What are the reasons for absenteeism in secondary education in New Zealand/ Aotearoa? A systematic review of the qualitative literature using student voice research

Anna Richards and Kayleen Clark-Howard

ABSTRACT
In New Zealand/Aotearoa, high levels of secondary school absenteeism are a nationwide problem. Absenteeism is associated with a range of adverse outcomes for individuals and has detrimental effects on society. Since the global COVID-19 pandemic, with the government closing schools during lockdowns, absenteeism has reached epidemic proportions as students have failed to return to school. Despite the considerable concerns around absenteeism, there remains a significant gap in the research literature regarding the circumstances that influence students' decisions not to attend school. This systematic literature review of qualitative research conducted in Aotearoa through student voice examines adolescents' reasons for being absent from school. The review found that many underlying factors influence absenteeism, including teacher/student relationships, the school environment, peer relationships, curriculum and pedagogy, and family and personal well-being. This review found that the most critical theme that influenced student non-attendance at school is relationships. These findings indicate that relational pedagogies and restorative practices in schools, which serve to support and sustain student relationships with their teachers and peers, could reduce absenteeism.

KEYWORDS
Absenteeism, secondary education, student voice, relationships

Introduction

Frequent school absenteeism is associated with many adverse outcomes. A substantial body of research has found that students who are frequently absent from school are more likely to drop out early and leave without any qualifications (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Daraganova et al., 2014; Kearney, 2008), and be involved in risky sexual behaviours and have unintended pregnancies (Houck

et al., 2012). Further, students that frequently absent are more likely to have lower-paid employment (Hibbett et al., 1990), and to be involved in delinquent behaviours and crime (Rocque et al., 2017). Therefore, there are substantial personal and societal costs linked to absenteeism.

The reasons for school absenteeism are complex and multi-dimensional. Reid (2002) argues that the causes of absenteeism can be separated into three broad categories: home and social background, school and institutional factors, and psychological concerns. However, Reid acknowledges that frequently it is a combination of all these factors that contributes to a student's absenteeism. Home and social background factors that contribute to student absenteeism include living in violent neighbourhoods, living with family members with substance misuse issues, and exposure to multiple adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (Stempel et al., 2017). However, a key criticism of blaming social backgrounds for absenteeism is that it promotes deficit thinking and ignores the role of factors within the school system that deter students from attending (Valencia, 2012).

School and institutional factors can cause anxiety and emotional distress for students. One such example of school and institutional factors is bullying at school, which makes students feel unsafe and results in reduced attendance (Baiden et al., 2020; Malika et al., 2021). Smyth's (2007) studies of school dropouts found that students often had good reasons for not wanting to attend school, including wanting to protect their sense of self and personal well-being. This suggests that schools need to examine their processes for keeping students safe and dealing with issues such as bullying effectively to address the level of absenteeism.

Psychological concerns are another key factor that contributes to school absenteeism. A systematic review and meta-analysis of quantitative data strongly supports the association between depression and poor school attendance (Finning et al., 2019). Likewise, students who have anxiety often refuse to go to school to avoid emotional distress (Egger et al., 2003; Havik & Ingul, 2021). It is important to note that globally, the research indicates that the rates of school refusal have increased yearly (Ek & Eriksson, 2013). Mental health professionals are predicting that the COVID-19 pandemic and social isolation from lockdowns will have long-term effects on the mental health of adolescents (Guessoum et al; 2020). There is currently little research into the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on school absenteeism; however, school refusal rates will likely continue to increase post-COVID-19.

Aotearoa context and The Treaty of Waitangi

New Zealand legally requires children to be enrolled and attend school from 6 to 16 years old (Education and Training Act, 2020). The Ministry of Education-Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga (MoE, 2011) states that school boards, principals, and teachers should ensure that students attend school regularly. In New Zealand, regular attendance equates to attending school for more than 90% of the term (MoE, 2011). Attendance data shows that, in term 2 of 2021, only 59.7% of all students attended school regularly (MoE, 2022). Concerningly, Māori and Pacific children accounted for the most significant decreases in regular attendance. Only 44.4 % of Māori and 44.8 % of Pacific students attended school regularly in term 2 of 2021 (MoE, 2022). Furthermore, this report shows that the most significant decline in attendance occurred in the country's poorest regions.

The over-representation of Māori students in the absenteeism statistics is of significant concern. According to Bishop et al. (2003), deficit thinking by teachers impedes Māori students' capacity to thrive within the education system. Global examples of deficit thinking are that students from low-income families or minority cultures have lower intelligence, lack motivation, suffer from inadequate socialisation, and have poor linguistic development (Valencia, 2019). It is important to note that studies have consistently found that teachers interact less positively with students they had low expectations of (Bishop, 2010; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Brophy & Good, 1970). Consequently, the lack of positive interactions between students and teachers makes students feel unworthy and incapable of achieving and decreases their self-esteem (Bishop et al., 2003).

The New Zealand government and the Ministry of Education have a legal obligation to uphold the Treaty of Waitangi in all their interactions with Māori. The Treaty promised Māori partnership, protection, and full participation in all aspects of life in Aotearoa. Culturally responsive pedagogy that honours the Treaty principles and highlights the importance of relationships is crucial in reducing the inequalities in education for Māori students.

Student voice

The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, n.d.), which was ratified by New Zealand in 1993, explicitly states that children have the right to express their views on matters of interest to them and to have their views listened to and acted on by adults. Importantly, student voice research has the potential to create meaningful educational experiences for youth and improve educational outcomes. However, Mitra (2004) argues that those in authority seldom consult with young people and seek their opinions about the schooling system. Encouraging students to have a voice in the education system is essential in providing teenagers with a sense of agency and belonging (Mitra & Gross, 2009).

Research aim

This systematic review aims to assist school counsellors and education professionals in better understanding why students are absent from school. School counsellors regularly work alongside students absent from school for various reasons, such as friendship difficulties, bullying, anxiety, depression, poor self-esteem, family issues, and trauma. The purpose of this review is to understand the lived experiences of students who frequently miss school and identify the common factors that affect attendance.

Research question

What factors contribute to adolescents' non-attendance in secondary education in New Zealand/ Aotearoa?

Methodology

Why a systematic review?

There is a growing consensus across the health and education sectors that the needs and preferences of the people who use these services must be considered when developing and evaluating services (Ring et al., 2011). A systematic review of qualitative research that examines the experiences of the people who use the service is valuable in identifying themes in the literature or divergent views by bringing together several studies on a specific topic of interest (Dickson et al., 2017).

Qualitative studies can be helpful in the identification of barriers and facilitators in health and education provision and typically focus on people's experiences seeking to identify the "how and whys?" of a specific issue or phenomenon (Ring et al., 2011). Therefore, a systematic review of the research that examines students' reasons for absenteeism within secondary education in Aotearoa was considered appropriate for this study.

Search strategy

The search strategy was developed in collaboration with a specialist research librarian at Massey University. Table 1 details the search terms. The terminology used for attendance included attendance, non-attendance, school refusal, school phobia, absenteeism, and truancy. A comprehensive search for qualitative studies on absenteeism was conducted in line with the Centre for Reviews and Dissemination protocols (Booth et al., 2010). Searches were supplemented with forward and backward citation searches. Baskerville, an expert in the field and a key author, was contacted for information about any additional research.

Table 1. Key search terms

	Keywords	**Search terms**
	attendance	attend* OR non-attend* OR refus* OR absen* OR truan*
AND	student	student* OR adolescen* OR youth* OR pupil* OR teen* OR young people
AND	qualitative	qualitative OR student voice OR voice OR narrative OR phenomenological OR student attitudes OR observation OR grounded research OR focus group
AND	school	secondary school OR secondary education OR high school
AND	New Zealand Aotearoa	

Inclusion/exclusion criteria

The PICOSS (population, intervention, control, outcomes, study design, setting) acronym, frequently employed in defining the inclusion/exclusion criteria in systematic reviews (Boland et al., 2017), was used to structure the foreground of this review. The PICOSS table (Table 2), outlines the eligibility

criteria for the studies selected in this review. Studies were included if they were: (a) published in English; (b) qualitative research studies that used students' voices; (c) the participants were adolescents between 13 and 18 years old or adults' reflections of absenteeism; (d) focused on school absence; (e) from New Zealand; (f) were conducted between 2000-2022. Studies were excluded if they: (a) did not discuss attendance; (b) the study was not about secondary school absenteeism.

Table 2. PICOSS eligibility criteria

PICOSS criteria	Description
Population	Students that have been enrolled in secondary education in NZ.
Interventions (Focus)	Absenteeism. Studies will be included using a broad range of terms for absenteeism: unauthorised absence, school refusal, school phobia, non-attendance, or chronic absenteeism.
Comparator	Absenteeism compared to regular attendance in secondary school.
Outcomes	The outcomes of interest are the reasons adolescents are absent from secondary school.
Study design	Qualitative studies that use student voice research.
Setting	New Zealand secondary schools.

Information and sources

After several scoping searches, the following multidisciplinary electronic databases were searched: Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science. Educational databases were searched using EBSCO Discovery Service, including (but not limited to): PsycInfo, Education Source, Index New Zealand, Scopus, Web of Science, and Academic Source Premier. Including multidisciplinary databases meant that the search was comprehensive. The final search was conducted on the 23rd of July 2022.

Selection process

The results generated from the search of the electronic databases were screened against the eligibility criteria for inclusion/exclusion. During stage one of the screening, the titles and abstracts were manually screened by the researcher for eligibility, and any duplicates were removed. When the researcher felt there was ambiguity regarding the eligibility of a particular study, the researcher discussed these discrepancies with the supervisor to reduce bias. Full-text papers of potentially eligible papers were exported to Endnote X9 bibliographic software, which was then used to store and manage the selected texts.

Critical appraisal of studies

The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2018) systematic review checklist was used to assess the quality of the included studies. The CASP is a ten-item checklist that evaluates the appropriateness of the methodology, the study's rigour, and whether the study has met the criteria

set by ethical guidelines for research conducted with human participants. No studies were excluded after using the checklist.

Data extraction and synthesis

Thematic analysis was used as an appropriate, realistic and essentialist approach to report participants' lived experiences and the meanings they make of their experiences. The key benefit of choosing thematic analysis is its flexibility, as it can be used across a data set that uses a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Only direct quotes were coded for this systematic review. This included the findings section of each thesis, direct quotes in the published research articles, and direct quotes contained in the book chapter in this review.

Braun and Clarkes' (2006) six phases of thematic analysis were used to guide the process of the evaluation. This systematic review used a data-driven inductive method (Boyatzis, 1998) and a deductive approach using a code book (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). This involved first familiarising myself with the research. Thereafter, during the preliminary data extraction, the key findings of each study were identified (Table 3). These key findings were used to generate a codebook using the prevalent themes for the initial codes. Each article was examined against the code book, and potential codes, themes, and subthemes were reviewed and added. The process of generating tables helped to clarify and refine the themes and subthemes. The most prevalent themes and subthemes were then identified for further discussion.

Ethical considerations

The participants in the selected studies were adolescents who gave consent in the original studies. The participants in the included studies are anonymous to protect their privacy. Ethical approval was sought from the Human Research and Ethics Committee at Massey University, by submitting a low-risk notification form.

The Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching, and Evaluations involving Human Participants (Massey University, 2017), states that research must adhere to the fundamental human rights of protection from harm, autonomy, and privacy. This research adheres to the principles implicit in The Treaty of Waitangi and Te Ara Tiki Māori framework (Hudson et al., 2010, as cited in Massey University, 2017), and the NZAC code of ethics (New Zealand Association of Counsellors, 2002).

The ethical guidelines of Massey University (2017) stipulate that research should benefit the population under study. This study hopes to illuminate the barriers and the necessary facilitators for adolescents in attending school and privilege the collective welfare of this group. This research intends to honour whakapapa (relationships), tika (purposefulness), manaatikitanga (cultural responsibility), and mana (justice and equity) by keeping these principles at the forefront of the research process, and consultation with a cultural supervisor when issues arise.

Results

The PRISMA diagram (Page et al., 2021), Figure 1, shows the process of systematic search and article selection.

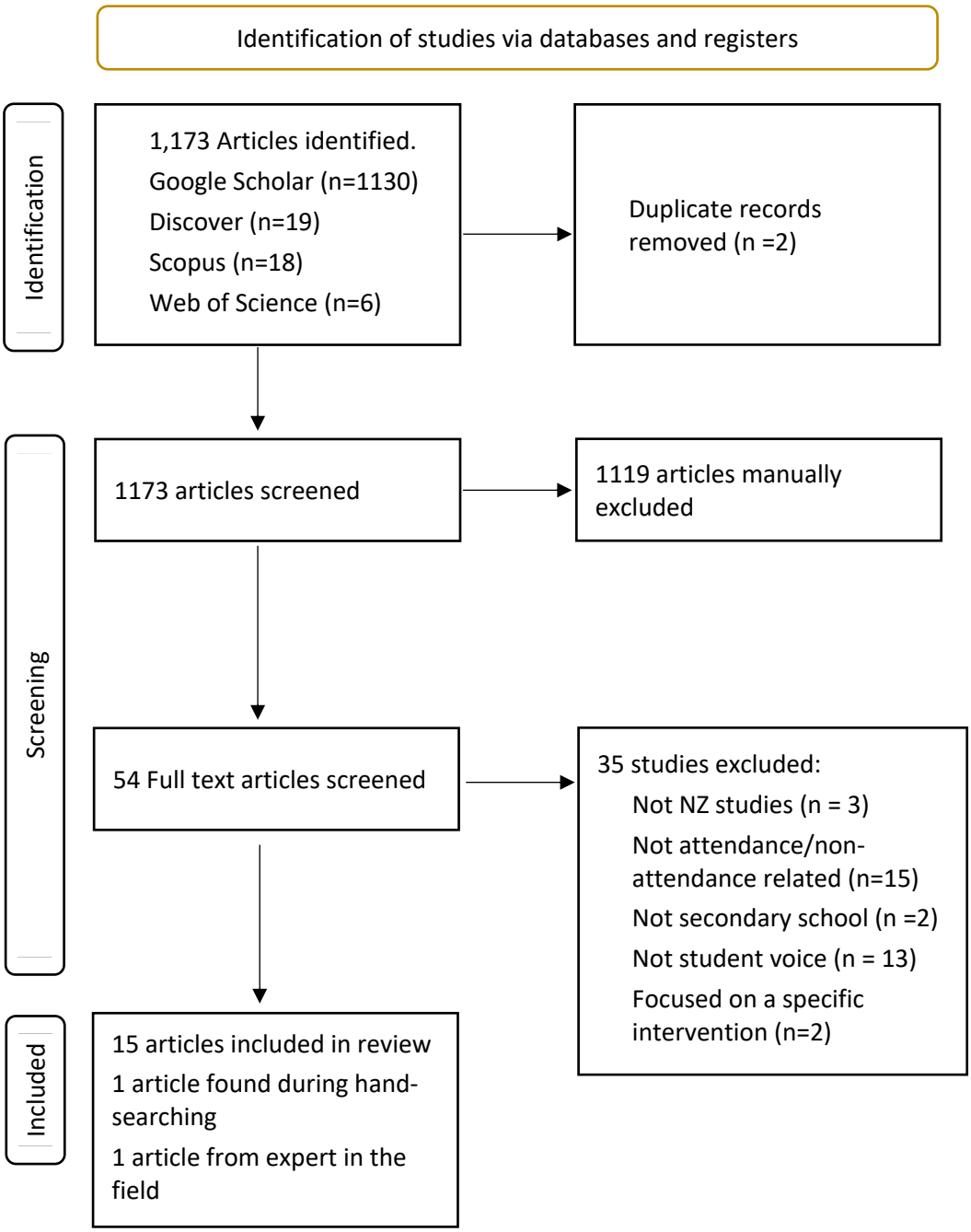

Figure 1. A flow chart of the process of the systematic search and article selection

Study characteristics

Ten of the selected studies included in this systematic review directly addressed absenteeism. These were: Baleinakorodawa (2009); Baskerville (2019, 2020, 2021a, 2021b); Baskerville and Loveridge (2020); Bruce (2014); Bruce and McCormack (2018); Stroobant and Jones (2006); and M. White (2006). While Huxford's (2015) and McCormack's (2015) main focus was student disengagement, these authors included a discussion on absenteeism. Five of the included studies in this review examined students' experiences in education and included a discussion on absenteeism. These were: Berryman et al. (2017); Bishop et al. (2003); Hamon (2015); Nairn & Higgins (2011); and Virtue (2021).

This systematic review included seven research theses from masters and PhD students, two reports, one chapter from an edited book, and seven published journal articles. The seventeen studies included a range of theoretical approaches. Three studies explicitly stated they employed kaupapa Māori research methods, six studies used a grounded theory design, two studies used discourse analysis, two studies used a phenomenological approach, and one study used an ethnographic approach. Seven studies conducted research with students enrolled in, or who formerly attended, an Alternative Education Centre. Eight studies conducted research in Aotearoa secondary schools. Four studies conducted research with students who were known to the attendance service in their region or were classified as not engaged in education (NEET). Two retrospective studies were conducted with adults who had previously attended secondary school in Aotearoa. The study characteristics table, Table 3, shows some key findings of these studies.

Table 3. Study characteristics data extraction

	Study	Summary of key findings affecting student attendance
1	Baleinakorodawa (2009)	• Teacher behaviour. • Lack of self-belief. • Lack of support from family and community. • Level of engagement at school.
2	Baskerville (2019)	• Feeling disrespected by teachers. • Feeling disrespected by peers. • Lack of power and autonomy in the classroom. • Seeking connection with peers out of class.
3	Baskerville (2020)	• Teacher/student relationships. • Lack of support from teachers. • Bullying. • Negative experiences at school diminish a student's sense of self.
4	Baskerville and Loveridge (2020)	• Non-attendance is a response to perceived disrespect. • Wanting to be with friends. • Wanting to be alone. • Non-attendance becomes a habit.
5	Baskerville (2021a)	• Students do not attend school because they do not feel a sense of belonging or connection with the school and their peers.

	Study	Summary of key findings affecting student attendance
6	Baskerville (2021b)	• Poor peer relationships increase non-attendance.
7	Berryman et al. (2017)	• Māori students need to resist negative stereotyping at school. • Have opportunities to develop a strong cultural identity. • Experience whakawhanaungatanga at school. • Work collaboratively. • Have explicit and timely direction.
8	Bishop et al. (2003)	• Relationships and interactions between teachers and students in the classroom are critical. • Effective teachers take a non-deficit view of Māori students and see them as capable.
9	Bruce (2014)	• Relationships with teachers. • Friendship and belonging. • Curriculum and pedagogy. • Wider school support. • Personal challenges. • Learning difficulties. • Home challenges.
10	Bruce and McCormack (2018)	• Relationships with teachers are important. • Bullying by teachers and students. • Bullying is not adequately addressed. • Lack of support in class. • Good pastoral care helps students feel supported.
11	Hamon (2015)	• Chronic health conditions make attending school hard. • Lack of support and empathy from teachers. • Bullying is a problem.
12	Huxford (2015)	• Disengagement is a process. • Teacher/student relationships are important. • Students need to feel supported. • Teachers need to believe students are capable of success.
13	McCormack (2015)	• Negative teacher/student relationships cause students to disengage. • Lack of support.
14	Nairn and Higgins (2011)	• Non-attendance is a response to a process of alienation following a breakdown in teacher/student relationships.
15	Stroobant and Jones (2006)	• School refusal is a response to negative experiences at school.
16	Virtue (2021)	• Teacher/student relationships are negatively impacted by deficit theorising from teachers and an overexertion of power.
17	M. White (2006)	• Teacher attitudes. • Students' low self-perceptions. • The school environment. • Bullying. • Relationships with peers affect non-attendance.

Participant characteristics

Across all studies, 276 participants were included in this review. The participants that took part in Baskerville's (2019) research and Bishop et al.'s (2003) study were only counted once, as the original data was collected on one occasion and then used in multiple articles. One study focused on Pacific students, and one specifically focused on the experiences of students with Chronic Health Conditions (CHC). Five studies exclusively focused on the experiences of Māori students in education. Eight studies did not specify the ethnicity of the participants. Only two studies in this systematic review identified that the participants had a mix of ethnicities ranging from Māori, Pacific, New Zealand European, and Dutch.

Assessment of the quality of the included studies

The CASP checklist (Critical Appraisal Skills Program, 2018) was used to assess the quality of the studies in this review. The studies included had clear research questions and aims and detailed methodological procedures, including outlining how participants were recruited. Most studies also discussed how their data was collected and interpreted. In addition, the researchers in the included studies have considered their relationship with their participants and reflected on their research ethics.

Issues arose with two of the selected articles using the CASP qualitative review process. Firstly, in Stroobant and Jones' (2006) article, there is no explicit reference made to ethical considerations. Stroobant and Jones claim to use discourse analysis to explain the participants' experiences of school refusal. However, in the article Stroobant mentions that she refused to attend secondary school, therefore, there is the possibility that her own experience may have biased her interpretation of her results. Nevertheless, the views offered by the authors provide a valuable alternative perspective on absenteeism, so the study was included.

The second article where issues arose was Nairn and Higgins (2011). In this study, the authors did not make explicit their methodology or present a discussion of ethics. Therefore, it was unclear how interpretation biases were accounted for. However, it was found that this study drew from an earlier work by Nairn and Higgins (2007). Reading the earlier work, it was found that the recruitment of participants was discussed. As both of Nairn and Higgins's studies can be found in reputable journals, it was assumed that the original research did follow the prescribed ethical guidelines. As such, this study was considered reputable for this review.

Synthesis of the findings

The thematic analysis identified themes and subthemes across the selected literature. This resulted in seven core themes that influence absenteeism being identified. These were teacher/student relationships, school environment, peer relationships, curriculum, pedagogy, family, and personal well-being. Table 4 shows the prevalence of themes and subthemes across all seventeen articles. It was found that some studies contained multiple themes and subthemes.

Table 4. Prevalence of themes across articles

Themes	**Subthemes**	**The total number of studies discussing each theme**
Teacher relationships		*17*
	Lack of support by teachers	15
	Unfair treatment	12
	Deficit thinking	8
	Teachers are racist	4
School environment		*14*
	Lack of power and autonomy	9
	Feeling unsafe at school	7
Peer relationships		*13*
	Bullying	11
	Detaching from peers in class	6
	“Wagging” to be with friends	4
Family		*12*
	Family support is necessary	8
	Problems at home	4
	Family commitments	1
Curriculum		*9*
	Too hard/too much work	6
	Lack of practical subjects	3
Pedagogy		*8*
	Too much reading and writing	5
	Little variety in teaching methods	4
Personal wellbeing		*9*
	Drug/alcohol problems	4
	Low self-esteem	3
	Anxiety/depression	3
	Wanting to be alone	2
	Physical illness	2

Discussion

This systematic review acknowledges that the reasons for students' non-attendance at school are complex and multi-factorial. This study identified seven core themes affecting attendance: teacher/student relationships, school environment, peer relationships, family, curriculum, pedagogy, and personal well-being. Teacher/student relationships were the most significant theme; students spoke about their relationships with their teachers and how they impacted their school experience. The prevalence of this re-occurring theme indicates that the most critical factor affecting students' willingness to attend school is their relationship with their teachers. Within this key theme were four sub-themes that impacted student/teacher relationships. These are lack of support with learning from teachers, unfair treatment, deficit thinking, and racism.

A lack of support with learning was identified as the most prevalent sub-theme that affected how students felt about their teachers. Baskerville and Loveridge (2020), state that students have a strong emotional response when they feel inadequately supported in class. Again, when students do not feel supported with their learning, they feel they are being unfairly treated. In addition, a recent meta-analysis found that teacher support was significantly correlated with student belonging (Allen & Kerns, 2017). This implies supportive relationships and a student's sense of belonging are interconnected. Consequently, students who do not feel supported in their classes and experience a sense of belonging at school are significantly more likely to be absent.

There are many reasons a student may feel unfairly treated; unfair treatment may result from deficit thinking or racism. Moreover, students are aware of teachers' deficit views about them and their families. One example of deficit thinking from the international literature is that parents from low-income families do not value education. The belief is that the undervaluing of education is transmitted to the children of low-income parents, and consequently, these students are unmotivated to learn or attend school (Cooper, 2003; Felix et al., 2008; Valencia, 2002; C. M. White, 2014). Consequently, deficit thinking results in teacher attitudes and school practices that aim to "fix" the child. This removes the responsibility from teachers and the school to examine the broader issues that perpetuate the problem (Weiner, 2006).

Research indicates that teachers' negative beliefs and low expectations of students' academic abilities influence their interactions with the students, thus creating a self-fulfilling prophecy that thwarts academic achievement and consequently perpetuates further inequality (Brophy & Good, 1970, 1974; Jussim, 1989; Jussim & Harber, 2005). Moreover, deficit thinking is often closely linked with racism. Bishop and Berryman (2006) report that when Māori students experience negative stereotyping from their teachers, they "voted with their feet" (p. 255) and absented themselves from class. One way in which teachers can reject deficit thinking is to actively disregard preconceived limiting beliefs about a student's capabilities based on ethnicity or economic status and have high expectations of all students.

The school environment was identified as the second most prevalent theme relating to absenteeism. As such, students reported they felt they had a lack of power and autonomy at school. One way to increase student autonomy is through teaching practices. Assor et al. (2002) assert that a teacher's

ability to utilise autonomous teaching practices is the hallmark of a good teacher. Furthermore, Assor et al. suggest that teachers can provide students with more autonomy in the classroom by using non-controlling language, providing students with choices, fostering their interests, and encouraging students to think critically and independently. In addition, autonomy-supportive teaching helps students value a task and enjoy learning (Reeve, 2016). Equally, Bishop (2010) argues that effective education for Māori requires co-construction and an environment of non-dominance and interdependence in the classroom and school. Notably, autonomous practice has implications for enhancing student/teacher relationships and therefore reducing absenteeism.

Peer relationships also significantly influence school absenteeism. Students who said that they did not have any friends in their class, experienced a sense of alienation and rejection (Nairn & Higgins, 2011). Hamm and Faircloth (2005) found that friendships provide students with social support that helps them feel safe, creates a buffer that helps them cope with psychological distress and generates a feeling of belonging at school, which is essential for academic success. Likewise, Craggs and Kelly (2018) found that feeling safe and secure at school depended on a student's positive and supportive relationships with teachers and peers, which is implicit in students experiencing a sense of belonging at school.

Students recurrently expressed that they were absent from school to avoid being bullied. Likewise, the school environment is interrelated with bullying and impacts how safe students feel at school. Students stated that when teachers were aware of bullying but failed to intervene, this made them feel unsafe. Teachers must intervene when they witness bullying at school to reduce absenteeism. Evidence suggests that restorative practices can improve teacher/student relationships and effectively address bullying (Weber & Vereenooghe, 2020). Teachers can also support students by referring them to the school counsellor if they seem to be struggling with friendships or suspect they are being bullied. Counsellors can offer emotional support and assist students to develop strategies and build resilience to navigate difficult situations. The result of this review suggests that if school staff support students in managing peer relationships, then students will feel more connected to their teachers and peers which could reduce absenteeism.

Students' home lives affect their level of attendance. In eight of the included studies, students discussed the importance of family supporting them to attend school and helping them re-engage after a period of absenteeism (see Table 4). Family problems also meant that some students were absent from school. Family dynamics can impact a student's well-being. Divorce, separation, illness, and death in the family can all affect students' attendance. If teachers become aware that a pattern of absenteeism is emerging for a particular student, a referral to the school counsellor can help support that student. School counsellors can assist students in exploring their emotions and concerns and assist them in building resilience.

Pedagogy was the fifth most prevalent theme identified in this review that students talked about when reflecting on their school experiences. Students disliked not being able to collaborate with their peers in class and talk to each other about their work. Bishop and Berryman (2006) outline the importance of a dialogic way of working for Māori students, or wānanga, in their effective teaching profile (ETP). Students want to be able to interact with the teacher and other students and share

their knowledge. Importantly, pedagogy links with the theme of teacher/student relationships and peer relationships because collaborative learning supports connections and strengthens relationships with both teachers and peers. Consequently, this review suggests that schools should adopt a cultural pedagogy, such as the ETP, as this would benefit all students, and reduce absenteeism.

The sixth theme discussed by students was the curriculum. Students stated that the work was "too hard" and there was "too much work" and expressed that they would like more practical subjects in the curriculum. The findings of this review are that students would like more choice in the subjects that are available to them at school and would like a wider range of practical subjects to be offered. Accordingly, students not having a choice over the subjects they take links closely to the theme of the lack of autonomy felt by students identified in this review. This review suggests that a more diverse curriculum, with more practical options for students, would reduce absenteeism.

Personal well-being issues, such as mental health and physical disability, was the seventh and final theme identified as a cause of absenteeism. This review indicates that anxiety and depression are a significant contributing factor to absenteeism. Likewise, substance misuse was also highlighted as impacting mental well-being, causing absenteeism. For this reason, when a pattern of absenteeism emerges, teachers should direct students to the school counsellor, who can provide support or make a referral to a specialist agency on the student's behalf. Therefore, school counsellors have an important role in reducing absenteeism for students who have issues affecting their well-being. Physical well-being was also found to be a contributing factor to student absenteeism. In two of the selected studies, students discussed how their disability or illness prevented them from attending school.

Limitations

For this systematic review, grey literature was included due to the limited amount of published literature on this topic. One of the limitations of grey literature is that the methodology used is sometimes unclear and, therefore, risks inherent biases (Dickson et al. 2017). However, there are also benefits of using grey literature, because the data is often from diverse sources, which reduces publication bias. For this review, the decision to include grey literature was heavily influenced by the researcher's desire to examine a broad range of student perspectives.

Another limitation is that not all studies in this systematic review directly addressed absenteeism. As such, some of the included studies had a limited discussion related to non-attendance. Nonetheless, across all the included studies, students report that their relationships with the teachers are central to their educational experiences. Another limitation of the included studies is that the complete transcripts were unavailable for analysis, so valuable information could have been omitted and potential themes missed. An additional limitation of the review, when considering the included studies, is that student voice research is typically conducted with only a small number of participants making generalisations about the presented data problematic (Dickson et al., 2017). In addition, regarding the participants, students' ethnicities were often not stated, so it is unclear if there is a representative sample across Māori, Pacific and Pākehā students in the included studies.

The cultural bias of the researcher is inherent in all research alongside researcher positionality. Positionality is defined as the position a researcher occupies within existing hierarchies of power and how the researcher identifies themselves and is identified by others within those systems (Sehgal, 2009). Bourke (2014) states that researcher positionality is not neutral and is present throughout the research process, influencing the research question, the methods a researcher employs to answer a question, and how the data is interpreted. Thus, positionality is inherent in all of the selected studies and is also one limitation of this review. A cultural positioning piece was included in the original thesis to be transparent about any inherent bias in this review.

Another limitation of this systematic review is that only one researcher conducted the searches, therefore some valuable research may have been missed. To reduce this risk, the researcher collaborated with a specialist research librarian to formulate the search strategy and searched on several occasions to replicate the results. Again, only one researcher coded all the data, and therefore the researcher's positionality is a source of potential bias; the best practice is for two researchers to code the data (Dickson et al., 2017), but due to the limitations of the Master of Counselling program, this was not possible. Where discrepancies or uncertainties arose during the research process, these were discussed with the research supervisor and a colleague to limit individual interpretation bias.

Recommendations for further research

Recommendations for further research include exploring absenteeism using student voice methodology to examine each theme identified in this study explicitly. Furthermore, student voice research should be utilised to explore the reasons for absenteeism post-Covid-19. The effects of the current cost-of-living crisis on absenteeism should also be investigated as some students may be choosing to work due to family finances.

Implications

The most critical theme identified as affecting absenteeism in this systematic review is relationships, which were identified across all seventeen of the selected studies. This implies that schools could reduce absenteeism by employing relational processes and pedagogies. One example of a relational practice which could be used to improve non-attendance is restorative practices. Restorative schools foster the values of mutual concern, dignity, and respect (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). By fostering these values, restorative schools teach students social, emotional and relationship skills which support them to build effective relationships with their teachers and their peers and provides students with a sense of security and belonging.

Further examples of relational pedagogies include Te Kotahitanga (Bishop et al., 2003) and mana ōrite (Berryman et al., 2018). Te Kotahitanga's authors formulated the Effective Teaching Profile (ETP) which consists of five key elements. The first relational construct of the ETP is manaakitanga which means that teachers care for students who are Māori by respecting their culture, acknowledging their worldview, and creating a nurturing and supportive environment. The second relational aspect of the ETP is mana motuhake; which asserts that effective teachers have high expectations of their Māori students and believe that they can succeed. The third relational construct

is ngā whakapiringatanga, which states that effective teachers create a secure, well-managed environment and can use the curriculum creatively to respond to learning conversations and encourage students to work collaboratively to contribute to their learning. The fourth relational teaching process is wānanga, which encourages discussion between teachers and peers. The final construct of ako means that effective teachers regularly use a variety of teaching methods (Bishop, 2010). Berryman et al. (2018) argue that schools have a legal responsibility to implement a culturally responsive pedagogy where power is shared in the classroom, where the learning is interactive and dialogic, and students experience a sense of connectedness with their teacher and peers.

School counsellors can help reduce absenteeism by providing emotional support and advocacy and supporting students to develop emotional intelligence through their counselling practice, so students feel supported at school. Similarly, research shows that the relationship between a therapist and the client is the most critical factor in effective therapeutic outcomes (Norcross & Lambert, 2019). Therefore, having counsellors in schools could help reduce absenteeism by encouraging supportive relationships between school staff and students.

Conclusion

Reducing absenteeism in Aotearoa is challenging and complex because there are often many contributing factors. The findings of this systematic review identify teacher/student relationships, school environment, family concerns, pedagogy, curriculum, and personal well-being as contributing factors to absenteeism. This review found that teacher/student relationships was the most critical theme in student absenteeism. As such, the recommendations are that schools, teachers, school counsellors and support staff should work to create supportive relationships with students to reduce absenteeism.

References

Allen, K.-A., & Kern, M. L. (2017). *School belonging in adolescents: Theory, research and practice*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5996-4

Assor, A., Kaplan, H., & Roth, G. (2002). Choice is good, but relevance is excellent: Autonomy-enhancing and suppressing teacher behaviours predicting students' engagement in schoolwork. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 72*(2), 261-278. https://doi.org/10.1348/000709902158883

Baiden, P., LaBrenz, C. A., Okine, L., Thrasher, S., & Asiedua-Baiden, G. (2020). The toxic duo: Bullying involvement and adverse childhood experiences as factors associated with school disengagement among children. *Children and Youth Services Review, 119*, 105383. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105383

Baleinakorodawa, L. (2009). *Causes of non-attendance from mainstream education for a group of Pasifika students enrolled in alternative education* [Master of Arts in Social Sciences thesis]. Auckland University of Technology. https://hdl.handle.net/10292/786

Baskerville, D. (2019). *Under the skin of truancy in New Zealand (Aotearoa): A grounded theory study of young people's perspectives* [Doctoral dissertation]. Victoria University of Wellington. http://hdl.handle.net/10063/8152

Baskerville, D. (2020). Truancy: Young people walk away from negative school factors. In L. Hogg, K. Stockbridge, C. Achieng-Evensen, & S. SooHoo (Eds.), *Pedagogies of with-ness: Students, teachers, voice and agency* (pp. 27-36). Myers Education Press.

Baskerville, D. (2021a). Mattering: Changing the narrative in secondary schools for youth who truant. *Journal of Youth Studies, 24*(6), 834-849. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2020.1772962

Baskerville, D. (2021b). Truancy begins in class: Student perspectives of tenuous peer relationships. *Pastoral Care in Education, 39*(2), 108-124. https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2020.1788125

Baskerville, D., & Loveridge, J. (2020). Nature of truancy from the perspectives of secondary students in New Zealand. *Educational Studies*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2020.1834356

Battin-Pearson, S., Newcomb, M. D., Abbott, R. D., Hill, K. G., Catalano, R. F., & Hawkins, J. D. (2000). Predictors of early high school dropout: A test of five theories. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 92*(3), 568-582. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.92.3.568

Berryman, M., Eley, E., & Copeland, D. (2017). Listening and learning from rangatahi Māori: The voices of Māori youth. *Critical Questions in Education, 8*(4), 476-494. https://hdl.handle.net/10289/11517

Berryman, M., Lawrence, D., & Lamont, R. (2018). Cultural relationships for responsive pedagogy: A bicultural mana ōrite perspective. *Set: Research Information for Teachers, 1*, 3-10. https://doi.org/10.18296/set.0096

Bishop, R. (2010). Effective teaching for indigenous and minoritized students. *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences, 7*, 57-62. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.10.009

Bishop, R., & Berryman, M. (2006). *Culture speaks: Cultural relationships and classroom learning*. Huia Publishers.

Bishop, R., Berryman, M., Tiakiwai, S., & Richardson, C. (2003). *Te kōtahitanga: The experiences of year 9 and 10 Māori students in mainstream classrooms*. Ministry of Education. https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/maori_education/english-medium-education/9977/5375

Boland, A., Cherry, M. G., & Dickson, R. (2017). *Doing a systematic review: A student's guide* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Booth, A. M., Wright, K. E., & Outhwaite, H. (2010). Centre for Reviews and Dissemination databases: Value, content, and developments. *International Journal of Technology Assessment in Health Care, 26*(4), 470-472. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266462310000978

Bourke, B. (2014). Positionality: Reflecting on the research process. *The Qualitative Report, 19*(33), 1-9. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2014.1026

Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Sage.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brophy, J. E., & Good, T. L. (1970). Teachers' communication of differential expectations for children's classroom performance: Some behavioural data. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 61*(5), 365-374. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/h0029908

Brophy, J. E., & Good, T. L. (1974). *Teacher-student relationships: Causes and consequences*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Bruce, J. (2014). *Dis/engagement in secondary schools: Toward truancy prevention*. University of Canterbury. https://hdl.handle.net/10092/101074

Bruce, J., & McCormack, A. (2018). *Young people and caregivers' perspectives on truancy and non-enrolment*. Te Ora Hou Ōtautahi. https://hdl.handle.net/10092/101056

Critical Appraisal Skills Programme. (2018). *CASP systematic review checklist*. https://casp-uk.net/casp-tools-checklists

Cooper, C. W. (2003). The detrimental impact of teacher bias: Lessons learned from the standpoint of African American mothers. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 30*(2), 101-116.

Crabtree, B. F., & Miller, W. F. (1992). A template approach to text analysis: Developing and using codebooks. In B. F. Crabtree & W. L. Miller (Eds.), *Doing qualitative research* (pp. 93–109). Sage.

Craggs, H., & Kelly, C. (2018). Adolescents' experiences of school belonging: A qualitative meta-synthesis. *Journal of Youth Studies, 21*(10), 1411-1425. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2018.1477125

Daraganova, G., Mullan, K., & Edwards, B. (2014). *Attendance in primary school: Factors and consequences*. Australian Government Department of Social Services. Occasional Paper (51). https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/10_2014/attendance_in_primary_school_accessibleword_doc_revised.pdf

Dickson, R., Boland, A., & Cherry, M. G. (2017). *Doing a systematic review: A student's guide* (2nd edition ed.). Sage.

Education and Training Act. (2020). https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2020/0038/latest/LMS170676.html

Egger, H. L., Costello, J. E., & Angold, A. (2003). School refusal and psychiatric disorders: A community study. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 42*(7), 797-807. https://doi.org/10.1097/01.CHI.0000046865.56865.79

Ek, H., & Eriksson, R. (2013). Psychological factors behind truancy, school phobia, and school refusal: A literature study. *Child & Family Behavior Therapy, 35*(3), 228-248. https://doi.org/10.1080/07317107.2013.818899

Evans, K. R., & Vaandering, D. (2016). *The little book of restorative justice in education: Fostering responsibility, healing, and hope in schools*. Skyhorse Publishing.

Felix, N., Dornbrack, J., & Scheckle, E. (2008). Parents, homework and socio-economic class: discourses of deficit and disadvantage in the "New" South Africa. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique, 7*(2), 99-112.

Finning, K., Ukoumunne, O. C., Ford, T., Danielsson-Waters, E., Shaw, L., Romero De Jager, I., Stentiford, L., & Moore, D. A. (2019). The association between child and adolescent depression and poor attendance at school: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 245*, 928-938. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2018.11.055

Guessoum, S. B., Lachal, J., Radjack, R., Carretier, E., Minassian, S., Benoit, L., & Moro, M. R. (2020). Adolescent psychiatric disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. *Psychiatry Research, 291*, 113264. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113264

Hamm, J. V., & Faircloth, B. S. (2005). The role of friendship in adolescents' sense of school belonging. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 2005*(107), 61-78. https://doi.org/10.1002/cd.121

Hamon, M. R. (2015). *The learning experiences of New Zealand secondary school students with chronic health conditions* [Doctoral dissertation]. Victoria University of Wellington. http://researcharchive.vuw.ac.nz/handle/10063/4848

Havik, T., & Ingul, J. M. (2021). How to understand school refusal. *Frontiers in Education, 6*, 715177. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.715177

Hibbett, A., Fogelman, K., & Manor, O. (1990). Occupational outcomes of truancy. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 60*(1), 23-36. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8279.1990.tb00919.x

Houck, C. D., Hadley, W., Tolou-Shams, M., & Brown, L. (2012). Truancy is associated with sexual risk among early adolescents. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioural Paediatrics, 33*(9), 728-731. https://doi.org/10.1097/DBP.0b013e31827134a5

Huxford, R. (2015). *An investigation into Māori students' academic disengagement from the mainstream education system and re-engagement in the alternative education system* [Master of Educational Psychology thesis]. Massey University. http://hdl.handle.net/10179/6907

Jussim, L. (1989). Teacher expectations: Self-fulfilling prophecies, perceptual biases, and accuracy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57*(3), 469-480. http://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.57.3.469

Jussim, L., & Harber, K. D. (2005). Teacher expectations and self-fulfilling prophecies: Knowns and unknowns, resolved and unresolved controversies. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 9*(2), 131-155. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr0902_3

Kearney, C. A. (2008). An interdisciplinary model of school absenteeism in youth to inform professional practice and public policy. *Educational Psychology Review, 20*(3), 257-282. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-008-9078-3

Malika, N., Granillo, C., Irani, C., Montgomery, S., & Belliard, J. C. (2021). Chronic absenteeism: Risks and protective factors among low-income, minority children and adolescents. *Journal of School Health, 91*(12), 1046-1054. https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.13096

Massey University. (2017). *Code of ethical conduct for research, teaching and evaluations involving human participants*. https://www.massey.ac.nz/research/ethics/human-ethics/

McCormack, A. (2015). *What are young people saying about disengaging from mainstream secondary schooling in Aotearoa-New Zealand?* [Master of Arts in Sociology thesis]. University of Canterbury. http://hdl.handle.net/10092/12234

Mitra, D. L. (2004). The significance of students: Can increasing "student voice" in schools lead to gains in youth development? *Teachers College Record, 106*(4), 651-688. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9620.2004.00354.x

Mitra, D. L., & Gross, S. J. (2009). Increasing student voice in high school reform: Building partnerships, improving outcomes. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership, 37*(4), 522-543. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143209334577

New Zealand Association of Counsellors. (2002). *Code of ethics: A framework for ethical practice*. https://nzac.org.nz/document/6629/NZAC-Code-of-Ethics-2002-Revised-2020.pdf

Ministry of Education-Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga. (2011). *Attendance matters: Guidelines for implementing an effective attendance management plan*. https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Education-and-Training-Act-2020/AttendanceMatters-updated-legislation.pdf

Ministry of Education-Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga. (2022). *Attendance statistics*. Education Counts. https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/attendance

Nairn, K., & Higgins, J. (2007). New Zealand's neoliberal generation: Tracing discourses of economic (ir)rationality. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 20*(3), 261-281. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390701281819

Nairn, K., & Higgins, J. (2011). The emotional geographies of neoliberal school reforms: Spaces of refuge and containment. *Emotion, Space and Society, 4*(3), 180-186. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2010.10.001

Norcross, J. C., & Lambert, M. J. (Eds.). (2019). *Psychotherapy relationships that work: Volume 1: Evidence-based therapist contributions*. Oxford University Press.

Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., Shamseer, L., Tetzlaff, J. M., Akl, E. A., Brennan, S. E., Chou, R., Glanville, J., Grimshaw, J. M., Hróbjartsson, A., Lalu, M. M., Li, T., Loder, E. W., Mayo-Wilson, E., McDonald, S., McGuinness, L. A., Stewart, L. A., Thomas, J., Tricco, A. C., Welch, V. A., Whiting, P., & Moher, D. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ, 372*, n71. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71

Reeve, J. (2016). Autonomy-supportive teaching: What it is, how to do it. In R. M. Ryan, J. C. K. Wang, & W. C. Liu (Eds.), *Building autonomous learners: Perspectives from research and practice using self-determination theory* (pp. 129-152). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-630-0_7

Reid, K. (2002). *Truancy: Short and long-term solutions*. Taylor & Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203018019

Ring, N., Ritchie, K., Mandava, L., & Jepson, R. (2011). *A guide to synthesising qualitative research for researchers undertaking health technology assessments and systematic reviews*. NHS Quality Improvement Scotland. http://www.nhshealthquality.org/nhsqis/8837.html

Rocque, M., Jennings, W. G., Piquero, A. R., Ozkan, T., & Farrington, D. P. (2017). The importance of school attendance: Findings from the Cambridge study in delinquent development on the life-course effects of truancy. *Crime & Delinquency, 63*(5), 592-612. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128716660520

Sehgal, M. (2009). The veiled feminist ethnographer: Fieldwork among women of India's Hindu right. In M. K. Huggins and M. Glebbek (Eds.), *Women fielding dangers: Negotiating ethnographic identities in field research* (pp. 325-352). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Smyth, J. (2007). Toward the pedagogically engaged school: Listening to student voice as a positive response to disengagement and 'dropping out'? In D. Thiessen & A. Cook-Sather (Eds.), *International handbook of student experience in elementary and secondary school* (pp. 635-658). Springer. https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/1-4020-3367-2

Stempel, H., Cox-Martin, M., Bronsert, M., Dickinson, L. M., & Allison, M. A. (2017). Chronic school absenteeism and the role of adverse childhood experiences. *Academic Pediatrics, 17*(8), 837-843. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acap.2017.09.013

Stroobant, E., & Jones, A. (2006). School refuser child identities. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 27*(2), 209-223. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300600676169

UNICEF. (n.d.). *Convention on the rights of the child*. https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text

Valencia, R. R. (2002). "Mexican Americans don't value education!" On the basis of the myth, mythmaking, and debunking. *Journal of Latinos and Education, 1*(2), 81-103. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532771XJLE0102_2

Valencia, R. R. (2012). *The evolution of deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*. Routledge.

Valencia, R. R. (2019). Chapter 6: New Zealand (Fiji). *International deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice* (pp. 145-170). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367855581

Virtue, K. (2021). *Lessons for teachers through intergenerational Māori experiences in Aotearoa's education system* [Master of Education thesis]. The University of Waikato. https://hdl.handle.net/10289/14580

Weber, C., & Vereenooghe, L. (2020). Reducing conflicts in school environments using restorative practices: A systematic review. *International Journal of Educational Research Open, 1*, 100009. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2020.100009

Weiner, L. (2006). Challenging deficit thinking. *Educational Leadership, 64*(1), 42-45. https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/challenging-deficit-thinking

White, C. M. (2014). Deficit thinking redux: Cultural deficit discourse and an urban community and school in Fiji. *Social Identities, 20*(2-3), 155-170. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2014.978750

White, M. (2006). *Out of sight, out of mind: Truancy, through the lens of five Māori 'truants'* [Master of Education thesis]. Massey University. http://hdl.handle.net/10179/14034

AUTHOR PROFILE

Anna Richards

Anna Richards is a counsellor, working in secondary education in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Anna holds a BSc (Hons) in Psychology, a Post Grad Diploma in Education and Guidance, and a Master of Counselling Studies. In addition to her educational achievements, the author has previously worked for over two decades, in a variety of roles, in the health and disability sector in both the United Kingdom and New Zealand. This extensive professional journey has equipped her with a profound understanding of the challenges people experience when accessing support across the health and education sectors. Anna is passionate about empowering individuals to develop their self-advocacy skills to create positive systems change.

Email: aldrichards@icloud.com

Kayleen Clark-Howard

Kayleen is a Lecturer at Massey University, Institute of Education, based on the Albany campus in Auckland. Prior to joining Massey University, she worked as a teacher, Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and Learning Support Coordinator (LSC) in various secondary schools in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Her Master of Education (Inclusive Education) explored New Zealand secondary school teachers' understanding of inclusion and how this understanding influences their practice. She is currently working on her PhD which aims to reimagine human development within an inclusive paradigm. Passionate about inclusion and inclusive education, where a human rights approach informs her understanding, she aims to promote inclusive education philosophies, aligning her research with the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Goal 4, which aims towards global, inclusive, equitable, quality education and lifelong learning for all.

Email: k.clark-howard@massey.ac.nz