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**Children's Participation in Curriculum Decision-Making: Supporting Their Rights to
be Self-Determining**

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989; United Nations, n.d.) gives all children the right to participate in decisions on matters of interest to them. Although children spend a significant part of their childhood in school, research demonstrates that children's participation rights in education are often approached in paternalistic or tokenistic ways by adults. This research study explored how children in a Year 5/6 classroom in Aotearoa New Zealand participated and influenced curriculum decision-making, and specifically how children influence their learning in the classroom. Instigating youth participatory action research (YPAR), I worked alongside children and their teacher in their classroom over three school terms. The children's experiences were documented and analysed, resulting in a case study that includes three case narratives: (i) curriculum-based learning, (ii) teacher-initiated inquiry, and (iii) child-initiated inquiry. The findings showed the multiple roles children and teacher played in curriculum decision-making, and illustrated how children can be enabled to have active participation in their own learning within the classroom. Using Rogoff's planes of analysis, the results demonstrated how children engaged in the learning and classroom life through the community, interpersonal, and personal planes. This showcased the role of classroom structures, routines, and peers in how children learn. Through these classroom interactions with peers and teachers, children appropriated new knowledge, skills, and understandings about themselves and their peers. This research demonstrates that children developed self-determining ways of being through their collaborations in learning. A key factor for children's active participation and influence in curriculum decision-making was their sociocultural participation in classroom activities and events that fostered a collaborative community of practice, connecting to the children's cultural identity, whānau, prior knowledge, and interests. Autonomy-supportive teaching as a pedagogical approach was evident, highlighting benefits for both children and teacher in supporting children to participate and influence curriculum

decision-making. The research offers practical examples of how teachers can engage in a pedagogical partnership with children that gives children opportunities to be self-determining and active agents in their learning, relationships, and school life.

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Glossary

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Ako | To learn, study, to teach; learning in partnership; Reciprocity |
| Ākonga | Student, learner |
| Hapū | Kinship group; tribe; subtribe |
| Hauora | Health and wellbeing; to be in good spirits |
| Iwi | Extended kinship group, tribe, nation, people, nationality, race |
| Mana | Status, integrity, authority, influence, spiritual power |
| Manaakitanga | Showing respect, kindness, caring, and generosity towards others; acting with sincerity and integrity |
| Rangatahi | Youth, young person; adolescent; teenager |
| Tamariki | Child |
| Tangata whenuatanga | Contexts for learning where identity, language, and culture (cultural locatedness) for Māori and whānau are affirmed; place-based, localised curriculum |
| Tuakana-teina | Learning from an older or more experienced (tuakana) other |
| Wānanga | Meet and discuss; engage in open dialogue about teaching and learning |
| Whakawhanaungatanga | Establishing relationships, relating well to others; responds to the context and strengths of others |
| Whānau | Family group, extended family |
| Whanaungatanga | Sense of family connection; relationships through shared experiences providing a sense of belonging; referred to as a whānau-culture in present study |
| Whare | Building, house, residence |

List of Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|--|
| CRAG | Children's research advisory group |
| DeSeCo | Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations |
| ERIC | Ethical research involving children |
| LSP | Lego Serious Play |
| NZC | New Zealand Curriculum |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| PAR | Participatory action research |
| PISA | Program for International Student Assessment |
| SDT | Self-determination theory |
| UNCRC | United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| UNICEF | United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund |
| YPAR | Youth participation action research |
| ZAD | Zone of actual development |
| ZPD | Zone of proximal development |

Chapter One

Introduction

This research study aimed to explore the extent to which children participated in and influenced curriculum decision-making in a Year 5/6 classroom in Aotearoa New Zealand, in line with the intent of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ([UNCRC], 1989; United Nation, n.d.). Article 12 has been established as one of the four general principles of the UNCRC, determining the child's legal rights to be listened to and their views genuinely considered (UNICEF, n.d.). Identifying the classroom environmental factors and pedagogical approaches to learning and teaching that support children's participation and influence in everyday classroom life and learning proved to be a critical aspect of this research. Over the course of three school terms in 2022, this study demonstrated how children's participation rights were enacted in everyday ways in the classroom setting, consequently supporting children to act in increasingly self-determining ways.

The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) has a vision statement for all children in Aotearoa New Zealand to be “confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 7). The curriculum's *direction for learning*, alongside the *values*, demonstrates the importance of a curriculum that encourages innovation, inquiry and curiosity, diversity, equity, community, and participation. *Principles* for this document also include high expectations for learning, cultural diversity, inclusive teaching practices, community engagement, and being future focused. Critically, from a child-rights perspective, whilst the curriculum document outlines for teachers the conditions under which children are enabled to be increasingly self-determining, with aspirations for learners to become active participants in society and good citizenship, this document does not explicitly include or refer to the UNCRC (1989; United Nation, n.d.).

In the Aotearoa New Zealand context, the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) and the imminent release of a draft refreshed curriculum, Te Mātaiaho

(Ministry of Education, 2024) includes provisions for a localised, place-based curriculum that takes into account the unique identities of community, culture, and context. Such provisions present a curriculum that is adaptive and responsive to the children's prior knowledge, cultural identity, and interests (Bishop, 2023). However, whilst the intent of these curriculum documents is for learning and teaching to be culturally relevant for children and in the context of their lives, research demonstrates that this is an evolving space and one that is yet to be fully realised (Bourke, O'Neill, & Loveridge, 2018a).

I am a pākehā woman, brought up in a traditional farming community. When I commenced my teaching career in my early 20s, working with preschool children (aged 4–6 years) in Australia, the importance and value of listening to and participating with children to plan learning experiences became a high priority. Later, as a primary school teacher, both in Australia and, later, New Zealand, I continued to explore how to ensure the active inclusion of children in the development of the classroom curriculum. As my teaching career advanced, I was able to lead curriculum development across the school in consultation with children, first as a deputy principal and, later, as a principal. For instance, passion project inquiries were instituted across all levels of the curriculum where children followed their own passions and interests over the course of a school term, facilitated by teachers. Another example was student surveys co-constructed with children and administered by children to gather the voices and interests of children across the school. Importantly, children knew why they were conducting these surveys, knowing their input informed the direction of curriculum through inquiry-based learning topics. These were shared with whānau in advance, encouraging community involvement. The inclusion of children's voice and participation for the direction of learning remained central to my teaching and school leadership. As a school leader, I saw it as a privilege to work with children, whānau, teachers, and community to develop localised curriculum, both at the school I worked at and, later, for several other schools. I met with groups of children, whānau, teachers, and community groups. These meetings occurred in

schools, the homes of whānau, local community centres, and marae. The resulting localised curriculum was unique to each school community with significant buy-in by all stakeholders.

Research experts in the field of children's rights as well as research with a specific education focus informed the development and design of this present study. The adoption of the UNCRC (1989; United Nation, n.d.) by the General Assembly of the United Nations, and its ratification by 196 countries, demonstrates the strength of the international commitment to children's rights. The UNCRC was the first legally binding treaty to lay down specific rights and implementation methods for all children (Ensalaco, 2005). The rights encompass all aspects of a child's life with fundamental rights in the home, school, health, and welfare (Kilkelly, 2017). There are four general principles of the UNCRC: (i) non-discrimination/equality—Article 2; (ii) best interests of the child—Article 3; (iii) survival and development—Article 6; and (iv) participation/inclusion (views of the child)—Article 12 (European Commission, n.d.). These principles must be applied to all provisions set out in the UNCRC. Central to this is Article 12 and children's participatory rights to express their views and have these views given due weight, in accordance with their age and maturity (Kilkelly, 2005; UNICEF, n.d.).

In a report commissioned by United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, n.d.), key findings established that of the countries investigated, most have not fully incorporated the UNCRC into domestic law. However, for the few countries that have, a significant effect on children's lives has occurred. Fundamental to this are children's participatory rights being upheld (Lundy, Kilkelly, Byrne, et al., 2012). The primary motivational factor for this research study is the UNCRC, specifically Article 12.1:

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. (United Nations, n.d., p. 4)

Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989; United Nation, n.d.) sets out the legal rights for all children to form and express their views in all matters affecting their lives. However, it has been established that Article 12 is the least enacted of all the UNCRC articles (Hammarberg, 2009; Lundy, 2007). This is unsurprising given that Article 12 was the subject of fierce debate during the ten-year drafting period (Cohen, 2006; Cohen & Naimark, 1991; Lundy, 2007). The Committee for the Rights of the Child, the independent monitoring authority for the UNCRC, asserted in 2002 that children continued not to be consulted on matters affecting them (Lundy, 2007). Further to this, the United Nations General Assembly reaffirmed the importance of Article 12 to ensure children's participation rights (Ensalaco, 2005). A further updated General Comment from the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) provides a breakdown of the intent of Article 12 that includes the recognition of children's capabilities in forming their own views on matters affecting their lives.

A seminal article in the field of children's rights, "Voice is not enough" (Lundy, 2007), brought Article 12 of the UNCRC and children's participatory rights to the fore for many researchers, educators, and, indeed, policymakers. Since this time, steady, albeit slow, progress has been made. However, Lundy (2018) maintains attempts to include children in decision-making in their lives has often been tokenistic and an evaluative exercise after an event has taken place (see also Brooker & McDonald, 1999). Additionally, adults predominately hold the power in deciding when and what children participate in (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018c; Lundy, 2018). Recent research points to approaches that elevate children's voice and participation rights in the school context (Nelson, 2018; Smith, 2023). Whilst Perry-Hazan (2021) notes that schools have been resistant in engaging in a child-rights approach, mostly due to traditional ways of seeing education and concerns for teacher authority, it is the school context that provides the ideal space for children to exercise their participatory rights. Perry-Hazan further demonstrates that children's participatory rights are met when classrooms have genuine communication and include children's informal and

everyday learning as part of the classroom curriculum. Importantly, teachers must engage in inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogies (see also Bishop, 2023; Riwai-Couch, 2021).

The articles of the UNCRC can be divided into two broad categories, namely the protection and nurturance of the child and the child's right to be self-determining (Murphy-Berman et al., 1996). Of the 54 articles of the UNCRC, nearly one-quarter of these addresses the child's rights to inclusion, active participation, and decision-making in their own lives (Hart, 1991). Besides protection and provisions for welfare, children also have rights to influence and participate in decision-making in their own lives, with adults obligated to upholding these rights (Hammarberg, 1990). A recent purpose statement by the United Nations (2023) notes the concepts of parental guidance and clarifies what this means for children's rights. Of particular interest to this research study is affirmation by the Committee on the Rights of the child (United Nations, 2023) whereby Article 5 of the UNCRC upholds the legal obligations of parents, family, legal guardians, and community in provisioning appropriate guidance and support, in line with children's evolving capabilities in exercising their rights recognised under the UNCRC.

Within the backdrop of children's participation rights and the intent of current and draft Aotearoa New Zealand Curriculum documents, this study aimed to identify the extent to which children participated in curriculum decision-making within the classroom. A youth participatory action research (YPAR) methodology was used to partner with children and their teacher in a low socioeconomic community, Year 5/6 classroom in an Aotearoa New Zealand primary school. This study focused on the practical classroom implications of the child's rights to be self-determining and the conditions that promoted or inhibited children's full participation and decision-making in their everyday learning. The research field of children's participation and student voice work continues to grow. This present study aimed to add to this growing body of research by identifying to what extent children's participatory rights are currently being met in everyday learning and classroom life, in line with Article 12.

Specifically, this research study responds to the following research question: How do Year 5/6 children who participate in curriculum decision-making realise their rights as self-determining persons?

The sub-questions related to this main question are:

1. What are the supporting and inhibiting factors Year 5/6 children experience in participating individually and collectively in curriculum decision-making?
2. How do teachers encourage and facilitate children's participation?
3. How do these experiences enable self-determination for children?

The literature review is presented in Chapter Two that begins by outlining the evolution of Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020). My interest in Deci and Ryan's research began several years ago whilst still working in the primary sector. At that time, as a school leader, my team and I were working to understand what the notion of "learner agency" meant in our school and classrooms. Self-determination theory was one way of seeing what this could look like in our school. It provided "signposts" for good practice and inclusive classrooms. As teachers, we were aware of the importance of creating a classroom that had a strong sense of belonging, a place where all children felt included and an integral part of the class and school culture. Curriculum was designed with children "at the table" formally through a student council (Years 1–8) and informally through conversing with children and knowing them well. The curriculum included their community, interests, passions, and aspirations for learning. Children's autonomy and competence were affirmed through the structure of our classrooms and the use of positive and specific feedback.

Self-determination theory is a motivational theory that determines when individuals have their three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness met, intrinsic motivation is more likely to occur. Self-determination theory holds when humans are intrinsically motivated, they are more likely to be goal-orientated, engage in positive

relationships, be more community-minded, have a greater sense of belonging, and act in more autonomous and self-regulating ways. Included in the literature review are two further perspectives of self-determination theory by Wehmeyer (1999; Shogren et al., 2015; Wehmeyer & Abery, 2013) and Reeve (2012; Reeve & Jang, 2006; Reeve & Shin, 2020) that also includes the value of agency and what this means for children and their learning.

The term “agency” or “student agency” is ubiquitous in the field of education. Agency, as well as similar terms, such as causal agency (Shogren et al., 2015; Wehmeyer & Abery, 2013) and agentic engagement (Reeve & Shin, 2020), are included in this study. In reviewing the use of agency by the researchers in the literature review, commonalities can be found in what agency means in terms of this present study. For this study, the adopted use of agency is considered as children having their basic psychological and biological needs met through experiencing autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These needs are met through children having meaningful choice and decision-making in goal-orientated ways (Shogren et al., 2015). Further, O’Neill (2018) asserts that (voice and) agency for children is having “the capacities to participate in and shape their worlds constructively” (p. 40). Therefore, the use of agency in this study encompasses the full intent of self-determination theory (namely, autonomy, competence, and relatedness) alongside children’s voice and participatory rights.

Autonomy-supportive teaching finds its origins in self-determination theory and is an approach to teaching that is gaining momentum in education (Reeve, 2016; Reeve & Cheon, 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Whilst self-determination theory identifies the psychological needs to support intrinsic motivation, autonomy-supportive teaching practices provide the environment for children to experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Reeve, 2012, 2016; Reeve & Cheon, 2021). This, alongside inclusive and culturally sustaining pedagogies, sees classroom environments that have strong relational values alongside high expectations for learning and behaviour (Bishop, 2023; Riwai-Couch, 2021).

Seeing children as capable is an important factor in recognising their rights as self-determining, thus providing yet another layer to this present study. Nussbaum's (2011) version of the capabilities approach is a human development approach that includes the ideals of human dignity and political liberalism, with a strong focus on social justice. Nussbaum's capabilities approach includes ten central capabilities that support humans to realise a quality of life from a social justice perspective. In this approach, the focus is on what an individual is capable of doing, with society provisioning the means to develop these capabilities.

Nussbaum terms these affordances as "substantial freedoms" or opportunities to choose and act in accordance with personal abilities and the societal, political, social, and economic environment. Critically, whilst individuals may be equipped with the internal capabilities to exercise their substantial freedoms, society itself may not afford these freedoms based on political or religious agenda. Theories such as self-determination theory and the capabilities approach were important in this present study in identifying the ways in which children's participatory and self-determination rights were lived out.

The collection of research papers in *Radical Collegiality Through Student Voice* (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018b) focuses on children's voice and participation in the field of education. Included in this body of work is the research of Bourke and Loveridge (2018a, 2018c) that focuses on children's views and the nature of learning at school. As will be demonstrated in the discussion chapter (Chapter Five), similarities between Bourke, O'Neill, and Loveridge's (2018a, 2018b) research and this present study can be made.

Chapter Three details the methodological approach for this research. A qualitative, exploratory, inductive approach was required, and participatory action research (PAR) was used given its aims to investigate a particular phenomenon to bring about transformation and social change (Barnikis et al., 2019; Berg, 2004; Punch & Oancea, 2014). PAR crosses the boundaries between viewing the world objectively with the researcher becoming deeply involved in the research itself (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019). Nested within PAR, critical

emancipatory PAR (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019) differs from traditional views of research by advocating for radical thinking and action in the support of minority groups that include gender, and civil and environmental rights as well as promoting radical pedagogy and knowledge democracy. This form of PAR is noted as specific to education, community, radical democracy, and transformative practices. Notions of power-sharing and collaboration are included in critical emancipatory PAR as well as provisioning for child-friendly methods in research. Importantly, this version of PAR interrogates the role children play in research and brought further clarity to what it meant for children to be co-researchers in the context of this study. YPAR was used to engage in co-research specifically with children, and other examples from the field have shown its value (for example, see Shier, 2001, 2019, 2022; Corney et al., 2022; Mitra, 2008; Mitra & McCormick, 2017).

The study that follows outlines the experiences of 17 child-participants and their teacher over the course of three school terms in 2022. Following the methodology chapter (Chapter Three), the findings in Chapter Four present the experiences, perspectives, and the ever-increasing autonomous and self-determining ways children acted through a case study. Nested within the case study are three case narratives. The first case narrative shares the experiences of children in curriculum-focussed learning through the core learning areas of English and mathematics. The findings will show that children acted in self-determining ways with planning and organising learning as well as demonstrating goal-orientated behaviours whilst collaborating with others within known structures and routines. The second case narrative presents the account of children through teacher- and school-initiated inquiry. In this, children engaged in real-life problem-solving, including working within a budget for school camp and creating products and experiences for the school fair. The final case narrative details a child-initiated inquiry that saw the research class plan, construct, and deliver a community pantry for their community. All three case narratives demonstrate the power of the social context for learning, and the importance of collaboration for motivation,

engagement, and positive educational outcomes. Additionally, and most importantly, this study will demonstrate that the children participated in and influenced curriculum decision-making in a myriad of ways, daily. In obvious ways, this occurred through the teacher engaging with children's prior knowledge, lived experiences, and interests. However, this study will also show that children are making decisions in self-determining ways about what and how they engage in learning. These can often go unnoticed but have been generously shared through this study by the children themselves.

Rogoff's substantial body of work (Rogoff, 1990, 1993, 2003, 2008, 2012; Rogoff et al., 2018) provided the tools for further analysis of the findings from this research and is presented in Chapter Five. The discussion demonstrates consistencies with a sociocultural perspective where children are viewed as apprentices in thinking, gaining new knowledge, understandings, and skills from whānau, peers, teachers, and others. In Rogoff's theory, the three planes of analysis demonstrate how children engage with their environment and peers through observation and participation in sociocultural activities, and, over time, transformation of participation occurs. Three planes of analysis observe how children engage in sociocultural activities, tasks, and events through the community/institution, guided participation, and participatory appropriation planes (Rogoff et al., 2018). Through this further analysis, the discussion chapter (Chapter Five) responds to the research question and sub-questions through three themes: 1. children and their teacher experienced active and contributing roles in curriculum decision-making (community/institution plane); 2. children actively engaged in the social context for learning (guided participation/interpersonal plane); and 3. children demonstrated self-determining attributes in collaborations and learning (participatory appropriation/personal plane).

This research study concludes with a summary of the research and research outcomes, including the limitations, implications for further research, and practical recommendations for educators (Chapter Six). More than 30 years have passed since the near world-wide adoption

of the UNCRC (1989; United Nation, n.d.), which includes the legal obligation for all to uphold children's voice and participatory rights. Whilst the research included in this thesis demonstrates there is a growing momentum towards the recognition of these rights, it has been determined they are yet to be fully realised. This present study will demonstrate the ways in which children participated and influenced curriculum decision-making that increased over the course of a year. It will also demonstrate how the teacher and school leaders worked to engage in this environment, what the tensions were, and how they worked to resolve these by listening to children and engaging in culturally responsive pedagogies. In line with comparable research, the voices of children, teacher, and school leaders will also show that there is still more work needed to be done in the field of education to truly recognise children as self-determining rights-holders, capable of participating in decision-making in their everyday school lives.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Despite the legal obligations to the UNCRC (1989; United Nation, n.d.) ratified by New Zealand in 1993, children's participatory rights remain unfulfilled in research involving them or are often played out in paternal and tokenistic ways (Corney et al., 2022; Lundy, 2007, 2018). An important part of children's lives is the time spent in school. Current trends of the inclusion of "student voice" and "agency" are seen to respond to the tenets of Article 12 of the UNCRC (Holquist et al., 2023; Lundy, 2007, 2018; Mitra, 2008). However, some researchers argue that student voice is often enacted because of adult benevolence, and genuine participation is not always afforded in all areas of school life (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018a; Lundy, 2007, 2018; Mitra, 2008).

To move beyond tokenistic approaches to children participating and influencing school decision-making, children need to be supported to engage in meaningful learning experiences related to the context of their lives that include their prior knowledge and interests (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2019; Riwai-Couch, 2021). A key factor to this occurring could be children's participation in classroom curriculum decision-making. However, curriculum decisions regarding children's learning content and context continue to remain largely the responsibility of the teacher (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018c; Brooker & MacDonald, 1999; Lundy, 2007; Nelson, 2018; Smith, 2023). Even so, children have valuable contributions to make to discourse and learning experiences, especially within the context of their everyday lives. However, children's narratives and experiences are seldom responded to in genuine ways (Roholt & Baizerman, 2019).

Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory is one of the ways to explain how children enact and are enabled to be self-determining persons. In the mid-1980s, Deci and Ryan's research led to the development of a motivational theory that demonstrates how individuals are intrinsically motivated to be self-determining and self-regulating when their three basic

psychological needs— autonomy, competence, and relatedness—are met. The theory was initially developed to explain the effects of external events on intrinsic motivation. This was further extended to include the intra-personal and interpersonal aspects of human motivations (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In their seminal work, Deci and Ryan saw a direct correlation between their emerging motivational theory and the applicability to practice in the field, including in education, where it was argued that self-determination can be a way of bridging theory and practice (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The review of the literature suggests theories such as self-determination theory provide real opportunities for teachers and children in the classroom to demonstrate how the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness impact and support individuals' ability to actively participate and be decision-makers in their own learning.

Lending further support to Deci and Ryan's research, Wehmeyer (1999; see also Wehmeyer & Abery, 2013) suggests self-determination is a demonstration of how a person learns to gain control over their lives and, as a result, becomes further adept at self-regulating their behaviour, actions, and goals. Reeve (2012) also argues that both motivation and engagement are considerations in understanding how persons are supported in becoming self-determining. Children experiencing agency is seen as a critical element in Reeve's iteration of self-determination theory. Children are energised, motivated, and goal-directed when participating in reciprocal learning and teaching experiences (Reeve, 2012).

Autonomy-supportive teaching is an approach to teaching that can be attributed to the research field of self-determination theory. Teachers can create and nurture a supportive learning environment that motivates and engages children in their learning and where learning and teaching is experienced as reciprocal, particularly fulfilling the autonomy and competency psychological needs (Reeve, 2012; Reeve & Cheon, 2021; Reeve & Jang, 2006). Teachers play a significant role in engaging children in learning that encompasses strong relational factors, including knowing and understanding an individual's personal goals,

interests, and emotional and social dispositions. The notion of teacher control is also explored through this teaching approach (Guay, 2022; Reeve, 2016).

The literature review provides an overview of Nussbaum's (2011) capabilities approach that demonstrates the supporting and inhibiting factors for how an individual can flourish and thrive in society through opportunities, such as effective education and opportunities to gain skills to achieve their goals through realising their own capabilities. The capabilities approach, developed by Nussbaum (2011), is viewed through a social justice lens that encompasses all dimensions of human development. It is autonomy based and focussed on individual freedoms and liberties, enabling people to exercise self-determination. Reynaert and Roose (2014) argue that the capabilities approach is concerned with the interplay between human entitlements and the corresponding social resources, including human legal rights entitlements. Coupled with this is an individual's abilities to access and engage with these entitlements and resources.

The next section of the literature review shifts focus to the classroom environment, incorporating a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978; see also Bruner, 1986; Rogoff 1993, 2003). Teachers' deliberate acts in building positive, dialogic relationships, and nurturing social, emotional, and cognitive learning through scaffolding tasks and activities that are deeply rooted in children's histories and identities are explored through the literature reviewed. Alongside this, an increasing body of research highlights the importance of not underestimating the significance of the children's whānau and family connections or of the children's prior knowledge and interests. In school environments where teachers embrace sociocultural practices, they are said to be engaging in culturally responsive pedagogies. Through this, children are actively engaging and participating in learning and classroom life in authentic and meaningful ways (Bishop, 2023; Bourke & Loveridge, 2018c; Riwai-Couch, 2021).

The inclusion of Rogoff's seminal body of research (1990, 1993, 2003, 2008, 2012; Rogoff et al., 2018) demonstrates that learning is a community process whereby all participants in the community contribute and benefit from participation. Rogoff explains this as a community of learners, whereby three planes of analysis occur, these being the community/institution, interpersonal, and personal planes. Sewell (2006) demonstrates how Rogoff's community of learners can be realised in primary-aged classrooms through teachers developing reciprocal partnerships with children. Alongside Rogoff's and Sewell's research, Morcom (2014; Murdoch University & Morcom, 2016) details the benefits and practicalities of creating collaborative communities of practice where children learn in an environment with teachers who engender a strong sense of belonging and where learning is both contextualised and collaborative. Included in this section is Tātaiako (Ministry of Education, 2011), which demonstrates a specific Aotearoa New Zealand viewpoint, through a te ao Māori worldview. Riwai-Couch (2021), an educational leader and researcher, provides further support for collaborative communities of practice, asserting this is critically important for the success and achievement of ākonga Māori and Pasifika.

In the final section of the literature review, the literature focuses on the rights of the child through the UNCRC (1989; United Nation, n.d.) specifically Article 12. Beginning with her seminal work, "'Voice' is Not Enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child", Lundy (2007) argues that, decades after the ratification of the UNCRC by 196 states and countries, children continue to have their voices and participation rights unheard and unmet. Lundy's initial analysis of a model of participation with regards to children's rights identified a framework for governments, agencies, educators, and researchers to determine whether, and how, they were meeting their obligations to children, consistent with Article 12. In simple terms, Lundy identifies that Article 12 has two key elements: (i) the right to express a view; and (ii) the right to have views given due weight. These two elements have been further broken down to "space",

“voice”, “audience”, and “influence”. Lundy (2007) asserts that Article 12 does not operate on its own and is further supported by Article 2 (nondiscrimination); Article 3 (best interests); Article 5 (right to guidance from adults); Article 13 (right to information); and Article 19 (right to be safe).

Alongside Lundy’s (2007) research, a body of international and local research has been examined to understand what “voice”, “participation”, and “influence” look like in practical terms in the classroom environment. Researchers and educators have interpreted children’s rights to being enabled to express their views and thoughts and be genuinely heard in a number of ways. Initially coined by Fielding (1999, 2001), “radical collegiality” is a concept seen as a democratising process whereby learners and teachers work in dialogic, reciprocal ways.

2.1 Self-determination Theory

Nearly one quarter of the 54 articles of the UNCRC (1989; United Nation, n.d.) uphold the child’s rights to inclusion and participation, and to be self-determining (Hart, 1991). In order to establish what it means to be a self-determining person, this research draws on Deci and Ryan’s (1985) self-determination theory to establish how the three basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—are enacted in everyday classroom life for children. During the 1980s, Deci and Ryan developed a broad motivational theory, drawing predominately on organismic theory that assumes all humans respond to both internal and external environmental factors in needs-satisfying ways (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Specific to the field of education, Deci and Ryan note that curiosity—the desire to explore and understand—is a central motivator for learning with a strong emphasis on intrinsic motivation (see also Dacre, 2021, see Appendix A).

Ryan, Curren, Deci, et al. (2013) state that self-determination theory (SDT) “is a broad theory of optimal functioning and motivation” (p. 61). To achieve an optimal functioning state, persons need to be developmentally moving towards greater autonomy. For

this to occur, Ryan, Curren, Deci, et al. suggest that individuals need to experience: (i) competence, that is efficacy and a sense of control; (ii) relatedness, this being connections with others and feelings of social significance; and (iii) autonomy, a state where individuals act through their own volition with self-endorsed behaviours.

At the heart of self-determination theory is a person's ability to authentically engage in human experiences that are intimately connected with human thriving (Ryan & Martela, 2016). Arguing from a self-determination stance, the attributes of awareness, intrinsic pursuits, and autonomous regulation fulfill basic human psychological needs. These aspects of self-determination theory are strong predictors of the quality of life one experiences and can lead to a greater sense of autonomy and integrity, competence and effectiveness, as well as a greater connectedness with others (Ryan & Martela, 2016).

Self-determination theory is based on the understanding that persons who have their basic psychological needs met are more likely to be intrinsically motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020; Ryan & Martela, 2016). This includes the pursuits of intrinsic goals, such as intimate relationships, altruism, being community-minded, and actualising personal growth. Importantly, being able to regulate behaviour autonomously rather than be controlled is a significant aspect of this theory. Additionally, self-determination theory embraces individuals experiencing a reflective, mindful life—in essence, embracing eudemonic principles. Moreover, greater mindfulness is linked to autonomous self-regulation (Ryan & Martela, 2016).

2.1.1 *Autonomy*

In their early research studies, Deci and Ryan (1985) determined that curiosity—the desire to explore, discover, and understand—are all intrinsic to being human. Additionally, these characteristics are a central motivator in educational settings. Deci and Ryan's research includes multiple studies involving children and adults and the benefits of supporting children to be autonomous through intrinsic motivation. One such study by Deci et al. 1981,

included in Deci and Ryan (1985) involved children and teachers in 35 classrooms to determine the relationship between teacher orientations and the effects of these on children's autonomy. Results showed that children are more likely to experience higher self-esteem and greater intrinsic motivation with teachers who are orientated towards supporting children in autonomous ways. Furthermore, Ryan, Curren, Deci, et al. (2013) reviewed research in primary schools that adds further support to interpreting the psychological need for autonomy within the school setting, which can be observed through children's ability to self-regulate. Autonomy is promoted through greater conceptual learning and results in increased engagement, decreased anxiety, improved performance, and a number of other positive school-related outcomes.

Ryan, Huta, and Deci (2008) introduced a specific working model of eudaimonia, grounded in self-determination theory that includes four motivational concepts that incorporate (i) pursuing intrinsic goals and values; (ii) acting in autonomous or consensual ways; (iii) being mindful with a sense of awareness; and (iv) acting in ways that satisfy the basic needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Specifically, for this group of researchers, autonomy "is defined by one's reflective and thoughtful endorsement of actions" (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008, p. 158). When individuals realise their own autonomy in its fullest sense, they are empowered to engage in greater mindfulness, which, in turn, creates the ability and conditions for self-regulation (Reeve, 2012; Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008). Translating this view of autonomy to the classroom and children's learning, Ryan and Deci's (2020) recent work explored the large empirically based literature that centralises the importance of children being enabled to demonstrate initiative and take ownership of their learning. An important aspect of this psychological need is meaningful opportunities to explore choices and curiosities. Ryan and Deci are careful to note that not all "choices" are equal, demonstrating that choices can exist as options an individual does not necessarily

want. However, Ryan and Deci affirm that when choices are offered to children in meaningful ways, improved outcomes can result.

An example of children having meaningful choices can be identified in Svrcek and Abugasea Heidt's (2022) research in primary classrooms in the United States of America. Both researchers were current teacher educators and former classroom teachers. The research included the experiences of their own children as well as students in schools, drawing on the experiences of public-school educators, parents, teacher educators, and researchers. This research examined children's classroom-based reading programmes with a focus on self-determination theory as a catalyst for change in approaches to teaching reading. Traditional views of reading instruction focus on children's reading capabilities, which are assessed using benchmarking tools to determine children's level of ability and conceptual knowledge of print. Teacher strategies adopted in their research to encourage autonomy were audio books, authentic responses to reading, variety in book and media choices, multilingual texts, reader workshops, and encouraging reading wish lists.

Svrcek and Abugasea Heidt (2022) note that alongside consideration of reading levels, teachers need to include a deliberate emphasis on children's autonomy, competence, and relatedness to foster intrinsic motivation and engagement in reading. In their research, teachers actively supported children's autonomy through providing children with choices in text based on their interests. Through this, children demonstrated increased ownership of their learning, were more persistent and engaged in reading, and achieved improved outcomes and greater self-esteem.

2.1.2 Competence

The second psychological need emphasised in self-determination theory is the individual's need for competence. Competence is defined by Ryan and Deci (2020) as one's need to experience success and the opportunity to engage in mastery experiences. In self-determination theory, children's feelings of competence are inextricably tied to children

experiencing autonomy. Deci and Ryan's (1985) early research suggest that fulfilling the second psychological need of competence leads an individual to seek further challenges to optimise their capacities. Further to this, Deci and Ryan state that autonomy and competence are of mutual importance for intrinsic motivation. Svrcek and Abugasea Heidt's (2022) research aimed to shift the focus beyond children's reading ability being determined solely by benchmarked reading levels to include texts of interest to children. Such opportunities provide choice and challenge and affirm the importance of children experiencing positive feelings of competence. Learning opportunities that see children experiencing challenge—and critically knowing they are “capable of completing successfully” (Svrcek & Abugasea Heidt, 2022, p. 315)—nurtures personal growth. Equally, specifically in Svrcek and Abugasea Heidt's research, children's sense of competence can also be undermined when they are knowingly compared to peers or placed in “lower” reading groups. In order to support children with a variety of text levels, teacher strategies included: cooperative learning; conferencing with children; communicating assessment data with children and families, identifying strengths and areas for growth; and encouraging children to keep a reading log. Adding further support to Svrcek and Abugasea Heidt's research, Reeve (2012) notes the importance of both the pursuit of one's interests and “the inherent desire to exercise one's capacity” (p. 154).

Classroom teachers are a central figure in children experiencing competence. Children's perception of self-efficacy, ability, and academic competence are strong predictors of engagement and achievement in learning (Reeve, 2012). Teachers who actively seek to validate children's autonomy are supporting children in their feelings of competence as, for example, by nurturing children's mastery of learning by providing well-structured classrooms that offer optimal challenges, positive and specific feedback, and encouraging children's personal growth (Reeve, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

2.1.3 Relatedness

Relatedness, as the third psychological need, refers to a person's need to feel a sense of belonging and is inherent in numerous psychological theories and models. Maslow's hierarchy of needs establishes a person's physiological and safety needs as being of the greatest importance, followed by a person's need to be loved and to "belong" (Duchesne & McMaugh, 2019). Bronfenbrenner's theory of the ecology of human development emphasises children must be able to "connect" to the world they live in (O'Brien, 2018). Similarities can be drawn between Maslow's model and Bronfenbrenner's theory (Duchesne & McMaugh, 2019), and Reeve (2012) insists people's innate need for relatedness is "to establish close emotional bonds and secure attachments with others" (p. 154). Further to this, relatedness is seen as social engagement, the building of relationships, and feelings of connectedness as well as being a significant predictor of sustained intrinsic motivation and engagement in learning. This is nurtured in a kind, caring, trusting, and empathetic environment (O'Brien, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Relatedness is primarily concerned with individuals experiencing a sense of belonging and connectedness, this being fostered through care and respect (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Children's experience of belonging and connection begins with their emotional ties they develop with family, friends, and peers. By implication, creating a classroom environment that actively nurtures a relatedness orientation, teachers need to establish authentic relationships with children as well as relationship building *between* children (Svrcek & Abugasea Heidt, 2022). When these conditions are in place, the teacher is said to be "in sync" with children and engaged in an authentic teacher-student partnership that encompasses both motivation and agentic engagement (Reeve & Cheon, 2021; Reeve & Shin, 2020).

2.2 The Growing Evolution of Self-determination Theory

Ryan and Deci (2020) themselves assert that the emergence of self-determination theory in the 1980s has instigated a considerable body of research involving the fundamental

elements of this theory. In addition, both Ryan and Deci and O'Brien et al. (2018) hold that self-determination theory requires a review. Subsequently, Ryan and Deci re-examined their theory, the research that has been inspired by it, and the importance of understanding a person's intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Ryan and Deci (2020) maintain that unlike behavioural approaches to learning and engagement, "SDT places its emphasis on people's inherent motivational propensities for learning and growing, and how they can be supported" (p. 2).

Critically, self-determination theory's relevance and importance to education today remains focused on both the learner *and* the teacher. Over the past 40 years, research has continued in the classroom that examines the benefits and effects for learners' self-determination when their basic psychological needs are met. Recent research by Ryan and Deci (2020) also acknowledges the importance of diverse cultural contexts and the positive impact this has for individual's intrinsic motivation and enhanced well-being. Their later research has also been able to define further the importance of needs-supporting teaching approaches. Through this, teachers set the conditions for learning whereby the environment promotes motivation, engagement, and authentic learning (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

2.3 Exploring the Function and Purpose of Self-determination Theory

Deci and Ryan (1985) have inspired a generation of researchers in the field of self-determination theory. Wehmeyer (1999) offers a different understanding that explores the function and purpose of this theory. Wehmeyer asserts that self-determination does not solely lie within a person but is the product of both the individual and the influences of their environment. Wehmeyer argues for the need to acknowledge the individual's personal characteristics, the ecological influences, and behaviour manifestations. For Wehmeyer (1999), the "theories of personal self-determination are, in essence, theories of how or why people become self-governing and exert control over their lives" (p. 54). In this view, self-determining behaviour relies upon causal agency. Causal agency refers to an individual who

endeavours to “cause” things to happen for the purpose of making a specific change or achieving an outcome. Enacting causal agency results in self-determining actions (Wehmeyer & Abery, 2013; see also Shogren, et al., 2015). Causal agency is identified by four essential characteristics: autonomy; self-regulation; initiatives and responses to an event; and fulfilment of personal abilities (Wehmeyer & Abery, 2013).

Wehmeyer’s functional model of self-determination theory promotes autonomy, self-regulation, empowerment, and self-realisation (Shogren et al., 2015; Wehmeyer, 1999) and includes nine components: (1) choice-making; (2) decision-making; (3) problem-solving; (4) goal setting and attainment; (5) self-regulation/self-management; (6) self-advocacy and leadership; (7) positive perceptions of control, efficacy, and outcome expectations; (8) self-awareness; and (9) self-knowledge. This places emphasis on a child’s development within their environment, which is demonstrated via learning and experiences that are determined by the child’s capacity, perception and beliefs, and opportunities. These are explored next through the New Zealand Curriculum’s (2007) key competencies.

2.4 Viewing the Key Competencies Through the Lens of SDT

In 2007, an updated New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) was introduced to all schools in Aotearoa New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2007). As part of the “front half” of the document, five key competencies were included. The idea for the key competencies originated from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in response to Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) assessments that evaluate how well students are able to apply skills in reading, mathematics, and science in the context of their everyday lives (Hipkins, 2018). In response to this, the Definition and Selection Competencies (DeSeCo) project was initiated and, during the late 1990s and early 2000s, developed a framework informed by international studies, practitioners, policymakers, and reviews on scholarly work focused on the concept of “competence”. The aim of the framework was to equip children and young people with the key competencies that every

child would need—regardless of circumstances—and were relevant in all cultures as well as meaningful in all learning areas (Hipkins, 2018).

The Ministry of Education in Aotearoa New Zealand sought policy advice on the DeSoCo project on how this conceptual framework could “best be translated into the New Zealand context, and specifically how they might be included in the NZC” (Hipkins, 2018, p. 2). There are strong commonalities between the DeSoCo framework and the NZC key competencies, with additional inclusions of cultural influences in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as: communal learning; contributions to the well-being of others, including whānau; explicit development of “thinking” (including metacognition); reflectivity; and creativity (Hipkins, 2018).

Aspirations for the implementation and integration of the key competencies in schools and classrooms were presented by McDowall and Hipkins (2018) in their Ministry-of-Education-funded project. McDowell and Hipkins used the term “capabilities” to illustrate new learning outcomes that demonstrated a curriculum document that was integrated in more purposeful ways. Other concepts closely aligned with the key competencies were: lifelong learning; self-regulated learning; 21st-century learning; learning power; inquiry; student goal-setting; self-management; formative assessment; learning to learn; and (as noted above) metacognition (Hipkins, 2018).

Wehmeyer’s (1999) nine components demonstrate the participatory language that can be interpreted and loosely grouped through the NZC’s key competencies (Ministry of Education, 2007). Taking the example of one of the key competencies (Ministry of Education, 2007), *thinking*, a metacognitive process that incorporates the child’s ability to make sense of their learning and the world in creative and curious ways, aligns with Wehmeyer’s problem-solving, goal setting and attainment, and decision-making. Similarly, the competency, *using language, symbols, and texts*, sees children being effective communicators and “meaning-makers”, and, again, problem-solving is an element of this as

well as choice making. *Relating to others* signals children demonstrating competencies in communication with a diverse range of people, being active listeners, sharers, negotiators, and able to recognise another's point of view. This can be seen through several of the nine components, including, but not limited to, self-advocacy and leadership skills, self-awareness, and self-knowledge. *Participating and contributing* relates to the child's place in communities of learning as well as communities at micro and macro levels. Particularly pertinent to this key competency is again self-awareness and self-knowledge. *Managing self* is stated as "self-motivating" and "self-assessing", and, inherent in this key competency are all nine components, as stated:

Students who manage themselves are enterprising, resourceful, reliable, and resilient. They establish personal goals, make plans, manage projects, and set high standards. They have strategies for meeting challenges. They know when to follow, and when and how to act independently. (New Zealand Curriculum, 2007, p. 12)

2.5 Motivation and the Agentic Learner

Another perspective of self-determination theory is offered by Reeve (2012), who identifies the importance of teachers' differing approaches to motivating student engagement in conjunction with self-determination theory. Reeve's (2012) classroom-based research established a practical approach to learner engagement in the classroom using a multidimensional construct. This construct represents the learners' motivation during learning tasks that encompasses the three basic psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy.

Reeve (2012) distinguishes two key factors for children experiencing positive outcomes in learning, these being engagement and motivation. According to Reeve (2012), engagement is defined as the extent of student's active involvement in a learning task, a definition that Reeve attributes to Welborn (1991, cited in Reeve, 2012). To elaborate,

engagement consists of four distinct but closely correlated aspects, these being: (i) behaviour engagement; (ii) emotional engagement; (iii) cognitive engagement; and (iv) agentic engagement. Children exhibiting these four aspects of engagement will demonstrate greater persistence, enjoyment, and strategic thinking (Reeve, 2012). Additionally, engaged learners are more likely to initiate, generate, and expand their “freedom of action” (Reeve, 2012, p. 162). Crucial to self-determination theory and Reeve’s interpretation is the addition of “agentic” engagement, which posits that learners are intentional, proactive, constructive, and engaged in reciprocal learning and teaching instruction. Agentic engagement correlates with two of the basic psychological needs of autonomy and competence whereby learners who have active involvement in their learning often have feelings of greater success.

Reeve’s (2012) second key factor is motivation, which is defined as any force that energises and directs behaviours. This “force” enhances strength, intensity, persistence, and direction. Motivation ensures purposefulness and goal directedness. Further to this, Reeve views motivation as psychological-needs-based satisfaction, maintaining that if the three basic psychological needs are met in a learning task, then high-quality motivation is the outcome. Equally, if these needs are not met for learners, then low motivation and frustration will occur.

The distinction between motivation and engagement is described as motivation manifesting as an unobservable, psychological, neural, and biological process that serves as the antecedent cause for the visible and observable behaviour that is engagement (Reeve, 2012). Therefore, these concepts are inherently linked and influence one another. Of equal importance to both motivation and engagement is establishing the context of learning for and with the learner (Reeve, 2012).

A common underlying theme in the actualising of self-determination is a person’s right to flourish and thrive. Reeve (2012) maintains that for learners to “flourish”, three elements must be present: (i) supportive conditions for learning, most importantly the

student-teacher relationship; (ii) the role of the teacher in creating a positive environment for motivation and engagement; and (iii) the social context, motivation, engagement, and that outcomes operate in both a linear and reciprocal manner. The NZC's (Ministry of Education, 2007) vision for all learners to be *confident, connected, actively involved, and life-long learners* not only supports the ideals of a person's right to flourish and thrive, but it also embodies the learner's right to be self-determining. Consistently throughout the NZC, learners are referred to as being actively supported to participate, make choices, and be decision-makers, self-aware, and good citizens. Pivotal to this is the classroom environment.

2.6 Autonomy-supportive Teaching

Autonomy-supportive teaching is the instructional endeavour that provides children with an environment and teacher-learner relationship that supports children's psychological need for autonomy. This approach includes the child's personal characteristics, ecological influences, and behaviour manifestations. Reeve and colleagues (Reeve & Cheon, 2021; Reeve & Jang, 2006; Reeve, 2012, 2016; Reeve & Shin, 2020) demonstrate how an autonomy-supportive teaching approach motivates and supports children to participate and engage in learning. Reeve (2012, 2016; see also Reeve & Cheon, 2021; Reeve & Jang, 2006; Reeve & Shin, 2020) refers to this as "agentic engagement" whereby children participate in reciprocal learning and teaching instruction. Reeve suggests that agentic engagement is deeply connected to the psychological needs of autonomy and competency. When these two needs are enacted, there are greater feelings of success (Reeve, 2012). For children to experience learning in a needs-satisfying way, conditions for this must be realised in the classroom. In conjunction with self-determination theory, Reeve and Cheon (2021) have researched and examined the phenomenon of autonomy-supportive teaching, determining its theoretical basis in self-determination theory. Importantly, autonomy-supportive teaching is a teaching approach that supports teachers to teach in ways that affirm children's rights to be self-determining.

Concurring with Ryan and Deci (2000), Domen et al.'s (2020) research demonstrates that the psychological needs of autonomy and competency are key factors for autonomy-supportive teaching. When children are enabled to act in autonomous ways, they are adapting tasks and activities to their own personal values. Critically, alongside teachers encouraging and supporting learners' autonomy and competence they are also providing clear communication and expectations, supporting children in knowing what to expect and, critically, how to achieve learning goals (that is, providing structure). Additionally, providing structure in the classroom environment enables children to have control in their learning and outcomes. It is noted that clear structures in the classroom have a positive impact on autonomous motivation (Domen et al., 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

2.6.1 *Autonomous Motivations*

All teachers have their own, unique motivating styles. Additionally, all teachers encounter challenges in motivating and engaging learners. For some teachers, teacher control is an important factor and is often associated with inherent pressures for children to “think” and “do” as the teacher does (Reeve, 2016). Additionally, adopting a teacher-control stance often implies a tone of pressure, negative impacts on children's motivation and engagement (Reeve, 2016; see also Reeve & Cheon, 2021). Guay (2022) asserts further that as the main adult in a primary school setting, the teacher exerts considerable influence on children's autonomous motivations.

Domen et al. (2020) drew on self-determination theory to investigate teachers' perceptions of student-specific autonomy support with twenty-four primary school teachers and their students in the Netherlands. Data was gathered through a short questionnaire for teachers and two questionnaires for students. A multi-level approach was conducted to assess autonomy support and structure for students and students' need-support and motivation. Domen et al.'s research identifies autonomy-supportive teaching approaches include teachers providing choice—alongside opportunities to express thoughts and feelings—and perspectives.

Positive correlations were made for increased student engagement and higher conceptual learning.

Autonomous motivation occurs when students experience high degrees of autonomy, free will, and volition (Domen et al., 2020). Furthermore, autonomous motivation has “consistently been found to be associated with beneficial outcomes, such as deep learning, higher grades, and higher psychological well-being” (Domen et al., 2020, p. 404). However, Domen et al.’s research findings have also demonstrated that teacher and student perceptions of need-support differed. One explanation the researchers offered was that teachers might respond with differing motivational approaches in response to the abilities of students as, for example, more explicit motivational strategies for lower levels of ability. Also noted as contrary to findings from previous studies was the negative impact of classroom structure. At a classroom level, this was associated with lower levels of student-perceived need-support and controlled motivation. The research also suggests that teachers might find it difficult to incorporate structure from an autonomy-supportive position (Domen et al., 2020).

A critical factor for autonomy-supportive teaching is for teachers to view learning tasks and activities from the child’s perspective, sometimes known as a cognitive empathy approach response (Reeve, 2016). Teachers engage with this by actively monitoring children’s needs, personal goals, priorities, preferences, and emotionality, anticipating potential obstacles. To be effective in this, teachers need to, at least partially, set aside their own perspectives to better understand children. Additionally, teachers need to consider whether children will find learning tasks and activities interesting. This occurs when learning tasks are designed to be more relevant to the context and interests of children. According to Reeve (2016), lessons that are not prepared with children’s perspectives and interests in mind have a greater likelihood of being ignored or neglect children’s inner motivational resources.

2.7 Understanding Capabilities

Nussbaum (2011) has provided a framework to realise human beings' rights to a quality of life based on a social justice ideology known as the capabilities approach. Initial collaborations with fellow philosopher, Amartya Sen, saw Nussbaum develop approach further (Robshaw, 2023). Nussbaum (2011) argues that in “decent” societies, an individual has opportunities to exercise their (substantial) freedoms and choices to be what they are “capable” of being and achieving. The capabilities approach also highlights social injustices and inequality, “especially capability failures that are the result of discrimination or marginalization” (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 19).

It is useful to understand what Nussbaum defines as capabilities. For her, this involves answering the question, “what is a person able to be and do?” Nussbaum (2011) describes this as substantial freedoms; these being interrelated to opportunities of choice and action. Nussbaum argues that a person has *internal capabilities*, which encompass the characteristics of an individual, and *combined capabilities*. Internal capabilities include personality traits, intellectual capacity, state of health, perception, movement, and the ability to internalise learning. Society plays a prominent role in the development of internal capabilities by promoting the development and enhancement of individuals through supporting physical and emotional health, ensuring individuals have a sense of belonging, the love of their family, and access to good education amongst other essential and holistic needs.

Combined capabilities, whilst overlapping with internal capabilities, can be distinguished. Nussbaum (2011) makes the distinction between the two simply by stating that whilst “society” may serve people well by provisioning the means to develop internal capabilities, they may fall short of providing the freedom and opportunities to enact them. An example of this is: “Many societies educate people so that they are capable of free speaking on political matters—internally—but then deny them free expression in practice through repression of speech” (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 21). Therefore, combined capabilities are the

combination of one’s internal capabilities and broader social, political, and economic conditions.

The UNCRC recognises children as rights-holders with sensitivity to both their welfare needs and agency (Dixon & Nussbaum, 2012). Noted earlier in this section 2.7, most societies provision children with the internal capabilities to fulfil their participatory rights by ensuring (amongst many other things) decent education, loving and nurturing homes, and opportunities to develop the skills of good citizenship. However, children’s true affordance to fully enact their rightful freedoms are often still oppressed (Nussbaum, 2011). Nussbaum’s capabilities can be seen through the rights set down for children in the UNCRC (1989; United Nation, n.d.). They are seen through both social and political lenses and offer a framework for the practical application in line with self-determination theory. Dixon and Nussbaum (2012) state, the capabilities approach “helps affirm the status of even the very young as rights-bearers” (p. 553).

2.7.1 Seeing Children as Active Agents

The capabilities approach advances the theory of social justice to encompass all dimensions of human development. It forms an autonomy-based egalitarian position with a focus on individual freedoms, rights, and capabilities that support self-determination and individual liberty. In the context of the child, and consistent with the UNCRC Article 12, children—like adults—can express their thoughts and opinions (Reynaert & Roose, 2014).

Children experiencing agency in their own lives is fundamental to children’s rights and instrumental in Nussbaum’s capabilities approach (Reynaert & Roose, 2014). Further to this, Reynaert and Roose, like many children’s rights advocates, challenge the notion that children are passive objects of concern in need of protection (see also Dacre, 2019, see also Appendix B; Ennew, 2000; Ensalaco, 2005). Instead, they maintain that children are active agents with entitlements to being self-determining in realising their full participation rights. Reynaert and Roose (2014) examined the concept of agency and deem “agency” exists as a

“personal versus relational” construct that can be distinguished in two ways: as a personal trait where the individual has the capacity to act autonomously and is led by rational reasoning, therefore acting as an “agent”, and as a relational construct, interpreted as “agency”, an inter-relational trait that sees individuals or groups making decisions with others in socially capable ways.

The UNCRC (1989; United Nation, n.d.) provides the framework for rethinking the social position of children in society, providing the legal obligations for states to recognise “children as active agents and autonomous persons who construct their lives in their own right” (Reynaert & Roose, 2014, p. 178). This sees the shift in people’s thinking from children being seen as “lacking in competency” to being acknowledged as autonomous and capable. This is further supported by—amongst others—Article 5 of the UNCRC that holds adults are to provide appropriate guidance and direction consistent with the evolving capacity of the child (1989; United Nation, n.d., 2023).

Reynaert and Roose (2014) argue that whilst the UNCRC is a valued step forward, further academic critique is needed. For instance, continued discussion is required to understand how everyday social practices and their related consequences impact on children. Nussbaum (2011; see also Reynaert & Roose, 2014) maintains that human rights require government intervention for them to be fully enacted. Whilst there is a continued need for government and legal support, children’s rights as a movement are also the lever for social change (Reynaert & Roose, 2014).

Exploring the capabilities approach as a mechanism for children’s rights is one way of understanding how children can be supported in realising their participatory rights. Dixon and Nussbaum (2012) state the UNCRC “clearly gives some degree of special priority to the realisation of certain rights for children” (p. 554). There are two broad justifications for children having special priority. First, children are especially vulnerable due to legal, economic, physical, and emotional reliance on adults (vulnerability principle) and, second,

there is the cost-effectiveness of protecting the rights and dignity of the child (cost-effective principle; Dixon & Nussbaum, 2012). Therefore, the capabilities approach is concerned with the interplay between children's entitlements and the corresponding social resources. Coupled with this is the child's ability to access these entitlements and resources. The capabilities approach recognises that people participate in society and make use of resources in a variety of ways (Reynaert & Roose, 2014).

2.8 Prior Knowledge and Lived Experiences Inform Learning

The seminal research of Vygotsky (1978) shows that learning for children is established well before formal education commences. Vygotsky states, "any learning a child encounters in school always has a previous history" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 84). In education today, this is often referred to as prior knowledge and lived experiences. The underlying principle is that children live in multiple contexts at home, school, and community, with all experiences contributing actively to their learning.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978) continues to inform how learning is viewed and, subsequently, many of the pedagogical practices in schools today. Vygotsky's research demonstrates learning and teaching are informed and influenced by place, culture, context, development, and inquiry. Specifically conceptualised to explain and support learning and development for children, ZPD defines how a child's learning should be aligned to their current developmental stage, but it is not limited by this. Vygotsky proposed two developmental levels, the first being the *actual* development level, identifying current capabilities and level of independence in problem-solving and learning tasks. The second developmental level is based on the scaffolded support by the teacher or in collaboration with more capable peers. Support such as this provides a conduit between the zone of actual development (ZAD), where children engage in learning tasks and activities they already know without assistance with minimal

new learning through to the potential for new learning assisted by more capable others, known as the zone of proximal development (ZPD; Vygotsky, 1978).

Reported by Aitken and Sinnema (2008), the four mechanisms for effective pedagogy are *connection* (make connections to students' lives); *alignment* (align experiences to important outcomes); *community* (build and sustain a learning community); and *interest* (design experiences that interest students). The *alignment* mechanism demonstrates the importance of identifying children's prior knowledge. Noted in Aitken and Sinnema's report, paying attention to what individuals and groups already know and understand is important in maximising learning potential. Included in their report is a case study involving Year 7 and 8 students in Aotearoa New Zealand classrooms. The study comprised of a comprehensive pretest containing over 200 items based on an Antarctica unit of learning. Whilst the results demonstrated a wide variation in prior knowledge on this topic, the pretest also showed students already had an average of 45% pre-existing understandings of this topic. However, post-testing of this topic also highlighted the complexities of designing learning experiences to progress children whilst not overlapping with prior knowledge. Post-testing also identified misconceptions of learning.

Aitken and Sinnema's (2008) report demonstrates that the inclusion of children's prior knowledge is an important consideration in planning learning for the classroom. Prior knowledge is seen as a way of children participating with learning experiences by making connections between new information and existing knowledge and schema. Importantly, the concept of schema is influenced by cultural identity and the context of individuals' lives. Bishop (2023) concurs, noting that the inclusion of children's prior knowledge is critical to learners' success, and it must be legitimised through collaborative and culturally responsive teaching practices. Bishop and Glynn's (1999) research emphasises that "culture counts", concluding that teachers who approach the inclusion of prior knowledge and interests provide

an environment that fosters sense-making by not only incorporating the existing knowledge of children but also affirming this knowledge as “accepted” and “official”.

Hattan et al. (2024) conducted a systematic literature review to examine the research on children’s prior knowledge and how this is activated in relation to text comprehension. The initial literature review identified 2,639 articles with research parameters, funnelling this to 54 articles that examined a total of 68 studies (some papers included more than one study). Interestingly, there had been no systematic review conducted on prior knowledge and its activation since 1999. Hattan et al. note that, in recent years, children’s prior knowledge in learning has gained traction with literacy scholars and curriculum developers advocating for content-specific knowledge in core learning areas in response to declining reading results in a number of OECD countries and the United States of America. However, although there is significant support for the importance of engaging with children’s prior knowledge, less attention is given to how prior knowledge is activated and utilised, and what strategies are employed to support these.

Hattan et al.’s (2024) systematic review has identified that activating prior knowledge is most effective when this includes more than academic knowledge, instead tapping into the background or personal knowledge of children. This broader understanding of prior knowledge supports the culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds of children. Defining prior knowledge is important as this ensures that teachers are drawing on “domain-specific knowledge as well as other types of knowledge, such as general world, metacognitive, and sociocultural knowledge” (Hattan et al., 2024, p. 82). Importantly, this broader view of prior knowledge considers the lived experiences of children, acknowledging the lived experiences children bring to reading and, in fact, all learning. Researchers also note that knowledge activation supports the construction of knowledge and meaning-making (Hattan et al, 2024). Hattan et al.’s findings note that activating broader understandings of

prior knowledge is associated with significant improvements in students' reading comprehension.

2.9 Teachers Creating Supportive Learning Environments

This present study has predominantly drawn on sociocultural theories to understand the experiences of children in the classroom environment. The strong relational factors of these theories align with a te ao Māori worldview that includes a collectivist perspective, placing importance on the community. Whilst tensions can exist between western and collectivist views, sociocultural theories have been chosen because of the emphasis placed on the social context of learning, an integral feature of classrooms in Aotearoa New Zealand. Included in this section are te ao Māori worldview concepts, that demonstrate an alignment with sociocultural theories and perspectives (see also sections 2.8, 2.10, & 3.6).

Teachers are well positioned to create supportive learning environments that promote learning through positive relationship building with their learners (Morcom, 2014). This is commonly achieved by fostering social, emotional, and cognitive learning through scaffolded activities and tasks. The concept of scaffolding was introduced by Bruner, building on the earlier works of Vygotsky (Bruner 1986; Duchesne & McMaugh, 2019; Morcom, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). The concept of scaffolding is represented as a metaphor to illustrate the act of supporting children's trajectories of learning. Vygotsky's notions of socially constructed learning and Bruner's model of scaffolding demonstrate how learning occurs when children are assisted by adults or collaboratively with more capable social partners. Multiple terminologies have been used to refer to this process, including assisted learning, reciprocal learning, assisted discovery, or collaborative cognition (Duchesne & McMaugh, 2019). In the Aotearoa New Zealand context, the Indigenous concept of tuakana-teina explains how learning occurs from engaging in partnership with others where learning from a more skilled and knowledgeable person is evident (Bishop, 2023; Riwai-Couch, 2021). Vygotsky's (1978) development of sociocultural theory supports sociocultural perspectives, foregrounding the

critical role the teacher plays in children's lives. This encompasses key factors such as relationship building within social and cultural contexts where "norms, values, rules, and relationships are socially constructed" (Morcom, 2014, p. 18).

Sewell (2006) identified what a community of learners could look like in the Aotearoa New Zealand classroom context. Sewell's research was situated in a large urban state primary school comprising of four Year 3/4 classrooms (with four teachers). A total of 58 children provided informed consent, alongside their parents/caregivers. Of the pool of 58 children, 16 target children were selected to ensure representation of the diversity of the school population, including gender, ethnicity, and ability as well as the likelihood of remaining at the school for the duration of the research due to the school's transitory nature. The voices of these 16 children contributed to four case studies. Sewell engaged in collaborative action research that involved collaboration and participation with teachers and children over a school year in 2002. Semi-structured interviews with teachers and children were held as well as teacher workshops to understand the evolving views and perspectives of the teachers and children and what a community of learners meant to them. Sewell also actively engaged in the classrooms with teachers and children, collecting data from observations, conversations, and classroom artefacts.

Findings from Sewell's (2006) research demonstrates that at the turn of the 21st century, researchers and teachers were beginning to explore sociocultural approaches to learning and teaching, attempting to shift from the traditional models of transmission and constructivism to classroom environments that encourage shared participation and decision-making. To do this, Sewell drew on the work of Rogoff to explore teachers' and children's participation through the community/institution, interpersonal, and personal planes. The research demonstrates how both teachers and children grappled with this approach to learning and teaching with each teacher finding their own ways of navigating this and views and perspectives changing over time. Teachers initiated different pedagogical approaches to

develop a community of learners; for instance, one teacher and the children from their class noted the instigation of sharing circles, a place for the teacher and the children to share what was “on top” for them. This was also noted as part of the daily classroom routine (see also Aitken & Sinnema, 2008). Factors noted that impacted on the development of a community of learners were curriculum constraints and teachers needing to meet the demands of achievement objectives from the curriculum document of that time. Timetables, both across the school and classrooms, were also noted as a constraint. However, some teachers and children did negotiate ways of meeting curriculum demands through such approaches as inquiry-based learning. Critically, Sewell (2006) notes:

Child-initiated joint participation only occurred in classrooms that had begun to function as a community of learners. As joint participation became accepted cultural practice, children began to contribute ideas, seek out the expertise of others, suggest innovations, share their feelings, lead without controlling, spontaneously manage inappropriate behaviour, initiate shared interactions without it being cued by the teacher or make decisions without needing adult approval (p. 222).

Sewell’s (2006) research has established teachers’ and children’s participation in a community of learners is based on five reciprocal dimensions, these being: cognitive, social, emotional, spiritual, and physical. These reciprocal dimensions occurred through the sharing of ideas and activities; shared decision-making and responsibilities, and feelings; emotional connectedness to self and others; as well as informal configurations for collective learning.

Morcom’s (2014) longitudinal qualitative action research involved two separate studies in Victoria, Australia, and shares similarities with Sewell’s (2006) research. The first study was conducted in two schools with 57 child-participants aged 8–11 years and two classroom teachers. The subsequent smaller study was conducted with a smaller group of 12 children and their teacher and involved once-a-term interviews as well as children and teacher

engaging with reflective journals. In each study, three experienced teachers and their mentor instigated practice change, framed from a sociocultural perspective. Morcom's research determines and reaffirms the benefits of children expressing ideas and views that reflect the values in the classroom and school contexts. The teachers in the research used a variety of teaching strategies to engage with children's thoughts, ideas, and perspectives. These included a "class agreement" on how children and teachers would interact, such as mutual respect, attentive listening, and doing their personal best. Regular classroom routines included: a daily sharing (social) circle; weekly class meetings where all class members could raise concerns; sociograms, where children could nominate who would be in their new group; and opportunities for reflection and feedback.

Children's participation, engagement, and sense of belonging in their classroom provides a higher probability that children will have a personal stake in how they engage in positive ways with their teacher and each other. A sociocultural approach sees teachers valuing children's lived experiences, culture, and identity, setting the foundations for learning that is relevant to and for their lives. In such an environment, children are active agents in their learning. When teachers actively draw on sociocultural principles, they apply effective pedagogical approaches that enhance relationships, active participation, collaboration, and meaningful learning opportunities for young people (Morcom, 2014).

From a sociocultural perspective, children's motivations relate to their social context and are operationalised through collaborative and individual endeavours. This demonstrates that motivation itself is a psychologically, socially, and culturally situated concept (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's notions of the individual and the sociocultural environment align with establishing a *unit of analysis* that preserves the essence of events of interest rather than separating these into elements that no longer function as a whole (Rogoff, 2008). Instead, the researcher identifies and analyses the active participation and contributions of children, their social partners, and collaborators across *three planes of analysis*. In doing so, observing how

and why children actively engage with their prior knowledge, cultural, and historical traditions result in the transformation of their social, emotional, and cognitive worlds in individual and interdependent ways of being (Rogoff, 2003).

The sociocultural context for cognitive development involves individuals engaging in tasks and solving problems together. This occurs in varied and nuanced ways and is not always immediately obvious to the observer. For instance, this could involve children working in individualised ways side by side or face to face in an activity or task that is connected in culturally contextualised ways (Rogoff, 1993). Within a sociocultural framework, the role of social interaction is essential in the context of advanced cognitive thinking (Rogoff, 1993).

Included in this section is the te ao Māori concept of tuakana-teina (Bishop, 2023; Riwai-Couch, 2021), whereby the novice learner gains new learning and understandings from an expert partner. This concept and other cultural competencies are interpreted and discussed further in the discussion chapter (for instance see sections 5.1.1, 5.1.3, 5.2).

2.10 Collaborative Communities of Practice

There are similarities between the sociocultural field of research and that of collaborative communities of practice. Over the last several decades, researchers have developed theories and frameworks that show how children’s learning is supported in communities that offer strong relational values, emphasise a sense of belonging, as well as engage in learning that is contextualised in collaborative ways (for example, see Morcom, 2014; Riwai-Couch, 2021; Rogoff, 1993, 2003; Rogoff et al., 2018). Understandings such as “community of learners” (Rogoff et al., 2018) and “collaborative communities of practice” (Morcom, 2014) maintain a sharp focus on collaboration between children and the roles adults play in facilitating these.

On this view, teachers can provide learning conditions in classrooms by inducting children into a collaborative community of practice. An important aspect of this is having a

strong sense of belonging and the understanding that, collaboratively, the community and the individual can thrive (Morcom, 2014). The notion of a collaborative community of practice is not a singular one; individuals belong to multiple communities and, because of this, engage a variety of resources through which to make meaning of learning and life. As with notions of informal learning, such learning communities may take place in schools, churches, sporting and recreational interests, whānau, and friendship groups (Morcom, 2014). Morcom further maintains there are common elements in these collaborative communities, which include the strong relationships with the community, activities, and events. Riwai-Couch's (2021) research demonstrates that in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, communities of practice are a crucial factor for ākonga Māori and Pasifika in achieving success.

Riwai-Couch's (2021) recent publication, *Niho taniwha: Improving teaching and learning for ākonga Māori*, shares the stories of her own educational experiences and the experiences of other Māori people, rangitahi, and tamariki. This book is purposefully written for teachers with the aspiration that teachers of ākonga Māori and Pasifika will benefit from reflecting on these stories shared and how reflection will result in pedagogical practice changes that will see greater success for ākonga Māori and Pasifika. Riwai-Couch demonstrates the difference one teacher can make for one ākonga. A strong foundation for this is whakawhanaungatanga, which places the emphasis on relationship building with children, whānau, hapū, and iwi and, through this, "creating better understandings about each party's aspirations and priorities" (Riwai-Couch, 2021, p. 167).

Important aspects of a collaborative community of practice are the sustained mutual relationships that can at times be both harmonious and conflicting. This means that within a community, constructive ways are developed to engage in diverse perspectives. Over time, shared understandings and values develop as the community grows to know and understand the individuals within it. Additionally, within this community are shared ways of knowing how activities, tasks, and events are engaged in. It is through these elements that the

collaborative nature of activities generates collective understandings of how the community operates (Morcom, 2014). Bruner (1986) argues that it is through negotiation and shared communal and cultural learning that a child develops a strong sense of belonging, leading to greater potential as a positive citizen in society.

2.11 Rogoff's Planes of Analysis

Informed by sociocultural principles, Rogoff (1990, 2008) developed a framework to demonstrate how children act as apprentices in thinking, and using peers, adults, and others to influence their thinking within a variety of communities, such as schools and community groups. In this framework, learning and problem-solving occur through observing and participating with others who are more skilled. In the act of apprenticeship, new skills and learning develop and are applied in different sociocultural activities. Alongside notions of apprenticeship, the concept of guided participation in sociocultural activities sees children learning in tacit and explicit ways from more knowledgeable persons in collaborative ways. Children engage with other children and adults in routine and understood ways as well as intent collaborations. Participation in these collaborations supports children in gaining new knowledge and skills to participate in similar or related events. The three planes (Rogoff, 2008) consist of:

- (i) Community/institution (apprenticeship): understanding systems, processes of community or institution;
- (ii) Interpersonal (guided participation): learning from others, sharing ideas and working towards a common goal; and
- (iii) Personal (participatory appropriation): individuals are transformed through participation in collaborative sociocultural activities.

The apprenticeship plane exists within a community or institution with roles orientated towards achieving goals. In such communities, children and adults communicate and coordinate, gaining new knowledge and skills as they participate in sociocultural

activities (Rogoff, 2008). Rogoff (1993) provides an example of this with her research with the Girl Guides Association, where girls learned new skills selling Girl Guide cookies. Rogoff notes that the planning and selling of cookies resembled an apprenticeship system whereby children collaborated and competed to sell their products. Children learned and adapted their approaches as they were guided by adults and peers. Importantly, the “community” had a particular structure and values system that children and adults operated within. Rogoff further notes that institutional and interpersonal contexts occur in numerous places, including schools. Such contexts provide opportunities to not only develop new skills and understandings but also engage in problem-solving.

Rogoff (2008) explains that the concept of guided participation is not considered an operational definition that is readily observable or measurable. Instead, the interpersonal plane focuses the attention on the system of interpersonal collaborations that support participation in tasks and activities that are managed by individuals and their social partners. Additionally, this plane of analysis provides perspective on how to view interpersonal understandings in alignment with sociocultural processes and, in doing so, illuminates a deeper understanding of learning and development. The interpersonal plane, represented by guided participation, focuses on a community where individuals engage with others in routine structures, using the cultural tools for learning in collaborative ways managed by themselves and others. The interpersonal plane (guided participation) also acknowledges the direct interactions individuals have with each other when engaging or avoiding tasks and activities assigned and how these are made possible or constrained by the actions—or inactions—of others. However, guided participation does require some level of engagement and meaning-making of shared activities but not necessarily in reciprocal ways (Rogoff, 2008). It is therefore noted that guided participation is an interpersonal process in which individuals manage their own and others’ roles and structure situations through both observation and

participation in cultural activities. It is through these interactions that transformation occurs in cultural practices, and this can be seen through successive generations.

The personal plane of participatory appropriation is the process by which an individual transforms their understanding of, and responsibility for, activities through their own participation. Importantly, it is the act of appropriation that sees the child change and grow in knowledge and understanding (Rogoff et al., 2018). This, in turn, leads to the child being prepared for subsequent and similar activities, in many ways echoing Bruner's (1986) model of scaffolding where children themselves are providing the scaffolded steps to new learning. Participatory appropriation also necessitates ongoing contributions to learning endeavours. Appropriation is seen as a process by which children gain competence in activities. To elaborate further, children "appropriate" new skills and knowledge through participation in a shared activity. Therefore, the act of appropriation is the process by which new knowledge and skills are gained through participation (Rogoff et al., 2018).

All three planes are part of a mutually constituting process that does not privilege one plane over another. The mutually constituting processes are integral to participatory appropriation. These include personal, interpersonal, and cultural processes that occur in sociocultural activities. As has been noted, not only are all planes simultaneously active, but the sociocultural activity can also be engaged in as an individual, in pairs, or groups (Rogoff, 2008). Additionally, children and adults participating in sociocultural activities demonstrate the diverse ways in which children and adults engage in sociocultural activities and, in doing so, actively appropriate new skills and knowledge (Rogoff, 2003).

The three planes of analysis provide a pathway for what Rogoff et al. (2018) terms as transformation of participation. In the classroom setting, this was demonstrated earlier in the research of Morcom (2014) where children participated in sociocultural activities as part of a collaborative community of practice. Through these endeavours, children transform their understandings, roles, and responsibilities. Critical to the notion of transformation is what is

learned through the acts of participation in learning activities. For this to occur, an effective instructional model needs to be employed. Rogoff et al. (2018) propose there are three instructional models, these being: (i) adult run, (ii) children run, and (iii) community of learners (see also Sewell, 2006). Whilst both adult- and children-run models follow transmission and exploratory models, respectively, the ideals of a collaborative community of practice are that all participants are active, no one has all the responsibility, and no one is seen as passive recipients of learning. Additionally, a collaborative community of practice does not seek to find an optimal blend of the two one-sided approaches. Instead, learning occurs *through* participation (Rogoff et al., 2018).

2.12 The Voices of Children and Their Rights to Participate

Championing the child's rights to "voice" and "influence", Lundy (2007) asserts that children in schools are not consistently consulted on matters affecting their education.

Although numerous studies lend strong support to "student voice", Lundy (2018) contends that this is often tokenistic and determines that children's participation is not taken seriously.

Lending support to Lundy's assessment are several international and local experts who demonstrate the view that, generally, children's thoughts, ideas, and opinions are not actively sought when it comes to their learning (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018c; Mitra, 2008; Mitra & McCormack, 2017; Smith, 2023). Furthermore, the intent of Article 12 of the UNCRC is not clearly understood (Lundy, 2007). To address this, Lundy developed a framework that offers a clear interpretation of the obligations under Article 12. Two key elements are the focus:

1. The right to express a view (ensuring space and voice); and
2. The right to have views given due weight (ensuring an audience and influence)

The Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) has written an in-depth review of Article 12 of the UNCRC. In its report, the intent of Article 12 has been examined to establish what it means for state parties to fulfil legal obligations to children. Key phrases from the article are elaborated on, such as "all matters affecting the child", which is seen as a

basic condition of respect. The Committee states that children's views must be carefully listened to "wherever their perspectives can enhance the quality of solutions" (p. 10). The phrase, "being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009), refers to the capacity of the child, stating it is insufficient to simply listen; instead, the child's views need to be seriously considered. Article 12 clearly states that age alone does not determine the importance of a child's view. Additionally, the Committee recognises that "maturity" is difficult to define, suggesting that maturity is recognised by the child's capacity to reasonably and independently share their views.

Children being "capable of forming their own views" (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009) is a fundamental, contributing factor for this present study. Critically, the Committee emphasises that no age limit is imposed on children expressing their view. The Committee's review also provides guidelines for education and schooling:

In all educational environments including educational programmes in the early years, the active role of children in a participatory learning environment should be promoted. Teaching and learning must consider life conditions and prospects of the children. For this reason, education authorities must include children's and their parents' views in the planning of curricula and school programmes. (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009, p. 24)

Brooker and MacDonald (1999) maintain that student voice is often elicited *after* the learning has concluded as an evaluative measure. Similarly, Lundy (2018) contends that children are often consulted after decisions have been made. Furthermore, children are often provided with opportunities to express their views on less substantial issues. Bourke and Loveridge (2018c) suggest that the role of "student voice" is often structured by the adult with an adult-orientated agenda. Roholt and Baizerman (2019) note that while young people are consulted on matters, minimal action or change results, and Perry-Hazan (2021) argues

that Article 12 of the UNCRC has “anchored children’s rights to participate in decision-making” (p. 184).

Perry-Hazan’s (2021) research centres on participation rights in education. Perry-Hazan conducted a systematic analysis concerning the implementation of participation rights in education using contextual critiques of practices. In this analysis, Perry-Hazan highlights the conflicts that have arisen between these rights and other rights, including social contexts. The research identified barriers, noting in the educational context that “realising participation rights in a compulsory space requires careful thought on how to alleviate existing structures of power” (Perry-Hazan, 2021, p. 186). Noted in the article, education has been a space that has been particularly resistant to children’s rights. One of the reasons given for this is teacher beliefs that a child-rights stance undermines teacher authority or traditional views of practice.

Teachers and school leaders who facilitate children’s participation in decision-making at school and classroom levels not only serve children’s best interests but also improve the school environment and sense of belonging for children (Nelson, 2018). Perry-Hazan (2021) argues that children’s participation rights can be met by providing diverse ways of communication, informal and everyday opportunities for learning, and culturally inclusive pedagogical approaches. The next section, Section 2.13 of the review, elaborates on the challenges faced in enacting children’s participation rights. The review also considers ways in which children’s participation rights are currently being met in the education and research spaces.

2.13 Enacting Student Voice

Mitra’s research in student voice and school reform has made important contributions in the field of student voice in education (Mitra, 2008; Holquist et al., 2023; Mitra & McCormack). Mitra’s research predominately sits in the field of education and has been a strong voice for students’ inclusion, noting not only their capabilities in sharing their views on school and classroom practice but also contributing to its improvements. Mitra (2008)

notes student voice initiatives begin with providing students with the opportunities to share views and problems with the school staff. A further approach is for students and adults collaborating to address problems that arise. More extensive student voice work would include students taking on leadership roles as change agents.

The experiences of ninth-grade students in one high school in California was the focus of Mitra's (2008) research. Student achievement rates and teacher attrition had been identified as problems, with school leadership looking to reform current practices and include students in this process. This saw a collaborative process of students and teachers facilitating focus groups. The process alone led to improved student-teacher relationships, teacher instruction, and the empowerment of students. Mitra further notes the benefits of student-teacher partnerships, which resulted in a school culture change and the establishment of legitimised student voice in the school.

Student voice and children's involvement in school decision-making is explored by Holquist et al. (2023) whose research drew on two different data sources. The first was a systematic review of research focused on student voice, and the second was interviews/focus groups conducted with students, teachers, and school leaders in middle and high schools who had experience with student voice in the United States of America. The aim of this research was to identify whether the literature on student voice from the past aligned with current practices in schools using interviews and focus groups with students and teachers. Holquist et al. note that adopting an expansive leadership approach, where school leaders' vision for the school includes both adult and child views, demonstrates a commitment to furthering children's and young people's participation in school life. This was defined as opportunities for children to participate in and influence educational decision-making that directly impacts on and shapes the lives of children. The research by Holquist et al. showed there are two fundamental components of student voice in schools. The first component of "structure" includes three elements: setting, focus, and intent. Structure is identified as the basic design

work that supports student voice and includes targeted areas of focus. The second component was “relationships” with four included elements: access, representativeness, roles, and responsiveness. The importance of trusting relationships is stated as an antecedent for effective student voice practices. Alongside this, “relationships between adult-student and student-student power dynamics are critical to understanding a student voice practice” (Holquist et al., 2023, p.726).

Holquist et al.’s (2023) recent research maintains that children and young people continue to feel they have few opportunities to share views and participate in decision-making at school and classroom levels. Holquist et al. maintain this is particularly apparent for marginalised groups, including children of colour, low socioeconomic status, LGBTQ+, additional needs with learning, as well as recent immigrants and refugees. However, the research also demonstrates that good work is being done, and slow progress is being made. Their research showed that within classrooms, “students had opportunities to participate and influence decisions about teacher curriculum, instruction, and pedagogy” (Holquist et al., 2023, p. 722).

Whilst the field of research that focuses on children’s participation rights is growing, Smith (2023) reports for primary-aged children (5–12 years) that this is still limited. This is particularly the case for the Aotearoa New Zealand context. Smith’s research—situated in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools—aimed to identify the extent to which genuine participation and decision-making currently occurs in schools. Smith’s research involved two principals, ten teachers, and 29 children (aged 5–11 years) across two primary schools with the aim to investigate the ways children with student leadership roles participated in decision-making on school student councils. The research findings showed that children experienced genuine participation when these opportunities were facilitated and organised by adults. However, of equal importance “where adults offered contrived or limited opportunities, children had little voice or agency, and authentic participation did not occur” (Smith, 2023, p.

2). An important factor to highlight for this finding was that children's participation in decision-making appears to be reliant on how adults view children's capabilities. Smith points to one of the reasons for this being the piecemeal adoption of the UNCRC in Aotearoa New Zealand, resulting in professionals who work with children not being sufficiently aware of the UNCRC and its obligations to children.

2.14 Radical Collegiality in Education

Fielding (1999) first proposed the notion of radical collegiality as a response to democratising education. Included in Fielding's research is discussion on collaboration and collegiality, which are often viewed as interchangeable concepts. Fielding asserts that collaboration is a pluralistic form of individualism as motivations to collaborate could be serving self-interest. Collegiality, in contrast, is communal in its origin, is interpersonal, and favours individuality and community over individualism and contract. Whilst the concept of collegiality is common in education, it has often been focused on the collegial relationships between teachers. In response to this, Fielding's research explores the notion of a radical or inclusive collegiality that involves the reciprocal nature of teachers as learners and learners as teachers. Fielding (1999) proposes this can be viewed from a radical collegial perspective, meaning learners are not viewed as objects of professional endeavours but, rather, are partners in the learning process. Fielding advocates for three strands: (i) in education, there are opportunities and the dispositions for teachers to learn from one another; (ii) learning can be seen as a reciprocal construct between teacher and learner; and (iii) education in a democracy is characterised by inclusiveness that includes teacher(s), learners, family, and community. Fielding contends that much of the ideals of radical collegiality are provocative; however, there is also a glimpse of capturing the essence of what is at the heart for many teachers, this being that "learning and teaching are often at their most exhilarating and most demanding when there is a shared awareness that both parties can be both teachers and learners" (Fielding, 1999, p. 24).

Bourke and Loveridge (2018b) have documented examples of “radical collegiality” with a collection of researchers exploring student voice from the “chalkface” to the policy level through a radical collegiality lens where researchers and teachers have recounted and challenged traditional teacher practices and the school status quo. In other words, learners and teachers disrupt the day-to-day, taken-for-granted school routines and their own roles within these.

To authentically listen to children, one must be attentive to the language, lived experiences, and the context of each child’s life (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018c). In their research, Bourke and Loveridge (2018a, 2018c) actively engaged in conversations with children to understand learning from a child’s perspective. This demonstrated that learning for children was complex and existed beyond the classroom, and involved all aspects of their lives, including their interests, family/whānau, friends, and activities. Significantly, children demonstrated their awareness of needing a range of skills to achieve better lives. According to Bourke and Loveridge (2018c), student voice work requires foregrounding the multiple ways children make connections with their world. This includes relational interdependence between adults and children, listening to children, and engaging in conversations about their lives and their learning, developing inclusive collegiality that results in children being self-knowing, self-regulating, and autonomous.

Bourke and Loveridge (2018a) also demonstrate that authentic student voice can be achieved by listening and engaging with the numerous aspects of learners’ lives. Critically, in their research, the act of listening to student voice did not necessarily lead to change. Instead, it was evident that teachers tended to be selective about whose “voice” would influence the classroom decision-making. Included in their research were accounts of teachers narrowing to the parameters of the NZC through a teacher’s lens (as distinct from the child’s), demonstrating further that children and teachers often have differing views on what learning and teaching encompasses.

Nelson's (2018) empirical research in three classrooms in an intermediate (students aged 11–13 years) school in Aotearoa New Zealand explored how three teachers partnered with children to share pedagogical decision-making in the classroom. These children acted as “radical agents” in the professional learning of teachers, assisting to identify what good teaching practice looked like. This research established three imperatives for learning and teaching in the classroom, these being:

1. creating new identities to position students as partners;
2. expanding the pedagogical decision-making agenda students could participate in;
and
3. appropriating current professional discourses to enact student voice aspirations.

Partnership orientations establish the importance of children's inclusion and influence in decision-making. Nelson's (2018) research demonstrated that the teachers had a vested interest in partnering with children as governance partners, which saw children and teachers making decisions for the whole class. Collaborative action research was employed by Nelson (2018) whereby children and teachers worked together for social change. This pedagogical partnership provided opportunities for reciprocity, which positioned teachers as learners and children as agents for their professional learning. Working through the three instituted imperatives, new learning was established. First, new norms were implemented around the identity of children that normalised the child-teacher partnership. Second, a shift occurred in the classroom decision-making process and included the teacher involving children in decisions that the teacher would typically make. Decision-making took place in collective class discussions, which made children's thinking more accessible to the teacher. Third, student-led inquiry and assessment for learning were promoted, the research indicating that student engagement and ownership of learning improved learning outcomes. Additionally, teachers noted, they were “handing over or stepping back to promote student-led learning” (Nelson, 2018, p. 209).

Nelson's (2018) research demonstrates that pedagogical partnerships support and encourage children's participation in classroom decision-making while also addressing the power relations that existed in the teacher-learner relationship. This meant that teachers acknowledged that partnering with learners was not always a comfortable space for them. However, over time, teachers drew on resources that supported them to overcome this, furthering their endeavours for more genuine participation and decision-making with learners.

2.15 The Views of Children and Teachers

Bourke and Loveridge (2018c) reported on an exploratory qualitative research project that involved 49 primary school teachers, teaching in Years 4–8 in seven schools in Aotearoa New Zealand. The focus of this research was teachers engaging with and reflecting on previous student voice research on learning gathered from children in schools. This research demonstrated there are contrasting views between teachers, school leaders, and students on what is seen as important for learning. For instance, Bourke and Loveridge note that teachers viewed student voice through a teaching lens that was focused on the New Zealand Curriculum and was seen as evidence of children's understanding of curriculum and enactment of the key competencies. In contrast, children viewed learning through a broader lens, seeing learning as something that occurred also outside of school and was strongly driven by their interests and talents. Interestingly, a key difference in views was held by teachers and children on what constituted "talent". For many of the teachers, talent was seen as a fixed trait—something people either had or did not have. Children, however, saw this differently: "Critically, the emotional dimension of talent was important for the children. For them, developing and realising talent was not just about acquiring skills, but also the affective feeling it gave them" (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018a, p. 170).

The research of Bourke and Loveridge (2018a) demonstrates that, as researchers, we also need to be actively present in the research. The initial aim of their research was to explore children's views on learning and assessment. However, the researchers responded

and adapted to the voices of children, seeing the direction for the research change to reflect this. What emerged was children's views on the importance of learning for them and on how they were actively developing skills and talents outside of school. Additionally, children were focused on their futures and how their learning would support them as they grew.

Black and Mayes (2020) researched within a multi-sited qualitative case study in three primary schools in Victoria, Australia, that involved teachers and students across diverse economic backgrounds. Data were gathered through focus groups and interviews, and focused on two overarching research questions that sought to understand the impact of the Primary School Engagement (PSE) programme and what enabled and constrained these impacts. Results demonstrated that student voice work is complex for all stakeholders. Across the three schools, clear messages of support and enthusiasm for student voice from teachers and school leaders were evident. Accounts included comments like, "these teachers and school leaders are all emotionally engaged in student voice and passionate about its observed and potential benefits for their students" (Black & Mayes, 2020, p. 1071). However, school leaders also identified that some teachers were resistant to or uncomfortable with student voice, identifying this as teachers being "set in their ways".

Additional factors for Black and Mayes' (2020) research was the potential emotional cost of student voice work for both teachers and students. Their research demonstrates that teachers can be nervous and exhibit avoidance of student voice work because of concerns that student voice may threaten their authority or be seen as a criticism of their practice. Equally, students can also experience similar emotions of nervousness and intimidation when voicing their views with teachers.

The research of Black and Mayes (2020) uncovered yet another layer of complexity to consider in student voice work: one that includes the emotional considerations of teachers. For instance, student voice proponents are likely to see student voice as ways of being creative and innovative in their practice, bringing high teacher satisfaction. In contrast,

teachers who are reticent to engage with students as partners may experience emotions of blame, shame, and anxiety with less likelihood of sharing this in the face of strong student voice advocacy.

2.16 Engaging with Children in Educational Research

Holquist et al. (2023) assert that research involving children in the school environment where an “insider approach” is used requires researchers to actively engage in a partnership with their child participants. Holquist et al. argue that “student voice work thus requires great energy focusing on the positioning of young people and how they interact with adults in partnership” (p. 706). Equally, noted by Holquist et al. is an “outsider approach” that can question structures and systematic injustices. Adopting a youth participatory action research approach in the classroom setting supports children in questioning and critiquing their surrounding worlds.

Authentic action research leads to transformative practice-changing practice for teachers with children central to its research and transformation (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2019). Roholt and Baizerman (2019) observe that it is common for children and young people to be seen as competent and capable of contributing to research when the research is contextualised in their lived experiences. The field of youth participatory action research is an acknowledgement of the youth-adult partnership that exists in another version of participatory action research. Aligned with participatory action research more broadly, this form of action research has the aim of social change and transformational practice.

Anyon et al. (2018) conceptualise youth participatory action research as inquiry-based, concerned with children’s lived experiences. Connected with this is the collaborative nature of youth participation and the transformational practices that result in improved outcomes for children and young people’s lives and their communities. Berg’s (2004) views align with Anyon et al., asserting that the critical factor in youth participatory action research is the democratising of relationships between children and adults. Anyon et al. (2018)

conducted a systematic literature review of over 3,000 research articles with a final sample of 67 articles focused on youth participatory action research. Findings from this review indicate the most common improved outcomes associated with youth participatory action research are student agency and leadership, followed by academic or career, social, interpersonal, and cognitive outcomes. Additionally, the systematic review outlined skills and competencies children and young people can offer in the youth participatory action research.

Enacting a youth participatory action research stance demonstrates a strong alignment with the UNCRC's Article 12. Importantly, Article 12, as one of the four guiding principles of the UNCRC, upholds children's rights to participation and inclusion. There is now substantial evidence of the benefits of taking a child-rights approach to research where children, young people, their context, and lived experiences contribute to improving children's lives. Research such as this supports voice, participation, and agency (Corney et al., 2022; Lundy & McEvoy, 2012; Lundy, McEvoy, & Byrne, 2011; Mitra & McCormick, 2017; Roholt & Baizerman, 2019; Shier, 2001)

Mitra and McCormick's (2017) research, based in the United States of America, examined the ethical dilemmas associated with youth participatory action research in a middle school (aged 10–13 years) social studies class with 12 students. One of the researchers was a university scholar, the other the classroom teacher in the research study. The research school was seen as having a progressive, democratic approach to learning and teaching rather than a traditional one. This school was considered more receptive to involvement in youth participatory action research. Mitra and McCormick detail their processes in engaging with this form of research through the sharing of students' and their teacher's experiences. An inquiry learning approach was adopted with students prompted to explore a topic of interest or something they were passionate about. Students followed an inquiry process, developing open-ended questions in order to explore their chosen topic, and this process was supported and guided by the classroom teacher. A variety of topics were chosen by the students,

including school-based priorities, such as school schedules, recess time, extended time for reading, and other areas of interest like raising funds for resources and access to technology at different times of the day. Aspects explicitly taught by the teacher included students learning how to code data, identify themes, and develop what the teacher termed as “mini-theories”. Importantly, these mini-theories provided the opportunities for discussion and collaboration, at times testing students’ perspectives.

A critical aspect of Mitra and McCormick’s (2017) youth participatory action research was the impact that the children’s research had on the school community, resulting in meaningful changes for students. These included timetable structures and changes to independent reading time. The article also provided a case study of the experience of one student who challenged the current school dress code, this becoming a schoolwide debate. The ethical dilemma of gender bias and the sexualisation of females were tackled through a classroom inquiry that demonstrated how complex this issue was, challenging long-held stereotypical belief systems. With the support of their teacher, this student (and others) presented their research to the democratic body that governed the school. Importantly for student voice advocates, this student saw themselves as an activist with the school working to balance the voices of students with policies and governing bodies. Consistent with Article 12 (1989; United Nation, n.d.) the students in this research were supported to express their views with these views given due weight (Lundy, 2007). Outcomes included meaningful changes to current policies and curriculum as well as substantive issues having a forum for discussion and debate.

Jackson (2020) provides another example of students and teachers partnering in an authentic and meaningful way. In this school, located in Victoria, Australia, the leadership team spent time with the Junior School Council (JSC) to discover what they felt the next steps were for the children and teachers at their school. In partnership, the leadership team tasked the JSC with the question, “What is student voice?” The JSC took the lead on this and, over

the next two years, student representatives held workshops, conducted surveys, and talked with students and teachers. Initially, student voice informed the co-construction of classroom expectations, reward systems, and events (Jackson, 2020; Rosanna Primary School, 2019). Through these experiences, student voice was utilised in purposeful ways to influence teaching and learning and was reported as a shift from student voice to learner agency (Jackson, 2019). From this, a *Learning Lab* was established where teachers listened to children, providing a forum whereby teachers and children engaged in conversations about their lives, their learning, and school (Jackson, 2020; Rosanna Primary School, 2019). As the principal of Rosanna School has stated, the school aims “to build independent learners through inquiry-based learning approaches, where student voice and independent decision making is a feature” (Jackson, 2020, para. 2).

2.17 Summary

The UNCRC (1989; United Nation, n.d.) has acted as something of a blueprint to ensure that a child-rights stance was adopted for this research project. This was supported by the understanding that nearly one quarter of the 54 articles of the UNCRC uphold the child’s rights to inclusion, participation, and self-determination (Hart, 1991). Central to this is Article 12, one of the four guiding principles of the UNCRC that asserts children’s rights to participation.

To establish what self-determination means in practical application in education, the literature of Ryan, Deci, and colleagues’ self-determination theory has been comprehensively reviewed to understand what this means for children in the classroom (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008; Ryan, Curren, Deci, et al., 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2020; Reeve, 2012; Reeve & Jang, 2006; Wehmeyer, 1999; Wehmeyer & Abery, 2013). Their empirically derived theory reveals the importance of learners experiencing the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Alongside these, parallels were drawn with Nussbaum’s

capabilities approach, which affirms the child's rights to social justice, citizenship, and to flourish and thrive (DeHaan et al., 2016; Nussbaum, 2011).

The review has also shown that autonomy-supportive teaching locates its origins in self-determination theory. Reeve and contemporaries (Reeve & Cheon, 2021; Reeve & Jang, 2006) demonstrate how this instructional approach supports agentic learning that motivates children to engage and participate in learning. Agentic learning is said to be connected to two of the basic psychological needs—autonomy, and competence—contributing to children experiencing feelings of success. Teachers who employ this pedagogical approach teach in ways that affirm children's rights to inclusion and participation by developing reciprocal and dialogic relationships. Teachers who engage in autonomy-supportive ways view learning, tasks and activities from the child's perspective. In doing so, teachers act in “needs-satisfying ways” that include the prior knowledge, lived experiences, cultural identity, and interests of children. Inherent in this approach to teaching is the importance of a classroom environment that is inclusive of diversity and culture, and one that fosters a strong sense of belonging for children (Bishop, 2023; Hattan et al., 2024; Riwai-Couch, 2021).

Theories of collegiality and partnership with children convey the view that classroom life, learning, and teaching happen in dialogic, reciprocal ways; critically, the context and social context for learning must be located in the child's world (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018a, 2018c; O'Neill, 2018). Taking a child-centric approach involves a sociocultural perspective where children are motivated and engaged in activities and tasks in which learning is often a collaborative, shared endeavour. In these spaces, children learn from more experienced others, sharing knowledge and skills as well as developing valuable social and emotional skills. Rogoff (1993, 2003, 2008; Rogoff et al., 2018), Sewell (2006), and Morcom (2014) name such conditions as a community of learners (or practice). Researchers observe children within a unit of analysis, a sociocultural event, or activity to identify and foreground, in turn, three planes of analysis.

The theoretical and empirical research included in this review has highlighted the ongoing need for advocacy regarding children's participation rights. It began with the early research of Brooker and MacDonald (1999), who described children's participation in learning as an evaluative process, through to the ground-breaking research of Lundy (2007) that emphasised the legal obligations adults had for provisioning space, voice, audience, and influence for children. Later research maintains that paternalistic and tokenistic approaches to children's participation rights persist (Corney et al. 2022; Lundy, 2018). Typically, this involves power dynamics between children and adults where children's rights are reliant on adults upholding their obligations in line with the UNCRC (1989; United Nation, n.d.; Bourke & Loveridge, 2018c; Lundy, 2018; Mitra, 2008). However, more recent research also demonstrates a cultural shift regarding children's participation rights. Whilst progress is slow, meaningful student participation and voice work is occurring in the education space (Perry-Hazan, 2021; Smith, 2023). This has been demonstrated through examples of the democratising of classrooms and schools as well as ensuring that school policies and curriculum are informed by children (Mitra & McCormick, 2017; Nelson, 2018). Critical to achieving favourable outcomes, such as improving school environments, is the establishment of trusting relationships by teachers. Through this, children experience a stronger sense of belonging. When this is enacted, a "push back" occurs on traditional power dynamics (Bishop, 2023; Perry-Hazan, 2021; Riwai-Couch, 2021). Additionally, there is recognition of children's unique position as being "experts in their own lives" (Bourke & O'Neill, 2022, p. 5).

Fielding (1999) first proposed the notion of adopting a radical collegiality to "disrupt" the power imbalances that exist between children and teachers. Instead, Fielding posits that teachers partner with children in authentic and dialogic ways. Several of the researchers included in the literature review co-opted the term "radical collegiality" as a way of not only exploring partner orientations with children but also providing the space for listening and

engaging with children in genuine and meaningful ways. Bourke and Loveridge (2018a, 2018c), Mitra and McCormick (2017), and Nelson (2018), for example, have demonstrated through their research what this might look like in practical, everyday ways. These include engaging with children's informal and everyday learning, understanding the context of children's lives, partnering with children to improve teacher practices, and engaging with children's interests for learning, citizenship, and social consciousness. Through such practices, not only are children's voices affirmed and elevated but they are also recognised as capable, self-determining decision-makers in their own lives.

This present study aimed to contribute to the field of research that advocates for children's rights to have voice, participation, and influence in all matters affecting their lives. For this research, in particular, the focus is on children's rights to participation and influence in curriculum decision-making in schools. Summarised below are the key substantive issues identified in the literature review:

- Despite the legal obligations under the UNCRC children's full participatory rights are not yet fully realised.
- Children are reliant on adults for these rights to be fulfilled.
- Participatory rights in education are reliant on teachers and the pedagogical approaches they employ.
- Whilst student voice work has advanced in education, this does not yet consistently afford children's participation and inclusion in all school and classroom decisions.

Chapter Three

Methodology and Methods

This chapter draws on experts in the field of qualitative research. Additionally, in the context of this research, expertise has also been sought from a number of researchers who are engaged in the field of educational research, specifically, in line with the UNCRC (1989; United Nations, n.d.). Graham et al. (2013) affirm the UNCRC “gives visibility and legitimacy to the **agency** and participation of children, while also drawing attention to their **protection** and **provision rights**, thus recognising children as both able to and entitled to participate in activities such as research” (p. 12; bold emphasis in the original). Graham et al.’s stance for children’s legal rights to agency, protection and provision rights has further sharpened the focus for this study.

This present study aimed to promote the voices of children as self-knowing, self-regulating, autonomous persons who were actively engaged in the research. Importantly, researchers who work with children are obligated to uphold the intent of Article 5 of the UNCRC (1989; United Nations, n.d.), provisioning guidance and support in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. In doing so, researchers recognise children’s capabilities, diverse life experiences, cultures, environments, and circumstances (Graham et al., 2013).

Researchers that adopt an ethical methodological stance support actively listening to children. Through this, researchers can represent children’s conscious and self-aware reasoning of experiences in their own lives and settings. This requires researchers to develop practical research skills that respond to children in their own social settings (O’Neill, 2018). Bourke and Loveridge (2018c) support this research stance, emphasising the importance of being attentive to the language, lived experiences, and the context of not only the children’s experiences but also the researcher’s own understandings and how this can influence the analysis of children’s experiences. Additionally, developing research skills that enable the observation of how children interdependently interact in the setting requires a reflexive

approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Graham et al., 2013; Köngäs & Määttä, 2021; von Unger et al., 2022).

Student voice involves the perspectives of children in educational debate, design, and decision-making (Nelson, 2014). Educational research that actively seeks to explore and examine the collaborative partnerships of teacher and children involves reconceptualising the teacher and child roles. Teachers play a significant role in enacting student voice and participation in classroom decision-making, bringing children closer to a pedagogical partnership with teachers, fostering a more democratic engagement in the teacher-student relationship. However, even as researchers and teachers strive for equity of voice and participation in education and classrooms, researchers and teachers must be aware of the power imbalances in the adult-child educational relationship (Graham, et al., 2013; Nelson, 2018).

Also noteworthy in the context of this study is the collaboration between researcher and classroom teacher. Fielding (2001) affirms that teachers' active involvement in student voice work is necessary in supporting development and encouraging positive ideals (see also Mitra & McCormick, 2017; Nelson, 2018). Nelson's research demonstrates that collaborative action research supports both teachers and children in partnering to enact social change. This present study sought to encourage a mutual partnership between children, teacher, and researcher.

3.1 Study Aims

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to identify to what extent and how children currently participate in curriculum decision-making in a Year 5/6 classroom in an Aotearoa New Zealand primary school. Youth participatory action research (YPAR; see Section 2.16) was chosen as the basis for developing a research partnership with children and their teacher to explore how curriculum decisions could be a shared, dialogic experience

(Barnikis et al., 2019; Corney et al., 2022; Holquist et al., 2023; Lundy & McEvoy, 2012; Mitra & McCormick, 2017).

This study was informed by the UNCRC (1989; United Nation, n.d.) with children's participatory rights at the forefront. Various methodological approaches and models were employed, alongside aspirations to partner with children and their teacher in the classroom setting. Lundy's (2007) original model of participation distinguishes children's rights to express their views and to have these views heard through the enactment of "space", "voice", "audience", and "influence". This original model and the Irish government depiction of this (Hub na nÓg, 2023) has acted as a guide for this study, including the establishment of a children's research advisory group (CRAG) and YPAR in the research classroom.

3.2 Qualitative Research Paradigm

Qualitative research employs interpretive approaches or frameworks that explore research problems in a natural setting to understand individuals or groups and how they interact within it (Berg, 2004; Creswell, 2013). Critically, qualitative research often aspires to be transformative and is seen as a "call for change" (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). This aligns with Groundwater-Smith and Mockler's (2019) notion of practice-changing practice (also known as practice architects) whereby teachers adapt and change teaching approaches by engaging and responding to student voice in purposeful and meaningful ways (see also Chevalier & Buckles, 2019).

Qualitative researchers attend far more extensively to the social and cultural contexts of the participants' lives. This involves how individuals inhabit and engage in settings; the social structures, rituals, and routines; and what ecological experiences are brought to the setting (Berg, 2004; Bourke, O'Neill, & Loveridge, 2018a; Creswell, 2013; Graham et al., 2013). Often, the researcher is situated in the setting with the participants, engaging face to face as well as exploring the environment and artefacts. This enables researchers to examine how individuals learn and make sense of themselves and others, affirming that conducting

qualitative research empowers individuals' narratives and voices, and minimises power relationships (Berg, 2004; Creswell, 2013).

Subjective and intersubjective meanings develop through both social and historical contexts (Creswell, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2022) concur with Creswell's stance, adding that qualitative approaches are widely implemented in the social and health sciences and beyond to explore, interpret, and report on relevant patterns of meaning across data sets. Such an approach requires researchers to become thoughtful and reflexive analysts. Additionally, a qualitative paradigm emphasises the multiple and contextual nature of meanings and knowledge as well as the researcher's subjectivity. In consideration of the experts mentioned in this chapter, this study was guided by a sociocultural position that aligned with an exploratory, inductive, and qualitative approach. Additionally, a reflexive research approach acknowledged the researcher's subjective perspectives as an educator and researcher and included the context of children's lives (Graham et al., 2013; Hopman, 2021).

3.3 Description of Qualitative Research Design

Participatory action research (PAR) nests within action research and differs from many other methodologies as there is a sharing of knowledge and experiences between participants and researcher. Furthermore, when collaboration occurs between teachers, researcher, and children, collective problem-solving occurs that builds a community of learners (Punch & Oancea, 2014). In this case, teacher, researcher, and children are shaped by all their experiences (Creswell, 2013). Hopman (2021) provides a further perspective, noting that "the past shapes lived stories but also influences stories waiting to be lived" (p. 44). The implementation of PAR aligns with the ontological beliefs of socioculturalism and social constructivism. Ontology refers to the realities and beliefs of people with individuals often holding multiple ontological beliefs, considering these to be ontological worldviews (Schraw, 2013).

3.3.1 *Participatory Action Research (PAR)*

PAR is defined as a reflective and experiential framework with all involved in the research, irrespective of role, contributing to the research. The aim of PAR, and action research in general, is for people to engage in scientific inquiry in real-life ways and, in doing so, helping to understand and shape their lived worlds. PAR draws on the ideals of democracy with the aim of investigating a particular phenomenon with the hope of bringing about social change (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019; see also Nelson, 2018).

Researchers who want to advance children's rights work tend to employ participatory methods, which can empower children through a democratised process (Barnikis et al., 2019). However, Barnikis et al. caution that empowerment regarding participatory research implies that without adults designing participatory methods for children to engage with, children are unlikely to achieve agency in research. Therefore, it is vital that researchers acknowledge that participants are already active participants in their own lives and worlds (Barnikis et al., 2019). Barnikis et al. make consistent links in their research that acknowledges children's distinct human rights. In particular, Articles 12 and 13 of the UNCRC (1989; United Nations, n.d.) clearly state the need for a child-rights approach to research, particularly children being consulted on matters affecting their lives and with their views being given due weight (see also Graham et al., 2013).

Chevalier and Buckles (2019) outlined three pillars in their use of PAR: *participation* (life in society); *action* (experience, practice); and *research* (knowledge making). Critical to the participation pillar is the view taken of the participants. For instance, participants can be seen as co-researchers and therefore share the power and collaborate in the decision-making. Children can also be seen as partners in the research where they contribute to a shared goal (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019). The primary aim of the action pillar is not to change practice or the direction of the research but to provide insights and knowledge through a collaborative research partnership. The focus is on the "action" that takes place in the research with a

strong emphasis placed on “keeping a sense of perspective and purpose at all times” (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019, p. 31). The research pillar is the joining of scientific inquiry and lived experiences to create a shared understanding in transformative and democratic ways. It is a melding of research practices, active engagement in people’s social histories, and ethical participation democracy (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019).

A keen awareness of the intent of Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989; United Nations, n.d.) provided the basis for engaging with children in this research in ways that supported their autonomy, capabilities, and sense of belonging. Through these, children were seen as co-researchers that played active roles sharing their own lived experiences of classroom life, learning, and, indeed, their own worlds. Consistent with this, PAR that includes co-researchers in the research environment blurs the boundaries between science, research, and community to deepen the understanding of people’s different worlds and experiences. From the outset, this study resolved to take a child-rights stance where there was a greater likelihood of ensuring that “community members are neither tokens nor advisors but co-creators in the research process” (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019, p. 27).

Critical Emancipatory PAR. This study also aligns with elements of critical emancipatory PAR. Most pertinent to this form of PAR is its connections to grassroots, community, radical democracy, and transformative practices. Crucially, its origins are founded in education (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019). Critical emancipatory PAR formed the foundations for this study that aspired to not only form a radical collegiality with children and teacher but to also foreground the voices of children and actively promote their rights to participation, inclusion, and influence in transformative ways. von Unger et al. (2022) state, “emancipatory and participatory approaches have established reciprocity and empowerment as key ethical principles” (p. 2). Specifically, with a child-centric lens, this methodology supported a child-friendly study where children entered in the initial stages (Graham et al., 2013).

3.4 Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)

Youth participatory action research (YPAR) is another iteration of PAR that specifically speaks to co-research work with children and young people. Whilst this research draws on critical emancipatory PAR in the field of education, YPAR is not specific to education and is used as a research approach in communities, organisations, and agencies where children have a personal stake (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019).

The reflexive nature of YPAR (Shier, 2022) includes fully and explicitly locating the researcher in the research. Corney et al.'s (2022) research involved youth participation in youth policy in the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. Through this, researchers and young people collaborated on the delivery of funded programmes for youth. This included the co-design, co-production, and co-management of client-centred practices. Corney et al. reiterate that partnering with young people plays a significant role in the sharing of knowledge and skills. Additionally, research such as this challenges false, idealised, and generic representations of adults and young people.

Mitra and McCormick (2017) research, based in United States of America, employed YPAR in a school that saw a partnership formed between teacher, researcher, and children. These researchers note there are three elements that YPAR focuses on: (i) youth participation as partners (also known as co-researchers); (ii) projects that aim to have an impact on society; and (iii) taking a critical perspective on inequality. For children and young people to engage with YPAR, they need to develop skills and knowledge in how to engage in such research. Of note, adults need to provide support to these children and establish norms for respect and equality. Additional factors were creating a space where a common vision, accountability, and group decision-making occurred. Mitra and McCormick utilised an inquiry process facilitated by the classroom teacher to explore children's passions and interests, predominately focused on schoolwide structures, policies, and direction for learning.

The potential ethical dilemmas of working with children and young people on controversial issues were also explored by Mitra and McCormick (2017). At times, teachers are put in a position of considering the best interests of the child and valuing the questions raised by children for injustices. This can lead to tensions for school leadership and teachers when needing to engage with topics that are potentially contentious and can result in a persistent emphasis on avoiding conflict and such issues in schools. Mitra and McCormick's research reported that a YPAR stance requires teachers to advocate on behalf of children as well as acting in partnership.

There are similarities to be drawn between Mitra and McCormick's (2017) research with middle school children (aged 10–13 years) and this study. Mitra and McCormick observe that most YPAR occurs in the secondary school space with less research focused on the middle and primary school years. In this study, participants were aged 9–10 years and, whilst the focus of the study was based on curriculum decision-making, broader social issues, such as food security, unsheltered living, and cultural stereotyping, did emerge throughout the year. Like Mitra and McCormick, the children in this study had a strong advocate in their teacher, who continually strove to enable the children's voices and perspectives to be heard. Additionally, in contrast to accepted norms of school leadership wishing to avoid controversial issues (Mitra & McCormick, 2017), the school leadership of the research school met such issues head on with strong advocacy for the voices of all children, wanting to ensure a culturally safe space for ākongā Māori and Pasifika (Bishop, 2023; Riwai-Couch, 2021).

Co-research: Engaging with Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence. An essential element of engaging in YPAR was to continually remind myself as the researcher to understand the role of co-research through the lens of the child. Lending support for this was Lundy's (2007) model of participation (see also Hub na nÓg, 2023). This framework has influenced this study from the beginning. The quadrants of "space", "voice", "audience", and "influence" have had a significant impact on how this study has been shaped. This included

setting up the CRAG and the initial group activity (Lego classroom models) with the children. The recent development of the ‘everyday spaces checklist’, developed in Ireland (see Figure 1; Hub na nÓg, 2023; Lundy & O’Donnell, 2021) acts as a guide for teachers and other professionals who work with children in the ways of listening to children, providing them with the voice to be active in decision-making in everyday settings. In a conversation between Lundy and O’Donnell (2021), O’Donnell states:

This was a big development and we developed a draft everyday spaces checklist. You will remember that our ambition and that of the department was to develop a uniform checklist that would be suitable for use in a wide variety of settings such as schools, youth clubs, youth services, early years settings, social work settings, hospitals and other spaces. (p. 24)

Figure 1

Everyday Spaces Checklist



Note: Reproduced from <https://hubnanog.ie/#> with kind permission of Hub na nÓg, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Hub na nÓg, 2023).

3.5 Ethical Considerations

This present study was granted full ethics approval from Massey University Human Ethics Committee ([MUHEC] SOB 21/20). I have current police vetting required by the Institute of Education, Massey University as required by the Children’s Act 2014 for my work in schools (Oranga Tamariki: Ministry for Children & Ministry of Education, 2014).

The UNICEF compendium for Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC; Graham et al., 2013) provides an international charter committed to respecting children's human dignity, rights, and well-being. This Section 3.5 responds to the following commitments as stated in ERIC (Graham et al., 2013, p. 23):

1. Ethics in research involving children is everyone's responsibility
2. Respecting the dignity of children is core to ethical research
3. Research involving children must be just and equitable
4. Ethical research benefits children
5. Children should never be harmed by their participation in research
6. Research must always obtain children's informed and ongoing consent
7. Ethical research requires ongoing reflection

Ethical considerations in research that involve children must take into consideration their status as rights-holders (Graham et al., 2013; Malatest International, 2021). In a discussion paper focused on ethical considerations in social research with children and young people, Malatest International (2021) determined that whilst children in Aotearoa New Zealand fall under the protection of the UNCRC (1989; United nations, n.d.), additional treaties, conventions, and policies also ensure a rights-based inclusion and protection approach. These are:

- Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
- The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which recognises tamariki and rangatahi Māori are tangata whenua.
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which recognises the rights of children with disabilities to make decisions about their lives based on free and informed consent and to be active members in society.
- The Care of Children Act 2004 and the Evidence Act 2006, which aim to improve recognition and opportunities for children and young people to express their views

and to be heard (particularly during court proceedings). (Malatest International, 2021, p. 4)

Malatest International (2021) state, “Children and young people in Aotearoa have unique cultural and social contexts” (p. 3). In acknowledgement of these unique contexts, research involving children and young people must seek to include and understand their lived experiences. For this to occur, leadership and guidance by rangatahi Māori is needed to support and prioritise not only the principles of partnership, participation, and protection of ākonga Māori in line with Te Tiriti o Waitangi but also aspirations for co-determination (Malatest International, 2021). As a Pākehā woman, I acknowledge my Western worldview, upbringing, and the influence and limitations this has for this study. In response to this, and as part of my full ethics approval, I have sought cultural advice and support to gain a better understanding of a Māori worldview perspective.

During the early stages of the study, I approached the principal of the research school, who is wāhine Māori, to see if she would take on this cultural advisor role. The potential conflicts of interest versus the benefits of this were discussed with my supervisors. Through discussion with them, the benefits were seen to outweigh any potential conflicts of interest. Additionally, steps were taken to mitigate any potential conflicts of interest. For instance, the deputy principal took oversight for the research at the school, scheduling suitable times for me to conduct the research, meeting with me for updates, and liaising with the classroom teacher. The principal, as cultural advisor, provided valuable context and support throughout the study, particularly for ākonga Māori who participated in this present study. Advice was sought on a regular and often informal basis with the principal, who offered valuable background information for the culture and values of the school as well as for children (Malatest International, 2021). Suggestions for research framed in the Aotearoa New Zealand context were offered, and these have been included in the thesis (for example, see Riwai-Couch, 2021). Malatest International (2021) demonstrates the importance of cultural and

community consultation and co-design in research, which supports the researcher in having “the right lens and culturally appropriate approaches to design, gaining consent, data collection, analysis, interpretation and reporting for different communities included in the research” (p. 3). Additionally, I also drew on *Tātaiako: Cultural Competencies for Teachers of Māori Learners* (Ministry of Education, 2011). This is a document that I am familiar with as a teacher and through my work in Initial Teacher Education. The cultural competencies of *ako* (practice in the classroom and beyond), *whanaungatanga* (relationships with [students, school-wide, community] with high expectations), *tangata whenuatanga* (place-based, socio-cultural awareness and knowledge), *manaakitanga* (values–integrity, trust, sincerity, equity), and *wānanga* (communication, problem-solving, innovation) (Ministry of Education, 2011) have been drawn on in Chapter Four to support the cultural context of the findings.

3.5.1 Ethical Pathways to Children’s Participation in Research as Rights-holders

This study was designed to focus on “what matters” for children. The research was ecologically based in the context of a significant feature of children’s lives—in this case, the classroom and school setting. This present study and the research that informed it drew strongly on the context of children’s lives and their lived experiences. From a Western perspective, sociocultural theory has informed the qualitative and participatory nature of this present study (Vygotsky, 1978; see also Rogoff, 2003, 2008). Further still, self-determination theory and the capabilities approach provided tangible examples of how children’s autonomous and participatory rights could be realised (Nussbaum, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

O’Neill (2018) demonstrates that, over time, the view of the child has changed and can be seen as a reflection of the evolving societal views and the influence of treaties and conventions, such as the Human Rights Convention (United Nations General Assembly, 1948) and the UNCRC (1989; United nations, n.d.). Until the 1970s, the child was not seen as a person in their own right, but, by the 1980s, through child’s rights advocacy, government,

and nongovernment organisations, the child's emergence as a person in their own right was gaining traction. As a result of these treaties and wide-ranging ratification of the UNCRC, the child is now seen as being their own agent (O'Neill, 2018). In this view, the child as a person of equal status in social research gives greater recognition of the value of children's participation and voice in research. Although there is an increasing awareness in academic communities that demonstrates the imperatives for research that supports the understanding of children's lived experiences, evidence of such research has often fallen short (O'Neill, 2018).

There is also a strong acknowledgment that children are capable of being rational decision-makers and autonomous in the choices they make when engaged in their social worlds and interests (O'Neill, 2018; see also Graham et al., 2013). Ethical considerations for this study strived to ensure that children's participation and voices were represented as conscious and self-aware of their own experiences and worlds. It is important for researchers to develop skills and knowledge on how to respond to children in their social settings and understand how children engage with each other and their worlds. Critically, there is a need to ensure there are no preconceived assumptions about the child, their experiences, or their individual lives (Graham et al., 2013; O'Neill, 2018).

3.5.2 Conducting Fieldwork with Children

Peart and Holdaway (2000) provide ethical guidelines for research involving children, including specific advice on research with children in the field of education. Principles include the importance for research to benefit children, noting that research with children should only be completed when comparable research with adults would not answer the research questions (see also Graham et al., 2013). Other factors to consider are the age of children, and Peart and Holdaway note a preference for research with older children with research designed or supervised and conducted by people who have experience in working with children. This present study aimed to explore the extent of children's participation and

influence in curriculum decision-making. In order to understand this from a child's perspective, I needed to engage with and listen to children. As a researcher, I had recent experience in the research field with children of a similar age group. Additionally, as an experienced classroom teacher, I am familiar with diverse classroom environments and enjoy working alongside children.

Peart and Holdaway (2000) also outline the potential risk factors, which can include procedures, interventions, and experiences for children that are expected to have beneficial outcomes, be they medical, psychological, social, or educational. Furthermore, researchers must be cognisant of the potential to cause harm for children, whānau, and communities (Graham et al., 2013). Mitigating risk and harm was always my prime consideration. This meant building collegial relationships with the classroom teacher and children. It was important for me to follow the cues of teacher and children, knowing when to engage with a child and when to give them time and space. Bourke (2017) signals that alongside the ethical protocols of standardised universities and institutions is the need for the continuous reflexivity that includes the researcher's own understanding of what ethical practice looks like when researching with children.

3.5.3 Gaining Consent, Assent, and Acknowledging Dissent

In the first phase of this study, a school was identified using the following criteria: a local primary school with an interest in engaging in research that was informed from a child-rights perspective, focusing on children's participation and influence in curriculum decision-making. Additionally, the target year group was Year 5/6. The invitation to participate initially occurred informally as the principal of the school and I had met through our mutual professional teaching network. Through professional discussions, we identified a common interest in furthering student voice research and practice. After confirmation that the research could proceed in the school, the principal discussed the research study with the leadership team and senior syndicate teachers. A potential Year 5/6 classroom and teacher were

identified. An initial meeting took place between the teacher and me to outline the research to see if they were interested in participating. Following this, informed written consent was given by the teacher (see Appendix C information sheet for classroom teacher and Appendix D for consent form). After teacher consent was gained, the teacher shared the information sheets for children (see Appendix E) and parents/caregivers (see Appendix F) and consent forms (see Appendix G) with her class, and these were taken home by children to discuss with their whānau. Written and informed consent was gained from 18 children and their parents/caregivers. Additionally, a similar process occurred for the recruitment and consent of the CRAG participants and their parents/caregivers (see Appendix H for information sheet for children, see Appendix I for information sheet parents/caregivers, see Appendix J for consent form).

While consent must be gained from both the parent and the child, assent must also be continuously checked throughout the research with children (Peart, 2007). Further to this, assent comes in the form of visual and nonverbal clues as well as directly checking in with children to see if they are comfortable and assent to continuing with the research (Barnikis et al., 2019; see also Bissenden & Gunn, 2017). Locke et al. (2013) concur with this and describe this as a process of ongoing assent. Throughout the research process, I constantly checked for children's assent with activities, mid-year focus groups, and individual interviews. Furthermore, consent and assent from teachers and children were also actively sought when audio recordings were used. Throughout this study, children made choices about whether to participate or not, providing ongoing assent when they did. At times, children also exercised dissent, declining to have specific interviews recorded but assenting to notes being taken. Some children also chose not to participate in the mid-year focus groups.

An additional consideration during this present study were the children who did not consent to participate (or their parents/caregivers did not), but who were members of the class where the research was taking place. Whilst classroom numbers fluctuated during the year

due to COVID-19 and children shifting schools, approximately 4–7 children did not consent– or dissented–to participate in the research. It was essential to ensure that these children did not feel isolated or left out of school-based activities. Additionally, a child’s refusal to participate in research must be respected, ensuring that no pressure is placed upon a child to participate (Peart, 2007). An important assurance in information for children and parents/caregivers was to communicate that whilst children were excluded from data gathering, their active involvement in their class was maintained (see Appendix K).

3.5.4 Anonymity and Assuring Confidentiality

Importance must be placed on child participants not being identifiable in research and assuring confidentiality. Confidentiality for all participants was ensured by providing pseudonyms for the school and participants. Photos that included children were de-identified by obscuring facial features and identifiable school motifs. I also sought advice from supervisors and my cultural advisor for appropriate pseudonyms for ākonga Māori whose first names were a traditional Māori name. The school principal provided appropriate pseudonyms for these children.

Classroom observations were conducted over three terms during the 2022 school year for approximately one morning per week for one and a half hours. These observations recorded everyday classroom routines, peer interactions, children’s choice and decision-making in the classroom, teaching, and learning. Transcripts were anonymised to ensure confidentiality for all participants and all classroom observations. Tolich and Davidson (1999) state it is essential to distinguish between anonymity and confidentiality as only confidentiality can genuinely be assured in the case of observations. In addition, all data was securely stored on a password-protected iPad and laptop (Graham et al., 2013).

3.5.5 Clear Communication with all Stakeholders

Locke et al. (2013) set down principles to guide ethical behaviour. These include respecting and consulting with all stakeholders who are participating (including

nonparticipants), seeing all as full members of the research, even though roles may change over the course of the study. Of further importance is participants' right to withdraw or renegotiate the terms of participation. All communications with participants and their community needed to be in jargon-free language that was understood. Furthermore, I had responsibility as a researcher to be transparent as well as respecting the feelings and views of participants. These principles acted as a further checkpoint during the writing of the ethics application and during the research itself. As children played a vital role in this study as participants and co-researchers, particular attention to ethics and the information communicated to children, parents/caregivers, and potential gatekeepers was an important consideration (see Appendices C, E, F, H, I, K, and M).

3.5.6 *Consideration for Gatekeepers*

Consideration for potential gatekeepers that exist in the environment was also explored. Permission and cooperation for children to participate in research is required from various players, including parents/caregivers, school leaders, teachers, and, of course, the children themselves. Adults often act as gatekeepers for children in research for various reasons; however, this is often seen as a role of protection. Adults usually take on gatekeeping roles for children when they perceive that children need protection from certain issues (Barnikis et al., 2019). However, Barnikis et al. suggest that this can “further silence a marginalised group” (p. 11). It must be noted that gatekeepers do have a vital role to play in ensuring that children are protected from unethical, and poorly conceived or conducted research (Barnikis et al., 2019). In the case to this study, possible gatekeepers could be school leadership, teachers, parents, and whānau.

3.6 *Researcher Reflexivity*

Reflexivity in research involves an analytical practice that considers the positionality of the researcher and includes their life experiences, academic training, and social context (von Unger et al., 2022). Importantly, insider and outsider positionality affect the perspective

of the researcher in fieldwork, potentially impacting on how data are interpreted and reported. Ethical considerations are additional factors that influence the representation of data, considering the dynamic and interrelational nature of qualitative research. Additionally, von Unger et al. establish the importance of shifting beyond “procedural ethics” to “ethics in practice”. This requires researchers to not only adhere to ethics regulations but to also anticipate ethically important moments that could occur in the research setting. Taking both procedural ethics and ethics in practice into consideration supports ethical conduct that encompasses the critical dialogic and is an “ongoing process of reflecting on the social, political, and moral dimensions of empirical research” (von Unger et al., 2022, p. 2).

ERIC (Graham et al., 2013) demonstrates that at a minimum, reflexivity is the capacity of people to be conscious and accountable for their actions. This also requires a person to be able to “detach” from a situation and reflect upon it. With this view, reflexivity is seen as both a skill and a virtue. Ethical research involving children requires reflexive engagement that considers the following important issues (Graham et al., 2013):

- Is this research necessary and relevant?
- Does the researcher have the capacity and readiness to conduct the research?
- What assumptions does the researcher hold about childhood and the children involved?
- What are the potential impacts of the experience for both children and researcher?
- What actions are being taken to address disparities in power between researcher and child participants?

Researcher reflexivity, as described by Köngäs and Määttä (2021), demonstrates an individual’s personal awareness of the experience and is an integral part of research evaluation, this being a continuous process. Included in the data analysis section (see Section 3.14), a reflexive approach was necessary for me to take a step back and view the data through the lens of the child—not as a teacher. Whilst reflexivity acknowledges the researcher

subjectivity, it also provides opportunities for self-analysis of the cognitive and emotional aspects of myself and the research being undertaken (Graham et al., 2013). Critically, recognition of these emotions supports researchers to understand themselves and their participants from new and different perspectives (Hopman, 2021). Kögäs and Määttä (2021) note further that researcher reflexivity is the process of *transformation reactivity*, an emotion-based observation, into *reflexivity*, shifting towards critical evaluation. In a similar way, Hopman (2021) maintains reflexivity supports transformation reflection leading to “future change, particularly change in oneself that initiates action” (p. 43).

Many aspects of Kögäs and Määttä’s (2021) research resonate with this present study. Their reflexive ethnographic study was situated in childhood, informed by observations of real events, recognising that “perception of children’s culture is not straightforward for the adult-centred researcher” (p. 98). To support their reflexive approach, Kögäs and Määttä designed a “circle of reflexivity” to demonstrate the nature and process of reflexive research. The circle forms a rotating spiral towards a “supposed truth” with the researcher adapting original perceptions. This circle provides the space to wonder about the topic and how this is related to their own personal histories in inter-reflective and intra-reflective ways. An additional aspect of their research that emerged in this present study was the development of my own researcher reflexivity. This meant being reflexive and sensitive to children’s views and experiences, looking beyond the spoken words and observations to understand the child’s world and perspective.

A reflexive approach recognises the power imbalances and the power of influence that exist between adults and children. von Unger et al. (2022) note that participatory action research, whilst highly ambitious, has distinct opportunities and challenges, these being (i) challenges in bringing together academic and community partners; (ii) possibilities of addressing power structures related to post/colonial inequities; and (iii) navigating complex layers of power relations in a community. A reflexive approach becomes an important factor

in addressing power inequalities and other ethical issues that could surface in collaborations. Reflexive research aims to create conditions and structures to enable and support researchers and participants to engage in research in their own ways (von Unger et al., 2022).

As a teacher, I am actively aware of the cultural inequities that exist for ākonga Māori and Pasifika in schools and understand the importance of culturally responsive pedagogies. It was therefore important to have the cultural expertise of both my cultural advisor (principal) and the teacher, Whaea Tupou. For instance, in the research classroom I was guided by Whaea Tupou who interpreted classroom life through a cultural lens that lived the ‘whānau culture’. The principal, as my cultural advisor, brought a broader school cultural lens. Through our discussions both of these educators often re-interpreted my observations and analysis through a te ao Māori worldview, helping me to understand this—a genuine experience of tuakana-teina (Bishop 2023; Riwai-Couch, 2021). Additionally, the principal encouraged me to examine Niho Taniwhā (Riwai-Couch, 2021), taking the time to explain the tensions that arose in her own professional conversations with her team as they explored this text.

3.7 Children’s Research Advisory Group (CRAG)

Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989; United Nations, n.d.) determines that children’s involvement in research situated in their lives is an entitlement (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012). This has been demonstrated in Lundy and McEvoy’s research that involved researchers working alongside children as co-researchers with research processes guided by a CRAG (see also Bourke & Loveridge, 2018c; Corney et al., 2022; Lundy, McEvoy, & Byrne, 2011; Shier, 2002, 2021). This present study also included the establishment of a CRAG guided by Article 12. The CRAG acted as advisors, expressing their views and perspectives as well as actively shaping questions for interviews, providing feedback on the initial group activity with child participants, participating as active co-designers in a choice and decision-making activity, as well as providing overall feedback on the data collection. Lundy and McEvoy’s

(2012; see also Lundy, McEvoy, & Byrne, 2011) research and expertise in this area highlights important aspects of co-researching with children of which to be aware. For instance, children need to feel comfortable and at ease in their surroundings. The school setting is a common site for research with children; however, researchers must be cautious if research is school based as children might view this as schoolwork. Additionally, a nondeficit view of the child and their capacity is also crucial. Informed by the UNCRC (1989; United Nations, n.d.) and Article 12, it is not the child's place to prove their capabilities; rather, adopting a stance that presumes children are capable of expressing their views is required (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012).

The CRAG's purpose was to provide advice and feedback to the researcher throughout the research. The CRAG children were conversant with the culture of the school, classroom, and peers, this familiarity aiding the potential to further democratise the research. Gaining the children's insights increased the likelihood of instigating genuine partnerships with the CRAG, child participants, and their teacher (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019; Jackson, 2019). Furthermore, the knowledge and understanding gained from these partnerships over the course of the study prompted a responsive approach by the teacher and myself, both adapting to children's priorities and interests (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2019). The intent was for teacher, researcher, and children to take a transformative approach to further the inclusion of children's voice and influence in curriculum decision-making in meaningful ways (Anyon et al., 2018; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2019; Jackson, 2019).

Traditionally, a CRAG acts as an advisory group that sits alongside the research. The role is typically to guide, monitor, and advise adult researchers in relation to research questions and suitable methods when working with children in the research. Shier (2019) maintains that members of the CRAG are considered advisors and, therefore, are excluded from being active research participants. Lundy and McEvoy (2012) concur with Shier, noting that the specific responsibility of a CRAG is to provide advice on the research process,

support the researcher on how to best engage with child participants, and assist with data analysis and the interpretation of the findings. Similar to these research examples, this present study instigated a CRAG that consisted of children within the same school and year level but not the same classroom. This provided valuable insight into the culture of the school and the children who were seen as co-researchers in this study. The CRAG were active in their role in piloting and refining questions for interviews, developing activities for the research classroom, and providing feedback on data collection, particularly in the early stages of the research. For instance, the CRAG provided their perspective on children's responses to interview questions for the Lego classroom models activity, as well as the choice and decision-making activity that had been co-constructed with the CRAG. I met with the CRAG on a termly basis, this providing an opportunity for member checking on these group activities and other sociocultural activities and events. However, I did not extend the involvement of the CRAG to the data analysis of classroom participants' individual data due to confidentiality and privacy reasons.

Guided by the everyday spaces' checklist (see Figure 1), the idea for the initial group activity (see also Section 3.13.7) was developed. This involved children building classroom models followed by semi-structured interview questions. The interview schedule (see Appendix L) was piloted with the CRAG, and questions were subsequently refined and, in some cases, changed in response to the CRAG's advice. An important aspect of this first CRAG meeting was gaining insight and understanding of the language children used in school and their everyday lives. For example, one of the original questions asked about children's favourite learning areas. "Learning areas" is a term used by teachers from the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). It was clear when this term was used that children did not know what this meant. Through discussion, I learned that children use the word "subjects" and, as a result, the interview question was reworded. Another term that children used was "zoned out". Initially, I had interpreted this as disengaging from learning;

however, I quickly learned that this term was used when children were in a space in the classroom where they could “zone out” from others in the classroom and focus on their learning. These were not only valuable insights at the outset of the research but they also acted as a reflective prompt in classroom observations, mid-year focus groups, interviews, and informal exchanges to check my understanding was attuned with the voices of children. Additionally, the CRAG’s knowledge and lived experiences of the school’s culture, values, and classroom practices proved to be an important touchstone throughout the research.

The CRAG also played a key role in the development of an activity based on children’s choices and decision-making. The initial concept was based on observations and conversations with children and their teacher that involved foods they liked and what this meant when eating together as a whānau. Ideas for an activity were discussed with the teacher, and, together, the concept of an activity based on children’s favourite foods was developed to explore children’s understanding of choices and decision-making. The CRAG was engaged to advise and pilot this activity. It soon became evident that without the CRAG’s expert knowledge, this activity would not have been successful. Together, the CRAG and I co-constructed, piloted, and refined this classroom activity. This activity proved to be a successful addition to the research with artefacts that prompted further discussion in the mid-year focus groups (see Appendix M).

3.8 Recruitment

Importance must be placed on identifying the site and population for the research. Considerations for this in the first instance are research questions and whether the chosen site supports answering these (Berg, 2004). Additional considerations are access, the target population, availability of participants, and the probability of the research being conducted at this site. These factors add further rigour to the validity of the research design (Punch & Oancea, 2014).

This present study aimed to recruit one local primary school that had shown initial interest in this research. The research questions aligned with the research setting (that is, a primary school). The purpose of this research was to identify where current curriculum decision-making by children occurred and that the school, teacher, and children were willing to engage in research that aimed to be collegial and transformative (Berg, 2004; Punch & Oancea, 2014). Further criteria for inclusion in this research included: one primary school class in Year 5/6 with children aged 9–10 years and an additional Year 5/6 classroom for the CRAG.

3.9 Sampling

For this qualitative research, purposive sampling was used. Purposive sampling is employed in qualitative research where the researcher selects the site for the proposed research to explore and answer the research question(s) or phenomenon that are central to the research (Creswell, 2013). This present study took place in a Year 5/6 classroom in a low socioeconomic community in the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. School-wide ethnicity¹ data for the research classroom shows that the student population consisted of: Pākehā/European 64%, Māori 38%, Pasifika 9%, and Asian 5% (Education Counts, 2024). The identified school already had an established focus on the inclusion of student voice and participation. Children had been actively involved in several school-wide projects, including community consultation on the school values, playground design, and inquiry-based learning. Conversations with the school principal saw an alignment with this proposed research, offering the opportunity to focus on one classroom with one teacher and children. Additionally, as there were three Year 5/6 classrooms, the opportunity to have a CRAG in the same year level was also seen as beneficial by the principal and myself.

¹ “Ethnicity” is a multiple response in that students who affiliated with more than one ethnic group have been counted in each ethnic group. Students are only counted once in the total; therefore, the ethnic groups may not sum to the total (Education Counts, 2024).

Establishing boundaries for the sampling group was needed to ensure data collected was within the time constraints and capabilities of the researcher, and aligned with the research question and sub questions (Miles et al., 2020). The boundaries established for this present study were limiting the sample group to one school in a Year 5/6 classroom over a period of three school terms in 2022. From the outset of the research, a realistic view was taken about the number of participants that would be gained with the aim of 10–15 children providing consent to participate. Initially, 18 participants consented to participate with one child leaving the school part way through the year. The sample size of this group gave confidence that the voices and views of the participants reflected most of the class (the approximate size of the class was 22 children). The sample size determines how researchers can accurately draw statistical and analytical generalisations (Miles et al., 2020). Experts recommend that sample sizes of qualitative data collection should “achieve data saturation, theoretical saturation, or informational redundancy” (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007, p. 289).

3.10 Relationships

Building respectful, trusting relationships with children and their classroom teacher was a key factor in this present study. This began with approaching the school principal and articulating what this research was about and how the leadership team, teacher, and children could benefit by partnering in the research (see Appendices C and M). The principal was supportive and took the time to consider which group of children and classroom teacher would be the best fit for this research, identifying a teacher in their third year of teaching. Whaea Tupou was suggested by the principal because she was a teacher who was wanting to further student voice in her classroom and was passionate about creating an inclusive, culturally responsive learning environment. Whaea Tupou was identified by the principal as a teacher who was able to authentically connect and build strong relationships with children in inclusive and culturally responsive ways. In conversations with the principal she talked about Whaea Tupou being a Tongan woman who was proud of her culture and was seen as an

inspiration and leader in her Pasifika community. Building warm, trusting, and respectful relationships with children formed the foundations for her pedagogical approach to teaching. According to the principal, Whaea Tupou placed high importance on knowing about children's lives in and outside of the classroom, working to include their culture, prior knowledge, and interests.

The principal also consulted with the Board of Trustees, with the principal providing written consent for this research to go ahead (see information sheet Appendix N and consent form O). Once the initial support and permissions were gained, an informal meeting was held with the deputy principal, who became the regular contact person from the leadership team. An initial informal meeting with Whaea Tupou was had outlining the intent of the research. An information sheet and consent form were left for the teacher's consideration. Whaea Tupou shortly after agreed to partner in this present study, providing written consent (see Appendix D). How the researcher regards the participants and families has a strong influence on developing authentic relationships. Through this, there is acknowledgement of the importance of participants' perspectives, opinions, experiences, well-being, and the value of their contributions (Richards, 2019). Spending time in the classroom then helped to build rapport with teacher and children.

According to Graham et al. (2013), relationships are at the core of ethical research. Ethical and reflexive research involving children acknowledges the multiple relationships that occur during the research process. This includes both protection and participation rights, ensuring attention to active dialogue and collaboration. Graham et al. identify three principles that underpin ERIC: (i) *Respect*, acknowledging children as rights-holders, valuing the context of individuals' lives and their dignity; (ii) *Benefit*, involving the components of nonmaleficence and beneficence, requiring researchers to "do no harm". This principle also addresses the power disparities that exist between researcher and child participants and

adults' responsibilities to the UNCRC; and (iii) *Justice*, including respecting the views of the child and acting with fairness and equity.

Another important aspect to building genuine relationships is creating a “listening culture” from the beginning. When adults listen to children, it encourages respectful, confident relationships. Listening can reveal inequalities but, at the same time, also ensure inclusion (Graham, 2013; Ministry of Social Development, 2003). The children who participated in this study were predominately open and willing to share with me, and observations demonstrated lively debates with their teacher and with each other. I also experienced times when some children appeared reluctant to engage with conversations and interviews. This was respected and, over time, more children were willing to engage and share their thoughts and experiences. Of course, for some, this did not fully eventuate. It is important for researchers to understand that not all children and young people are enthusiastic about opportunities to participate, and this could be because they are not comfortable with the researcher, the situation, do not value the kind of consultation being offered, or do not feel culturally safe (Corney et al., 2022). Additionally, Corney et al. add that for those who do participate, there will be varying levels of participation.

One year after the data collection and analysis were completed, I returned to the school to share with the children the findings from the research. Slides of the findings in a child-friendly format were presented. It was important to provide feedback on research outcomes for child participants that summarised children's views and, alongside this, expressing gratitude for their participation is a common courtesy (Lundy, 2018). Feedback opportunities can create “dialogue between children and adults, rather than just ‘listening,’ [and] has been identified as one of the most crucial dimensions of meaningful child participation” (Lundy, 2018, p. 349). Malatest International (2021) concurs, recognising that effective consultation includes providing opportunities for children to review processes and findings and provide information on how their participation in the research will influence

policies and programmes. In this present study, during the final feedback to the children, a few things became evident. I had taken time to build relationships with the children, and a certain level of trust between us had developed. As a result of this, children shared their everyday lives and learning, many in great depth. The children recalled their participation in the research and some of the things they had done from the year before. However, what was also evident was that the children had moved on, and their interests had shifted. Children remembered the inquiries and enjoyed recalling some of the things they had shared and were excited about their learning “being made into a book”. However, it was a stark reminder that as researchers, we continue to relive the data and findings of our research but, for our participants, their lives do not remain static; they are constantly reshaping and growing in new directions.

3.11 Participants

After the approved ethics application was completed, the information sheets for the children and parents/caregivers (see Appendices E and F) were given to the classroom teacher, who discussed the research with the children and provided the information sheets and consent forms for children to take home to discuss with their whānau. The classroom teacher collected the consent forms from the children. Initially, 18 children and parents/caregivers in the Year 5/6 classroom consented to participate in the research (see Appendix G). The participants were made up of nine female and nine male children. One female participant left the school in the third term, leaving 17 participants (see Table 1).

Table 1*Child Participants*

| Pseudonym | Gender | Age | Year level | Ethnicity |
|--------------|--------|-----|------------|-----------------|
| Sarah (left) | Female | 10 | 6 | Pākehā/European |
| Henry | Male | 10 | 6 | Māori |
| Theo | Male | 9 | 5 | Māori |
| Rewi | Male | 9 | 5 | Māori |
| Jack | Male | 9 | 5 | Asian |
| Ariki | Male | 9 | 5 | Māori |
| Carter | Male | 10 | 6 | Asian |
| Isaac | Male | 9 | 5 | Pākehā/European |
| Hakopa | Male | 9 | 5 | Māori |
| Ella | Female | 9 | 5 | Māori |
| Wiremu | Male | 10 | 6 | Māori |
| Rose | Female | 10 | 6 | Pākehā/European |
| Ava | Female | 9 | 5 | Māori |
| Melody | Female | 10 | 6 | Pākehā/European |
| Charlotte | Female | 9 | 5 | Pākehā/European |
| Giselle | Female | 9 | 5 | Samoan |
| Aroha | Female | 9 | 5 | Māori |
| Addison | Female | 10 | 6 | Pākehā/European |

Note: of the child participants Māori 50%, Pākehā/European 33%, Asian 11%, and Pasifika 5%.

This present study was conducted in 2022 in Terms Two, Three, and Four. The research took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this impacted on this study in several ways. Although lockdowns did not occur in New Zealand schools in 2022, COVID-19 continued to impact on classroom life. For example, teachers were often absent from class due to themselves and/or whānau members contracting COVID-19. Relief teachers were

scarce during this time and so, often, classes were combined. Additionally, there was a high rate of absenteeism for children due to either themselves or whānau being unwell. As a result, during this time, many child participants were not present in class. This sometimes meant that the classroom observations did not go ahead as planned. Class numbers improved significantly towards the end of Term Three and into Term Four.

Once consent from the school, classroom teacher, children, and parents/caregivers had been established, an initial meeting with the classroom teacher was held to discuss the research in more detail. One task early in the research was to recruit and establish the CRAG. In this case, it was important to ensure that the school leadership team understood diversity, and a range of voices in the group would be optimal. In particular, the CRAG ideally would comprise children who were not necessarily school leaders. This is consistent with the expert researchers included in the literature review, who assert that it is often the articulate and confident children that “represent” the student body as a whole (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2019; Lundy, 2007, 2018). Lending further support, the Ministry of Social Development (2003) recommends involving children early in the research process to ensure that they have the time to make informed decisions as well as demonstrating that this research is relevant to their lives (see also Bourke & Loveridge, 2018c; Bourke, O’Neill, & Loveridge 2018a, 2018b; Malatest International, 2021). The principal was supportive and aware of the importance of diversity of voice for the CRAG. In consultation with the classroom teacher of the CRAG, they identified 12 children who were then given the information sheet (see Appendices H and I) and consent forms (see Appendix J) specific to participation in the CRAG. Of the 12 children approached, seven gave consent and participated in the CRAG sessions (see Table 2).

Table 2*CRAG Participants*

| Pseudonym | Gender | Age | Year level |
|-----------|--------|-----|------------|
| Eva | Female | 10 | 6 |
| Ivy | Female | 10 | 6 |
| Caleb | Male | 9 | 5 |
| Paige | Female | 10 | 6 |
| Thomas | Male | 9 | 5 |
| Eli | Male | 9 | 5 |
| Leo | Male | 10 | 6 |

Note: CRAG participants including gender, age, and year level.

3.12 Engaging in a Qualitative Case Study

A qualitative case study involves the study of a real-life context or setting (Creswell, 2013). Case studies involve a bounded system or systems that are identified as a “case” or multiple cases. Data collection for this approach draws on multiple sources of information, such as observations, interviews, audio-visual material, and life and oral histories. These collective data assist the researcher in developing an in-depth understanding of a social phenomenon or setting (Berg, 2004; Creswell, 2013). Consistent with a case study approach, this present study collected multiple forms of data that included individual and group interviews, mid-year focus groups, classroom observations, group activities, and photo-elicitation. Together, this has provided rigour for validity, cross-checking, and the triangulation of data (Creswell, 2013; see also Section 3.14 for data analysis).

Creswell (2013) states there is conjecture amongst researchers on whether case studies are seen as a methodology, research strategy, or a form of inquiry. In Creswell’s view, case studies are considered a methodology that *include* a form of inquiry. In a similar way, Berg (2004) also views case studies as a methodology that systematically gathers information

about individuals, groups, events, and social settings in order to gain an in-depth understanding of how they operate and function. Typically, case studies “tend to focus on holistic description and explanation” (Berg, 2004, p. 251). In contrast, Punch and Oancea (2014) maintain a case study approach is a research strategy rather than a method, reasoning a case study does not have a specific technique; instead, it is seen as a way of organising social data “to preserve the unitary character of the social object being studied” (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p. 148). However, whilst expert opinions may differ on methodology versus research strategy, there is common agreement on the aims of a case study, these being: gaining an in-depth understanding of a natural setting, events, or individuals in order to understand the complexities of its context (Berg, 2004; Creswell, 2013; Punch & Oancea, 2014).

Researchers have raised concerns around generalisability with case studies due to this form of research focusing on a particular phenomenon, event, group(s), or individuals (Creswell, 2013; Punch & Oancea, 2014). However, Berg’s (2004) perspective sees scientific value in investigating and gaining understandings of a single category of individuals, groups, or events. Whilst acknowledging the challenges of generalisability, Creswell (2013) does agree that generalisations can be made across similar settings or groups.

Case studies in the field of education can instigate practice change by providing insights and exemplars (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Critically for this present study, case studies based in educational research are concerned with “narratives for practical learning, rather than a theory” (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p. 153). In this view, case studies are seen as “practical wisdom” with an aim of not producing generalised knowledge but instead offering exemplary knowledge that validates connections and insights between individual and group experiences (Punch & Oancea, 2014).

Patton (2002) presents the notion of *nested* and *layered* case studies that occur during fieldwork. These result from fieldwork that provides a description of a community, neighbourhood, organisation, or programme. Whilst a single case study may be the result of

fieldwork, nested within this large case are smaller cases that tell the stories of individuals, groups, or events. For instance, important events, occurrences, or celebrations may be presented within the larger case. Patton provides the example of a wilderness education programme that employed multiple data collection methods of a series of events and experiences of both groups and individuals over a period of three years. Each of these events and experiences was documented in a series of multilayered, nested (mini) case studies within one large case study—that is, the wilderness education programme. Importantly, each mini case study contributed to the overall final evaluation of the programme.

This present study has been guided by Patton’s (2002) notion of a multilayered nested case study. An overall case study is presented as a descriptive narrative of children’s participation and influence in curriculum decision-making, providing insight into the lives and learning of children and their teacher in one classroom. Alongside this, children will show the ways in which they acted in autonomous and self-determining ways. Presented in Chapter Four and told through three case narratives are the stories of children’s experiences and accounts of everyday learning and events. Each case narrative offers in-depth descriptions and insights into children’s curriculum-based learning and inquiries, initiated by both the teacher and the children.

3.13 Methods

This study aimed to understand how children participated in and influenced curriculum decision-making in a Year 5/6 primary classroom in Aotearoa New Zealand in accordance with their participatory rights as established by the UNCRC (1989; United Nations, n.d.). An initial group activity using Lego models as a prompt for the group interviews (Camacho, 2019) was used to establish how children viewed the general classroom context.

During Term Two, 2022, I undertook classroom observations, usually during the daily mathematics and literacy block, once a week for approximately one and half hours of class

time. This enabled the observation of children, the tasks and activities they engaged in, and for me to talk informally with children. The classroom observations provided the opportunity to notice what children had shared in the initial group interviews in action, gaining further insight and understanding. Mid-year focus groups were also held during Term Two in response to a classroom activity co-constructed with the teacher and the CRAG. Whilst not all children consented to participate in the mid-year focus group interviews, for those that did, further understanding of how children participated in learning and classroom decision-making was added as children, researcher, and teacher grappled with seeing how and why children made choices and decisions in their school and everyday lives.

During the final term of the school year in 2022, fourteen children shared their experiences of personal growth, learning, and achievement in the research classroom during that year. Children demonstrated a variance of experiences and motivations with their learning: some children were keen to share their experiences and wanted to discuss these, at times in-depth, while others were more reticent and responded briefly to questions asked.

The analysis of the data was completed in two ways. First, interviews were transcribed, and time was taken to become immersed in the data with transcripts and field notes read multiple times. Initially, transcripts and field notes were transferred to Excel spreadsheets where, line by line, the data were read and analysed, checking for patterns of voice, and coding the data in response to these developing themes. This was completed three times; however, initially, my teacher perspective influenced the analysis. While qualitative research involves subjectivity, it was not easy to separate my many years of classroom teaching from the aim of deliberately listening just to what children had to say without interpreting this through a teacher-specific lens. Subsequently, a second and different data analysis approach was taken, starting initially with cutting strips of data that focused only on what children said and organising children's responses according to what children focused their discussions on. After the initial sorting exercise, all files were uploaded to the qualitative

data analysis software NVivo, and data analysis continued using the simple coding system guided by the initial strips of data. Through iterative analysis of the dataset and conversations with supervisors, three clear case narratives were conceptualised within a classroom-focused case study.

Observations, group interviews, mid-year focus groups, semi-structured individual interviews, field notes, Lego serious play (LSP), photo-elicitation, and informal discourse were the employed methods for this research. This supported a research partnership that saw the lived experiences of three parties coming together to gain insight into how classroom life was experienced. Alongside this, the research demonstrates how the voices and participation of children informed and influenced the pedagogical and curriculum decision-making for this Year 5/6 classroom.

3.13.1 Data Collection

Data collection in qualitative research can comprise of—but are not limited to—spoken, visual, written, as well as multimodal demonstrations of an individual’s experiences. These occur through interviews, observations, and other visual methods (Punch & Oancea, 2014). In this study, child-friendly data collection strategies were employed with methods closely aligned to the natural setting (Camacho, 2019; Chevalier & Buckles, 2019). Researchers also need to understand that each child’s voice is equally valued because their experiences are unique to them (Graham et al., 2013). Whilst Graham et al. demonstrate children’s genuine participation in research has benefits, these can also be hard to define as the direct result of research undertaken. Taking these factors into consideration, YPAR was employed to engage with children in this present study in ways that were familiar to them through their everyday classroom experiences. Importantly, conversations with children over the course of the study were able to demonstrate the reflective ability of some children when considering their lives and learning. Outlined in this chapter (Chapter Three) are the different approaches utilised in the study, guided by YPAR (see Table 3).

Table 3*Data Collection Methods*

| Frequency | Participants (n=) | Data collection type |
|-----------|---|--|
| 3 | CRAG participants ($n=7$) | Group meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Piloting and feedback questions for semi-structured interviews (for children) • Co-constructing classroom activities on choices and decision-making • Piloting and feedback on questions for individual interviews |
| 1 | Child participants ($n=15$) (7 groups) | Group activity (Lego classroom models) |
| 6 | Child participants ($n=14$) (1 away; 7 groups) | Semi-structured interviews (Lego group interviews) |
| 10 | Child participants ($n=18$; $n=17$ – one participant left the school; varied number on each day) | Classroom observations |
| 4 | Child participants ($n=12$) | Mid-year focus groups |
| 1 | Child participants ($n=14$) | Individual interviews |
| 3 | Teacher ($n=1$) | Semi-structured interviews |
| 1 | Child participants ($n=14$) and nonparticipants ($n=7$) (NB: classrooms were combined on this day due to children and teachers having COVID-19) | Classroom activity (choices & decision-making) |
| 1 | Child participants ($n=1$ boy) nonparticipants ($n=3$) | Painting of community pantry |
| 1 | Teacher ($n=1$), school leaders ($n=2$) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback on the research • Provided a summary of findings • Feedback to researcher provided and included in final report |
| 1 | Child participants ($n=8$) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback on the research • Provided a summary of findings • Feedback to researcher provided and included in the final report |

Note: Brief description of methods employed for data collection.

Data were collected via the above-mentioned methods (see Table 3). Field notes were taken for classroom observations ($n=10$; see Table 4) and were written up during the week they were taken. Often, this commenced with the teacher leading the class with setting out tasks for learning, reading aloud, facilitating team-building activities, or discussing the school values and what this meant for children's learning and relationships with others. During 2022, particularly in Terms Two and Three, the impact of COVID-19 continued to influence school life, and, as a result, there were many absences for both children and their teachers. School leadership responded to absences by combining classes when teachers were on sick leave and class numbers were low. This meant there was some variation in the number of children attending class, the composition of the classes, and the teachers who were teaching the children.

A preliminary semi-structured interview (see Appendix P) with the teacher provided the foundation for the study in how the teacher and researcher would form a collegial research partnership. This also provided the opportunity to gain insight into the teacher's current perspectives on children's participation in curriculum decision-making and how the classroom structure and setting enabled children to be self-determining. The group activity involving building classroom models using Lego also took place in the initial phase of the study. This action-orientated, problem-solving study provided a formative evaluation approach for data gathering, identifying data related to the setting of the study. Additionally, data gathering such as this focuses on ways in which programmes and approaches can be improved, particularly when involving the participants themselves (Patton, 2002).

3.13.2 Observations

Creswell (2013) outlines considerations while conducting field observations. For instance, how the researcher positions themselves—as a participant, nonparticipant, or something in between. Naturalistic observations are guided by the research questions through observations of tasks, activities, and daily routines (Angrosino, 2012; Creswell, 2013;

Pellegrini et al., 2013). A “reactive observation” method was utilised to allow for conversations with children and to be able to clarify what was being observed. Reactive observations are common in the classroom setting and are often used to provide feedback to teachers and administrators to support the improvement of teaching practice (Angrosino, 2012).

Observations are an effective tool for data collection in qualitative research and are focused on the research purpose and questions. Observations include the setting, participants, activities, interactions, and conversations (Creswell, 2013). Observations in the classroom setting are commonly noted as “naturalistic” whereby the researcher does not seek to control what is happening in the setting but is there to observe what naturally occurs (Angrosino, 2012). Angrosino (2012) contends that for educational researchers, there are four observational phases: (i) descriptive observation; (ii) focusing; (iii) selective; and (iv) saturation point. Descriptive observation provides an overview of the environment, including the physical setting and social characteristics. The focusing phase is when the researcher begins to identify patterns of behaviour, asking questions, such as: What is occurring here? Who is involved? An additional layer of rigour is added with the selective phase when the researcher is asking focused questions that can only be answered by selected observations. Through this phase, further clarification of the relationships between people and the environment is made. The final phase involves the data saturation point. Data saturation occurs when new findings consistently replicate what has already been discovered and accounted for (Angrosino, 2012).

Consistent with the aforementioned observational phases, data saturation occurred at the end of the third school term of the research. Consistency in data was evident in classroom observations and mid-year focus groups; for instance, consistent discourse was shared by children about the learning tasks and activities with which they were engaged. However, whilst data saturation had been achieved through observations, group interviews, and mid-

year focus groups, I felt that further insight could be gained by engaging with children as individuals. In consultation with my supervisors, a shift in data gathering from focus groups to individual interviews was made for the final phase of the research. This provided further opportunity to gain student voice and to listen to the individual perspectives and experiences of the children who were participating in the research.

3.13.3 Field Notes

Field notes contributed to the data gathering and were informed by observations of day-to-day classroom life. Mechanical details, such as remembering to take notes, accurately recording quotes, and funnelling down observations from a broad focus to a narrower one, were additional factors to consider (Creswell, 2013). As well as this, there are numerous formats for taking field notes from jotting down a few words and phrases through to whole sentences. Other considerations are the inclusions of reflections on the day's events, who participated, and in what activities, and conversations that were had. Additionally, some field notes were also recalled when transcripts were reread (Berg, 2004; Punch & Oancea, 2014).

Field notes during the observations were written up and often expanded further. Notably, Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (2001, cited in Berg, 2004) identify rudimentary aspects, such as recording date, time, and place of observation, as fundamental inclusions. Including details that involve sensory impressions are also important, concurring with Creswell (2013). Additionally, the researcher's responses could include specific phrases and "insider language" and recording questions and wonderings. Four distinct elements have been established by Berg (2004) for taking field notes: (i) cryptic notes; (ii) detailed descriptions; (iii) analytic notes; and (iv) subjective reflections. Consistent with this advice, field notes recorded the day, time, weather, and an overview of what was occurring on arrival in the classroom. As well as this was the inclusion of the voices and interactions of the children and teacher. Observations, conversations, as well as photos of work artefacts were also gathered throughout the study.

3.13.4 Semi-structured Interviews

At the outset of the research with the teacher and the children, semi-structured interviews occurred. The purpose of the first interviews was to introduce the research and to gain much-needed insight into the classroom setting, rituals, routines, and the children who were central to this research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Year 5/6 classroom teacher (see Appendix P) and the CRAG as a starting point, followed by semi-structured group interviews with children for the initial group activity (see Appendix L).

The interview schedule for the semi-structured interviews explored how the teacher and the children understood student voice, participation in curriculum decisions, and what this meant in relation to children being self-determining. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using predetermined questions that gave the flexibility to be responsive and adaptive to the participants responses and discussion (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Additional “probing” prompts were also included in the interview schedule and were used to gain further insight into the responses of the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Chevalier and Buckles (2019) describe this as an interactive process of listening to each other while also “framing the discussion at hand” (p. 93).

The semi-structured interviews with children occurred following the Lego classroom model building. Children chose to work in either pairs or small groups to build their classroom models with group interviews following either on the day or the next day. All group interviews began with the Lego classroom model as a prompt for discussion with the semi-structured interview schedule following on from these. In many cases, the scheduled questions were answered during the discussion focused on the classroom models. Table 4 identifies each group and the participants.

Table 4*Lego Group Participants*

| Lego groups (n=7) | Participants (n=15) |
|-------------------|------------------------------|
| Lego group one | Hakopa & Ariki* |
| Lego group two | Melody, Charlotte, & Addison |
| Lego group three | Aroha & Rose |
| Lego group four | Wiremu & Theo |
| Lego group five | Isaac & Giselle |
| Lego group six | Jack & Carter |
| Lego group seven | Rewi & Ella |

Note: The Lego groups were decided on by children for the construction of the classroom models. Group interviews were held with each group. The findings chapter, Chapter Four, refers to the Lego groups as a data source. *Ariki participated in the Lego classroom model building but was sick the following day when group interviews continued.

3.13.5 Focus Groups

Important aspects for group interviewing are the researcher taking on a facilitation and moderation role. Through this, the researcher records the conversations, noting such things as group dynamics. The researcher provides the questions and offers prompts for discussion throughout the process. Group interviews can be used in conjunction with other data gathering instruments for both qualitative and quantitative research (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Focus group interviews have a specific topic to discuss with groups, and these usually have between 6–10 participants (Patton, 2002). Additionally, these groups typically have a similar background or interest. The purpose of focus groups is primarily on the discussion and is not seen as a forum for problem-solving. It is critical to plan these interviews well and ensure a safe environment that is conducive to discussion. The strengths of this approach is the ability to offer flexibility and spontaneity and “go with the flow” (Patton, 2002, p. 343).

Mid-year focus group interviews were held with groups of between 2–5 children following an activity co-designed with the teacher and CRAG to gain insight into what

children saw as choices and decision-making. An interview schedule was developed as well as consent forms for the mid-year focus groups (see Appendix Q) to ensure ongoing consent. As stated earlier in Section 3.5.3, not all children consented to participating. It is worth noting that children questioned being able to say “no” to the focus group with some children asking if they could they really say “no”. When I responded with “yes”, they could say “no”, for two groups, there was a mass exodus. In many ways, this was a disheartening day as a researcher but, equally, a proud one because children clearly felt able to make authentic decisions about participating or not. Table 5 identifies the mid-year focus groups and participants.

Table 5

Mid-year Focus Groups

| Mid-year focus groups (n=4) | Participants (n=12) |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Mid-year focus group one | Giselle |
| Mid-year focus group two | Wiremu, Melody, Charlotte, Ella |
| Mid-year focus group three | Henry, Ariki, Jack |
| Mid-year focus group four | Aroha, Carter, Addison, Isaac |

Note: The mid-year focus groups occurred after the choice and decision-making class activity. The findings chapter, Chapter Four, refers to the mid-year focus groups as a data source.

3.13.6 Individual Interviews

Nearing the end of Term Three, 2022, preparation had begun for another round of focus group interviews. There were a few considerations for this, such as drawing on the classroom observations as well as the inquiry-based learning that was occurring. The focus for inquiry-based learning had been discussed formally in a mid-year semi-structured interview and informally with the teacher with great interest. This resulted in attending the research school at different times on some occasions to observe parts of the inquiry-based learning. However, what had become apparent during Term Three was that data saturation had occurred for the regular time allotted for classroom observations. This was certainly the case for the morning block when observations had been taking place. The results from the

analysis of data from the Lego group and mid-year focus group interviews as well as classroom observations told a similar story. However, it was clear that there was a gap in the data collection. Group interviews had provided the opportunities for children to share their perspectives and indeed their stories of learning and classroom life. What they did not offer was the individual experiences of each child; for this, they needed their own time and space. Therefore, it was decided that individual interviews would be held in Term Four, 2022. Part of this was ensuring ongoing informed assent, which was gained verbally from 14 children at the beginning of each interview.

I was fortunate that over the course of three terms, relationships had been developed with children, and there was an existing rapport (Seidman, 2013). In saying this, I was also aware of children's body language, noting whether they were comfortable in the interview or not. Even though verbal assent was given, it was clear that for some children they were not comfortable and so, I as a researcher, kept the interview to a minimum. This meant that interviews lasted between 10 and 30 minutes. Some children who had been keen to participate and share in the Lego groups and mid-year focus groups were less forthcoming in the individual interviews. Equally, some children who had shared little in the group interviews were highly articulate in the individual interviews. Seidman (2013) notes this as being a "delicate balance" of respecting what is shared whilst also taking the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of participants' views and experiences. Whilst the researcher might seek to create a unique interview relationship focused on the interview purpose, there are numerous social forces that contribute to this process, these being the social and cultural identities and lived experiences of the participants (Graham et al., 2013).

The individual interviews with the children affirmed the importance of gaining their perspective on how children participate and influence decision-making. Additionally, individual interviews supported a few of the children to critically reflect on their learning,

relationships, and school life. These interviews have provided additional depth to this research.

3.13.7 Lego Serious Play

One of the first activities proposed with the CRAG was an initial activity to orientate me to the classroom environment and meet the child participants who would take on the role of co-researchers. The use of the Lego models as an initial activity was inspired by another research project I was involved in as a research assistant. For that research, children created collages, reflecting their informal learning. I saw how valuable the use of these prompts were to engage with children and listen to their views. As a teacher, I knew the value of Lego, blocks, and similar items of play in children constructing and making sense of their worlds. Researching using Lego in research with children confirmed this as a valid research method known as Lego serious play (LSP; Camacho, 2019).

LSP is a “thinking communication, and problem-solving methodology for teams” (Camacho, 2019, p. 229). This involves play theory through persons using their imagination and storytelling to bring about a shared understanding. For this study, children constructed their classroom environment and the “players” within it where they could “describe and interpret their reality” (Camacho, 2019, p. 244). The hands-on, Lego classroom models acted as a generative tool that prompted discussion in both generalised and specific ways. The Lego activity allowed me to gain a greater insight into the classroom setting itself and how this influenced children’s engagement with peers and learning. This activity also provided the opportunity to discuss children’s roles in the classroom and what their interests were, so I could begin to understand the extent of student voice and participation in the classroom setting (see Figures 2, 3, 4, & 5 in Chapter Four). Notably, LSP is seen as a method that supports children who are often silent and marginalised and is a way of engaging with student voice and authentically involves the children in the research approach (Camacho, 2019). Additionally, this method facilitates collaboration, gaining an understanding of the child’s

lived experiences, and contributes to the transformation of learning and teaching (Camacho, 2019).

3.13.8 Photo-elicitation

For this study, photo-elicitation was used by the children and I (informed and guided by children) to further illustrate what school experiences, tasks, and activities they identified as instances of participation. Briggs et al. (2014) employed photo-elicitation in their research into children's sense of place. Children were given opportunities to take photos that demonstrated what was meaningful to them, and these photos were later used as interview prompts.

Ní Chróinín et al.'s (2020) research focused on physical education using photo-elicitation in the form of a photo diary to help articulate how “they seek to understand, interpret, and think” (Ní Chróinín et al., 2020, p. 6). Like Briggs et al. (2014), interviews were conducted using the photo diaries, and these formed the basis for data analysis. Significantly for Ní Chróinín et al. (2020), the photos provided evidence of real-life experiences of what was important to children.

Photo-elicitation also occurred in the research completed by Jackson (2019) in a primary school, located in Victoria, Australia. Described as “secret snappers”, photos were taken of what was considered as “deep learning”. These included photos taken by children, teachers, and other people from the school community. Photos of tasks, activities, and, in particular, their interests were used as additional tools and prompts at focus group meetings and individual interviews. In similar ways, this present study used photos from the initial group activity (Lego classroom models), classroom observations, as well as photos taken by the children used as prompts for the CRAG, mid-year focus groups, and individual interviews. These photos provided context for discussions and were often a tool to gain further insight into the perspectives of children (Zhang & Hennebry-Leung, 2023).

Collectively, these methods formed a solid foundation for gathering data that were analysed and shared with the CRAG, children, teacher, and school leaders for feedback and perspectives. Of particular importance when entering the world of children is understanding the context and vernacular of children. Coming into this space, I was not privy to the insider knowledge of classroom life, the children, the routines, and the common language and terms that were shared. The CRAG provided key information that supported me to enter the classroom with some background knowledge, together with an interview schedule and initial activity informed by the advice and guidance of children from the same school context and same year level.

3.14 Data Analysis: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Throughout the study I gathered the research data and conducted the data analysis in an iterative way. I also regularly checked my interpretations of the data with the participating children, Whaea Tupou, the principal, and the CRAG, as appropriate. After the data gathering phase, the data analysis commenced, employing a reflexive thematic analysis. Throughout the study, I continued to question to what extent children experienced genuine partnership in the research. This meant returning to the research questions, revisiting transcripts, and listening (repeatedly) to what children had shared, and questioning what this meant from a child's perspective—not an adult's. What was clear was the genuine partnership that existed between the children and their teacher. In the end, this study was able to share the narratives of children's learning and school life and how this, in their classroom, influenced decision-making for curriculum learning and classroom life. The findings, presented in Chapter Four, will demonstrate how the following reflexive approach to data analysis developed and informed a case study that has been conceptualised through three case narratives. The first case narrative focuses on children's views, perspectives, and experiences in the curriculum areas of literacy and mathematics. The second draws on teacher- and school-initiated inquiries that included school camp preparation and developing a product or experience for

the annual school fair. The final case narrative tells the experiences of the children through a child-initiated inquiry that resulted in the building of a community pantry.

Data analysis serves three purposes: (i) to reduce and organise raw data; (ii) to assess the patterns, connections, and trends; and (iii) to support and validate conclusions, and draw well-informed inferences (Greene, 2007). Additionally, data triangulation serves to strengthen a study when multiple methods of data collection are used. A common misconception of data triangulation is that different sources of data yield the same result; however, the purpose of data triangulation is to identify consistencies across a data set (Patton, 2002). Triangulation of data was achieved in this qualitative inquiry through analysing interviews, observations, group activities, and artefacts (Patton, 2002). Whilst Patton asserts there are no predetermined tests that can be applied for reliability and validity, as researchers, we can do our utmost to provide a fair representation of the data. Research that involves qualitative inquiry emphasises the need for cross-data and validity checking by checking for consistency, validity, and reliability of patterns and themes. Cross-data validity checks were made across all the data collected and included checking hard-copy strips of data and also running further checks using *NVivo* that included confirming the context of voices shared by children.

Thematic coding and analysis is typically used in qualitative research and not seen as a single method. Instead, this is seen as a family of methods with common characteristics but also significant divergences (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The varying approaches to thematic analysis demonstrate the flexibility of this analysis tool and can be seen in both inductive and deductive approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Employing a reflexive thematic analysis incorporates reflexive research that is context situated and, as a result of this, shaped by processes and practices instigated in the research. Such research recognises the value of subjectivity, context, and locatedness (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2022). It is through the open acknowledgement of my own subjectivity that understandings of the participants' lives, combined with the data gathered, formed shared patterns of meaning.

The data analysis was conducted using a reflexive thematic analysis approach. The point of coding is to discover the evidence for the themes. Reflexive thematic analysis codes are developed and later grouped into themes that reflect shared patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Braun and Clarke (2022) demonstrate that coding is not a process of generating codes and code labels but that codes are conceptualised as building blocks for analysis. A single code exists as an analytical entity in its own right and signals the “way to your destination” with the resulting theme being “the destination”. Reflexive thematic analysis themes act as patterns of meaning that underpin and unify the central theme (Braun & Clarke, 2019). For the purpose of this study, themes were developed to demonstrate patterns of shared meaning that were constructed from the data in open, exploratory, flexible, and iterative ways.

An important factor of reflexive thematic analysis is the need for researcher transparency and the continual questioning and querying of assumptions whilst coding and interpreting data. When themes are developed in this manner, they do not passively emerge from either data or coding; rather, themes are seen as interpretive stories about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2022). The result of a reflexive thematic analysis coding determined that the data was reread multiple times and was recoded to ensure that the voices of the children were presented in a way that reflected their thoughts and views. In line with Braun and Clarke’s (2019, 2021, 2022) view of reflexive thematic analysis, it required balancing researcher subjectivity with the importance of foregrounding the voices of children.

Qualitative analysis is often seen as an adventure, and as messy, organic, complex, and contested (Braun & Clarke, 2022). For this study, I entered this classroom as a researcher but also as an experienced teacher who was familiar and comfortable with the context of the classroom. This is consistent with research that includes researcher reflexivity and has been outlined in Section 3.6. This meant that, at times, I had to grapple with viewing data from two perspectives—one as a teacher, the other as a researcher. Support and guidance were found

through my supervisors, and by continually returning to the everyday checklist (see Figure 1) and the guidance that the “space”, “voice”, “audience”, and “influence” quadrants provided in striving to see the data from a child’s perspective.

3.15 Data Analysis: Inclusion of Photo-elicitation

Photo-elicitation was predominately used during interviews where specific photos taken earlier (by the children or me) were used to support discussions with children and as a reminder of activities in which they had participated. The use of photo-elicitation interviews in educational research supports children to make sense of their lived experiences, their beliefs about learning, and the pedagogical practices of teachers (Zhang & Hennebry-Leung, 2023). Additionally, photos that are included at interviews “trigger deeper individual consciousness and latent memories, and elicit participants’ personal knowledge, thoughts, and emotional responses” (Zhang & Hennebry-Leung, 2023, p. 2).

A systematic review of 34 studies (funnelled down from 117 studies) was conducted by Zhang and Hennebry-Leung (2023) on the use of photo-elicitation in investigating children’s meaningful participation and experiences in everyday life. Their research has provided a useful classification of three types of photos. The first is participant-driven whereby photos are taken by participants, providing concrete references to their daily lives whilst providing the researcher with an insider’s view of participants’ experiences. The second type is researcher-driven photographs that have been taken of the setting, setting artefacts, and people. The third type of photos are pre-existing images that are independent of the research. For this present research, a combination of participant-driven and researcher-driven photos were used as prompts for discussions alongside an interview schedule. This began with photos of Lego classroom models and included photos of everyday learning in the classroom. These photos were either taken by the children or me. Verbal permission to take photos of either work products or children themselves was always sought from children. I

was also careful to de-identify images of children or nonparticipating children (Zhang & Hennebry-Leung, 2023).

Similar to conducting a reflexive thematic analysis, awareness of subjectivity when interpreting photos and analysing the photo-elicited information is needed. This includes transparency of researcher values, potential bias, and preconceptions of photos (Zhang & Hennebry-Leung, 2023). This was largely mitigated in this present study because photos were either a result of observations and conversations in the classroom, therefore providing another piece of evidence, or were used as a prompt for discussions either in mid-year focus groups or individual interviews.

Typically, data from photo-elicitation is analysed as a stimulus for interviews, as a separate analysis of the photos from the verbal account of participants, or in analysing and displaying photo-elicited narratives alongside photos as a data source presented in the findings (Zhang & Hennebry-Leung, 2023). In this study, alongside prompts during mid-year focus groups and individual interviews, photos were also used as further illustrations of children's perspectives and experiences in this report.

3.16 Summary

Decisions concerning appropriate research methodology and design informed this present study's aspirations from a child-rights perspective. The UNCRC (1989; United Nations, n.d.) and Article 12's premise that children have a right to have their views listened to and considered on all matters concerning their lives were key considerations for all aspects of this study.

A qualitative research approach was employed to explore the extent that children actively participated in and influenced learning and classroom life. Qualitative research is noted for its ability to be transformative, and, in the field of education, supports notions of practice change (Berg, 2004; Chevalier & Buckles, 2019; Creswell, 2013). The social and cultural contexts were important aspects of this study with a qualitative approach that

employed reflexive practices that acknowledges researcher subjectivity and the importance of the context of children's lives (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2022; Creswell, 2013; Fabian & Huber, 2019; Kōngäs and Määttä, 2021; von Unger et al., 2022).

Ethical considerations formed a substantial part of the research design that required full ethics approval. Included in the ethics application was the importance of doing no harm to children, including protecting their rights to privacy and confidentiality. Written, verbal, informed, and ongoing consent was also sought, ensuring these were delivered in child- and parent-friendly ways. Additionally, cultural considerations were an important aspect and were informed by engaging a cultural advisor and Aotearoa New Zealand research centred on Kaupapa Māori worldviews (Graham et al., 2015; Hawkins, 2017; Locke et al., 2013). In addition, recent research by Bishop (2023) and Riwai-Couch (2021) supports gaining further insight for ākonga Māori and Pasifika in the educational setting.

From the outset, I aimed to partner with children and teacher as co-researchers to uphold children's rights to participation, inclusion, and influence through child-friendly methods (Graham et al., 2013; Mitra & McCormick, 2017). To support this, PAR was seen as the appropriate approach due to its action-orientated, partner-inquiry stance. PAR is seen as an umbrella term for several forms of this methodology. Critical emancipatory PAR was considered for its strong connections to grassroots, community, radical democracy, and transformative practices in the education setting. The nexus of research on this view comprises of scientific inquiry and lived experiences of children that lead to shared understandings in transformative and democratic ways. This form of PAR aligned with the aspirational aims of this research to be hands-on, transformative, and knowledge-building for all stakeholders (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019).

YPAR formed the final layer to this complex methodological approach. Whilst YPAR is not specific to education, it does provide a valuable basis for co-researching with children. YPAR aims to have a genuine impact on society and the lives of children (Corney et al.,

2022). Notably for this study was the inclusion of an inquiry stance with the added rigour of exploring the ethical dilemmas in engaging with this form of research. For this, it was important to draw on the experts in the field of co-research to gain a deeper understanding of what this meant for children and adults. Comparable education-based research, such as Bourke and Loveridge (2018b), Mitra (2008), Mitra and McCormick (2017), and Nelson (2018), were examined for ways in which to support and further student voice and agency. Further still, the works of Corney et al., (2022), Lundy (2007), Lundy, McEvoy, and Byrne, (2011), Lundy and McEvoy (2012), and Shier (2001) informed the legal obligations of children's rights to participation as well as further valuable advice on conducting research with children.

A CRAG was engaged at the beginning of the study and was consulted with throughout. The CRAG proved to be an important part of the success of the research, mainly because of the insider knowledge of the lives of children of this age and the culture and context of the research school. Notably, the CRAG offered advice and feedback on the research and co-constructed an activity for the research classroom that added further valuable data (Corney et al., 2022; Lundy & McEvoy, 2012; Shier, 2001).

The analysis of the multiple datasets was undertaken using a reflexive thematic analysis approach that acknowledged researcher subjectivity (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021, 2022). At times, this caused tension when my "teacher lens" influenced the initial analysis. This was eventually resolved with a purposeful focus purely on the voices of children, and, whilst this did not completely remove subjectivity, it did lessen it. Data were triangulated across a variety of data-gathering instruments that included field notes, classroom observations, group and mid-year focus groups, individual interviews, and child-friendly activities (Patton, 2002). Through cross-data validity checking, data saturation was achieved (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). The addition of photo-elicitation at the data gathering and

analysis stages provided further opportunities to foreground the voices of children (Zhang & Hennebry-Leung, 2023).

The following findings chapter (Chapter Four) is presented as a case study that includes three case narratives that are told through the voices, views, and experiences of 18 children (with final participant numbers of 17 due to one child leaving), aged 9–10 years, along with their teacher.

Chapter Four

Findings

This case study, presented as three case narratives, has provided the opportunity to concentrate on telling the stories of children's learning and lives as faithfully as possible, through the child's lens. Three case narratives were determined: (i) curriculum-focused learning; (ii) school- and teacher-initiated inquiry; and (iii) child-initiated-inquiry. The following sections (4.2, 4.3, and 4.4) outline the findings through three case narratives that aimed to contextualise and to bring to the fore voices of Year 5/6 children in a single classroom, along with the voice of their teacher. This study was instigated to explore how children participated in curriculum decision-making in meaningful ways that supported, motivated, and encouraged active learning.

Consistently evident throughout the three case narratives were the culturally responsive pedagogical approaches by the teacher and school leadership. The cultural competencies of *whanaungatanga*, building strong relationships with children, whānau, and community; *manaakitanga*, the demonstration of values, such as integrity, trust, sincerity, and equity; *tangata whenuatanga*, place-based, sociocultural awareness and knowledge; *ako*, reciprocity in teaching and learning; and *wānanga*, communication, problem-solving, and innovation (Ministry of Education, 2011) are demonstrated through the voices and actions of children and their teacher. Additionally, by acknowledging and contextualising curriculum-based learning, children's participation, influence, and autonomy have a greater possibility of realising children's participatory rights. However, first, the analysis of Lego classroom models is discussed, with this group activity setting the scene for this study.

4.1 Building Classroom Models

The Lego classroom models proved to be a successful initial group activity for beginning to understand how the research classroom operated, what children considered important to their learning, and how they participated in learning tasks and activities. The

Lego models also provided the opportunity to familiarise myself with classroom routines and the culture of the classroom. It was during the first group interviews that initial themes for the research study began to appear. These themes included the importance of the social context of learning alongside children valuing choice in organising and planning how they engaged in learning tasks. Further to this, children shared how their interests were included in core curriculum areas, such as mathematics, literacy, and inquiry-based learning, often referred to as projects by the children and teacher.

Figures 2, 3, and 4 illustrate three of the six classroom models built collaboratively by children and offer a consistent and true representation of the classroom configuration. One of the groups shared that this classroom was renovated the previous year and included the input of the children in that class; they commented, “It wasn’t actually our classroom last year, but it was [another classroom teacher], and his classroom was the one who designed it with the colours and stuff” (Lego group two). Figures 2, 3, and 4 demonstrate some variation in the detail that has been added, but key classroom features can be identified. For instance, the “low” table is placed correctly in the middle of the classroom and is represented as blue and yellow in Figure 2, brown and yellow in Figure 3, and blue and green in Figure 4. Figures 2 and 3 clearly show where the Chromebooks are stored with white shelving and added thin

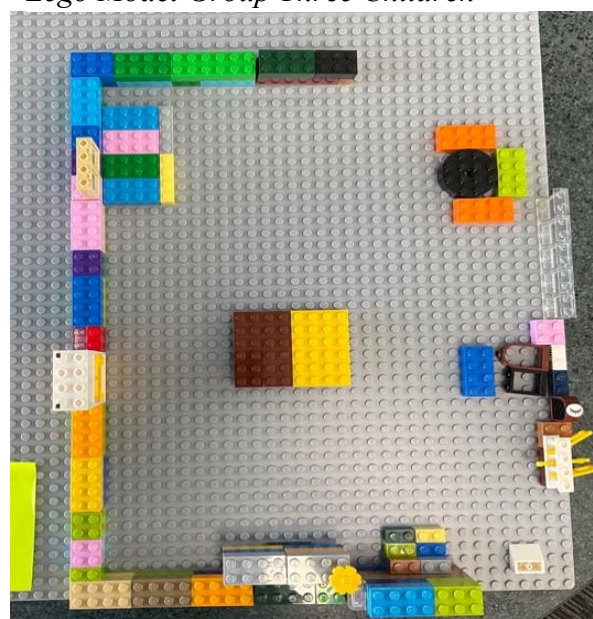
Figure 2

Lego Model Group Two Children



Figure 3

Lego Model Group Three Children



brown bricks (see Figure 2) and yellow thin bricks (see Figure 3) as representations of the Chromebooks.

Figure 3 shows the large double doors using clear bricks that lead outside with a blank space on one wall that leads to what the children termed as the “blue zone”, a collaborative space shared by two classes. Doors and spaces in the wall are consistent with this for Figures 3 and 4. Figures 2, 3, and 4 include the large TV screen with Figures 2 and 3 adding the collective reward jar (represented by the flower brick in Figure 3) at the “teacher’s station”. One group shared:

The pasta jar right here is how, if we’re being good, they’ll add some into it [the teacher]; if we get to the right amount, we get our reward. It’s basically being good, inside and outside, and letting other people play outside, and then getting recognised by a teacher. (Lego group three)

Further insight to the reward system was provided by another group:

We decide what would it [the reward], and we put it on there, with a sticker, and we wrote something on it [what the reward could be], and then we had to keep it [the pasta in the jar]. If the pasta gets to there, we get to have it [what the reward was, determined by children]. (Lego group five)

Figure 2 provided the greatest detail of the three models. On the right-hand side wall, the black bricks represent where their individual tote trays are stored for such items as books and stationery. At the top right-hand corner is the window seat, which was referred to by a number of children in group interviews as a quiet place to “zone out”, read, or observe nature. The top left-hand corner is where the “tall” table is; this table has access to power outlets to charge Chromebooks and is also mentioned in the group interviews. In the middle of the left-hand wall is the teacher’s station that includes the TV, teacher’s chair, and the reward jar also sitting on top of the teacher station.

Figure 4

Lego Model Group Five Children



Figure 5

Lego Models: The Circle Table



Figure 5 shows the model building in progress. This also highlights part of the classroom that has been consistently mentioned throughout the group and individual interviews—the “circle” table clearly visible in the corner of each classroom model and a favourite place, particularly for several of the boys. Some of them referred to this as “the gaming table”. In real life, the vinyl-covered spongy seats are orange, and these are represented in Figures 2, 4, and 5. All models represent this as a round table except for Figure 4, highlighting the importance children placed on this area.

The inclusion of the initial group activity provided insight into classroom life at the beginning of the study. Children created faithful representations of their classroom, including sharing where the ideas for the classroom design came from. The models also provided the opportunity to explore how children engaged in this environment physically and socially. Several discussions were had about their learning and how they participated in the curriculum decision-making. These are explored through the following three case narratives: curriculum-focused learning, school- and teacher-initiated inquiries, and a child-initiated inquiry.

4.2 Curriculum-focused Learning

Mathematics and literacy were prioritised in the curriculum every day within the morning block, Monday–Friday, 9.00 a.m.–11.00 a.m. At the beginning of 2022, the teacher reflected and revised her mathematics programme with a focus on meeting the diverse needs of children, ensuring the mathematics curriculum made space for explicit teaching and the practise of new learning for children.

The classroom’s reading programme involved children working in differentiated workshops using a school-wide structured literacy programme. In the first half of the year, all reading workshops were run in the research classroom by the teacher. Three girls said in a group interview they needed to stay in their classroom for reading “because of COVID” (Lego group three). However, during the second half of the year, reading workshops were taught across the senior syndicate in different classrooms. These workshops had different foci, including structured literacy, comprehension workshops, and flipped learning.

Children recounted their experiences of the mathematics and literacy curriculum areas, connecting their learning to personal experiences, interests, and whānau, predominately within the social context of learning. Children commented on how valued connections with others motivated and engaged them in the core curriculum areas of mathematics and literacy. Two boys in a group interview noted that along with mathematics, reading was their favourite subject. While they were not fans of writing, one said they “don’t really mind reading. I like being with the teacher and doing her things” (Lego group six). Another boy agreed and equally enjoyed “mathematics and reading at the same time” (Theo). Section 4.2.1 starts with the voice of the teacher with input from the school leadership team to demonstrate the motivation and pedagogical approaches employed for teaching and learning in this classroom, foregrounding the importance of whanaungatanga, the building of relationships and creating a strong sense of belonging.

4.2.1 *Variation in Approaches to Teaching and Learning*

Creating a sense of whanaungatanga by building positive relationships with children was a priority for the teacher and an important part of ensuring the success for children and teacher in the classroom. The teacher put considerable time at the beginning of the year into building a classroom environment that was akin to a whānau environment. The teacher and school leadership highlighted several challenges for this but identified what led to success:

For the principal and teacher, it was important that the children in this class recognised their culture in their teacher. It was important that relationships went beyond knowing children's place in their whānau, what games they liked to play, or what their reading level was. For these children, they needed to connect in a deeper, more genuine way. The principal referred to this as a cultural connect. (Principal, deputy principal, & teacher meeting notes, 24.8.2023)

Interviews with the teacher and classroom observations demonstrated that relationship building, creating a sense of whānau, and ensuring what the principal termed as a “cultural connect” occurred through everyday interactions as well as team-building games. In an interview with the teacher, she explained:

Every single day I did a team-building activity with different groups. So, I purposely split up groups because I just want to get rid of that clique vibe. Different groups with a different focus, so it was relationship building and it was non-academic, so it was all just fun stuff that they could do with each group; I let them know I wanted them to build relationships. (Whaea Tupou)

An example of this was seen during a classroom observation with the game “*Hare i te whare*”, a game where the teacher calls an action in te reo Māori and children quickly respond (or are eliminated from the game—similar to musical chairs). The three randomly called instructions see children responding as an individual, in pairs, or in threes. The actions are: “*hare!*” (freeze/stop); “*whare!*” (two children make a house); or “*hare i te whare*” (two

children make a house and another child sits in the house). The following observation of this team-building game was made:

Children found their own space on the mat and responded to the action calls of the teacher. Children were intent, focused on the teacher, with high energy—it was very exciting. All children were engaged and very competitive, responding quickly to each action call. As children were eliminated, they joined the others on the outside of the circle, cheering their friends on. It became obvious this was very much “boys versus girls”. The final two, one boy and one girl, were cheered on to win, the boys cheering on Ariki, the girls cheering on Rose. Rose won this game and said later when I congratulated her that it was good to win because no one thought she would. (Field notes, 12/5/2022)

Cooperative Learning Groups. A new initiative to the school in 2022 was the introduction of cooperative groups to encourage children to work with others. The teacher believed it was an opportunity for children to engage with other children outside of their established friendship groups. The teacher identified Kagan structures² (groupings; Clowes, 2023) as an approach that had been part of this success (see Figure 6). The teacher took the time to introduce and develop the skills required for children to work cooperatively in these groups:

I think it’s a mix of doing heaps of team building, team activities—lots of the Kagan. Kagan really mixed and really formed my class, just having different groups mixed, so having my boys mixed up with my girls. Having different abilities from my highest abilities to my lowest abilities mixed in. (Whaea Tupou)

² Kagan structures provide five tools to support cooperative learning for groups in the classroom. The five tools are aimed at promoting cooperative learning, communication, and engagement.

Figure 6

Cooperative Learning Groups



On one occasion, the teacher and I co-constructed an activity with input and advice from the CRAG for a choice and decision-making activity to try and gain a better understanding of what children’s views and perspectives on being a decision-maker were. The teacher felt that Kagan groupings would work well for this activity:

Whaea Tupou explained that the school was using the Kagan approach to grouping, so we are going to use this approach. Firstly “rally robin” for working in pairs and then “round robin” for group work. Whaea Tupou has had an activity that focused on “we like” [see Figure 6], which we both agreed is a great platform to build on with the choice/decision activity. The Kagan groups are already established as mixed ability groups. Aroha asked Whaea Tupou why they could not choose their own groups. Whaea Tupou responded that Kagan groups are about learning to work with different children with different ideas, and it supports their classroom being inclusive (school values). We discussed roles in the groups; this had been a problem the first time they did this as Whaea Tupou had assigned a scribe in each group with the thinking that this would take the pressure off children who were reluctant at writing. This resulted in tears from a couple of the boys in her class, and she did not expect this. I suggested

that we have each person recording their thoughts on the brainstorm using a different coloured pen, and Whaea Tupou agreed that this could work well.

(Field notes, 19/5/2024)

A Shift to Mixed-ability Grouping. A fundamental change in the mathematics programme for this teacher had been a shift from a whole-class approach to working in two smaller groups. The teacher explained that she had wanted to improve her skills and knowledge in teaching mathematics and had been participating in professional learning and development in this curriculum area. She was heartened by children's responses in an end-of-year survey: "Seeing the surveys that their favourite part of the day was maths made me really happy because that means that I'm doing something right, and secondly, I feel more confident teaching maths" (Whaea Tupou). Children's participation started with the choice of their mathematics group names and followed an interest early in the year around the foods they enjoyed. Mixed-ability grouping formed the basis for these groups, scaffolding children's learning across three mathematics stages for each group. The teacher noted, "This year I quickly learned that it's easier for me to access their brains in small groups" (Whaea Tupou).

Some children shared their experiences working in mixed-ability mathematics groups and what this meant for their learning. For example, "Well, we've learned how to tell the time, like what they're doing right now [group with the teacher]. That's the Snickers group. We're in Mars Bars, so we're doing Mathletics" (Lego group six). Another boy explained his experiences of the maths groups:

We have two groups: Snickers and Mars Bars. One group is doing their Mathletics tasks and going into the Prodigy, or, if it's 10 minutes till lunch, sometimes it's the internet. So, I'm in Snickers; in our maths groups, we are making this Christmas tree out of 3D triangles. (Henry)

In September 2022 (Interview, 28.9.2022), the teacher reflected on her goals for the mathematics programme:

I feel like it's my programme itself. So, there's a mix of independent work, but there's also a mix of where they come to me, and I just talk them through and teach them. I guess, it's my structure. So, on the first day [Monday], I frontload. Normally, my idea was to frontload the whole class as one, but now I do it in my groups. My groups are mixed ability as well. So, I frontload on Monday, and then Tuesday/Wednesday I do a problem-solving task. On Thursday, I do workshops with children who I just notice need a bit of *mahi* [work] around that. Fridays are usually maths games and more practical activities on Fridays. I implemented it this year, and I've loved it, and the children have gotten used to it as well. So, I feel like maybe that's part of it as well. (Whaea Tupou)

Place-based, Classroom-based Curriculum. During the first and subsequent interviews with the teacher, it was clear that children's interests consistently formed the basis for the teaching and context of learning for children, demonstrating her commitment to tangata whenuatanga, a place-based, culturally, and socially aware curriculum. This was evidenced by two children, one of whom commented: "I don't think everyone in the senior syndicate is doing time, but I think Whaea Tupou wants us to know how to tell the time" (Lego group six). The teacher confirmed this: "We do things differently, never mind what other classes are doing. What works for me in my class, so it's just gathering their voice" (Whaea Tupou).

Differentiation in Teaching Approaches for Reading. Term Three saw a shift in the senior syndicate to reading groups across three classrooms. While the teacher continued teaching a structured literacy programme in her classroom, most of her class shifted to other classrooms for the reading block. This change once again highlighted for the teacher the importance of building strong, trusting relationships with the children in her class with the

change in structure showing the work she had put into building a sense of whanaungatanga and noticing this was not as strong with a different group of children:

I take structured literacy groups across the team. I've got three of my children on structured literacy now. So, my children are split amongst other classes. It's a bit harder for me—this is where I miss my class as well; we had set up the expectations, and I trusted my children to be on the right websites when on computers. So, I feel like my dilemma at the moment with reading is that I do give them choice—to my new group—but they're on the wrong platforms. So, I have to change it. So that's when I miss my class. (Whaea Tupou)

During the reading block in Term Three, children engaged in the reading programme using various structures and approaches, ranging from individual reading with the teacher to flipped learning where children engaged in short online videos developed by the teacher, outlining learning tasks to be carried out independently. Reading groups were determined by the teacher based on the child's progress against the curriculum levels. Children shared a range of understandings of what reading activities they were engaged in and the reasons for this. For example:

We do our senior syndicate reading where we get split into reading groups that are best for us, and we usually have to listen to podcasts, write the summary of what we've heard in the podcast, and it usually gets checked by the end of the week to see what we did in the week. (Rose)

Another girl explained what she was doing for reading in Term Three:

Everyone's in a different class for reading now. I'm in another room for reading, and we do different things, different times. The main thing we do is flipped learning, and the teacher has this Passage Picker. Flipped learning just shows you what we're learning. There's a video, and it tells you what we're doing, and it tells you what to do and how to do it. Normally, it's involving a book because

it's reading. We have to read that book, and, for "Passage Picker", we have to pick our favourite passages and write it down in our books or there's a sheet that we write it on. I like to write in my book. We write why we liked it. (Giselle)

Giselle continued, describing a follow-up task and how this related to flipped learning. Opportunities for working individually, as a group, or a combination of both were part of the culture of learning in this classroom. One boy explained how the independent tasks that followed on from the book read with the teacher supported understanding of different genres and comprehension skills:

In reading, we have to read a book, and then there's a dice roll, so if you roll the dice on a nonfiction book, there are things like: What's the main characters? What's a question you'd like to know about? Sometimes, I have to think about those things on my own. (Jack)

Section 4.2.1 has demonstrated building a whānau culture; a sense of whanaungatanga was important in establishing the foundations for relationships and learning. Additionally, this section has begun to outline the approaches used for mathematics and literacy. An important aspect of this was knowing children well and therefore knowing what their interests were. The teacher worked to incorporate children's interests in their learning, and the children were keenly aware of this.

4.2.2 *Communication Tools in the Classroom*

The ways in which the teacher communicated learning, tasks, and activities were also seen as important by children. During the Lego classroom model activity (see Figures 2, 3, and 4), all groups identified and commented in some way on the large-screen television (TV) in their classroom. Whilst TVs and screens are a standard feature in Aotearoa New Zealand classroom settings, comments concerning their learning and how their day was structured demonstrated that, for children, screens were an important communication tool. Groups shared various comments, such as using the TV "every single day" (Lego group four) for

taking the roll, Kahoot quizzes, and mathematics tasks. Lego group two commented in their group interview on the importance of the TV for their learning. They saw the TV as an essential communication tool with their teacher. This group was also able to make connections to other areas of learning and identified that, for them, listening to the teacher was not enough—they also needed the visual prompts to understand what they were learning and the tasks they did daily. Another girl also commented on the use of the TV:

You wouldn't be able to communicate with the teacher because you can't see—you have to see what you are doing, just like when we're doing reading; we've got to see what we need to do instead of actually her saying it. (Rose)

Classroom observations also demonstrated that the teacher used the TV as an additional communication tool. For instance, on entering the classroom on one day for an observation, these notes were taken:

Arrival in class. All children on the mat during “read and feed”. Whaea Tupou is reading a novel to the class with a digital format also on the screen. All children attentive whilst eating, either listening or following along on the screen. (Field notes, 12/8/2022)

On another occasion, the teacher shared children's digital books they were writing about their whānau, further demonstrating whanaungatanga and tangata whenuatanga, supporting learning that is culturally connected. The focus for this exercise was not only to demonstrate the importance of their whānau, whakapapa (family tree), and interests but to also practise their presenting skills and skills as a respectful listener:

Whaea Tupou puts a digital bookshelf up on the screen with all the children's books (many had presented the day before so today was a finishing off exercise). Isaac asks Jack to help him present, and Jack comes to stand beside Isaac. Isaac appears a little nervous and voice is quiet; he is sitting on the “teacher chair”. Isaac presented his digital book on his favourite animal, his

whānau, and where he was from. Children are very excited about the digital books and are finding it tricky to not call out, ask questions, or deliver statements that affirm they like the same things. Whaea Tupou pauses children, saying, “It’s hard to be up here in front of the class presenting, so remember to use your inclusive [school] values to help the person up here.” (Field notes, 12/5/2022)

Children and the teacher relied on various forms of communication. Whilst a relational orientation is most obvious in this classroom, children shared the importance to them in also having other forms of communication, such as the TV screen and devices.

4.2.3 Classroom Routines, Structures, and Choices

Through classroom observations, and group and individual interviews, children shared their understanding and experiences of the weekly task menus for the literacy and mathematics learning blocks. The mathematics menu included tasks where children engaged in mathematical knowledge, strategies, and mathematical concepts (including mathematics strands). The mathematics menu provided the opportunity for children to practise and grow their mathematical skills and knowledge through individual and collaborative endeavours. Additionally, children organised and planned their own timetable for the week. Explicit teaching with the teacher occurred daily with the two mixed-ability mathematics groups. The teacher explained the purpose and focus for this aspect of the mathematics programme:

They’ve enjoyed the maths menu and being on the mat. The maths menu, because there’s just not enough time in the year to cover all the strands, I have been linking it through my maths menu. So, there will be a section of problem-solving, a section on algebra, basic facts, a section on fractions, and then after they do three or four of those, they can go onto Mathletics or Prodigy. The maths menu gets updated every single week. They love the maths menu.

(Whaea Tupou)

Children interpreted the mathematics menu with varying degrees of understanding. For example:

We have to do A, and then two other ones. I usually just do C. It's like maths questions; it's easy. Then you can go on Prodigy really fast. You have to go onto Mathletics and do the tasks and then go to Prodigy for F. I do A, F, and C.

(Rewi)

One boy commented that he always started with the easiest tasks first, this determining the order: "We just have to do all of them, I think—and then, after we've done, Mathletics and Prodigy" (Hakopa). Wiremu concurred, and he also chose to start with the easiest, progressing to the more difficult tasks, tackling something he considered difficult—like fractions—last. One girl said the menu included a variety of ways to engage in mathematical tasks. Her comments demonstrated that the structure of the mathematics programme was well-known and accepted, providing continuity and consistency with learning, so children knew what was expected of them and how to approach each task:

We have to do geometry—there's actually those questions, and we have to do that, or we can do a basic facts worksheet. Then, once we finish that, we can do Prodigy or Mathletics. You have to do your Mathletics tasks, and then you can go onto Prodigy. (Addison)

The mathematics menu structure intentionally gave children choice in approaching and organising their learning. While some children explained that starting with the most straightforward tasks worked best for them, one girl approached the mathematics menu by tackling the most difficult first: "I normally do the harder ones first, then I can do the easier ones, so I get it over and done with" (Charlotte).

Rose's level of understanding of the purpose of the mathematics menu closely aligned with the teacher's intent. Her comments demonstrated the benefits of providing a familiar structure for learning where children understood not only what the tasks and learning were

but also the expectations for the completion of tasks. An important aspect of this approach to learning was that the structure provided opportunities for children to succeed at a pace that was manageable for them. Significantly, the structure did not change, meaning children knew when they had completed tasks.

For some children, working up to the more difficult tasks suited their way of learning. For others, ensuring that all the “must-do” tasks were completed earlier in the week meant they had time to engage in practice activities and what were seen as “fun” tasks. Although most children spoke favourably about the mathematics menu’s choices, one child questioned the notion of the mathematics menu being about choice. For this child, the choice was limited to how they organised their learning and did not encompass choices about the learning content in mathematics: “The choices aren’t really choices to me because you have to do all of them during the week.” For her, the choice came in “Just like a specific order I do them in. So, they’re different letters; I like doing A first” (Giselle).

The literacy menu followed a similar structure to the mathematics menu with children needing to complete “must-dos” and then proceed to “may-dos”. Four groups commented on the literacy menu during group interviews for the Lego classroom models. Interestingly, one child felt that the literacy menu not only provided choices in what they did but also commented on the benefits of having these choices:

Well, we often do Mathletics on them and literacy tasks. We have our own classroom app that we can find the links to things on. There’s must-dos and may-dos. So, there are choice boards around that. There’s a literacy choice board and the maths choice board, and you have to do two must-dos before you can do the may-dos. Well, you know, sometimes not everyone would like what the teacher tells them. So, I think it’s good to have their choice. (Jack)

When prompted about who decided on what was on the literacy menu, one group responded with, “The senior syndicate. Sometimes, if she doesn’t tell us, some people also go onto something else that’s not their must-dos and may-dos” (Lego group six).

The literacy menu structure provided children with practice tasks in literacy, such as spelling, sentence structure, and vocabulary, as well as opportunities for children to work on individual or group writing or visual literacy tasks:

A small group of boys left to do sports training. Independent reading on Stories Online or EPIC. Children choosing different areas to work in. Tall table (as described in Lego classroom model) (five girls). One girl at the jellybean table, another group at the short tables (four boys), three boys on chairs, other children scattered on the floor, and two boys at the soft chair table. All children on devices with Whaea Tupou working one on one with children conferencing for maths. Majority of children on either Storyline or EPIC with headphones on. A few boys were either using a graphic app that they were colouring and erasing or working on adding to their digital storybook. Wiremu continuing to work on his digital book about himself and whānau. He was very focused on completing his pepehā and whānau family tree. Ava was very keen to show me her digital book of her whānau and spoke with pride in her mum and siblings. There were many photos of them all. (Field notes, 12/5/2022)

Children responded positively to the flexibility that the literacy and mathematics menus offered, having the ability to choose their entry point to learning tasks. In Term Two, as well as attending differentiated reading workshops with the teacher, children worked independently using the literacy menu. One girl commented what their choices for the literacy menu were: “In reading, we have literacy menu where there’s Typing Jungle, and EPIC and Stories Online, and stuff like that” (Charlotte).

Based on my observations and conversations with children, a significant component of the literacy menu in Term Two was children's strong engagement in the two online reading applications—EPIC and Stories Online. Children consistently referred to choices they made with the two online reading applications they accessed during the literacy block. Children shared their experiences of these two applications many times. Additionally, children commented on their engagement with reading online and what piqued their interest when it came to choosing books or tutorials:

You do it every day, and there's five rotations you can do. We get to choose. We're allowed to pick reading on the Chromebooks. Or Word Work, which is basically you get given a task like crosswords, or just something to fix in your writing, or spelling. We're allowed to choose the books, or we'll choose to watch a tutorial online and we'll use our headphones, and just listen. (Lego group three)

These three girls shared a similar perspective: "We already know when we've done it, and we just move onto the next thing. Our may-dos is like maths and literacy, too" (Lego group two). When prompted about what it felt like to have choices, the group responded with:

Happy because then we don't have to just do one (Addison); you get to choose what you want to do (Charlotte). Then, if you don't like something that's too hard for you, then you can change (Melody). You can change, and we can just do something else. So, yesterday, I did a maths crossword (Addison). I did that, as well (Melody). A crossword and then I read to someone, and then we got to go on EPIC (Addison). (Lego group two)

Choosing to Work Collaboratively, Choosing to Work as an Individual. Writing or visual literacy tasks and activities were also included on the literacy menu, often in the "work on writing" task. One of these tasks was to design a "kindness" poster. The children said they could choose whether this would be an individual or collaborative activity. The

teacher had modelled how to find quotes that demonstrated kindness to include on their poster. Children related these quotes to being an individual, the rejection of bullying behaviour, and being influenced by whānau and school values. During a classroom observation when children engaged in tasks from the literacy menu, there were a mix of children working on EPIC or Stories Online and children working on kindness posters (Field notes, 19/5/2022). One girl explained what Kindness Week was: “It is Pink Shirt Week and that [local high school] was having a Pink Shirt Day” (Ava). Ava showed how she had conducted a Google search to find the correct quote for her. She considered a few quotes before settling on “Kind People are my Kinda People”. She explained, “In the end, this quote fitted me best, and the others were too long for my poster” (Ava; see Figure 7).

Another girl showed the poster she had created, adding that she “loved the sparkle” (Aroha). She demonstrated her understanding of the importance of being an individual, saying “no” to bullying behaviour and having positive messaging about not allowing others to dampen one’s spirit. As well as this, the influence of whānau values was also present: “My Mum says we should celebrate kindness every day” (Aroha; see Figure 8).

Figure 7
Kindness Matters

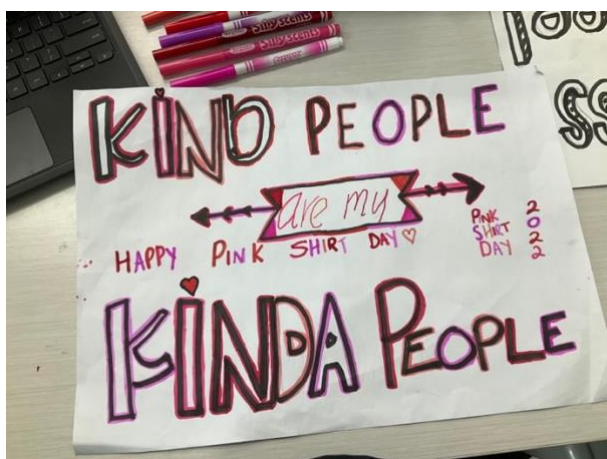
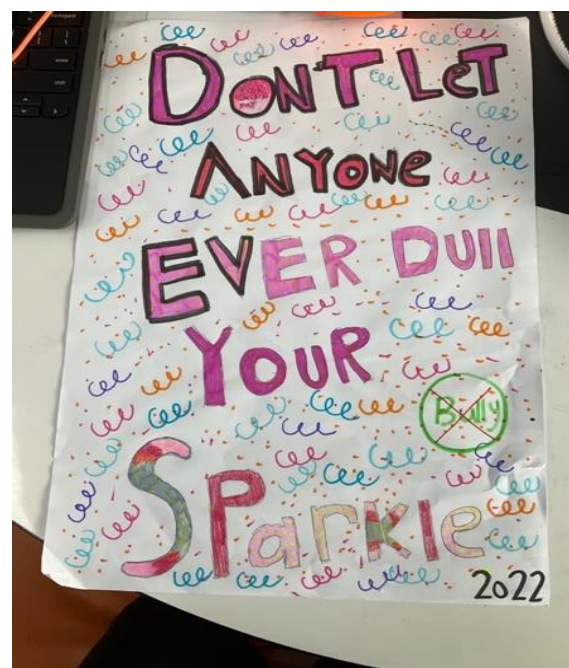


Figure 8
Reflecting Whānau Values



Melody collaborated with Rose to do their kindness poster with the theme “Be strong! Be kind! Be you!”. Melody provided further background on why they were making the posters, saying the posters were designed and displayed for the annual “Pink Shirt Day”. The kindness posters were something the Year 5/6 classes had done the previous year and were seen as a leadership opportunity by these girls (Field notes, 19/5/2022; see Figure 9).

Charlotte was focused on the aesthetics of her poster (see Figure 10). She had enjoyed adding the sparkle, stating that this suited her personality. Charlotte’s quote, on her poster, reflected her love of sparkle with a deeper message of not allowing others to determine how people view themselves, or, in other words, “dull” one’s sparkle. Additional inclusions on her poster showed that there was no place for bullying at their school and that everyone needed to spread the message of kindness. Charlotte also discerned people can have a little too much [sparkle]—less is better (Field notes, 19/5/2022).

Figure 10

Reflecting Individuality

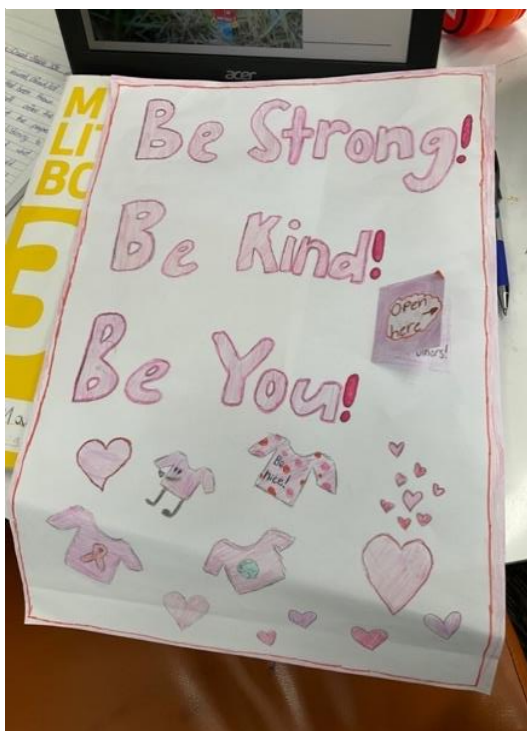


Figure 9

Valuing Who I Am



As noted earlier, children could choose to do their kindness poster either as an individual, in pairs, or in a group. Both teacher and children saw children having the choice to

work individually or collaboratively as normalised practice, a demonstration of ako in the classroom. One boy completed his poster as an individual, providing further background on this activity: “We were able to just choose what quote and whether we wanted to do our poster by ourselves or with someone else” (Theo). He produced his quote– “Be kind, be a [acronym for school values].” The reason for his unique quote was, “They have to be a [acronym for school values] at school and it’s good to be a [acronym for school values] because it makes people happy” (Theo).

Section 4.2.3 has shown that many of the children worked in autonomous, self-regulating ways within the known structures of the mathematics and literacy menus. Children showed a clear understanding of what the expectations were for task completion and planning and organising learning tasks in line with social and learning goal orientations.

4.2.4 Where do Children Choose to Learn?

At the beginning of the study, children identified through the Lego models their “favourite” places in the classroom to work, mostly with their friends. For example, for two girls, it was the window seat that provided a comfortable place to sit and observe what is going on outside of the classroom but, mostly, “A nice spot to sit at if you’re doing particular learning like reading, or something. It’s a quiet spot to sit” (Lego group three). Both girls felt that a quiet spot like this was necessary for their learning because when the noise level was too high, it impacted on their ability to concentrate and focus on learning tasks. Also choosing a space known as the blue zone were two other girls; Melody commented, “I choose the blue zone, or outside so I can focus because inside was too loud.” Giselle added:

Just a nice, quiet corner to sit in, and there’s chargers down there to charge your Chromebook. When there’s such a noise around, I can’t think, so I get my stuff mixed up, and when I’m doing maths and stuff, I get numbers mixed up, and I can’t really count, and stuff when people are talking. So, I like quiet places.

(Giselle)

Another girl provided a similar response, identifying a place that is “just a nice, quiet corner to sit in, and there’s chargers down there to charge your Chromebook. And so, nobody annoys me” (Charlotte). A boy elaborated on his need for a quiet place to work and how he negotiated this alongside his good friend. This boy demonstrated an understanding of what supported his learning and drew on his connection to his friend and how they collaborated:

Sometimes it can’t [support learning] because it’s really loud. Well, when it’s loud, me and Carter usually talk together about the answers before we write it down because, usually, when we write it down, I usually muck up because I can’t concentrate with all the loudness ... So, I usually just sit there with Carter, and we play together, or otherwise, if Carter’s not there, I sometimes do it on my own, and then when I do it on my own, I do the same thing. I pretend Carter is there and try to use his advice. (Jack)

During observations, I noted that children chose spaces where they felt comfortable. On one particular day, two groups of children were with a student teacher engaged in a technology lesson whilst the rest of the class were “reading to self”, followed by “reading to someone else”:

Two girls from jellybean table change books. Isaac returns to class (has been out), chooses a book and lies on the floor. One boy changes book (floor). The classroom was very calm and settled. All remaining children continue to read. Observe a picture book called a “look book”, science book, and cartoon picture book read by Jack. Whaea Tupou transitions class to “read to someone”, reminds children this is “shoulder to shoulder” (children sit beside each other, sharing a book, one child reads whilst the other listens). Whaea Tupou asks to see Theo and Ella at the jellybean table for reading. Children move into pairs. Two boys at the tall table reading to each other (picture book). Melody and Charlotte reading to each other. Jack and Isaac reading to each other, lying

side by side on the floor. Jack reading, Isaac slides over the top of Jack to his other side; Jack continues to read. Isaac and Jack reading to each other. Isaac slides over Jack to read his page (left page). Jack joins this game and slides over Isaac to read his page (right page). This game happens quietly but with smiles and fun, and the boys continue to take turns reading a page each quietly to each other. Whaea Tupou scans the room and affirms who is reading well with their buddy. Rewi reading to boy, appears very focused on the words reading and listening well to when is buddy is reading. Sustained reading and listening to each other. (approximately 20 minutes; Field notes, 19/5/2022)

As noted by some children, spaces in the classroom were also chosen for practical reasons, such as being close to the power points for charging Chromebooks. Children also named the tables in the classroom; for instance, there was the tall table and the round table, referred to as the “gaming table”. This was a favourite for some of the boys and a place where they gathered for the online digital platforms, such as Prodigy (see Section 4.2.7 for more).

Although there were a variety of table and seating arrangements children could choose to be at, at times, the floor tended to be a place children chose to work. Carter and Jack from Lego group six explained why: “Sometimes, we just sit on the mat around here [indicating the open space on the classroom model]” (Carter), and “It just feels more comfortable for me, than sitting up at a table” (Jack). Classroom observations also confirmed that a number of children chose to work on the floor individually, in pairs, and in groups (Field notes, 12/5/2022, 19/5/2022).

Section 4.2.4 demonstrates that children know how the classroom environment best supports or hinders their learning. Whilst some children talked about the need for a quiet space to do their learning, others felt they learned best working with friends or peers. Other children were also able to discern that working alongside another where they completed tasks independently suited them best.

4.2.5 The Role of Online Platforms and Choice

Through conversations with children, many identified their favourite parts of the mathematics menu were Mathletics and Prodigy. Children were able to identify the differences between these two online platforms. Two boys said that Mathletics was a must-do, Prodigy was a may-do, and that the senior syndicate determined this, “because Prodigy wouldn’t be one of them [must-dos] because it’s also a game (Jack). Even Mathletics—but it’s half maths and half a game” (Carter; Lego group six). Another boy agreed: “Whaea Tupou sometimes says in maths, you can go on Mathletics, and then you can go on Prodigy, but you have to do all your Mathletics tasks” (Isaac). Another boy noted that Prodigy and Mathletics “are fun” as well as “just helps us with learning maths” (Hakopa). Comments such as these demonstrated that children were able to discern for themselves differences between the two online platforms and how these helped with their learning. One girl viewed Mathletics as learning with set tasks: “You have to do them before you can get other things [tokens] in Mathletics. Prodigy doesn’t really help you. People use the hack, so they get everything in the game. It’s just not really working” (Giselle). Another boy included a further mathematics digital application, identifying how this game supports his learning, “You can play maths games with action games and brainy games. There are all sorts of games that you can play” (Theo).

Two boys from Lego group four commented on being able to choose the books and tutorials available on EPIC and Stories Online: “It’s cool that there’s a lot of books that you can choose from. It makes me focus” (Wiremu). Both boys provided an overview of the subjects they both liked as well as what they knew other children enjoyed:

Just depends what books you like. Some people like Goosebumps. Some people like Cat Ninja, and Minecraft (Wiremu).

Yeah, Minecraft and Fortnite (Theo).

And some videos on how to make food and how to make stuff out of paper
(Theo & Wiremu).

I usually do Goosebumps, Minecraft, and I like sports ones, that's all (Theo).

I normally watch Goosebumps, basketball, and Martin Luther King, and stuff
(Wiremu).

During Term Three, one boy shared that whilst they had not done EPIC or Stories Online for a while, they were platforms where children could connect with their interests and learn more about them. Theo commented:

We read cool books. On EPIC, I usually choose basketball books, or rugby books. They're my favourite sports. All I learn is ... because the basketball books I read, it's about the players and stuff—Stephen Curry, LeBron James, or Michael Jordan. (Theo)

Classroom observations recorded children reading independently on their Chromebooks or watching tutorials using either EPIC or Stories Online. Consistent with Lego group interviews, children chose various spaces around the classroom and into the “blue zone”, a shared space adjoining two classrooms. Children sat together while reading independently, all wearing headphones (see Figure 11). As well as reading, children also chose to do other tasks from the literacy menu, such as working on writing digital books or, on another occasion, their kindness posters (see Section 4.2.3). Observations recorded that children were settled and focused on their chosen tasks during these blocks of learning. Children were often willing to share what they were reading, listening to, watching, or writing:

Whilst roving the classroom, chatting with children about what they were doing, most children were happy to take a little time to chat with me but remained focused on the particular task they were doing. Children moved from one task to another on their own. Whaea Tupou worked with a small group of children at

the jellybean table, giving praise to the class or individuals for using the [school] values. (Field notes, 19/5/2022)

Figure 11

Engaging in Online Reading



Awareness of Digital Safety. Some children were aware of the importance of using devices and online platforms appropriately. One group explained that it was important that they were sensible with using devices as there were consequences when poor choices were made. Additionally, this group recognised the different genres available to them: “We need to choose something appropriate, otherwise it will get taken off us for a little while” (Aroha), and “I quite like non-realistic stories, like sometimes it could be a fantasy, if it was— depending on what sort of one it is” (Rose; Lego group three). Jack gave his understanding of being cyber safe and offering this advice to teachers: “Maybe blocking some games that aren’t good for us”. He continued:

We’ve got a thing, and so if we’re on the wrong site, they’ll block our screen, and apparently it can go from a few seconds to an hour, apparently. So, you better not be on the wrong thing. Essentially, it just blocks out—they can even delete your tabs. So, I’m always on the right thing. (Jack)

Data collected from observations, and group and individual interviews have shown that online learning platforms were both motivating and engaging for children. Online text and tutorials were popular with children with personal interests being one of the key motivations. Children were also able to discern when online mathematics learning was beneficial to furthering mathematics knowledge and skills and when it was more “game” orientated.

4.2.6 Context, Interests, and Prior Knowledge

Mathematical problem-solving tasks were often contextualised to include the real-life experiences of children, demonstrating the teacher drew on the concept of *ako*, validating children’s prior knowledge and interests and what this brings to children’s learning. The teacher explained:

It can even come down to what you are interested in maths. What they want to learn, what they want from me as a teacher, how they learn, there are different ways of learning as well, not everyone can just sit there and listen to Whaea Tupou talk and talk and talk. Some need to do some actions. Some need to do some practising, and I always have this in mind. (Whaea Tupou)

One child identified that “problem-solving is actually maths” (Jack). Conversations with children showed that they “see themselves” in mathematics with problem-solving tasks that involved themselves and their everyday lives. In a group interview, children explained, “When we do the maths problems, she [the teacher] uses some people [for example], ‘Aroha has to stack the lunches, like six by eight’” (Mid-year focus group four). One girl articulated what problem-solving meant in the context of mathematics for her: “It’s like a quiz-type thing. Normally it’s like—I’m just going to use other people—so, like Charlotte bought 15 candy canes, and Melody bought five; how much do they have all together? Like that, with harder numbers” (Giselle).

While the children recognised that their teacher developed the problem-solving tasks, they also knew that their own interests were often the context for learning. Two boys shared: “Well, for example, a few weeks ago, she made a Pokémon one because all of us like Pokémon” (Lego group six). During a mid-year focus group three, boys also recognised that their teacher drew on their current interests for learning: “Whaea Tupou helps with decisions; we talk to her about what we like, [and] she asks us questions. We do research on events and projects that are happening. Like we can do writing about Pokémon and basketball because we like to play basketball” (Mid-year focus group three). The teacher confirmed these boys’ thinking, explaining her motivation for including children’s interests, particularly the boys, was to engage children in the curriculum in more authentic ways. Current interests in Pokémon and basketball were included in the mathematics and writing programmes with other areas of interest continually being explored:

There’s been a lot of work, especially with my boys, around Pokémon cards instead of arguing with them on that. We’ve put it into our maths problems. We’ve put it into our writing. So, our writing was persuasive writing. I said, tell me—which Pokémon card is the best or something along those lines that we’ve just fully linked it in. And even basketballers. I’ve got some amazing basketballers in my class. I’m trying to figure out how I can link basketball, especially with maths, because I’ve noticed that that’s where my data lies. So, maths and reading, that’s where I need to really bring in their interests as well.

(Whaea Tupou)

Two girls also recognised the motivation of their teacher to use some of the children’s interest in Pokémon. The girls demonstrated that their teacher knew them well and what their interests were. Their discussion illustrated that they could see “the balance” their teacher was working to achieve by providing learning in a context that worked to meet the needs and interests of a diverse classroom community:

Basically, they do problem-solving stuff that we would understand. Once, we did this Pokémon one for the boys because they would understand it. We'll take turns doing things that the girls and boys like and then it's fair. (Lego group three)

Some children showed that by providing tasks that connected to children's different interests they were more motivated to engage with learning. One girl acknowledged that even though it might not be a specific interest of a particular individual at that time, there would be space to include the interests of others at another time. When asked what she would choose for a problem-solving task, this girl also revealed a competitive and fun side to the inclusion of the children's interests:

I would want to get their faces [the boys] down, so I would probably choose something really girly, like princesses, for example. They're going to be like; eeeewww... It's quite good getting in the boy's faces as well as getting to do Pokémon, which I know completely nothing about, but it is quite fun to get to choose. (Rose)

This girl also confirmed that drawing on her prior knowledge and connecting this with context (theme) made a difference in her learning. She explained that learning was scaffolded by the teacher with children actively seeking connections to the context. Children could identify through everyday activities, such as observing and playing, that they already had the knowledge and understanding to engage and succeed at tasks:

Well, if you've watched it a lot, or you play with it a lot, then it would probably be used to it because of the theme. It was not really the theme we did, but we also had to add up their health and stuff—the Pokémon's, in real Pokémon. So, that's basically how it's a lot easier. (Rose)

Engaging in Online Text and Tutorials. The two reading online platforms were a consistent part of the first two terms' literacy programme. Daily, children chose books and

tutorials from either EPIC or Stories Online. The following accounts were gathered from classroom observations where children shared the reasons why they had chosen books or tutorials (Field notes, 19/5/2022). Demonstrating that family and school life often cross over, Rose chose a book to help her with a late Father's Day present. Rose shared that she saw her father every second weekend and was looking for "inspiration" to make something for him by reading a "how to" book. Charlotte chose an audiobook on animals, and she liked both stories and factual text related to animals. The books she chose provided inspiration, ideas, and new vocabulary to make her writing more engaging and sophisticated. Additionally, Charlotte demonstrated that she was actively connecting learning across the curriculum.

One girl shared why she was engaged in a tutorial called Life Hacks on EPIC. She commented that tutorials provide important tips so she could "Make stuff at home from what I have learned" (Aroha). Like Rose, Aroha actively sought to learn new things by following her interests, making deliberate choices for her learning.

The books children chose supported a range of abilities and interests. Isaac chose an audiobook and demonstrated how the book "reads out loud" and highlighted the words as he followed along. Isaac identified how this helped him with his reading because he could "hear" and "see" the words. He also showed how he could go back to a word, highlight it, and repeat it. In doing so, Isaac was actively seeking to develop his reading skills. Similarly, Rewi chose a book called *Dreams and Things* because it was easy to read and, like Isaac's book, it also read the story to him. He liked to choose funny books. Providing regular opportunities for children to choose their entry point with reading materials supports self-efficacy, building necessary literacy skills as well as children seeing the benefits of reading on a frequent and regular basis.

During classroom observations (Field notes, 12/5/2022, 19/5/2022), children were often enthusiastic in communicating what they were reading or the tutorial with which they were engaged. A common theme for children's book choices were their personal interests as

well as learning about a topic of interest in practical ways. For instance, Jack was excited to share the Lego tutorials he watched on EPIC as these tutorials inspired his model-making at home (Field notes, 12/5/2022).

Seeking New Interests, Values Inform Choices. As noted earlier, one boy demonstrated that not only did he draw on current interests when choosing the text but also explored new areas of interest, actively broadening his knowledge and understanding of the world:

Well, I usually choose the books I'm used to. They're picture books, except they'd have more words, or otherwise chapter books, except with little grey pictures with them. I usually choose those—basketball, Pokémon. Sometimes I just read about random things that I don't really know about, like an actual disaster or something. It's something I don't really know, and I wanted to try something new. (Jack)

One girl provided her motivation for choosing the books she read, relating the choice of one book to value dispositions:

Well, I just choose what I like, and what I want to read. I wouldn't want to choose something that I don't want to read because if I choose it, and I don't want to read it, then I wouldn't read it because I don't feel comfortable reading it, I guess. So, I have to feel good reading it for me to actually read it. (Ava)

Learning at School to Support Home Interests. Classroom observations, and individual and group interviews demonstrated the continued interest children had in using these online reading applications. The following examples show why they chose a particular book or tutorial. A consistent theme was the connection children made between home and school. What also became apparent through classroom observations and interviews was that children themselves were taking a similar approach by accessing resources and learning in the school context that informed their everyday lives *outside* of school. These included everyday

practices, such as cooking, learning new arts and crafts skills, and techniques to share and enjoy with their whānau. Additionally, following old and new interests, such as sports heroes and historical events, were also mentioned.

Aroha engaged in a tutorial called Food Hacks that provided recipes and tips for cooking. Aroha said she had a keen interest in cooking and was something she enjoyed doing with her family. She regularly took turns in cooking something special for her whānau:

I want to find something to make for dessert for my family, I like cooking. I'm going to make something for movie night on Friday night. We get to stay up late, and I am allowed to pick the dessert. Food Hacks will help me decide what to do (Aroha; see Figure 12).

Figure 12

Inspiration for Friday Dessert



Melody watched an art tutorial, stating she often watched these because she “Loves art and does art every day after school”. Her nana was also an art person, and this was something they often did together. On this day, Melody was learning how to make marble paper and was excited to share this new skill with her nana (see Figure 13).

Figure 13

Inspiration for Art & Craft with Nana



Charlotte chose a book from EPIC on teacup dogs. Later, she came to find me to tell me that the book was about a dog called “Teacup” and that the book’s premise was that the dog thought they were a big dog in a small world, but it turned out they were a small dog in a big world. Charlotte noted further that she loved dogs, and her whānau had dogs but not a teacup-sized one (Field notes, 12.5.2022). Charlotte demonstrated that, for her, it was important to clarify her thinking, demonstrating her understanding of the text. When she chose this book, she was not sure if it would be a fiction or nonfiction book. She had originally picked this book to learn more about teacup-sized dogs, showing a self-determining disposition.

Building on Section 4.2.5, this section (Section 4.2.6) continues the underlying theme of the importance of prior knowledge and children’s interests in the context of their learning. Over the course of the year, the teacher looked for ways to include children’s prior knowledge and interest in everyday learning, and children were aware of this, particularly in the mathematics curriculum. Children also actively drew on their prior knowledge, interests, and whānau context when engaging in independent tasks and activities.

4.2.7 Children's Social Awareness of Learning

The beginning of this chapter demonstrates the importance the teacher placed on building positive relationships with and between children. The establishment of the whanaungatanga, a whānau-like environment, was seen as pivotal to ensuring the school values and classroom expectations were being met. Time was spent establishing these through getting to know children well, instigating team-building experiences, cooperative learning groups, and reenforcing the school values. Classroom observations, group and mid-year focus groups, and individual interviews also showed that relationships, and working alongside of and working collaboratively with one another were important to children, showing the strong evidence of manaakitanga that had developed over the course of the year with children. In this section, Section 4.2.7, children demonstrate varying levels of awareness of how the social context of learning contributed, benefitted, or hindered their classroom environment and learning.

Learning in an environment that provided choice to self-direct and self-regulate provided children with opportunities to negotiate their timetable through the choices available on the task menus. One girl demonstrated that having choices in learning was a key factor for her own motivation to complete a task:

I usually set a frame for myself, like I'll do this until it will turn out good, and then I'll do this part for when it's time to finish, but it's just really good to set time for yourself, and there's no time limit on anything. So, I'm not like, "Oh, I have to be finished by this time", because I probably—it's not a high chance—I probably would be finished, but I just go in a bit of an order. (Rose)

Included in this girl's account was the underlying message that she had an established goal-orientated and self-regulated approach to learning that included references to being "on task", language that could be attributed to teacher-speak:

Well, my biggest decision is if I'm on task, or I'm doing the best I can, or showing the lesson values, or just really anything that I do not want to muck it up or anything, but I always put my best effort into everything I do. (Rose)

Rose's response could also be attributed to the strong focus on the school values and what this meant for the children and teacher in this class. Notions of being on task had a wider implication than just completing learning tasks. The following excerpt from an interview demonstrates that the teacher had set consistent high standards for how children engaged in learning and with each other, and how to engage with classroom resources:

We've got new Chromebooks. Now, every time we've co-constructed what this looks like, so what would [school] value look like? What would this look like in the classroom? For instance, be *leaders*, I walk with two hands with my Chromebook. I hold with my two hands, walking feet and I sign out. I'm *determined* to stay on the right task. Every single time that they are off or they're not doing the right thing, I say, "You've told me this. We made this [class expectations] together". This is our pact, so it's pretty much making them accountable so they contribute to what we're doing because I can make them accountable by bringing them back to the school values. (Whaea Tupou)

Some children identified that "being on task" was often associated with whom they chose to work and collaborate. Additionally, for a few, over the year, they had adapted their ways of working with their peers to meet their social and emotional needs as well as optimise learning opportunities. One boy demonstrated the importance for him of being with others, stating he "Preferred to work with my friends, so I am not alone" (Hakopa). Another boy adds, "We all do our learning together. It is easier because we all just help each other. If someone's stuck, they'll just copy us" (Rewi). Another boy considered the social context of learning, demonstrating that being able to work alongside a friend and not necessarily collaborate was also conducive to learning. He elaborated on this from his perspective: "Just

working, sometimes you can talk to them, but if you're doing something important, just do it without talking, then talk after you've finished" (Wiremu). One girl showed that working with and supporting friends with learning motivated her to be engaged and supported her self-determination:

It's way more fun than learning by yourself. You get to learn with someone ...

Well, whenever we've done our maths and stuff, if people aren't finished, we go over and help them with what we do. It's quite fun doing that. Sometimes my teacher, she helps me, and then so do my friends; they help me be determined.

They just tell me I can do it. (Ava)

Children also made decisions on who to work with based on connections beyond the current classroom. One boy explained: "A little bit [working with others], but sometimes I like sitting by myself. I'm a little bit sensitive of who I'm going to pick. Giselle is a kind person because I've known her since we were kids" (Isaac).

Consistently, children made informed decisions about working individually or collaboratively. Some children demonstrated that making informed decisions benefitted and optimised their learning. One boy explained: "We could do this on our own or in a group. I chose a group because I like hanging out with friends. They come up with good ideas, appropriate ideas—appropriate, not being silly" (Jack).

Navigating Relationships to Support Learning. Another boy took the time to explain in detail the deliberate decisions he had made over the year when choosing who to work with (or not). He distinguished and navigated between the importance (for him) of maintaining relationships and being engaged in learning tasks. He started his conversation with:

Maybe if we're doing some tasks on a worksheet, I don't know what one to do first, so I ask my peer what they're doing first, and then I do it at the same pace as them ... I try to be with the people that I can work better with, so then we

wouldn't just argue about wanting to do this instead of that. And who I can cooperate with the best. (Henry)

This boy demonstrated his ability to reflect over time and to examine his relationships and how these could hinder or support how he learned best. He elaborated on the decisions he made when it came to working with others:

Near the start of the year, I just kept on being with the people that were my very good friends, but they sometimes would forget about their work, and I tried to remind them; it worked sometimes, but the other times they were continuing. But now I'm with people where I can cooperate better with not having to ask them to get on with their work or just it's much better to cooperate with them than the other people that I was with at the start of the year. (Henry)

Children also shared the importance for them of working with and supporting others. This included the social and emotional benefits. Navigating friendships and balancing this with engagement in learning tasks in the classroom was at times seen as challenging by children and teacher. However, the following excerpt from one boy's interview demonstrated that, at least for him, he had developed relationship and negotiation skills that showed strong self-awareness as well as an efficacious disposition:

I still have one of my good friends in my group, and then the other would be with their other friends. So, then I wouldn't be disconnecting them; I'd still be talking to them and working with them. I think it's the people near me that help me and getting to know them. Then it's easier to pick who I can cooperate with better because you also don't want to pick someone that is the exact same as you because then you might talk about the exact same things and then just get distracted. (Henry)

As has been stated thus far, children noted the importance of working with others, demonstrating the concept of ako whereby children brought their own knowledge and

experiences to shared learning activities and tasks. A continuum could be identified from their collective comments: from simply being with friends and working independently, collaborating with friends on tasks, activities, and projects and knowing who to go to for help through to established, trusting relationships that drew on others' strengths in reciprocal ways. One boy explained: "All us boys usually sit there [round table] all the time. It's just when we get free time; it's basically like our gaming table" (Theo). Another boy gave a similar response: "Ariki and Hakopa are in my same reading class, so we all just play together. We all do our learning together" (Rewi). One girl also identified the importance of working with friends and her friends' preference for the smaller breakout spaces: "In reading, I normally go into this room with my friends. There is a little room, and we usually go into there" (Charlotte). In a group interview, three girls explained that where they sat and who they sat with mattered for their learning. For them, choosing friends that have similar goal orientations, such as not being distracted from tasks, was seen as important for their learning:

You just say to your friend, come sit with me. Then, they might say "Yes" or "No". So, that's fun. You don't have to be where people are going to distract you. Yeah, and annoy you and you can just sit near your friends that actually are not going to talk to you. (Lego group two)

During an individual interview later in the year, one of the girls from this group interview elaborated on how she negotiated the social context of learning, asking herself if the environment was conducive to her and her friends' learning. For instance (as stated above), this group preferred a smaller quiet space where they could work as a team to support each other's learning. An additional consideration for this girl was:

Actually, thinking if they're going to talk to me, and if they are, then I won't get my work done, so basically, it's going with the people that won't talk to me, so I can get my work done. Otherwise, we won't be able to do other stuff if we didn't finish it. (Addison)

A boy also reflected on the benefits of working with others, considering how working as a group provided reciprocal learning opportunities where children drew on one another's strengths and ideas:

Just depends how they're doing, and if they're in a group with others. I'm thinking—just because if they're in a group with another, one might know what to do, and then the other one will just be learning from the other about it.

(Henry)

Another girl explained the benefits of working with others:

She's (Ella) my best friend. We get along well, and we're just really good together; we always know what's best for each other. We help each other in all ways that we can. I give her the best options that she needs for herself, and that would help her and that's best for her. (Rose)

When prompted if Ella also shared advice, Rose responded with, "Yeah, she definitely does".

Many children took the time to explain the importance of working with and alongside each other, and this was consistently evident in classroom observations and interviews. Some children were able to identify at a deeper level how developing relationships with their peers helped with completing tasks, focusing on their learning, and, for some, gaining a deeper understanding of the purpose of learning. In the next section, Section 4.2.8, children talk about what progress in learning means to them.

4.2.8 What Children Know About Their Learning

Children showed an awareness of their progress in mathematics with varying levels of understanding. In a group interview, three girls commented on the mathematics learning tasks: "If she [teacher] gives you easy stuff, you might get smarter, and if you get to choose, you can choose something" (Melody), "... at the right level for you" (Addison), and "At the end of the day, we get a certificate thing" (Charlotte). When prompted to gain understanding of what the right level meant, the girls elaborated further: "There's this thing in maths, I think

it's a must-do, there's sheets you have to fill it all; it goes fast, and you get to choose what grade—two or four, or five and six” (Lego group two).

One of the girls identified her progress in mathematics during the year, attributing this to her teacher: “Well, actually, this year, my maths has gotten better. Maybe it's just because Whaea Tupou helps me a lot with my maths” (Addison). Another girl commented that their teacher also helped children progress by supporting their decision-making and providing some choices. Additionally, she said, when children get “smarter”, they are also helping the teacher: “I think she gives us decisions, some choices; we decide what we want to do. She puts us in higher grades, and we're kind of helping if we're smarter. Sometimes, some people went up a grade” (Giselle).

One boy commented on how he looked to the teacher when he was unsure of a learning task, explaining his confidence had grown over the year with mathematics learning. He also recognised that while he identified that reading could be difficult for him, with help, he could tackle mathematical tasks. Additionally, this boy articulated his growing, efficacious approach to learning by asking for “extra work” to improve. It was important to him that his teacher was kind and caring, which positively impacted on his ability to progress and experience success:

Sometimes, if I have a good question, or I don't know the maths question, and on maths tests, I had to put my hand up for Whaea Tupou to read it for me. I'm pretty bad at reading, and I normally choose to put my hand up to ask a question in the class. I told her yesterday, and now she said she'll help me. I asked if there was an extra writing class because I'm really bad at writing, but I just know I can never get my eyes fixed. Once I made Whaea Tupou confused with my maths. So, it made me feel she was surprised. I did a different kind of solving it out, but I got the question right. Whaea Tupou had to come to see it, so I felt proud. (Isaac)

One boy noted that “I normally like maths the most because it just feels nice” (Jack), and, from other comments, he thrived in it. He knew where to go for help, valued collaboration, and could articulate the mathematics learning with which he engaged. One girl had a pragmatic sense of her progress in mathematics learning: “I know that I’m above in mainly all my subjects. I am maybe at the expected level in maths ...” (Rose). When prompted to understand how she knew this, she relayed how children’s learning and progress were shared with her whānau using a school sharing application, “It’s basically posted on our Seesaw³ for our parents to see, and then sometimes my Mum reads it out to me, or sometimes I just see it when I’m posting something on my Seesaw page” (Rose).

Another girl explained her progress and improvement in mathematics over the year. She had drawn not only on her teacher but also identified others in the classroom who she could go to for support: “I do not really need that much help. Sometimes, I would go to Jack and Carter because they’re really smart” (Giselle). The Māori concept of tuakana-teina is demonstrated in Giselle’s account where Giselle recognised the skills and knowledge of her peers, knowing she can learn from others in her class. This girl reflected further on her mathematics learning, taking a goal-orientated approach by engaging in mathematics both in class and in her own time:

At the start of the year, I wasn’t that good at maths, so I got a few things wrong, and when I got it wrong, she [Whaea Tupou] would explain to me how to do it. Now I’m learning square roots and stuff. I’m learning it in my own time. I’ve evolved a new hobby for maths. (Giselle)

In classroom observations and interviews, children also talked about reading being something they often did at home for fun and to improve their reading ability for assessment. For instance, one girl read every night before bed and enjoyed *The Baby-Sitters Club* series.

³ Seesaw is an online sharing application schools and classrooms use to communicate with whānau. Children and teachers post examples of learning and assessment to keep whānau up to date.

She recognised that by reading at home, she was improving her reading ability, commenting, “So, when I come back to school, I’m better” (Charlotte). Another girl also read at home and identified that she did this so she was prepared for upcoming reading assessments, “So that I’m ready for it” (Addison). This girl also said that she had to do another reading test “Because I went up another level in my reading” (Addison). This demonstrated that Addison, at least in part, had some understanding of the assessment process and how children’s progress in reading was monitored.

Another girl also identified reading assessment was an important part of her learning, explaining, “I also think I’ve gotten smarter because I moved up levels” (Ava). When prompted for how she knew this, she continued to share:

Because once I was doing reading, and I felt since the last time I read it, I didn’t know how to read it properly, and then Whaea Tupou taught me stuff, and now I know how to read it properly, and I went up the level. It feels good. It feels like I’m smarter. It has kept me being determined to know more. (Ava)

The accounts of the children alongside those of their teacher demonstrate that curriculum-focused learning requires more than just the teaching of reading, writing, and mathematics. For this classroom teacher, tangata whenuatanga, a place-based, culturally responsive approach that embraces the cultural context of all children, was most important:

It’s a good thing because it just shows that if you put children on top of what you were planning, then you’re going to have a very successful class. I can’t build enough relationship building. I know lots of people just go, “Oh, here we go—relationships”. It’s a huge thing. It’s so big, and I can honestly say, I wouldn’t have the class I have now if I didn’t have my relationship with them. My class is so comfortable with me. Sometimes they’re a bit too comfortable, but I do have expectations. They’re just really comfortable, and they can say things to me, and then they can freely express themselves, which is cool.

There's a lot of different personalities in the class ... I know there's a lot of different opinions around how much you should share with the children, I guess, but I feel having the children seeing me in a different light, where I'm also a learner, or letting yourself be a learner, and the children can see that. (Whaea Tupou)

In this section, Section 4.2.8, children have demonstrated they are aware of the progress they have made in learning with a focus on mathematics and reading. Children have attributed their progress to the support of their teacher, and some children have goal orientations for improving learning outcomes by engaging in reading and mathematics tasks outside of school. Additionally, some children have identified where their strengths lie and who they can call on for additional help.

4.2.9 Summary

Within the menu structure developed by the teacher, children demonstrated their ability to make considered choices and decisions for their learning in the core curriculum areas of mathematics and literacy. Key factors, such as the social context of learning, their prior knowledge and interests, and ensuring the space they were working in was conducive to learning, were important for many children. Children have also demonstrated in curriculum-focused learning that they took an active role in day-to-day curriculum direction and decisions for learning. The next two case narratives will demonstrate that through an inquiry-based approach, children experience further opportunities to demonstrate meaningful choices alongside engaging in learning in purposeful and real-life ways.

4.3 School-initiated and Teacher-initiated Inquiry

The senior syndicate and the research teacher drew on inquiry-based learning to engage children in the broader curriculum that aimed to integrate learning areas. Children's interests, schoolwide, and syndicate foci were often at the centre of these inquiries, referred to as projects by both the teacher and children alike. What follows in these next sections are

accounts of school- and teacher-initiated inquiries. The focus for these are the school camp and the annual summer fair. However, children also referred to other inquiries that had taken place over the year during interviews. These sections will illustrate how the teacher and children prioritise prior knowledge and interests, negotiated the social context of learning, as well as meaningful choice and decision-making through these learning experiences and events. In doing so, they embraced the cultural competencies of wānanga, ako, manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, and tangata whenuatanga.

The children were at the forefront of the teacher planning as indicated by the teacher: “Everything that we do in our classroom is based on our children, but they don’t always know that” (Whaea Tupou). However, in a mid-year focus group interview, three boys commented on their participation in the decision-making for a recent Matariki⁴ project they were completing and made a distinction between their own decisions and those of the teacher:

Children were a part of the decision-making on the Matariki project and could decide what their research on Matariki would be. It was the teacher who decided on the event [Matariki] they would do their projects on. (Mid-year focus group three⁵).

During interviews, both teacher and children explored the motivation and ideas for these inquiries. The following two case narratives (Sections 4.3 and 4.4) demonstrate that children and teacher did not always agree on where the ideas for inquiries, events, or projects came from. Whilst the teacher drew on the interests of children through a variety of channels, such as surveys, current interests, localised (place-based) curriculum, and community events, the teacher recognised that this was not always evident to children:

⁴ Matariki is the celebration of the Māori New Year and is signalled by the rising of the star cluster also known as the Pleiades.

⁵ Mid-year focus group three chose not to have their group interview recorded but consented to notes being taken. The quote comes from the notes taken on that day.

So, I think it's more explicitly letting children know what we do, why we do it. We don't do it often, and I don't know why we assume. I think a lot of us assume that they know why they're doing it, but they don't. It's funny, though—in our staff meetings, we always say, what we are doing, this is our goal, and why we are doing it, yet we don't always do this with children. I can happily reflect on that; I don't do it enough—I don't do, this is the why and this is why we're doing this. (Whaea Tupou)

The following accounts were shared through the final individual interviews with children towards the end of their school year.

4.3.1 *Summer Fair*

The summer fair was an annual fundraising event at the research school for children, whānau, and community. This event was held in Term Three and provided the opportunity for children in Year 5/6 to work in groups of their choosing to develop an experience or product to sell at one of the stalls. The accounts that follow demonstrate that children engaged in the Māori concept of wānanga to discuss, co-design, and problem solve in both innovative and pragmatic ways. During the individual interviews, eight children demonstrated how their experiences of the summer fair supported active collaboration, problem-solving, and creativity, alongside drawing on prior knowledge, strengths, and experiences to produce products or activities they could sell. Additionally, prompted by questions about the choices and decisions they made in their everyday school lives (Mid-year focus group interviews, 30/6/2022), one boy showed his understanding of what the summer fair entailed: “The Christmas fair—it was when the senior syndicate and some of the little kids made stalls. So, my group, we did origami and guess how many lollies are in the jar” (Henry).

Creating a Product or Experience: Drawing on Strengths, Interests, and Supporting Others. One group of girls agreed with Henry, stating that only the Year 5/6 children contributed to stalls for the summer fair. These girls used the leftover wood from the

community pantry (see Section 4.4) to make Christmas trees for their stall, helped by the school caretaker. One girl described how they constructed the Christmas trees using wood, tubes, and glue. The group then added loom bands for decorations. One of the girls commented how pleased they were with their efforts, noting, “They sold out quick” (Melody).

Children developed a range of ideas, concepts, and products for the fair. The products and experiences that were realised drew on each groups’ classroom activities and personal interests. For instance, two boys chose to do an activity based on basketball “because I like basketball” (Hakopa). One of the boys elaborated further on how they conceptualised the basketball activity and actioned this, as well as commenting on the social context, in doing so showing manaakitanga for another child. The activity involved a half-court where prizes of lollies were awarded for three categories: 1. a shot from the half-court line, 2. a (slam) dunk with a prize of four lollies, and 3. a shot from anywhere on the court. The boys in this group also drew on support from the caretaker and a student teacher to help with equipment. Theo commented, “We were getting a lot of kids” for the basketball activity. This boy further explained:

When it started getting windy and cold, there was me and [boy from the group–nonparticipant] helped this kid get dunks and shots because he couldn’t really get it in properly, so we gave him a handful of lollies. (Theo)

This boy also demonstrated concern for this child because he was worried it was getting too cold for him, saying, “I was going to give him my jersey, but he said he was going to go and grab his jersey in his bag” (Theo). Theo and his group drew on their expert knowledge of the game they played daily to create a successful experience for other children. Mentioned in the first case narrative (Section 4.2.3) was Theo’s respect for the school values, which included manaakitanga—care for others—as well as the promotion of leadership skills. It was important to Theo that the children who participated in their activity

experienced success. In this example, Theo demonstrated how children mentor others, drawing on the Māori concept of tuakana-teina, recognising that to build confidence, one needed to experience success. In this case narrative and the following (see Section 4.3) are other examples of children “living out” the school values and, in doing so, demonstrating their own understanding of whanaungatanga that includes engaging in productive partnerships.

One girl from another group also shared the inspiration for her group’s stall, which had two options—spiders (a drink made with ice-cream and soft drink) and scrunchies (fabric hair ties). A boy from this group shared that while he was not there the day his group made the decision to include spiders at their stall, he did share the range of flavours on offer: “Vanilla, strawberry, and chocolate. Drinks were raspberry, Coke, Sprite, and Mountain Dew” (Rewi). Like the group before, the girl from this group drew on her prior knowledge and experience; however, this time, she looked to her whānau for inspiration, advice, and help for the ideas and creations for their stall:

Well, first we were doing ice-cream spiders and cake-pops, but none of us knew how to make cake-pops and didn’t have the ingredients for it. So, my Mum asked me if I wanted to do scrunchies because we have a scrunchie and earrings shop. So, it’s like an online shop, and we now sell dog bandanas. (Giselle)

Giselle also shared her aspirations for the future, following in the artistic footsteps of her mother:

I already know how to sew, but not with a sewing machine, so she’s [Mum] going to teach me because I want to be like a sewing artist type thing when I’m older too, but mostly, I want to join the SPCA. (Giselle)

Collaborating, Negotiating, and Strategising. One boy talked briefly about the negotiating skills used within his group that had initially decided on creating origami decorations. He commented that he “did a lot of the preparing ... and folded most of them”

(Carter), demonstrating his skills and knowledge with this. There was debate and negotiation over what other ideas could be used for the stall. During his interview, one boy from the same group also shared other stall ideas from other groups, such as spiders (ice-cream floats), scrunchies, loom bands, and summer treats. He also elaborated further on the reasons for the lolly jar and the origami concept. While each group only needed to develop one product or experience, this boy shared that in his group, he and another boy wanted to do an additional item: “It was because I didn’t really want to do origami; while the other half of our group was thinking of origami, while me and Isaac were trying to think of different things as well” (Henry). They produced the idea of “guessing how many lollies were in the jar”: “So, we were still on the table, just three of us were doing something different than Carter and Jack” (Henry). Henry also elaborated further on the idea to create origami and the making of Christmas trees. He shared that during mathematics sessions, different mathematics groups were making Christmas trees using 3-D triangles:

So, there’s one triangle here that we made. We all make one, or I think everyone in our group made at least two or more, so we have one triangle at the top, and then it expands when it goes down, and I’m pretty sure that Snickers Bars is going to join in with our one—not make a different tree. (Henry)

Whilst another group also made Christmas trees with decorations and loom bands, one boy described how their group’s trees were decorated with origami: “We had a flower on there, and a star, which was made out of a few—I don’t know what they’re called—but different pieces of origami put into the circle as a star” (Henry). Henry also demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of what helped or hindered the sales and marketing of a product. For instance, if there were too many similar products, there would be greater market competition. He also shared the thinking that occurred leading up to developing the ideas for their stall, taking into consideration what other groups were doing and the experience of the “shopper”:

We thought of the ideas of getting the different things, so then there wasn't really a lot of the same thing because there was one other origami stall and two wouldn't make it a huge difference than having like maybe five or six. Because we don't want a lot of people doing the same thing—I think Whaea Tupou said about only one team or three having the same ideas in the Christmas fair.

(Henry)

A girl working in a group of six girls that included one nonparticipant also talked about her experience of the summer fair. Her sharing focused on the loom bands that decorated her group's Christmas trees. She commented that this was a "fun" experience and that all the girls "chipped in" with money to purchase the loom bands as well as "the money that we got provided with" (Ava). Ava shared that experiences and activities like this helped her to be "smarter with your choices" (Ava). When asked to elaborate on the notion of smart choices, Ava provided a detailed account of choices and decisions they made as a group, demonstrating how their interests through "play" activities outside of school influenced and informed the decisions made at school. This group of girls held expert insider knowledge of what would be a successful product for their potential customers. In simple terms, this group played to their strengths and collaborated in a design process that adapted along the way as they saw how they could attract customers with variations on the loom bands. Ava shared how they developed their concept and saw this as making "smart choices":

Well, the smart choices we made was making rings as well, and putting charms on some of the bracelets, because then it would look better, and we had some charms so might as well use them. So, when we were making the bracelets—or, when we were just playing—we decided we should make some of them like this. And then all of them agreed, so then we made it. Then we just started chipping in with the money, and then we kept making them every day and put them in these drawers. We done it colour coordinated, and that was way easier. We all

decided that it wouldn't be that good if we just had bracelets, and, finally, [nonparticipant group member] wanted us to make necklaces, so we made rings as well, and we added some charms. (Ava)

The summer fair prompted children to engage in real-life opportunities to create products or experiences to sell to their friends and community. Notably, the predominant instigator of each stall was their interests, whether it be through play, sport, or whānau experiences. Children, like their whānau and family, had experience as “customers” purchasing from shops, and children drew on these life experiences while planning for their stalls. Section 4.3.2 demonstrates further that children's prior knowledge and whānau have positive impacts in engaging with curriculum and school experiences, a further demonstration of whanaungatanga and tangata whenuatanga.

4.3.2 School Camp

The annual school camp for Year 5/6 also occurred in Term Three and was referenced by seven children during the individual interviews with links made across the curriculum to mathematics and writing. As well as this, children made decisions about what activities they wanted to participate in while on the camp. The teacher and the senior syndicate deliberately intended for children to be part of the decision-making for this upcoming event. Below outlines the teacher's approach to preparing for camp:

We were given a list of the camp activities from [school camp facility], and then what I've done is I've put it into our maths [costings for each activity]. So, in our maths, they [children] picked what camp activities they wanted, so they had to really make the decisions on which ones. So, some of them were like, “Well, I think we should do the tubing because even though it's expensive, we don't really do it, or we haven't done it.” Some of them have chosen horse-riding because they wouldn't ever do it. So, they made a decision around that. Then, it

was across the team [senior syndicate], and then we ended up finding out which ones. So, the children picked our activities. (Whaea Tupou)

Teaching and Learning in Real-life Context. The teacher explained that children were asked to justify their choices and was surprised by children's analytical approach when selecting activities. An additional factor for children was the criteria provided by the teacher, as, for instance, the budget and balancing this with being able to engage in new and fun experiences for many of them. Children considered what was "value for money", similarities in activities, and ensured they had a mix of expensive and inexpensive activities. Through this, children demonstrated their ability to analyse real-life problems and apply thinking that included taking into consideration the cost of activities and how this would impact on costs for whānau. The teacher shared surprises, such as:

My boys and some of my girls looked at the cost, and they thought, "Okay, we'll do some expensive ones, but also do some inexpensive ones." So, they really chose a range of options from expensive, but also, right down to [including] the free ones. (Whaea Tupou)

What follows are the accounts of seven children. This included the planning stage where deliberate connections to the curriculum were made, what children enjoyed, and what their concerns were, and, for one, what this meant for them being separated from their whānau for the week.

One boy shared that camp "was so much fun" (Isaac). He enjoyed being able to go with his Dad, who was a parent helper. Another boy provided an overview of what preparation for camp looked like and shared that camp, for him, was also a fun experience:

During our activity groups, we were deciding which buddies and groups to be in. My roommate was in my group, so I chose him ... Oh, before camp, in Term 3, all of us did a survey, and we did a survey for ourselves, and we chose which ones [activities] we'd like to do and how much money it would cost. So, they

put the ones that wanted more of the same thing together, and so obviously kayaking was one of the top ones. (Jack)

Agreeing with Jack, another boy commented that he had enjoyed being able to choose what activities they would do:

For camp, we had to decide what activities to do. So, we had all the activities on a spreadsheet, and then we all chose nine activities, and then we put a tally mark under the activity, and then the nine with the most tally marks were the ones we most wanted to do. (Carter)

Demonstrating that decision-making is not always clear to children, one boy commented that he was unsure who decided on the camp activities, but he thought his whānau group might have made this decision. He also said, “We had a lanyard, and it said what time we had to do the activities and what day” (Hakopa).

One girl elaborated on working as a group to decide on activities, reaffirming the strong presence of whanaungatanga, this being an important aspect for her: “We decided what activities we were doing as a class, and that helped more than doing it individually” (Ava). When prompted for the process they went through to decide on the activities, she added further:

When we were on our Chromebooks, we went into this website thing and looked at the activities we could do, and finally, I would write down on the paper what we would like, and then under that, tick what we put down as a class. Then, we got to do most of the things (Ava).

Ava reiterated that what helped her the most when choosing the camp activities was “just working together”.

Connecting the camp experience to the curriculum in a purposeful way with persuasive writing was another aspect of the school camp that two children shared. One girl noted that their writing assessment for the term was persuasive writing and that the senior

syndicate teachers decided on this topic: “It was camp is better than school. Some people thought that school was better than camp because then you won’t have to pay much money at school” (Addison).

Demonstrating the importance of his whānau through the persuasive writing topic, one boy shared his thoughts and perspective: “We were writing about would you rather go to camp or go to school” (Rewi). Rewi decided that staying at school was better than camp because going to camp meant he could not be with his whānau. For him, being with his whānau was fun and meant that he would miss special time with his Mum, who picked him up after school on some days of the week. He also felt that camp might be boring and that he could not use his device. He further shared:

Staying at school because camp ... you won’t be able to see your family. It’ll get boring as well because we’ll be doing the same activities over and over again. It’s just going to be dumb. Yeah, at school, you get to do lots of different things every time, and you get to go on your Chromebooks. You get to go see your Mum and Dad after school. Mum picks me up every Tuesday and Wednesday because my Mum works in the office, and every other day she works at home, and on Thursday she has a day off. So, today she’s going to pick me up. (Rewi)

The opportunity to talk with children about their camp planning and experiences has provided key insight into how large school events can provide genuine opportunities for children to be part of the school and curriculum decision-making. Children that commented on their involvement in the decisions for included activities demonstrated that they also applied real-life experiences in understanding the importance of a budget and working to be inclusive of the group’s needs and wants. Opportunities were also taken advantage of by the teacher in providing an authentic context for teaching in mathematics and writing, in doing so integrating the curriculum in meaningful ways.

4.3.3 Summary

School- and teacher-initiated inquiry in this research school included accounts of two opportunities for children to participate in meaningful ways for the direction and design of two events: the summer fair and the senior school camp. While children did not decide that there was to be a fair, the children in the senior syndicate were afforded autonomy in the decisions on *how* they contributed to the fair with their group stall. Children were supported by their teacher, other school staff, whānau, and friends to ensure their products or experiences were successful. Additionally, children organised and planned in groups, drawing on individuals' interests, strengths, and expertise. Opportunities such as this saw children employ negotiating skills with friends, whānau, teacher, and school staff as they navigated through differing ideas in their group. Children also drew on their real-life experiences and interests to develop and plan for their product or experience. Through this, children showed that learning for them was a holistic experience and was strongly influenced by experiences outside of school, a strong demonstration of tangata whenuatanga. Similarly, children's participation in the camp activities went beyond merely choosing what activities they would like to do. Instead, the teacher provided a meaningful, real-life structure in the form of a budget to which children needed to adhere. Children considered this carefully, and, through this, opportunities for authentic mathematics learning also occurred as well as fun experiences on camp, which were shared by children at interviews. The next section, Section 4.4, examines more closely the impact of the inclusion of prior knowledge and children's interests and lives through a child-initiated inquiry, which resulted in the building of a community pantry.

4.4 Child-initiated Inquiry

Nearing the end of Term Two, the research classroom was unexpectedly given a substantial package of nonperishable food by a local community organisation. The teacher discussed this donation of food with the children to see what they thought might be the best

way to use this. Through class discussion, the teacher shared, “We kind of adopted their idea [from the community organisation], and they [children] wanted to do a community pantry for school” (Whaea Tupou). One girl agreed with the origin of the idea for building the community pantry, saying, “For the community pantry, we decided that we wanted to make a pantry to give food to people that needed it because our church donated to us some food, I’m pretty sure” (Ava). A boy added further, explaining how the learning they were currently doing in hauora [health] was focused on well-being and the importance of being healthy: “When we do hauora, we were thinking about growing up and eating food to get more energy. So, we thought about making a pantry for the community” (Jack).

What follows is an account of this child-initiated inquiry that occurred over several weeks in often fluid and organic ways, facilitated by the teacher and the school caretaker. Whilst the case narratives thus far have demonstrated the culturally responsive practice of the teacher, alongside children showing how they have embraced a whānau culture that includes the Māori concepts of whanaungatanga and manaakitanga—the building of authentic relationships and care and respect for one another—the child-initiated inquiry will show how children themselves led learning in not only collaborative ways but also with knowledge and confidence, a strong demonstration of ako and wānanga in the classroom setting.

4.4.1 Building a Community Pantry

One boy recognised how teachers in the senior syndicate collaborated and planned for learning in curriculum learning areas that included the focus of inquiry that usually changed each term in response to children’s needs and interests. This child-initiated inquiry meant the research classroom deviated from the original inquiry planned across the senior syndicate. From his perspective, the idea for the community pantry came from his teacher:

I’m pretty sure it was the senior syndicate teachers because we were, every classroom was going to do something different, and we also came up with ideas

of what we could do, but no one in our classroom thought of the community pantry. (Henry)

The teacher also saw the community pantry as an opportunity to integrate other areas of learning, such as mathematics and literacy, with this inquiry. As a starting point for the inquiry, children were asked how they would construct the pantry. Children demonstrated that they considered design aspects, safety considerations, location of the pantry, who would receive the food, as well as considering any allergies people might have and who would be responsible for the pantry. Consistent with other learning tasks and events, children chose whether to craft their initial inquiry questions as individuals or as a group.

The teacher shared with me a class activity where all children wrote letters to the school principal (see an example in Appendix R), requesting funds to purchase materials to build the pantry. Two girls were tasked with writing a letter to the school caretaker to ask for advice and help with building the pantry (see Appendix S; Field notes, 12/8/2022). A subsequent letter was written to one of the parents who worked at a local hardware store to see if the store could help by donating materials.

4.4.2 Engaged in Planning and Design

On the morning following on from the inquiry questions developed by the children, the teacher set the scene for the planning and design of the community pantry. She summarised for the children what had happened so far and the good news that the principal had allocated \$500 for the building of the community pantry. The teacher emphasised, “This was real money” (Whaea Tupou). Tasks were established by the teacher and reflected the inquiry questions children themselves had developed. The tasks included:

- creating a budget for the building of the pantry as, for instance, paint and timber;
- researching the design of the pantry;
- writing to the school caretaker for advice and help;

- creating a Google survey, identifying what food items to include in the community pantry (other than what had already been donated); and
- scouting the school grounds for the best site for the community pantry. (Field notes, 12/8/2022)

There was an excited and purposeful atmosphere in the classroom with children focussed on and engaged in their chosen tasks. Children chose which of these tasks to be involved in:

The children would need to work on a budget for building the pantry (e.g., paint and timber). They would also need to research, design, and organise how this was going to happen. A Google survey would also need to be developed to find out what types of food people would want for the community pantry. Children had the choice of the activity they would be involved in [see above bullet points pages 169–170]. Children gathered Chromebooks or iPads and set to work around the classroom at tables, on the floor, in the blue zone (where the food was stored in boxes). Children worked side by side, in small groups, and a couple of children worked on their own. Two children went to scout the school grounds for the best location for the community pantry (their teacher reminded them to take a lanyard—this showed they had permission to be outside). Rose and Addison joined me at the round table with their Chromebooks. They quickly got to work on a shared Google Doc to write to the caretaker. (Field notes, 12/8/2022)

Experiencing success with the initial letter to their principal, Rose and Addison wrote to the school caretaker, requesting help with the construction of the pantry and, later, a letter to one of the children’s Mums, who worked at a local hardware store (Field notes, 12/8/2022). During this classroom observation, Rose and Addison worked on a shared Google Doc, writing a letter to the caretaker. As they collaborated on the letter, they used the

comments feature on Google Docs and verbal exchanges to improve the letter and provided feedback to each other, an example being, “I feel like it would be a better letter if we ...” (Rose; Field notes, 12/8/2022), this used to refine their letter. “Whaea Tupou drops by to check on the girls’ progress, conferencing with them about their writing with prompts and suggestions and then moves to another group” (Field notes, 12/8/2022).

Rose and Addison discussed how they would “sign off” at the end of the letter, debating whether it should be *friendly* or *formal*. They talked about how they had used a formal close (“Yours sincerely”) for the letter to the principal (see Appendix R) but that this was more about asking for help, so they decided on “Thank you” for the caretaker’s letter (see Appendix S). In a subsequent interview (Individual interview, 9.11.2022), Rose shared her experience of writing the letters for the community pantry, a task to which she and Addison were assigned. Rose connected the current learning focus of persuasive text with this, stating they needed to “persuade” their principal to help the class with funds for the community pantry. The writing of the letters was supported by their teacher and resulted in gaining help and support from the principal, caretaker, and a local hardware sponsored materials. As the morning’s observation continued, “I begin to rove and check in with others observing groups of children busily and purposefully working around the room, heads down and very focused on their tasks” (Field notes, 12/8/2022).

In another part of the room was a boy who was also designing a pantry and was focused on the type of food that should be included. He explained: “Canned food would be good as it won’t go bad” (Henry; Field notes, 12/8/2022; see Figure 14). This led to a discussion on what type of canned food people might like—baked beans, spaghetti, and Henry asked if canned fruit was a good idea. Giselle thought that it would be. Henry demonstrated his awareness that food needed to be preserved in some way to remain eatable, commenting

further, “They couldn’t really have frozen food because it wouldn’t stay frozen—unless they put it back in the freezer” (Henry; Field notes, 12/8/2022).

Figure 14

Food Donations



Amidst the participation from children in these activities, the teacher roved around the classroom, talking with children and observing them in action; she posed questions and supported children in their individual and collaborative tasks. The school caretaker visited the classroom (having heard about what the class was undertaking) and showed his hand-drawn design that included measurements and the products needed (see Figure 15). Whilst the caretaker was talking through the design aspects and specifications with the teacher, Giselle waited to show the teacher her design. Giselle had shared her developing design earlier in the morning with me. Both Giselle and I viewed the caretaker’s design with interest:

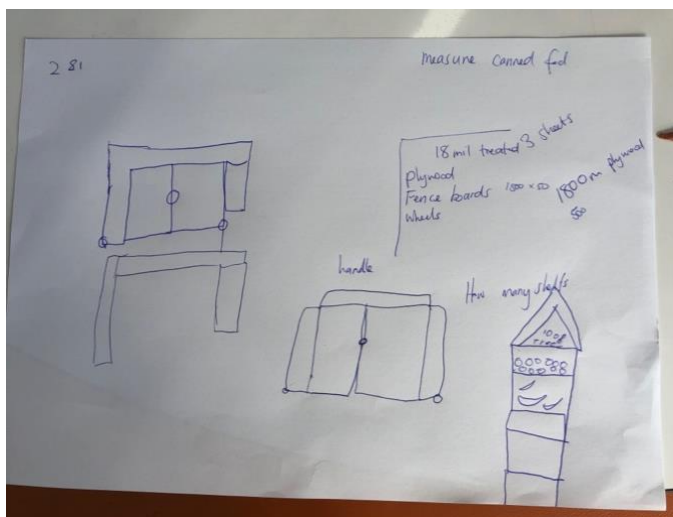
[Caretaker] comes back to show his quick design and share some advice. Whaea Tupou, Rose, Addison, Wiremu, with another couple of children [nonparticipants] are attentively listening. Giselle arrives hugging her Chromebook to share her design with Whaea Tupou. The caretaker says they need plywood (1800 h), and they will need three sheets. Fence boards would

also be good. Caretaker’s design had castors on the bottom. Giselle looked at the caretaker’s design and looked at me with a small knowing smile—I returned the smile. When the caretaker left, I said to Giselle to share her design with Whaea Tupou. Giselle’s design was almost identical to the caretaker’s design. There was a lovely exchange between Whaea Tupou and Giselle where Whaea joked about Giselle seeing [caretaker] design first! Giselle and I laughingly confirmed that she had designed this before the caretaker came in. Giselle beamed with pride. (Field notes, 12/8/2022)

In a later interview (Individual interview, 2/12/2022), Giselle said, “It was surprising and very cool” that her design was similar.

Figure 15

School Caretaker’s Draft Community Pantry Plan



4.4.3 Our Experiences Inform our Choices

For this child-initiated inquiry, it was evident that following their interests and drawing on prior knowledge and lived experiences was an intrinsic motivator for some children, demonstrating the influence that tangata whenuatanga—place-based knowledge and sociocultural awareness—has for children’s learning. An example of this was the children who chose to research the materials needed to build the community pantry. Children used the

internet to locate local hardware stores where they researched the timber needed to build the pantry. While designing the pantry, Wiremu researched online for the best timber to use:

He chose this because he was good at building. He said they needed to use treated timber because it was going to be in the weather. They also had a budget to stick to, so he needed to find out how much this cost. They would also need to get more food. (Wiremu; Field notes, 12/8/2022)

Another boy also considered the types of materials needed and the budget. He recalled at a later interview (Individual interview, 28.11.2022), “He [caretaker] had ideas about what is the best wood to use for the community pantry, so then we searched out how much it would be, but then, we got it for free” (Henry). When prompted for what might have been some of the challenges with the decisions they had in building the community pantry, Henry identified the importance of having background knowledge on what materials were needed in order for the community pantry to have longevity: “I think it’s knowing what supplies to use because you might get wood that looks very stable, but then within a week, it just breaks” (Henry). Another boy also shared in a later individual interview that, “Matua [caretaker] helped us, just to see what wood we had to get. We had to get treated timber” (Theo). When prompted as to why they needed to use treated timber, Theo elaborated on this, demonstrating his prior knowledge and the learning he had gained from both his uncle and the school caretaker:

If we left the wood outside—because if it wasn’t treated timber, the wood would get, inside of it would get all smelly and wet, soggy. Treated timber is a waterproof wood. My uncle does building, and I usually help him with building—even though Matua told us about it. (Theo)

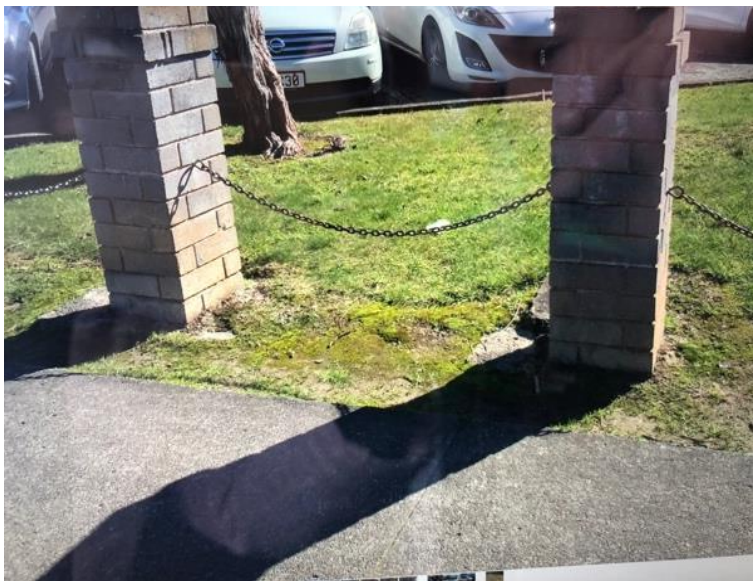
During this time, Isaac and Ava scouted the school grounds for different sites for the community pantry:

Isaac and Ava came back from scouting the school for a potential site for the pantry. They had taken photos on the iPad, and they were sharing these with

Hakopa. The best place they (Ava and Isaac) thought was out the front where they do road patrol (pedestrian crossing). That way, people would see the pantry when they walked past. Outside the hall was another option, but people would have to come all the way into school. Ava adds further with Isaac, agreeing by nodding and “yessing”. If we have it out the front, it would be better because some people might get embarrassed and worry that people don’t think they have any money. (Field notes, 12/8/2022; see Figure 16)

Figure 16

Scouting the School for Community Pantry Site



4.4.4 Children’s Awareness of Social Issues

Both the interviews and the observations within the classroom showed that children had varying views on what a community pantry might mean for others. For example, they recognised that accessing the community pantry may cause embarrassment for some people as they may think it might indicate they could not afford to buy food for their whānau.

Hakopa, who was part of the reviewing process for the positioning of the pantry, thought that adding the school values would be a good idea as people walking past would then know what these values were. This demonstrated that the school values informed children’s decisions and learning daily in multiple ways. At later interviews with two students (Individual

interviews, 1.12.2022, 9.11.2022), Ava and Isaac explained further their thinking on the positioning of the pantry: “We gave the ideas, and then we just looked around. We took photos around the school, and then we figured out that we needed to put it out there near the pedestrian crossing” (Ava). Isaac added that their motivation for where the community pantry was situated came from the understanding that food security was a social problem experienced by many whānau in Aotearoa New Zealand:

We put it over there. I took a photo there, and we also did take one right outside (other classrooms). Sometimes people starve—families—and they might need some food to eat. So, then we made a community pantry, and then each day, someone would get picked to go to Matua [school’s caretaker] to build it.

(Isaac)

This child-initiated inquiry demonstrated children’s awareness and care for their community and their understanding of the significance of food security for whānau. Children’s perspectives and views showed that this pantry was built for their community and that they did not want there to be barriers to accessing this. This included: “If nobody has food, they can come to our pantry” (Charlotte) and that community pantries are needed “Because people starve” (Ariki).

Another factor the children highlighted through the design process was the importance of protecting the experiences and respect for whānau, a strong demonstration of manaakitanga. The children wanted to ensure whānau members would not be put in a position where they may feel embarrassed or ashamed for taking some food. This was the deciding factor for the location of the pantry so that people would not have to walk into the school to access the pantry. One girl explained: “If we have it out the front, it would be better because some people might get embarrassed and worry that people don’t think they have any money” (Ava). The following interview excerpts further demonstrate the awareness the children had that school-based community pantries and other community organisations support those in

need as, for instance, “[then] you can grab some food if you’re hungry, or your family doesn’t have that much food to cook for tea” (Isaac). Henry agreed with Isaac: “We put that out for families in need, then they wouldn’t have to use a lot of money going out buying stuff, and it goes out in the morning and afternoon”. Rose made connections to the wider community:

I have seen many community pantries around town, and sometimes you see [name of non-profit organisation that provides free food], and you can see a few community pantries around town, and stuff like that. So, it’s just an amazing idea to help people that need it more than everyone else does. It’s just really kind to the people. (Rose)

For one child, the significance of food security and an extension of this–unsheltered living–was important to know about. In an individual interview, she demonstrated understanding and empathy with the needs of others in her community: “Well, it teaches you that sometimes people need this, and you don’t. Because then you can help them” (Ava).

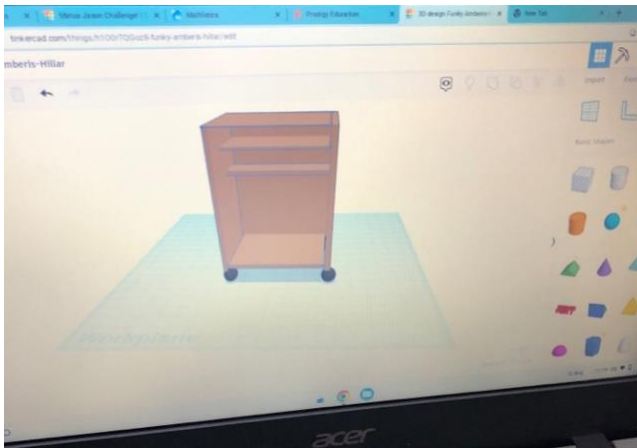
4.4.5 Connecting Mathematics Knowledge and Technology Design Skills

Hakopa, using the digital tool Tinkercad, wanted to create a pantry that resembled a wharekai (house for preparing and eating food) or wharenuī (meeting house) that included carvings across the roof. He also felt that the school values should be included somewhere. A three-dimensional application called Tinkercad was the digital platform most children used to design the pantry. Theo was focused on the sides and shelves and demonstrated how he could use measurement in the application to determine the sizes needed. Giselle, also used Tinkercad, working out how to add further shelves, and thought they also needed doors and wheels on the bottom. Using her problem-solving abilities, she “was figuring out how to work out the measurements” (Field notes, 12/8/2022; see Figure 17). One boy also saw the importance of mathematics and measurement in this task and related how he applied his mathematics knowledge and skills in designing the pantry:

It's just like you're doing huge measuring, so that's kind of maths because you have to measure how many things—well, while you measure, we have to see how many things could fit in one thing because we kind of wanted three [shelves], so we were deciding how big each one would be. (Jack; Field notes, 12/8/2022)

Figure 17

Designing the Community Pantry



Also designing a pantry on Tinkercad was Carter, taking advantage of the application's three-dimensional capabilities by viewing his design from all angles. In one observation, Carter was engrossed in this task and was working on lengthening the roof line. Addison was viewing Carter's design, nodding at the changes he made, and providing feedback on his design. Demonstrating her understanding that the design needed to ensure the food was kept safe from the weather, Addison pointed to the design and commented, "The roof has to come out more otherwise the water comes down over the food" (Field notes, 12/8/2022; see Figure 18).

Figure 18

Design Considerations



In the adjoining “blue zone”, children worked with a builder’s measuring tape and donated packaged food items (Field notes, 12/8/2022). Hakopa and Wiremu joined this group, measuring the packaged food as they thought it was important that the pantry design accommodated the dimensions of the food packaging (see Figure 19). Hakopa and Wiremu commented that, “They were measuring the food to make sure it would fit on the shelves” (Field notes, 12/8/2022). In a later individual interview, another boy also showed that considerations for “how” the food would be displayed on the shelves was also seen as important. Concurring with Hakopa and Wiremu, he also saw the importance of measuring the food items to ensure they fitted neatly onto the shelves: “We need to know how big the field is for each slot, because otherwise they’d have to lie down, and they might get messed up. So, we thought it would be good to have everything standing” (Jack). Figure 22 (see Section 4.4.8) does indeed demonstrate that the children’s careful measuring and attention to optimising the display of food products was successful.

Figure 19

Collaboration—Measuring Food Items to Fit Pantry Shelves



Apparent at the design stage were the considerations given for the different roles in the development and building of the pantry and how the efforts of the class community contributed to the “whole” product. Engaging in wānanga and ako, the discussions between children who were designing using the Tinkercad application with those who were measuring food items demonstrates the reciprocal and intentional ways children worked together. Jack, who was particularly engrossed with the design stage, demonstrated the sophisticated thinking involved in his design. He collaborated closely with his friend Carter and explained:

Carter and I both agreed it shouldn't be too tall because some people can't reach, so we thought it would be better to be wider. So, there was a corner, and then bring it out, because we were using a 3-D design app. We tried to find out the best set out for it. It was if we should make one big door and drawers, or one big drawer, or two open. We ended up going for two doors because it would probably be easiest; it would be kind of weird to think [of] this bigger bit as a drawer [pointing to the design]. And people wouldn't really know what to do—and know if they're allowed to check in it. (Jack)

4.4.6 Constructing a Community Pantry

Over the next few weeks, the building and painting of the school-based community pantry continued, typically by small groups of children working with the caretaker. At this point, the teacher took a step back from the inquiry with the children and caretaker taking responsibility. One boy explained the process of building the community pantry:

We made a community pantry, and then each day, someone would get picked to go to Matua to build it, and I painted this white, and then they had to over do it [the undercoat], and then when that came, and I saw it, and that was real cool. And then, we needed people to not starve because we're a kind class, and so we made that, and then, we had to wheel it out in the afternoons. (Isaac)

As part of the project, a group of children accompanied the caretaker in the school van to collect the donated materials needed to complete the pantry from a local hardware store. The continued theme of the importance of the materials needed for the project was also included, with one boy commenting, "it was very good wood because it's still standing" (Henry).

Children shared their individual experiences of this time during individual interviews, which included whether they were involved in the construction, preparation, painting, or advertising of the community pantry: "I just cut out the base with the first group, and then after that, everyone just had a turn painting and stuff" (Wiremu). One girl said she "Painted it white, and then they painted over it. That's what I did; I painted it white—and sanded" (Charlotte). Another boy also participated in the sanding process, saying "The edges couldn't be pointy, so you didn't get any blisters, and I got to paint it too" (Theo). On one of the days that painting occurred, I was present and able to observe the experience first-hand (Field notes, 7/9/2022).

Up to this point, children had taken turns in participating in sanding and painting the pre-cut boards, ready for assembly. The final product mirrored what the children had designed on Tinkercad. The boards had been undercoated and were ready for their first coat

of colour. Four children (four boys, including one participant, Hakopa) were ready for their turn and would be the ones to select the colours for the sides and doors. There was a lot of interest and excitement about being in the caretaker's shed:

The boys entered the shed and expressed how impressed they were with the shed and its contents. The shed was filled with tools, a ride-on lawn mower, wheelie bins for storage. The caretaker had two sawhorses set up to put the boards on for painting. He let the boys know that the boards were already primed and that they would be putting the first lot of colour on them. (Field notes, 7/9/2022)

During the observation (Field notes, 7/9/2022), the caretaker asked the children what colour or colours they would like to paint the pantry, pointing to a corner of the shed where there were numerous paint tins. Initial ideas included lots of colours, rainbow colours, and stripes. One of the boys thought they should use the school house colours (the caretaker confirming he had those colours). Further discussion between the children and the caretaker included using a range of colours on different boards (the pantry was not yet assembled).

Other considerations included the colours of the children's favourite basketball team:

Discussion continues about how they are going to do this and what colours to decide on. This still revolves around house, school values, and favourite basketball team colours. The caretaker opens the back door to the swimming pool area and takes them to the changing rooms, which are painted in the school values colours. All the boys are very impressed, expressing "wow" and "this looks great". The caretaker takes them next door where the colours vary but are still the school values colours. The boys leave here with a clearer idea of what they wanted. As they leave, the caretaker points out that the picnic tables are in the house colours (differing from the school values), and this was also met with

approval. The boys and caretaker make their way back to the shed. (Field notes, 7/9/2022)

As the colours continued to be discussed, the caretaker brought over the boards for the pantry and demonstrated how each piece fitted together. He explained that the roof would come out further to keep food items dry. This replicated the design and ideas of the children and was referred to earlier in the case narrative by Jack and Addison (see Section 4.4.5). The caretaker then brought over the doors and showed how these would be attached, including hinges and door handles, with wheels (castors) to come. Details like the handles and wheels were also considerations during the design process. For instance, one girl commented, “I just built like a normal pantry-type thing, and I put a handle on it, and that’s what this is ... The foundation, and wheels to move it around” (Giselle). Another boy also demonstrated the importance of being practical with the design: “Adding wheels, so we can actually move it” (Jack) The four boys decided on colours for the pantry inspired by the school houses and values (see Figure 20). A decision to create two large stripes on each panel was made, and the caretaker demonstrated how they would use masking tape to achieve this effect. This also meant there needed to be drying time between colours. One boy commented on the colour combination: “red and blue look good together, let’s do that” (Hakopa; Field notes, 7/9/2022). The children split into two painting teams. The caretaker used a large straight edge to draw a line down the middle of each board. First, he measured the width, saying to the boys, “400—what is half of 400?” Instantly, all children respond with “200!” Each pair, having decided on their two colours, played “paper, scissors, rock” to decide who would paint the board and the edges (Field notes, 7/9/2022).

Figure 20

Learning New Skills–Painting the Community Pantry



Before painting commenced, the caretaker provided paint shirts for each child, with either a brush for the board or a foam brush for the edges for painting. All children listened intently and worked on, following the modelling of the caretaker, responding positively to tips from him. Completing these boards, the caretaker asked if they would like to do the doors also. A resounding “yes” was given from all four boys. The discussion shifted back to the colours, deciding on whether to do another half/half combination of colours or one colour for each of the doors. With the caretaker holding the doors in place to help the boys decide, they unanimously decided that each door would have one colour: one blue and the other yellow (see Figure 21). This time, the caretaker presented the boys with rollers to use. He demonstrated the painting techniques used with paint rollers, and all the boys followed the advice and tips. After a short while, one boy commented, “This is so satisfying painting with the roller” (Hakopa; Field notes, 7/9/2022), clearly enjoying the process of painting and the outcome of his efforts.

Figure 21

A Colour Scheme Reflecting School Values



The observations in the classroom demonstrated the sustained concentration and considerable pride the children took in their work. While painting the pantry, all children were careful with their painting, often checking for streaks and drips from different angles, resembling adult craftspeople inspecting their work. At the end of their session, the children had completed the first topcoat on all the sides, doors, and handles. Initially, they were only going to do the sides. However, all boys were very keen to complete all sections for the pantry.

4.4.7 What Motivates to Participate: Choice and Engagement with Life Experiences

During the inquiry, children demonstrated sophisticated vocabulary associated with building and design, such as “treated timber” and why this was important (see previous comments from children in Section 4.4.3). They also understood the importance of foundations and that it needed to be “stable”. Another key factor was children’s prior knowledge and lived experiences and how these informed decisions in their everyday lives and learning. Including the interests and experiences of children outside of school proved to be a strong motivator. Additionally, children having the choice of what part of the design and building process they wanted to contribute to demonstrated authentic participation. For instance, one boy did not participate in the painting because “he didn’t really want to”

(Henry), showing his interests did not lie in this aspect of the development and building of the pantry. However, having the choice to be active in other aspects meant that he was motivated and part of the experience. There were also times when children shared their frustration and self-awareness, relating these feelings to school values. For instance, one girl shared her reflection on the design process:

The most difficult part was trying to design the pantry. We had to go on an online app or website, and it's called Tinkercad, and we had to try to design a little frame, or something, for the pantry, and I think that it was difficult to use. I'm never using it again. Now, that's my resilience being low; I'd get frustrated with that ... I had an amazing picture in my head, "Oh, I'm going to do this", but no. (Rose)

The community pantry's building drew on various children's interests, strengths, and skills. While some had new learning experiences, such as the building, painting, and designing of the pantry, children also drew on their own lives and their broader understanding of their community, a further demonstration of tangata whenuatanga. Children also saw this as a valuable life experience, with one girl commenting, "If anyone wants to be a builder when they're older, they have had some experience in life" (Charlotte). Another girl noted, "It's good because then I get used to doing stuff like that" (Addison). Most children shared this experience was "fun" with one boy commenting, "It's fun because it's like free time, but it's building free time" (Wiremu). Agreeing that the community pantry was a fun, collaborative experience, another boy said, "Sometimes it's just a very fun activity to do with the classroom" (Henry).

4.4.8 Starting the Conversation: Recognising Children's Capabilities, Leadership Skills, and Cultural Stereotyping

Much of this case narrative lacks the "voice" of the teacher, Whaea Tupou. This was deliberate on her part. Whilst her involvement in the initial setting up stages was evident

through the co-construction of development tasks and group organisation, the community pantry's design, construction, and needs belonged to the children. They were mentored and supported during the construction and painting phases by the caretaker, and all these tasks and steps were taken seriously by the children involved. The teacher saw her role as a “facilitator” and shared her genuine surprise when the community pantry was completed:

I stood up for the first time, I think when we got it [community pantry; see Figure 22] back to class, and I said, “Wow–this is it?” The children said, “How do you not know about it?” I said, “Because I haven’t been going with you; you have been making all the decisions without me! And I’m fine with that.”

(Whaea Tupou)

Figure 22

Community Pantry



For the teacher, there was an additional layer to consider regarding activities and experiences like the community pantry. For her, such activities demonstrated the capabilities,

leadership qualities, and whānau culture of the children—in other words, a strong demonstration of whanaungatanga:

I guess, my one is that there has been a lot of stereotyping around my children, and I just want others to know that my children are amazing, and I think more—so—I know that they’re amazing, but it’s more so other people or other teachers. So, the stereotyping is more around other teachers have seen my children more in the background, not so much in what I see day to day, the changes they have made. So, I hope that this kind of influences their viewpoint of them. (Whaea Tupou)

When prompted to understand and explain the classroom culture, the teacher elaborated further, seeing such activities as a “conversation starter” for positive discussions around the stereotyping of children. Additionally, children themselves made the connection to stereotyping through the hauora curriculum, including feeling stereotyped because of the colour of their skin. The teacher also added that children were often stereotyped through culture and sport. While many of the children, boys in particular, were acknowledged as excellent sportspeople, the teacher also wanted other teachers and society to see that these children had many other strengths and skills:

I hope it’s a conversation starter for relationships to be built up for other teachers to go, “I saw your pantry”—just to think of something positive to talk about with them. So, we’ve covered stereotyping in hauora, and most of my kids said, “Whaea Tupou, we feel like we get stereotyped for the colour of our skin.” So, that really made me sad; I really want to change that. Some of the stuff that they came up with was getting stereotyped for only being good at sports—which they are really good at sports, but it’s more so; they are good at other things, too. I think that’s why, for the next generation, I just want them to know that

they can do stuff, and they're enough. You don't have to feel like you just have to be sporty or whatever. It's a really hard one. (Whaea Tupou)

4.4.9 Summary

The child-initiated inquiry provided further opportunities for children to engage in a collaborative project that saw children determining for themselves where their strengths and interests lay and how they would participate. Additionally, the consistent narrative of children drawing on their prior knowledge and lived experiences was seen through children drawing on the knowledge and skills of whānau and learning from each other. Inherent in this was also the social context for learning. Children knowingly integrated their knowledge from other curriculum areas, such as mathematics, writing, and hauora. There was also a strong sense of community–whanaungatanga–where children showed understandings of social issues, wanting to lessen these for whānau. Similar to the school- and teacher-initiated inquiries, children saw the building of the community pantry as real-life learning and, for two children at least, perhaps preparation for future careers. The teacher saw this inquiry not only as a learning opportunity but also as one for children to demonstrate their capabilities, strengths, and leadership skills to the wider school community.

4.5 Listening to Children

As the community pantry building gained momentum over Term Three, 2022, the teacher and the class decided that although they had a significant food donation for the community pantry, they would need regular donations to sustain it. Two girls were tasked with contacting local organisations to see if they were willing to donate nonperishable items for the community pantry. One of the girls shared: “So, me and Rose rang some of the companies with food, but they couldn't do it, and then Whaea Tupou rang, and they said they could do it” (Addison). Addison's account demonstrates a nonchalant acceptance that the companies would say “no” when approached by a child but not when it was an adult, perpetuating the view that for children, “voice is *still* not enough”, with children's voices

often not taken seriously by adults. Additionally, as demonstrated by Addison, children accept and expect this from adults.

School- and teacher-initiated inquiries often intentionally draw on children's prior knowledge and lived experiences. Children in this study demonstrated a continuum of "knowing" that the teacher or teachers from the senior syndicate were deliberate in their choices of learning experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. The teacher shared during the three interviews that she did not feel that children always knew it was children's interests and ideas that drove decisions made for the school and curriculum:

I don't think they do; for instance, the children made the decision on the design for the school van—they had a concept that they voted for. But I don't think that they realise that they made the decision for that and that it wasn't us [teachers]. We gave them choices, but it was their decisions that made us decide what to do. (Whaea Tupou)

However, 12 children answered with a range of responses when asked about the teacher listening to their ideas with affirmative responses. Additionally, children articulated why it was important to them that teachers and adults listened to them. For two children, at least, this had an emotional effect. Included in comments from two children was the importance of children also needing to listen to adults, with one child considering the role of the teacher in decision-making and ideas. The following excerpts from individual interviews (9.11.2022, 28.11.2022, 30.11.2022, 1.12.2022, 2.12.2022) illustrate the views and thoughts of children in this study in response to teachers and adults listening to their ideas. Melody states, "Our ideas might be different. They could be right, and they could be wrong". Addison adds further with "It feels good ... It's good, because then they know their [children] ideas, and it could be different to theirs". Also referring to how being listened to feels was Wiremu: "It feels like I'm kind of the teacher, but I'm not. We might have good ideas". Another boy said it was good that teachers listened to children's ideas, making him

feel “proud” (Isaac). However, he also wanted the autonomy to keep his ideas to himself. Offering an alternative perspective, Rewi reflects, “It’s also good for kids to listen to adults as well. Then there’s no arguing and crying”.

One girl offered the following insight, pausing to think about her response to when teachers listen to children’s ideas:

It feels like—what does it feel like? With their ideas—but not always because the adults are older than the kids, and they have more mature choices than kids. But sometimes in their learning, they will have to because they’re a teacher, and that’s what their job is—to help kids and to help people learn. (Ava)

Another girl also had positive feelings when the teacher and class listened to her ideas, demonstrating that being part of a community supported individuals’ feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy:

It feels pretty good because it’s just an idea, and when they use it, it just feels really good for yourself. For instance, I suggest the thing with the class, and then the class is all happy about it. Everyone likes it, and it just feels really good and nice. (Rose)

Like Rose, one boy also shared the positive effect of sharing ideas with friends and his teacher and how this contributed to “a fun year” (Jack). He already felt that the teacher listened to his ideas and that, “sometimes I have really good ideas” (Jack). Jack also shared that when teachers listened to his ideas it “puts me at ease [because] sometimes I feel worried because my idea might get taken, [but] I like telling my ideas” (Jack). Jack also felt it was important for teachers to listen to children, noting that teachers needed to consider more than one piece of evidence when assessing learning. Importantly, for him, conversations about learning mattered: “If they don’t listen, they don’t really know how to improve us. You can’t just tell what we do by just looking at our work” (Jack). Demonstrating that children critically

evaluated the world around them in active ways, Jack also recognised the research interviews was another way of listening to children's ideas.

4.6 Reflecting on a Year of Learning and Teaching

Reflecting on the 2022 year's teaching and the voices of children, the teacher looked back and noted the importance of whanaungatanga and the strong relationships she intentionally created at the beginning of the year with children. This included deliberate team-building exercises as well as a consistent focus on the school values. These values supported the whānau culture and provided an environment that fostered learning, interdependence, and high expectations for behaviour and learning. An additional factor was the impact this had for the teacher's pedagogical practice:

I'm more myself around them as well. I don't know if it's because I've become more confident in teaching or because of the children, but we've just had such a fun year, so far, with lots of opportunities for the children to do stuff—lots of learning for the children and for me. So, the vibe that we have—we have a massive whānau vibe. (Whaea Tupou)

The teacher looked to the coming year and, again, reflected on the survey the senior syndicate distributed to the children to gain feedback on the year's learning and school life. This was also an opportunity to gather children's voices for the upcoming year and would be used to plan each term's curriculum units and inquiries. She said:

We've done a survey at the end of the last term, and the sort of things that came through was they wanted more science, and they wanted more art, and the thing that they loved most was mathematics. (Whaea Tupou)

In response to the survey, anecdotal conversations, classroom observations had with children, and group and individual interviews, the teacher wanted to shift her focus to a broader curriculum focus that included the arts, technology, and science:

I reflected on the need to bring in more of the arts curriculum. I do need to bring in more of science. I have brought in more technology, but it's not every day or every week that I've done it. So, that's something that I'm really mindful of that I need to try and link in. It's so hard, though. There's just not enough time.

(Whaea Tupou)

4.7 Real-life Learning Supports Participation in Curriculum Decision-making

Over the course of the year, children's life experiences were considered and included in classroom learning and curriculum in ever-increasing ways. As a result of this, reciprocal learning relationships between teacher and children and between children occurred, a strong demonstration of the cultural competency of ako. Importantly, for these children, much of everyday learning in the classroom was considered real-life learning.

The community pantry provided children with the opportunity to engage in a real-life inquiry that impacted on social, emotional, and cognitive learning. Children were able to apply known skills, such as using a design application and knowledge of building, and connect these with learning that had occurred in the mathematics, literacy, and hauora curriculum areas. Evident in classroom observations and through interviews were the ways in which children collaborated in learning tasks, activities, and events. Children purposefully engaged in the tasks they had chosen and were able to "shift across" these tasks, consulting and checking with each other. What was also apparent was the teacher often "melted into the background" during these times, adopting a supporting act role. Noticed across the three inquiries was the confidence that children had in themselves as individuals within this community. Children relied on each other, their strengths, and knowledge to achieve their outcomes. They also looked to the teacher, a trusted person that they knew implicitly was there to support, encourage, listen, and be a facilitator in enacting their ideas. For their teacher, children being active in their curriculum decision-making was critical, with inquiry-

based learning being a pedagogical approach that supported and motivated children's inclusion in this process:

I have to say, it's letting children direct learning. What I mean by learning is plan and explicitly do what you do in your classroom based on your learners. What I have done this year is completely different from what I did last year, and that's just because different learners mean different things. I guess, what I've loved the most—and I know that the children will highlight or what they'll talk about most is probably that they will remember this year is the pantry—and that was around decision-making. So, a project or something where the children can make a decision around their learning, make the choices, decisions, and direct their learning—more inquiry learning. (Whaea Tupou)

4.8 Summary

A key aim of this study was to establish how children's rights to participation were afforded to children in a classroom environment and how children are supported to be self-determining persons. However, while this study can demonstrate *how* children participated and influenced decision-making, it also became evident that this was far more complex and nuanced. Considerations that included notions of voice and learner agency were apparent throughout observations and interviews. The children who participated in this study demonstrated consistent engagement in everyday curriculum-based learning, and school- and teacher-initiated, and child-initiated inquiries. Often, the motivation for learning was pre-empted by the social context alongside individual and collaborative actions by children.

Interestingly, children had a tacit understanding that their participation in school-based learning and events was often seen as “business as usual”. Children themselves had expectations about their choices in learning as well as with whom they sat and collaborated. Planning and the development of ideas, activities, and events were also a regular occurrence in their school life. For these children, their level of participation mattered to them, whether it

be as simple as choosing the book they read online, organising their daily and weekly timetables, developing ideas for a fair, deciding on the activities for camp, or planning and building a community pantry that served their community.

There was also an underlying notion that children were confident in making these decisions about their learning and lives. Children recognised the vital role that their teacher, friends, and whānau played in their learning. Importantly, several children in this study saw themselves as active participants and instigators in their learning. There were also times when children felt that it was important for adults and teachers to make decisions on their behalf as they had more experience and understood the needs of children. When asked if teachers should listen to the ideas of children more than they currently do, the responses were predominately “no”, reasoning that being listened to and included in decision-making was already being met much of the time.

Children’s inclusion, participation, and influence in curriculum decision-making can often be invisible to both adults and children. This study aimed to partner with and listen to children to identify how they experienced learning in the school setting and, through this, identifying to what extent children participated and influenced curriculum decision-making. Over the course of three terms, children shared their learning activities and tasks, and their motivation to engage in these. Importantly, what became evident was that children participated and influenced curriculum decision-making in complex and varied ways. However, there appeared to be three clear consistent catalysts for this participation. First, children engaged in learning tasks and activities that connected to their prior knowledge, lived experiences, and interests. These notions were inextricably entwined with their whānau, identity, and culture. Additionally, children chose reading and other literacy tasks connected to their own interests, with many children identifying how the reading or tasks they were engaged in would further their learning inside and outside of the classroom. In the mathematics curriculum, children engaged with mathematical problems that were

contextualised and often connected to their worlds. The addition of the teacher purposefully integrating curriculum areas to ensure that literacy and mathematics were engaged with in meaningful and real-life ways was seen as motivating and important to children. Evidence of this will be further explored in the discussion chapter, Chapter Five.

Second, the social context of learning can be seen throughout interviews and observations as a crucial factor in how children engaged and participated in learning. Children were able to share varying levels of understanding on why this was important to their learning. These included having a sense of belonging and helping each other to determine when it was appropriate for their learning to be collaborative, or not, and how this positively impacted their educational outcomes. Children also showed how they negotiated and identified meaningful pathways to learning. They recognised their strengths and the strengths of others as well as, for some, knowing what their next steps in learning were. Fostering a whānau culture was intentional by the teacher, who knew the value of building authentic relationships. This also supported children's voice and participation as children felt comfortable and confident in sharing their views and ideas, knowing these were valued by their teacher.

The third consistent motivation for children were the autonomous ways they acted throughout the school day. While they were provided with a structure to complete tasks, children themselves planned and organised their own timetable. During the mathematics and literacy blocks, children established routines that supported their learning. Within the structures provided, children were autonomous in the choices they made, such as reading, tutorials, and mathematics tasks. Children demonstrated, through a variance in voice, that autonomy in their class life meant they were in control and were able to decide what was best for their learning, demonstrating how they acted in self-determining ways.

Chapter Five will demonstrate that the research classroom showed consistencies with a collaborative community of practice. Rogoff's planes of analysis have provided the

opportunity for a further analysis of the findings. This further analysis will provide an in-depth view of how children participated in the community/institution, interpersonal, and personal planes (Rogoff et al., 2018). Foregrounding each of the planes provides further opportunity to examine the everyday ways children have participated in and influenced curriculum decision-making.

Chapter Five

Discussion

The major purpose of this chapter is to discuss the research findings using Rogoff's three planes of analysis in order to understand the interrelated and interdependent nature of the children's experiences in the classroom that lead to transformation of their participation within a collaborative community of practice. Through these three planes, the discussion will detail how the teacher ensured the classroom environment encouraged the collective development of a collaborative community of practice that presented opportunities for children to act in autonomous, self-determining ways. This discussion chapter begins with the three main themes interpreted through Rogoff's planes of analysis (Sections 5.1–5.3). Together, these sections provide a response to the overarching research question: *How do Year 5/6 children who participate in curriculum decision-making realise their rights as self-determining persons?*

Chapter Four identified three main themes in the collaborative community of practice that was established. With this in mind, this discussion chapter first provides an interpretation of the themes through Rogoff's (2008; Rogoff et al., 2018) planes of analysis. There are three planes of analysis: the community/institution, guided participation, and participatory appropriation planes. Theme one, *Children and their teacher experienced active and contributing roles in curriculum decision-making*, will be discussed through the community/institution plane where children worked in a collaborative community of practice as apprentices, learning from known structures and their community (Section 5.1). Theme two, *Children actively engaged in the social context for learning*, aligns with the guided participation plane where children demonstrated their interpersonal skills whilst engaging and learning in sociocultural activities and events (Section 5.2). Finally, theme three, *Children demonstrated self-determining attributes in collaborations and learning*, is explored through the personal plane (participatory appropriation) whereby children drew on their collaborative

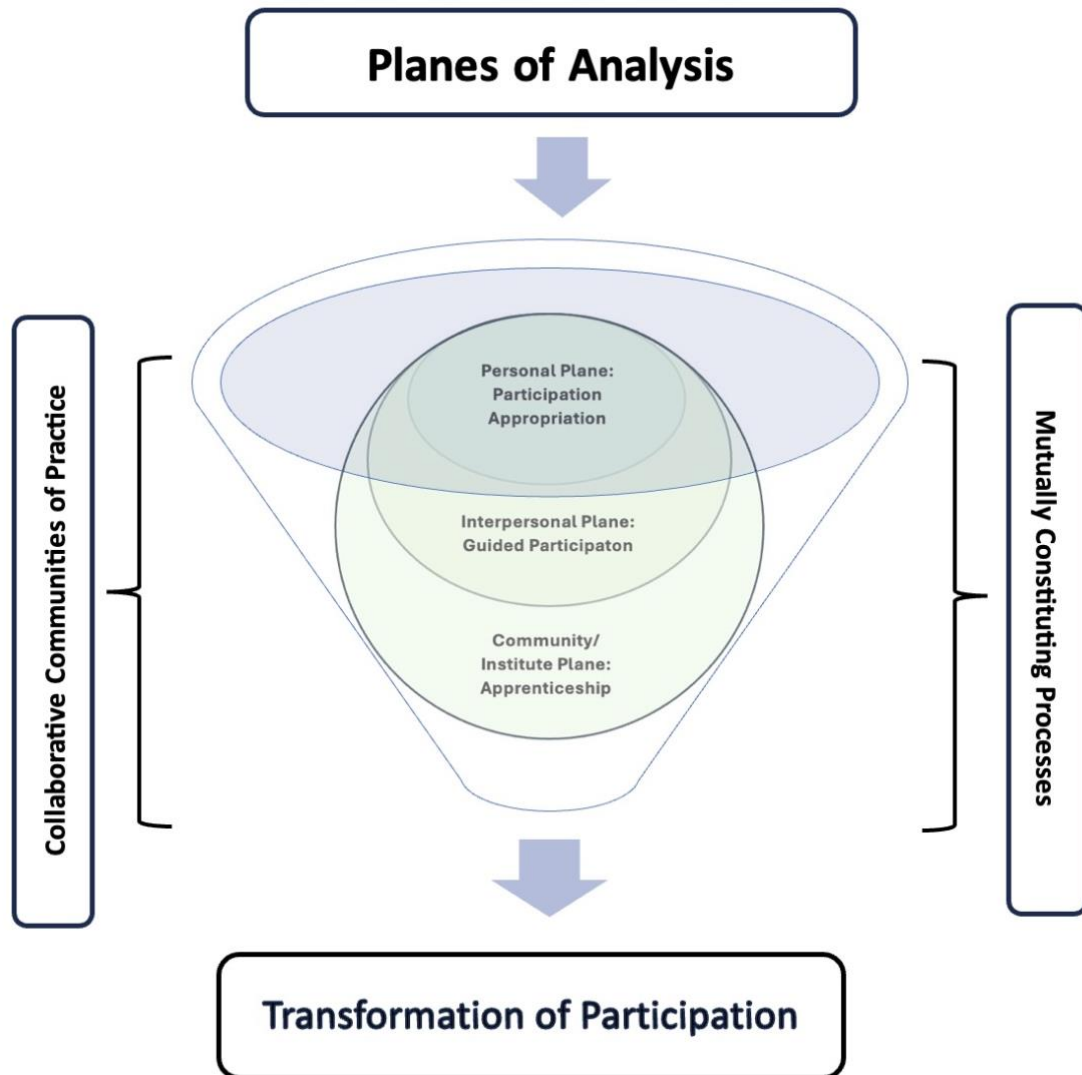
community of practice, their strengths, and the strengths of others to further their knowledge and skills and apply these in a variety of contexts (Section 5.3).

The findings from the case narratives as a whole are examined through the planes of analysis to help better understand the dynamic social construction of the classroom environment and children's transformation of participation in their learning (Rogoff, 1990, 1993, 2003, 2008; Rogoff et al., 2018).

Figure 23 illustrates how the concept of a collaborative community of practice may be understood in Rogoff's terms by viewing children's participation and influence in curriculum decision-making through the three mutually constituting planes of analysis, resulting in transformation of participation for children and teacher. Critically, it is understood that the planes of analysis are not considered to be hierarchical nor separated. Instead, each plane is part of the one picture, bringing to the fore a different focus within the whole integrated sociocultural activity or event (Rogoff, 1993, 2003, 2008). Whilst foregrounding or distinguishing one plane, the understanding is that two further planes exist in the background (Rogoff, 2008). Rogoff (2003) states: "These levels of analysis are inseparable. The efforts of individuals constitute cultural practices and further organise people's development" (p. 65). The final stage in this process is the resulting transformation of participation, which occurred in this study through children participating and contributing to sociocultural tasks and events in meaningful and purposeful ways. Many children were able to share and articulate how their learning, lives, and perspectives were transformed through their participation (Rogoff, 2003) in a collaborative community of practice, seeing them acting in ever-increasing autonomous and self-determining ways.

Figure 23

Interpreting the Transformation of Participation in a Collaborative Community of Practice



The final section of the discussion chapter (Section 5.4) provides further examples of how children's participatory rights as self-determining persons were actualised in the classroom. In doing so, the section provides responses to these further research sub questions:

1. What are the supporting and inhibiting factors Year 5/6 children experience in participating individually and collectively in curriculum decision-making?
2. How do teachers encourage and facilitate children's participation in curriculum decision-making?
3. How do these experiences enable self-determination?

Following on from the discussion on Rogoff's three planes of analysis, the concluding section (Section 5.4) begins with examples from the findings on how the key competencies in the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC; Ministry of Education, 2007) can be interpreted through a self-determination lens, supporting children to act in self-determining ways through their engagement in sociocultural activities and events (Section 5.4.1). Following on from this (Section 5.4.2), children's motivation and engagement in learning is discussed, demonstrating the many ways children consistently acted in autonomous and agentic ways, recognising their own and the capabilities of others. In doing so, developing the skills of good citizenship. Next, autonomy-supportive teaching and the benefits for both children and their teacher are presented. Also included is discussion on inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogical approaches and the practical ways in which teachers can support and encourage children to be self-determining and self-regulating with their learning (Section 5.4.3). Section 5.4.4 returns to the initial motivation for this study, Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989; United Nations, n.d.) and children's participatory rights. The chapter as a whole provides a comprehensive view of what a collaborative community of practice looks like in action and how this supports children to realise their participation and voice rights in curriculum decision-making.

5.1 Children and Their Teacher Experienced Active and Contributing Roles in Curriculum Decision-making

This section foregrounds Rogoff's community/institution plane through children's apprenticeship in the classroom community. The findings established that the teacher deliberately fostered a collaborative community of practice. In establishing this community, a strong emphasis was placed on the building of relationships, creating a sense of belonging, and understanding the context of children's lives. The discussion that follows will also include the importance of whānau, culture, prior knowledge, and the interests of children. A strong focus in this plane of analysis is the establishment of structures and routines in which children engage. In Rogoff's (1990, 2008) terms, through such structures, children act as

apprentices, familiarising themselves with routines alongside others in their community. The discussion will consider how children planned and engaged in learning and sociocultural activities in both collaborative and autonomous ways. In doing so, it is shown that they participated and influenced curriculum decision-making.

5.1.1 Establishing a Collaborative Community of Practice

At the start of the 2022 school year, the teacher set about intentionally building a collaborative community of practice, focusing on building relationships with children and creating a classroom culture that was inclusive of and affirmed the diverse identities and cultures within this community. The children also learned about their peers in their classroom, including those outside of their friendship groups, enabling a collective sense of belonging or whānau to emerge. From the outset of this research, this was the teacher's intent. Bishop (2023) asserts that creating a whānau culture in the classroom has expectations and the values of caring (manaakitanga), support (tautoko), and learning (akoako). A whānau culture is a place where ideas and identities flourish and thrive, and the community prospers. Bishop (2023) also maintains that the context for learning is critical.

The teacher's approach to building a classroom culture included deliberately grouping children in ways they would not typically choose and was implemented through team-building games and activities for children to get to know and understand each other in this classroom. This was established by using cooperative grouping that deliberately mixed gender, ability, and friendship groups using a specific structure (Clowes, 2023; Morcom, 2014). Children were actively involved in this process with goals for group activities shared and often discussed and developed by teacher and children. Rogoff (1993) notes that cooperative classroom learning has a positive impact on academic tasks and social structure, and fosters peer collaborations. However, noted in the initial stages of introducing cooperative grouping was the voice of at least one nine-year-old girl who was unhappy at first with not being able to choose her friends to work with for these specific times. Despite the

initial misgivings of at least one child, classroom observations and conversations with children over the three terms saw children talking favourably about these cooperative group times with children being able to share the focus for the group discussions and the specific processes involved to ensure everyone was able to contribute in inclusive ways. This result could be attributed to cooperative grouping that was an integrated part of classroom practice rather than cooperative learning opportunities being offered in an isolated, predominately adult-run approach (Rogoff et al., 2018).

The classroom culture of a “whānau environment” was important to the teacher, who consistently reinforced that children in the class needed to be there for each other, to support each other. For the teacher, this was a vital element to have in place to ensure that curriculum and learning were effective. Integral to this process was the explicit reinforcement of the school values, which provided clear guidelines and high expectations for learning and behaviour. Evidenced in the findings, children adopted the values as a way of being, both in and outside of the classroom. This guided and supported children in how they interacted with others and engaged in learning tasks and activities. Riwai-Couch (2021) aligns with the research classroom teacher’s values, insisting that ākonga Māori, Pasifika, and non-Māori children are more likely to achieve when they see themselves, whānau, hapū, and iwi reflected in the context of learning. Cudré-Mauroux et al. (2019) agree, noting a trusting teacher-student relationship based on shared values fosters mutual respect.

The teacher not only built strong relationships with children, but she also had the confidence to adapt the curriculum and direction for learning in response to her knowledge of individual children, and their needs, interests, context, and cultural identity. This often occurred in small yet impactful ways as, for instance, integrating children’s interests for mathematics and literacy tasks through to deviating from the senior syndicate focus for a child-initiated inquiry. Cudré-Mauroux et al. (2019) support this approach, explaining that

children experiencing social engagement and a strong sense of belonging are significant predictors of sustained intrinsic motivation in the classroom.

Reeve (2012) explains that the psychological need of relatedness sees individuals developing close emotional bonds with others. Throughout this research, the teacher often commented on the positive impact the collaborative community of practice had for children who had been identified as challenging at the beginning of the year by school leadership and other teachers. The teacher also noted changes in relationships between children. Significant changes were observed by the teacher of children who had previously “not got along”, or the inclusion of children who had not been accepted by a certain group of children and who were now seen being included. The teacher attributed these positive changes to the whānau culture that had developed. Examples of this were children encouraging and supporting one another as well as working alongside one another. Relatedness is primarily concerned with individuals experiencing a sense of belonging and connectedness, fostered through care and respect (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Experiencing belonging and connection begins with the emotional ties one has with whānau, friends, and groups. By implication, creating a classroom environment that actively nurtures a relatedness orientation requires teachers to establish authentic relationships *with* children as well as relationship building *between* children (Svrcek & Abugasea Heidt, 2022). As the following section demonstrates, when these conditions are in place, the teacher is said to be “in sync” with children, engaged in an authentic teacher–student partnership that encompasses both motivation and agentic engagement (Reeve & Cheon, 2021; Reeve & Shin, 2020).

5.1.2 The Teacher–Student Relationship: Creating an Environment of Mutual Respect and Care

Rogoff (2003) notes that members of a community can often have difficulty in noticing changes, particularly when they are members of different communities at the same

time. This is due to boundaries being blurred between communities. This is particularly applicable in the school setting where many structures and routines are similar, with classrooms often having subtle differences in approaches, structure, and routines. In this research, the teacher established a strong whānau culture, fostering a sense of belonging where children felt included and valued. In addition, the teacher's introduction of classroom structures and routines created a sense of stability for children, and, over time, a clear understanding of expectations developed. Children's need for structures and routines were affirmed when a change occurred to the syndicate timetable, seeing a break in the usual structures and routines, and this caused a point of tension for the teacher. Interestingly, when children from the research classroom talked about the changes to the literacy timetable (during this time), they did not remark on the changes in structures and routines. Instead, children commented on the changes in line with the type of learning they were engaged in with core curriculum areas.

Conversations with children demonstrated the strength of the teacher–student relationship that existed in the research classroom. For instance, children were comfortable and confident in sharing their views and ideas with each other and their teacher in a variety of ways, including cooperative groups, collaborations of their own choice, and informal, everyday interactions. Importantly, Holquist et al. (2023) note that “stronger student–teacher relationships have been identified as an outcome of student voices [sic] practices” (p. 726). Mayes (2020) affirms the importance of the teacher-student partnership where teachers listen to children and recognise them as “expert witnesses” in relational and pedagogical possibilities, leading to transformative institutional change. Additionally, Mayes is in agreement with Holquist et al., stating that mutual respect between student and teacher has been identified as a critical component in furthering student voice.

In this present study, the teacher also valued the identity and culture of children and worked to create sociocultural activities that children could relate to and wanted to participate

in. This work extended to the senior syndicate team and school leadership. The syndicate-wide approach was particularly evidenced during the two inquiry-based learning case narratives where collaborative decisions by teachers and children were made for the school camp and summer fair. Another example was the community pantry in the research classroom where the children actively sought support from the principal and school caretaker. Consistent with Morcom's (2014) research, when children are provided with the tools and environment to share ideas with peers, they develop trust, tolerance, and empathy, these being valuable life skills.

The school values also played a key role in establishing expectations for learning and behaviour and the forming of positive relationships in the research classroom. There were multiple references to these throughout the year, whether it was through conversations; how children engaged in learning, reflecting on their resilience, determination, and persistence with tasks; or how they supported others. Opportunities to exercise leadership and citizenship were important factors for children, including the care of younger children as well as peers. Creating a class and school environment where children are living out their rights to “prosper, flourish, and thrive” sits at the heart of a community and provides the impetus for self-determining behaviours (Becroft, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2007; Reeve, 2012).

Over the course of the school year, this particular collaborative community of practice developed an environment where children were confident to be who they were and, because of this, were secure in their agency to make decisions for their learning, alongside also trusting their teacher to make the right decisions for them. Fielding's (1999) notion of radical collegiality reimagines the teacher–student relationship as a partnership that sees children empowered to participate in decision-making in more meaningful ways. To achieve this, Fielding suggests that “transformation requires a rupture of the ordinary” (p. 2). Whilst transformation in this present study did not appear to include a “rupture”, it did require a determined pathway by the teacher, supported by the school leadership and the school values

that had been established in consultation with the community and children. Holquist et al. (2023) likens this to a form of distributed leadership that sees school leaders including other adults and children in a school's vision, embodying a stronger social justice lens. Similarly, Perry-Hazan (2021) argues that "participation serves children's best interests, as it contributes to more accurate and relevant decisions in schools, improves school climate, and increases students' sense of belonging" (p. 186).

The notion of relatedness has been identified as one of the three basic psychological needs in self-determination theory, together with autonomy and competence (Ryan, Curren, & Deci et al., 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2020; Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008). This means children need to experience a sense of belonging and feel connected to those in their community for sustained intrinsic motivation and engagement to occur. Importantly, the learning environment needs to be one that is nurturing, kind, caring, trusting, and empathetic (Bishop, 2023; Riwai-Couch, 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Classroom observations, mid-year focus groups, and group and individual interviews with children and teacher in this study confirmed that at the heart of this collaborative community of practice was a place of genuine care, respect, and trust, and that these relationships were reciprocal in nature.

5.1.3 Children's Learning and the Context for Motivation

Children's prior knowledge, lived experiences, and interests are intimately connected with whānau, identity, and culture (Bishop, 2023; Bourke & Loveridge, 2018a, 2018c; Riwai-Couch, 2021). In this study, one of the key factors for children's participation and influence in curriculum decision-making was the teacher's strong understanding of children's prior knowledge and lived experiences. Planning for curriculum occurred at school leadership, syndicate, and classroom levels. From the perspective of the teacher and school leadership, planning for curriculum came from a localised, place-based context as well as the known interests of children. The NZC (Ministry of Education, 2007) states that a local and national context should underpin all curriculum decision-making. This includes a curriculum that

“connects with their wider lives, and engages the support of their families, whānau, and communities” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 9). The priorities for a place-based curriculum continue in the refreshed draft curriculum, Te Mātaiaho (Ministry of Education, 2024), noting the importance of local and national contexts being brought to life in the classroom.

Furthermore, tangata whenuatanga, included as one of the cultural competencies in Tātaiako (Ministry of Education, 2011) demonstrates the importance of teachers harnessing “the rich cultural capital that Māori learners bring to the classroom by providing culturally responsive and engaging contexts” (p. 10).

The teacher acknowledged that whilst teachers planned with children’s interests and learning trajectories central to this, this was not always obvious to or known by children themselves. Children were able to identify the hierarchical decision-making that occurred in their school, whether these were decisions made by the teacher, senior syndicate, or the school leadership team. For instance, children often commented that the principal or senior syndicate teachers made decisions about the topics or inquiries they were learning about. Interestingly, even though children engaged in a survey prepared by the teachers to gather data on their interests and thoughts for the curriculum in the coming year, children did not mention this in interviews. However, at the classroom level, most children consistently shared throughout the year how their prior knowledge and interests informed classroom learning. Additionally, children were able to explain when and how this occurred, and how this engaged them in learning. Importantly, it was the everyday activities and interests of children that engaged them most. Aitken and Sinnema (2008) demonstrate the importance of continuity between the home and school context for learning. For this continuity to occur, learning needs to be relevant to the whānau context, experiences, expertise, and interests of children. In doing so, learning “builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities” (p. 57). The research of Bourke, O’Neill, and Loveridge (2018a, 2018b) also recognises the

importance of the authentic inclusion of children's everyday lives, interests, whānau, and friends in learning tasks and activities. It is through this that children make connections with the world, which includes working as part of a collaborative community of practice where such collaborations result in children operating as self-knowing, self-regulating, and autonomous learners (see also Bourke & Loveridge, 2018c).

There were also occasions when the teacher changed the direction for the classroom-based curriculum from the original plan in direct response to children's interests. For example, it was based on these changes that the child-initiated inquiry materialised as well as the deliberate changes in the mathematics programme at the beginning of the school year by the teacher. In this regard, Bishop (2023) maintains that for ākonga Māori to enjoy self-determination (*te tino rangatiratanga*), culturally responsive pedagogies must enable prior knowledge to be legitimised with collaborative, co-constructed activities that seek "to use power-sharing strategies" (Bishop, 2023, p. 31).

This present study demonstrated that there are several factors to consider when enacting children's partnership and collaboration in classroom curriculum and pedagogical decision-making. Genuine reciprocal relationships provide the foundation for this; however, also critical to participation and decision-making is the understanding that children's prior knowledge, lived experiences, culture, and identity must be central. The teacher purposefully connected the lives and interests of children with the classroom curriculum learning context. Moreover, curriculum informed by the context and lived experiences of children is not only engaging for children but it also supports agentic learning as well as positively impacting on children's lives. Reeve and Shin (2020) explain that agentic learning is both an action and behaviour that sees children making constructive contributions to teaching and learning. Furthermore, it is a form of engagement that is "uniquely proactive and reciprocal" (p. 152). Importantly, agentic learners take action and speak up, offering suggestions and perspectives.

Nelson's (2018) research explored how teachers, working with intermediate-aged children (11–13 years) were able to form genuine partnerships with children, resulting in shared pedagogical decision-making in the classroom. However, Nelson (2018) cautions that partnership and collaboration between teacher and students is often constrained by adults, “with substantive student involvement in decisions around pedagogy within the classroom a rarity” (Nelson, 2018, p. 198). In the research classroom, such constraints were addressed by actively searching for new and innovative ways to include children in the decision-making process. Initially, this was based on children's interests, such as Pokémon and favourite sports, but expanded across the year to include inquiries and real-life events, such as the summer fair and community pantry. A further demonstration of actively seeking children's participation in classroom decision-making was evidenced in the three interviews with the teacher, particularly the final one. In this, the teacher demonstrated that she was critically reflecting on how effective she had been with inclusive decision-making. She was able to identify when children had knowingly been included and how this could be expanded further in the year to come. For instance, there was the possibility of the inclusion of more science and the arts.

Children Instigating Whānau and Interest-based Learning. Contextualised learning provides opportunities for deeper understandings. In the curriculum-based learning case narrative, children's interests formed the basis for independent reading tasks, and these were consistently informed by whānau and personal interests. Children's choice of text or tutorials saw them motivated and engaged in their learning choices. The two online reading platforms that children could access provided a wide range of topics. Whilst furthering known contexts and interests, children also actively sought new knowledge and understandings outside of their immediate context and world. Some children shared that engaging with learning like this helped them to focus. Svrcek and Abugasea Heidt's (2022) recent research focuses on children's reading abilities and notes that strictly adhering to children's reading

levels does not predetermine reading success. Rather, the inclusion of providing regular opportunities for children to choose books based on personal interests alongside celebrating current reading practices motivates children's interest and self-determination in reading. In similar ways to Svrcek and Abugasea Heidt's (2022) research, children in the research classroom actively sought out the genre of books they liked to read with children's use of the digital library akin to visits to the local town library. Children scanned and searched the catalogues to find what was of interest to them and then engaged in the act of independent reading. Children also shared that for some of them, the added digital tools of being able to listen to the text, and "click on" words that were unfamiliar and repeat them supported the furthering of their reading skills.

Through the participatory nature of this present study, children's motivations were often shared through informal conversations as well as through mid-year focus groups and individual interviews. Children also demonstrated that they knew the interests of others in their collaborative community of practice and could identify these. Consistently, many children were keen to share their interests, and, in most cases, their interests connected with their whānau. Additionally, some children demonstrated considerable pride in their family's interests, activities, jobs, and community involvement. Much of the initial stimulus that informed this present study came from the research of Bourke and Loveridge (2018a, 2018c; see also Bourke, O'Neill, & Loveridge, 2018a, 2018b) where the researchers engaged with children, and children themselves recorded their experiences of informal learning. Bourke and Loveridge's research built on an initial research project that focused on teachers reflecting on student voice research and its influence on learning. The subsequent research took place in four primary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand with Year 4 (aged 7–8 years) and Year 8 (aged 11–12 years) children. The initial intent was to explore children's views on learning and assessment during a period of mandated National Standards. However, the focus of the research shifted to include children's accounts of what was important for their learning,

illustrating “how learning for children is interconnected with their entire lives: interests, family, siblings, peers, and activities” (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018c, p. 149). Further to this, children demonstrated they were aware of needing a range of skills and knowledge to achieve better lives (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018c).

Seeing Learning Through the Lens of the Child. This present study has also demonstrated that when one listens to children’s experiences of school, one sees learning through the lens of the child. This lens highlighted that it was often the little things that mattered for children and their learning. To elaborate further, children were motivated and engaged with learning when they understood the context and, through this, established personal learning goals that were not always evident to the teacher or researcher. The children in this study also shared similar aspirations for their learning, identifying what they needed to do to improve learning outcomes. A critical part of this, for this group of children, was participating in a collaborative community of practice where they saw the benefits of drawing on their friends as social partners in reciprocal and collaborative ways. Rogoff (2008) relates apprenticeship to a group in a community with specialised roles orientated towards the accomplishment of goals. In this, children communicate and coordinate as they participate in socioculturally structured collective acts. Observations and conversations with children and the teacher in this study consistently affirmed that children were indeed actively communicating with one another, planning, and working towards personal and collective goals. In similar ways, Sewell’s (2006) research with children and teachers in a community of learners identified that children participate in dialogic “knowing” ways, building on each other’s ideas.

Recognition of Culture, Strengths, and Skills. The teacher aimed to plan tasks and activities that played to the strengths, interests, and context of children’s lives. This stance aligned with her own cultural identity and strong connections to the school community and saw her reflecting on what this meant for many of the children in her class. This teacher

wanted other teachers and society to know that ākonga Māori and Pasifika had many strengths and skills, and that, for example, whilst they were often excellent sports people, they were also capable of achieving success academically and in other professional worlds. Critically, the teacher wanted these children and future generations to know they are capable of achieving their goals and succeeding in all career pathways. Echoing the voice of this classroom teacher, Riwai-Couch's (2021) research reports that parents of tamariki Māori have high expectations for them from multiple perspectives, including academic, sporting, cultural, and social. Additionally, parents "want their tamariki to experience success, enjoy learning, and for it to be meaningful and relevant to them" (Riwai-Couch, 2021, p. 144).

5.1.4 The Ecological Influence of Whānau on Learning

Throughout the three case narratives presented in this study, it was evident that whānau played a vital role in children's learning in and outside of school. The child-initiated inquiry established how children participated in meaningful ways, drawing on their own life experiences that informed decision-making when building the community pantry. During one of the teacher-initiated inquiries, the products for the summer fair were inspired by whānau for some children. These included family businesses, and cultural and leisure activities. When talking with children, whānau and cultural identity were consistently foregrounded as the motivation for a product or activity for their stalls. Additionally, some children were proud of their whānau achievements, often attributing their strengths and interests to whānau influences. These included sporting success, artistic and creative ventures, as well as life and career skills, such as building. Bourke and Loveridge's (2018c) research affirms that whānau play a significant role in motivations for learning: "often the talents that children wanted to foster and develop were the ones that were important to others in their family, and they spoke of enjoying compliments of their work, or being compared to their parents' successes" (p. 150).

The influence of whānau on children’s personal goals was evident through the present study in incremental, everyday ways, such as choices made for text and tutorials, the ways in which they engaged in mathematics problem solving, and inquiry-based learning opportunities. Consistently, children were living their “life”, making connections to what was already known and familiar as, for instance, a parent who had started an online business selling accessories or an uncle who was a builder. This further supports the notion that children make learning connections through their life experiences. Bourke, O’Neill, and Loveridge (2018a) demonstrate the importance of including children’s interests in the formal learning setting. In their research, examples were given of children’s increased engagement and achievement through the teacher listening to the stories of children’s lives and incorporating these into everyday learning. Importantly, the teacher also connected with children’s lived experiences, sharing their own similar childhood experiences. This proved to further strengthen the teacher–student relationship as well as to increase confidence for the child to “have a go” at more challenging learning.

5.1.5 Autonomy in Learning Supported by Clear Structures and Routines

The particular school values were initiated by the current school principal whose goal was to ensure that children and community were partners in the development of the school values. At the time of the research, these had been embedded for several years. A similar process was also described by Jackson (2020) in an Australian school that also began with the voices of children who actively participated and collaborated with teachers to develop and implement school values (Jackson, 2020; Rosanna Primary School, 2019). Known values are reported to support children in developing the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Furthermore, children’s autonomy in learning is more likely to be enabled when clear structures and expectations for learning and behaviour are in place (Reeve, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Central to the community plane of analysis is the understandings held by children of the structures that support the apprenticeship of individuals in a collaborative community of practice. Newcomers to a collaborative community of practice advance their own skills and knowledge through participation with others in culturally organised activities (Rogoff, 1993, 2008). Particularly evident through the individual interviews, some children shared what it meant to come into a new classroom. For example, one nine-year-old boy actively took time to observe how structures and routines unfolded. He also observed how his peers interacted and engaged with each other and tasks, eventually finding his own place and gaining confidence over time. In Rogoff's conception, the notion of apprenticeship reaches beyond "expert–novice dyads" and instead focuses on interpersonal engagement through which children participate in culturally organised activities where "apprentices" become more responsible and skilled participants. Significant to this are the cultural–historical factors for a particular community or institution (Rogoff, 1993, 2008).

The research classroom provided clear structures and routines for children. Children knew the expectations for each block of learning, and they had choices in how they organised themselves for a particular curriculum focus on a daily and weekly basis. The findings showed children exercising varying degrees of autonomy in organising how they planned their week, based on personal and group learning goals. An integral part of this was also the deliberate choices children made about who they would work with collaboratively or whether they chose to work alone. Many children voiced the importance of having a structure for the learning day. Additionally, children shared how being able to see the timetables and menus for each learning block was important and also served as another form of communication with their teacher. Rogoff (1990) notes that children determining the choices they make relies on the willingness and support of adults in provisioning these choices (see also Bourke & Loveridge, 2018a). However, children also make choices on how cooperative they are in engaging with the choices on offer. Therefore, for teachers to engage children in task or

activity choice in meaningful ways, teachers need to ensure that the choices are relevant and engaging for children (Reeve & Cheon, 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2020; Svrcek & Abugasea Heidt, 2022).

The teacher created a task menu for mathematics and literacy, and these had a similar structure of “must-dos” and “may-dos”. Children were consistently able to share what this meant for their learning, and it was clear that they were very practised at this. Most children enjoyed the autonomy the menus brought them. They saw the benefits of being able to organise learning tasks and activities in line with their personal learning goals. Learning goals varied. Some children supported one another to complete the must-do tasks to be able to do more fun activities, typically online games. Other children had personal learning goals that aligned with mastery goals that saw them working towards improving learning outcomes in self-regulating and self-determining ways. Polson (2001) likens the structures and routines of a community of practice to a ballet “where performers move so gracefully, flowing to their positions and cooperating with such beauty that it looks deceptively simple” (p. 72).

However, like all onstage productions, it is what occurs backstage that brings a performance to life. Polson maintains that planning and teamwork of both teachers and children are key to ensuring the classroom environment operates smoothly. Classroom observations during these blocks of learning demonstrated that children were consistently engaged in completing tasks, working in small groups in different spaces around the classroom and adjoining breakout spaces, and enacting self-regulation and agency. Many children related this time to “being on task” and that it was important for them to be focused to complete tasks, whether to pursue more fun activities or improve learning outcomes. Sewell (2006) demonstrates that when children are “afforded roles” in a learning community, “they became intensely focused and interested in their learning” (p. 219). Furthermore, Ryan, Curren, and Deci, et al. (2013) note that autonomy in learning increases engagement in learning, decreases anxiety, and improves learning outcomes. Additionally, when there is an established culture of autonomous learning,

the results show greater persistence, task performance, as well as improved holistic benefits. Further to this, Ryan and Deci (2020) establish the importance of children being able to show their initiative and take ownership of their learning.

Within the structures and routines provided, children in the research classroom confidently navigated their learning. Many children discussed what they were learning about and how the practice tasks on the daily menus supported their progress in learning. Equally, some children were able to identify when they needed additional support, whether this was from the teacher or peers. Whilst most children identified that the menu boards provided them with choice and the ability to organise their learning in self-determining, autonomous ways, one nine-year-old girl concluded that the choices were not really choices for her, discerning that, irrespective of the “choices” she had, she still had to complete all tasks during the week. Additionally, for her, choices or decision-making did not extend to participation in determining what the tasks on the menu boards were or why. Ryan and Deci (2020) demonstrate that not all choices are associated with autonomy. For instance, making the choice between options that a child does not want can result in “meaningless choices”. Ryan and Deci elucidate further by stating the importance of teachers providing meaningful choices based on children’s interests.

Nonetheless, children did plan and organise their daily timetable aligned with their goal orientations. Whilst observations of the classroom routines, such as the daily mathematics and literacy menus, showed that children were outwardly engaged and settled with learning tasks, it was the conversations with children that illuminated the motivations for task and activity completion. Conversations showed that most children were confident in the choices and decisions they made with their learning. Furthermore, several children demonstrated active participation in goal-orientated learning, in the most part supported by their friends and peers. The apprenticeship plane places the focus on the community and sociocultural endeavours. For the research classroom, this included understanding and

negotiating school purposes and goals, cultural context and constraints, values systems that support reaching individual and collective goals, and the cultural tools available to assist these as, for example, classroom resources (Rogoff, 2008).

Most children were purposeful in organising tasks and activities and were active in supporting others with social interactions. This could be as simple as tackling the easiest or most challenging mathematics tasks first, working alongside another person who was trusted and demonstrated kindness, or working with others who had “good” and “appropriate” ideas. Ryan, Curren, Deci, et al. (2013) maintain that when a person is enabled to act in autonomous ways, they are exercising both volition and self-endorsement of their own behaviours. Many children in this study demonstrated that they were confident in the choices and decisions they made and were able to identify the benefits for themselves and their learning. This supports the ideals of autonomous self-regulation in the education domain, and this psychological need promotes greater conceptual learning, perceived competence, lower anxiety, improved learning outcomes, and, overall, positive, holistic outcomes (Ryan, Curren, Deci, et al., 2013).

5.1.6 Participation, Influence, and Decision-making

This study has explored how children’s participation, influence, and decision-making occurred in the classroom, establishing that these were often instigated in small, everyday ways. Examples of this were shown through the planning of the week’s timetable, choosing texts, including children’s interests in mathematics or writing, and providing inquiry-based learning opportunities. In contrast, Roholt and Baizerman’s (2019) research maintains that, typically, consultation on matters affecting children is minimal or tokenistic (see also Lundy, 2018). In this classroom, a child-centred approach, alongside the active support of school leadership, provided opportunities to ensure that children’s voice, participation, and influence not only mattered but were at the forefront of thinking and planning. This was evident with options for participation and influence not being limited to specific events or activities. Instead, in both tacit and explicit ways, the curriculum decision-making was driven by the

prior knowledge, lived experiences, cultural identity, and interests of children. In an interview with the school principal, she stated that having a cultural connect was vital for the children in her school and was clearly a part of the research classroom's culture. In Riwai-Couch's (2021) research, teachers and school leaders were encouraged to grow their own cultural competence or "cultural capability" through engaging and knowing a young person's values and beliefs. Additionally, integrating these resources in learning demonstrates "culturally responsive learning partnerships that exemplify ako" (Riwai-Couch, 2021, p. 93). Relatedly, Mitra's (2008) research explored how teachers could involve students in meaningful ways in the decisions that were seen to shape their lives in secondary school. Through this, teachers partnered with students to examine practice and, thus, built positive teacher-student relationships. As a result of this, "students and teachers recognized that they often had similar reactions to activities and situations within the school" (p. 24).

The first part of the school year was actively dedicated to building a collaborative community of practice, and the teacher maintained a responsive teaching stance that was focused on the inclusion of children's interests and learning needs. This included the change in how mathematics was delivered, resulting in positive outcomes for teaching and learning for children and teacher. On occasions throughout the year, the teacher departed from the senior syndicate team planning to respond to the interests of children, an example being the community pantry. Real-life learning opportunities were also integrated into classroom life. These included: the active collaboration in planning activities for the school camp, which involved working within a budget; negotiations with collaborators to bring products and activities to life at a school fair; and building and providing a service for their community in the form of a community pantry. These were large-scale events that demonstrated children not only participated in curriculum decision-making but partnered in it. In a comparable way to other studies, the teacher knew the children's trajectory for learning and tailored this to their interests through actively constructed inquiry. Morcom's (2014) qualitative action

research, involving three teachers and 57 children (aged 8–11 years) in two Western Australia primary schools, reported how children collaborated in meaningful activities with scaffolded guidance from the teacher. Importantly, Morcom notes both teacher and children negotiate relationships and, in effect, create the context for learning together. Similarly, Nelson's (2018) collaborative action research reported a pedagogical partnership with children that provided opportunities for reciprocity, positioning teachers as learners and children as agents for professional learning.

There are similarities between Nelson's (2018) research and this present study, such as establishing norms in teacher–student relationships and decision-making processes. The teacher in this study was also committed to children's inclusion in decision-making by considering children's context, cultural identity, and interests. However, children were not always cognisant of their participation in or influence on curriculum decision-making. For instance, children did not always recognise that an inquiry topic was based on the interests of children; instead, children tended to see this as a decision made either by the principal or the senior syndicate teachers. Through interviews and informal discussions, the teacher and I often discussed how to ensure that children were consistently aware and active in their curriculum participation. However, the teacher acknowledged that more work needed to be done for children to see themselves as active participants in all areas of the curriculum and their learning. Holquist et al. (2023) argue that current research in the field of student voice recognises the critical role teachers play in student empowerment. However, teachers feeling able to respond to the needs and voices of children in their classroom and be supported by school leadership is not yet commonplace. Therefore, for children to experience true student voice and participation, teachers, school leaders, and academics need greater clarity on what authentic student voice inclusion means (Holquist et al., 2023).

5.1.7 Children's Collaboration in Curriculum Decision-making

In this study, children participated in and influenced curriculum decision-making in various ways. This was supported by the teacher having established, clear structures for learning and expectations in place. Within terms of the community/institution plane, children acted as apprentices in this community, becoming aware of the ways of being, gaining confidence, and learning to navigate systems and relationships. The findings from this study and the significant body of research from Rogoff (1990, 1993, 2003, 2008; Rogoff et al., 2018) demonstrate that, for children to participate and influence curriculum decision-making, they need to be supported by known structures. In doing so, this collaborative community of practice was able to achieve a transformation of participation in which teacher and children contributed to and supported one another in shared endeavours. Importantly, this was not a compromise between an adult- or child-run model (Morcom, 2014; Rogoff et al., 2018; Sewell, 2006). Rather, all classroom actors were secure in their roles, and most children were active in managing their learning and coordinated with their teacher and peers. Additionally, evident in individual and group interviews were children's reflections on their learning and how the collaborative community of practice contributed to this in positive and affirming ways (Morcom, 2014; Sewell, 2006).

Through collaboration in sociocultural activities, children gained information from other children and adults, understanding the purpose of activities and how these were explicitly connected with prior knowledge and lived experiences. Collaborative groups in the research classroom were predominantly based on friendship groups, and, within these friendship groups, there were often collective and personal goal orientations. The lens of Rogoff's (1993) apprenticeship plane highlights children's active engagement in organising and planning in a community (in this case, the classroom), drawing on social partners to gain understanding of the context, technologies, and goals for social and cognitive activities. Research by Ryan, Curren, Deci, et al. (2013) adds the insight that children need a sense of

belonging to support positive social contexts where values and practices of a group are adopted by individuals. Similarly, Holquist et al. (2023) state: “strong and supportive relationships between students, and teachers or school administrators help students feel comfortable to participate in student voice practices and cultivate trust that their expertise and knowledge will be respected by teachers and school administrators” (p. 726).

Other collaborations in the research classroom had focused learning goals that were based on student achievement. For these collaborations, children were intrinsically motivated to learn by being with their friends, supporting the completion of tasks and improved academic outcomes. Further still, reciprocal learning took place for children when they relied on the strengths of their friends and peers to gain deeper understandings of learning as, for instance, in mathematics or technologies. Ryan, Curren, Deci, et al. (2013) argue that the third basic psychological need of relatedness is integral to becoming self-determining; however, it is less proximal to a person’s intrinsic motivation as most activities are done in solitude. In contrast, this present study revealed the importance of the fundamental element of “relatedness” in fostering a collaborative community of practice. Without this, autonomy and competence would not have been as evident. Ryan, Curren, Deci, et al. do acknowledge that the ideals of relatedness provide a necessary sense of security to explore and, combined with autonomy and competence, provide intrinsic motivation for positive, growth-related strength. Additionally, in Ryan and Deci’s (2020) more recent research on self-determination theory, which includes intrinsic and extrinsic factors, they acknowledge that when children are engaged in environments that emphasise social relatedness and autonomy support, greater engagement and motivation is present.

To summarise, the community–apprenticeship plane and the theme of *children and their teacher experienced active and contributing roles in curriculum decision-making* demonstrate the importance of establishing a collaborative community of practice that began with the teacher building genuine relationships with children and fostering relationships

between children. Establishing these relationships took time and was a deliberate action on the part of the teacher, the result being children and teacher having a strong sense of belonging or a “whānau culture”. In this study, the teacher employed several strategies, including cooperative learning groups as well as providing an environment where children formed their own collaborations based on social and learning goals. This study has evidenced these relationships deepened over time, and children were actively aware of how these relationships impacted on their learning. The importance of cultural identity, whānau, prior knowledge, and interests were other key factors in the success of how children were included and contributed to curriculum decision-making.

Establishing structures and routines alongside the school values also proved to be pivotal to the success in this collaborative community of practice. Within these known structures and routines, children had choice in organising and planning their day. Children’s acts of apprenticeship were observed in the classroom and shared through interviews. These involved children firstly gaining an understanding of structures and routines and how their peers engaged and interacted in this space. Over time, children gained confidence in the known structures and routines, actively planning their day with identified social and learning goals in mind.

5.2 Children Actively Engaged in the Social Context for Learning

This section foregrounds the guided participation plane, highlighting the experiences of learning in sociocultural activities and events alongside of, and in collaboration with, social partners. This plane of analysis revealed how children are more likely to be motivated to participate when learning is of significance in their lives, and they see how this benefits them now and in their imagined future. The guided participation plane also illuminates the interpersonal skills children employed in negotiating collaborations with others, sharing the choices of why they chose to collaborate—or not. Importantly, this section of the analysis demonstrates that the social context of learning played a significant role in children’s

everyday classroom life and that children were making informed choices both of what benefitted and, in some cases, hindered learning for them. It is through these discussion points that children's participation rights can be seen in small yet meaningful ways.

Rogoff's (2008) framework draws on children's own active nature of participation that includes children's observations of their peers in sociocultural activities within their collaborative community of practice. Whilst the interpersonal plane is foregrounded in this section, it is recognised that both the apprenticeship and personal planes are also enacted. This underscores the practical reality of the mutually constituting processes that play an active role in transformation of participation (see Figure 23). However, specifically for this plane, children have opportunities to participate in shared endeavours in tacit or explicit ways, face to face or side by side (Rogoff, 1993).

5.2.1 The Role of the Teacher

Children in this study recognised the roles of teachers, friends, and whānau and how these positively impacted, informed, or hindered their learning. Findings demonstrated consistently that having a kind and caring teacher was an important part of learning for these children. The research and personal stories of Riwai-Couch (2021) confirm the importance of teachers embodying such traits as kindness alongside professionalism. Riwai-Couch asserts that these traits impact on children's learning and achievement but also support teachers as learners. Additionally, Riwai-Couch identifies teachers' explicit instruction as a critical factor in achievement for learning. In this study, many of the children were able to identify when the teacher had taught them specific skills, strategies, or new knowledge, and supported them with challenging tasks. Children also recognised that this was the role of the teacher with some children voicing that the teacher should take their role seriously, and it was their job to help children to learn. Focused time with the teacher was also noted by some children as important for their learning, and they and the teacher looked forward to this aspect of daily classroom routines. This is supported by Rogoff (1990), who notes guided participation is a

process in which adults' and children's roles are intertwined through both tacit and explicit learning opportunities.

The teacher recognised there were times within this collaborative community of practice when it was important to “step back” and have children take the lead, exercising their autonomy with learning. During these times, the teacher's facilitation of learning was no less a deliberate act of teaching. Such times provided opportunities to observe, listen, support, and encourage children to achieve personal and group goals. Ryan and Deci (2020) maintain there are basic needs-supportive classroom approaches that foster autonomous motivation, initiative, engagement, and adjustment in the classroom. Ryan and Deci also note that autonomy-supportive teaching is not always easy, citing constraints such as time, resources, and curriculum demands as barriers to this. The importance of relatedness, building relationships, and creating an inclusive environment that supports children's sense of belonging in this present study were critical components of children experiencing autonomous behaviours. Riwai-Couch (2021) affirms there are crucial aspects of relatedness in the classroom that encompass identity, language, and the culture of each child—these acting as resources for learning. These empower children and foster autonomous ways of being. Further still, Riwai-Couch, in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, offers a model for teaching and learning that sees children and teacher(s) moving through three phases of participation and partnership. The first is *whai*, which describes the process of encountering new learning and topics and committing to engaging with these. Second is *ako*, or actively engaging in the subject matter and encouraging reciprocity, and the third is *mau*, which is reviewing the impact of the experience and identifying further teaching and/or learning needs.

In the research school, as has been noted, leadership staff were proactive in ensuring that the teacher could experience autonomy in how her classroom was established and operated. Additionally, there were high expectations for all children's learning and behaviour. An important factor for this was the teacher and school leaders knowing what children needed

to be successful in learning. The principal was deliberate in bringing together a particular group of children who identified as Māori with this teacher, citing that cultural context mattered and that there were clear understandings for establishing a whānau culture. Riwai-Couch (2021) refers to this as whakawhanaungatanga, the process of growing sustained, positive relationships in a nurturing environment that responds to the context and strengths of children and rejects deficit theorising that views diversity as a disadvantage. Notions of self-determination and autonomy are further explained by Ryan and Deci (2020), who state:

Autonomy support entails, by definition, respecting and attempting to appreciate the perspective of, and unique challenges faced by, each learner. Autonomy support is an essential part of the arts of teaching and mentoring, as autonomy support entails an interest in the learner's needs, barriers, and resources, whether they be cognitive, emotional, or cultural. (p. 5)

Children's View of the "Role of the Teacher". Collaborative communities of practice recognise the distinct roles that individuals play in the community. In the research classroom, the roles of children and teacher were based on mutual trust and respect. Interestingly, children were able to articulate and distinguish what the role responsibilities were and, in doing so, were able to go some way in addressing the balance of power dynamics. For the children, the teacher "had a job to do", and this came with responsibilities to teach them. Most children were also able to identify when it was important for teachers and parents to make decisions on their behalf, citing that, in these cases, adults had more knowledge or life experiences and, because of this, made informed decisions for them. Equally, many children also identified when it was important for teachers, parents, and adults to listen to them, simply because they (children) also had good ideas. Perry-Hazan (2021) notes that children have an "insider's perspective" on the teacher-student relationship, and, when children can share their perspectives, there is a significant and positive impact on learning. Echoing Perry-Hazan's sentiments is the research of Nelson (2018). Nelson's

research reported that while children were open to having increased influence in the classroom, for them, it was still important that the teacher set the direction for learning, otherwise there might be arguments between children, and the teacher would simply be “sitting around”.

One of Nelson’s (2018) participants talked about the importance of there being a balance of teacher direction and children having the autonomy to make decisions. Again, like the children in this present study, the children in her research also identified that there needed to be times when the teacher made decisions and times when it was appropriate for children to take the lead. Provision for children’s rights to adult guidance and support is evident in Article 5 of the UNCRC (1989; United Nations, n.d.), which states adults (parents, extended family, and community) are obligated to provide guidance and support in a “manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child” (United Nations, n.d., p. 4).

5.2.2 Motivating and Engaging Children in Meaningful and Real-life Learning Experiences

The teacher in the research classroom placed importance on knowing and engaging with children’s interests, and these often informed the direction for learning. For instance, noted in Section 5.1.3, many boys in the class had an interest in Pokémon. Mathematics problem solving and writing topics were developed around these interests. This was also evident to the children as they commented on how their interests and lives were often used to engage them in learning. Children were also able to see that, although the focus for a lesson might not be their particular interest, their turn would come. For instance, one ten-year-old girl noted that there was a “balance” of children’s interests used for the context of learning. Ryan and Deci (2020) assert that teachers who support children’s autonomy are working to understand and be responsive to their perspectives. Teachers do this through supporting children to take initiative in and ownership of their learning by providing meaningful choices in tasks based on their interests.

On several occasions, the teacher also commented on the importance of including children's interests in the curriculum. The senior syndicate team's planning drew on the interests of children and the community context to establish a "big idea" for each term that connected to core curriculum learning areas. Riwai-Couch (2021) notes that culturally responsive pedagogies place the contexts and interests of children at the heart of learning and teaching. In doing so, the prior knowledge and lived experiences of children not only help to scaffold learning but also validate and legitimise their own cultural identity. In this present study, examples of culturally responsive pedagogies were demonstrated across the three case narratives that included the teacher-initiated inquiries for the school camp and summer fair. Within these "big ideas", children took charge of planning the activities for camp, operating within a real-life budget. Alongside this, children worked with each other to decide which activities most children would enjoy and, pragmatically, consider what was "value for money". Opportunities such as this not only provided children with experiences that support a broader curriculum of knowledge, but it was also an acknowledgement of how children applied their knowledge of the world to their learning. For instance, "value for money" was likely to be something that families discussed in everyday ways. Children having the opportunity to practise this makes the learning experience personal and meaningful. Bourke, O'Neill, and Loveridge (2018a, 2018b) reported on children's informal and everyday learning, relating this to the learning children gained from parents and whānau when engaging in activities, such as household chores, trips to the grocery store, and whānau and cultural traditions. It is through these everyday events that children were immersed in life experiences, ones in which they themselves were becoming experts. Providing opportunities for children to practice their known and growing life skills in the school context brings these two worlds closer in proximity for children and their community. Riwai-Couch (2021) affirms that sociocultural activities and events exemplify the principle of ako—that is, the reciprocity of teaching and learning—demonstrating that "when culture counts, the voices of

all partners are heard, and students feel known, respected, and valued. Culture is seen as ‘capital’—something of value that can be leveraged to generate greater success” (p. 93).

Through the summer fair inquiry, children were supported by the teacher to develop ideas, products, and activities, driven by their own interests and experiences. Observations, conversations, and, indeed, work (sales) products demonstrated that children drew on their own knowledge, interests, and cultural context. Whilst some children developed products that were currently popular with their age group, others drew on whānau interests, skills, and talents that included sporting and creative endeavours. Alongside this, children also demonstrated they were “savvy” when it came to developing and marketing their product. For instance, they understood that the products and choices needed to be varied to attract wide interest, creating greater competition. In the context of the summer fair, it was children having the autonomy to choose what product to develop and then sell that motivated and engaged children in varying degrees. It was clear that the more involved children were in the conceptual development of the product or experience, the greater the engagement. Domen et al. (2020) note that children’s psychological need for autonomy is supported by teachers who provide children with meaningful choices and opportunities to express views and perspectives, and, critically for the inquiry-based learning case narratives, to be able to include personal values and adapt learning experiences. Experiences such as this also foster greater conceptual learning. Furthermore, Mitra and McCormick (2017) maintain that acknowledging the lived experience of young children encourages class and schoolwide discourse, increasing student voice.

Demonstrating further the point that Rogoff’s three planes of analysis do not operate in siloed ways, the teacher set up an initial structure for the planning and building of the community pantry inquiry. The community pantry began with discussions guided by the teacher with the choice to work in a group or as an individual to develop a simple plan for what was needed to bring the community pantry to life. Children chose which elements they

wished to engage with. The teacher then took a deliberate back seat for children to lead and collaborate on the community pantry. When the community pantry was completed and presented, the teacher was able to show her genuine surprise at the final product because she had not played an active role in the construction, trusting children and the caretaker to lead this project. A form of inquiry-based learning featured in the research of Sewell (2006), whereby children built knowledge through inquiry and debate on topics of interest. Sewell notes that, over time, children's identity shifted from consumers of knowledge to creators of knowledge. As a result of this, a "sense of group expertise" was developed. Critically:

When teachers vested authority in children to address their own inquiry questions, and when they guided their attempts to do so [some children] came to view learning as more than searching for other people's knowledge, it came to be about '*sharing their minds*' with peers, their teachers and outsiders to create new knowledge. (Sewell, 2006, p. 220)

Context for an Integrated Curriculum. To establish meaningful contexts for mathematics and literacy, the teacher and the senior syndicate team drew on the "big idea" or "inquiry focus". For instance, explicit teaching of writing and understanding persuasive text was taught through the school camp preparation with one prompt being: School is better than camp. Children wrote in meaningful ways on this topic, but, in addition, children *talked* about persuasive writing. They shared the structure that was needed for this genre and why it was important to be able to take a stance and support this with evidence. One nine-year-old boy recounted that, for him, school was better than camp because being at camp meant he missed special time with his Mum and whānau. Further still, two ten-year-old girls were able to connect learning persuasive writing techniques to the community pantry inquiry when letters were written to the principal, caretaker, and a local business to ask for support with their project. These girls used the terminology of having to "persuade" when collaborating on writing these letters. In doing so, children demonstrated that the learning they were doing was

relevant to them and useful in their lives. Reeve (2012) affirms the need for teachers to be active in their inclusion of the children's interest and context, seeing this as an important factor in children's feelings of competence and autonomy. Reeve maintains that for children to be self-determining, to flourish and thrive, three essential elements must be evident. These are: (i) supportive conditions for learning, most importantly the teacher–student relationship; (ii) the role of the teacher in provisioning a positive, motivating, and engaging environment; and (iii) the social context, motivation, engagement, and outcomes that operate in both linear and reciprocal ways. This present study demonstrates a classroom environment that is consistent with Reeve's essential elements, these evolving and transforming over the course of the year.

Important messaging occurred with the teacher being active in relaying the point that the learning activities and experiences were “real life”. For instance, children were tasked with managing a \$500 budget for both the community pantry and for school camp activities. In the context of the community pantry, this provided the opportunity for children to experience learning in a localised context. Children were the instigators of much of this project. They were also able to connect the project to the curriculum learning area hauora (health and well-being) where the notion of whānau and the topic of food security were explored. Children drew on their own knowledge gained through whānau experiences as, for instance, whānau members who worked in the building industry. Exploring the implications of children's informal learning in the classroom context, Bourke, O'Neill, and Loveridge (2018a; see also Bourke & Loveridge, 2018b) research demonstrates the benefits and possibilities this offers in practical application in the classroom. For instance, the deliberate inclusion of children's knowledge and skills outside of the classroom in the curriculum enables “children to develop and draw on their learning strengths across multiple contexts” (Bourke, & O'Neill, Loveridge, 2018a, p. 784).

Learning Now for the Future. New skills were also learnt through participation in the building of the community pantry. Children actively participated in the buying of timber and supplies, the painting, and the construction of the pantry. These activities were seen by some children as important skills for later in life. Nelson's (2018) research with adolescent learners (aged 11–13 years) also affirms children's future-focused stance in engaging in activities that are seen as "real-life" learning, equipping them for jobs in the future. There are continued consistencies between Nelson's (2018) research and this present study. Nelson undertook a research project where children were positioned as pedagogical partners in the classroom, resulting in children being active participants in classroom decision-making. This present study established that when children had more opportunities to make learning choices and decisions, engagement was also seen as authentic (see also Morcom, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

For many of the children in this research, their motivations were focused on progress in learning with the knowledge that the learning they were doing in that time would benefit them in the future and, in doing so, demonstrating the fundamental self-determining needs of autonomy and competence (Ryan, Curren, Deci, et al., 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

5.2.3 The Social Context of Learning: Collaboration in Learning

In this section, a closer look is taken at how and why children in this study made the choices of with whom they collaborated. The findings demonstrate that, for some children, this was to change over the year, showing that, for these children, there were elements of critical reflection on their relationships and how these benefitted or hindered learning. When foregrounding the interpersonal plane, understanding the nuances of participation was an integral part of understanding what guided participation meant in the research classroom. For instance, guided participation can be tacit or explicit, face to face or distal, involving shared activities with familiar people, or unknown individuals or groups. Additionally, a child

working alone on a task or activity is participating in a sociocultural act with guidance from teacher, peers, and/or whānau, often in unobservable ways (Rogoff, 2003, 2008).

The social context of learning played a significant role in this study. For the children in this classroom, having the choice of who and why they collaborated with others mattered. There were degrees of sophistication to this; for instance, the motivation might be as simple as not wanting to be alone or a group working together in a task-orientated manner that had a goal of completing the task. Rogoff (1993) maintains that communication and active participation are central to the interpersonal plane. Through this, novices are active in making sense of an activity or task, and, importantly, children are active in positioning themselves to learn.

Many children negotiated collaborations in deliberate and purposeful ways, drawing on the known strengths of others as well as identifying their next steps in learning. Additionally, some children noted it was important to choose peers to work with that would stay “on task” with their learning, in doing so ensuring they were “doing their best”, alongside meeting school values expectations. Rogoff (1993) describes this as a process of establishing a “common ground of understanding” from which children then extend and grow.

Demonstrating further the enactment of guided participation, one ten-year-old boy described how working alongside a friend did not necessarily mean they were collaborating. Rather, choosing someone to work alongside of as a companion who had the same values for task completion and who would not interrupt what he was doing was important. Rogoff (1993) concurs with this, noting such an event as an example of a shared endeavour that offers further perspective on “interpersonal engagements and arrangements as they fit in sociocultural contexts, to understand processes of learning and development” (p. 135).

Children were able to articulate that the interpersonal nature of learning provided a positive learning environment that not only fostered learning but was also fun. For instance,

children often helped one another to complete tasks, this being something they enjoyed doing. The “value” of being determined was also noted as something friends helped with through positive affirmations and encouragement. Children also included the role their teacher played in guiding and supporting them to be successful. Rogoff’s (1990) research shows that children are naturally attuned to the viewpoints and interpretations of activities and events by others. In doing so, they become partners in communication, adapting to each other, mutually adjusting to facilitate interpersonal understandings for the purpose of communication.

Children did not necessarily forsake social goals for learning-orientated goals. Rather, these were interconnected. While children identified social orientations, such as not wanting to be alone or wanting to “hang out” with friends, they also chose to work with children who had “good” and “appropriate” ideas as well as displaying sensible work habits, demonstrating that some children were making informed choices about who they collaborated with and why. A particular example of this was one ten-year-old boy who knew which of his peers to go to for guidance and who he “cooperated” with best. Reflecting on this, he was able to demonstrate the often difficult balance humans try to achieve in maintaining friendships when values or goals are not shared. Making the choice to group himself with children that shared similar learning goals and, in the process, getting to know who they were was important to him. This boy was further able to reason that if someone else had the exact same interests, then they would be distracted from learning as they would want to talk about their shared interests. Proving his ability to navigate the social context of classroom life, he had also been able to maintain friendships with children who he did not necessarily collaborate or choose to work alongside. Central to guided participation are communication and coordination of efforts. Newcomers are active in making sense of this, adapting to and with other members of the community. Integral to this is the search for common ground where individuals extend themselves. This involves adjustment and growth of understanding (Rogoff, 2008).

Interpersonal relationships within the classroom were further demonstrated with children collaborating on shared tasks, actively providing specific feedback to improve work products. This could involve children providing verbal feedback to one another or digitally through a shared Google Doc to improve work products. Children also regularly consulted with one another during inquiry-based learning, seeking feedback on ideas and taking into consideration others' points of view. Interestingly, like collaborations on tasks, children were intent on listening to others' views, giving full attention to these and affirming with nods and "yeses". In the case of the community pantry, conversations and feedback were often centred on whānau and their community, and how their choices and decisions would impact on them, in particular. The children were intent on ensuring the location of the pantry would provide easy access and not cause whānau shame or embarrassment. It was important to these children that they upheld the mana of their whānau and community. Riwai-Couch (2021) articulates that mana "is a source of both personal and collective strength, pride, and identity" (p. 205). Riwai-Couch adds further to this, describing mana tamariki (mana of the child) as the "child's status, empowerment, and inherent authority" (p. 205). Mana tamariki places "needs and interests at the centre of any decision-making or activities within the school environment" (p. 205), echoing the intent of Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989; United Nations, n.d.).

5.2.4 Children Negotiate and Navigate Meaningful Pathways in Learning

Throughout the research, many children were able to identify the beneficial or hindering factors of the classroom environment in working with others. Several children spoke of the importance of having a quiet and calm classroom environment where they could focus on their learning. In the initial group interviews following the Lego classroom models, many children identified specific spaces in and around the classroom setting that supported learning for them. This was often in small groups with friends. For instance, two girls shared that a quiet space was "necessary" to concentrate on their learning and that without this, they

often got “mixed up” and made mistakes. Bhandari (2023) views calm spaces through a spiritual well-being lens, having observed children and teachers in a variety of classrooms. As indicated by the children in this study, the “level of noise” in the classroom impacted on children’s ability to concentrate on tasks and activities. Bhandari maintains research demonstrates that higher levels of noise hinder learning and productivity. Importantly, moderate noise levels or what this researcher and the participating teacher referred to as a “learning hum” is conducive to children focusing on the tasks at hand. This hum supports a calm environment where deeper engagement in learning can occur. For example, one nine-year-old boy was able to identify the strategies he and his friend used when the class was too noisy. This boy shared that he and his friend would talk through the answers quietly themselves first before recording them. This helped him to clarify his thinking and avoid making errors. Demonstrating the problem-solving skills children employ to operate in their worlds, he further shared that when his friend was away, he would often “pretend” his friend was there and ask his advice, having internalised conversations. Both Bhandari (2023) and Csikszentmihalyi (2014) relate calm spaces to the notion of “flow”, describing an optimal experience as one that is a voluntary focus of attention. Self-regulating and determining behaviours see the individual choosing and determining the quality of their experience and, consequently, they are more likely to enjoy the learning or task. Additionally, a state of flow acts in reciprocal ways that enables individuals to interact with information, people, and the environment. Pertaining to children’s shared and internalised conversations in this present study, having optimum conditions to focus on learning reduces anxiety and makes learning enjoyable.

Being able to choose texts based on their interests was not only motivating and engaging for children but it also supported them to focus on the task of reading. Children displayed a wide range of interests from sports, cooking, arts, and crafts, to interests in history and world events. Popular fictional texts were also included. Domen et al. (2020) note

the importance of providing both structure and autonomous opportunities for reading, asserting that this is “conducive to the motivation of students” (p. 405). Svrcek and Abugasea Heidt (2022) concur, stating provision and support for autonomous motivation in reading tasks leads to better outcomes in reading achievement.

During the literacy and mathematics learning blocks, children chose and organised their tasks and activities for the day and the week. They were practiced at this and could recite the order in which they preferred to do tasks. These were often coordinated with friends so that they could either complete the tasks together or alongside one another. One such task was the “kindness posters”. The teacher had modelled how to research phrases that supported the ideals of kindness, and children chose to work either individually or collaboratively.

Whilst most children chose to work with someone else, some children chose to do this individually. An important factor for this was that children accepted that the choice to either work collaboratively or autonomously was part of normalised ways of being in this classroom. Other examples of this occurred frequently over the three terms. For instance, it was often observed that many children engaged in online reading collectively whilst some chose that time to work on individual projects, such as their digital *Who am I?* books or completing an activity from another curriculum area. This suggests that children also made decisions about their learning in line with their own personal learning goals and felt confident to do so. Bishop (2023) maintains that teachers who employ culturally responsive pedagogies that include learning and tasks that are located in the context and interest of children’s lives ensure that all children can bring who they are into the classroom. The consequence of this is a higher likelihood of active participation, genuine collaborations, and both individual and group goal setting. Through this, children are more likely to realise their true potential. Nussbaum (2011) concurs, asserting that for people to demonstrate their full capabilities and potential they must be given the freedom to do so. Reynaert and Roose (2014) remind us that being able to reach their full capabilities is a fundamental right for all children. This is

demonstrated when children are seen as active agents in their own lives, capable of acting in autonomous and self-determining ways.

As in real-life experiences, not all collaborations went smoothly or without the need for negotiating skills. During planning for the summer fair, one group discussed several options for their stall, discarding these as they did not feel they had the knowledge or skills to bring the product to fruition. This group eventually settled on a known food option with the support and inspiration from whānau. Another group had the idea of origami and Christmas trees, connecting with recent mathematics lessons. One of the boys was skilled and practised at creating origami and had commented that he had created most of these for the stall. In this same group, two of the boys were not keen on the idea of origami, so they negotiated with other group members to have a second option for their stall, and this was agreed upon. Negotiation skills inherently involve choice and decision-making, again as in a real-life process, that involved their own interests and needs as well as considering the needs of others. There were also pragmatic negotiations and decision-making on matters such as the availability of resources and skillsets. A central tenet of guided participation is the negotiation skills needed to effectively collaborate (Rogoff, 1993). Rogoff et al. (2001) affirm that a community of practice develops “cultural” practices and structures that are multifaceted, having differing roles and responsibilities. Through this, a community problem-solves and resolves conflict to maintain relationships within the community. Sewell (2006) elaborates further, seeing such opportunities as a constructive form of debate that sees “problematizing meaningful content, authorising children to resolve it, and holding them accountable to the contributions of others” (p. 220).

Further evidence of guided participation was the notion that children learned in the interpersonal plane through sociocultural activities from teachers, adults, and social partners. During the planning phase of the community pantry, the children who were researching the timber needed for the pantry were also “guided” by people inside and outside of the

classroom. The community pantry provided an opportunity for children to demonstrate and use the knowledge and experience they had gained from whānau and apply it. For instance, children who had whānau in the building industry had learned the importance of using “treated timber”. Interestingly, in the last individual interviews with children, several children commented on the need to use treated timber, demonstrating that children gained new knowledge from one another through this activity. A real-life activity such as this provided children with the opportunity to exercise their knowledge and to enact what they had either seen or participated in, in and outside of the classroom. Each step of the community pantry was carefully thought through by children, whether it be extending the roofline to ensure that the rain would not damage food items to where the community pantry should be located or ensuring that people felt comfortable in using the pantry. The entire process was one of consultation and collaboration with children consulting with one another, their teacher, the caretaker, local businesses, and whānau. Rogoff (1993) maintains that active participation and communication are central factors for guided participation. The community pantry provided opportunities for children to make sense of this task “primarily putting themselves in the position to learn” (Rogoff, 1993, p. 135). Additionally, sociocultural events such as this strengthen communication skills and growth in understanding and are a demonstration of intersubjectivity whereby understanding occurs between people and is not attributed to one person alone. Instead, shared understanding is the common focus for the group (Rogoff, 1990).

The community pantry provided an excellent example of how all three planes of analysis work together in symbiotic ways. Being able to foreground a specific plane helped to integrate the intricate ways the children engaged, supported, enabled, and collaborated with others. At the beginning of the planning stage for the community pantry, the classroom was buzzing with shared ideas, focused planning, and intent collaborations, exemplifying for this researcher what guided participation looked like in a concrete sense. In the first instance, the

class had a common goal—to build a community pantry for their community. They had a strong understanding of food security and well-being through learning in the hauora curriculum area alongside prior knowledge and lived experiences. Connecting their learning in hauora, children knew the community pantry could be of service to their whānau and community. As is the nature of participatory action research (PAR), I was able to be involved in the planning, engaging in conversations and sharing wonderings. Roholt and Baizerman (2019) note PAR provides opportunities for children and young people to be involved in their community and to take action on social issues. Furthermore, as a research strategy, this approach supports meaningful voice and agency.

The community pantry saw children research, drawing on knowledge and skills gained from whānau as well as on the human experiences they saw every day. As already established, children actively participated in the genesis of the project, and, as time went on, took on more responsibility with their teacher ever-present, facilitating when needed. Through this, they engaged in their own and each other's lived experiences to bring meaning and purpose to the activity. Many children were passionate about this inquiry, and there was a strong element of social justice that involved citizenship alongside real-life learning opportunities as, for instance, feeding their community, understanding of unsheltered living, and ensuring that whānau were not shamed or embarrassed by using the community pantry. From Chevalier and Buckles' (2019) perspective, the community pantry is a representation of scientific inquiry where the lived experiences of this collaborative community of practice created a space of shared understandings in transformative and democratising ways.

5.2.5 Environmental and Cultural Factors that Impact Voice and Participation Rights

Sociocultural events, such as the community pantry, provided opportunities for the children to practise capabilities, leadership skills, whakawhanaungatanga, and the ways in which they effectively collaborated with one another. Bishop (2023) maintains that classes that operate as whānau approach the learning environment from an alternative perspective,

and children and teachers have less traditional roles and responsibilities. A whānau culture shifts beyond the transmission of knowledge model to embrace collaboration, shared decision-making, problem solving, and shared understandings, as well as building effective communication skills.

During this study, the teacher explained how a source of tension for her was the stereotypical view held by some of the other teachers of the children in her class. She observed that the children in her class were often not noticed for their diverse capabilities and leadership qualities. As a result, both children and teacher had feelings of being stereotyped because of their cultural identity and the colour of their skin. Bishop (2023) denounces stereotyping as this results in deficit explanations of how and why children do or do not perform well. Riwai-Couch (2021) adds further by stating that:

Racist attitudes and stereotypes are rarely held consciously, especially among educators in a liberal, democratic nation such as Aotearoa. Nevertheless, it is powerful, reflecting a very real imbalance in the relationship between minority and majority groups. (p. 185)

Whilst this class was known for and regularly talked about their expertise in sports, the teacher wanted the children, other teachers, and future generations to know that they were also capable and able to achieve and excel in other areas. Berryman and Eley (2018) describe this teacher stance as a relational pedagogy when teachers actively reject negative stereotyping and instead hold high expectations for all children's capabilities. This teacher's hope was that the community pantry would be an example of the capabilities and leadership skills of her class and was a "conversation starter"—a space for teachers and communities to acknowledge and affirm ākonga Māori and Pasifika knowledge, skills, and interests in all areas of the curriculum and life itself, starting with affirming culture and identity (Berryman & Eley, 2018). Riwai-Couch (2021) argues the importance of teachers recognising that not all children are from their own cultural paradigm and that genuine respect and reciprocity come

from authentic inclusion of the child's unique identity, culture, language, and the context they bring to the classroom.

The social context in the research classroom was fostered through the collaborative community of practice by the teacher who envisioned a whānau culture where children's culture, identity, voice, and participation were empowered, valued, and acted upon in several ways throughout the year. Burger (2017) explored the participation rights of a cohort of female participants (average age 11 years) in Geneva-based schools to identify to what extent children felt their participation rights were being met in line with Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989; United Nations, n.d.). Burger's quantitative study sought to determine to what extent children depended upon social and psychological resources to enact their participatory rights and how this was implemented into practice. Burger focused on seven resources from a child's perspective that either supported or inhibited their participation rights, these included: knowledge of rights; subjective well-being; the feeling of safety; perceived non-discrimination; the availability of a person of trust; and the perceived level of being informed about matters concerning their lives.

The research classroom met a number of Burger's (2017) seven resources necessary for children to enact their participation rights. The resource of fear did not appear to be a factor in the research classroom, due to children having a trusting relationship with their teacher and, because of this, felt safe in sharing their views with her. The whānau culture established an environment where it was safe to share ideas, views, and perspectives with peers with clear evidence through the findings that children accepted and encouraged the diverse identities in the class. A strong focus for the teacher and leadership team were factors of non-discrimination and, whilst teacher, leadership, and children were aware of discriminatory factors, within the classroom setting, children felt affirmed in their cultural identity. Burger's research (2017) established that children who experienced positive well-being were more likely to experience active social participation, and, as a result, were more

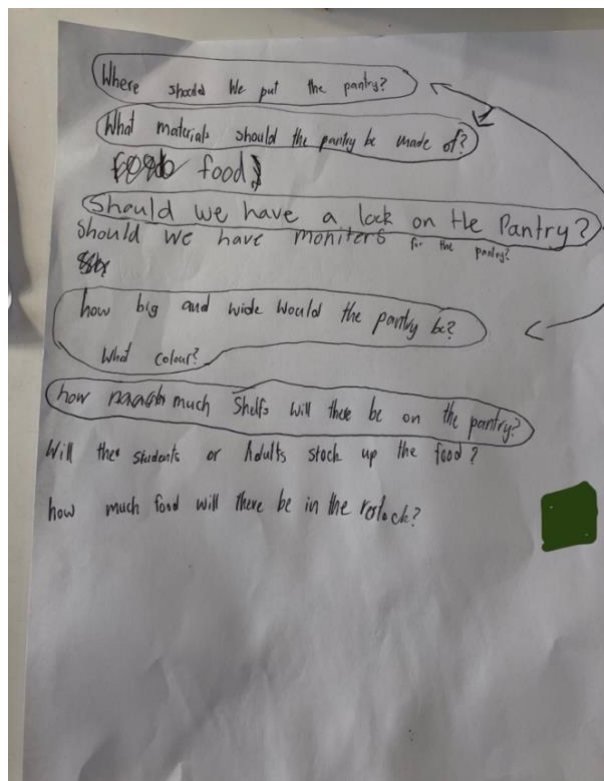
likely to perceive their participation rights as being met. This is consistent with the voices of the children in this study. For example, several children attributed positive well-being to their teacher, friends, and whānau. Guay's (2022) research supports this view in terms of the self-determining relatedness need whereby children work towards their potential by developing secure emotional bonds with others, enabling internalisation and effective and harmonious relationships.

An additional aspect that pertains directly to children's voice and participation rights emerged during one of the final individual interviews. During the planning for the community pantry, two 10-year-old girls took on the task of writing to the principal, the caretaker, and a local hardware store, requesting support with this project. For them, this was a serious undertaking, and they discussed and collaborated on the best approaches to garner the support of community members and organisations, drawing on the skills they had learned in writing persuasive texts. Whilst it was apparent that the school and local community were supportive of this project and saw the value in this for children and community, there was a case where the child's voice was "not enough" (Lundy, 2007). During the building of the community pantry, it became evident to the children and their teacher that the one-off donation from a local organisation, whilst significant, would not be enough to sustain the community pantry. This was evidenced also in children's initial planning (see Figure 24). The two girls who wrote the letters set out to gain further support by approaching local organisations with the community pantry initiative. Many organisations were contacted and, each time, the girls received a "no" to their request. It was not until the teacher communicated with some of these organisations that responses turned from a "no" to a "yes", resulting in further donations. For me, it was not the "no" responses from organisations that created feelings of disappointment nor the fact that once the teacher had communicated with organisations, responses changed to "yes". It was the moment in the interview when the child accepted without question (and a shrug of their shoulders) a tacit acceptance that it was okay to say "no" or not to listen to a

child, but it was important to listen to an adult. Lundy (2018) addresses tokenism and power imbalances through children's legal rights to voice and participation in relation to Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989; United Nations, n.d.). Lundy's definition of tokenism is attributed to adults seeking the views of children by adults but not taking them seriously. Whilst this present study has demonstrated that adults in this school have worked to invite, consider, and respond to children's voice and participation, there is a wider local community perspective that exists outside. From this, the girl in question had accepted the view that it is normal for adults not to listen to children.

Figure 24

Planning for the Community Pantry



Note: This planning was done by a 10-year-old girl in the research classroom.

Central to children's participation rights in this present study was their teacher. All children on multiple occasions said that the teacher listened to them in classroom decision-making and that their ideas, interests, and direction for learning were included. Additionally, in the final interviews, all children felt it was important that not only teachers but also adults

listened to children. One nine-year-old boy also recognised the value of research with children and noted that it was important that researchers also listened to and included children's views and perspectives. For me, this provided an appropriate 'bookend' statement for this study that started with a nine-year old boy in the CRAG who asked, "Why would you be asking children this stuff, wouldn't teachers know more?". Lundy and collaborators (Lundy, 2018; see also Lundy & McEvoy, 2012; Lundy, McEvoy, & Byrne, 2011) did extensive research with children and children as co-researchers and demonstrate that not only do children experience tokenism but they are also aware of it. Whilst tokenistic participation can result in cynical and disaffected participants, it can also spur children and young people on to advocate for change and improved participation rights. Lundy's (2018) research notes that adults were identified by many children as a crucial element in exercising their participation rights.

To summarise, the guided participation–interpersonal plane and the theme of *children actively engaged in the social context of learning* demonstrates how sociocultural activities and events can motivate and engage children in learning. For this study and the classroom setting, guided participation was not seen as a random collection of acts; rather, they were directed and purposeful, operating within known structures and sociocultural activities and events that children were able to identify with, thereby making meaningful connections to their own lives and real-world experiences. Understanding of the shared purposes involved in collaborative activities is an essential part of the analysis of guided participation in the interpersonal plane. Individuals actively work toward implicit, explicit, or emerging goals. Evident in the research classroom was the importance of the social context of learning as children organised learning with or alongside their peers. The interpersonal plane has highlighted numerous examples of how children's participation in curriculum decision-making was enacted. Predominately, these were demonstrated when learning experiences, activities, and events provided real-life opportunities for learning. It was through these that

children not only saw themselves in their learning, but they were also keenly aware of the relevance of such opportunities to their lives and future lives. The roles of the teacher, whānau, friends, and community played a significant part in how children engaged in activities and events. Notions of relatedness and autonomy were particularly evident in this section as children and teacher found their place in this collaborative community of practice. Children were able to voice the reasons for collaboration, these often having social, personal, and group learning goals.

This section also highlighted times when the teacher and children felt stereotyped by others because of their cultural identity. This had been something children had voiced with their teacher, with their teacher fiercely advocating on their behalf for others to see the children's many strengths, including sporting, academic, and active citizenship.

Participation rights concluded this section with the interpersonal plane, identifying how an environment such as a classroom provides opportunities for children to participate in relevant and meaningful sociocultural activities and events. The environment also provided a platform to actively live out their rights to participate in and influence the decision-making in their lives in self-determining ways. From this has emerged a picture of a group of children who were confident, capable, and ready to advocate for themselves and for others.

5.3 Children Demonstrated Self-determining Attributes in Collaboration and Learning

This section demonstrates how the three case narratives, presented in Chapter Four, highlight the ways in which children acted in deliberate ways to gain new knowledge and skills from others. Through foregrounding of Rogoff's (1993) participatory appropriation plane, it can be seen how children applied new knowledge and skills to progress their learning as well as connecting this across the curriculum and everyday life in contiguous ways. Observations and conversations with children showed how their personal learning goals established their next steps for learning. Children also appropriated learning both inside and

outside of the classroom through whānau and extended whānau. Notably, learning that had been appropriated in the classroom and home environments was drawn on in reciprocal ways. The personal plane further demonstrates the ways in which children participated and influenced curriculum decision-making, showing their keen sense of self-determination as well as experiencing support from their teacher and school leaders that furthered children's participation rights.

5.3.1 Children's Interests Play an Important Role in Personal and Collective Learning Goals

The curriculum-based learning case narrative provided the opportunity to understand the ways in which individual children accessed learning and developed personal learning goals for themselves through their interests. As has been shown, children chose their online text and tutorials for reading during the literacy block in Terms One and Two. Most children happily shared what they were reading or engaging in and why. Whilst interests in sports, arts, crafts, pastimes, and whānau-orientated themes of cooking and family pets were predominant, some children gave deeper reasons for the choices they made; for instance, they were searching for ideas to make a gift for a family member. Some children explained that the text and tutorials provided important and useful tips to improve or develop new skills. In these cases, the online platform also became a source of knowledge and skills with children intentionally seeking to further their learning in areas of interest. Rogoff (2008) demonstrates that notions of "time" are inherent in participatory appropriation. Events are not separated into past, present, and future. Instead, the *present* is an extension of previous events that build towards a goal yet to be achieved. When sociocultural activities and learning are viewed through this lens, learning and teaching can be recognised and affirmed as fluid with individuals acknowledged for knowledge and skills they already hold, supporting children to be active participants in their learning and progress.

A few children made the connection with reading at home as a way of improving reading skills. Reading at home was also seen as helping them to prepare for upcoming assessments and improve their reading results. Other benefits associated with reading at home were improved efficacy. O'Brien (2018) maintains that when the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are enacted, children experience greater task orientation and value, and understand the purpose of what they are learning, this resulting in improved task performance.

In Chapter Four, it was reported how a group of girls shared their process in creating a product for their stall. In line with the notion of participatory appropriation, this group came to this sociocultural activity with prior knowledge through play. Loom bands were popular with this group of girls, and, because of this, they held insider knowledge of what would make a successful product to sell. Through participating in this activity, the girls built on each other's knowledge, experimented with ideas, and innovated with different versions of the original product idea. One nine-year-old girl commented that through participating in activities such as this she learned to be a better decision-maker and smarter with the choices she made. Rogoff (2008) identifies the importance of shared history in achieving individual and collective goals. The summer fair provided children with an event to capitalise on children's expert knowledge of current and popular interests. Authentic learning events such as this support children's intrinsic motivation, recognised through the self-determining needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan, Curren, & Deci et al., 2013).

A further example of how children appropriated knowledge and skills and applied them in new situations was a nine-year-old girl who had gained knowledge and skills from her mother's online business. The ideas and knowledge gained from this became the basis for her group's product for the summer fair. This group had discussed and discarded several ideas for their stall, reasoning that for the discarded options they did not have the resources or know-how to make them. This demonstrates that children themselves recognised that they

need to have at least a basic understanding of how to undertake an activity to be successful (Rogoff, 2008).

In each of the case narratives, children had opportunities to pursue personal goals or valued experiences that either linked to their personal or whānau interests. Children participated in group activities and events where they were able to contribute and share their own knowledge and skills. Consistent with participatory appropriation, children also furthered and learned new skills and knowledge. Sociocultural activities that promote children's appropriation not only support self-determining attributes, but they also contribute to positive well-being and the ideals of persons being enabled to flourish and thrive. DeHaan et al. (2016) describe the concept of being able to flourish in life as one of optimality and full functioning. Of importance to children's participatory appropriation are the key factors of being able to demonstrate capabilities, achieve one's goals, and experience freedom to follow valued experiences (Rogoff, 2003).

In the earlier section (Section 5.2) that focused on the interpersonal plane, reference to the planning day of the community pantry in the child-initiated inquiry case narrative described the collaborative and individual endeavours of children. This event also demonstrated how children in this class acquired new knowledge and skills through the personal plane. Within the classroom, pockets of industry were observed with groups of children working collaboratively, side by side, and individually on their chosen tasks. Roles shifted in fluid and organic ways throughout this time. This meant that at any moment, the lead was taken by a more skilled or knowledgeable participant (adult or child) with another taking a secondary role but still as an active participant who was gaining new skills, understandings, and confidence (Rogoff, 2008).

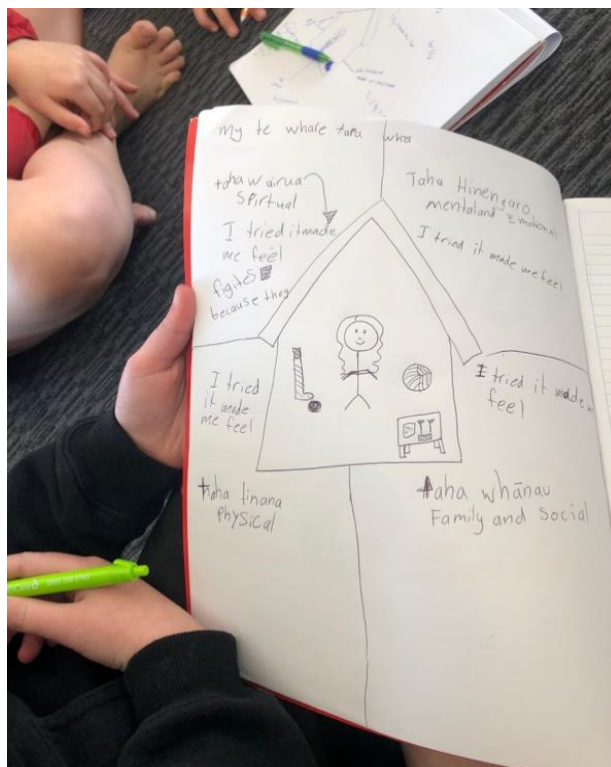
5.3.2 Children Appropriate Knowledge Inside and Outside of the Classroom

One of the instigators of prior knowledge for the community pantry was a hauora unit of learning focused on well-being. The unit began with an Aotearoa New Zealand model for

health and wellbeing, Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1985; Mental Health Foundation, 2023). Through this early exercise, children explored “the walls of the whare” (see Figure 25). These walls are taha wairua (spiritual growth), hinengaro (mental and emotional well-being), taha tinana (physical well-being), and taha whānau (family and social well-being), with connections to the whenua (land) that forms the foundations. The Te Whare Tapa Whā model holds that when all are in balance, we thrive. However, when one or more is out of balance, our well-being is impacted.

Figure 25

The walls of my whare



Riwai-Couch (2021) affirms that educational success for ākonga Māori encompasses all aspects of hauora. This includes self-esteem, language, identity and culture, and personal relationships. Over the course of this topic in the research classroom, the social issue of food security emerged and, not long after, the donation of food from a local community organisation occurred. Highlighting elements of participatory appropriation, children from the

research classroom had recent shared knowledge and understanding of what was important for an individual and, indeed, whānau well-being. Earlier findings and discussion points demonstrate the virtues of care and empathy children in the research classroom held as, for example, working to ensure people of their community would not feel shame or be embarrassed when accessing the community pantry. What was also clear is that children had gained a strong understanding through the learning in hauora about what food security meant and what impact this had on whānau and community. This learning was the trigger for wanting to help their community. Not only was this their shared learning history and understanding but this group was also presented with a new situation for them to problem solve, uniting them to reach a shared goal—that being contributing to feeding their community. Morcom (2014) notes that a collaborative community of practice shifts the focus from the individual to the social and contextual aspects of classroom life, this providing an environment where children “learn to volunteer and share ideas with their peers, and develop values such as trust, tolerance, and empathy, [and] they also develop valuable life skills” (p. 20).

All the children who spoke about the community pantry were able to share the reasons for building it as, for example, “so people won’t starve”. However, some children were able to provide a more in-depth response that revealed their emergent empathy, social conscience, the importance of being kind, and of helping others. As O’Neill (2018) notes, “most children’s capacity to think abstractly, reason, consider the interests of others, and understand the consequences of personal decisions develops and matures over the course of their childhood” (p. 42). The community pantry provided opportunities to develop and practise these and other capacities. It prompted conversations about unsheltered living and demonstrated their awareness of other community pantries and not-for-profit organisations that provided free food for those in need in the local community. Another dimension to this classroom’s shared endeavour and goal of providing for their community was the strong

social justice element, and the indignation they felt if they saw children or people taking food from the pantry when they perceived they did not need it. Ryan and Martela (2016) maintain that persons who have their basic psychological needs met—that is, are self-determining—have a greater likelihood of not only pursuing intrinsic goals but also are more likely to be community minded, altruistic, as well as actualising their own personal growth.

The experience of building the community pantry provided “real-life” opportunities for learning. Through this endeavour, children were able to draw on experiences of whānau, and on their own interests and experiences. Equally, in participating in a community-shared goal, children gained new knowledge and experience. Early in the planning stages, some children researched the materials needed to build the community pantry. Two boys who had prior knowledge of building knew that they needed to source “treated timber” and were able to share the reasons why this was an important construction decision. Both boys gave informed responses when asked to add further to the conversation, including the importance of it being weather resistant and the need for materials to provide stability in the pantry construction. Interestingly—and aligned with participatory appropriation—having to use treated timber became common knowledge amongst the children with some children detailing in their final interview why it was important to use this product. Reasons included to ensure that the pantry would be waterproof, not rot, and that it would last. In these instances, the boys acted as leaders in the shared endeavour with other children taking on active secondary roles, learning and increasing knowledge and skills as the building of the pantry progressed. Rogoff (1993) explains the roles of leadership and active secondary roles with an emphasis on the secondary role(s) being active in their collaboration. Rogoff notes that alternative perspectives could view this as “imitation” or “internalisation” as the secondary role gains knowledge and confidence. However, such perspectives do not consider the active role the child is playing in the collaboration.

Some came to the community pantry with building knowledge, but the experience provided all children with new hands-on skills in construction. Children had the opportunity to work with the school caretaker, to pick up materials from the local hardware, paint, and to construct the pantry. These provided further examples of the roles of leadership and active secondary roles in participation (Rogoff, 1993). On one occasion, I observed a group of boys working with the school caretaker to paint the community pantry. The boys had not experienced painting in this way before, and they were keen to learn new painting skills modelled by the caretaker. Documented in the findings, the boys took this responsibility seriously, taking care with their painting and then, as their confidence grew, adopting a craftsperson's persona, stepping back and checking their handiwork. Rogoff (1993) demonstrates that transformation occurs in the context of sociocultural activities where participation often starts in the peripheral, shifts to a secondary responsibility, and sometimes moves to more central responsibilities. Additionally, Rogoff et al. (2018) note participatory appropriation is "inherently creative, with individuals actively seeking meaning and making links between situations on the basis of their understanding of the previous or current situation" (p. 145).

The child-initiated inquiry provided a variety of real-life experiences that enabled children to participate in ways that not only interested them but also supported new knowledge and skills. This aspect was clear to many of the children. While children recognised the skills and knowledge of whānau and their peers, they also saw the value in learning new skills for life or careers. Aligned with the personal plane, children engaged in the process of appropriation as individuals in this shared endeavour. As a result, many of the children were able to share how they personally had learned new skills and knowledge, demonstrating the transformation of participation (Rogoff et al., 2018). The importance of children seeing the value in what they are learning in the present as useful for their future has also been demonstrated in other research. For instance, Bourke and Loveridge (2018a)

highlight the importance children placed on learning occurring beyond the school gate, including thinking about their future and developing their talents in support of this.

5.3.3 Navigating Next Steps in Learning Through Strengths and the Strengths of Others

Across the three case narratives, many children were able to identify what their strengths were in both formal and informal settings for learning and interest pursuits. Many also identified peer strengths, whether these be strengths in a collective group or the strengths of an individual. Some of the children were also able to voice how their own strengths and the strengths of others supported their next steps in learning. In children articulating this, they were identifying how they appropriated new knowledge and from whom. Whilst the findings chapter (Chapter Four) and this discussion chapter thus far have evidenced the strong social context for learning that often motivated children, many of the children were also intrinsically motivated to improve their own achievement outcomes. A collaborative community of practice provides the opportunity to sharpen the lens on participatory appropriation and learning outcomes by examining the individual's efforts and those of their companions within the structures of an institution (Rogoff, 1993). Through this, opportunities and constraints are identified, and adaptive practice employed. The following discussion—across the three case narratives—focuses on children's efforts and goals and how they and others supported them in achieving these.

Over the course of three terms, some children self-identified areas of challenges that included social and emotional factors as well as curriculum-based learning. These same children could also identify what helped in these situations, such as having trusted friends. Another important person who children identified supported them in reaching personal and learning goals was their teacher. All children saw their teacher as kind and caring, a person they knew they could go to for help and reassurance. Svrcek and Abugasea Heidt (2022) affirm the importance of a positive teacher–student relationship and the impact this has on

motivation for learning, noting, “Showing students that you respect and care for them is the cornerstone of building relatedness” (p. 316).

Some children were also able to identify how they had improved in mathematics and reading over the year, sharing the strategies and tools that supported this, such as tools on digital platforms, as well as engaging in problem-solving tasks or practise tasks at school and at home. Children also demonstrated self-awareness of their progress and shared their pride in this. Self-determination theory outlines the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, seeing these as important factors for intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020; Svrcek & Abugasea Heidt, 2022). Whilst the importance of both relatedness and autonomy have played significant roles thus far in this study, the psychological need of competence can also be brought to the fore in the personal plane. Ryan and Deci (2020) maintain that autonomy and feelings of competence are closely connected. Importantly, experiencing success in learning, therefore demonstrating competence, leads to individuals seeking further learning challenges. Teachers who provide an environment that nurtures autonomy, competence, and relatedness are said to be creating a motivating classroom environment (Svrcek & Abugasea Heidt, 2022).

Some children were keen to share the subjects they saw themselves excelling in and enjoyed. This was particularly evident in mathematics where some children also voiced they knew where to go for help and valued collaboration in learning with others. Additionally, some children stated that at the beginning of the year they did not feel particularly good at mathematics but, with the support and help from the teacher and peers, their confidence grew, enabling them to tackle more complex mathematical concepts. Rogoff (1993) notes how the personal plane can be deployed to observe the changes resulting from participation in an activity, in this case the mathematics curriculum. Rogoff further notes, through participation, the child makes the activity their own with new learning changing how they respond in future similar situations. Equally, this is another example of children demonstrating the self-

determining attributes of autonomy and competence whereby the child is able to identify their own personal growth and, indeed, “need” to optimise their own learning (Svrcek & Abugasea Heidt, 2022).

Sociocultural activities, such as the kindness posters, were another way children demonstrated participatory appropriation. As stated earlier (see page 132), the teacher had modelled for children how to use Google to find an appropriate phrase or “meme” for their kindness posters. This activity could be completed as an individual, pair, or group. Armed with the tools to identify a phrase that supported their perspectives and values, children created posters that demonstrated individual and shared views. One particular example was a nine-year-old boy, who chose to work on his own, developing his own message on kindness based on the school values. Understandably, when this linkage was shared with the classroom teacher and leadership team in 2023, they were particularly pleased. The leadership team stated that although their expectations were that all children aligned with the school values, this boy had only been at the school for the 2022 year. It is reasonable to suggest that these school values had affected this boy positively as he talked often of them in class and in his interviews. Collectively, the posters provided a strong message for their collaborative community of practice. Whilst denouncing behaviours of bullying and negativity, they stood strong in positive messaging on what it meant to be kind, endorsing identity, individuality, and diversity. Reeve (2012) highlights the importance of teachers establishing an environment that is inclusive but also sets the conditions for learning. This includes explicit modelling and teaching and, as has been demonstrated thus far, providing an inclusive environment for children with plenty of opportunities to develop self-determining behaviours. Many of the children in this present study demonstrated that not only did they know the strengths of self and others, but they also knew their own self-worth.

Identifying strengths in self and others also emerged via close friendships. The capability to work with their friendship group has been identified throughout this study with

children consistently sharing the importance to them of being able to collaborate and discuss their learning with others. Additional aspects of this were knowing each other's strengths and supporting one another to learn through providing options and feedback. Improvement in their learning and assessments were also attributed by some children to working with friends. Furthermore, dispositions, such as resilience and determination, were further attributed to friendship groups, alongside feelings of pride when new learning was accomplished. According to Reeve (2012) and Ryan and Deci (2020), teachers are central figures in children experiencing feelings of competence by providing well-structured environments, optimal challenges, and positive, specific feedback. It also appears that alongside the research classroom's teacher, some children were also active in providing feedback on learning as well as demonstrating transformation of participation through appropriation practices. Rogoff (1993) maintains appropriation occurs in community and shared endeavours with individuals stretching common knowledge to fit new perspectives. This occurs through individuals making the process their own, influencing how to engage with similar future activities and events.

5.3.4 Children are Instigators of Learning and Make Connections Across the Curriculum

Many children demonstrated that they were instigators of their own learning in both implicit and explicit ways. Whether this was observed and shared through the curriculum-based learning case narrative or through the inquiry-based case narratives, children had normalised being active participants in learning. For instance, as highlighted in the apprenticeship plane (see Section 5.1), children planned their own learning within the classroom structures and routines. This was done for varied purposes across the classroom as children made choices of how and when to complete set tasks aligned with their own personal goals. Personal and shared goals could be simply to complete tasks to move on to more enjoyable pursuits through to children optimising choices to improve their learning outcomes. For all children, it was accepted as normal that they planned and organised their learning for

these set times. Classroom observations showed that during these times, children were purposeful and confident in the tasks with which they were engaging. Self-determining behaviours can be highlighted by the psychological need for autonomy with Ryan, Curren, Deci, et al. (2013) stating that in the classroom environment, autonomy is realised through children's ability to self-regulate. The outcomes for this are greater conceptual learning, increased engagement, as well as holistic benefits, such as decreased anxiety. Links can be made to the participatory appropriation plane when events, such as the curriculum-based learning case narrative, demonstrated how children acted in autonomous and self-regulating ways, transforming their learning through participating in these tasks and activities with a focus for some children on how to improve learning outcomes (Rogoff, 1993).

Children choosing their own text or tutorial was one of the clearest examples of children instigating or furthering their learning. During Term Two, 2022, children were observed, informal conversations were had, and group and individual interviews undertaken that consistently revealed why children made the choices of texts and tutorials. While personal and whānau interests were the predominant themes, at least one child was actively engaging with a reading application to improve his reading, identifying that being able to both “see” and “hear” a word helped him to improve his skills, showing he could go back to a word, highlight it, and repeat it. This demonstrated that this child wanted to improve his reading skills and was intentionally taking full advantage of the digital application's features to support this. Svrcak and Abugasea Heidt (2022) maintain:

It is important to provide opportunities for students to enjoy reading and internalise the importance of reading in daily life. Opportunities for students to express their autonomy are withheld when assigned reading levels dictate book choices, peer groupings, or indicate what students *should* read. (p. 315)

Active meaning-making across curricula can be seen with children drawing on one subject area to help in another (Rogoff, 1993). For instance, there was a nine-year-old girl

who actively sought new vocabulary from the books she read online to include in her writing, reasoning this would make her writing more engaging. Similarly, connecting mathematics skills in the two inquiry case narratives was also evident. Examples of this were the planning for the school camp where children were tasked with planning the camp activities within a set budget. Alongside a survey that children created was also a spreadsheet that detailed the cost of each activity. Children made decisions on which activities to include based on cost and the value children based on each of the camp activities. The teacher commented that there were many surprises for her during this exercise. For instance, the boys were focused on the cost of each activity, weighing up the benefits and similarities of expensive and less expensive activities. Alongside this, the children considered what each activity would bring to the group in terms of new experiences, two examples being kayaking and horse-riding. Demonstrating a strong investment in this collaborative community of practice, some children commented that they got to do most of the activities they wanted, but that the important part of this exercise was working together to achieve the best outcome for everyone. Rogoff (1993) observes that by adopting a participatory appropriation stance, the view of children's development and learning shifts from an interdependent lens to one that reveals roles that are "active and dynamically changing" (p. 139). Moreover, through such events, specific processes of communication and shared decision-making occur, contributing to cognitive development (Rogoff, 1993).

The mathematics curriculum also featured in the building of the community pantry. This event started with planning and designing the pantry. Some of the children who were designing the pantry were very aware that the building dimensions needed to be "fit for purpose". At least three children were able to share on the day how they included measurements for the pantry that included height, depth, and width, and the children identified this as a measurement and mathematics task. Problem-solving skills were also a factor for designing the pantry on a digital platform. There was a strong cross-pollination

during this activity with a group of boys measuring the food packaging and communicating with others who were designing the pantry. These considerations were instigated by children and occurred as the planning and designing unfolded on the day. With each elaboration and decision made, children recognised what their next steps needed to be to bring this pantry to life with some children demonstrating complex and sophisticated thinking processes. Suffice to say, the final 3-D digital image of the community pantry designed by one ten-year-old boy was impressive and built on the ideas and input of many, a strong example of participatory appropriation (see Figure 18). Participatory appropriation is noted as a perspective where social partners work interdependently, and their roles are active and changing in response to shared decision-making, this being the essence of cognitive development (Rogoff, 1993). Morcom (2014) further demonstrates that collaborative sociocultural events such as this facilitate and create context for collaboration by empowering children, teaching skills, and developing children's knowledge and maturity through negotiation and shared efforts.

To summarise, the participatory appropriation–personal plane and the theme of *children demonstrated self-determining attributes in collaborations and learning* illustrate how children in this research acted in deliberate ways to further their knowledge and skills by appropriating new learning from social partners in a collaborative community of practice. Their “community” consisted of children, their teacher, as well as whānau and the wider community. An important factor shown in the personal plane was children's awareness of their strengths and the strengths of others, identifying how knowing these benefitted their and others' learning. Consistent throughout the case narratives, and demonstrated through each plane of analysis, was the further importance of children drawing on their interests and prior knowledge, thus supporting personal and collective learning goals. Some children also actively sought to improve learning outcomes in their own self-determining ways. Children demonstrated that they were actively connecting across the curriculum as, for instance, recognising when mathematics knowledge and skills were needed in other areas of learning.

The community pantry was one example of a sociocultural event that saw all children actively contributing to the planning, designing, building, and delivery of a worthwhile community service. In doing so, children were also able to demonstrate citizenship and their keen awareness of real-life issues, such as food security and unsheltered living.

When viewing sociocultural activities through the personal plane, such as the ones included in the three case narratives, researchers and teachers can identify the myriad of ways and levels of sophistication in which children knowingly engage, participate, and appropriate new knowledge and skills. Furthermore, shifting the lens across the three planes illuminates the motivations and complex ways children operate within sociocultural activities. As Rogoff (2008) asserts, “orientating our inquiry by focusing on how people participate in sociocultural activity and how they change their participation demystifies the processes of learning and development” (p. 71).

The discussion to this point has considered the teaching and learning that occurred in the research classroom in terms of Rogoff’s three planes of analysis. This next section discusses further examples of how children’s participatory rights were enacted in the classroom.

5.4 Children’s Rights to Participation and Self-Determination

The predominately sociocultural nature of this study has demonstrated the positive impact a collaborative community of practice has for children’s learning. Additionally, such a community also encourages and fosters self-determining and self-regulating attributes. This section outlines the conditions for learning, instigated by the teacher who embraced inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogies. The beginning of this section provides an overview of the key competencies of the NZC (Ministry of Education, 2007) and their genesis into the Aotearoa New Zealand educational landscape. Viewed through Wehmeyer’s (1999) functional model of self-determination theory (SDT), the key competencies demonstrate the role they play in supporting children to be self-determining in their learning and lives

(Section 5.4.1). Following on from this, the children in this study demonstrate the importance of having the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness met in support of both their motivation and engagement in learning (Section 5.4.2). This study has identified that the teacher aligned with an autonomy-supportive teaching stance, encouraging children over the course of the year to have greater agency in their learning and to partner in curriculum decision-making. The section will also outline the benefits and challenges for teachers as well as children (Section 5.4.3). The final section (Section 5.4.4) provides a brief reminder of Lundy's (2007) research and her framework for participation and the importance of Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989; United Nations, n.d.) for children's participatory rights. Following this, examples of how children were afforded and, indeed, took charge of their participatory rights are demonstrated through a myriad of meaningful, everyday ways. Importantly, this section concludes with a focus on how children were listened to in genuine ways—from the voices of children themselves.

5.4.1 Living out the Key Competencies of the New Zealand Curriculum

Included in the literature review as an alternative view of self-determination theory, Wehmeyer (1999) proposed a functional model of self-determination theory that elucidates the classroom environment and learning via experiences that are determined by children's own capacities, perceptions, beliefs, and opportunities. As has been discussed, the community pantry inquiry offered authentic learning where children took a real-life issue and, with the support of their teacher and school caretaker, realised a solution. The practicalities of the planning, designing, and building of the pantry and, later, ensuring it was available on a regular basis for whānau and community saw children taking the lead at every point. Key elements of Wehmeyer's (1999) model are children having the opportunity to make decisions, problem solve, be goal-orientated, demonstrate self-regulation and management, as well as demonstrate leadership and self-knowledge. Self-knowledge was an important factor in this child-initiated inquiry. Children drew on experiences from outside of school, the

curriculum, and the knowledge and skills of each other to build this pantry with the support of adults in guidance and facilitation roles.

In fact, Wehmeyer's (1999) functional model of self-determination theory echoes the intent of the New Zealand Curriculum's key competencies (Ministry of Education, 2007). These key competencies are: *thinking; using language, texts, and symbols; relating to others; participating and contributing; and; managing self*. The community pantry provided an authentic opportunity for children to demonstrate these competencies. The following discussion connects self-determining attributes with the key competencies of the NZC (Ministry of Education, 2007) through the lens of the community pantry.

The key competency of *thinking* is a metacognitive process in which children make sense of their world in creative and curious ways. At each phase of the pantry's building process, children worked in individual and collaborative ways, bringing their own ideas and values into the planning and design. For instance, whilst there were many similarities in the designing of the pantry from children using the same digital platform, there was also space for children to bring their own individuality, creativity, and cultural identity. Children's use of problem solving, goal setting and attainment, and decision-making were also evident throughout this as they worked to complete the pantry and then continued to provide this service to the community during the remainder of the school year. Hipkins (2018) provides insight into the development of the key competencies for the Aotearoa New Zealand context, noting *thinking* includes cultural influences that are supported by collaborative learning and is not just an individualistic approach. Additionally, alongside metacognition, reflectivity and creativity are valued.

The key competency of *using language, symbols, and texts* highlights children's skills in being effective communicators and meaning-makers. The community pantry premised the importance of effective communication skills as well as the opportunity to use tools in interactive ways (Hipkins, 2018). Across the designers (digital application), writers (Google

Docs), scouters for the positioning of the pantry (iPad), and the children organising the food (measuring tapes), clear communication was needed as each group relied on the knowledge and skills of others. Hipkins and Boyd (2011) maintain that successful learners draw on all of the competencies in combination with other tools available to them. Whilst McDowall and Hipkins (2018) note *using language, symbols, and texts* is often seen as a literacy and numeracy competency, the emphasis is to expand ideas about meaning-making across all curricula.

The key competency *relating to others* is a critical factor in a collaborative community of practice. As has been demonstrated throughout this study, relationship building was the dominant starting position for the teacher and her class. This took time and, as has been noted by teacher and the leadership team, there were challenges to overcome to achieve a whānau culture. Central attributes of this key competency were the ability to listen to others, share, negotiate, and recognise others' points of view (Ministry of Education, 2007). A significant strength of this collaborative community of practice was that children knew each other well and respected the diverse identities and personalities in the classroom. During the planning, designing, and building of the community pantry, attributes of self-advocacy and leadership skills were clear, and children were confident in their own skills and knowledge and recognised the strengths of others. Ryan, Curren, and Deci, et al. (2013) determine that the basic needs satisfaction of autonomy and relatedness is achieved by individuals who pursue SDT intrinsic goals, such as community endeavours, helping others, experiencing personal growth by learning new things, and connecting with others in meaningful ways. Furthermore, by experiencing these intrinsic goals, well-being is positively impacted.

The key competency *participating and contributing* embraces the ideals of a community of learning where children have a sense of belonging, and their interests and culture support them in making connections in the world (Bishop, 2023; Ministry of

Education, 2007; Riwai-Couch, 2021). Additionally, children make sense of the world through understanding their rights and responsibilities as good citizens (Mitra & McCormick, 2017; Reeve, 2016). It is safe to say that this child-initiated inquiry provided a platform for the children to demonstrate their self-awareness and self-knowledge (Wehmeyer, 1999). Whilst the practicalities of designing and building the pantry drew on some of the children's capabilities, it also brought into sharp focus these children's awareness of issues that affect many children and whānau across Aotearoa New Zealand and the world—in this circumstance, the very real issue of food security and unsheltered living. Hipkins (2018), in providing the background to the development of the Aotearoa New Zealand key competencies, discusses that initially this competency was considered as “belonging”. However, argument was made to changing the intent to *participating and contributing* to encompass “sociocultural thinking about the distributed and active nature of learning to be more explicitly signalled” (p. 5).

The key competency of *managing self* is evident in all elements of Wehmeyer's (1999) functional model. Critically, notions of self-motivation, self-regulation, and self-assessment were apparent throughout the community pantry inquiry. Factors that supported this were children playing to their own strengths and interests. Additionally, children appropriated new skills and knowledge along the way in line with the participatory appropriation plane (see, for example, Rogoff, 2008). The aspirations contained in the NZC (Ministry of Education, 2007) for children and young people to be “enterprising, resourceful, reliable, and resilient” (p. 12) has acquired a particular focus in COVID-19 and post-COVID times. In this study, events, such as teacher- and child-initiated inquiries, provided opportunities in real-life ways to practise and learn new skills and knowledge and be innovative. Consistencies between Mitra and McCormick's (2017) research and this present study show that children have a strong social justice lens. In both studies, children were strong advocates for their communities, actively seeking to understand the issues of interest and be “activists” on behalf of others.

5.4.2 Children Demonstrating Self-determination

Ryan and Martela (2016) maintain that central to self-determination is a person's ability to authentically engage in human experiences, this benefitting an individual's ability to thrive. Critically, such experiences are strong predictors of quality of life that include an individual's ability to experience the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in authentic, everyday ways.

Children in this study demonstrated motivation and engagement in sociocultural activities and events that were facilitated by themselves and their teacher, supporting individuals to act in autonomous, self-determining ways (Reeve, 2012). Initially, this began with an established structure for the mathematics and literacy blocks of learning. As time went on, children were afforded greater autonomy through the teacher- and child-initiated inquiries. Many of the children in the study were able to share their autonomous ways of being with varying levels of sophistication and knowing. With this, several children shared that, for them, they felt in control of their learning and, because of this, knew what was best for their learning.

All children shared through group and individual interviews the process they went through when deciding how they organised their day. As has already been determined through the apprenticeship and interpersonal planes (see Sections 5.1 and 5.2), some children focused on an order that would be the most expedient way to complete tasks to satisfy more social- or interest-orientated goals whilst other children organised their learning for mathematics and literacy based on what would benefit their learning best. For instance, some children felt it was best to tackle the more challenging tasks first as these took longer and needed more time to do well.

Ryan and Deci's (2020) research has shown that the psychological need of autonomy is inextricably connected with feelings of competence. Competence is defined as opportunities for individuals to experience success and engage in mastery experiences

(DeHaan et al., 2016). Importantly, in the context of learning, individuals who consistently experience feelings of competence seek further challenges, optimising their capabilities. In this present study, the teacher had planned structures and routines that included expectations for the completion of tasks. Within the structure provided, children had choice in how and when they tackled each task over the week. The teacher and children had shared that the tasks were individualised, and children could succeed at a pace achievable for them. For some children, they saw this as tasks “being at their level”. Reeve (2012) notes the central role teachers play in enabling children to experience autonomy, academic competence, and self-efficacy, these being strong predictors of engagement and achievement in learning. Reeve further states that for mastery learning to occur, classrooms need to be well-structured, offer optimal challenges, and give positive and specific feedback on learning.

Children in the research classroom experienced self-determination in their learning in a myriad of ways daily. This occurred through the choices they made about who to collaborate with, to work on their own, or to work side by side. Self-determining attributes were also seen in large-scale events, such as the three inquiries reported on, with children making decisions about organising budgets and developing and selling products through to the conception and delivery of a community pantry. There were also less visible signs of agency through the choices and decisions made about books and tutorials chosen, the reasons for a particular phrase in a kindness poster, or a prompt for writing. These agentic ways are sometimes only uncovered when engaging in conversations with children or by knowing their individual histories and identities (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018c).

The capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 2011) is a human development framework that incorporates both one’s internal capabilities and the combined capabilities that are provisioned by society. For instance, these can include a decent education, loving and nurturing homes, and opportunities to develop the skills of good citizenship. Key to this framework is the ability for all humans to demonstrate and engage in their substantial rights

and freedoms to achieve their individual optimal capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011). Similarly, the UNCRC (1989; United Nations, n.d.) recognises children as rights-holders and that their rights include provisions for both welfare and agency (Dixon & Nussbaum, 2012).

Accordingly, in teaching and learning, when attempting to realise children's rights to be self-determining, it is important to provide sociocultural activities and events that encourage self-determining dispositions. Small, everyday opportunities for children to experience and grow their agency matter. Significantly, children in the research classroom knew this, voicing this on numerous occasions throughout the study. Furthermore, seeing children as active agents is a critical element in realising self-determination and full participation rights. Bourke and O'Neill (2022) concur with Dixon and Nussbaum (2012) and Nussbaum (2011), viewing children's participatory rights through a capabilities perspective. Importantly, for this research and the Aotearoa New Zealand context, a capabilities perspective is seen as holistic and includes what is important for the child and whānau. The teacher plays an instrumental role in supporting children to develop self-determining attributes.

5.4.3 Autonomy Supportive Teaching

This section outlines and provides practical examples of how autonomy-supportive teaching occurred in the research classroom. Teachers engage in autonomy-supportive teaching in unique and personalised ways, and recent research demonstrates the positive impact this can have on educational outcomes for children (Reeve 2016; Reeve & Cheon, 2021). Autonomy-supportive teachers are learner focused and actively seek to provide conditions for learning that encourage children's curiosity, interests, and preferences in open and flexible ways. Additionally, children who interact with learner-focused teachers report positive relationships with their teacher and increased emotional security (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). Context is also crucial for children's learning. Reeve and Cheon (2021) report that drawing on children's prior knowledge and lived experiences enhances motivation and engagement in learning. They state: "When students become the origins of their own

behaviours and pursuits and when students experience a wholehearted self-endorsement of what they are doing, they experience autonomy ‘satisfaction’ in the form of pleasurable subjective feelings” (Reeve & Cheon, 2021, p. 55).

The three case narratives have been able, at least to some extent, to identify the origins of what motivated and engaged children in learning and, alongside this, the role the teacher played in setting the conditions to enable children to act in self-determining, autonomous ways. Critical to this was the teacher recognising the importance of prior knowledge, lived experiences, and the cultural identity of children. These factors were central to all aspects of the classroom life for the teacher with everyday learning and large-scale inquiries revolving around this. Additionally, the teacher was constantly engaging with children about their lives and their interests. This meant she deviated, at times, from the planned direction for learning to follow the interests of children. In most cases, children were aware of this; however, children also recalled occasions when the teacher, principal, or senior syndicate made decisions on the direction for learning. Autonomy-supportive teachers seek to locate the origins of children’s interests, and, for the children of this study, the origins were often deeply rooted in their whānau and cultural identity (Reeve & Cheon, 2021; see also Bishop, 2023; Riwai-Couch, 2021; Wehmeyer & Abery, 2013).

In this present study, identifying the “origins” of what is important and of interest to children strived to go beyond surface or tokenistic ways of seeing children as active participants and influencers in their learning (and lives). As noted previously, Lundy (2018) attributes the term “tokenism” to “the experiences of children whose views have been sought by adults but not taken seriously” (p. 342). From the outset of this study, the teacher stated that she was actively gathering the “voices” of children to inform the structures, routines, and planning for learning. This continued over the course of the year with the teacher taking a reflective stance, continually looking for ways to ensure that not only were children’s views sought but also acted on. There were also key moments throughout the year when the teacher

reflected on what more could be done. For instance, there was the recognition that the reasons for a certain direction in teaching were always discussed at a team and staff meeting level yet not always discussed with children. Lundy (2018) demonstrates the complex role of adults who are working to establish genuine participation for children. This takes effort, time, and resourcing to ensure that children have access to information and the necessary support needed to understand this. As this study has demonstrated, however, “there can be much to be gained from simply letting children into these spaces and conversations” (Lundy, 2018, p. 346).

In this present study, children appeared to be motivated and engaged in learning when their own experiences, expertise, and perspectives were included. Research has shown that autonomy-supportive teachers establish the conditions for fostering children’s engagement and participation not only through curriculum design but also actively supporting children to build learning connections, collaborate, and draw on the strengths and experiences of their peers (Morcom, 2014; Reeve, 2016; Rogoff, 2008). According to Reeve (2016), autonomy-supportive teachers are highly respectful of children’s perspectives and initiatives. Interactions are consistently reciprocal and flexible, accompanied by scaffolded support. Associated with this is the importance of social belonging. Reeve and Cheon (2021) draw comparisons between social belonging and the work of Rogoff where a community culture is established in the context of autonomy-supportive teaching that fosters children’s engagement in tasks and activities. Further still, Bourke and O’Neill’s (2022) notion of autonomy-supportive teaching affirms that teachers who see children as capable contributors in their own learning are affording opportunities for children to develop knowledge and skills, and to pursue their own interests and realise their responsibilities as members of a collaborative community of practice. Consistently, this study has demonstrated that a collaborative community of practice—with the teacher setting the conditions for children to be able to choose to act in autonomous, needs-satisfying ways—has achieved these characteristics.

Throughout this present study, children commented on their competence with tasks, sociocultural activities, and events. This was evident in both the curriculum-based and inquiry-based learning. Children shared not only what they enjoyed learning about, but they also shared their and others' strengths. Mathematics had been a focus for many of the interviews, and children shared their progress, often citing that mathematics had been challenging before this year but that their teacher had been one of the determining factors in their progress and success. This also included feeling more confident in mathematics learning. Equally, children shared their competence and capabilities in the areas of sports, arts, reading, writing, and life and practical skills gained from whānau, the inquiry-based learning opportunities, and each other. Guay's (2022) study examined autonomous versus controlled motivation whereby the second psychological need of competence was also considered, similar to Reeve's (2012) notion of agentic engagement and the need for both autonomy and competence. Guay's research involved primary-aged children who perceived themselves to be competent in tasks and learning. This longitudinal study showed that children who experienced the psychological need of competence attained higher education degrees ten years later. This signals the significant, positive impact learner-focused teaching has for children, demonstrating that "satisfaction of the need for competence is thus an essential prerequisite for full functioning at school" (Guay, 2022, p. 80).

Autonomy-supportive Teaching in Practice. The teacher's autonomy-supportive teaching practice saw her preparing lessons, sociocultural activities, and events that included the interests, prior knowledge, and cultural identity of the children in her class. Numerous examples of this have been demonstrated in the findings chapter (see Chapter Four) and discussed at length in this chapter (Chapter Five) through the three planes of analysis. As noted in the prior section, the teacher demonstrated that, for her, authentic teaching and learning could not occur without consideration and inclusion of children's voices. Knowledge and understanding of children were also important factors whereby the teacher commented

that many of the children had diverse ways of approaching learning; for instance, for some, practice tasks were important while, for others, more active, hands-on learning was required. Critically, the teacher noted the importance of children not having to sit and listen to the teacher for extended periods of time. This aligned with children commenting on the importance of having different forms of communication, such as visual timetables (menus), and their teacher confirming that instructions were being given as well as known structures and routines. More broadly, Bourke and O'Neill (2022) have observed that listening and responding to children's views is good pedagogical practice, stating:

An often-used phrase in research on childhood today is that 'children are experts in their own lives', which must surely give considerable pause for thought to teachers, leaders, and trustees in schools where children by convention have a very limited say in determining the conditions of their learning. (p. 5)

While researcher observations clearly demonstrated children's engagement in learning, whether this was curriculum- or inquiry-based learning, it was the conversations with children that elaborated on their motivations for engagement. These included academic achievement goals whereby children had shared areas that they were wanting to improve in, social goals that saw children actively collaborating to complete tasks, and fulfilling relational goals of wanting to work alongside friends. Within this social context, some children demonstrated sophisticated ways of negotiating friendships and collaborations to fulfil personal and academic goals. Additionally, for some children, this adapted and changed over the year and was evident in their reflections in the final interviews. Reeve (2016) notes the importance of children being engaged in needs-satisfying, curiosity-provoking, and personally relevant learning experiences. Further, Domen et al. (2020) maintain that, when children are enabled to act in autonomous ways, they are adapting tasks and activities in line with their own personal goals. This results in children engaging in autonomous motivation

that has been found to have consistent benefits for achievement outcomes, including deeper learning and improved psychological well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Benefits of Autonomy-supportive Teaching. Guay (2022) maintains it is the environment that supports humans to be self-determining and that, innately, we are all born with the tendency to want to grow, face challenges, master new learning, and integrate new experiences into what we know—of our own volition. This present study demonstrated that children saw themselves as successful with their learning. Many of the children were able to identify their challenges in learning and what their strengths were, as well as sharing the progress they had made over the year. The teacher commented in her initial interview that the voices of the children were paramount but so also was the early assessment data of children. These data identified areas of learning where a focus was needed to lift achievement. Two of these areas were mathematics and writing. As has been shared, and in line with autonomy-supportive teaching practices, the teacher reviewed the mathematics programme and adapted this in response to children’s needs. Improvement in mathematics was commented on by both children and their teacher.

This present study found consistencies with the work of Bishop (2023), who maintains that an effective leader of learning will first create an extended family, whānau environment. Additionally, the context for learning sets the conditions for learners to be successful on their terms. Second, the effective leader of learning will interact with learners in an environment that enables teaching principles and practices that make a difference, and third, will monitor learners’ progress and the impact of teaching practices, and modify these in response to learners. These three points align with autonomy-supportive teaching and with the voices of children from this research endorsing this approach. Reeve and Cheon (2021) see autonomy-supportive teaching as malleable—that it can be learned through the same processes that teachers employ with learners, namely: modelling, guidance, practise, and feedback. Teachers that exemplify this approach consider the views and perspectives of

children, provide opportunities and structures that support a collaborative community of practice, offer rationales to explain less interesting experiences, and adapt and respond to children's interests.

The benefits, however, do not just lie with children. In this study, the teacher shared her passion and enthusiasm for teaching in autonomy-supportive ways consistently throughout the year. This was built on a strong foundation of understanding that the first thing she needed to do was build trusting relationships and, through this, build a strong, positive classroom culture. The teacher referred to this as a “whānau culture” or “the classroom culture vibe”. From the beginning of the study, the voices and needs of children were at the centre of her talk and work. Decisions made for setting the conditions for learning were based on this “vibe”, and the teacher actively reflected on how it could be furthered. Explicit inclusion of cooperative and collaborative learning was embedded in the classroom (Morcom, 2014). The teacher firmly stated: “I can't function, my classroom cannot operate if their [children] voices are not being heard; there's no point me teaching them stuff that they're not a part of” (Whaea Tupou).

Reeve (2016) maintains that autonomy-supportive teachers experience greater teacher satisfaction, more harmonious relationships with children, stronger passion for teaching, greater teacher efficacy, higher job satisfaction, increased vitality during teaching sessions, and less emotional and physical exhaustion after teaching. When these factors are in play for both children and teacher, it is said that the teacher is in “sync” with children. These conditions enable the teacher to be more responsive and therefore autonomy-supporting towards children. Equally, this provides greater opportunity for children to authentically engage in learning activities, knowing their voice is included and affirmed, thus resulting in higher quality motivation. All these features were similarly apparent in the research classroom through the year. Black and Mayes' (2020) comment on the complex nature of teachers engaging in student voice, and their research demonstrates the “emotionality” of this

for teachers. For instance, in their research, there was wide-ranging support from school leaders and teachers who were emotionally invested in promoting the inclusion of student voice work, stating: “These teachers and school leaders are all emotionally engaged in student voice and passionate about its observed and potential benefits for their students” (p. 1070). However, Black and Mayes’ research also reveals some teachers’ fears and resistance to changes to student voice policy, with school leaders often interpreting this as teachers “set in their ways”. Yet, as the authors point out, these teachers are also experiencing an emotional response to change and need support in seeing a way forward for both children and their own teaching practice.

5.4.4 Children’s Participation and Influence in Classroom Decision-making

Finally, in the context of this study, it is important to acknowledge how Lundy’s (2007) model of child participation has brought to the fore Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989; United Nation, n.d.) and the urgent need for children’s participation rights to be realised in education. Lundy’s examination of Article 12 highlighted two key elements: (i) the right to express a view, and (ii) the right to have views given due weight. These are conceptualised through four quadrants that are interrelated and overlap: “space”, “voice”, “audience”, and “influence”. The work of Lundy (see, for example, 2007, 2018) has been an ever-present driving force for this study. My initial engagement with her work saw me closely reflect on 30 years of teaching, identifying when I had lived up to the aspirations of this framework and the intent of Article 12, and when I had not. Equally, Lundy’s research has enabled me as a researcher and teacher to examine, through this study, the ways in which one teacher afforded children’s participation rights and how, over a classroom year, these rights were furthered.

The storying of the three case narratives and further analysis and discussion in this chapter using Rogoff’s planes of analysis have provided multiple examples of how children participated in and influenced curriculum decision-making and, therefore, have been active in sharing their ideas, thoughts, perspectives, and views. The curriculum-based learning case

narrative demonstrated that within the structure of curriculum menus, children had choice on how they organised their tasks, who they collaborated with, and, in the case of reading, what the content was. Not surprisingly, given the structured nature of the mathematics and reading learning areas, greater autonomy was evident with the two inquiry-based studies. The teacher-led inquiry saw children have autonomy over the choice of products or experiences they would sell with the support of adults. There was also evidence of children making informed decisions on what their products might or might not be, recognising the resources and skills available to them. The school camp was another example of children participating in decision-making in genuine and meaningful ways whereby children managed a predetermined budget for camp activities. Through this, many children demonstrated sophisticated decision-making skills that involved real-life decisions, such as activities being seen as “value for money” as well as being inclusive of the needs and wants of the group. Nonverbal embodiments of participation in decision-making can also be considered as part of this whole with children working and moving with confidence and purpose during activities. This became more evident over the course of the year. Reynaert and Roose (2014) note the importance of children being seen as capable and experiencing agency in their lives and a fundamental right. Reynaert and Roose maintain that children having agency includes personal traits—that is, the capacity to act in autonomous ways—alongside a social construct of relational interrelatedness that sees children making decisions in socially capable ways.

The child-initiated inquiry, borne out of a chance donation of food and class discussion, was a demonstration of active citizenship and social justice. Evident in this inquiry were children exercising autonomy in how they participated, the decisions made, and how these decisions could best serve their community. Most importantly, children were trusted by their teacher with these decisions, and the children knew this. Mitra and McCormick’s (2017) research, based in the classroom with children aged 10–13 years, has similarities to this present study, seen through an inquiry-based learning lens. While the

children in Mitra and McCormick’s research chose individual inquiries of interests and passions to pursue, both studies evidence elements of social justice and advocacy. Children from both studies were highly invested in their inquiries and recognised elements of social justice, whether it be focused on school policies, gender inequity, or the wider political and social issues of food security and unsheltered living. What both studies demonstrate is that children are strongly aware of these issues and want to participate in finding solutions—and in bringing about change. Equally, in both studies, children had a strong advocate in their teacher who willingly supported children, seeing them as capable, self-determining persons in their own rights.

The teacher’s inclusion of children in decision-making within the research classroom was acknowledged and recognised by the children. Children expressed how they felt valued and listened to by their teacher with most children recognising the context for learning came from their interests or were connected in some way to a whānau context. Clearly, when this occurs, it increases the likelihood of children not only being enabled to live out their participatory rights but to also normalise the inclusion of children’s voices, views, and perspectives in classroom life. Additionally, when children experience greater access to voice and participation, their expectations of meaningful participation increase. Similarly, Lundy (2018) notes that opportunities and experiences such as this “opens up the space for further informed interaction and the possibility of continued dialogue” (p. 349). Additionally, children need the support of adults to build their capacity in claiming their rights to participation. However, the point to be made is that although teachers play a leading role in setting the conditions for this, children themselves often appear to still be unaware of their legal rights to participation and are reliant on adults to share this information (Hub na nÓg, 2023).

The teacher in this study spoke during interviews about the importance of class discussions and the co-construction of goals for the week, whether they be curriculum-,

values-, or expectation-based. Often, the teacher and children developed a matrix so that they could check on their progress and reset when needed. This was strongly connected to the teacher's drive to create a whānau culture. Echoing children's responses in interviews, the teacher shared that because of the whānau culture, children were comfortable with her—sometimes too comfortable, and that would then lead the teacher and children back to the classroom values and expectations to reset behaviours. Examples such as this demonstrate that children's participation is not necessarily high stakes and may be accompanied by little fanfare. Rather, the examples of voice and participation in this study demonstrate that the teacher set the conditions for participation and influence by listening and including the views and perspectives of children in routine, open, transparent, and ongoing ways. This happened daily and was integrated through culturally responsive pedagogical approaches that had a focus on inclusion and participation. Lundy (2018) notes this approach is a crucial aspect for meaningful participation. Messiou et al. (2022) agree and add that teachers who engage with the views of children are also ensuring diverse views are listened to and heard, resulting in learning being more inclusive. Mayes (2020) lends further support to the importance of the teacher–student partnership where teachers recognise and affirm children's status as “expert witnesses” in their own lives. Critically, Mayes maintains such partnerships not only support student voice work but also lead to transformative institutional change.

Throughout the year, the intent of the teacher was to expand children's participation and influence in curriculum decision-making. This was documented through classroom observations and interviews with children and their teacher. The teacher commented that over the year, children's decision-making increased as collaborations between children and the teacher strengthened. Often, she was surprised by some of the decisions children made about their learning. For instance, in the writing programme, the teacher offered increasing choice and freedom about writing topics, working to ensure that the topics children chose from aligned with interests and prior knowledge. Often, children chose an area of interest, such as

basketball; however, because there were a variety of writing prompts, children could also follow or establish a new interest. This was also evident within the reading programme.

Children shared that they often read about topics of interest but that they also liked to explore new topics, such as historical events. Nelson (2018) discusses the power imbalances that can exist in schools and notes that this is a complex and multifaceted issue that student voice advocacy is working to address. Teachers engaging in partnership orientations with children as decision-makers seek to reduce the power imbalances, but current research demonstrates that there are varying degrees of success with this (Lundy & O'Donnell, 2021).

Children's Views on Adults Listening to Children. In the final interviews, children were asked about the importance of adults and teachers listening to children. All children were in agreement: adults and teachers should listen to children. For some of these children, listening to adults was also important, reasoning that adults have more experience than children and therefore will often know what is best for them and that, in fact, their parents knew what was best for them. An alternative perspective was also offered, this being that teachers needed to set rules and that they needed structures and routines; otherwise, children might not do anything. This was also commented on by one child in Nelson's (2018) research, reasoning that if the teacher did not set the direction for learning, then children would not know what to do. Whilst children may not have had knowledge of their legal status as rights-holders, children did know that it was "the job" of adults and teachers to guide and support them. These legal obligations are set down in Article 5 of the UNCRC (United Nations, 2023), which obligates parents, whānau, and community to provide support and guidance for children appropriate with their evolving capacities and, in doing so, supporting them to exercise their legal rights under the UNCRC (1989; United Nations, n.d.).

There was also recognition that whilst all children in this study said that they felt listened to and saw themselves as active participants in their learning, this view came from a class who admired, respected, and, indeed, loved their teacher. Lundy and O'Donnell (2021)

assert that for adults and institutions to meet their obligations to children's rights to participation, then the conditions for children to feel comfortable and at ease to do so must be enabled. This present study has demonstrated this can be achieved by establishing a collaborative community of practice that starts with the teacher placing high importance on building partner-orientated relationships. Additionally, noted by the teacher in this study and Nelson (2018), collaborative partnerships involve reflection on practice and children seeing their teacher as a learner. Smith's (2023) recent research in the primary school setting affirms this view, noting that for children to participate as decision-makers, they need to feel comfortable working alongside teachers who are encouraging, collaborative, and respectful.

The findings from this study do not claim to be revolutionary nor new to the field of educational research; rather, the findings are consistent with the current and local research of Bishop (2023), Nelson, (2018), and Riwai-Couch, (2021). However, what this study does demonstrate is that children participated and influenced in often small, unnoticed ways through their everyday actions. This participation and influence have been revealed through talking and listening with the children and their teacher in the research classroom. Whilst there were no grand gestures of children "sitting around the table" planning curriculum, they were actively participating on a daily, weekly, termly, and annual basis. These were not always obvious to adults and children or possibly not recognised as participation and influence. What is obvious, from the perspective of this study, is the importance of setting the conditions for a collaborative community of practice where children are supported, facilitated, and encouraged to be self-determining, thereby enacting their voice and participation rights. Bourke and O'Neill (2022) concur:

It is often the unheralded micro-practices of teachers' daily practice where children feel listened to and come to believe they have a meaningful say that will be respected and acted upon. Unconsciously, perhaps, teachers who engage in these ways are upholding Article 12 of UNCRC and the broader range of

articles that relate to young people’s wellbeing, health, education, and identity.

(p. 8)

To summarise, this final section (Section 5.4) of the discussion chapter aimed to respond to the three further research sub questions that have supported this study to identify the ways in which children were enabled in actualising their participatory rights as self-determining persons. This section began by outlining the key competencies of the NZC (Ministry of Education, 2007) and their alignment with Wehmeyer’s (1999) functional model of self-determination, which provides the conditions for children to engage in decision-making, problem solving, and leadership, and act in goal-orientated, self-regulating, and self-knowing ways.

The supporting and inhibiting factors for children’s individual and collective curriculum decision-making were also discussed and examples from everyday classroom learning and life through a collaborative community of practice were provided. An important factor for children experiencing self-determination was their teacher, who embraced culturally inclusive pedagogies that aligned with an autonomy-supportive teaching approach. Outlined were the benefits of this approach for both children and teacher. However, also included was the broader perspective of teacher “emotionality” when it comes to adopting teaching practices that embrace student voice (Black & Mayes, 2020).

The “last words” of this section belong to the children. Their sage words demonstrate their capabilities in voicing their views, perspectives, and, indeed, their view of the world. This final section also demonstrates the positive impact a teacher can have on the lives and learning of children.

5.5 Summary

This discussion chapter has argued and shown that the findings from this study share consistencies with similar research studies that are focused on the inclusion of student voice and child participation rights in the classroom setting. Additionally, this chapter has

demonstrated the ways in which the classroom teacher and school leaders employed inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogical practices that supported and evidenced the ways in which children were enabled to act in increasingly self-determining ways.

Children participated and influenced curriculum decision-making in three key ways. First, there was the establishment of a school and classroom curriculum that saw the teacher and children experiencing active and contributing roles within an established collaborative community of practice—a place where children had a strong sense of belonging and were encouraged to work in cooperative, collaborative, and autonomous ways. Inherent in the research classroom was the inclusion of cultural identity and the importance of whānau (Bishop, 2023; Riwai-Couch, 2021). Established early in the data gathering phase of the research were the crucial elements of clear structures and routines, these elements being affirmed by both teacher and children. Additionally, classroom curriculum supported and encouraged children’s prior knowledge, lived experiences, and interests. Second, the social context of learning was an important factor in children building relationships and rapport with peers. This extended beyond friendship groups and was deliberately fostered by the teacher through cooperative and collaborative sociocultural activities and tasks (Morcom, 2014). These opportunities furthered children’s sense of belonging and trust in their teacher and peers, enabling them to share who they were, and their thoughts, ideas, and views. In response to this, children navigated and negotiated meaningful pathways in learning, demonstrating growing confidence and abilities in learning as well as negotiating friendships and collaborations in increasingly sophisticated ways (Rogoff, 2008; Ryan, Curren, Deci, et al., 2013, Ryan & Deci, 2020). Third, children were supported to act and learn in autonomous ways. Self-determination by children was evident in individual and collective goal setting, which was supported by children knowing their strengths and the strengths of others. As a result of this, many children were able to articulate their next steps in learning and what they needed to do—or were currently doing—to further their knowledge and skills. Some children

further demonstrated that they were instigators in their own learning and were able to make valuable connections across the curriculum and, indeed, their everyday lives (DeHaan et al., 2016; Rogoff, 2003).

Setting the conditions for participation and influence are fundamental to children experiencing self-determination in classrooms. The teacher in this study set the conditions initially through deliberate relationship building and, in doing so, creating a whānau culture. Within this culture were high expectations for behaviour that focused on a collaborative community of practice where children were supported to be inclusive and accepting of each other (Bishop, 2023; Riwai-Couch, 2021; Ryan & Martela, 2016). In the research classroom, these key findings played out often in small, invisible, or barely visible ways, such as children choosing the topic for reading or the reasons behind their choice of phrase for a kindness poster through to continuing their learning at home to improve outcomes at school.

The discussion chapter (Chapter Five) has provided the opportunity to further analyse and discuss the findings through Rogoff's planes of analysis, drawing on Rogoff's considerable body of work to fulfil this (Rogoff, 1990, 1993, 2003, 2008; Rogoff et al., 2001; Rogoff et al., 2018). Rogoff's planes of analysis has proved to be an insightful tool for gaining deeper understandings of the data gathered in this study. Through each of the planes, children's voices have been the focus in portraying the meaningful ways they participated in learning and classroom life. Children's participation and influence in curriculum decision-making and everyday classroom life were demonstrated through Rogoff's community/institution, guided participation, and participatory appropriation planes of analysis (Rogoff, 1993; 2003; Rogoff et al., 2018). The analysis revealed the multiple ways children engaged as apprentices in this community through the establishment of clear structures and routines. Following on from this, children demonstrated their developing interpersonal skills through the guided participation plane, which identified how children collaborated in varied, nuanced, and increasingly knowing ways. The third plane of analysis

gave the opportunity to examine how children appropriated new knowledge and skills from more skilled others. For example new knowledge and skills were gained through collaborations with peers, teacher, whānau, school caretaker, as well as digital platforms. Importantly, children were also able to show how they applied their knowledge and skills across different curriculum areas and life itself.

Critical to the planes of analysis approach is the understanding that all planes form a mutually constituting process and that, whilst one plane is foregrounded for discussion, the other planes remain backgrounded and are contributing to the overall understanding of the events (Rogoff, 2008). Figure 23 illustrates the transformation of participation that occurred in this study as the result of children working within a collaborative community of practice. Aligned with this study's aims and questions, transformation of participation has been evidenced through the collaborative and self-determining ways children acted. The evidence shows how they contributed to, participated in, and influenced curriculum decision-making in meaningful ways. Critically, it is the voices of the children themselves that have demonstrated how their participation in this collaborative community of practice has been transformative for themselves and their teacher.

The early days of the fieldwork for this present study gathered compelling evidence of a collaborative community of practice and how important this was to the teacher and the children. Documented throughout this discussion chapter were the everyday curriculum-based learning and larger sociocultural activities and events, such as inquiry-based learning, where children acted in autonomous, collaborative, and self-determining ways. These events effectively determined the first phase of the analysis by identifying the units of analysis, these being the three case narratives: curriculum-based learning, and teacher-initiated and child-initiated inquiries, these nested within a classroom-based case study.

The study also demonstrates that the classroom teacher's approach to teaching and learning aligned with the principles of autonomy-supportive teaching (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

The teacher developed a curriculum that drew on the prior knowledge, lived experiences, interests, and cultural identity of the children in her class. Observations and conversations with children and teacher showed children engaging in learning and tasks that aimed to be engaging and curiosity provoking. Doing so provisioned opportunities for children to experience autonomy in choice and decision-making, demonstrate their capabilities and strengths in needs-satisfying ways, and to have a strong sense of belonging (Reeve, 2016; Reeve & Cheon, 2021).

The purpose of this present study was to identify to what extent and how children participated in curriculum decision-making in a Year 5/6 classroom in an Aotearoa New Zealand primary school. In order to achieve this, youth participatory action research was employed to develop a research partnership with teacher and children (see, for example, Corney et al., 2022; Mitra & McCormick, 2017). The initial and subsequent interviews with the teacher demonstrated her belief that listening to the children in her class was critical to children experiencing success in school. Importantly, part of creating a whānau culture for ākonga Māori, Pasifika, and non-Māori children was for them to experience learning in ways that aligned with their cultural identity (Bishop, 2023; Riwai-Couch, 2021). Additionally, the curriculum needed to support hands-on learning with plenty of opportunities to practise new skills. The teacher was also deliberate in gathering the voices and views of children, both formally and informally, catering to individual and group current pastimes and interests as “ignitions” for core curriculum areas. Children were also aware and commented on these deliberate acts, knowing when an interest or focus was aimed at a particular group.

Whilst this study has provided a comprehensive view of how children are enabled and supported to participate in curriculum decision-making in autonomous and self-determining ways, for the teacher, more work needed to be done, and she maintained that too often teacher decisions were “invisible” to children. On several occasions, children shared that they thought the decisions about their learning were made by the senior syndicate when, in fact, the source

of the decision-making had come originally and directly from the voices and interests of children. This demonstrates that whilst this study has identified and discussed the many practical ways children participated in and influenced curriculum decision-making, this does not necessarily mean that this was widely known by children or the broader school community.

This study has shown the importance of establishing a collaborative community of practice. To do so means providing the conditions for children to participate in curriculum decision-making, supporting children in furthering their participatory rights in line with Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989; United Nations, n.d.). The teacher's adopted practice of a partner-orientated approach aligned with autonomy-supportive teaching principles and provided an environment that set consistent high expectations, and was adaptive and culturally responsive to the needs and interests of all children. Additionally, high importance was placed by children on their teacher being kind, caring, and supportive, as well as ensuring she fulfilled her role "as teacher". Equally, the children saw themselves as active participants in this community—individually and collectively—each finding their place, acting with purpose, confidence, and agency in ever-increasing ways over the course of the year.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

This qualitative research study explored children's participation rights and how these were enacted by the teacher and children, predominately through a sociocultural lens. The focus included Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989; United Nations, n.d.) and how children's participatory rights as self-determining persons were actualised. The study focused on exploring how a group of Year 5/6 children in a single classroom in a low socioeconomic, culturally diverse community participated in classroom life, learning, and curriculum decision-making.

The study drew on the work of Rogoff (see, for example, 1990, 1993, 2008; Rogoff et al., 2018) to analyse and explain the phenomenon known as a collaborative community of practice, further supported by the classroom-based research of Morcom (2014) and Sewell (2006). Additionally, given the local Aotearoa New Zealand context, the research of Bishop (2023) and Riwai-Couch (2021) helped to explore how a collaborative community of practice that supported ākonga Māori and Pasifika could realise successful achievement outcomes aligned with their cultural identity. Central to developing and appreciation of a collaborative community of practice was ascertaining how and when all members of the community developed a shared understanding of the values, structures, routines, and ways in which to engage in sociocultural endeavours and interactions with each other.

Rogoff's planes of analysis were particularly useful in peeling back the layers of activity in the classroom to reveal the autonomous behaviours of children (see, for example, Rogoff, 2008; Rogoff et al., 2018). Foregrounding each plane of analysis to further analyse and understand how children shifted between roles of apprenticeship, interpersonal and shared endeavours, as well as identifying when participatory appropriation occurred to further transform their own knowledge and skills took careful analysis. Whilst classroom observations as the researcher were integral, the children's sharing of how and why they

made the choices to engage in activities and events was essential in being able to determine the extent of their authentic participation in curriculum decision-making. This study has demonstrated that establishing a collaborative community of practice not only supports children to be self-determining but it also lives out Lundy's (2007) notion of provisioning children with the "space", "voice", "audience", and "influence" necessary to exercise their rights in everyday ways (see also Hub na nÓg, 2023; Lundy & O'Donnell, 2021).

The teacher's deliberate inclusion of children's prior knowledge, lived experiences, and interests were three key influencing factors in how children participated in curriculum decision-making (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008; Bishop, 2023; Hattan et al., 2024; Svrcek & Abugasea Heidt, 2022). However, they did not occur in discrete ways. Instead, all three elements—children's prior knowledge, lived experiences, and interests—were deeply embedded in whānau, identity, and culture. When asked for the reasons for choosing their focus for learning via a text, topic, activity, or event, the children most commonly referred in some way to whānau and/or culture. This demonstrates that we cannot remove children from *who* they are to *what* they are learning in order to motivate and engage them (Bishop, 2023; Hattan et al., 2024; Riwai-Couch, 2021).

Findings from this study demonstrated that many of the children were often goal-orientated in their learning and, at times, deeply reflective about themselves as learners. There was clear evidence that, for the children, the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness were important to their feelings of success (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Children having the opportunities to be more reflective about what and how they learn demonstrates a promising starting point to enhance children's sense of autonomy (Bozack et al., 2008). Moreover, when children are provided with the opportunities to act in agentic ways, they are engaging and practising the skills of social negotiation and decision-making (Guay, 2022; Reeve & Cheon, 2021).

This study has demonstrated that children were supported in enacting their participation rights through the teacher adopting relational and culturally responsive pedagogies (Bishop, 2023; Riwai-Couch, 2021). All participating children in the research classroom shared that it was important for teachers to listen to and consider their ideas with the knowledge that not only would their ideas be validated but many also knew that this improved their learning outcomes. Equally, collaborating with peers also improved learning outcomes with some children able to provide in-depth responses to the benefits of collaborations and the deliberate decisions they made for their learning regarding working with others. In doing so, children themselves were aware of what the supporting and inhibiting factors were for their learning.

The children also showed how they acted in autonomous and self-regulating ways in everyday class life. However, the autonomous ways in which children acted were not always immediately visible to the observer. Indeed, decisions made by children in curriculum-focused learning often only became obvious when voiced by the children themselves. In this way, autonomy for children is realised when children feel they are the instigators of actions, and these actions are consistent with their values and interests (Reeve & Cheon, 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

This study has highlighted the critical contribution of an autonomy-supportive teaching approach within a collaborative community of practice in supporting children to be autonomous, self-regulating learners (Bourke & O'Neill, 2022; Guay, 2022; Reeve & Cheon, 2021). The findings from this study show that for children's participation to be meaningful, a supportive learning environment must be established. This starts with building authentic relationships with children that are trusting and, critically, reciprocal in nature. Additionally, the relationships need to go beyond a didactic, teacher–student relationship and include the fostering of positive relationships between children that are based on understanding the diverse cultural identities, strengths, knowledge, and skills of children. In turn, this fostering

of relationships was shown to have a positive effect on social, emotional, and cognitive learning outcomes (Bishop, 2023; Bourke, O’Neill, & Loveridge, 2018a, 2018b; Riwai-Couch, 2021).

Consistent with other research, and as part of this study, a children’s research advisory group (CRAG) was established (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018b; Lundy & McEvoy, 2012; Shier, 2001). However, in contrast to these other CRAGs, the one in this study was situated in the same school and year level, providing valuable “insider knowledge” not only of children’s lives at this age but also of the cultural context within the school. The CRAG played a crucial role in piloting questions for interviews, the initial group activity, and a further classroom activity, as well as providing feedback at other points during the research. Critically, it was the CRAG that opened the “space” for co-research with children.

Through youth participatory action research (YPAR) within this study, I felt a sense of freedom to engage in data collection, enabling children to share their views and perspectives in ways that suited them (Corney et al., 2022; Mitra & McCormick, 2017; Shier, 2001, 2019). Some children were active in wanting to share what they were doing; others were not. This meant that, although there was written consent from 17 children (originally 18 children), not all 17 children actively participated. Bissenden and Gunn (2017) state the importance of both written and informed consent as well as continuous and ongoing informed assent by children. It was important, then, to consistently communicate with children that this research was about them sharing how they participated in decisions about learning and how this helped teachers plan learning tasks and activities. Lundy and O’Donnell (2021) stress the importance of “participation with purpose” and note this is often a missing factor in child participation work.

I consciously adopted a reflexive researcher approach from the beginning of the study (Köngäs & Määttä, 2021; von Unger et al., 2022). This included several attempts to code and recode the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2022). My experience and identity as a teacher saw the

initial coding of data interpreted through the “lens of the teacher”, but I came to realise that this lens did not reveal the full potential of children’s voices. This proved to be a pivotal turning point in the analysis of the data. A decision was made to *only* analyse the voices of children. To do this, my teacher lens needed to be consciously minimised when engaging with transcripts by solely focusing on what children had to say. The result of this was a case study that included three case narratives—curriculum-focused learning, and teacher- and school-initiated and child-initiated inquiries—each of which has told the stories of these children’s lives in and out of school.

Through this study, children, teacher, and school leadership shared their contributions in the hopes of giving greater expression to and appreciation of children’s voice and participatory rights (Hart, 1992; see also Lundy, 2018). The adoption of seemingly simple but achievable classroom practices and relations went, at least in some ways, to addressing tokenistic approaches to children’s participation and inclusion in matters affecting their lives (Bourke & O’Neill, 2022). Children’s participation and influence in curriculum decision-making occurred in simple but not immediately obvious ways. In fact, it was not until I began to speak with children that the deeper levels of participation became more obvious. Regular classroom observations and interviews with children uncovered much of this participation but partnering with the teacher also helped to “fill in” the parts of the day and curriculum when I was not there.

This study clearly showed how teacher practice supported children to participate and influence curriculum decision-making in realisation of their self-determining participation rights in three key ways:

1. There was the establishment of an inclusive, culturally responsive school and classroom curriculum where teacher and children experienced active and contributing roles within an established collaborative community of practice—in other words, a place where children had a strong sense of belonging, experiencing

cooperative, collaborative, and autonomous ways. Children operated in known structures and routines for learning, drawing on their own prior knowledge, lived experiences, and interests. These experiences and interests broadened over the year as children and teacher continued to mine new interests and real-life topics of learning. Through this, children's sense of purpose and confidence grew as they found their place in this community.

2. There was also the valuing of the social context of learning where children built relationships and rapport with peers. This was deliberately fostered by the teacher through cooperative and collaborative sociocultural activities and tasks. These opportunities furthered children's sense of belonging and trust in their teacher and peers, enabling them to share who they were, and their thoughts, ideas, and views. Additionally, children themselves understood what they needed to do to be successful in learning, drawing on peer support in the classroom and negotiating relationships in line with learning and social goals. Engaging in real-life and meaningful sociocultural activities and events meant children were developing "skills for life" with children cognisant of the role these events played in shaping their future learning and lives.
3. Children were supported to act and learn in autonomous ways. Children demonstrated self-determination by instigating individual and collective goal setting. This was supported by children knowing their strengths and the strengths of others. Through this, children made valuable connections across the curriculum and their everyday lives. Interestingly, whilst children drew on their prior knowledge, lived experiences, and interests for school learning, what became apparent was that children were also actively drawing on the tools and resources at school to further their learning, passions, and interests outside of school. Children also developed a strong sense of identity. Part of their identity was knowing

themselves in relation to their learning, self, and, indeed, society. Children engaged in self-assessment, including understanding their progress in curriculum learning, their skills and talents in chosen areas of interest, and their ability to collaborate with peers. These self-determining ways supported children in developing confidence in their roles of being active and conscious decision-makers in curriculum, learning, and life.

In this study, the important teacher-initiated factors to support children's participation in curriculum decision-making were:

- Establishing a collaborative community of practice;
- Having positive school leadership and a schoolwide approach for the inclusion of student voice and participation;
- Establishing structures and routines that enable children to act in autonomous, self-regulating ways with meaningful and relevant choices;
- Seeing children as capable persons, valuing lived experience, cultural identity, strengths, and expertise;
- Making meaningful connections to children's prior knowledge and lived experiences, and being inclusive of their whānau and cultural identity;
- Including children's interests (present and emerging) in the context of learning in authentic ways;
- Engaging in autonomy-supportive teaching approaches; and
- Recognising, acknowledging, and supporting the status of children as rights-holders and, particular to this study, children's participatory rights (UNCRC, 1989, Article 12; United Nations, n.d.).

The child-reported inhibiting factors for children's participation in curriculum decision-making were:

- Being presented nonmeaningful choices that come in the form of choices between predetermined options;
- Being unaware of what had informed the direction for learning; and
- Learning, activities, and tasks that were not seen by the child as relevant to their context or interests.

Previous research has reported that teachers who actively seek pedagogical partnerships with children are more likely to avoid tokenistic practices and outcomes for children (Mitra & McCormick, 2017; Nelson, 2018; Smith, 2023). Many of the children's voices gained strength and confidence over the course of this study. This could be attributed in the first instance to the strong relationship building by their teacher. A key question for educators centres on how they can support children to fully realise their rights as self-determining persons of equal status (O'Neill, 2018). Currently, an invitational approach to enacting child rights is often implemented that sees adults making the "space" available for children. In doing so, this effectively continues the power imbalance between adults and children (Nelson, 2018; Smith, 2023). For educators and researchers, then, it is important to normalise efforts aimed at power-sharing with children in spaces that are focused on benefitting their personal growth, development, and learning in our society.

In response to the research question and further sub questions, this study has demonstrated that children participated and influenced curriculum decision-making through acts of dialogical partnership with their teacher and peers, within a collaborative community of practice. In this present study, this partnership nurtured children's self-determining ways of being. These combined factors were realised in one ordinary classroom, situated in a culturally diverse, low socioeconomic school community by a class of children and their teacher.

6.1 Limitations

This study has identified the many ways children have participated in curriculum decision-making. However, there are limitations within the study. First, there is an acknowledgement of a small sample size—one Year 5/6 classroom with one teacher and 17 child-participants—which means the results of this study cannot be generalised across educational settings. Additionally, the research school already placed high importance on student voice and agency and participated in this study to progress their child voice agenda. Equally, the classroom teacher already valued listening to children and saw the importance of engaging with the prior knowledge, interests, and cultural identity of children.

This study occurred in 2022, amid the COVID-19 pandemic. As mentioned earlier in this thesis (see Section 3.11), whilst schools in Aotearoa New Zealand did not experience lockdowns in 2022, there were significant absences from school for both teachers and children. In Term Two, there were occasions when only five child-participants were at school. Additionally, on a few occasions, classes were combined because of low numbers, so whilst a near full class was present, there were only a few of the children from the research classroom. As stated earlier (see Section 3.11), this improved in Terms Three and Four. Absences in Term Two limited the range of data gathered for observations, and not all participants were available for individual or group interviews, or mid-year focus groups. Additionally, for one focus group session in particular, children chose not to participate, limiting the amount of data gathered for those sessions.

Recognition has been made from the outset of this study regarding researcher subjectivity. In response to this, a qualitative methodology was employed that legitimatised researcher participation through youth participatory action research (YPAR). Steps were taken to limit bias, such as ensuring a muted background presence whilst in the classroom and focusing only on the voices of children when analysing data. It is also acknowledged that whilst care was taken with this, teacher experience could skew the data perspective.

While I tried as a researcher to take an explicit child-rights stance, it is unlikely this was communicated effectively to the children. Even though initial communications through information sheets and sharing this verbally with children at frequent points throughout the research occurred, what was needed was deliberate and ongoing conversations with children foregrounding their rights-holder status.

The first two limitations to this research could be addressed first by conducting further research in this field with a wider sample group, across a diverse range of school settings. The second limitation could be addressed with the experience from this present study informing further research. For instance, the insight this research has provided at the data analysis phase provides valuable learning to inform ongoing research practice. The final limitation of children *knowing* their status as rights-holders needs to be addressed in the broader educational context with explicit education for children, teachers, school leaders, and communities.

6.2 Implications and Recommendations for Further Research

This study has been informed by similar research in the field of education involving both formal and informal learning, specifically the study by Bourke, O'Neill, and Loveridge (2018a, 2018b). Their research with child- and teacher-participants identified the many ways children learn outside of school and how these can inform children's learning in the classroom. Similarly, in this study, children and teacher identified the importance of including children's prior knowledge, lived experiences, interests, whānau, and cultural identity (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008; Bishop, 2023; Hattan et al., 2024). Consequently, children saw learning as relevant and were able to identify how current learning could support them in their future lives.

A key factor for Bourke, O'Neill, and Loveridge's (2018a, 2018b) research was teachers seeing the benefits of including the lives and interests of children in the classroom curriculum. Whilst this insight was evident in this study also, what also became clear was

children actively engaging with activities and events *in school* that would further inform and develop interests and skills *outside of school*. This was particularly evident in the curriculum-focused case narrative with children engaging in reading.

“Partner orientations” were explored by Nelson (2018) that saw teachers and children acting in dialogic ways to share pedagogical decision-making. Decision-making occurred through collective class discussions with teachers positioning themselves as active listeners as well as learners. Interesting comparisons can be made between Nelson’s research and this present study. Both included the voices of children who shared their views on classroom life and learning. Both studies saw children wanting to participate and act in autonomous, self-determining ways, yet they also saw that teachers and adults had roles to play in decision-making on behalf of children. Additionally, this had a social justice dimension with children reasoning that the teacher’s role was to ensure that children were learning.

This study demonstrates that children are not only capable of sharing their views and perspectives but they also have much to contribute in terms of their own learning and, indeed, citizenship.

Inquiry-based learning was the focus for ensuring the voice and participatory rights of young people in Mitra and McCormick's (2017) youth participatory action research. Similarities to this study were the one class, one teacher, and the use of inquiry-based learning to engage with the interests of children. In both cases, notions of social justice and citizenship came to life as well as engaging in real-life problem-solving. Whilst the research of Mitra and McCormick had a wider impact on the school community and tackled ethical dilemmas such as gender equity, the children in this present study also demonstrated their strong understanding of real-life issues such as food security and, through their teacher, voiced feelings of stereotyping. Apparent in both studies was the strong advocacy the classroom teacher undertook for the children and young people in their class. Advocacy took

the forms of ensuring the voices of children were heard by adults, and that their interests, passions, and concerns were acknowledged and responded to (Mitra & McCormick, 2017).

The implications from this body of research demonstrate that children are already engaging and participating in their learning in everyday ways and, in fact, children themselves are the ones creating the opportunities to do so. The extent and authenticity of children's participation is of course still reliant on adults provisioning this. Whilst Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989; United Nations, n.d.) obligates adults to ensure children's legal rights to participation and voice, it is important in respect of this to also incorporate the full intent of Article 5 of the UNCRC. Article 5 obligates adults to ensure children's rights to agency, autonomy, and recognition of their ever-increasing capacity to take responsibility as they develop and mature (United Nations, 2023). Stronger awareness of these legal obligations needs to occur. It is reasonable to suggest that a good place to start is in the education space. The findings of this and other studies provide a strong advocacy for children's rights to participate. Sharing this advocacy wider is a critical next step, and further research is needed to explore how teachers advocate for the voice and participation rights of children.

6.3 Recommendations for School Communities, Researchers, and Policymakers

This study has demonstrated that participatory rights can be met daily through inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogies. This starts with establishing a collaborative community of practice whereby dialogical and collaborative relationships are built among all classroom stakeholders. Additionally, the importance of including children's prior knowledge, cultural identity, and interests to inform curriculum decision-making in meaningful and obvious ways cannot be underestimated.

It is important to support children to act in self-determining ways by providing learning tasks, activities, and events that offer meaningful choices and agency, and encourage ever-maturing self-regulation and efficacy. Teachers need to understand that providing children tokenistic choices between options that are not valued or understood by

the children is not genuine choice. Therefore, teachers can start by including children in decision-making about the options or choices for independent learning as well as the larger-scale learning opportunities, such as the themes or big ideas for inquiry-based learning. The following are recommendations will further children's participation rights in regards to curriculum decision-making. Additionally, these are all pertinent to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes.

6.3.1 *Recommendations for Children and Whānau*

- Help teachers understand what is important to you for your learning, decision-making, and school life.
- Share with teachers and adults your culture, interests, and passions so they can include these in your school and everyday learning.
- Let teachers and adults know it is important for you to be part of the decision-making at school and in your own life. Help them to know *how* you want to participate in decision-making.

6.3.2 *Recommendations for Teachers*

- Foster dialogic relationships with children that support a shared understanding of the classroom structure, routines, and learning in the classroom.
- Engage in autonomy supportive teaching practices that encourage children's autonomy, competence, and relatedness.
- Recognise and encourage the social context of learning for children, valuing their collaborations.
- Actively include children's prior knowledge, lived experiences, and interests in everyday classroom learning.
- Seek authentic inclusion and participation of children's involvement in decision-making by engaging in conversations with children about their lives and learning.

- Support children’s own awareness of voice and participation by providing feedback to children on their contributions in school life and curriculum decision-making.
- Include ‘the rights of the child’ in your curriculum.

6.3.3 Recommendations for School Communities and Leadership

- Promote awareness of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ([UNCRC] United Nations, 1989).
- Provide professional learning and development for school communities on the UNCRC and what this looks like in the school and classroom environment in practical, everyday ways.
- Seek and encourage children’s active participation in the development of localised, place-based curriculum.
- Develop and articulate school values that support children’s rights and self-determination in consultation with children and the school community.

6.3.4 Recommendations for Researchers

- Engage in longitudinal research with attention placed on everyday classroom practice, across all years of school life.
- Develop dialogic research relationships with children and teacher(s) that uphold the intent of Article 12 of the UNCRC by engaging with, and listening to the interests and life-worlds of children.
- Prioritise child-friendly methods for research that ensures children are both participants and collaborators in the research.

6.3.5 Recommendations for Policymakers

- Explicitly include the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989) in educational policies, documents, and curriculum—specifically the fourth guiding principle Article 12, *the views of the child*.

- Give enhanced attention to the key competencies within the New Zealand Curriculum framework, expanding these to include child rights and student voice.

6.4 Final Thoughts

“Why is it important for adults to listen to children?” (Researcher)

“So, they feel more confident, and so they can keep doing what they love, because if they, [adults] don’t really listen to kids, it will make them feel sad inside, make them feel stressed [and] don’t think they’re good enough” (nine-year old girl).

Enacting children’s participatory rights starts with genuine care in listening and engaging with children, knowing who they are as an individual, their whānau, cultural identity, and context. Equally, understanding the social context for learning in the classroom and how this can benefit and further learning is an additional vital factor for the inclusion of children’s participatory rights, including the right to participate in curriculum decision-making. Teachers who are actively aware of, and understand the value of children’s participation and collaborations are provided with opportunities to understand how individual children can best access new knowledge and skills (Rogoff, 2003). Therefore, providing both cooperative and collaborative opportunities for children to develop skills in these spaces is crucial. Through such opportunities, children learn social and emotional skills in how to communicate with others. This includes understanding the diverse perspectives and worlds of their peers. Children learn to navigate and negotiate relationships in ways that benefit themselves and others. These are skills for leading one’s best life and for engaged citizenship.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Self-Determination, Influence of Student Voice, Agency, and Context

(Dacre, 2021)

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Self-Determination, Influence of Student Voice, Agency, and Context



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This entry concerns children's right to participate and have a say in decisions that affect them in the classroom. The entry provides an overview of key education literature on children's rights and student voice, the nature of children's informal and formal learning, and teacher strategies to promote and support greater student autonomy in the classroom.

In 1989, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC has subsequently been extensively ratified globally and adopted into domestic law. Fifty-four articles uphold the legal right to protection, provision, and participation for all children. Of these, a quarter uphold the child's right to be a self-determining person of equal status. At the heart of the self-determining articles is Article 12 which specifies children's right to participate and have genuine "voice" and influence in all matters affecting their lives. Inherently, Article 12 supports children's rights to be self-determining persons of equal status to adults.

Today, terminology and concepts such as student voice, child participation, and student agency proliferate in schools and classrooms. These are often acted out in schools through such provisions as student councils, extracurricular activities, playground settings, and equipment (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler 2019; Lundy 2018). However, a child's ability and freedom to make decisions in line with their best interests is truly enacted through them being afforded the right to make meaningful choices in the classroom environment. This could include ownership of and initiative in their learning and being able to engage in their personal interests (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler 2019). Lundy (2018) has demonstrated that agency in the form of genuine voice and participation is yet to be widely established for all children in all contexts in truly meaningful ways. Instead, superficial forms and enactment of voice and participation are more commonplace and need to be challenged. Child rights in schools are dependent upon the cooperation of adults and their commitment to upholding the rights of children to have meaningful participation and influence in their lives. Children have the right to express their views and participate in decision-making in matters affecting their lives and should not be reliant on the adults choosing when, where, and how this occurs (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler 2019; Lundy 2018). In classrooms, this implies that for there to be universal adoption of student voice, participation, and agency then commonplace teacher practice, where teachers make

most or all decisions about student learning, and what affects their learning, needs to change.

Research has demonstrated that student participation impacts significantly on student outcomes (Lundy 2018; Ryan and Deci 2020). However, what is also evident is that the act of listening to children alone does not necessarily lead to change, and that teachers tend to understand and translate "student voice" through their own teacher curriculum-based lens (Bourke and Loveridge 2018). This in part occurs because adults are the decision-makers in the classroom (Lundy 2018). In the school context, this is most often the teacher where the act of listening to children can be selective. It is often the teacher who decides whether or not a student's voice, or collective student voice, will influence classroom decision-making. Research has shown that students and teachers have differing views on what learning and teaching involves or what is considered important or urgent in learning. Additionally, teachers have pressures to follow formal curriculum and assessment requirements, take account of parent and local community expectations, and to accommodate topical political agendas (Bourke and Loveridge 2018). In this way, teachers work a compromise to meet the requirements of the official curriculum while supporting children to access learning through this formalized framework. When learning takes place in the context of children's lives it not only has a high interest value for the children, it is also relevant and meaningful, concepts that are critical in engaging children in learning how to negotiate their natural and social worlds.

Research demonstrates the efficacy of listening to student voice (Bourke and Loveridge 2018). This research initially set out to listen to children's views on assessment and learning, actively engaging with student voice. Through this, a shift of focus occurred from the requirements of assessment as understood by the adult to the importance of learning as understood by the child. This resulted in two different constructs of what learning meant for teachers and children. Teachers in the Bourke and Loveridge (2018) study tended to take an institutionalized view by consistently linking learning experiences to official curriculum

objectives and desired learning outcomes, which resulted in not readily hearing student voice about learning. At the same time, for children, the official curriculum was not the focus. Instead, learning was driven by their needs, interests, and what occurred in their daily lives. For them, learning was also intentional and future-focused. Learning was seen by the children in the study of developing skills, knowledge, and talents for their future, based on their interests and the context of their own lives (Bourke and Loveridge 2018).

Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) research examines the implications for educational practice through a relational developmental systems framework emphasizing the importance of context in an individual's life. This research argues that while the many contexts of children's lives are often compartmentalized, the science of learning and development determine that all forms of learning are deeply connected. This means physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and emotional processes all have an effect on a child's development and learning. Further to this, educators have a key role to play in this. Supporting the view of a holistic approach for children, Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) assert four key factors that interact with each other to address major developmental needs. These being: supportive environmental conditions; productive instructional strategies; social and emotional learning; and system of supports. Each will be elaborated on further to establish a framework that supports teachers in creative, twenty-first century classroom environments to facilitate learning for all children in all areas of their development, including being critical thinkers and problem-solvers, having the ability to find, analyze, and synthesize information, as well as being able to apply knowledge in new and interesting ways.

Providing a supportive classroom environment is one that nurtures trusting relationships with children, family (whānau), extended family (whānau), and community. Key elements include emotional connection, having a sense of purpose, identity, as well as a sense of belonging. Further to this, a culturally responsive classroom that ensures consistency and predictability is an important factor in reducing anxiety for children

and engaging them in learning (Darling-Hammond et al. 2020).

Productive instruction strategies encourage motivation and self-directed learning. This can be achieved through meaningful learning experiences that build on children's prior knowledge and experiences and is understood in the context of their own lives. Opportunities for collaborative learning tasks, as well as inquiry-based learning occur in classrooms where children are encouraged to co-construct solutions, develop meta-cognitive skills as well as reflective practices. Teachers use scaffolding, formative, and diagnostic assessment, as well as providing specific feedback which develop children's competencies and builds confidence (Darling-Hammond et al. 2020).

Classrooms that provide systems of support for children break down barriers to learning for children. These include responding to children's individual needs including academic, health, and social support systems. Furthermore, this extends beyond the classroom to including agencies and support services as part of a multitiered system. Alongside this, mastery learning experiences as well as enrichment and additional support to address achievement gaps are fundamental. Critically, this system includes both the teacher and families, including other educators, and support providers (Darling-Hammond et al. 2020).

Social and emotional learning creates mindsets that facilitate self-efficacy and improved learning outcomes. Self-regulated behaviors as well as agency over learning, alongside inter- and intrapersonal skills, are part of developing resilience and executive function. In order to foster social and emotional learning, teachers need to be explicit in their instructions, support conflict resolution, as well as provide ample opportunities for children to engage in practicing social and emotional skills. Additionally, a classroom environment that includes educative and restorative approaches builds a sense of community (Darling-Hammond et al. 2020).

Darling-Hammond et al.'s (2020) research is consistent with the three basic psychological needs of Deci and Ryan's (2020) Self-Determination Theory (SDT). These being

autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these basic psychological needs are met, individuals are more likely to be intrinsically motivated, experience success, and have a stronger sense of belonging. Further to this, teacher's that actively seek to validate children's autonomy are supporting children in their feelings of competence. As a result, children are more likely to experience success in learning. Additionally, teachers who commit to building warm, trusting relationships with children has been strongly associated with children's feelings of connectedness and acts as a predictor of sustained intrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci 2020).

SDT's three basic psychological needs are demonstrated in the classroom setting in the following ways. *Autonomy* for children is realized when they have choice in their learning, are able to participate in decision-making, and learning is valued by children. In order for this to occur, the content of the learning needs to be contextualized so that children can readily make connections with their own lives and experiences. This results in children's ability to self-regulate and promotes greater conceptual learning, increased engagement, and decreased anxiety. Furthermore, Ryan and Deci (2020) research have established that when students experience greater autonomy, they are more likely to engage in tasks and experience improved learning outcomes along with greater psychological, physical, and well-being benefits.

The second psychological need, *competence*, is defined by Deci and Ryan (2020) as one's need to experience success and the opportunity to engage in mastery experiences. In SDT, children's feelings of competence are tied inexplicably to children experiencing autonomy. Classroom teachers are a central figure in children experiencing competence. Teacher's that actively seek to validate children's autonomy are supporting children in their feelings of competence. For instance, nurturing children's mastery of learning by providing well-structured classrooms that offer choice, optimal challenges, positive and specific feedback, and encourage children's personal growth and participation in learning tasks and experiences (Reeve 2012; Ryan and Deci 2020).

The third basic psychological need, *relatedness*, is realized in the classroom first by building trusting relationships between teacher and student and among peers. This supports children's sense of belonging in the classroom. Teachers who are deliberate in making connections with children's worlds by engaging with their interests, personal and cultural connections to encourage and support social engagement, respectful relationships, and feelings of connectedness. Significantly, relatedness is a strong predictor of sustained intrinsic motivation, engagement in learning, and is nurtured in a kind, caring, trusting, and empathetic environment (Ryan and Deci 2020). Additionally, Deci and Ryan (2020) reviewed their research on SDT and have proposed centralizing the importance of the child being enabled to demonstrate initiative and take ownership of their learning. This notion provides further support for children in not only being self-regulating but also in realizing their rights as self-determining persons of equal status.

Deci and Ryan (2020) affirm that emergence of SDT in the 1980s has instigated a multitude of research involving the fundamental elements of SDT. One of these researchers, Reeve (2012), offers another perspective on SDT. Reeve also identifies student engagement in conjunction with SDT and offers a practical application in the classroom. This is interpreted as a macro-theory that comprises of five interrelated mini theories, these being: basic needs theory, organismic integration theory, goal contents theory, cognitive evaluation theory, and causality orientations theory.

Reeve distinguishes two key factors for children experiencing positive outcomes in learning, these being engagement and motivation. Offering clear definitions are useful in understanding SDT. According to Reeve (2012), engagement is defined as the extent of student's active involvement in a learning task, a definition that Reeve attributes to Reeve (2012). To elaborate, engagement consists of four distinct but closely correlated aspects, these being: (1) behavior engagement, (2) emotional engagement, (3) cognitive engagement, and (4) agentic engagement. Reeve (2012) asserts that children exhibiting

these four aspects of engagement will demonstrate greater persistence, enjoyment, and strategic thinking. Additionally, engaged learners are more likely to initiate, generate, and expand their learning. Perhaps crucial to SDT and Reeve's perspective is his addition of "agentic" engagement, which posits that learners are intentional, proactive, constructive, and engaged in reciprocal learning and teaching instruction. Agentic engagement correlates with two of Deci and Ryan's (2020) basic psychological needs of autonomy and competence whereby learners who have active involvement in their learning often have feelings of greater success.

Reeve's (2012) second key factor is motivation which is defined as any force that energizes and directs behaviors. This "energy" enhances strength, intensity, persistence, and direction. Motivation ensures purposefulness and goal directedness. Further to this, Reeve (2012) views motivation as psychological needs-based satisfaction. This is pertinent to SDT maintaining that if the three basic psychological needs are met in a learning task, then high quality motivation is the outcome. Equally, if these needs are not met for learners, then low motivation and frustration will be the likely outcome.

To further elaborate, the distinction between motivation and engagement is described as motivation manifesting as private, unobservable, psychological, neural, and a biological process that serves as the antecedent cause for the visible and observable behavior that is engagement. Therefore, they are inherently linked and influence one another. Of equal importance to both motivation and engagement is establishing the context of learning for and with the learner (Reeve 2012).

A common underlying theme in the actualizing of self-determination is a person's right to flourish and thrive. Reeve (2012) maintains that in order for learner's to "flourish," three elements must be present: (i) supportive conditions for learning, most importantly the student-teacher relationship, (ii) the role of the teacher in creating a positive environment for motivation and engagement, and (iii) that social context, motivation, engagement, and outcomes operate in both a linear and reciprocal manner. Both Deci and Ryan's SDT and

Reeve's iteration of SDT addresses the participatory rights of children as well as supporting children in being active, contributing members of society who have knowledge, skills, and capabilities.

The classroom is an environment where the principles of SDT can be realized with children's voice, agency, and influence actively being encouraged and sought. What is critical for children's participation and learning is that children are afforded equal participation and influence in all areas of school life. This includes all areas of the formal curriculum. Viewing learning and teaching through the lens of SDT where children have meaningful opportunities to have choice in what they learn and how they learn creates opportunities for teachers to partner with children and actively listen to what is of interest to them as well as what is important for their learning. Through this, the teacher can ensure learning is relevant and in the context of the child, with the outcome of greater motivation and engagement (Reeve 2012). When engaging in deliberate acts, children become efficacious learners who demonstrate and experience competence, which results in children's improved capabilities, having a sense of belonging, as well as flourishing and thriving (Reeve 2012; Ryan and Deci 2020).

The critical importance of student voice and the importance of teachers engaging with students in a dialogic way is fundamental to partnership roles in classrooms. As Lundy (2018) demonstrates, in order for children to be genuine participants in matters affecting their lives, adults must actively listen to their views, experiences, and engage in what is important to children. Importantly, given the opportunity, students are articulate in identifying valued experiences in school. Further to this, widespread recognition is given to the fact that children are the "expert witnesses" in their experiences not only at school but also their lived experiences. If we are to engage in responsive and reciprocal relationships with children, then actualizing genuine voice, participation, and agency must occur (Bourke et al. 2018; Groundwater-Smith and Mockler 2019).

Listening, responding, and engaging with children in both the informal learning sense as well as

in the classroom context represents how teachers can authentically engage with student voice and intent participation. Affording children a "voice" in the classroom is not a gift to be granted by adults but rather a right and therefore adults are obligated to support children in having a voice. Additionally, there has been a demonstration that learning for children occurs in many contexts and is not restricted to the formal setting. Often, for children, informal learning is valued more than formal learning and is seen as important for their future, particularly when it involves the improving of one's own skills and talents.

Learning theories, such as SDT and relational developmental systems frameworks such as Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) research, supports the ideals self-regulation, self-directed learning, as well as facilitating self-determining learners who have opportunities to engage in tasks that include prior knowledge and experiences, are of high interest and value. This results in a higher likelihood of students being intrinsically motivated, experiencing success, and having a stronger sense of belonging. Tokenistic approaches to involve children in decisions making around their lives has highlighted that much work is yet to be done in ensuring that the voice of children is not only heard but amplified. For Lundy (2018), this is a start, as even when adults do engage in tokenistic participation change happens: "once a toe has been dipped in the waters of child participation, even if it has been imperfect or tokenistic, there is the opportunity of learning for all, including reluctant or cynical adults" (p. 348).

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THE ORIGINS OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS — A PATHWAY TO PARTICIPATION

11

MARIA DACRE

Senior Tutor, Massey University

I am currently working on my PhD in education, focusing on children's rights and the way children¹ can directly influence both pedagogical practice and educational policy. My attendance at the Children's Rights Symposium in Wellington this year, enabled me to focus on the legal implications of UNCRC, and I have explored what triggered this international commitment to children.

The historic Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1924)² and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)³ paved the way in recognising children in their own right. Decades on, the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) by the General Assembly of the United Nations (1989)⁴ demonstrates an international commitment to this landmark document. Now policymakers, practitioners, social scientists, and researchers are working to understand what this means in children's lives.

In the year 1919 a key advocate for children, Eglantyne Jebb, began her historic campaign to secure special protection and recognition for children in the aftermath of World War I. Jebb's motivation was her observation of daily misery and abuse of many children across Europe, along with the apparent 'inaction' of the British Government in addressing the plight of these children. This initiated her determined crusade on behalf of all children. She subsequently founded the Save the Children Fund, later to become the Save the Children International Union (1920).⁵ In 1923, Jebb penned a five-point declaration that ultimately foreshadowed children's rights today.

Jebb's stalwart social activism and her influence in political and social circles led to the British delegation presenting the draft Declaration to the League of Nations.⁶ This was adopted unanimously, almost without alteration by the League of Nations in 1924, and subsequently known as the Declaration of Geneva.⁷

The Declaration on the Rights of the Child (DRC)⁸ was another milestone. Central were the child's entitlement to special protection, adequate housing, care, and opportunities. There was also a shift to include the child's right to freedom from discrimination⁹.

As with the Declaration of Geneva, DRC was not enforceable by international law. Like Jebb and the League of Nations before them, DRC also appealed to government bodies and non-government agencies to elevate the profile of DRC with recommendations to "publish as widely as possible the text of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child" (p. 20).¹⁰

At this time, Janusz Korczak, a physician whose work spanned 1910-1940s, worked in the Warsaw orphanages.¹¹ Best known for his radical campaigning on behalf of the child, Korczak held an aspirational view of children's rights. His stance went beyond the Declaration of Geneva's notion of protection and welfare, where in his eyes children were seen as objects of charity.¹² Instead, Korczak pleaded for the rights of responsibility, learning from experience and respecting the integrity of the child.¹³

Instigating a *child's republic* in the orphanages of Warsaw, Korczak placed children's right to participate in decision-making, the right to speak and the right to be listened to as fundamental to his teaching.¹⁴ This has been identified as the introduction of the ideas within Article 12 of the UNCRC.¹⁵ Korczak's unyielding stance that all children were unique and must be recognised as 'active agents' resonates with advocates for children's rights today.

In 1979, the twentieth anniversary of DRC was celebrated with 'The Year of the Child', promoting the end to discrimination, the right to protection, healthy lives, education and respect as human beings.¹⁶ This also signalled the 10-year-long drafting period for what we now know as UNCRC: the first international, legally binding convention that serves to

uphold the convention partners' obligation for the rights of the child.¹⁷

A century on from Jebb's initial campaign to seek protection for the child, it was a privilege to bear witness to the gathering of international and local experts, advocates, government and NGOs at the Children's Rights Symposium. This Symposium was a 'call to action' and marks yet another step in actuating the UNCRC to its fullest potential. As a teacher, principal, and now teaching in higher education and a researcher in education, it excites me, that this year, 2019, marks the thirtieth anniversary of the signing of

UNCRC. As the most ratified treaty of our time, the recognition of children's rights has gained momentum. The Symposium highlighted the imperative that as researchers, educationalists, and advocates for children, we must continue the campaign instituted by Jebb and Korczak to ensure that UNCRC is realised to its full extent, for children to be duly recognised as equal rights holders and active participants in the decision-making in their own lives.

ENDNOTES

- 1 According to the UNCRC, Article 1 (1989) human beings under the age of 18 are referred to children.
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Appendix C: Information Sheet for classroom teacher

How Children and their Teachers Participate in Classroom Decision-Making

Kia ora,

About the researcher

I am a researcher and Ph.D. candidate from Massey University and currently work in the Educational Psychology and Initial Teacher Education Programmes. I am interested in how teachers listen, respond, and include children when curriculum decisions are made for learning and teaching.

What is this research about?

I am interested to know and understand how The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is included in Aotearoa New Zealand schools.

This research aims to understand how teachers currently engage with student voice and work with children to make decisions for learning and teaching. Additionally, where do children see they have the most influence in the decision-making process.

As a researcher, I aim to work with children and their teacher to identify what part children play in learning and teaching decisions. The project also aims to investigate strategies that teachers and children use to further children's involvement in learning and teaching decisions.

Why am I inviting you?

Your school has indicated an interest in my research. You have received this information sheet because you are a classroom teacher in Year 5/6 and might be interested in talking to me about how you currently include children in learning and teaching decisions, as well as how we can form a research partnership with children to further their involvement in the decision-making process.

What would I be doing?

If you agree to take part, you will be interviewed one-on-one by me. The interview will be 30-40 minutes and, with your consent, be recorded using an audio device that will be transcribed and the audio file deleted.

Over three school terms, using everyday classroom experiences, data will be gathered initially on where children's decision-making currently exists in learning and teaching. I would like to spend one morning or afternoon per week (approximately 3 hours, with a total of approximately 90 hours over the project) over three terms. In collaboration, strategies will be developed to further support the inclusion of children in the decision-making. The researcher will not alter classroom routines, tasks, and experiences.

What happens to the teacher and children's contributions?

The researcher will record the initial interview. The researcher might use some of the words in the recording for the research, but it will not be possible to identify you. Classroom observations will be recorded anecdotally, and these observations will also be included in the research study. Data gathering will occur through the usual classroom programme, with the researcher taking notes that will be written up afterward.

Data would be collected from child participant's work products such as brainstorming, mind maps, and other group and individual activities. In addition, participants will be able to take photos of learning and opportunities, using an iPad provided by me, where they have taken part in the decisions for learning and teaching. These will be included in the research data but will not identify you or the children.

Participant's rights

You do not have to accept this invitation.

- You can remove yourself from the research project at any time.
- You can ask us questions at any time.
- Your name will not be used in the research.
- We will give you and your school a copy of the research when it is finished.

If you would like to take part in this research project, please sign the consent form attached.

Ethics approval

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application SOB 21/20.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Gerald

Harrison, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356

9099 x 83570, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz .

Research contact

If you would like to talk to someone about the research, please contact Maria (m.dacre@massey.ac.nz).

Supervisors:

Prof. Roseanna Bourke (r.bourke@massey.ac.nz)

Prof. John O'Neill (j.g.oneill@massey.ac.nz)

Ngā mihi,

Maria Dacre

Appendix D: Participant consent form – Classroom Teacher

How Children and their Teachers Participate in Classroom Decision-Making

I have read the information. I have had the details of the research study explained to me. My questions have been answered. I understand that I may ask more questions at any time. I have had enough time to decide if I want to take part in the research study. I understand that I do not have to take part and that I can stop at any time. I understand that the interview will be recorded.

I agree to take part in the research study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Teacher:

I _____ [print full name] hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature _____ Date:

Yes, we would like the school to receive a copy of the summary research report.

Appendix E: Information sheet for children

How Children and their Teachers Participate in Classroom Decision-Making

Kia ora,

About the researcher

I work at the Institute of Education and teach people who want to be teachers. I am interested in how children and teachers listen to each other and share their ideas about the learning and teaching that happens in the classroom.

What is this all about?

I am a researcher, that means, for my research, I would like to find out about the different ways teachers can involve children in learning and teaching. Teachers plan a lot of different learning experiences for children, and I would like to know how children help their teacher with ideas for learning. I am also interested in finding out how children share their thinking and ideas about what they would like to learn about.

Why am I inviting you?

I will be collecting information (data) from a Year 5/6 classroom. Your school and classroom teacher have said they are interested in my research and have agreed to me visiting your classroom for my research project.

You have received this information sheet because I will be in your classroom one morning or afternoon a week for approximately 3 hours over three terms in 2022, starting Term 1 (a total of approximately 90 hours over the research project).

I will meet with the children who agree to would like to be a part of this research project and will talk with them about different learning activities. These discussions will take place in a group.

All children in the class are invited to be a part of this project. However, if you do not want to be part of this research, you can say no. I will only write about the activities that

children who want to be part of the research are involved in. You can also change your mind at any time and choose to join or leave the research.

I will make observations and write down notes in the classroom. Any conversations that are recorded or written down will not include your name or the name of your school.

What would I be doing?

If you say ‘yes’ to being a participant in this research, you will take part in regular class activities such as group work with brainstorms and take photos of learning and experiences where you helped with the ideas for learning. Children in the research will be part of a group that discusses the different ideas for learning and teaching.

The first activity will take about 45 minutes. This activity will be followed by a group discussion that will last about 30 minutes to talk about the activity. I will record this on a recording device. You will be able to check the written words after I have typed them up. There will also be other group discussions with the participants. These discussions will last no more than 30 minutes and will happen two times in each term. Over three terms, each child will participate in a total of six discussion groups.

I will check with your teacher to see when it is best for the activity, and group discussions to happen.

What happens to my contribution?

Children’s contributions will be recorded on a voice recorder and in a notebook. The information will only be used for the research. Some of the words in the recording might be used, but I will not use children’s names. The same goes for any pictures taken, I will make sure that you cannot be recognised.

What do I need to do if I say ‘yes’ to being a participant?

Read the information with your parent or caregiver. If you and your parent agree to being part of the research and classroom activities, sign the consent form attached and return this to your school and put it in the collection box, located at the office.

If you do not want to participate in this research, you will still join in any class activities; however, I will not write down anything you have been a part of.

If you have any questions for me, you can contact Maria, my information is at the bottom of this letter.

Participant's Rights

You do not have to agree to participate. In addition:

- You do not have to join in on discussions with the researcher.
- You can ask questions at any time.
- Your name will not be used in the research.
- Please tick the box if you would like a copy of the research to be given to your school when the research is finished.

Ethics approval

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application SOB 21/20.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Gerald

Harrison, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83570, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz .

Research contact

If you would like to talk to someone about the research, please contact Maria Dacre (m.dacre@massey.ac.nz).

Supervisors:

Prof. Roseanna Bourke (r.bourke@massey.ac.nz)

Prof. John O'Neill (j.g.oneill@massey.ac.nz)

Ngā mihi,

Maria Dacre

Appendix F: Information sheet for parents/caregivers

How Children and their Teachers Participate in Classroom Decision-Making

Kia ora,

About the researcher

I work at the Institute of Education and teach students who want to be teachers. I am completing a Ph.D. in Children's Rights and learning at school. I am interested in how children and teachers listen to each other and use their ideas and how this helps with decisions for learning and teaching.

What is this all about?

The research study also aims to find different ways teachers can involve children in learning and teaching decisions. Teachers use The New Zealand Curriculum to help them plan learning experiences for children. I am interested in understanding how teachers listen to children's ideas to help plan for learning. I am also interested in finding out how children share their thinking and ideas in different learning areas like science, maths, the arts, and literacy.

Why am I inviting you and your child?

I will be collecting data from a Year 5/6 classroom. Your school and classroom teacher has signalled their interest and have agreed to participate in this research project. You have received this information sheet because I will participate in and observe classroom activities one morning or afternoon a week for approximately 3 hours in your child's classroom, over three terms in 2022 (a total of approximately 90 hours over the research project).

I will meet with the children who agree to participate and talk with them about different learning activities. These discussions will take place in group interviews. All children in the class are invited to be a part of this project. However, if you or your child do not want to be part of this study, you can say no.

All children can still be part of all activities in the classroom, but I will only write about the activities that children who want to be part of the research are involved in. You and your child can also change your/their mind at any time and choose to join the project or remove yourself.

I will make observations and write down notes in the classroom. Any conversations or thoughts a child participant has that are either recorded or written down will not identify the school or the child.

What would I be doing?

If you and your child consent to take part in this research, your child will take part in normal class-based activities such as group work with brainstorming and take photos of learning and experiences where you helped make the decisions. In addition, children will be interviewed in a group with other children who have agreed to be participants.

The first activity that children who are participants will do, will take approximately 45 minutes. This activity will be followed by a group interview that will last about 30 minutes, per group to talk about the activity they participated in. Children will be invited to review the script from this group interview.

There will also be focus group interviews with the participants. Each focus group interview will last no more than 30 minutes, with two opportunities per term. Over the three terms, each child will participate in a total of six focus group interviews.

The activity, and all group and focus group interviews, will take place at a suitable time for the teacher and will not impact classroom learning time.

What happens to my contribution?

Children's contributions will be recorded on a voice recorder and in a notebook. The information will only be used for the research project. Some of the words in the recording might be used, but I will not identify children. The same goes for any pictures taken, I will make sure that you cannot be recognised, and your name will not be used.

What do I need to do as a participant or parent/caregiver?

Read the information. If the child who will be participating and the parent/caregiver agree to part of the observations and classroom activities in this study, sign the consent form attached and return this to your school and deposit in the collection box, located at the office. If the child or parent/caregiver does not want to participate in this study, they will still join in any class-based activities; however, I will not include any of the data the child has been part of.

If you have any questions for the researcher, the contact details are below.

Participant's Rights

You or your child do not have to agree to participate. In addition:

- A child does not have to engage in discussion with the researcher
- Questions can be asked at any time.
- No names will be used in the research.
- Please tick the box if you would like a copy of the research to be given to your child's school when the research is finished.

Ethics approval

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application SOB 21/20.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Gerald

Harrison, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83570, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz .

Research contact

If you would like to talk to someone about the research, please contact Maria Dacre (m.dacre@massey.ac.nz).

Supervisors:

Prof. Roseanna Bourke (r.bourke@massey.ac.nz)

Prof. John O'Neill (j.g.oneill@massey.ac.nz)

Ngā mihi,

Maria Dacre

Appendix G: Participant consent form – Child and parent or caregiver

How Children and their Teachers Participate in Classroom Decision-Making

We have read the information. We have had the details of the research study explained to us. Our questions have been answered. We understand that we may ask more questions at any time. We have had enough time to decide if we want to take part in the research study. We understand that we do not have to take part and that we can stop at any time. We understand that the group and focus group interviews will be recorded.

We agree to take part in the research study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by child:

I _____ [print full name] hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature _____ Date: _____

Declaration by Parent/Caregiver:

I _____ [print full name] agree for my child _____ to take part in this study.

Signature _____ Date: _____

Yes, we would like the school to receive a copy of the summary research report.

Appendix H: Information sheet for children–CRAG

INFORMATION SHEET FOR CHILDREN

CHILDREN’S RESEARCH ADVISORY GROUP (CRAG)

Kia ora,

About the researcher

I work at the Institute of Education and teach people who want to be teachers. I am interested in how children and teachers listen to each other and share their ideas about the learning and teaching that happens in the classroom.

What is this research study all about?

I am a researcher, that means, for my research, I would like to find out about the different ways teachers can involve children in learning and teaching. Teachers plan a lot of different learning experiences for children, and I would like to know how children help their teacher with ideas for learning. I am also interested in finding out how children share their thinking and ideas about what they would like to learn about.

Children’s Research Advisory Group (CRAG)

I will be talking with a Children’s Research Advisory Group (CRAG). The CRAG will have 5-6 children in a Year 5/6 classroom. Children who are part of CRAG will help the researcher by providing feedback on the questions I will ask the children in the research study. The CRAG will also give me feedback on the different types of activities used in the research classroom, like brainstorms, creating Lego models of the classroom, and other planning tools. The CRAG will also give feedback and comment on different parts of the research study.

Who is this research for?

I will be collecting information from a Year 5/6 classroom. Your school and classroom teacher have said they are interested in this research and have agreed to have

children in their classroom participate in the research study as part of the CRAG. I would like to know if you would like to be a member of the CRAG.

There will be 3 CRAG meetings. The first one in Term 1 2022. The meetings will take no longer than 45 minutes and will only happen once a term. We will work out the best time with your teacher to have these meetings. I will write down notes from the meetings but will not use your name.

If you agree to participate

If you and your parent both say yes to you being a part of the CRAG, then you will need to sign the consent form attached and return this to your school and deposit in the collection box, located at the office. If you have any questions, you can contact me using the details below.

Participant's Rights

You do not have to agree to participate. In addition:

- You do not have to take part in discussions with the researcher.
- You can ask questions any time.
- No names will be used in the research.
- Please tick the box if you would like a copy of the research to be given to your school when the research is finished.

Ethics approval

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application SOB 21/20.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Gerald Harrison, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83570, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz.

Research contact

If you would like to talk to someone about the research, please contact Maria Dacre
(m.dacre@massey.ac.nz).

Supervisors:

Prof. Roseanna Bourke (r.bourke@massey.ac.nz)

Prof. John O'Neill (j.g.oneill@massey.ac.nz)

Ngā mihi,

Maria Dacre

Appendix I: Information sheet for parent/caregiver–CRAG

How Children and their Teachers Participate in Classroom Decision-Making

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENT/CAREGIVER CHILDREN’S RESEARCH ADVISORY GROUP (CRAG)

Kia ora,

About the researcher

I work at the Institute of Education and teach students who want to be teachers. I am completing a Ph.D. in Children’s Rights and learning at school. I am interested in how children and teachers listen to each other and use their ideas and how this helps with decisions for learning and teaching.

What is this research study all about?

As a researcher, I aim to work with children and their teacher to identify what part children play in learning and teaching decisions. The research study also aims to find different ways teachers can involve children in learning and teaching decisions. Teachers use The New Zealand Curriculum to help them plan learning experiences for children. I am interested in understanding how teachers listen to children’s ideas to help plan for learning. I am also interested in finding out how children share their thinking and ideas in different learning areas like science, maths, the arts, and literacy.

Children’s Research Advisory Group (CRAG)

I will be to talking with a Children’s Research Advisory Group (CRAG). The CRAG will have 5-6 children in a Year 5/6 classroom. Children who are part of CRAG will help the researcher by firstly providing feedback on interview questions for the children in the research study. The CRAG will also provide feedback on the different types of activities used in the research classroom, such as brainstorming, creating models of the classroom, and other planning tools. The CRAG will also give feedback and comment on different parts of the research study.

Who is this research for?

I will be collecting information from a Year 5/6 classroom. Your school and classroom teacher have said they are interested in this research and have agreed to have children in their classroom participate in the research study as a CRAG member. I would like to know if your child would like to part of the CRAG.

There will be 3 CRAG meetings, with the first one in Term 1, 2022. Two more will be held in Terms 2 and 3, 2022. The meetings will take no longer than 45 minutes and will only occur once a term. We will negotiate a time with the classroom teacher that is suitable. I will write down notes from the meetings but will not use your name.

If you agree to participate

If you and your child both say yes to being a part of the CRAG, then you will need to sign the consent form attached and return this to your school and deposit in the collection box, located at the office. If you have any questions, you can contact me using the details are below.

Participant's Rights

You or your child do not have to agree to participate. In addition:

- A child does not have to engage in discussion with the researcher
- Questions can be asked at any time.
- No names will be used in the research.
- Please tick the box if you would like a copy of the research to be given to your child's school when the research is finished.

Ethics approval

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application SOB 21/20.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Gerald Harrison, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83570, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz .

Research

contact

If you would like to talk to someone about the research, please contact Maria Dacre (m.dacre@massey.ac.nz).

Supervisors:

Prof. Roseanna

Bourke (r.bourke@massey.ac.nz)

Prof. John O'Neill (j.g.oneill@massey.ac.nz)

Ngā mihi,

Maria Dacre

Appendix J: Participant consent form – Child and parent or caregiver

Children’s Research Advisory Group (CRAG)

How Children and their Teachers Participate in Classroom Decision-Making

We have read the information. We have had the details of the research study explained to us. Our questions have been answered. We understand that we may ask more questions at any time. We have had enough time to decide if we want to take part in the research study. We understand that we do not have to take part and that we can stop at any time.

We agree to take part in the research study as part of the CRAG under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by child:

I _____ [print full name] hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature _____ Date: _____

Declaration by Parent/Caregiver:

I _____ [print full name] agree for my child _____ to take part in this study.

Signature _____ Date: _____

Yes, we would like the school to receive a copy of the summary research report.

Appendix K: Information sheet for parents/caregivers and children

How Children and their Teachers Participate in Classroom Decision-Making

Kia ora,

This is to advise that research will take place in (research classroom) during Terms 1-3, 2022.

I work at the Institute of Education and this research forms my Ph.D. in Children's Rights and learning at school. Recently, your school and classroom teacher agreed to me conducting my research in your child's classroom. Some of the children have consented to be part of the research project, with their and their parent's consent. This letter is to inform you of what will be happening when I am in the classroom, conducting my research.

In Terms 1-3 2022 I will be present in the classroom for up to half a day each week. During this time, I will be observing the ways children and their teacher listen to each other and make decisions about learning. This includes taking written notes and talking with children participating in the research.

Classroom routines will remain the same. Any activities that happen in the classroom will be the part of normal classroom activities and all children will participate as usual.

Observations and data collection will only include the participating children.

Participating children may also take photos or videos using the researcher's iPad of learning or activities where they have identified that they were part of the decision-making. The researcher will look after the iPad, bring it to school and take it home again each time. The iPad will not be connected to the internet.

Should your child want to participate in the research before the end of the year, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Ethics approval

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application SOB 21/20.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Gerald Harrison, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83570, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz .

Research contact

If you would like to talk to me about the research, please contact Maria Dacre m.dacre@massey.ac.nz.

Supervisors:

Prof. Roseanna Bourke r.bourke@massey.ac.nz

Prof. John O'Neill j.g.oneill@massey.ac.nz

Ngā mihi,

Maria Dacre

Appendix L: Proposed script for the Children’s Research Advisory Group

Thank you for agreeing to a part of my research study. I am really interested in how children share their views and are listened to in school. This has a lot to do with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Have you heard of this before? (if not) About 30 years ago, the United Nations, a council of people who advise lots of countries, made a treaty – they often call this the Convention or UNCRC - that says children have rights. These rights are there to help protect you, make sure you have places like home, school, education, and a right to have a say in things to do with your lives. Do you have any questions about this?

There is a particular article in the treaty called Article 12 that I am interested in. This says that children have rights to express their views and that adults will listen and consider your thoughts, ideas, and views. I am interested in hearing your thoughts, views, and ideas about your learning and where you and your teacher make decisions together. Do you have any questions about this?

I have a few questions to ask that will help me understand your learning and your classroom.

1. Can you tell me about your classroom?
2. What does ‘student voice’ mean to you?
3. How do you express your thoughts, ideas, and views in your classroom?
4. Can you tell me about the times you get to make choices about how and what you are learning about?
5. How do you think your thoughts, ideas, and views influence the decisions made about the learning and teaching in your classroom?
 - a. Can you provide some examples of this?
6. When do you think it is important to be listened to in the classroom?

Before we finish up -

7. Is there anything else you think I should know or understand better?

8. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Appendix M: Co-constructed activity with CRAG

To be checked with the CRAG after Meeting with Whaea Topou (completed – see addition of KAGAN groups, see also 19.5.2022 meeting notes with Whaea Topou)

Checked with CRAG 24.5.2022 (see audio transcription for feedback and discussion, see the menus constructed by CRAG, they also practised the ignition tasks)

Children's Participation in Curriculum Decision-Making to Support their Rights to be Self-Determining

Resources:

- Menus
- Flip chart with prepared decision-making brainstorm
- Coloured pens

Purpose:

What is a choice? What is decision-making?

Social Group Participatory Norms:

KAGAN Model for sharing (Research School pedagogy)

Rally Robin.

What does being inclusive mean at (research) School in Room 8?

- Refer to (school) Values
- Revoice what has been shared

Prior knowledge: through data gathering, observations, conversations with tamariki and Whaea Tupou, tamariki enjoy talking about and debating their favourite takeaway food.

These were also included in their digital books.

Launch:

1. Present a menu that is made up of their favourite foods e.g., selections from McDonalds, KFC, Burger King
Cheeseburger (MCD)

Frozen coke (McD)

Rodeo burger combo (BK)

Chicken nuggets

Thick shake

McChicken combo

Mcflurry

Sundae

Fries

McFloat fried chicken

Prompt: You are allowed to choose one item from the menu. Which one would you choose and why?

Discussion: Rally robin with shoulder buddy which item from the menu you would choose and why. Share back.

2. Present second menu of foods not on a takeaway menu. Choose 1 from the menu and share with your shoulder buddy why you would NOT choose this item.

- Nacho
- Chicken nuggets and chips
- Ravioli
- BBQ ribs
- Onion rings & chips
- Dumplings
- Sushi
- Butter chicken
- Pancake
- Chicken wings
- Macaroni cheese

- carbonara

Discussion: shoulder elbow buddy which item from the menu you would NOT choose and why. Share back.

Prompt: why would you not include it. What things are in this dish that you would not choose.

What is the difference between a choice and a decision?

In the two launch activities you were asked to make a choice from a menu. You had to **decide** on one item and tell your elbow buddy why.

When we make a decision, we have to think through, what we will do or how we will do this or why we are doing or choosing something. This makes us **decision-makers** about what we do in our lives.

In your groups:

Brainstorm: when are we decision-makers?

In your Kagan rōpū write down all the activities or things that you do when you are a decision-maker. Remember, what is important about decisions is that you can say why you are making the decision.

- shared writing each with their own pen (different colour)
- Rove and use market research to scaffold ideas

Sharing circle:

- Each group to share back their decision-making mind map.

Plenary

- Who can tell me what a choice is?
- What a decision is?
- How can decision-making help us?

Appendices

Three key points:

1. **Life choices set a direction**, so spend the time to develop a mindset on how to build a meaningful future.
2. **Choose how to lead.** How we lead our teams and our work demands a thoughtful approach, meaning we need to define the presence we want through our actions and interactions.
3. **Decisions still matter**, so use a process to prune out the bad options and select the best ones possible.

<https://www.thindifference.com/2012/06/decisions-vs-choices-is-there-a-distinction/>

What is the difference between Choice and Decision?

- Decision marks the direction you take.
- Decision implies selection of one of the choices.
- Choices are opportunities or a multitude of options in front of a person while the decision is the final selection.
- Choice represents the capability while decision reflects the final result.
- Choices are presented to you while you alone make the decision.
- No more choices exist, once a decision has been taken.

<https://www.differencebetween.com/difference-between-choice-and-vs-decision/>

Appendix N: Information Sheet for Principal

Tēnā koe e te Tumuaki,

How Children and their Teachers Participate in Classroom Decision-Making

Further to our recent conversation about the feasibility of conducting my PHD Research project in collaboration with tamariki and kaiako at your school.

I have enclosed a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Forms for potential tamariki and kaiako participants, explaining what would be involved for participating tamariki and kaiako. This letter now formally requests access to the school in order to:

Research Classroom

- Recruit children from Years 5/6;
- Conduct a group model-making activity of approximately 45 minutes with participating children, and on a later day;
- Conduct group interviews with participating children of approximately 30 minutes

In addition:

- Over three school terms, starting in Term 3 2021/Term 1 2022 and finishing at the end of Term 3/4 2022, conduct classroom observations and, if appropriate participate and talk with tamariki and Kaiako in everyday classroom experiences;
- Data will be gathered by the researcher one morning or afternoon per week (approximately 3 hours, with a total of approximately 30 hours over the project) over three terms;
- Collaboratively, strategies will be developed further to support the inclusion of children in the decision-making;
- The researcher will not alter classroom routines, tasks, or experiences;

Children's Research Advisory Group (CRAG) Classroom

- Over 2022, starting in Term 1 2022 and finishing at the end of Term 4 2022 (at the latest), recruit a diverse group of Year 5/6 tamariki (group size approximately 5-6 tamariki) as this research study's CRAG;
- CRAG will be a different class from the research classroom;
- Seek feedback and comment from the CRAG;
- Feedback and comments will include the initial group interview questions; classroom activities and experiences; data gathered over the research study;
- Meetings will occur once a term over 3-4 terms for no longer than 45 minutes, with a total time over the study of approximately 3 hours.

If you agree to provide us access to the school, I ask that:

- The classroom kaiako in Years 5/6 introduce the project to the children using the information provided and make available copies of the Information Sheet and Consent Form to interested children, which I will provide;
- Alternatively, or as well, the researcher can come and speak with tamariki about the research at a suitable time for Kaiako;
- The school allows the researcher to place a drop-box for completed, signed Consent Forms near the School Office or suitable alternative;
- The school provides a suitable room for the researcher to undertake the model-making activity with participating children for which the researcher will provide all materials and return the room to its clean state on completion;
- The school provides a quiet area in which to undertake group interviews with children.

I anticipate that the model-making activity and group interviews will occur during Term 1 of the 2022 school year, on days and at times convenient for all parties. I appreciate that the school has many demands on the time and resources of Kaiako and tamariki. I have experience in conducting group and individual interviews with tamariki and kaiako. In

addition, I have been part of a school-based research project that involved observing and working alongside tamariki and Kaiako.

Upon completing the research, I will provide access to summaries of findings for (i) educators; and (ii) children and family-whānau.

In recognition of the contribution of the school community, I would also offer to make a koha presentation on the project findings to staff and trustees if the school wishes.

Please contact me if you have any questions or clarifications prior to making your decision.

Ngā mihi,

Maria Dacre

Appendix O: Participant consent form – Principal and Board Chair

How Children and their Teachers Participate in Classroom Decision-Making

I have read the information provided by the researcher from the research study letter and accompanying information sheets and consent forms. I have had the details of the research study explained to me. My questions have been answered. I understand that I may ask more questions at any time. I have had enough time to decide if I want to take part in the research study. I understand that I do not have to give permission for this research study to happen in my school and I withdraw at any time.

I agree for the child participants and teachers take part in the research study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheets.

Declaration by Principal:

I _____ [print full name] hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature _____ Date: _____

Declaration by Board Chair:

I _____ [print full name] hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature _____ Date: _____

Yes, we would like the school to receive a copy of the summary research report.

Appendix P: Interview Schedule–Teacher

Script and Questions for the initial meeting with teacher(s) (In preparation for the Ethics Application).

Thank you for agreeing to a part of my research study. My area of interest is how children can give their views and be listened to in educational matters that affect them, and their rights. This is part of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 12 is of particular interest to me. This speaks to a child's right to have influence over all matters that affect their lives. I am interested in what this looks like for children's learning and how listening to students' views; in other words, 'student voice' influences curriculum decisions in schools. Another area of strong interest to me is how children demonstrate self-determination in the classroom by showing their autonomy, their competence, and how they relate to others and have a strong sense of belonging.

Possible question prompts

1. Can you tell me how you set up your classroom environment?
2. What does 'student voice' mean to you as a teacher? How do you listen to students about their views in your classroom?
3. How does this (student voice) inform curriculum decisions?
4. Can you provide some examples of students participating in decisions about how and what they learn?
5. How do you decide what is important when including student voice and participation in these decisions?
6. Are there areas of the curriculum that student voice has a more significant influence on?
7. What have you noticed, if anything, about these areas of the curriculum?
8. Where do you think 'student voice' and influence sits in the New Zealand Curriculum?

9. During your teaching career, what changes have you seen regarding the inclusion of student voice and student participation in curriculum decisions?

- How do you feel about this?

Before we finish up -

1. Is there anything else you think I should know or understand better?
2. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Appendix Q: Focus group consent form

Project title: How Children and their Teachers Participate in Classroom Decision-Making

CHILD CONSENT FORM FOR GROUP ACTIVITIES

1. I have read and understand the Information Sheet. All my questions were answered.
2. I understand that I do not have to take part in the group activities.
3. I know I can change my mind and go back to class at any time.
4. I know I can ask questions at any time.
5. I understand that the things we talk about will stay within the group.
6. I understand that what we say in the group will be sound recorded by a device.
7. I understand that my name will not be mentioned in any reports written by the researchers.
8. I understand the researchers will let my teacher and principal know if they become very worried about my safety.
9. The researchers can keep or make copies of things I make during group activities.
Yes No
10. Do you want to take part in the group activities?
Yes No

Please write your name below if you agree to take part in the group activities:

Full name (or signature): _____ Date: _____

This research project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application SOB 21/20. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Gerald Harrison, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83570, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

Appendix R: Community pantry – letter to principal

Dear Whaea [principal],

On behalf of [research classroom] we are writing this letter to ask for funds towards a community food pantry here at [research] School. You may be wondering what pantry? Room 8 has made the decision to build a pantry because we were given a lot of food from the *(named)* organisation.

The purpose of the pantry is to help out families in need of kai. Whānau can help themselves to the food stored there. We would appreciate it if you could help us build our project. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely

[Research classroom]

Appendix S: Community pantry – letter to caretaker

Dear Matua,

On behalf of [research classroom] we are writing this letter to ask for your assistance in building a community food pantry.

You may be wondering why is [research classroom] building a pantry? We have made the decision to build a pantry because we were given a lot of food from the [named] organisation.

The [name of school values] in [research classroom] are currently researching designs of potential pantries that we could build. Inside the pantry will be long lasting food for families to help themselves to.

We would love to have your help with this project. We look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you,

[Research classroom]