opportunities to engage with genuine and authentic voice are missed (Keddie, 2015; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006).

A finding of relevance is that less than four years’ teaching experience and limited confidence in young teachers was understandably a source of risk for engaging with student voice. Teachers commented on the fact that, as they built more certainty in their craft, they became more open to allowing student voice in their classrooms, therefore strongly linking level of confidence in own ability to teach and level of risk. Interestingly, recent study by Twyford (2016) signals that teachers with limited confidence in their knowledge and skills considered involvement in professional learning programmes as risky.
activities. In her study, uncertainty (which underpins risk perceptions) and lack of confidence were directly linked to each other. This shows a common trend where teachers’ confidence to be sound practitioners and the level of risk attached to that confidence are intrinsically connected. Therefore, it would be a worthy endeavour to research further on the relationships and dynamics between young teaching practitioners, engagement with student voice and perceptions of risk.

**Assessment and curriculum demands and perceptions of risk**

Findings revealed that a primary area of concern and perceptions of high risk were related to student achievement. Teachers who showed more potential to take risks talked about student achievement in terms of intrinsic motivation and engagement, while teachers with less willingness to take risks saw achievement in terms of quantifiable results and assessment grades.

The teachers in this study who made room for student voice in their classrooms saw potential to improve their practice, but they often talked about change in terms of tweaking units of work, making small adjustments to how they delivered lessons and created new activities based on student feedback. However, teachers made limited space for student voice when it came to pedagogical decision-making. Of note, teachers preferred arrangements where they made the decisions around students’ learning and pedagogy but would take into consideration students’ views in the process, to tweak the lesson and to offer student choice within teachers’ designated tasks. These findings are concordant with the findings of Cook-Sather (2002) and Thompson (2012) who found that student voice is more prevalent in making decisions around extra-curricular activities that are often outside the context of students’ learning or focus only indirectly on matters of pedagogy.

Extensive student voice in pedagogical decision-making regarding curriculum and assessment practices tended to evoke a ‘rigid agenda control’ and teachers in this research seemed reluctant to negotiate around these areas or did not feel like they had any control over their delivery. Handing over some control on matters of curriculum and assessment was linked to feelings of uncertainty and heightened perceptions of risk. Teachers, by and large, saw assessment requirements as institutional constraints, which meant that they did not consider student voice within the realms of assessment. It is not then surprising to note that Frost (2007) in his research suggested that “we appeared to be consulting pupils yet denying them any real power to change anything because of an intricate web of institutional imperatives” (p. 442).
Teachers in the study were understandably consumed with the responsibility to their students to be successful at school, with teacher accountability and student grades a priority for most teachers. This finding adds to the work of other researchers in the field of student voice who found that institutional constraints and competing expectations that teachers need to satisfy leads often to limitations on real consultation of students to empower them to be equal partners in pedagogical decision-making (Frost, 2007; Frost & Roberts, 2011; Nelson, 2014). It is thought-provoking that teachers were concerned as to whether affording students greater freedom to explore and make decisions in relation to curriculum was at odds with students achieving highly academically.

Engaging with student voice at the perceived expense of dropping achievement targets, posed a real threat to their professionalism in relation to students’ themselves, but also at a systemic level (colleagues, department and school) and at a community level (parents and the wider community).

**Conflicting agendas: Practitioner growth versus threat to professional identity and perceptions of risk**

The majority of teachers expressed views that aligned with the findings of research carried out by Twyford (2016); that is, that teachers are more likely to genuinely engage with student voice with a view to change and reconsider practices in the classroom, if it is free from any links to professional judgement, independent of appraisal and evaluation of professional credibility; and that sharing student voice with colleagues is perceived as a risk if it questions professional credentials. Twyford (2016) comments that “uncertainty connected to evidence related to collecting student voice data where facilitators or leaders asked students to talk about their learning. The use of student voice as evidence of the efficacy of their teaching practice was relatively new and contained uncertainty around its collection and use” (p. 78). Indeed, the findings of this research agree that losing face in front of students and colleagues carries high importance to teachers and was earmarked as an area of high risk. Teachers’ responses, which identify possible professional judgement, as a result of engaging with student voice, as a perceived risk, may relate to teachers understandably wanting to protect their professional identity and the need to preserve their professional status intact. This conclusion is supported by Le Fevre’s (2014) study which highlighted a similar risk outlook for teachers in terms of defensive attitudes and high stakes of not losing face and threats to teacher’s self-perceived efficacy when student voice is less than complimentary about teaching practices.
It is important to note that teachers find it risky also not to change current practices and remain stagnant in their growth. Teachers saw risk connected to doing things the same way they have always done and only relying on their own expertise to teach a certain way. These findings are mirrored in Eley’s (2014) New Zealand-based research on perceptions of risk and teaching mathematics through problem-solving. In his research, teachers identified risk in not changing to teaching mathematics through problem-solving but keeping to proven, but less effective, traditional pedagogy.

Teachers mentioned that professional growth through ongoing reflection on their own practice afforded by student voice forced them to genuinely consider their practice and find authentic ways to embrace change. Those teachers commented that when they engage with student voice, and make that voice public, it obliges them to act upon it, which in turn obliges them to honestly consider a different way of teaching and engaging with students. This is supported by Howard and Gigliotti’s (2016) study, which advanced the idea that when teachers’ engagement with risk-taking is motivated by beliefs about learning and conceptions that quality teaching means ongoing change, then a culture of risk-taking is developed in those classrooms, which involves authentic engagement with student voice.

**Student voice that does not support the dominant narrative and perceptions of risk**

Teachers identified that capturing dissonant student voice, that is, student voice that does not align with the dominant existing narrative, carried perceptions of high risk. Multiple studies support these findings, as Cook-Sather (2006a), Keddie (2015) and Rudduck (2007) suggest that often teachers will listen to voice of ‘good students’, voice that are likely to concur with what is happening in the classrooms, while student voice that does not correspond with already existing arrangements is often discarded and dismissed. Dissonant student voice was described by teachers as ‘hard to hear’ feedback, emotionally laden student voice and challenging feedback on teachers’ pedagogy. Furthermore, student voice that came from perceived academically high-functioning students and behaviourally challenged students, carried different levels of engagement and different perceptions of risk and teachers engaged with voice differently. Charteris and Thomas (2017) and Messiou and Ainscow (2015) suggest that teachers tend to censor student voice that is different to their own biases and that student voice that reveals ‘unwelcome truth’ is unsettling and potentially risky for teachers. Similar to Charteris and Thomas (2017) and Messiou and Ainscow (2015), this study showed that a significant pattern in the teachers’ key beliefs was connected to the fact that students who misbehave or who are voicing
opinions that do not endorse the current practices and teachers’ own beliefs on what is effective pedagogy, or students who bring in emotion not reason to their voice, were more likely to be dismissed or not taken into consideration.

The data suggest that teachers were not very open to capturing a diversity of perspectives, as they were more likely to consider student voice that was consistent with their existing beliefs. Teachers commented that endorsing student voice was linked to low risk as the outcome was often aligned with the initial plan and intent. However, when engaging with dissonant student voice, teachers expressed higher levels of risk and justified it as having to consider an outcome that was uncertain, with the possibility of having to make significant changes to their teaching practices, which they were not prepared to.

The teachers in this research held views that academic ability is linked to worthiness of student voice inclusion and that student voice from those students whose behaviour is challenging is not deemed as important. Bragg (2001) and Thomson (2010, 2011) are sympathetic to the challenge that teachers generally face to take disengaged student voice into serious consideration and believe that, although teachers are more inclined to listen to voices that confirm their bias, they still need to strive to include opportunities for all student voice to be heard. There was scepticism about children’s capacity to have meaningful input into decision-making.

For the most part, teachers’ own emotions entered teachers’ minds as they considered student voice legitimacy, and how they made sense of dissonant voice, especially for those teachers who perceived higher levels of risk when doing so. Negative emotions, feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty appeared to take hold of their thinking and these connected to teachers’ pedagogical and knowledge banks, their skills and the quality of their relationship with the students.

Another interesting dimension interpreted in this study, when discussing diversity of student voice, relates to teachers’ ability to act upon student voice. There was a commonality of belief when it came to managing and controlling what happens in their classrooms and it highlighted that teachers are more likely to consider voice that they can do something about and listening to voice that they can control the action of, which aligns to Le Fevre’s (2014) study, where increased student participation conveyed feelings of uncertainty and risk when the control shifted from teachers to students. Teachers listening to voice that has an outcome they can control might provide an explanation for their course of action when deciding what student voice to listen to. If ‘being able to do something about student voice’
dictates what voice teachers listen to, then the question to ponder is how do we know what voice to listen to, and what voice to discard and are we missing particular student voices?

Such findings entertain the idea that we tend to listen to those whose views that are similar to our ideas and that engagement with dissonant student voice is challenging. This is a problem because, according to Fullan (2001), “we are more likely to learn something from people that disagree with us than we are from people who agree” (p. 41).

When students’ behaviour or disengagement in learning is a barrier to engaging with student voice, we need to consider the consequences of not overcoming such barriers. By engaging with student voice that echoes our beliefs and values, we are perpetuating marginalised students to still be marginalised. By giving our most vulnerable and at-risk students less voice, we unintentionally promote further disengagement with school. If we are not taking into consideration the dissonant voice of those already dissatisfied students, we risk damaging the relationships with those students even more, as they will not feel as valued. Relationships are at the heart of teaching and learning, and by risking relationships, teachers risk even greater disengagement from those students, impacting negatively on their outcomes. Giving students authority to have a ‘voice’ in their learning does come with challenges as insights from the students may not be simple or straightforward to address (Rudduck, 2007) but if we do not consider those marginalised voices, then those students could become further alienated and see having a ‘voice’ in their learning as a negative experience (Rudduck, 2007).

Despite the uneven extent of engaging with dissonant student voice, some teachers in this research acknowledged the importance of considering all voices, regardless of the risk involved. The findings suggest that those teachers realise the importance of engaging with dissonant voice to support each individual student to talk about themselves as learners and what is important to them. Teachers’ willingness to hear non-dominant discourses from students was evident in this study and affirmed by studies done by Twyford et al. (2017) who assert that teachers are more likely to accept risk-taking (within the confines of challenging student voice) if they think that it benefits students’ learning.

**Perceptions of risk and sharing student voice with colleagues**

Findings suggest that teachers need to keep a professional image in front of their colleagues, which could be fissured by sharing challenging student voice. Teachers feared that sharing of student voice could have a negative impact on the relationship they have
with their colleagues and they are not prepared to damage those collegial relationships. Even those who did disclose student voice viewed it as high-risk.

Relationships are important, and teachers worried that sharing student voice and being open to critical feedback from their colleagues carried a high degree of risk. Understandably, therefore, teachers in this research were more likely to share student voice with colleagues when their relationships with others were secure, trusting and confidential. Teachers needed to know with certainty that any divergent discussions and suggestions were not a personal attack and they needed to know that such discussions were free of judgement and comparisons, especially when the outcome was less than desirable. There is a range of professional relationship research that emphasises the importance of uncertainty, vulnerability and risk connected to relationships with others (Lasky, 2005; Le Fevre, 2014; Twyford, 2016; Twyford et al., 2017), as well as the importance of maintaining positive, trustful and confidential relationships (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Le Fevre (2014) explores the problem that sometimes learning is postponed by attempts to maintain good relationships amongst teachers, and between teachers and leaders. Adding weight to this argument is Twyford’s (2016) study which found that the higher the quality of professional relationships with others, the lower the risk perceived. Twyford’s (2016) extensive research found that the most common potential source of uncertainty, and therefore high risk, is related to the quality of relationships that are developed and established amongst colleagues. Teachers espoused the belief that quality relationships supported sharing of student voice. Having quality relationships was seen to improve teacher willingness, lowered risk and made sharing student voice safer for everyone.

In this study, teachers explained that if the sharing has a potential outcome of having to change practice, then it becomes a high-stakes activity as it commits the teacher (in the public eye) to actually carrying out the change in practice, a view also expressed in Hargreaves’ (2004, 2005) research, which found that public commitment to change involves high levels of risk to one’s own professional identity, potential outcome and relationship damage. Teachers’ responses and actions regarding sharing student voice could be interpreted as motivated by a need to protect themselves from possible feelings of vulnerability, embarrassment and judgement and fuelled by a desire to appear competent and in control of their teaching.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

Engaging with student voice involves a complex interaction of cognition, emotion and action by teachers. This research explored teachers’ complex emotional and cognitive responses and linked particular student voice with potential perceptions of risk, as both emotion and cognition are posited to contribute to the risk-perception process and are conceptualised as inseparable and interwoven (Slovic, 2010; Twyford, 2016). It investigated which students are most likely to be heard and how teachers make decisions about listening or discarding student voice. These key questions in the research found grounding in the thinking of Fielding (2004b) who asserts that “to continue to analyse the potential of student voice for changing practices in the classroom, we need to know who is taking and who is listening and whether such attentiveness is customary or spasmodic, an entitlement or a dispensation. We also need to know whether the listening is authentic” (p. 301).

Key findings suggest a willingness to engage with student voice. There was a strong belief that such action is worth pursuing. In addition, key findings indicated that there are various perceptions of risk attached to engagement with student voice. Demands of assessment, the need to cover content, and issues related to control, self-belief and sharing student voice, carry various perceptions of risk that manifest themselves in teachers’ classroom behaviour and likely impact on how student voice is utilised to improve practice.

This final chapter identifies potential strengths and limitations of the research, discusses key findings and their implications, provides recommendations for practice, outlines possibilities for further research and concludes with final remarks.

Strengths and Limitations of this Research

A strength of this study was the rich, descriptive dialogue that arose in the semi-structured and critical incidents interviews. The phase two participants were willing to engage in discussions about their perspective on the value of student voice, their approaches and the related perceptions of risk. The pilot-testing of both the questionnaire and interview questions and the feedback received sought to ensure that the questions of the semi-structured interviews were effective in addressing the research questions.

Limitations of this study include the small sample of just two secondary schools and the fact that the schools might be considered unique in that student voice is already seen as a valuable tool for changing practices and teachers are committed to engaging with it. The
perceptions of the phase two participants might not be typical of the larger school teaching population, because they were selected from volunteers from phase one, so despite attempting to interview participants with a range of perspectives on risk, the sample to draw phase two participants from had already been restricted. Furthermore, the five participants were purposefully selected by the researcher on the basis of their existing engagement with student voice as the main inclusion criteria.

The data collected in both phase one and phase two of the study were self-reported by teachers, therefore contains their constructive worldviews and cannot be accepted as ‘complete’ accounts of experience (Cohen et al., 2007). However, the essence of the research project was to uncover teachers’ perceptions of risk and experiences when engaging with student voice, so subjectivity and bias are a crucial aspect of a constructivist approach, as it is recognised that each teacher will have a different perception or view of the ‘same’ experience.

A further limitation of this study is that students were not interviewed to check their perspectives on how they viewed teachers’ engagement with student voice and what risk they thought it involved. Therefore, the research only reveals one side of the story, and there is no confirming or challenging teachers’ views on student engagement and perceptions of risk. The researcher is aware that the teachers’ views on student voice might not match the views of students, had they been interviewed.

**Implications and Recommendations for Practice**

Key recommendations from this research are outlined below, and pertain to areas of school culture, teachers’ professional learning and scaffolding student ownership of their voice. If schools are seriously committed to promoting engagement with student voice and increased student influence, then these areas need concurrent examination.

An overarching implication from this research centres on educational leaders becoming highly aware of the frames they use when they make sense of teachers’ experience with student voice in their schools. Firstly, leaders need to question their own framing of the role of student voice and possible impact on teachers’ classroom practices. Secondly, leaders need to be clear on where they position teachers’ responsibility to engage with student voice. In doing so, educators would then consider their sphere of influence on teachers’ engagement with student voice, through the school culture they support and the professional learning experiences available to teachers.
Additionally, raising educators’ awareness about the possibility of teachers experiencing perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability during engagement with student voice may help enable educators to be more responsive in ways that might reduce some of these perceptions of risk.

**Key recommendation 1: Leaders need to be responsive to the ways in which school culture influences teachers’ approaches and level of risk perceived in engagement with student voice**

Leaders plays an important part in defining the role and importance of student voice within a school. Effective leadership practices require leaders to master both the content and process of policy and strategy and to truly see students as change agents and protégés (Fullan, 2017), in order to promote a culture of student voice in the school.

A commitment to develop and maintain a school culture that is inclusive of student voice, encourages sharing of student feedback amongst teachers through a collaborative approach provides impetus, and leaders in the schools need to lead the changes that will see those commitments become ongoing, signature practices.

For any change to work, firstly the vision and values of the school need to be aligned and linked directly with its strategic plan. Vision and values underpin the culture of a school and teachers and students need to be involved in a) generating a set of values to uphold and b) put in the effort to keep the vision at the forefront of everything they do.

To implement any student voice initiatives, it is imperative that there is a clear schoolwide vision and set of values that are embedded in the school’s strategic intent, which places student voice at the centre of all decision-making discussions. To develop a school culture where engagement with student voice becomes the norm and students' involvement in their learning is promoted, school leaders must see and value all student voice. Engagement with student voice needs to be led by school leaders through a collaborative style of leadership that involve teachers in the development of the school’s vision and values.

School culture is deemed as fundamental to mitigate the level of risk involved when engaging with student voice and leaders need to examine school culture’s dual roles. Firstly, there is the role of school culture in supporting student voice. Being in a school that encourages and supports student voice shapes the way teachers engage with and consider student voice. When teachers are supported to engage with student voice, they are more willing to do it because of the expectations that the school has of including student input. Secondly, there is the role of school culture in affecting perceptions of risk. Being in a
school where risk is seen as an integral part of changing practices and is valued as a course of action lowers perceptions of the threats of risk for teachers and encourages risk-taking.

Developing a school culture that normalises and leverages student voice, so that it becomes “the way we do things around here” (Stoll & Fink, 1996, p. 81) and its value is apparent and visible to any new people to the school (Barth, 2002), requires leaders to foster a culture of trust amongst their teachers. That is, it means fostering an environment that is open and non-judgemental when it comes to sharing student voice. School leaders have a crucial role in establishing trust that is built on respect, integrity and competence since “in schools with high levels of trust, teachers experienced a sense of professional community and are more willing to innovate and take risks” (Robinson, 2011, p. 34). Trust moderates feelings of uncertainty and vulnerability (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), whereas an absence of trust escalates perceptions of risk. Central to leaders’ approaches is establishing supportive relationship networks as they are essential for teachers to take risks when they are not confident or certain in their state of knowledge. Supportive relationships need to be based on emotion and include the notions of being known as a learner and being shown empathy and respect.

A school culture that supports ongoing professional learning with a focus on student voice and student agency and sharing this voice, with a view to collaborating with colleagues about its meaning, is critical in terms of influencing the effectiveness of teacher practice. Student voice that is being talked about by senior leaders as a concept is not enough to actively shift practices for teachers.

Creating a culture of ongoing engagement with student voice within a school is a challenge worth pursuing for school leaders and needs to be modelled and embedded in their leadership practice. For sustainable, changed practices, led by student voice, there needs to be intentional, well-planned professional learning, as discussed below.

**Key recommendation 2: Intentional professional learning focused on how to engage with student voice is crucial in developing teachers’ confidence and minimising perceptions of risk**

As teachers in the study strongly suggested, establishing an inclusive student voice and building a culture that allows for it is not enough. Once the school culture around student voice is created, and the value and ‘why’ of it understood by all, teachers need to know how to engage with student voice, and they need space to develop their understanding on how to interpret student voice. For this to happen, there needs to be explicit support in place within the school, rather than a ‘hear/say/talked-about’ attitude to engagement with
student voice. Intrinsically motivated teachers, who understand the why and how of student voice, are more likely to embrace and participate in initiatives that engage with student voice. Perceptions of risk are minimised when a) the schools provide the necessary resources and ensure that the teacher has the pedagogical knowledge and understanding to support the students in their ventures to have a voice in the learning and b) professional learning is a place of true collaboration, devoid of judgement.

Therefore, firstly, schools need to be intentional and clearly communicate their vision of engaging with student voice and, secondly, establish what is needed to put in place processes to find out what teachers know and understand about student voice to then provide the adequate professional learning and development needed. School leaders play a pivotal role in creating strategic processes and approaches that foster deep understanding of the value of student voice, support ongoing dialogic interaction with students, and enable iterative reflection and analysis. Leaders need to actively participate in professional learning and be a role model of student voice strategies in school. Educators must model engagement with student voice if they are serious about building trust and expecting teachers to engage with student voice despite feelings of risk and vulnerability. In the words of Robinson (2011):

Leaders who participate with their staff are able to join in their professional discussions because they understand the concepts and the vocabulary associated with new learning. Direct involvement in professional learning enables leaders to learn in detail about the challenges the learning presents and the conditions teachers require to succeed. (p. 105)

Engagement with student voice requires a shared understanding of what it entails, and specific strategies and skills from teachers, for them to become confident about what to do once student voice is collected, how they might interpret it and what the course of desired action might look like. Providing clear guidelines and strategic processes designed to be made explicit to teachers is needed so they know where they are going if engagement with student voice is to be successful.

Failure to dedicate time to put these processes in place can lead to resistance, especially for teachers who do not agree that student voice is of relevance to overall pedagogy in the first place, and may limit attempts for teachers that sit on the fence when giving their students a voice. Reframing teachers’ engagement with student voice through a risk lens might challenge their beliefs about what valid student voice constitutes and, in doing so, encourages leaders to reframe professional learning that supports risk-taking. The
teachers in this study identified support as about not being judged, being shown respect as practitioners, trusting their colleagues and leaders and feeling trusted by them.

Furthermore, this research has uncovered the diversity of teachers’ pedagogical understanding of student voice and what it involves. The varied understanding and approaches highlight the need for schools to work towards a cohesive understanding of agreed principles of what engagement with student voice entails, through leaders modelling best practices and keeping student voice at the forefront of all staff professional learning so that is an organic and iterative process understood and valued by all. It is a recommendation of this study that senior leaders create the conditions required for high-quality engagement with student voice to occur. Hipkins (2010) argues that no matter how attached to the idea of “student voice” teachers may or may not be, they are “unlikely to arrive at a complex and multifaceted understanding … without the support of professional learning programmes that are demonstrably grounded in practice yet also build coherent bridges to theory” (p. 94).

There needs to be strategic resourcing that is directed towards ongoing professional learning that will increase the teachers’ capability to interpret and act upon student voice. Ensuring there is time allocated within the organisation’s structure is important so that professional development can be embedded, rather than seen as another add-on. Teachers need to have agency over creating ways in which to collect student voice and also offered tools to do so. The professional learning needs to include a component of a mentoring and coaching system, with supportive appraisers and colleagues, where teachers feel supported in their endeavours.

**Key recommendation 3: Scaffolding student agency and ownership of their voice**

Just as teachers need to have the appropriate tools and strategies to engage with student voice, so do students. For teachers to be able to trust student contributions, students themselves need to be able to identify what the key features of meaningful student voice are; and to be able to discuss their perceptions and learning experiences in a manner that is conducive to co-designing learning experiences with teachers, establishing partnerships that allow for genuine feedback to be taken into consideration. Students need to understand that their voice is valued, is important and that it has an impact in the way that teachers design their practices with the intent of moving them towards being involved and listened to when it comes to their own learning. The importance of scaffolding student ownership of
their voice is a governing value if student voice is to translate into teachers taking such voice into consideration and successful changed teacher practices.

Therefore, the last recommendation of this research is to suggest that for student voice to be valuable and meaningful, it cannot happen by accident. Teachers need to prepare students for shifts in agency from teacher-led pedagogical practices to partnership in lesson co-design which features student voice. To be able to engage with feedback on lessons, co-designing learning and teaching opportunities, being able to reflect on one’s own learning and teachers’ learning, students need to be trained to a) develop and use a common language of learning and b) master skills to allow them to share their voice. To this end, teachers need to work with their learners to develop key ideas and language prompts to allow for opportunities for students to share in decision-making. Furthermore, teachers need to be given time to dedicate to coaching the students on how to articulate and share thoughts and perspectives in a way that is useful for informing teachers’ practices, so that it enables them to have the skills and confidence to participate in decision-making.

The implications for teachers are to have an understanding that students’ ability to voice their perspectives lie on a continuum and that there need to be structures and scaffolding put in place to enact student voice deliberately and then to practically reflect on how it might bring about consideration of change in one’s own classroom. Before delving into collection of student voice, teachers need to develop students’ capabilities, knowledge and dispositions to voice their perspectives, so that they become the leaders and changemakers they could be.

**Implications for Further Research**

There are three obvious opportunities for further research that arise from this study, linked to both breadth and depth.

The first opportunity to consider for further research was mentioned under the limitations section and that is to include students’ perspectives on how they perceive that teachers engage with student voice. Examining student data would provide a wider picture and provide an opportunity for the triangulation of data. Further research could include observations of teachers while they engage with student voice and observations of departmental meetings and how student voice is shared and discussed. Allied to this could be a study that investigates whether risks perceived when engaging with student voice are
different for teachers with different cultural backgrounds, numbers of years teaching and subject taught.

The second opportunity for further research is to consider a longitudinal study that examines students’ learning outcomes in light of an ‘engagement with student voice’ philosophy. It would be interesting for schools to assess their teachers’ engagement with student voice and use the tools provided in this research to pinpoint where perceptions of risk become barriers for engagement with student voice, then follow the recommendations outlined in this study. The longitudinal study would entail following a cohort of students from first year to last year at the school to plot the progress of their learning, and compare results with a cohort of similar students from a school less orientated to student voice.

The third opportunity is to consider how student voice fits in with the concepts of learner agency and youth-adult partnership, how the three concepts might intersect, to inquire if they carry with them different perceptions of risk, and to analyse the variance of risk (if diverse) for the different concepts. Exploration of learner agency, described as engagement in and reflection on one’s own learning, cycles of respectful dialogue and youth-adult partnerships (Bolstead, 2010; Lundy, 2007) are all areas worthy of further research.

**Implications for Policy**

This research has implications for policy development. While student-centred pathways are at the centre of the *New Zealand Curriculum* policy, policy-makers need to consider the competing tensions that exist between contemporary educational philosophies and accountability agendas set up for teachers and, by extension, any school-based student voice initiatives, especially regarding assessment and curriculum demand.

Currently, the extent and depth of teachers’ engagement with student voice depends largely on the individual teacher and their willingness to consider how student voice can change the course of their teaching practices. Interpretation of student voice and consequent action remain isolated to one teacher, one class, one student, with high-risk associated with these actions. Teachers entering the profession stumble across student voice with varying degrees of understanding of its importance and varying degrees of uncertainty and vulnerability when presented with the opportunity to engage with it. Teacher education training programmes would do well to consider intentional time and specific modules on the importance of student voice and ways in which to carry out engagement with student voice, with a view to:
coming to understand the importance of developing relationships in which teacher and student assume joint responsibility and agency for learning, and developing strategies for understanding students’ conceptions and misconceptions as a starting point for teaching and practice and it might also include learning to be responsive to students through ongoing discussion. (Timperley, 2013, p. 32)

This research demonstrated that teachers are willing to engage and listen to student voice and it demonstrated that relational trust lowered perceptions of risk when sharing with others. Therefore, policy-makers have an obligation to provide adequate support to enable conditions that support teachers’ growth in these areas when planning policies across all education sectors.

Concluding Remarks

Educators do not necessarily connect engagement with student voice and perceptions of high risk. This research has explored this connection and suggests that when teachers experienced perceptions of high levels of risk, they took fewer risks, which in turn impacted negatively on their ability and willingness to engage with student voice.

This research concludes that the foundation of effective engagement with student voice and minimising teachers’ perceptions of risk is to be found at the intersection of school culture, intentional professional learning and equipping students with the necessary skills, knowledge and dispositions to voice their perspectives. It highlighted that the risks perceived and associated with student voice might be mitigated through professional learning that supports the preparedness of teachers to collect, analyse and act on student voice. For this to occur, a culture of openness and inclusivity amongst teachers and a culture of inquiry into practice must continue to lie at the heart of professional learning. Student voice needs to be the driver of innovative, ongoing and improving teaching and learning practices where students as seen as evaluators of learning, learning designers, decision-makers, co-teachers, researchers and advocates for 21st century learning. Teachers need to be conditioned to view co-construction of pedagogy and curriculum as a way of sharing power with students to enact student voice. I believe that teachers need to shift their discourse of engaging with student voice from one of sifting through student voice that confirms existing narratives to one that considers all student voice, which then positions students as producers of real change in the classroom, opening up dialogic opportunities for students to debate and deliberate on potential pedagogical strategies.
Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

To Principal and BOT

Participant Information Sheet: Site Access

Boards of Trustees and Principal

Research Project Title: Using student voice within the teaching as inquiry model: Teachers’ perceptions of risk.

Researcher: Cristina Casey-Schöner

Supervisor: Dr Deidre Le Fevre

I am a full-time Masters Student at the Faculty of Education, University of Auckland, working under the supervision of Dr Deidre Le Fevre. Currently I am on study leave from my position as Deputy Principal at Albany Senior High School.

I am seeking your permission to allow this research to take place in your school. The purpose of the research is to investigate the relationship between teachers’ perceptions of risk and gathering student voice within the process of teaching as inquiry. The intention is to examine and explore if teachers are using student voice in their inquiry and to seek out what perceptions of risk influence the approaches taken by teachers when using student voice. Given that the ‘teaching as inquiry’ framework from the New Zealand Curriculum identifies student voice as a powerful tool for improving teaching practices it would be the intention of the research to gain some insight into the enablers and barriers of using student voice to improve pedagogy.

The research would take place between May 2018 and August 2018. I am seeking a sample of 30 teachers across 2 schools to participate in the initial questionnaire (20 minutes), from which 8-10 teachers will be invited to participate in an individual interview (1 hour).

If you consent to site access, then the researcher will present the research brief to the teachers at a staff meeting inviting them to participate in the research project along with Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms outlining the project and informing them that their participation will be voluntary. I am seeking your written assurance that their employment status, future opportunities or relationship with the school will not be affected by their participation or non-participation.
As part of the research the researcher will write to teachers in the school asking them to:

- **Agree to participate** in the research and secure their written consent with a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form provided for this purpose. The Participant Information Sheet will inform the school teachers that their participation is voluntary, and that a written assurance has been given by their employer that their employment will not be affected as a result of their participation or non-participation.

- **Agree to complete a short questionnaire** (taking approximately 20 minutes). This questionnaire will be used to identify 8-10 teachers to be interviewed, across 2 schools.

- **Agree to participate in one interview with the researcher** (taking approximately 1 hour). All participants who are being recorded will be asked to give specific consent for audio recording and subsequent transcribing. Participants will be given a copy of their own transcript and the opportunity to edit it. No-one other than themselves, the researchers and transcribers, who sign a confidentiality agreement, will see their transcripts or receive copies of the recordings.

You may choose to withdraw the participation of your school without giving a reason at any time until two weeks after the last data collection. All collected data will be stored in a secure database for six years and destroyed thereafter.

Following our analysis of all data from all the questionnaires and interviews we will develop a summary about teacher’s perceptions of risk and how it impacts on their decisions to engage with student voice in their inquiry. Neither individuals nor schools will be identified in any reporting other than by the identifier known only to the researchers for the report. This information will remain completely confidential. Reports, articles and feedback arising from this research will not identify any sources of the data. Participants will be asked not to tell others they are participating in the research to protect confidentiality of themselves and the school. You may request a summary of the research findings, by indicating your email address on the consent form.

**Statements from participants that are published do have a risk of being identifiable if the participants work at the researcher’s place of work. The participants are encouraged to edit their interview transcript with this in mind. Questions relating to this research can be sent to the researcher, her supervisor or the Head of Department.**

Thank you for your participation in this research.

**CONTACT DETAILS AND APPROVAL:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Researcher</strong></th>
<th><strong>Supervisor</strong></th>
<th><strong>Head of School</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Cristina Casey-Schöner  
24 Vinewood Drive, Albany  
c/o Faculty of Education,  
University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019, Auckland  
Mail Centre 1142  
Tel: 09 623 8899. Ext. 89843  
Email Cscho28@aucklanduni.ac.nz | Dr Deidre Le Fevre  
Faculty of Education,  
University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019, Auckland  
Mail Centre 1142  
Tel: 09 623 8899. Ext. 89843  
Email d.lefevre@auckland.ac.nz | Associate Professor Richard Hamilton  
Faculty of Education, University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019, Auckland Mail Centre 1142  
Tel: 09 373 7999 ext. 85619  
Email rj.hamilton@auckland.ac.nz |

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373-7599 ext. 83711.

Email: ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz

Approved by the UNIVERSITY of AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on _________ for three years. Reference Number 020777
Appendix B: Consent Form

To Principal and BOT

CONSENT FORM: SITE ACCESS
Boards of Trustees and Principal

THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF 6 YEARS

Research Project Title: Using student voice within the teaching as inquiry model: Teachers' perceptions of risk.

Researcher: Cristina Casey-Schöner
Supervisor: Dr Deidre Le Fevre

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, I have understood the nature of the research and why my institution has been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree to allow the research to take place at my institution.
- I understand that all participants will complete a short questionnaire.
- I understand that some participants will be interviewed, and the interview will be audio recorded with their written consent and that these audio recordings and the transcripts made are confidential and will not be shared with me.
- I understand that a third party who has signed a confidentiality agreement will transcribe the audio recordings.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw the participation of my institution at any time until two weeks after the last data collection takes place I understand that the data will be kept for six years, after which it will be destroyed.
- I understand that the data will be used to develop a summary about teacher’s perceptions of risk and how it impacts on teachers’ decisions to engage with student data in their inquiry. These data may also be used to communicate to audiences through academic publications and conference presentations.
- I understand that the name of the school where the researcher works could be identifiable however the researcher will change details to make this unlikely in any publication that arises from the research.
- I provide an assurance that the decision of my staff to participate or not to participate will not affect their employment status, future opportunities or relations with the school in any way.

Name: ___________________________ Signature: ___________________ Date: _______

Approved by the UNIVERSITY of AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on _________ for three years. Reference Number 020777
Appendix C: Questionnaire

Research Project Title: Using student voice within the teaching as inquiry model: Teachers’ perceptions of risk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Gender: M F Prefer to not disclose</th>
<th>Teaching experience (yrs):</th>
<th>Ethnicity:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please respond to the following statements about the role that student voice has in informing your practice.

For each statement, rate by CIRCLING ONE number from 1-6 that addresses:

1. The extent to which you are willing to do this
2. The extent to which you perceive this as a risk

Below each statement is a space that allows you to comment and support, justify and/or elaborate on any decisions you have made.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATEMENTS</th>
<th>Extent to which I am willing to do this</th>
<th>Extent to which I perceive this as a risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Extremely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Encourage students to share their views about how they learn in my class.

The extent to which you are willing to do this

1 2 3 4 5 6

The extent to which you perceive this as a risk

1 2 3 4 5 6

Comments:

2. Intentionally record information about students’ view on how they learn in my classroom.

The extent to which you are willing to do this

1 2 3 4 5 6

The extent to which you perceive this as a risk

1 2 3 4 5 6
3. Intentionally recording information of student voice requires creating questionnaires, having focus groups, using exit cards, using google feedback forms.

The extent to which you are willing to do this

1 2 3 4 5 6

The extent to which you perceive this as a risk

1 2 3 4 5 6

Comments:

4. Sometimes students give particular feedback and say things that are difficult for us to hear. Intentionally consider all feedback from students.

The extent to which you are willing to do this

1 2 3 4 5 6

The extent to which you perceive this as a risk

1 2 3 4 5 6

Comments:

5. Make explicit to student why I am collecting student voice

The extent to which you are willing to do this

1 2 3 4 5 6

The extent to which you perceive this as a risk

1 2 3 4 5 6

Comments:

6. Interpreting student voice involves seeking patterns and considering new perspectives.

The extent to which you are willing to do this

1 2 3 4 5 6
The extent to which you perceive this as a risk

1 2 3 4 5 6

Comments:

7. Seek further understanding from students about their views

The extent to which you are willing to do this

1 2 3 4 5 6

The extent to which you perceive this as a risk

1 2 3 4 5 6

Comments:

8. Share student feedback with my colleagues

The extent to which you are willing to do this

1 2 3 4 5 6

The extent to which you perceive this as a risk

1 2 3 4 5 6

Comments:

9. Be open to receiving feedback from colleagues when interpreting student data.

The extent to which you are willing to do this

1 2 3 4 5 6

The extent to which you perceive this as a risk

1 2 3 4 5 6

Comments:
10. Create new resources/lesson plans/unit plans based on student voice.

The extent to which you are willing to do this

1 2 3 4 5 6

The extent to which you perceive this as a risk

1 2 3 4 5 6

Comments:

11. Try new teaching methods based on student voice.

The extent to which you are willing to do this

1 2 3 4 5 6

The extent to which you perceive this as a risk

1 2 3 4 5 6

Comments:

12. Change my teaching inquiry based on what students communicate to me.

The extent to which you are willing to do this

1 2 3 4 5 6

The extent to which you perceive this as a risk

1 2 3 4 5 6

Comments:

13. Use student voice to make significant changes to my assessments.

The extent to which you are willing to do this

1 2 3 4 5 6

The extent to which you perceive this as a risk

1 2 3 4 5 6

Comments:
14. What does the culture of collecting, interpreting and acting upon student voice looks like in your school?

Comments:

Please share any other views you have regarding the impact of student voice on your teaching inquiry.

Thank you for your time and help!

Approved by the UNIVERSITY of AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on 09/4/2018 for three years. Reference Number 020777
Appendix D: Interview Questions

Research Project Title: Using student voice within the teaching as inquiry model: Teachers’ perceptions of risk.

Semi structured interview questions

Collection of student voice (How I find out what students think/ feel about the way that they learn and my teaching practices)

- How useful do you think student voice is and why?
- How do you collect student voice data in your classroom?
- What risk (if there is any) do you perceive when collecting student voice?
- In what ways does this influence your ability to collect student voice?
- What do you find most difficult when/ if collecting student voice?
- Think about your experience of collecting student voice so far in your teaching, how has it changed (if it did) since the beginning of your teaching? What are the reasons some of those changes happened?
- How do you share the reasons for collecting student voice with your students? (if you do this)
- Are there any barriers that you are aware of when collecting student voice? Given that you identified X as a possible barrier [on questionnaire], what are some of the ways that you mitigate against this barrier?

Interpreting student voice: (the meaning behind what students say)

- What processes do you use to interpret student voice?
- How you seek further understanding from students to unpack what they have said? (if you do this)
- How often do you share student voice with colleagues? When do you do that? What does it look like? (if you do this)
- If you receive feedback on interpreting student voice, how do you act upon it? (if they give feedback)
- What have been some of the challenges for you when given feedback by your colleagues?
- What kind of feedback have you been given about the student voice you collected by your colleagues? (if any)
- Can you tell me of a time when you used feedback from colleagues to relook at student voice?
- Are there any barriers that might stop you from seeking feedback from your colleagues regarding sharing and/or interpreting student voice?
- What are some of the risks (if there are any) that you perceive that are associated with sharing student voice with your colleagues?

Acting upon student voice: (what I do about it as a teacher)

- Are there particular things that student have communicated to you that prompted you to consider creating new resources/ changing lesson and unit plans following collection of student voice? (and if so, what then?)
- There will be some occasions when you pay attention to student voice and some occasions when you don’t. What kind of student voice do you listen to? And what kind of voice do you not listen to?
- What risk (if there is any) do you perceive when making changes to your classroom practice based on student voice? How do these risks impact on your decision to change practice?
• What risk (if there is any) do you perceive when making significant changes to the assessment based on student voice? How do these risks impact on your decision to change assessments?
• Can you recall an instance when student voice has changed the course of your teaching inquiry? Why did that happen?
• Think of the last time you discussed the importance of student voice in a Professional Learning Development session. What happened?
• How well do you feel supported by your leaders in the school to act upon collected student voice? What are some of the barriers to making this happen?

Approved by the UNIVERSITY of AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on 09/4/2018 for three years. Reference Number 020777
# Appendix E: Engagement and Risk Scores for All Participants in Ascending Order

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Engagement /78</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Risk /78</th>
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</thead>
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<td>50</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>W</td>
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<td>D</td>
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</tr>
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<td>J</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>I</td>
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<tr>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Q</td>
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<td>R</td>
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<td>V</td>
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<tr>
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<td>77</td>
<td>U</td>
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Appendix F: Engagement and Risk Score for All Volunteering Participants in Ascending Order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Engagement with student voice /78</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Risk /78</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>D</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>Q</td>
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<td>O</td>
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<td>Q</td>
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<td>L</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>77</td>
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</table>
### Appendix G: Engagement and Risk Score for the Selected Participants in the Interviews

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<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Student voice</th>
<th>Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Extent to which I am doing this /78</td>
<td>Extent to which I perceive this as a risk /78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>55 (lowest extent)</td>
<td>45 (highest risk)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>77 (highest extent)</td>
<td>20 (lowest risk)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H: Process of Data Analysis

1. Raw data – Analyse the questionnaire responses from phase one participants. Pick up interesting pieces as prompts for interviews (if relevant)

2. Raw data- interview transcripts

3. Organise and prepare data for analysis - Initial coding generated from questionnaires into potential themes related to the three research questions

4. Read all transcripts – Identify initial ideas of recurring themes related to the three research questions, modify themes to reflect new findings

5. Coding of the transcripts – Use a combination of emerging and predetermined themes to code the data.

6. Identify common patterns within each theme and across all participants

7. Describe characteristics for each theme identified and interrelate themes and characteristics to address the research questions

8. Interpret the meanings of the themes in relation to the research questions through selected examples from the questionnaire and the interviews.

9. Recommendations for future practice and further research.

Feedback loop – Checking with participants for validity

Revisit interview participants for more information or clarification if required

Source: Adapted from data analysis processes based on the work of Creswell (2014).
## Appendix I: Engagement With Student Voice Ranked Scores (Question by Question)

| Score | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | V | W | X | Y | Total /150 |
| 1. Intentionally consider all feedback from students including when they say things that are difficult for me to hear | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 127 |
| 2. Make explicit to students why I am collecting student voice | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 123 |
| 3. Seek further understanding from students about their views | 4 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 121 |
| 4. Create new resources/lesson plans/unit plans based on student voice | 4 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 121 |
| 5. Interpret student voice by seeking patterns and considering new perspectives | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 5 | 120 |
| 6. Encourage students to share their views about how they learn in my class. | 5 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 116 |
| 7. Change my practice based on what students communicate to me | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 114 |
| 8. Discuss student feedback with my colleagues | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 112 |
| 9. Try new teaching methods based on student voice | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 110 |
| 10. Share students voice with the rest of the class | 3 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 102 |
| 11. Intentionally record information about students’ view on how they learn in my classroom. | 4 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 97 |
| 12. Receive feedback from colleagues when interpreting student voice | 4 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 94 |
| 13. Use student voice to make significant changes to my assessments | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 94 |
| Activity                                                                 | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | V | W | X | Y | Total /150 |
| Use student voice to make significant changes to my assessments        | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 71 |
| Intentionally consider all feedback from students including when they say things that are difficult for me to hear | 4 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 66 |
| Share students voice with the rest of the class                        | 3 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 62 |
| Encourage students to share their views about how they learn in my class | 4 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 60 |
| Receive feedback from colleagues when interpreting student voice      | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 60 |
| Try new teaching methods based on student voice                        | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 60 |
| Create new resources/lesson plans/unit plans based on student voice    | 3 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 56 |
| Seek further understanding from students about their views             | 4 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 55 |
| Change my practice based on what students communicate to me            | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 55 |
| Intentionally record information about students' view on how they learn in my classroom. | 3 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 53 |
| Discuss student feedback with my colleagues                            | 5 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 53 |
| Make explicit to students why I am collecting student voice            | 2 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 51 |
| Interpret student voice by seeking patterns and considering new perspectives | 4 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 50 |
Appendix K: Participant Information Sheet (Teachers)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Teachers in the school

Research Project Title: Using student voice within the teaching as inquiry model: Teachers’ perceptions of risk.
Researcher: Cristina Casey-Schöner
Supervisor: Dr Deidre Le Fevre

I am a full-time Masters Student at the Faculty of Education, University of Auckland, working under the supervision of Dr Deidre Le Fevre. Currently I am on study leave from my position as Deputy Principal at Albany Senior High School.

The project:
The purpose of the research is to investigate the relationship between teachers’ perceptions of risk and gathering student voice within the process of teaching as inquiry. The intention is to examine and explore if teachers are using student voice in the focusing stage of their inquiry and to seek out what perceptions of risk influence the approaches taken by teachers when using student voice. Given that the ‘teaching as inquiry’ framework from the New Zealand Curriculum identifies student voice as a powerful tool for improving teaching practices it would be the intention of the research to gain some insight in to the enablers and barriers of using student voice to improve pedagogy.

Invitation to participate:
You are invited to participate in this research. The researcher has approached you with this invitation to participate to ensure you have time to carefully consider your involvement and to avoid the possibility of feeling coerced. The study involves you completing a short questionnaire and potentially being identified to participate in an interview.
Your participation will be voluntary. We have a written assurance from your employer that your employment status, future opportunities or relationship with the school will not be affected by your participation or non-participation in this research.

Project Procedures:
If you choose to participate, you will be asked to:

- **Agree to complete a short questionnaire** (approximately 15 minutes).
- **Agree to one interview** (approximately 45 min) between yourself and the researcher.
- **Agree to the audio recording and possible transcribing of your interview** with the researcher/s. Transcripts of this interview will be offered to participants for editing or comment if they wish. No-one else other than you, the researcher, the supervisor and transcribers, who will sign a confidentiality agreement, will see your transcript.
Data storage, Retention, Destruction and Future Use:
All collected data will be kept in a secure locked filling cabinet in the Supervisor’s office at the UoA. These data will only be accessible to the researcher and the PI during this period. All digital files will be stored on a password protected computer. Data will be securely destroyed after six years.”. The data will only be accessible only to the researcher and the supervisor during this period. All digital files will be stored on a password protected computer. Data will be securely destroyed after six years.

Right to Withdraw from Participation:
You have the right to withdraw from the interviews and to have your data removed without giving reason for two weeks after the last data collection.

Confidentiality:
The preservation of confidentiality is paramount. Neither individuals nor schools will be identified in any reporting other than by the identifier known only to the researchers for the report. This information will remain completely confidential. Reports, articles and feedback arising from this research will not identify any sources of the data. Participants will be asked not to tell others they are participating in the research to protect confidentiality of themselves and the school. You will be provided with a summary of the research findings, which will be sent at an email address which you can provide on the Consent Form.

**Statements from participants that are published do have a risk of being identifiable if the participants work at the researcher’s place of work. The participants are encouraged to edit their interview transcript with this in mind.

Questions relating to this research can be sent to the researcher, her supervisor or the Head of Department.

Thank you for your participation in this research.

CONTACT DETAILS AND APPROVAL:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Supervisor</th>
<th>Head of School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cristina Casey-Schöner</td>
<td>Dr Deidre Le Fevre</td>
<td>Associate Professor Richard Hamilton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Vinewood Drive, Albany</td>
<td>Faculty of Education,</td>
<td>Faculty of Education, University of</td>
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<tr>
<td>c/o Faculty of Education,</td>
<td>University of Auckland</td>
<td>Auckland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Mail Centre 1142</td>
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<td>Mail Centre 1142</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tel: 09 623 8899. Ext. 89843</td>
<td>Tel: 09 623 8899. Ext. 89843</td>
<td>Tel: 09 373 7999 ext. 85619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email <a href="mailto:Cscho28@aucklanduni.ac.nz">Cscho28@aucklanduni.ac.nz</a></td>
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<td>Email <a href="mailto:rj.hamilton@auckland.ac.nz">rj.hamilton@auckland.ac.nz</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373-7599 ext. 83711. Email: ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz

Approved by the UNIVERSITY of AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on 09/4/2018 for three years. Reference Number 020777
Appendix L: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

This form will be held for a period of 6 years

Research Project Title: Using student voice within the teaching as inquiry model: Teachers’ perceptions of risk.

Researchers: Deidre Le Fevre (Principal Investigator), Cristina Casey-Schöner (Student researcher)

Transcriber: ________________________________ (name in full)

I agree to transcribe the audio-recordings for the above research project. I understand that the information contained within them is confidential and that I must not disclose or discuss it with anyone, other than the researchers. I understand that all files must be deleted from all my electronic devices upon satisfactory completion of this thesis.

Name: ________________________________
Signature: ________________________________
Date: ________________________________

Approved by the UNIVERSITY of AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on 09/4/2018 for three years. Reference Number 020777
References


Brown, G. T. L. (2004). Measuring attitude with positively packed self-report ratings: Comparison of agreement and frequency scales. *Psychological Reports, 94*(3), 1015–1024. [https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.94.3.1015-1024](https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.94.3.1015-1024)


